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## Lamorinda's Diverse Talents Help East Bay Deaf Children

By *Sophie Braccini*



(LtoR) Jill Ellis, Linda Barton, Ray Hilsinger, Joshua Gottschall, Carol Lettko holding child Sunnan Mushtaq, and Kim Burke-Giusti (teacher of the deaf) Photo courtesy of CEID

Orinda's Jill Ellis is the Director of the Center for Early Intervention on Deafness (CEID), a Berkeley not-for profit school servicing deaf and hard of hearing children from the East Bay. Last November she invited to the Center a team from Kaiser Oakland that had performed a treatment that changed the lives of many deaf patients: cochlear implant surgery.

The team included the Chief of Pediatric Otolaryngology Dr. Joshua Gottschall, Chief of Otolaryngology Dr. Raymond Hilsinger (an Orinda resident as well) and audiologist Linda Barton. The team usually sees a patient about three times, but when they visited CEID they had the opportunity to see the children one or two years after surgery and witness the progress they have made.

A cochlear implant is a surgically implanted electronic device that provides a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard of hearing. Unlike hearing aids, the cochlear implant does not amplify sound, but works by directly stimulating any functioning auditory nerves inside the cochlea (the auditory portion of the inner ear) with an electric field.

External components of the cochlear implant include a microphone, speech processor and an RF transmitter. The therapy that follows the surgery is the key to the success of the intervention.

"When children are implanted, they don't automatically make sense of these new sounds they are hearing," explains CEID speech/language pathologist Carol Lettko of Orinda.

"Our philosophy at CEID is to use signs and spoken words simultaneously, so they are seeing and hearing at the same time."

Ideally, a child should be diagnosed at birth, a first hearing aid should be given at 3 months so the hearing nerves get stimulated, and for severely impaired and deaf children the cochlear implant surgery can be performed as early as twelve months.

After the surgery, it takes them nine months to make sense of sounds and start producing sentences. "The signing bridges the gap," adds Lettko, "my job as a speech pathologist is to teach them language and I see the children four times a week in individual sessions." CEID provides toddler and pre-school programs as well where the children learn language through play and structured activities.

The Kaiser team usually never sees the children after the surgery. Gottschall commented that he meets the children prior to the surgery, on the day of surgery, and for a follow up appointment, "but to see these children almost one to two years later and to see the progress they are making is just amazing. It is really wonderful to see how the children flourish after implantation, which in large part is due to the nurturing environment CEID provides."

The Kaiser team observed their young patients within their educational environment and during individual speech and auditory training sessions. "I really liked the way the CEID staff worked with the children within a group setting in the classroom and then during a one on one individual therapy session," said Hilsinger, "we really enjoyed our visit and were particularly impressed with the progress our patients have made."

The cochlear implant surgery is not a miracle cure and results vary depending on the children. Some can rejoin mainstream schools, others continue in specialized environments, every child is different and parents make that decision.

For more information go to [www.CEID.org](http://www.CEID.org).

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