

MEDIA RELEASE:

Experts urge parents to recognise signs of hearing loss

Two thirds of children develop hearing loss after newborn screening

Hearing Awareness Week – 20-26 August 2017

Sydney, Australia - Embargoed until Sunday 20th August 2017: Hearing experts are urging parents to be on the lookout for the signs of hearing loss. Ahead of Hearing Awareness Week 2017, leading Australian children's charity The Shepherd Centre and [ambassador Penny McNamee](#) have launched an [online Hearing Quiz](#) for parents to help identify whether their child may be affected by hearing loss.

Currently there is no routine hearing testing for children after the SWISH (Statewide Infant Screening – Hearing) newborn screening process. This is despite the fact that two-thirds of children with hearing loss are diagnosed at a later date.

Common signs of hearing loss can include a child watching facial expressions more intently than usual, not responding to their name when called, touching or pulling on their ears and listening to the TV louder than seems necessary.

Parents who suspect their child may have hearing loss should seek professional help as soon as possible. Research shows children who receive early intervention therapy go on to achieve listening and spoken language skills on par and even above their hearing peers.

A recent report shows around three in five (62%) children with a hearing impairment who receive early intervention go on to achieve a tertiary level qualification. This compares to only two in five (43.3%) of the general population ¹.

After her second child Levi passed his routine screening at birth, hearing loss was the last thing on busy mum of four Felicity's mind. However she became worried when at almost three years old, Levi's speech didn't seem to be progressing.

After a trip to the GP, the family discovered Levi had hearing loss in both ears. While reeling from the news, Felicity had the rest of her family tested and discovered her younger daughter Charlie was also profoundly deaf.

SIGNS OF HEARING LOSS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

- Not responding to their name when called
- Watching the TV louder than seems necessary
- Difficulty focusing in crowded or noisy places (like supermarkets or shopping malls)
- Watching facial expressions more intently than usual
- Touching or pulling of ears or complaining about "sore" ears

Over the space of the next two years Felicity juggled the diagnosis of both children, regular early intervention therapy sessions at The Shepherd Centre, fitting them both for hearing aids and, eventually, surgery to receive cochlear implants. Both kids were 'switched on' the same day just before Christmas in 2014.

Felicity credits The Shepherd Centre's unwavering support for helping her feel confident in planning for her kids' futures saying, "We really learn the skills to monitor their hearing and speech and how to implement techniques to practice into our everyday lives. The Shepherd Centre treats you as a family unit and they go above and beyond to make sure we have all the information we need to support our kids as they grow."

"I'm so glad I was able to pick up on the signs with Levi when I did and I hope other parents can educate themselves as well. I know that he has a bright future and it is made possible by the fabulous support we have received," said Felicity.

Dr Jim Hungerford, Chief Executive Officer of The Shepherd Centre, said it is important for parents to be aware of the signs of hearing loss and to trust their instincts when it comes to their children's health and wellbeing.

"Currently our health system doesn't have routine hearing tests in place for children after newborn infant screening, so it's very important for parents to be aware of the signs and to speak up if they think something might be amiss.

"Many people don't realise 92% of deaf children are born to hearing parents and the majority of these children are being diagnosed as a toddler. Parents can give their children the best chance at success by picking up on it and beginning early intervention support as early as possible", said Dr Hungerford.

The Shepherd Centre has an extraordinary track record when it comes to giving deaf children access to sound and speech, with the majority of the centre's graduates heading to mainstream schools with outstanding communication skills.

Deafness is one of the most common disabilities diagnosed at birth, affecting one in 1,000 Australian babies born each year.

It costs almost \$20,000 per year to provide the essential early intervention therapy needed to help just one deaf child learn to listen and speak, and to reach their full potential.

As a charity organisation, The Shepherd Centre relies heavily on public donations to fund over half of this cost. To help The Shepherd Centre continue its life-changing programs for children and young people with hearing loss, visit www.shepherdcentre.org.au or call 1800 020 030.

The hearing quiz is available online at www.shepherdcentre.org.au/hearingquiz.

ENDS

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References:

1. *First Voice Report on Education, Employment and Social Outcomes of First Voice Member Centre Graduates (18-28 years)*. 2017 Available here: <http://shepherdcentre.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/First-Voice-Graduate-Outcomes-Report-2017.pdf>.

About The Shepherd Centre:

The Shepherd Centre is a NSW-based not-for-profit organisation specialising in early intervention to help children with hearing loss develop spoken language skills.

Since its foundation, The Shepherd Centre has opened up a world of sound for more than 2,000 deaf children. The organisation is recognised as a world leader in the field of early intervention Auditory-Verbal Therapy, providing families with assistance to develop their child's spoken language, so they can reach their full potential.

The Shepherd Centre relies heavily upon fundraising and donations to support close to 450 Australian families who turn to them for help each year. Funds raised by The Shepherd Centre help give deaf and hearing impaired children access to critical therapy support to help them learn to listen and speak, and to reach their full potential in the classroom – and in life. More information: <https://www.shepherdcentre.org.au/>