

Creating a more accessible world for deaf children in Ireland

Ireland – Sound Advice

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Sound Advice supports Inclusive Education for deaf children while empowering parents to develop their child's full potential, using a variety of measures such as information provision, training and consulting, early childhood literacy, mentoring, and public awareness. Through its website, Sound Advice is geared towards parents, educators, policymakers, researchers, tech firms, and employers. As a major result, newborns in Ireland are now entitled to digital hearing aids right after birth.

“Sound Advice – actively mainstreaming hearing difficulties to the public, with technology as the leveller.”

—Ms. Caroline Carswell, Founder, Sound Advice

FACTS & FIGURES

- Sound Advice is collaborating with local (mainstream) service providers to ensure gaps in family provision are filled and to get new projects rolling for mutual social benefit across the family-based, health, education, tech and social sectors.
- Since 2011, newborns in Ireland are entitled to digital hearing aids shortly after birth, and (as needed) to two cochlear implants from age seven months upwards. Previously, children waited up to five years to access basic hearing-aids.

PROBLEMS TARGETED

A child's critical period of 'learning' to hear runs from a mother's sixth month of pregnancy to the child's second birthday, making early diagnosis and intervention vital. Children who are detected with severe hearing loss and who receive digital hearing aids before six months of age and a cochlear implant before one year can develop spoken language skills similar to children with typical hearing. The earlier a baby hears sounds from hearing-devices, the sooner their brain learns to process speech and language tones for communication and print literacy.

SOLUTION & METHODOLOGY

Sound Advice launched a successful public education campaign to permit all eligible under-18 children in Ireland to access bilateral paediatric ear implants as part of the state health service, with a far-reaching impact. The ability of children to hear well at age two facilitates their inclusion,

participation, and equality in education and work. Sound Advice published a paper in the UK *Journal of Inclusive Practice in Further & Higher Education* to guide practitioners and employers in good practice. As a result, networks of the deaf and their families in the United Kingdom share information and look to Sound Advice for guidance on such topics as practical work experience and transitioning from graduate study to the workplace. Sound Advice is also mentoring families to advocate for inclusion, participation, and equality for their deaf youngsters.

OUTLOOK & TRANSFERABILITY

The Sound Advice website will continue to track and educate stakeholders on new technology and digital tools for children, students, and graduates with hearing difficulties to enable them to fully participate in their everyday learning, study, and working environments. Wireless connectivity provides important opportunities for levelling access to education and workplaces (e.g., Skype Translator); and as direct beneficiaries of these digital solutions, deaf individuals have the potential to provide input to product development and innovation processes as new products and services reach the market.

Photo: Yes

CONTACT

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