

## **Learning to listen: making it work for children with autism**

### **Hannah Ager**

As we all know, Deaf children can have a range of difficulties attributable to their Deafness but there is also a certain percentage of those children that have additional special needs. All children require an individualised therapy programme dependent on their individual circumstances and this is important for children with a dual diagnosis of Deafness and Autism.

My presentation is going to be about sharing my practice, focusing on what changes I make to enhance my therapy sessions with the aim of having better outcomes for Deaf Autistic children. When a child, who is profoundly Deaf, receives a cochlear implant, they now have access to sound that they have never experienced before. In Autistic children, the additional sensory experience can prove to be very challenging. As some of the children are pre linguistic or very young at the time of implantation this can also mean we do not necessarily know that they are Autistic until later on in the therapy journey. Children with autism have compromised social interaction skills and it is our role as teachers and therapists to use their new listening potential to maximize their communication skills. How do we do this? How do we get past the barriers? It is very challenging and I look forward to sharing my knowledge and experiences with you.

*Hannah qualified as a Speech and Language Therapist in 1999 gaining an honors degree at Sheffield University (Bachelor of Medical Science). Over the past 17 years, Hannah has developed expertise in Paediatric speech and language therapy with a specialism in Deafness. Hannah is trained in Hanen techniques, Parent child interaction therapy, PECS, TEACCH and many more, and is currently undertaking training to qualify as a Learning Language and Listening Specialist Cert Auditory Verbal Therapist.*

*Hannah has a many special interests within the field of Deafness but one particularly relevant to today's conference is the impact a dual diagnosis has on children with permanent childhood hearing loss and on the intervention you provide. Hannah is currently the Principal Speech and Language Therapist at the Midlands Hearing Implant Programme at Birmingham Children's Hospital. She deals with a diverse caseload of severe to profoundly deaf children, many of whom have additional special needs including Autism and provides regular assessments, advice and intervention.*

### **Deafness and Autism:**

Can children benefit from hearing technology?