

MAKING CONNECTIONS

CARE Center Educational Liaison



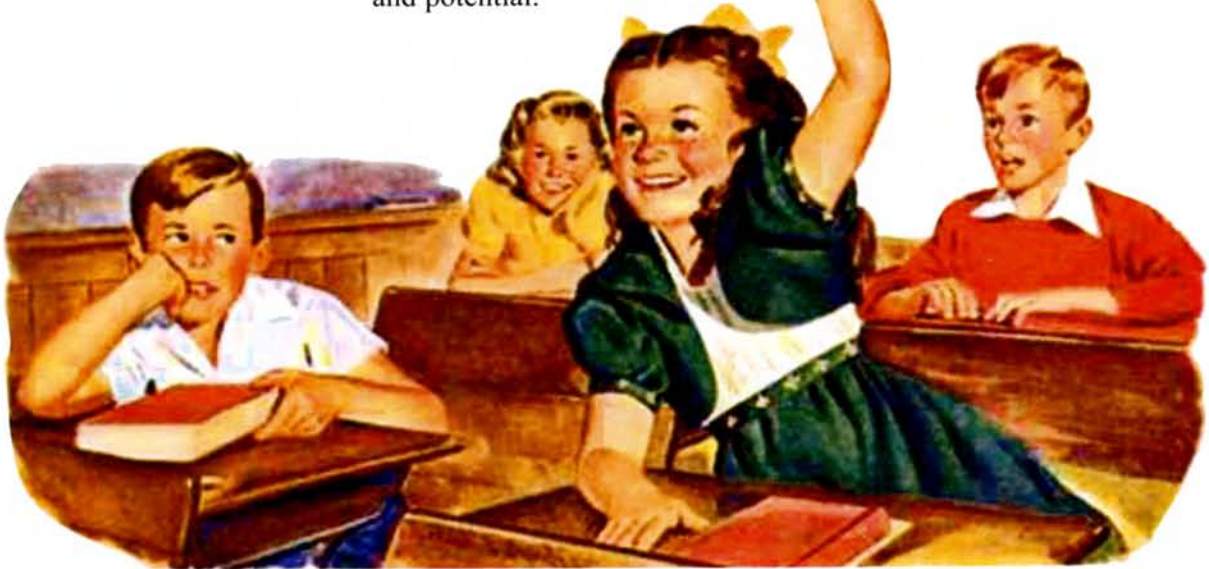
The House Ear Institute pioneered the restoration of hearing to deaf children with the cochlear implant in 1979. The cochlear implant had profound implications for treatment and therapy interventions for many children, and the Children's Auditory and Research Evaluation (CARE) Center helped develop many of the protocols that are now used around the world to help children adapt to the use of this remarkable device. In 1999 the Institute began a three-year study of the school performance of children with cochlear implants. One hypothesis of the study was that a commitment to intervention for parents and teachers could measurably enhance a child's performance. Therefore, as part of the study the Institute created a novel position for the CARE Center – Educational Liaison – to work with the schools in developing successful programs for children with cochlear implants in the classroom. This innovative position proved valuable beyond the requirements of the study and

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Melinda Gillinger, Educational Liaison at the House Ear Institute, extends the therapies of the clinical setting to the real life demands of the classroom for children with cochlear implants. She works directly with teachers and school speech/language pathologists to facilitate communication, cooperation and implementation of the most effective methods and materials to promote oral skill development. This intervention benefits the educational experience for hearing impaired children on many levels.

For the children themselves, Melinda's advocacy assures more appropriate instruction and consideration in the classroom. That, in turn, increases each child's chances for success in many learning situations and establishes an important base for the child's own understanding of his or her needs and potential.

For the families of hearing impaired children, Melinda is often the first contact they make with the Institute when in pursuit of treatment for their children. Melinda screens the children, talking with family members, physicians, therapists, educators and others to determine the potential for the cochlear implant's effectiveness. If it is determined to be appropriate for a child, Melinda becomes a partner to the family in the demanding process of coordinating educational and therapeutic services. When it is determined that a child is not a candidate for the cochlear implant in our program, she explains the



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reasons and helps the family seek other approaches to helping their child.

In the schools, teachers and administrators are eager for Melinda's assistance in understanding how a cochlear implant may affect a child's comprehension and performance in the classroom. The Institute is the only cochlear implant center in Southern California that provides an information resource for the schools, and the special on-site visits by Melinda help tailor the information to each child's individual situation. Teachers welcome the opportunity to relate classroom and school therapy activities to the sequence of normal auditory development that can most benefit their hearing-impaired students. By training the educators, one of the Liaison's goals is to empower the school system to be fully and effectively inclusive for children with hearing impairments.

Melinda is a busy member of the CARE Center team. She evaluates between fifty and sixty children for implants each year, and ensures that CARE Center

clinicians gain immediate and indispensable insight concerning problems that might be evident on a daily basis in the classroom but which are not apparent during the brief office visits. The school visits provide an extended context in which to evaluate a child's progress and needs. She makes up to 200 school visits annually, talking with teachers and other school personnel. The benefits of these visits can extend to the entire class when the special needs of one child are handled more effectively. And the Liaison presents up to eight seminars per year for educators, therapists and parents regarding cochlear implants and auditory therapy goals and activities.

Melinda Gillinger is also a qualified speech pathologist who has worked directly with young patients in therapy. This dual role gives her and the CARE Center team important insight into the various factors that may affect a child's school performance. She also handles educational inquiries from parents of patients who use hearing aids rather than the cochlear implant. Since the

CARE Center sees more than 1,200 children a year, this is a significant outreach service.

In the five years that Melinda Gillinger has been Educational Liaison, she has become an integral component in the learning success of the CARE Center's children with cochlear implants and a vital source of information for all of our hearing impaired patients. The Institute had previously worked informally to provide educational support for the children, but the creation of a dedicated position for this purpose has made an enormous difference in the effectiveness of our efforts. ❖

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