

**Years post-implantation:** 4 years

**Age category:** 31-50

**Cause of hearing loss:** Childhood measles

### **My Hearing before the Implant**

My hearing history is of a bilateral profound sensorineural hearing loss resulting from contracting measles twice before the age of one, following which I have worn bilateral hearing aids. My Mum recalls I had my first hearing aids just before my 4<sup>th</sup> birthday and had years of intensive speech therapy. I was educated in mainstream schools with additional support provided by the local authority teacher of the deaf and use of radio aids. I was exempt from learning Welsh as it was decided by the education authority and my parents that I had enough to cope with, focusing on my primary language. School was not an easy period of my life at the time as there was very little deaf awareness back then so I found it very isolating. With hard work and dedication, I left school with 10 GCSEs and the equivalent of 2 A levels. Shortly after leaving 6<sup>th</sup> form, I started employment with the local education authority as a teaching assistant for 2 children living with Down's Syndrome whom were in primary education. After starting this role, I received an application form to apply for a job within Audiology and decided to go for it. Here I am still in Audiology 20 years later!

My hearing did not change much over the years but my tinnitus became increasingly intrusive. I found working full time and commuting 250 miles a week exhausting so frequently became unwell and run down. My hours were eventually reduced to part time after having my first son in 2008. I first went for a CI assessment out of curiosity shortly before getting pregnant as I was concerned I would not hear my child cry when I was needed. I had a lot of anxiety about becoming a Mum and not being 'good at it' because of my hearing. I was told I would be the ideal candidate for a CI but once my son was born, my anxieties soon disappeared as I discovered just how powerful a mother's instinct would be and with the use of vibrating/flashing light baby monitors, I coped quite well. My family were also a huge support too so I decided not to go ahead with the CI. I was re-assured by the team that I could see them again should I change my mind.

Fast forward 10 years later, with another son joining our family, my hearing changed in my 'better ear' after a very heavy cold which was a severe/profound loss – this change was very slight on the hearing test but it had a huge, significant impact on me. I became increasingly withdrawn from social gatherings, chats at lunch time, tinnitus kept getting even more intrusive and I was often tearful. My family noticed a huge change in me as a person as I was not my usual bubbly self and were hugely concerned for my mental wellbeing.

## **Cochlear Implant Assessment**

A colleague gently suggested I had a CI assessment again so I got in touch and an informal chat was arranged to discuss my concerns and a further, more formal assessment was arranged. A battery of tests were performed on my hearing and my lip-reading skills both aided and non-aided. I also had an MRI scan and saw ENT specialists who would be performing the procedure to discuss this in further detail. I was offered the implant for my right side once all tests were completed and the team were satisfied it would be a success. I agreed to go ahead with it and signed all the consent forms. A short while later, I received an email offering me the CI in 10 days' time due to a cancellation. After a chat with my manager and my diary was sorted, I happily accepted.

## **The Operation**

I arrived at the Day of Surgical Admission (DOSA) on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018 at 7.00am and was greeted by the nurses with my gown and stockings. I was booked for the morning theatre list. A pre-op hearing test was carried out shortly before I went to theatre. A few hours later, I woke up feeling very disorientated and anxious. I had a very tight bandage wrapped round my head which was extremely uncomfortable at the time and I was quite agitated. A while later, the ENT specialist loosened the bandage slightly and arranged for me to be put on a drip as I was quite unwell, more so in the presence of bright lights and they kept me in a dark room whilst I had my drip. I soon came around and was discharged later that evening, arriving home around 10.30pm. The bandage had to stay on for a few days and within 7 days, I was back at Glan Clwyd Hospital to see the CI team and ENT specialist to check the wound and implant site. I was told I had internal dissolvable stitches in my ear canal because there was not enough room without opening the canal to fit the receiver and I had my external stitches from behind my ear removed that day. After 10/11 days since the op, I was finally allowed to wash my hair – that felt so amazing that day!

I then had to spend the next month using just my left hearing aid until my switch on – this was to allow my ear to heal and swelling to go down. I was of course, signed off work during this time as my balance was affected slightly and I did not feel confident enough to drive. That month felt very long and my tinnitus was off the scale during that time.

## **Switch-on**

The day of switch on was a very nerve wracking day. I knew it was not going to be easy and I was worried that I'd made a mistake which I would live to regret. My Mum and Brother were with me that day and my Brother filmed the whole process. Jenny set up my N7 processor and carried out all her fine tuning gradually. At first, I felt quite nauseous with waves of whooshing going through my head with every little noise. Nothing was intelligible, it was all beeps, signals none of which I understood. A few hours were spent at the clinic with time spent in the canteen to adjust to other noisy surroundings and further fine tuning shortly before I was able to go home. I

was provided with a huge bag full of kit...spare batteries, drying box with capsules and amazingly....a cover for when I go swimming. I could not wait to try this out as I've never heard my children whilst swimming with them - I was so looking forward to this. That day travelling home, I fell asleep – I was absolutely drained with it all. I used the implant for a short while whilst with my children when I got home but I soon removed it as I was just too exhausted to cope with it. From then on, I gradually increased the use of the implant, focusing on use in my own home to start with, my own familiar environment, and as my implant is made for Iphone, I played music from when I was younger, music that was familiar to me and on my laptop I would have the lyrics running so I could read what the words are. Over time, I used my laptop less for visual clues which I have so far achieved excellent results with motivation and dedication to the auditory training. I even roped my children in by playing games by blind folding myself so I could not lip-read what they were saying to me. They found this great fun, more so if I got the words wrong!

### **Life with a cochlear implant**

I am almost nearing my 4 year anniversary of receiving the implant and it has changed my life more than I had imagined. Not just in improving my hearing, but in relieving the intrusive tinnitus that I had been suffering for many years. This was such a huge relief, I could finally get a decent night's sleep! The tinnitus still exists, but it is nowhere near as intrusive as it used to be.

The cover for swimming, oh my days it is fab. Hearing the sea whilst having a swim and most importantly, hearing my children in the water. Our holiday later that year was really the most memorable holiday I've ever had. It was wonderful.

My cochlear implant is really an amazing piece of kit, the best thing I have ever done with a brilliant app which I use on my iPhone all the time, allowing me to make adjustments swiftly and stream music and speech – it's fabulous! I can also make phone calls to those with whom I am familiar, something that I had never been able to do before. The additional wireless device 'multi-mic' from GN ReSound which I use regularly is also another brilliant addition for when in social gatherings and in meetings. The implant has been life –changing. I'm much more confident and outgoing, I engage much more easily in social gatherings and I'm now able to use the telephone at work to contact not just my colleagues, but my patients as well. This was something I never thought I would be able to achieve, telephone calls without lip-reading but I can. I've become a much more active member of the team and will apply for things that I wouldn't have done previously. I've successfully completed a module of a Masters and have joined the team working with those with learning difficulties and dementia. I'm also the CI champion for my department guiding colleagues on who to refer for assessment. I do still have some difficulties, more so now with the facemasks we all have to wear today due to Covid-19 and I have days when I'm too tired to concentrate so will need some repetitions at times or will ask for the mask to be removed so I can lip-read.

I really can't thank the CI team at Glan Clwyd Hospital enough for all they have done and all my colleagues....they have been a huge support. But most of all, my family...