

Year in the Life

A celebration of the power of
Cochlear Implants to Transform Lives



The Cochlear Story

A year in the life

By Professor Graeme Clark

This book is a celebration of sound. The sound of waves crashing on the beach, the rustling of leaves, raindrops falling on the window pane, of music and lively conversations – and perhaps most joyous of all, the voices and laughter of children.

This book is dedicated to all the sounds heard and treasured by the more than 400,000 people who can now hear again, or for the first time, with their Cochlear and bone conduction implants.

It is also dedicated to hope and the belief that all things are possible if only we persist. Forty years ago, there was a widely held belief that nothing could be done about hearing loss. Many experts said that the inner ear was too complicated and delicate for the concept of cochlear implants to work.

But my optimism and passion could not be overcome, no matter how overwhelming the opposition became. It was the passion of my childhood - to help my deaf father and “fix ears” when I grew up.

It took many years of research, and the inspiration found in the shape of a shell on the beach, but my childhood dream was finally realised in 1978. This was thanks to the optimism and belief of another man, Rod Saunders, who agreed to receive the world's first multi-channel Cochlear implant.

Rod had lost his hearing in an automobile accident, but when we turned on his implant he could hear again. Seeing his face when he heard those first sounds was one of the happiest days of my life.

So this book is dedicated to Rod, whose faith in my dream paved the way for hundreds of thousands of people around the world to treasure those everyday sounds that the wonderful people in this book can experience now, and that so many of us take for granted. Their joy, and that of their loved ones, continues to inspire all those who dedicate their lives to make each new implant better than the one before.

To those passionate and eternally optimistic professionals, this book is dedicated to you too. May you continue to find ways to make the “impossible” possible.

Lastly, and sincerely, if you struggle to hear, this book is for you too. May its stories inspire you, as they have me, and give you hope that you will once again celebrate the sounds of life.



Professor Graeme Clark AC
Inventor of the multichannel Cochlear Implant

Welcome to “A year in the life” where we have followed two cochlear implant recipients on their journey back to a hearing world.

It has been a privilege to follow Charlotte De Jong and Scott McLachlan through their cochlear implant journeys. Their honesty, candor and openness about their experiences and those of their families have been both inspiring and humbling. Many thanks to Charlotte, Scott and their families for so generously giving their time to create awareness and understanding of their respective experiences.

Cochlear implants are life changing. They were the first technology capable of restoring a human sense. Unlike hearing aids that amplify sound, cochlear implants use an electrode array implanted into the cochlear to stimulate the auditory nerve. This partnership of human physiology and technology has changed the lives of many adults who have lost their hearing.

To lose your hearing is frightening. To communicate is to be part of society. Hearing loss is not just about the absence of sound; it's also about the loss of people's social life, being cut off from family, friends and work. It is no exaggeration to say that it can destroy lives. It's isolating, frustrating and lonely.

The digital revolution has changed this for many adults affected by severe to profound hearing loss with the advancement of cochlear implant technology. The quality of sound and access to hearing in real world settings has meant tremendous gains in quality of life and life opportunities for individuals.

Having their cochlear implants has enabled both Charlotte and Scott to get on with their lives, participate fully in everyday life and look forward to new possibilities. In the words of one cochlear implant recipient, “My cochlear implant is a miracle.” It is time that everyone who needs a cochlear implant in New Zealand has access to their own miracle.

Yours,

Peter Aitken
Chairman
The Pindrop Foundation

ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL FOR ADULTS



Following the Adult review meeting a letter is sent to client and to supporting professionals to advise of outcome



If you are a health professional or an adult with hearing loss, **A COCHLEAR IMPLANT** may be the right hearing solution.



If the answer was **YES** to one or more of these questions, please refer to the Cochlear Implant Program. For information visit the Northern Cochlear Implant Programme at www.ncip.org.nz or the Southern Cochlear Implant Programme at www.scip.co.nz



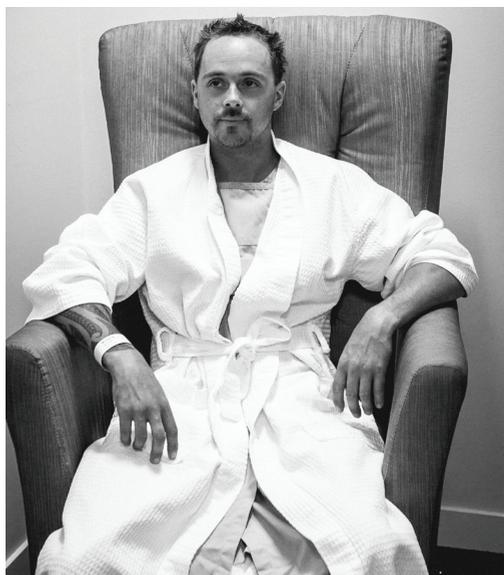
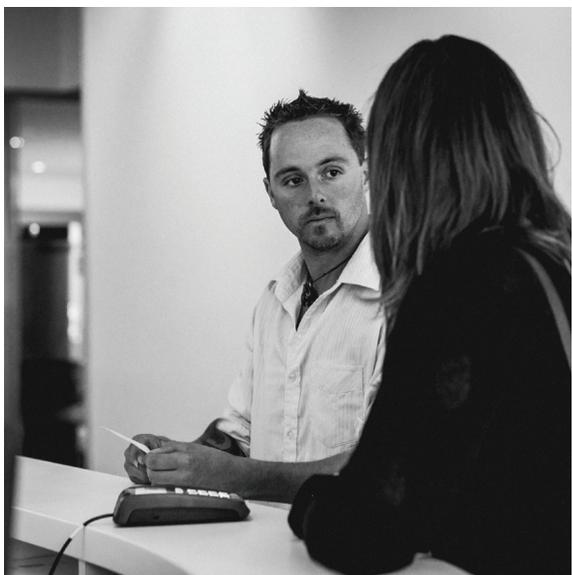
Scotty McLachlan

31, Waikato

When I started losing my hearing at 21, I missed listening to music the most. I had enjoyed going to gigs and concerts with my mates, listening to music in the car and having my playlist going in the house. All that was gone when my hearing went.

My friends and family also noticed that I wasn't hearing things too well, as I was missing the gist of conversations and getting the complete wrong end of the stick. For a long time I was in denial about how bad things were, until family and friends finally convinced me to get my hearing checked.

My audiogram showed that my hearing loss was significant and it was recommended that I wear hearing aids. Unfortunately they didn't work that well for me as they only amplified the sound, and didn't give me clarity of speech, which I really needed.



“ My life has changed so much in the year since I had my switch on. ”

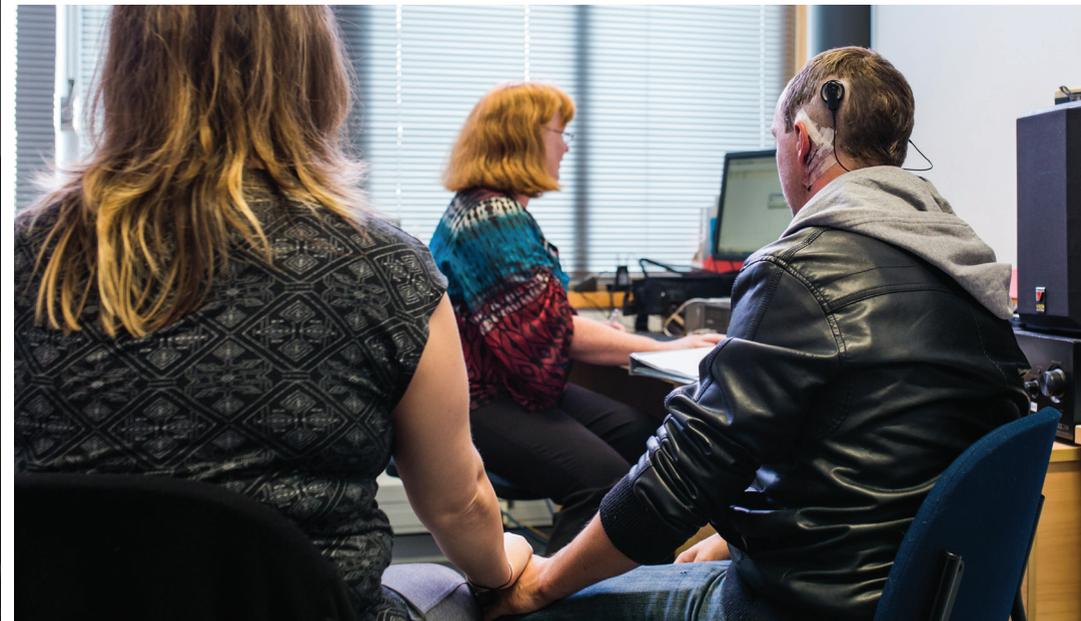
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Hearing loss creeps into every area of your life and I found that living with a hearing loss was a huge challenge when it came to finding a career path. I first started out doing a building apprenticeship but the communication difficulties and safety on a busy building site proved to be too much, so I had to give it up.

Luckily for me, I come from a family that is very passionate about horses and I knew quite a lot about them. When an opportunity came up to work at the racing stables in Matamata, I jumped at the chance. Some key achievements working there were being part of a winning premiership stable and being strapper for some of New Zealand's top race horses. It's an amazing job and nothing feels more rewarding than seeing a horse you care for win a race. I now work as the Assistant Foreman for Richardson Racing.

My hearing loss had continued to deteriorate over the years, to the point where my only option to get access to sound was to have a cochlear implant. I knew the funding was limited and I only hoped that I would be accepted onto the waiting list and that I wouldn't have to wait too long as my life was in limbo at that point.





Living with hearing loss can be so lonely and things like dating were nigh on impossible. I had been single for a while before I met my fiancée Liv in December 2016. We initially communicated a lot by email and text, as chatting on the phone was impossible. Liv also lived in Wellington at the time so we spent a lot of time travelling between places to meet up.

We eventually decided to move in together, and I must admit, Liv was amazingly understanding and supportive about my hearing loss. Things that couples would take for granted, like having a conversation in the car, speaking to each other from another room or even in the same room, but not facing each other, was impossible. Liv never let any of these communication challenges interfere with our relationship...it only strengthened it. She has been my rock.

When I got the call to have my cochlear implant in early 2017, Liv was there every step of the way. I couldn't have done it without her, for as soon as I received the date for surgery, I was both excited and nervous.

A lot of thoughts were going through my head, worrying about complications and also would it work. I didn't want to get my hopes up too much.

On the day of surgery it was safe to say that I was a nervous wreck. I couldn't have made it through the day without the support of Liv. Everything went really well and I had my CI switched on the next day.





Over the next few months I felt a whole new world open up. I was starting to hear sounds that I hadn't heard in such a long time which were confusing at first. As each week passed, things started to become clearer and conversations easier. This all took work and dedication, with the help of rehab and support of others around me. At times it was mentally exhausting as my brain tried to recognise and relearn all these new sounds, but I've always had a never give up attitude.

My life has changed so much in the year since I had my switch on. Liv coming into my life was one of the best things to ever happen to me and I proposed to her on her birthday six months after my switch on. She said yes and we are looking forward to our wonderful life together.

Advice I would give anyone embarking on this journey is to be brave and take it one step at a time.

Charlotte de Jong

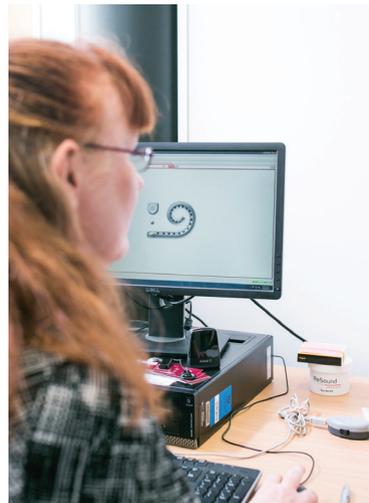
37, Tauranga, NZ

Losing my hearing was so hard, I didn't notice it right away but then certain moments made me realise that I was relying more and more on lipreading to get through the day. Then when I got home from work I was exhausted.

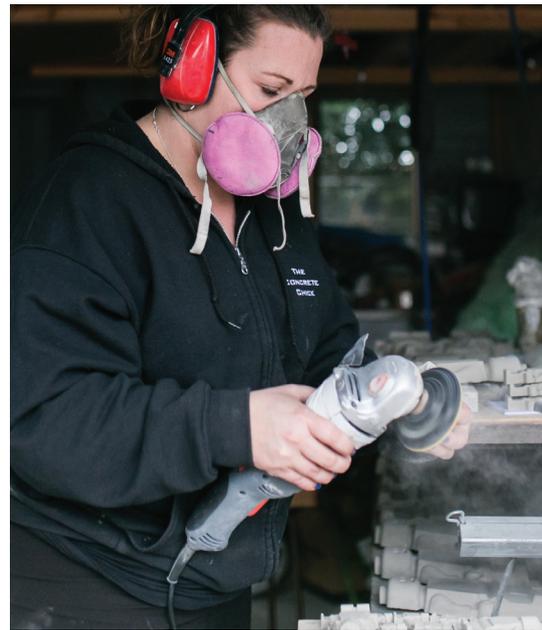
Teaching for me was getting harder and harder. My students were always amazing and would try to speak to me while facing me but at times it was just too hard. I had to use other technology to help me when I needed it, like listening to presentations and speeches. I managed to get a Roger Pen and this technology helped me to not miss so many things that were said in meetings. Even with all this, I was looking at the end of my teaching career and that was very scary. I hated the fact that my choices were being taken away from me due to my hearing loss.

When I found out that I was eligible for a CI I was apprehensive, I made the mistake of googling the op and saw some scary images! Don't do that! It took me a while to just get my head around the operation and the possibility of what life might be like after it. In the end I decided that it was not really an option for me to not have the op. As without it I would have had to have stopped teaching and I have two young sons that I need to hear (most of the time). I was a little frustrated having to wait for an unknown amount of time before being told I was up for my operation. This was the hardest thing though - the unknown waiting.

When I found out I was having the operation I was so excited for a moment and then terrified the next moment! I think I was lucky that I was still teaching, which, along with my sons, kept me super busy. It's hard to over think things when you are busy. So on the day of the op I was actually quite calm and ready. My op was early in the morning, so not much waiting around time. Then I was in and it was over. I remember waking up and being surprised that I wasn't in pain, just felt a bit woozey.



“Hi, I’m Charlotte, I’m a mum, I’m a wife, I’m a teacher, I’m the Concrete Chick and I’m deaf.”



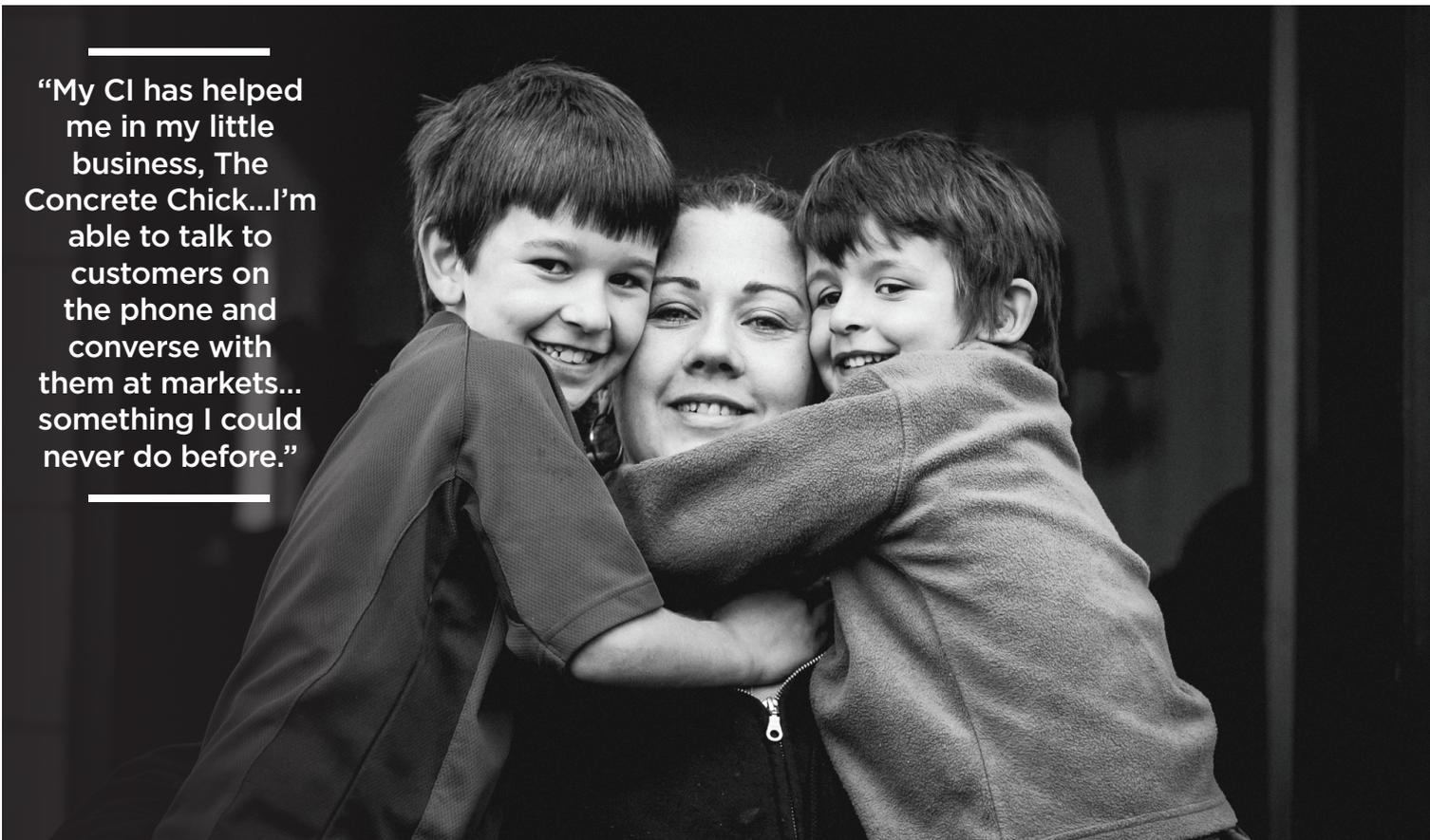
The next few days, as I recovered, were hard as I spent the time home alone - I couldn't wear a hearing aid on my op side so I heard less. I had a few amazing friends pop in to check on me and help me with my children. However the hardest part was coming to terms with having a foreign object inside me. If I stopped to think about it too much then I would end up having a mild panic attack, so I learnt to distract myself by watching a lot of Netflix with the subtitles on!

Switch on was an odd experience as you don't know what sounds to expect. Having talked to several people with CIs they all had different experiences. I remember thinking that what I was hearing first was like electronic noise - just noise. I made my husband keep talking to me for the rest of that afternoon and evening so that I could start to identify when a word began and ended. Slowly over the next few days I started to be able to decipher the number of syllables within a word.

The next few months my CI hearing improved dramatically with daily therapy provided to me by my children!! I started to venture away from my house more and more. Every morning I would wake up and take a deep breath and put my CI on. Yes it was tiring, yes it was hard, but it was becoming more and more useful.

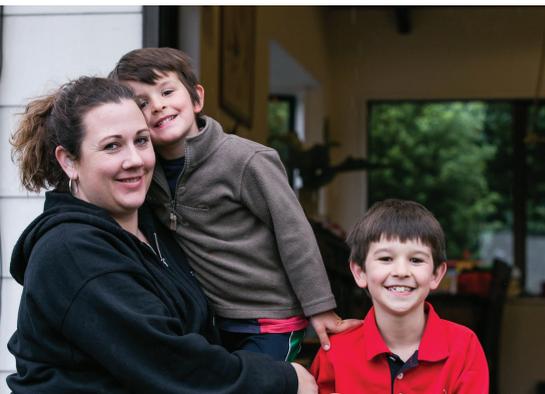
Now I would not be without my CI. I can hear pen clicking in class, my boys in the back seat, birds calling on our bush walks, rain hitting the roof and secrets shared. I am able to continue in my career as a teacher. I am able to use a telephone. I am able to go out to a restaurant and follow the conversation. I am able to hear in meetings. I am able to hear at the movies. I am able to hear at a rock concert. My list of things I can now do is constantly growing due to my CI. My CI has given me options again and for this I will always be thankful.

“My CI has helped me in my little business, The Concrete Chick...I'm able to talk to customers on the phone and converse with them at markets... something I could never do before.”



Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you'd have preferred to talk.

- Doug Larson



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