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Carolyn Kilpatrick
Libby Harricks Achievement award winner

*'Before my Cochlear Implant my life was black and white.
The Cochlear reintroduced colour into my life'*

Carolyn Kilpatrick's story- Libby Harricks Achievement Award Winner



Carolyn was nominated by Charyse May, Manager Guide Dogs Hearing Services/Audiometrist who wrote:

“Carolyn has had a hereditary hearing loss most of her life. A wife and mother of two young girls with a busy social

life, she found that by her early 30's, her hearing loss was impacting dramatically within her family, friends and lifestyle. Encouraged by her mother to attend a session conducted by Better Hearing Australia, SA Branch, Carolyn embraced the opportunity to improve her own communication ability. Having gained quality information and developed her own skills, Carolyn gained the confidence to continue her education to help others. Carolyn commenced study and achieved the BHA Teacher of Lip-reading & Aural Rehabilitation Diploma. From 1989 to 1996 she performed sessional work for Better Hearing Australia SA Branch. In 1997, Carolyn joined Guide Dogs Hearing Services as a Hearing Rehabilitation Co-ordinator. Carolyn was also instrumental in assisting with the development of the Specialised Smoke Alarm Scheme, the first Government funded scheme of its type in Australia. Carolyn has passionately travelled thousands of kilometres providing support and information to people with a hearing loss through the country outreach program.

With advances in technology in the 1990s, Carolyn embraced any new technology that could assist her. By the late 1990s, Carolyn had come to terms with regularly using a TTY and interpreter in the workplace as she was determined that her hearing loss would not affect her employment. Carolyn had her first cochlear implant in January 2002, and her second followed six years later.

Through her own experience, Carolyn has developed information and support groups for people with a hearing loss in the workplace and regularly facilitates these sessions out of hours to enable their participation.

Carolyn is very involved in volunteering in her local community, including the Special Olympics, SA Cochlear Implant Group, Murray Bridge Fire Service, Murray Bridge and Districts Lions Club and is a member of the Australian Communications Exchange Consumer Advisory Group (which reviews new technology).

Even after working in the hearing industry for 25 years, Carolyn continually seeks opportunities to develop her professional knowledge, most recently completing the Certificate IV in Audiometric Assessment in 2011.

Carolyn has an unerring self-belief and knowledge that she can contribute to others and is a role model to many people due to her excellent communication skills and empathy towards others.”

Carolyn's speech

At the presentation of the Libby Harricks Achievement Award on 17th March 2012, Carolyn said:

“To all a very big thank you it is an honor to be the recipient of such a prestigious award.

However if I was to rewind to the person I was 25 years ago I would not be standing here today. I had no confidence or self-esteem and poor self-worth, I was cocooned by my hearing loss not knowing how to communicate with others and therefore living in a world of self-isolation. I was not understanding what people were saying to me and my way of managing this was to nod, smile nicely and be very agreeable which led to a whole range of psychological and social implications.

My mother, who is also hearing impaired, was then attending lipreading classes and kept asking me if I had inquired about attending the same classes. I eventually made a phone call that would change my life and I started attending lipreading sessions.

I discovered that I was doing a few things right, however there were so many strategies to learn, one of these being how to adapt my own environment at home to assist with my hearing loss. On arriving home I rearranged my entire lounge room, disconnecting the TV aerial and moving the TV across to the other side of the room. I then phoned my husband at work and very quickly explaining what I had done and told him that if he wanted to watch the news that night he would have to reconnect the TV aerial. I hung up the phone before he could say anything.

Over the ensuing years many changes evolved with my husband and two daughters giving me so much support and encouragement for which I am forever grateful.

While I was attending lipreading classes I was asked to consider taking up study. I took up the challenge and achieved my diploma in Aural Rehabilitation and Lipreading to Adults. This is something I would not have considered possible only a few years before.

Over the past 15 years I have been employed by Guide Dogs Hearing Services (SA), being involved in many pilot projects that are now part of our service provision. These include the Specialized Smoke Alarm Scheme, with South Australia being the first State in Australia to adopt this Scheme. During my 5 year term as project officer I provided information to all the other States as requested to help them put forward their proposals for smoke alarm schemes. Other pilot projects included courses for people with both Vision & Hearing Impairment, and in 2009 the Managing Hearing Loss in the Workplace course which has been very successful with ongoing support groups now established in SA.

I am fortunate to travel throughout country South Australia ensuring people in the rural sector also have access to our services.

During my time with Guide Dogs Hearing Services my hearing deteriorated from severe to profound. With the support of my then manager Maureen McGrotty and work colleagues, and with my knowledge and skills gained not only at work but also at home, I was able to utilize as many Assistive Listening Devices as possible. These included the Telephone Typewriter (TTY) and the National Relay Service for both personal and professional phone calls, enabling me to understand confidently what was being said over the telephone, knowing when someone was at the door, and waking up in time.

I have received some interesting feedback when I explain to people that most things in my home flash and shake, with mostly flashing items at work.

In 2002 I received my first Cochlear Implant. My feeling was 'wow, amazing', I can hear an 'S' sound. I could not remember the last time I had heard an 'S'. I could understand words.

To begin with dogs sounded like ducks and people sounded like the chipmunks. However this quickly changed and I could soon define male and female voices and understanding became so much easier, with my husband needing to be very careful what he was saying when standing behind me, as I could now understand what he was saying.

When asked by South Australian Cochlear Implant audiologist Keith Chiveralls what were the biggest changes for me apart from being able to understand speech, I explained my world was now full of colour. I had not noticed so much colour before, the different shades of greens in trees were overwhelming, and the sky was so beautifully blue. I had been concentrating so hard on watching peoples' faces relying on speechreading that I could not have told you the colour of the wall behind them. And when I received my 2nd

Cochlear implant in 2007 - oh my!, surround sound. Every day I am so grateful for the ability to be able to understand words.

Over the years I have shed my cocoon. It does take time, however gradually I have gained knowledge, skills, confidence, self-esteem and self-worth. Yes I have a hearing impairment and when I take off my speech processors I am deaf. But I embrace my hearing loss and with the skills I have attained. I am currently the Chairperson for Lions at both Local and Zone level. I am involved with CICADA South Australia, a member of the Australian Communication Exchange Consumer Advisory Group and am constantly amazed that my hearing loss is accepted and others are more than willing to ensure that they face me and slow down. Best of all, I can ensure that only one person speaks at time.

Last year under the supervision of Charyse May, I have succeeded in attaining a Certificate IV in Audiometry. All of this would not have been foreseen 25 years ago.

If I am able to inspire or empower another person with a hearing impairment to seek information, gain skills to manage their hearing loss then I feel I have given something back.

To my husband Roger and two beautiful daughters who have kept me well-grounded and supported me through the many changes in my hearing over the past 42 years I am eternally grateful.

I would like to thank Charyse May for putting forward my nomination with her partner in crime Maureen McGrotty. By the way I knew nothing of this until Charyse had received word that I had won. I am still at a loss to explain how I feel that these two beautiful people felt I was worthy of nomination."



Photo: David Harricks (l) presenting the Libby Harricks Achievement Award to Carolyn with her proud husband Roger (r)