Southern
Cochlear
Implant
Programme

Hear things differently

APRIL 2026

Newsletter

From the CEO

Welcome to the first newsletter for 2026.

A focus for our newsletters is clients sharing their cochlear implant journey. In this edition we meet a group of clients from our Taranaki region.

Each whānau is unique, with one family having siblings with implants, while another features cochlear implant users across two generations.

The common thread in each of these families is, of course, the significant change to their lives that a cochlear implant made.

In our staff section we introduce Madiha Ehsan who has recently joined our Wellington team as an Audiologist.

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Talk to us

As always, we would welcome any feedback on the content as well as your input into future issues. Email us at **newsletter@scip.co.nz**

TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

SADIE EARL.

She forgets she has cochlear implants: catching up with Sadie Earl

Years ago, while Nicola Earl and her young daughter Sadie were waiting to be seen at the cochlear implant clinic in Christchurch, a teenage girl said something that would stay with her long after.

The girl had been on holiday and jumped into a pool with her implant on – she'd simply forgotten she was deaf.

"What I heard," Nicola recalls, "was this is a teenager who is deaf, but has a cochlear implant, but is on holiday, swimming and just doing everything with her family like a normal teenager."

Back then, Nicola's own children were little. She didn't know what their teenage years would look like. Now she does. And if you asked 16-year-old Sadie Earl's friends to describe her, 'deaf' wouldn't be the first word they'd reach for.

"I forget they're there sometimes," says Sadie of her bilateral cochlear implants, which she has worn since she was eight months old.

"Even my friends say, 'oh, I kind of forgot you had them.' They don't really affect my day-to-day life."

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Catching up with Sadie Earl...continued from page 1

Sadie attends Inglewood High School in Taranaki – where her father Tony teaches Physical Education (PE).

She is, by her own admission, not exactly a fan of sitting still.

Her favourite subject is PE ("I like not staying in class") and outside of school she plays basketball and volleyball for the school, hits the gym and spends as much time as possible with friends. She also works at a local takeaway shop. Life, in other words, is full.

"She just loves being social," says Nicola. "She's sporty, she loves her friends and family – that's who Sadie is."

Tony says the fact Sadie and her brother Benji have cochlear implants opened up opportunities. "Being deaf hasn't limited them in any way because they just do normal things – or extraordinary things."

Extraordinary is a fair word for some of Sadie's experiences and her cheeky sense of humour shines through when she talks about them.

She has appeared on television twice – the first time entirely without her parents' knowledge.

As a young child, she submitted a joke to a children's TV show called Fanimals and it aired before anyone at home had any idea. "I didn't even tell mum or dad about it," she laughs.

"One of mum's friends went up to her and was like, 'oh, I saw Sadie on TV the other day.' Mum was like, are you sure?'"

Sadie appeared on the same show a second time, being selected for a segment involving a farm stay by confidently claiming she could act like a 10-year-old – despite being nine.

More recently, Sadie took part in a short film called Hand in Hand, made in Auckland in 2022 and based on true stories.

In the 1970s, using New Zealand Sign Language in schools was banned. The true story of two girls breaking the rules in the name of friendship sheds light on the history and realities of being deaf and was written and directed by Shelley Waddams and produced by Georgia Hoskins-Smith.

TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

BENJI AND SADIE EARL.

Sadie auditioned via Zoom, learned her lines and spent four full days on set. The film went on to win awards at a film festival.

During breaks, she found herself gravitating not toward the other young cast members but toward a deaf woman on set, the two of them signing back and forth between takes. "It was really fun," she says.

Sadie currently has an agent, and while she is characteristically breezy about where acting might take her ("You'll see me on TV next week"), she hasn't ruled it out.

As for what comes next, Sadie is in no rush to decide but it's likely to involve helping people or animals.

For parents Nicola and Tony, sharing their children's stories has always been about more than their own family.

"We're the ones with the teenagers now," says Nicola, "and there are other families with small children and babies who are in that position where they don't know what their child's life might look like. I think it's important to share their stories – to show that they're having normal teenage experiences and lives."

Sadie's photos with her brother Benji and the rest of the family for the Southern Cochlear Implant Programme have appeared on billboards and buses and in newsletters – a fact she finds equal parts flattering and mortifying.

"There's a big poster when you walk into SCIP in Wellington," she says, "and it's like – cringe."

It's reassuring that, at 16, Sadie is exactly the kind of teenager that the anonymous girl in the waiting room once promised she could be.

Sadie's original story was published alongside her brother Benji's in the 2019 edition of this newsletter. Both children have bilateral cochlear implants. Benji's updated story appears on page 5.

TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

THE EARL FAMILY – BENJI, OLIVIA, TONY, NICOLA AND SADIE.

From the CEO

... continued from page 1

Madiha brings existing cochlear implant experience having previously worked in the cochlear implant and other sectors.

We say farewell to Lauren Mola, who leaves us shortly to return to her native United States. Her last day with us will be April 9. We have greatly appreciated Lauren's contribution to SCIP in the last two and a half years – and we hope she looks us up if she is ever back in New Zealand.

The format for our newsletters will shortly be changing as we move from a paper-based format to a digital format.

An electronic email-based newsletter will allow us to turn around stories and news faster, with opportunities to link to media and video.

In previous newsletters I have mentioned that our Government contract is due for renewal on 30 June 2026.

The funder, Disability Support Services, is currently undertaking a national process to determine how cochlear implant services will be delivered in the future.

We are participating in this process alongside others across the sector. At this stage, there are no changes to the care and support you receive – services continue as normal.

Our focus remains on providing high-quality, consistent care for you and your whānau. We understand that processes like this can raise questions and we are committed to keeping you informed if anything changes that affects your care.

In the meantime, please be assured that your clinical team and support services remain unchanged.

We hope you enjoy reading the patient journeys and that these resonate with your own experience.

NEIL HESLOP
Chief Executive Officer

TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

OLIVIA, BENJI AND SADIE FROM 2019.

TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

BENJI, OLIVIA AND SADIE THIS YEAR.

From the playground to the world stage: catching up with Benji Earl

When we first told Benji Earl's story in 2019, alongside that of his sister, Sadie, he was a bright, active 10-year-old from New Plymouth whose world had been opened up by bilateral cochlear implants. Back then, his mum Nicola reflected: that "... the implants have given them the option to do everything a typical Kiwi kid would do and that's an amazing thing."

In 2026, Benji is now 17 and showing just how true those words have become.

He has grown into a remarkable young man with a clear sense of who he is and a list of achievements that would impress anyone.

Hip hop dance has been central to Benji's life since he was around seven years old. Today, he's competing at an international level and stepping up as a leader for younger crew members.

"There's two groups," Benji explains. "One has around nine people, and the other ranges from between 16 to 23."

In the larger 'mega crew' group, which spans students from Year 9 through to Year 13, Benji took on a leadership role last year.

"I was one of the three leaders," he says simply. "We just help everyone else out when they need help."

That 'helping out' has taken him a long way from home.

In 2024, Benji's crew qualified for international competitions and travelled to Arizona and Los Angeles in the United States.

"We qualified for – or signed up for – competitions in New Zealand, and then one of them was a world qualifier," he says.

Watching crews from around the globe was an eye-opener.

"You got to watch all the other crews from all different countries and some of the dancers from other countries included their culture," he says, "which is really cool."


TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

BENJI EARL.

Back home in New Zealand, the competition circuit takes Benji to Hamilton, Auckland and Hastings. It's a schedule that requires commitment and funding.

To help cover costs, he works part-time at Woolworths.

Outside of dance and work, Benji has just finished Year 12 and is now enrolled in a Level 3 Early Childhood Education qualification that combines three days a week of placement at a kindergarten or primary school with two days of classroom study.

He credits his years helping train junior dancers at the studio as the spark. "I used to help train the little kids at dance," he says. "They're fun to hang out with."

As for his cochlear implants? They're simply part of who he is.

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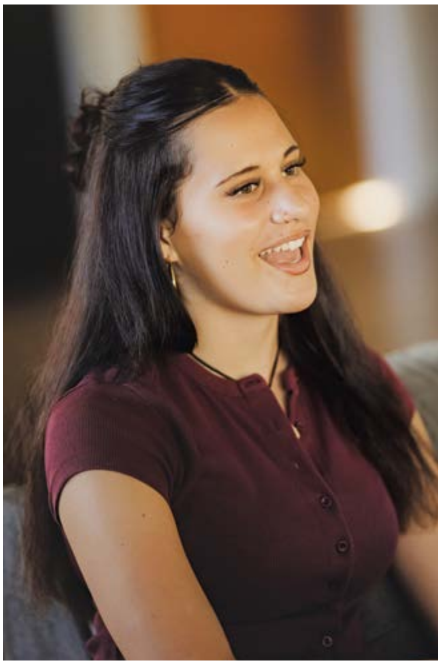
Catching up with Benji Earl... continued from page 5


TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

SADIE AND BENJI EARL.

TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY



SADIE EARL.

Benji doesn't get many questions about them these days.

But there's a quiet acknowledgement that the implants and his passion for dance are connected: without them, the music – and everything that has followed – might not have been possible at all.

Life right now, Benji says, is pretty much "study and hip hop" – plus friends, work and the next competition on the horizon.

A world qualifier, a leadership role, a new career path, and a life lived fully and on his own terms sounds like exactly what his family hoped for.

Benji's original story was published in the 2019 edition of this newsletter. A catch-up with his sister Sadie, who also has bilateral cochlear implants, features on page 1.

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TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

THE EARL FAMILY – BENJI, OLIVIA, TONY, NICOLA AND SADIE.

Life before Murray's cochlear implant is ancient history

"It just feels like I've had it forever," Murray Beck says about his cochlear implant, five years after surgery.

"It's only when I take it off that I think, 'Oh, this ain't so good.' It's definitely been a game changer."

Today, the 69-year-old Taranaki dairy farmer whistles while milking his 55 cows, chats easily and enjoys lively car conversations with his wife Julie.

But five years ago, Murray's world was increasingly silent.

After 17 years as a manager in the oil and gas industry in the Middle East, Murray's hearing had deteriorated severely.

By the time he returned to full-time farming in 2016, simple interactions had become ordeals.

"He wouldn't go anywhere when I was at work," Julie recalls.

Murray carried $50 notes to the supermarket because he couldn't hear cashiers.

He'd avoid conversations to prevent the embarrassment of answering wrong.

His grandchildren would yell in his ear, but he still couldn't understand them.

A hearing assessment revealed the devastating truth: Murray could understand only 4% of single words without visual cues.

"I cried," Julie admits. "I had no idea how bad it was. He was missing so much."

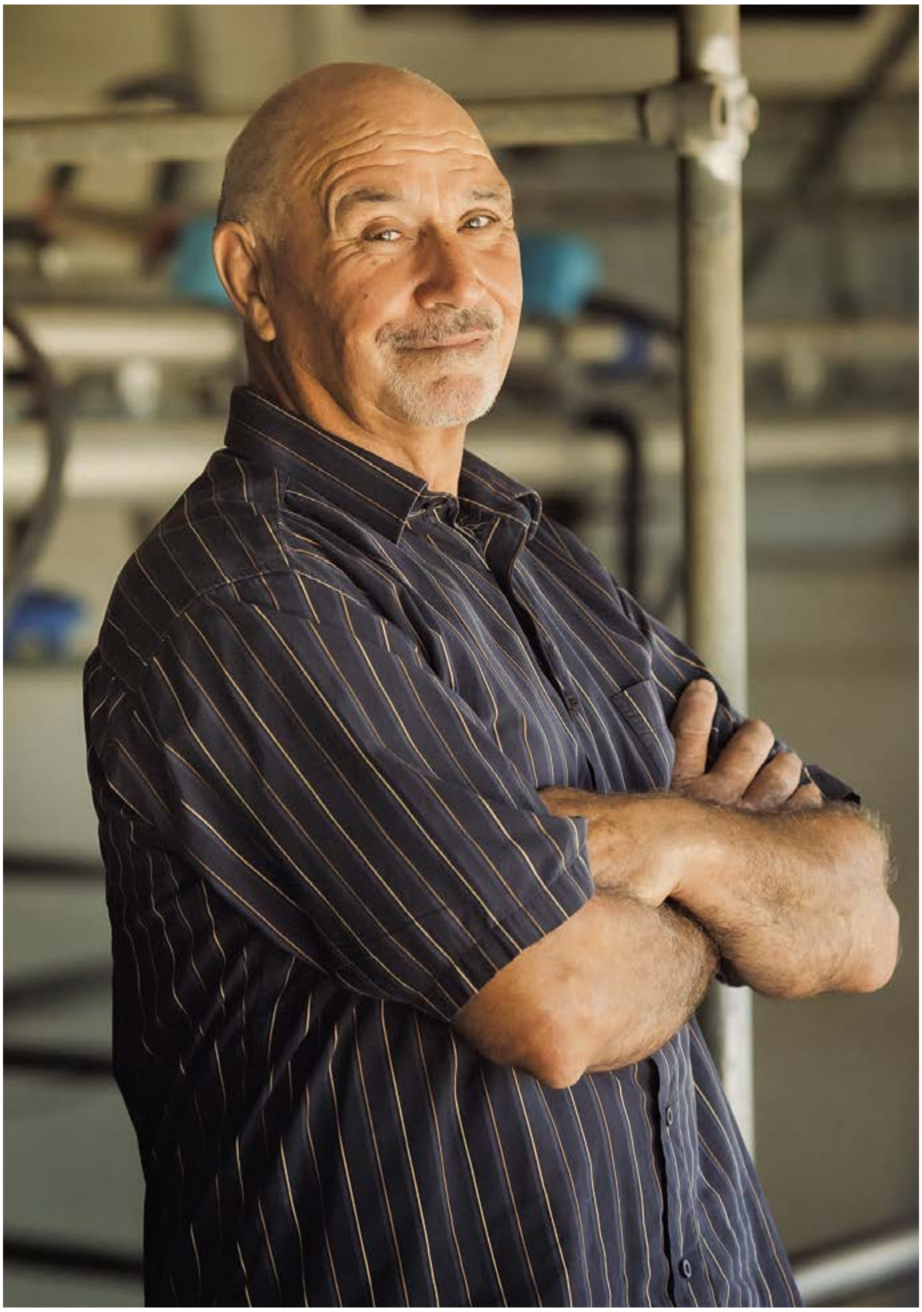
Watching television programmes became a frustrating ritual of pausing and explaining what was said.

Car journeys were silent because Murray would dangerously turn to lip-read while driving.

Exhausted from constantly trying to decode facial expressions and lip movements, Murray would fall asleep whenever he sat down.

"He was afraid to live life because he was afraid he was going to get it wrong," Julie says.

Meeting Nikki Cleine from the Southern Cochlear Implant Programme (SCIP) changed everything.



TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

MURRAY BECK.

As someone with a hearing difference herself, Nikki understood Murray's experience. Her description resonated: profound hearing difference is like being in a motel room with thin walls – you know people are talking next door but can't make out the words.

Seeing another cochlear implant recipient confidently talking at a crowded funeral showed Murray what was possible.

Funding the surgery themselves was the best $60,000 I ever spent, Murray says.

The day after his switch-on, he attended another funeral and, despite the sadness of the gathering, he couldn't stop smiling as he could hear everything.

Five years on, the transformation touches every aspect of life.

His grandchildren – now 18, 15, and 12 – talk easily with their grandad.

Car rides overflow with conversation.

Murray hears air leaks in his milking plant and the wash-down pump running, preventing costly repairs.

TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

MURRAY BECK AND HIS WIFE JULIE.

> As someone with a hearing difference herself, Nikki understood Murray's experience. Her description resonated: profound hearing difference is like being in a motel room with thin walls – you know people are talking next door but can't make out the words.

His iPhone streams directly to his processor, turning dreaded phone calls into a pleasure, he says.

Farm life has brought amusing moments. Murray wears a hat to prevent curious cows from licking his processor off his head.

Once, he wondered why everything went silent while working on the tractor – the processor's magnet had attached to the metal shed.

"Not as many arguments," Murray laughs, referring to misunderstandings when Julie would ask for something from another room.

The whole family had to learn to speak more quietly after years of raised voices.

Perhaps the most profound change is the return of Murray's true personality.

From a musical family with a great singing voice, he'd stopped whistling because he couldn't hear himself.

"Music came back," Julie says emotionally. "He whistles all the time. You can tell if he's had a good milking because he's whistling or singing."

With a 'Resound' hearing aid in his other ear that pairs with his cochlear implant, music he loves – like The Eagles – sounds like actual music again, streaming to both ears simultaneously.

"He's back to who he used to be," Julie reflects. "He's always been cheeky with a wicked sense of humour. A lot of that disappeared because he feared getting it wrong. He's back to that person now."

Murray puts on his processor at 5:30am and wears it all day. The couple has a sweet evening ritual: Murray stands ready for his shower and checks with Julie, "Is the conversation over now?" Only then does the processor come off.

"I don't really think about BC – *Before Cochlear* – anymore," Murray says.

"This is just how life is, and it's good."

Making the most of your cochlear implant

After five years with his cochlear implant, Taranaki dairy farmer Murray Beck has learned valuable lessons about maximising success.

Here are some practical tips from Murray and his wife Julie.

Before getting his cochlear implant, Murray's hearing assessment revealed he could only understand 4% of single words without visual cues.

"I had no idea how bad it was until I saw that test," Julie admits. "Hearing tests with beeps don't tell you what you lose in speech. That's what the world is about – talking to each other."

The importance of rehabilitation homework

The rehabilitationists at the Southern Cochlear Implant Programme were impressed with how quickly Murray adapted – but it wasn't magic, it was work.

Murray credits much of his success to diligently completing his rehabilitation exercises. "I'd read articles from the newspaper aloud and Murray had to repeat what he heard," Julie explains. "We'd do it at night and weekends – 20 minutes at a time."

The exercises helped Murray's brain relearn how to process sound. "To me, everything sounded like 'cat' or 'fish' at first," Murray explains. "But doing all those individual words and exercises, it all came together."

Murray's advice is straightforward: "Do the homework. Work with your partner or family member. Practice listening, do the exercises. That's how you get the best results."

Keep sessions short but consistent – around 20 minutes – and be patient. Sounds will seem strange at first but improve with practice. The whole Beck family also had to adjust, learning to speak more quietly after years of raising their voices.

Pairing with a hearing aid

For those with some residual hearing in the other ear, pairing a cochlear implant with a compatible hearing aid can significantly improve the listening experience, especially for music.


TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

MURRAY AND JULIE BECK.

> "Doing all those individual words and exercises, it all came together."

Murray uses a Resound hearing aid that pairs seamlessly with his cochlear implant.

"Music that I know and love – like the Eagles – now sounds like music again," he says.

Technology integration

Murray's processor connects directly to his iPhone, streaming phone calls straight to his ear.

This transformed phone calls from something he avoided "like the plague" to easy, pleasant conversations.

"I'd see the phone ringing and wouldn't answer it," Murray recalls. "Now I just pick up – even unknown numbers."

Many TV channels now offer subtitles, which the Becks keep on for a complete experience.

Don't delay getting assessed

The Becks' strongest advice is not to delay getting assessed.

"Murray could have had one 10 years before, but nobody ever offered it as an option," Julie says.

She emphasises asking audiologists specifically about cochlear implants. "Hearing aids amplify what you've got left. Murray had very little left."

The Becks chose to pay for Murray's surgery themselves rather than wait for funding.

"It was the best $60,000 I ever spent," he says emphatically. "If they can get the money, just go and get it done."

Murray is no longer exhausted from trying to decode conversations or afraid of social situations. His cheeky personality, sense of humour and whistling have returned.

Murray puts on his processor at 5:30AM and doesn't think twice about it.

His message is direct: "If someone's really deaf and knows about it, just go and get a cochlear implant. Life's too short."

SCIP Community Relationship Manager & Fundraising Update

As summer gently fades and the evenings grow cooler, there's something rather comforting about this change of season.

While we may miss those long, sun-filled days, autumn and winter bring their own pleasures – cosy nights, warm drinks and time to slow down a little.

Let's hope for a mild winter and not too long to wait before those golden evenings return.

So far this year, SCIP has had the pleasure of hosting two Cochlear Implant User Group meetings – in Nelson and Gisborne.

These gatherings are always a highlight, offering a wonderful opportunity for cochlear implant users to come together, share experiences and support one another in a relaxed and friendly setting.

We visit each region annually and are very much looking forward to connecting with many more of you in the months ahead.

We celebrated Loud Shirt Day at the end of October last year. After expenses, both SCIP and the Northern Programme (The Hearing House) each received $13,000.

While this event remains a valued part of our calendar because of the fun involved in dressing loud for a day, we are seeing a gradual decline in funds raised, likely reflecting the ongoing cost-of-living pressures many are facing.

On a bright note, we are delighted to share that – thanks to some truly remarkable generosity – SCIP has, for the first time, exceeded $200,000 in donations this year. The donations include $21,000 donated towards children's services.

We are sincerely grateful to all our donors for their kindness and the profound difference their support makes.

For those interested in a more detailed overview of grants and donations, our full financial report is published each October and is available on the SCIP website.

We're also very pleased with the continued success of SCIP's Financial Assistance Grant, now approaching its seventh anniversary year.

Since its introduction, nearly $55,000 has been distributed through grants to support individuals who need help with the costs of maintaining their cochlear implant or attending important appointments.

If you'd like to find out more about this support, please don't hesitate to speak with your audiologist.

Finally, I always enjoy hearing from our community. Whether you'd like to share your story, talk about leaving a gift in your will or simply offer feedback, you are warmly invited to get in touch.

BELINDA VAN DER MONDE
Community Relationship Manager
belinda.vandermonde@scip.co.nz
Phone: 027 355 3042.

THE COCHLEAR IMPLANT USER GROUP MEETING IN NELSON.

DID YOU KNOW?

- There are **80 adults on the waiting list** for a cochlear implant in SCIP's region
- The Government currently **funds cochlear implants** for **120 adults** every year (60 in SCIP's region)
- Cochlear implants are **not fully covered by health insurance**
- The **cost** of a **single cochlear implant is $55,000**

The CI technology is simply a part of life

Nicole Berry has worked at Puke Ariki – New Plymouth's library, museum and information centre – for 20 years.

She loves crafting, runs adult craft nights through the library and is currently expecting her first child with fiancé Beren.

She also has Usher Syndrome, wears a cochlear implant in her left ear and a hearing aid in her right. She is not, she will tell you plainly, defined by any of it.

"It's all just normal to me," says Nicole, now 38. "I don't know any difference. I just have a new piece of technology that makes hearing a bit easier."

Nicole was born with hearing loss, sharing Usher Syndrome with her mother Maree, who also has a cochlear implant. Her father Richard has one too.

Growing up watching her mother navigate hearing difference – and eventually embrace an implant – gave Nicole some reassurance when her own audiologist recommended the same path as her hearing continued to decline.

But it was the clinical recommendation that was the deciding factor for Nicole.

Her biggest concern was the surgery itself in June 2022.

"I had never had surgery before, never been in hospital. It was major surgery. That was my biggest worry."

Once through it, though, she was back at work within three to four weeks of switch-on and immediately began encountering sounds she had never noticed before.

"Who knew the buttons on the Eftpos machine made a noise?" she laughs. "Why do I want to hear that?"

One thing Nicole wants people to understand is that cochlear implant users don't simply hear less – they often hear more than people realise, and without the same filtering that hearing people take for granted.

"I think people forget we hear surround sound," she explains. "We hear everything. For a normal hearing person, their brain is trained to block out background noise. Whereas we hear that."

The sensory load adds up. Nicole and her mother Maree have both reflected on how much unacknowledged effort goes into lip reading alongside the implant.

"Some days your eyes get tired, your ears get tired, your brain gets tired."

Not all sounds are welcome, either. "There are sounds I hate. I can't stand birds. I'd never heard them before," Nicole says.

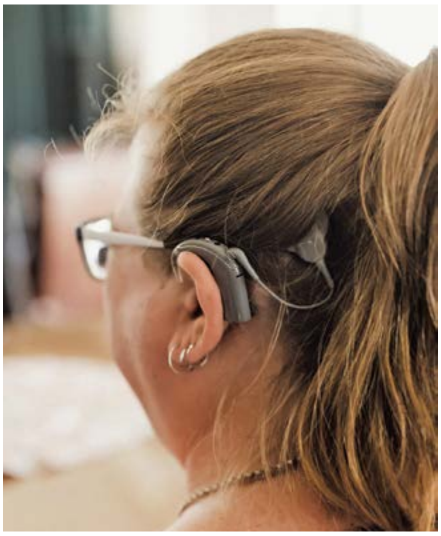
Puke Ariki is a busy, public-facing environment, and Nicole has encountered her share of ignorance and frustration at work over the years in her interactions with the public. She now wears a hearing-impaired badge each day, a practical step she has come to appreciate.

"I'd rather people come up and ask me about my cochlear implant than just be ignorant," she says.

The badge has also opened unexpected conversations. Families with newly implanted children sometimes seek her out.


TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

NICOLE BERRY.


TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

"I'm able to tell them my story and I think that's pretty cool."

The year after receiving her implant, Nicole went on a cruise and used an aqua kit for the first time – the waterproof technology that meant she could wear her processor in the spa pool and talk with people.

At home, she has embraced assistive technology broadly.

Her bedside system connects to the smoke alarm, doorbell and soon a baby monitor – with different vibration patterns to distinguish each alert.

She is matter of fact about it. "I just think it's cool that it's available."

Nicole and Beren are preparing for a new chapter and she is thinking practically, as she always does, about what it will mean to be a deaf parent with the right technology in place.

For Nicole, the implant is not a cure, a limitation or a statement. It's just part of how she moves through a full and busy life – at the library, in the craft room, on a cruise ship, and soon, with a baby to listen for.

Nicole is very appreciative of the help she has received from SCIP. "They stick with you throughout your whole journey."


TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

MAREE, NICOLE AND RICHARD BERRY.

Married couple navigate the world of sound together

When Maree Berry received her cochlear implant, she had no idea it would set off a chain of events that would eventually bring her husband Richard to the same operating table.

Their story is one of love, patience and the quiet courage it takes to open your world to sound.

Maree Berry can now multitask in ways that weren't possible before – knitting while listening to an audio book, music in the background, following conversation at a table.

She still scopes out the strategic seating in busy cafés. But her world is considerably larger than it was before she received her cochlear implant.

In fact, there are three members of this New Plymouth family who have cochlear implants.

Maree was born with Usher Syndrome, a genetic condition affecting both hearing and vision through a form of progressive sight loss called retinitis pigmentosa. It's a dual disability that shapes her day in ways most people never consider.

Her husband Richard Berry destroyed his hearing as a young motor mechanic, working in an era before anyone thought to hand out ear protection.

Their daughter Nicole also has Usher Syndrome.

TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

MAREE, NICOLE AND RICHARD BERRY.

Maree recalls as a small child her body-worn hearing aid was so bulky that her mother had to sew special pockets into her clothing to carry it.

She graduated to behind-the-ear aids before intermediate school, attended annual hearing checks for decades, and was eventually referred to Christchurch for cochlear implant assessment as her hearing continued to decline.

Three months later in June 2019 she was the first in the family to receive a cochlear implant, and the benchmark for those who followed.

"I think Richard and Nicole have seen how far ahead I've got with it," she says.

The first sounds Maree remembers after switch-on were small, domestic sounds, long unheard: Richard clicking the light switch in the motel room where they were staying and the zip on a bag.

"I like the sound of running water – turning the tap on or going down to the beach and hearing the waves." It's a short walk from their home to the seashore.

For someone who spent a lifetime scanning faces for cues, the change has been profound.

"Since the implant, I hardly do lip reading." The cognitive load that used to come with every conversation – eyes working overtime to supplement ears – has eased considerably.

Richard's path to supporting Maree with his own cochlear implant

Richard grew up in New Zealand after arriving from the UK at age three and spent his working life as a motor mechanic and later at the Methanex plant in Taranaki.

His hearing difference comes from decades of noise – engines, lawnmowers, machinery – at a time when hearing protection simply wasn't part of the culture.

"Hearing protection was never encouraged, you never thought about it," Richard says.

He watched younger tradespeople coming through later, when ear protection was worn as a matter of course, and understood too late what his generation hadn't been given.

TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

MAREE BERRY.

By the time Richard's right hearing aid stopped being effective when he retired, he had watched both Maree and Nicole go through the cochlear implant process. A question to his audiologist classified him as a candidate. He received his implant in 2024 aged 71.

Richard's reasons for proceeding were practical, but also something harder to name – a sense that getting the implant was, in some way, for Maree as much as for himself.

Her eyesight challenges mean he needs good hearing to be able to support her and counteract her disability.

He is candid about his ongoing adaptation to his cochlear implant. Speech clarity has improved significantly; music still doesn't sound right; phone calls with higher-pitched voices remain a challenge. Maree and Nicole are further ahead – more practised, more tuned in.

Before his surgery, the social withdrawal had been gradual and exhausting – the constant requests to repeat, the intolerant people who would give up after one or two attempts, the slow retreat from

TAMMIE PITTWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

MAREE, NICOLE AND RICHARD BERRY.

conversations that cost too much effort.

What Richard notices most now is something he hadn't expected.

"The big thing I found was I was able to talk to Maree in the car. We can now, at the right time, have a reasonable conversation during a long journey."

The Berrys have been in New Plymouth for more than four decades. They belong to a local hearing and peer social group that meets monthly – coffee, guest speakers, connection with others navigating the same terrain.

Richard and Maree also utilise the Southern Cochlear Implant Programme's remote mapping service. Their audiologist can adjust their programmes from Wellington while they sit at the computer at home with a hearing therapist from Your Way Kia Roha in New Plymouth.

Richard has a wood-turning workshop in his front yard, plays lawn bowls and enjoys getting out on his e-bike. Maree knits, sews, weaves and walks.

Without their cochlear implants, the couple wouldn't hear a knock at the door, a ringing phone or a smoke alarm.

Their processors go on in the morning and go off at night before they go to bed.

For them, that's harmony.

THE STAFF ROOM

On this page and the next we share some tips from our clinicians. We divided them up into the three different disciplines and welcome your feedback.

Madiha Ehsan.

Madiha Ehsan

I'm Madiha, originally from Pakistan, and I studied audiology at the University of Manchester, in the United Kingdom. I relocated to New Zealand two years ago with my family. I'm in love with New Zealand's clear skies and starry nights. I enjoy meeting people through my work and making a positive difference in people's hearing and quality of life. In my free time, I love watching movies, cooking and spending time with my family.

Madiha Ehsan, Audiologist, Queens Drive, Lower Hutt.

Lauren Mola.

Lauren Mola

After seven years living in Wellington, I'm heading overseas into a new chapter to be closer to family. Being part of the SCIP family has meant so much to me, and I'll really miss the people and connections here. Thank you all for making my time here so memorable. I'm looking forward to giving my family many overdue hugs, but I'll definitely carry a piece of New Zealand with me. I wouldn't be surprised if I find my way back to Wellington again someday.

Audiology Tips

When heading away on holiday, carry spare equipment for maintaining your communication, safety and independence.

Having spare parts on hand allows for quick replacement, ensuring continued access to sound, and helps prevent unnecessary disruptions.

Finding replacements may be costly and time consuming.

Pack essential backups such as a spare cable, extra batteries and microphone covers. Take your drying box too, particularly when travelling somewhere humid or wet.

When travelling overseas, check with your audiologist in case SCIP can loan you an older generation processor.

Being prepared with spare equipment means you can focus on your journey with greater confidence and peace of mind.

Check that your sound processor is covered by travel insurance in case of any unexpected losses!

Rehabilitation Tips

Listening can sometimes feel **mentally exhausting**, especially in busy environments or after a long day of conversation. This is called *listening fatigue*.

Your brain is working hard to interpret sound through your cochlear implant and this takes more concentration than typical hearing. Here are some simple strategies to help:

Take short listening breaks

In meetings, social situations or noisy places, give yourself permission to step away for a few minutes. A short break in a quieter space helps your brain reset.

Choose your listening environments carefully

When possible, choose quieter places to meet friends or colleagues. Sitting away from loud music, coffee machines or busy walkways makes conversations much easier.

Use visual cues

Seeing a person's face helps your brain fill in missing information. Position yourself so you clearly see the speaker.

Use technology to support listening

Captions, remote microphones or streaming audio directly to your processor make a big difference in challenging listening situations.

Plan recovery time

Schedule some quieter time to recharge after a big listening day.

Listening fatigue is a normal part of adjusting to hearing with a cochlear implant. Being aware of it and using helpful strategies makes listening feel much more manageable.

Tip: If you're feeling tired during a conversation, it's okay to say "My ears are getting a bit tired – can we take a short break?"

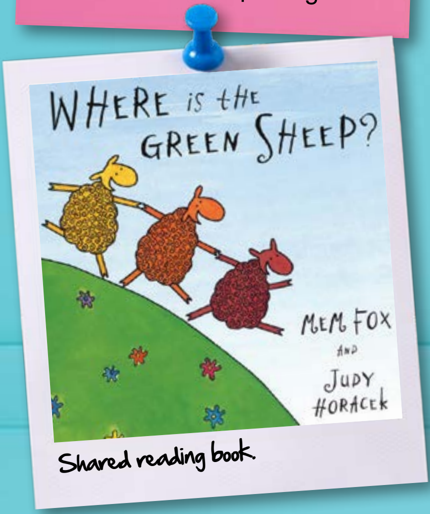
Habilitation Tips

Sharing books with tamariki is one of the most effective ways to support early language development.

Books expose tamariki to a wide range of language and concepts and encourage joint attention.

One important benefit of shared reading is **exposure to new vocabulary and concepts**.

While reading *Where is the Green Sheep?*, whānau can describe the sheep using the words in the story, such as "happy sheep" or "sad sheep."



Shared reading book

These simple descriptions help tamariki learn new words and connect them with what they see in the pictures.

Shared reading also helps tamariki learn **how words form sentences**.

Whānau can model short phrases that describe what is happening in the story.

For example, "The sheep is jumping," "The sheep is swinging," or "The sheep is sleeping."

Hearing these repeated sentence patterns helps tamariki learn how language is structured.

Another important part of book sharing is **joint attention and taking turns**, where whānau and tamariki focus on the same page together.

Looking at the pictures and talking about them encourages interaction and helps tamariki connect words with meaning.

For example, when turning the pages of the book, whānau might say, "I'm turning the page," and they may pause, waiting and giving tamariki time to talk e.g. "here is the…"

Through shared reading experiences like this, tamariki learn through positive interactions with whānau.

Over time, these experiences support vocabulary growth, language understanding and confidence in communication.

Every year we celebrate International Cochlear Implant Day (February 25) and acknowledge World Hearing Day (March 3).

Some fun facts to put SCIP's work in perspective:

Globally, **over 1 million cochlear implants** have been implanted (as at July 2022).

Estimates indicate **65,000 cochlear implantations occur annually** around the world.

One in four New Zealanders over the age of 60 live with a **hearing difference which significantly affects quality of life**.

Globally, 1 in 5 people experience **hearing difference**.

Nearly 30 million people have a hearing difference that significantly impacts communication. By 2050, globally more than 700 million people will require hearing rehabilitation.

Thanks to these special people who agreed to be SCIP ambassadors this year.

Evan Huyser from Springston is a typical busy boy who loves trucks, playing outside, dancing to music, and swimming. Now 2, he has had bilateral cochlear implants since he was 6 months old.

PHOTO: LIZ ROBSON – DISTANT SEA

When Mark Adams walks into his West Eyreton art gallery, there's a light in his eyes that was missing only months ago. Receiving a cochlear implant means he can again share his teaching gifts, something that was impossible when he could not hear.

PHOTO: LIZ ROBSON – DISTANT SEA

Eve Williamson from Christchurch embodies the spirit of determination and independence that comes from navigating life's challenges with grace and resilience. The second-year university student with bilateral cochlear implants studies psychology, is passionate about cars and loves the creative expression of photography.

PHOTO: LIZ ROBSON – DISTANT SEA

Te Peehi-Tukotuku Cashell-Hansen from Taihape is a very inquisitive boy. He loves his whanāu, tennis, swimming, Te Ao Māori and ocean animals. Now 8, he has had what he calls his 'super ears' since he was 2.

PHOTO: KEVIN BILLS MEDIA

Adult hearing screening: why wait?

The Cochlear Implant International Community of Action is highlighting the value of adult hearing screening and the urgent need for health systems to integrate screening into public health strategies.

Its report publicised for International Cochlear Implant Day – *Adult hearing screening: why wait?* – reviews recent evidence, international guidelines and policy changes.

ADULT HEARING SCREENING: WHY WAIT?

This report reviews evidence, international guidelines, and policy changes.

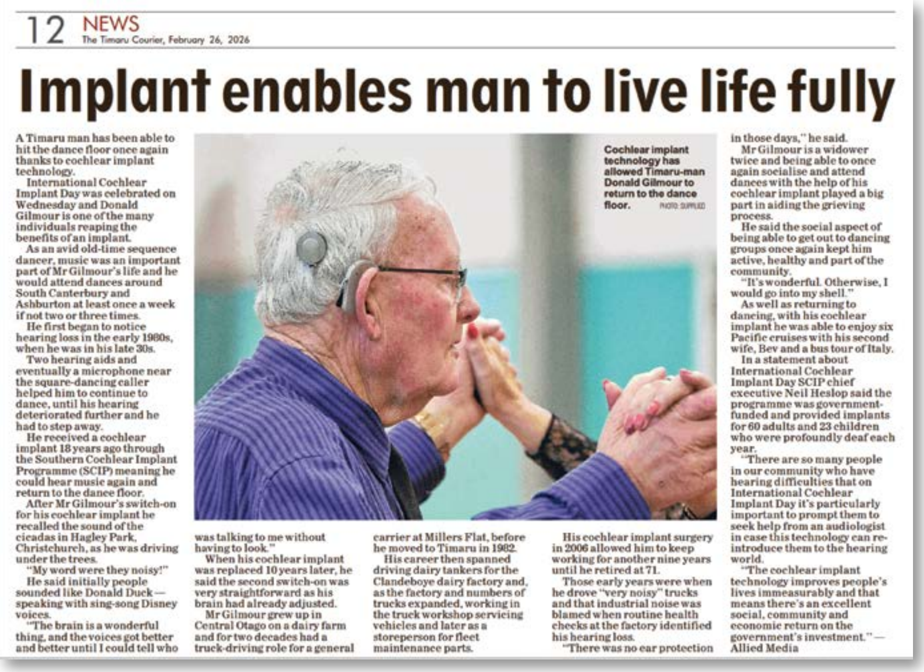
www.ciicanet.org

Without screening, technological advances may outpace policy, leading to risks of inequitable provision and missed opportunities to prevent avoidable health and social burdens, the report found.

- Adult hearing loss is one of the most prevalent and under-recognised health challenges worldwide, with impacts on communication, mental health, cognitive decline and dementia.
- Despite strong evidence for the effectiveness of the early fitting of today's hearing technologies, adult hearing screening is not available in most health systems.
- At the same time, rapid technological and regulatory developments – including over-the-counter devices, self-fitting hearing aids, and app-based hearing tests – are disrupting traditional models of hearing care and making direct patient access to hearing technologies possible.

For the full report see: **https://ciicanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CIICA-ADULT-SCREENING_WEB_24-2-26.pdf**

Thanks to media stars Eve Williamson, Donald Gilmour, Mark Adams, the Huyser family and the Cashell-Hansen whānau for helping to increase awareness.



12 NEWS The Timaru Courier, February 26, 2026

Implant enables man to live life fully

A Timaru man has been able to hit the dance floor once again thanks to cochlear implant technology.

International Cochlear Implant Day was celebrated on Wednesday and Donald Gilmour is one of the many individuals reaping the benefits of an implant.

As an avid old-time sequence dancer, music was an important part of Mr Gilmour's life and he would attend dances around South Canterbury and Ashburton at least once a week if not two or three times.

He first began to notice hearing loss in the early 1980s, when he was in his late 30s.

Two hearing aids and eventually a microphone near the square-dancing caller helped him to continue to dance, until his hearing deteriorated further and he had to step away.

He received a cochlear implant 18 years ago through the Southern Cochlear Implant Programme (SCIP) meaning he could hear music again and return to the dance floor.

After Mr Gilmour's switch-on for his cochlear implant he recalled the sound of the cicadas in Hagley Park, Christchurch, as he was driving under the trees.

"My word were they noisy!"

He said initially people sounded like Donald Duck — speaking with sing-song Disney voices.

"The brain is a wonderful thing, and the voices got better and better until I could tell who was talking to me without having to look."

When his cochlear implant was replaced 10 years later, he said the second switch-on was very straightforward as his brain had already adjusted.

Mr Gilmour grew up in Central Otago on a dairy farm and for two decades had a truck-driving role for a general carrier at Millers Flat, before he moved to Timaru in 1982.

His career then spanned driving dairy tankers for the Clandeboye dairy factory and, as the factory and numbers of trucks expanded, working in the truck workshop servicing vehicles and later as a storeperson for fleet maintenance parts.

His cochlear implant surgery in 2006 allowed him to keep working for another nine years until he retired at 71.

Those early years were when he drove "very noisy" trucks and that industrial noise was blamed when routine health checks at the factory identified his hearing loss.

"There was no ear protection in those days," he said.

Mr Gilmour is a widower twice and being able to once again socialise and attend dances with the help of his cochlear implant played a big part in aiding the grieving process.

He said the social aspect of being able to get out to dancing groups once again kept him active, healthy and part of the community.

"It's wonderful. Otherwise, I would go into my shell."

As well as returning to dancing, with his cochlear implant he was able to enjoy six Pacific cruises with his second wife, Bev and a bus tour of Italy.

In a statement about International Cochlear Implant Day SCIP chief executive Neil Heslop said the programme was government-funded and provided implants for 60 adults and 23 children who were profoundly deaf each year.

"There are so many people in our community who have hearing difficulties that on International Cochlear Implant Day it's particularly important to prompt them to seek help from an audiologist in case this technology can re-introduce them to the hearing world.

"The cochlear implant technology improves people's lives immeasurably and that means there's an excellent social, community and economic return on the government's investment." — Allied Media

Cochlear implant technology has allowed Timaru-man Donald Gilmour to return to the dance floor. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

LIZ ROBSON – DISTANT SEA

Children the focus for World Hearing Day 2026

For World Hearing Day 2026 the New Zealand Audiological Society ran a public awareness campaign to help whānau and teachers protect tamariki's hearing because prevention, early recognition and prompt action give children the strongest possible start in life.

Aligned with the World Health Organisation theme, *From communities to classrooms: hearing care for all children,* the campaign focused on how when ear problems go unnoticed, even briefly, they can quickly become barriers to learning and wellbeing.

Healthy hearing underpins how children learn, communicate and connect with the world around them.

WHO estimates around 90 million children aged 5-19 years live with hearing difference.

Over 60% of childhood hearing difference is preventable through simple, cost-effective public health measures.

Among those living with ear diseases or hearing difference, early identification and care are crucial to prevent long-term impacts on development, education and future opportunities.

OUR IMPACT AT A GLANCE

We have provided cochlear implants to:

265
CHILDREN

We have provided cochlear implants to:

1,284
ADULTS

In total we have provided:

1,875*
COCHLEAR IMPLANTS
**most children receive bilateral implants*

On the waiting list there are:

80
ADULTS

Cochlear Implant User Group contacts

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If you would like to become a local CI User Group Coordinator, please let us know.

Our locations

We have clinics in both Christchurch and Wellington.

In addition to this, we provide visiting clinics to a catchment area that includes all regions south of Taupō in the North Island, and the entire South Island.

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Southern Cochlear Implant Programme

www.scip.co.nz

Our major supporters: MCF Mutual Credit Finance · The Lion Foundation · St George's Hospital · Pub Charity Limited · Aotearoa Gaming Trust · Rātā Foundation · One Foundation · NZCT NZ Community Trust