

BC HANDS & VOICES

April 2011 - Issue No. 7



BC Hands & Voices is a parent-driven, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting families with children who are D/deaf or hard of hearing.

We are a parent/professional collaborative group that is unbiased towards communication modes and methods, believing that families will make the best choices for their child if they have access to good information and support.

Our goal is to support families in achieving successful outcomes for their children.

We are on the web at
bchandsandvoices.com

Blossoming in Kindergarten

By Jennifer Towers

Three years ago when our daughter Caitlin was 18 months old, she barely spoke ten words. We were concerned about her development so we took her for a hearing test (no screening was available when she was born). It turned out she had permanent mild to moderate sensorineural hearing loss. She was fitted with hearing aids within two weeks and then began intervention a month later. In my sadness, one big concern was whether she would be able to enter kindergarten in our neighborhood school with the young children she already knew. But, three years later, after consistent hearing aid use and weekly intervention, she was ready to go to our local school with her friends.

In the spring before Caitlin turned five, both her preschool teacher and speech and language pathologist thought she was ready to go to Kindergarten that September, but I was nervous about how it would all go. She is a late November baby, was still quite shy/quiet in group situations and she had just managed to learn her capital letters after hours of practice. To make matters worse, we had watched Caitlin struggle through the years with new concepts like learning her colours and the names of her extended family members. I was so worried that the new concepts in Kindergarten would take her a long time to master.

What put our minds at ease was we knew she would receive tons of support. Back in the spring, Caitlin's preschool teacher (coincidentally a mother of a hard of hearing teenager) referred us to a hearing resource teacher in our school district. We had a meeting in May and started planning her IEP (individualized education plan) with the professionals who would be working with Caitlin. The hearing resource teacher also arranged all the paperwork designating Caitlin such that she would receive as much support as possible. This designation led Caitlin to share a full time specialized education assistant (SEA) with another boy in her kindergarten class. In September, I attended an IEP meeting with the SEA, the classroom teacher and the hearing resource teacher. We spent an hour talking about goals for Caitlin and set three goals connected to her speech, listening and independence with her FM and speaker system. We were told she would be the only child with a hearing loss in her school, which was worrisome. But she spoke well and was very social in small group situations, so we hoped for the best as she embarked into Kindergarten that fall.

Caitlin's classroom was (happily) small and carpeted, creating an easier listening environment. In addition, the room is bright, colourful and full of books and toys. Overall, the classroom is stimulat-



ing but there are predictable routines. The hearing resource teacher works with Caitlin for an hour each week for a one on one session on the IEP goals we set. Also, the classroom teacher uses a sound field system to amplify her voice for all students (so she is very used to wearing a microphone). Caitlin's FM system patches in reasonably well. The hearing resource teacher even spoke to our hearing aid company and arranged for a dynamic sound field system that matches even better with Caitlin's FM - so Caitlin is receiving excellent sound quality.

With all of these accommodations and supports, Caitlin has done better than I ever expected. She loves learning her letters and quickly picked up her lower case letters. She is very independent and enjoys picking out original and fashion forward outfits in the morning before school and putting on and connecting her FM when she arrives at school. She

looks forward to "special helper day" when she gets to bring something from home in a box writing the first letter of each object on the outside. In September I had to help her; by November she chose three items (two frogs and a bird) independently. I looked on the front of the box and she had written "FFB" all by herself - wow, what progress! Caitlin started the year as a very quiet child and did not share her thoughts, but the teacher now tells me that she offers answers during circle time. Caitlin loves making play dates and plays well with others.

The best moment was in December at the Christmas concert. Each class from Kindergarten to Grade Four sang two songs. When I watched our older son in that concert last year, I couldn't even imagine Caitlin standing up there. If she could be dragged up there, I imagined her standing, head down and silent. Instead, to our delight, Caitlin confidently walked

onto the risers, and faced forward, head held high. She sang the songs with joy on her face. She didn't just sing - she shouted and I sat in my chair and smiled from ear to ear.

Our little girl has blossomed into a fully communicating, happy student who is succeeding in school. We have a long way to go yet (she needs to learn to read and understand math and of course so much more) but I definitely feel much more confident. The support to make sure that the many small things are in place that all add up to helping her succeed has been amazing, and Caitlin has thrived.

From Parents to Parents

Hard of Hearing Teenaged Fiddler Travels to Scotland

By Teresa Kazemir

Our son Jesse travelled to Scotland this past summer – he is a fiddle player with the North Shore Celtic Ensemble, and they participated in the Aberdeen International Youth Festival for 12 days in July and August. It was an intense, exciting experience for the 20 teens that went – they all had a fantastic, if exhausting, time.

Jesse is hard of hearing and wears two Bone Anchored Hearing Aids (Bahas), so there were a few things to consider when planning the trip. For one thing, we made sure the chaperones knew that he would not wake up in case of fire, as he would not hear the alarm. Chaperones and other kids in his flat were told that in the case of a fire, someone would have to go into his room and wake him, and so Jesse made a point of not locking his door when he was sleeping. In fact, even though he has a vibrating alarm clock, Jesse tends to fall back to sleep after it wakes him up (teenage boys can really sleep!), so there were a few occasions when his friends had to wake him up for breakfast.

Jesse also made a point of packing his dry aid kit – we have found that in some places the air is more humid (especially if we are camping and staying in a tent), and that causes problems with his hearing aids. Storing the aids in the dry aid kit each night helps with this. Jesse also took it in case his hearing aids got wet – it rains a fair bit in Scotland!

One security guard questioned Jesse about his hearing aids when going through security at the airport. Jesse is quite practiced at talking to people about his hearing aids and hearing loss, and once he explained, they did not hassle him any further. I think it helped that Jesse was not at all defensive, and was quite happy to explain.

There were some situations during the trip where Jesse found it difficult to hear – he managed OK in the cafeteria, but the cabarets we attended each night (where different groups performed for each other) were VERY loud. It was so loud that no one could hear, though, so Jesse was not alone.

Wig Tape

Some parents have found it hard to find wig tape. Actually it is available at any store that sells wigs. The Bay at Lougheed mall in Burnaby has a wig section, and they always have rolls of wig tape sitting there for sale.

Cheryl Lacey, one of BC Hands & Voices' members, has also got the following information sheet to share with us.

Wigtape is excellent for hearing aid retention, but sometimes difficult to find. Below is information on a wig-tape distributor in Toronto. The tape is 3M Surgical Tape, recommended for hearing aids and is of just the right size and strength and is latex free. It can be ordered online through the website given below:

Description: 3M Surgical Tape
Clear Roll
Size: 1/2" x 108"
Price: 99 cents per roll
Shipping: \$6.

Business: You're Lookin' Good
70 Peach Willoway
Toronto ON M2J 2B6
Phone: 647-300-1599
Website: www.hairtape.net
Email: hairtape@rogers.com

Jesse also found that each concert venue where they performed was different, and there were a few places where he had a hard time hearing the guitar (which is critical when you are playing as part of an ensemble, and the guitar sets and maintains the beat). The musical directors of the group are very respectful and understanding about Jesse's hearing loss, but they don't necessarily know when Jesse is having a hard time hearing. It's his responsibility to let them know, and then they make any necessary adjustments. When Jesse was new to the group, he was hesitant to speak up, but as his confidence has grown, he has become much better at advocating for his listening needs. There were two or three times this trip when he was able to adjust where he stood so he could better hear the guitar through the monitor on stage.

Another challenge was the fact that participants came from all over the world. Many people spoke English, but with a whole variety of accents. This typically presents a challenge for people with hearing loss, but Jesse actually found that he could understand most accents quite well. He did struggle with



the flight attendants from Air France, who had very strong French accents. He found he used the same strategies as everyone else – listening carefully, asking the person to repeat, or asking a friend for clarification.

Overall, Jesse's hearing loss did not really cause many problems for him on this trip. Preparing ahead of time definitely helped (talking with chaperones, packing the dry aid kit). The challenges a person encounters when travelling certainly vary from person to person, depending on their hearing loss and other factors, but one key strategy is to be proactive and be prepared. Other than that, perhaps the best tool is a sense of humour – a smile and a laugh certainly help to smooth things over when an instruction is missed or something is misheard.

As a parent (and chaperone) it was really good to see how independent Jesse has become, and how he can use strategies to compensate for things he might be missing. I have chaperoned on several trips over the years (ensemble trips and school trips) and have found it to be a wonderful way to help the other kids, teachers, leaders and parents learn more about Jesse's hearing loss. There are often nice, natural opportunities for people to ask me questions that they've never quite got around to asking.

So, Scotland was great, Jesse now has the "travel bug"...and I am confident that his hearing loss will not hold him back.

Hands & Voices Spring Picnic

Saturday, May 28th

Mark your calendar – Rain or shine! We have rented a hall this year in case it rains, but there is a great outdoor area if the weather is good. Join us for a potluck lunch, games & activities for the kids, and a chance to connect with other parents of kids who are deaf or hard of hearing. Travel grant available to assist with travel costs. Hope to see you there!

- Date:** Saturday May 28th, 11am–2pm
- Location:** Clayton Hall, Surrey
- Link:** www.bchandsandvoices.com – details are posted
- Contact info:** info@bchandsandvoices.com

Crash Crawly's Huge Success!

Family fun at Crash Crawly's on March 13th, a huge success!

A big thank-you to BC Hands & Voices, Family Network for Deaf Children, and CHHA Parents' Branch for organizing it.

220 people were there. Here is what Jennifer, one of our members, shares with us.

“What a great turn out! Children of all ages running around. My kids really enjoyed climbing and sliding with the other kids. There were lots of healthy snacks and a huge variety of beverages. My son and I enjoyed a round of laser tag. It was good for my kids to see others doing sign language. It was nice to touch base with people I haven't seen for awhile.”



Member News



Julia & her sister Ashley enjoying the late February snowfall



Connor and Hannah having fun during their recent family vacation in Kapalua Maui

A Bicycle Built for Two

By Chris Mallinson

Due to limited vision and only one functional eye, our son Scott is not supposed to be learning to ride a bike just yet. He loves being on bike though, so we've looked all over for a bike that he can share with one of us. One lucky day, we came across the "Two of Us" made by Asama. It's a six speed with an extra seat between the main seat and the handlebars, as well as foot pegs and a small handlebar for the child. Scott loved it. As a bonus, the bike is also completely foldable, and fits just about anywhere. A great option for someone with a small child that would like the feeling of riding a bike, but may not be ready to do so on his own.



Donate Now

DONATE NOW

Your donations will go towards providing more support to families with deaf/hard of hearing children in B.C.

To make a donation, please issue a cheque to BC Hands and Voices, and mail to:

BC Hands and Voices
5513 Parker Ave
Victoria, BC V8Y 2N2

A tax deduction receipt will be issued for any donation of \$25 or above. BC Hands and Voices is a registered charity (Charity Registration Number: 83838-4428 RR0001).



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Contact us via email:

info@bchandsandvoices.com

Visit our website:

bchandsandvoices.com

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