

Debra Nussbaum, MA, CCC-A, manages projects on language development and communication support at the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, located on the campus of Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Since 1977, she has been involved in direct service provision in audiology as well as resource development, research, and professional training.

Genie Chisholm, MA, CCC-SLP, is a speech-language pathologist at the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center. In addition to providing direct service to students, she is coordinator of support services and a certified “See-The-Sound Visual Phonics” trainer.

High School Students with Cochlear Implants: Coming Together for Success

By Debra Nussbaum, Genie Chisholm, Rebecca Galloway, Venita Dzime-Assison, and Jane Doyle

While many people assume that students with cochlear implants have placements in mainstream schools, almost 25 percent of the approximately 175 students at the Model Secondary School for the Deaf (MSSD), the residential high school on the campus of Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., have an implanted listening device. Working with these students, professionals encounter a group that is ethnically, culturally, and educationally diverse.

Some students arrive from general educational settings; some arrive from schools for the deaf. Some have been educated primarily through spoken language; others use both spoken and signed languages. Some learn visually; others have strong auditory skills and preferences. Some received their implants when they were very young; others just got them. Some love their implants and use them all the time; others feel ambivalence and use their implants periodically. Despite these differences, all have gone through the experience of surgery, and all have lived with an implanted listening device. In fact, having a cochlear implant provides a common bond for these young individuals.

The professionals at MSSD have discovered that providing opportunities for these students to come together and interact can be an important part of their personal and social success. A multidisciplinary group of professionals—including speech-language pathologists, audiologists, school counselors, school psychologists, teachers, and graduate

Photos by Susan M. Flanigan



Above: Students learn about home and family communication tips while enjoying cupcakes and popcorn.

interns—collaborates to plan three to four gatherings a year to give students the chance to talk about their experiences and challenges. These events provide an opportunity to explore helpful listening accessories and discuss effective language and communication strategies, especially those that include social media. They address identity issues and connect with deaf adults, who may or may not use cochlear implants, within the community.

The Bond of Implantation Getting Together to Learn—and Have Fun

All students with cochlear implants and students with other technologies that rely on implantation, such as implanted bone conduction hearing systems, are encouraged (but not required) to attend these meetings. It does not matter how consistently students use their devices or whether they have a single or a bilateral implant. Some students who have had their device's internal components removed have come, as well as students who are considering a cochlear implant for themselves and those who are curious to learn more about the technology. Typically 35-40 students

attend the meetings. Pizza is a strong motivator!

The meetings occur at the beginning or the end of the day or during lunch so they do not interfere with academics. Information publicizing each gathering is shared with students, staff, and families. Planning starts each year when every MSSD student with an implant is given a needs assessment. The assessment, completed either in print or through a face-to-face meeting, gathers information about each student's implant, communication background, feelings about his or her device, and possible supports. After reviewing the needs assessments, as well as brainstorming with the students themselves, a theme for each meeting is identified.

Each meeting includes an opportunity for social interaction as well as a structured learning experience. Students are encouraged to mingle informally, and technology and games are incorporated to promote their engagement. Activities are structured around topics to encourage information exchange, and ground

Rebecca Galloway, MS, CCC-SLP, is a speech-language pathologist and a PhD student. She has practiced in both general education settings and at the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center.

Venita Dzime-Assison, AuD, CCC-A, has worked for 30 years as an audiologist at the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center. She has been involved in resource development and professional training.

Jane Doyle, MS, CCC-SLP, is a speech-language pathologist at the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center. She is in the process of completing a master's degree in reading at Johns Hopkins University. Doyle is the mother of two adopted children who are deaf.

The authors welcome questions and comments about this article through Nussbaum at debra.nussbaum@gallaudet.edu.



Teens Demonstrate Independence and Advocacy— And a Need for Knowledge

We have learned that students with cochlear implants at this age and stage of development are transitioning to becoming greater advocates for themselves in the use and care of their implant. At the same time, they may have limited knowledge about the device they are using. For example, they may not be aware of the company that manufactured their cochlear implant or the many accessories that are available for it—accessories that can afford them increased opportunities for connectivity to media or improved listening in noisy situations.

In addition, as many of the students are teens, issues arise that are central to identity development. Students may

Above: The students brainstorm a name for the group.

rules are established to ensure information is conveyed in a nonbiased and respectful manner. An evaluation is completed at the end of each meeting to determine if the students enjoyed the activity and if learning objectives were met.

Some highly successful activities have included using:

- personal videos developed by the students that demonstrate how to use assistive listening accessories to connect to media;
- a “Jeopardy”-style game involving truths and misconceptions about cochlear implants;
- a Speed Meet and Greet, during which students move quickly from peer to peer asking each other questions related to cochlear implants;
- The Line Game, in which students “meet at the line” according to areas of commonality (e.g., the professional leading the meeting calls out such statements as: “Come to the line if you use your cochlear implant every day.” or “Come to the line if you went to a mainstream

school.”); and

- polling technologies (e.g., Turning Technologies ResponseWare, www.turningtechnologies.com) to survey students on opinions about topics such as the advantages and disadvantages of a cochlear implant, the decision to obtain a cochlear implant, or the advice about implants that they would offer to others.

The groups have also enjoyed opportunities for:

- participation in an essay contest on the topic of “What Would You Tell Other Deaf Students Who Are Considering Getting a Cochlear Implant and Why?”;
- presentations from cochlear implant manufacturers on assistive listening accessories and how they connect to smartphones, tablets, and other portable devices; and
- panel discussions involving Gallaudet University students and MSSD staff who use cochlear implants.

Below: A student evaluates the activity, answering questions such as: Did you socialize with other students? Did you learn any tips for communicating? Was this a supportive environment in which to share your experiences?



I didn't realize how many other students had CIs. I know that a cochlear implant doesn't work for everyone, but it has worked for me.

~ *Justina, 12th grade, MSSD student*

express interest in exploring questions such as: Why did my parents decide that I should have a cochlear implant? Do I fit more in the hearing community or the Deaf community? Now that I am in a school for the deaf, should I use my cochlear implant?

From many years of providing these group gatherings, we have seen how much students appreciate these opportunities and learn from them. We have observed that this opportunity fills in gaps that may not have been otherwise addressed in students' educational or personal experiences. We feel this kind of structured yet informal interaction is important in the program of every student who has an implanted device.

Professionals and volunteers from various settings—school districts, cochlear implant clinics, civic organizations such as Lions Clubs or Sertoma—can help establish after-school activities, clubs, camps, and weekend experiences to bring students with cochlear implants together. Students who live in rural areas or find getting together is difficult because of geography may find similar interaction through FaceTime, Skype, or other video chatting software. Based on the

growing number of younger children with cochlear implants who are becoming teenagers, providing these opportunities for social engagement should be considered an integral part of promoting student success.

At MSSD, students with implants have access to a wide variety of services provided at school. These services are integral to ensuring students have properly functioning technology and that they benefit from it to capacity. Services include:

- audiological services (including a complete audiological evaluation, troubleshooting when problems develop with implant equipment, and education regarding assistive devices to support listening with their implant),
- access to spare and loaner parts

- auditory and speech training provided by a speech-language pathologist based on goals documented through the IEP process, and
- counseling (as needed).

Each of these services is important. However, it is also important to remember that one of the best supports we can provide for our students is the opportunity to get together. This is what the professionals at the Clerc Center have done—allowed our students to meet, talk with each other about their implants, and explore their own questions. We have found that while we offer a wide range of supports for deaf and hard of hearing students with cochlear implants, sometimes one of the best supports we can provide for them is each other.

Resources to Support Teens with Cochlear Implants

- **Teens and Adults** (Cochlear Corporation), www.cochlear.com/wps/wcm/connect/au/home/support/rehabilitation-resources/teens-and-adults
- **Tweens & Teens: Telephone with Confidence**, www.cochlear.com/wps/wcm/connect/us/communication-corner/program-intro/tweens-teens-telephone.htm
- **Telephone Tips** (Med El), www.medel.com/us/user-support-telephone-tips/
- **Guide to Access Planning** (Phonak-Planning Guide for Teens with Hearing Loss), www.phonak.com/us/en/support/children-and-parents/planning-guide-for-teens.html
- **Young Adult Network** (Hearing Loss Association of America), www.hearingloss.org/content/young-adults-0
- **Encouraging Peer Support Groups** (Alexander Graham Bell Association), www.agbell.org/Document.aspx?id=1517