

Deafness in lockdown

Hayley Adams, an Audiology Technician, shares her personal story

My name is Hayley, I'm 47 and profoundly deaf. My parents believe I was born hearing as I could hear the rattle test, which was the hearing test they used back then. It wasn't until I was three years old that my parents noticed that my speech was jumbled, and it was then my mum took me for another hearing test and I failed it!

The first hearing aids I had fitted certainly weren't like they are now. It was a box I had to wear over my chest with two wires that led to my ears, such a very ugly thing! My hearing loss was mild at that time, so I started mainstream school. I had lots of lovely support from my Qualified Teacher of the Deaf (QToD) who visited three times a week. I had many friends and thoroughly enjoyed school, but when I started secondary school, I really did struggle with having so many different teachers etc. I mainly relied upon lipreading to help me understand what was being said, but I was issued with a radio aid, which helped me immensely, and I had lots of support.

At 14 years old, my hearing began to drastically decline and I had to be admitted to hospital for some time. My hearing never returned after that point and at 14, I found the transition from mild hearing loss to profound incredibly hard. It wasn't until I was in my 30s that my audiologist did further tests and I was diagnosed with Pendred syndrome. I continue to wear two hearing aids; even though I can't hear well it helps me with some sounds.

After finishing secondary school, I started college, studying travel and tourism, and had to spend six months at a hotel placement. I chose Bournemouth and I really enjoyed it, and this ignited my passion for travel. After college I went to work in the USA on a summer camp for three months, which gave me the opportunity to travel around America for some time. I loved it!

I went on to travel all over the world for many years exploring fantastic countries such as New Zealand, Australia, India and Asia all on my own. I could sit here for days telling you some stories about my travels, such as how my hearing aid battery ran out in the middle of a Cambodian jungle and I had to travel for two days on the back of a truck to get to the Bangkok audiology department to get batteries!

Another time, I jumped out of an aeroplane and my ears popped so bad that I was admitted to the cochlear implant ward in

Brisbane, and my poor mum flew across the world to be with me, although secretly I think

she wanted a holiday in Australia too! I decided not to go ahead with the implant as it was all so new then and I wanted to carry on with my travels.

I feel so proud that I have been so independent and travelled to so many places despite my hearing loss. Some people say to me "Wow you're deaf, how did you do it?", but I never understand why they think that being deaf should stop people from doing what they want.

I met my husband in Thailand 20 years ago when we were both backpacking and we now have three daughters, all hearing. Being deaf does have its advantages with children as I can switch off my hearing



aids for some peace and quiet!

In 2002 I started working for the hearing service in my local borough (Waltham Forest, London) as a deaf role model and an audiology technician. I absolutely love my job, supporting deaf pupils across schools. We discuss things around deafness and they feel comfortable speaking to a deaf adult. I also set up radio aids to help them in class. I love supporting them and it's great to see them grow up and do well.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been especially hard because of people having to wear masks. I find it really hard understanding people while they are wearing a mask as it makes lipreading extremely difficult. Day-to-day activities like going to the bank and shops, etc are a challenge. When someone asks me a question, I have to keep explaining "I can't see your lips" and it's so challenging.

I now wear a badge that helps me but it's still hard. I feel for the pupils in schools when teachers are wearing them in class. That is going to continue being very challenging for as long as masks are mandatory. I have worked from home during the pandemic due to schools being closed. My work colleagues from outreach set up meetings via

Teams, which I found extremely difficult for obvious reasons; one example was when there are a lot of people on at the same time, I never know who's talking so I struggle to follow them. Even though I have the captions on it's not always accurate. Even lipreading is hard as the connection at times can be poor. I can relate to how difficult it must have been for children with a hearing loss during these difficult times while learning from home virtually, which I believe has affected their education and confidence.

Hayley is happy to be contacted if there are young deaf aspiring audiology technicians who would like to know more about her work. h.adams@whitefield.waltham.sch.uk



Hayley Adams is an Audiology Technician at SENDsuccess, Whitefield Academy Trust, London.

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BATOD Magazine

This article was published in the Sept 2021 issue.

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BATOD
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MAGAZINE • Sept 2021 • ISSN 1336-0799 • www.batod.org.uk

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