

# LET US HEAR

Campaign Committee of Deafness Council NSW Inc for  
Equity & Continued Access to Services of Australian Hearing for Deaf Adults

## SENATE INQUIRY INTO HEARING HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA

### SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION

31 OCTOBER 2009

Thank you for inviting us to respond to comments made at the Senate Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia on 13 October 2009.

We would like to make the following points:-

1. We wish to respond further to Senator Boyce's question requesting us to "provide a snapshot of the sort of work that a parent or carer has to do when they have a child with a hearing loss?"

From a baby they must be taught language, listening, lipreading, speech and then later integration and social skills on a one to one basis.

- Language must be taught word by word always making sure it went hand in hand with cognitive development.
- Auditory training is taught to make maximum use of any residual hearing the child may have.
- Lipreading. For severe to profound deafness this is the primary source of communication and is a very important adjunct to all hearing losses especially in noisy situations.
- Speech training and improvement needs to be a part of the ongoing daily lessons.
- With early integration it was essential to teach social skills because they did not pick up on the nuances of social interactions.

As you can see this is a constant daily commitment to expand the child's experiences and comprehension. There is always a sense of urgency to not let time pass and use every moment productively.

There is a definite price to pay for this intense concentration of effort on one child as often siblings can feel that the family focus can be too much on the deaf child. One needs to be careful that the marriage does not suffer and that there are times when everyone needs to relax.

2. Senator Williams asked "Would you think that the biggest downfall in the Australian system, at the moment, is the lack of public support once people turn 21 years of age?" In every way the continuation of hearing devices are their lifeline and is imperative for the continuing well being of the deaf person. We can do no better than quote from the Australian Hearing Submission to this Committee where it says "Hearing loss isolates

people from those around them and can lead to depression, anxiety, paranoia, exhaustion, loss of intimacy and anger” (Page 3). These are the conditions that the deaf person could experience without the sustained use of their hearing devices. This is why “Let Us Hear” continues to advocate for ongoing access to Australian Hearing because deaf people face daily challenges participating in family and community life.

If the ear is not kept stimulated by the auditory device the ability of the hearing mechanism deteriorates through lack of use and the intelligibility of the person’s speech is affected as they cannot monitor their voice or speech. At the Senate Enquiry October 13 page CA64, this was reinforced by Leonie Jackson’s answer to a question by Senator Adams “How did you get on with not being able to access services when you turned 21?”. Leonie told of not being able to afford 2 hearing aids for many years and by the time she was able to buy a second hearing aid “my brain was no longer able to receive signals properly from the ear that had not been aided and would not benefit from having that other hearing aid..... That is a fairly common story told to me by other deaf and hearing impaired individuals”. What a tragedy for all these deaf people who experience this. Continued audition is imperative to prevent the residual hearing falling away.

3. We felt that the Hearing Aid Manufacturers and Distributors Association of Australia understood the plight of the over 21’s when they said “Australian Hearing children get to 21 and then basically thrown out into the community to some extent. I am not sure that that is a good thing for the community that they lose that lifeline of Australian Hearing at that point” They also stated that deaf people have got a hearing loss for the rest of their lives and there could be this struggling community that is not being helped. “Let Us Hear” has always been aware that the previous child clients of Australian Hearing are a group that some Private Providers have found difficult to service. This is often because they have not had the experience with the congenitally deaf.

4. “Let Us Hear” would like to add a comment on the productivity issue which was not brought up at the Inquiry. When you consider the audiological costs for deaf children from diagnosis to 21 and then to drop all help as they are approaching their productive years, does not make economic sense. When unemployment and underemployment is the result of the deaf person not being able to maintain functional hearing devices it makes all the money spent during their childhood pointless. Audiological services provided to facilitate their education should also be made available to facilitate employment. At this age they should be self sufficient people earning an income and paying their taxes as they all want to do.

5. We would like to comment on The Hansard record of Deafness Forum from 12 October 2009 page CA36. Ms Lawder was commenting on Deafness Forum’s relationship with various government departments and said “We could do a little more

work with our own membership to channel through the Deafness Forum. From the perspectives from some of those departments, it must be a bit frustrating to be contacted by the myriad of different hearing and deafness groups. They must wonder where they all fit in in the scheme of things”.

“Let Us Hear” is a member of Deafness Forum and appreciate the work it does for the deaf community but we feel we represent a discrete group of deaf people namely former child clients of Australian Hearing. The reason why “Let Us Hear” has continued to lobby separately is the disastrous occurrence which they all face at 21 when all auditory services, on which they are so dependent, come to a shuddering halt. This is completely different from those people who suffer from acquired deafness later in life. They grow up and have been educated and employed as hearing people who have not had to experience the total dependency on hearing devices. We consider that these 2 very different groups cannot be lumped together as one problem. Also “let Us Hear” supports all previous child clients of Australian Hearing to continue to have access for affordable hearing devices not just the unemployed, students and low income earners which is not include in Deafness Forums policy.

6. We have read where Australian Hearing in 2007/2008 reported a profit before tax of \$14.9 million per annum. It paid dividends during the year to the Department of Human Services of \$7 million. Surely this could go towards the expenses of allowing the continued access of 700 Australian Hearing clients turning 21 each year.

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