

# Transcript

## PART 1

[MUSIC]

**Karen**

Hi and welcome to the Here Hear Podcast. This is season 4. We are a team at the hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada. We are hearing healthcare professionals, researchers and clinicians who are aiming to understand and possibly improve quality of life for people with hearing loss. In season 4 of the Here Here podcast, I had the distinct pleasure of turning the microphone inward to our Hear Here podcast team to hear their very valuable insights and thoughts. So you're going to have the distinct pleasure of listening to Maryam Othman, May Wang, Nimrat Chani, Sofia Olaizola, Maria Khan and Anika Gasee. Enjoy.

[MUSIC]

**Karen**

Hello everyone. Welcome back to the Hear Hear podcast with our wonderful Hear, hear podcast team. There are three members with me at the moment, some to join the this conversation in a minute, but I'm going to let them introduce themselves. So may why don't you start?

**May**

Hi, my name is May, I'm a second-year undergrad at the University of British Columbia with a major in nutritional sciences. I was born single sided deafness and was a long term patient at Sick Kids Hospital. And I joined this team with the hope to connect with others that shared, you know, similar experiences and conditions and also help raise awareness around hearing loss.

**Karen**

Such a good objective, and I really hope we're meeting that I'm learning lots, OK, Annika.

**Annika**

Hi, my name is Annika, I'm a second year student at Laurier University in the Health Sciences program and my oldest brother has hearing loss. Wears a cochlear implant and a

hearing aid . And the reason I joined this team was to become more educated about cochlear implants to better understand his condition.

**Karen**

Amazing. OK. And Sofia? One of the originals of the team.

**Sofia**

Hi, my name is, I am a research project coordinator at the Hospital for Sick Children currently and am a University of Toronto graduate and I was born with bilateral profound hearing loss with bilateral profound hearing loss. And I've been wearing a cochlear implant since I was 11 months. I also joined the team to connect with others and hopefully share experiences to learn from others and bring awareness to living with [...] A hearing device and I'm excited to talk about high school today.

## **TOPIC: HIGHSCHOOL EXPERIENCES, INDEPENDENCE AND GROWTH, STRATEGIES/TECHNOLOGIES USED IN CLASS**

**Karen**

Yes. So that is a great. So we had some really important discussions around listening, fatigue. And then we were talking about your memories of being younger in elementary school. And what that was like. And when I say I learned a ton from you all, I really, really did. There were so many things I hadn't thought about in terms of just how children using these devices are faring at school, and what you might do after school just to get a bit of relief from hearing. That really spoke to me, and I've been talking about that with colleagues um around the world and I hope many people will listen for themselves to hear what you have to say.

I wanna move to high school because that's such a very special time in everyone's life. It's such a time of growth, it's can be very challenging for many people, regardless of, you know why it's challenging and there's just so many different kinds of things to maybe come to terms with. As you get into your teenage years and then as you move into, you know, from Grade 9, what are you 14 and you leave high school and you're almost 18, that's a massive change in development. Maybe we should start there. Tell us a little bit about, you know, where you went to high school, what rhe high school was like?

**Sofia**

So basically I think I had a little bit of a unique experience because I went to high school in Toronto and it was a self-directed high school so. It wasn't for those of you who don't know what that looks like. It's not really a traditional. Classroom style high so my school did not

have classrooms. It was divided up into departments, so there would be, for example, the math department, the Science department, and you kind of follow a university style of learning. So basically it's non semester. You would have 8 courses to complete for the whole year and your coursework is divided up into like a certain amount of unit. And it's up to you to sort of do your assignments and complete your assignments by the. There's no such thing as deadlines in self-directed school, but the recommended kind of deadlines that you could finish by June and in this kind of setting. You kind of set up your day as you want, so you would go to school. And everybody is assigned sort of a homeroom teacher, and everyone had their own little homeroom group, which is maybe a group of about 10 students, and you'd spend half an hour with your homeroom teachers to sort of tell them what you plan to do that day. These are the departments you plan to go to in the morning. I'm going to go to science 'cause. I want to talk to my science teacher about this thing that I'm confused about. And then your ta, your homeroom teacher would kind of sign off on your schedule and say, OK, you're good to go for the day. And in your home room, you also get mail from your teachers announcements where the teacher will tell you. Come see me about your test or something like that.

So. As a person with hearing loss, I think that that kind of school system really benefited me because I had the opportunity to learn from my teachers one-on-one. If I needed to discuss something about the course content, it was always one-on-one. Also being in that initial morning homeroom setting, where there's only about 10 of us, you have that opportunity to sort of connect with your homeroom teacher and they'll tell you the update. You on school announcements, anything you need to know. That's going on. They let you know in that morning and there's pretty easy to hear him because there's just ten of us. So I really liked and then the other thing that I really liked was I remember we were talking about this. You know previous episode where I talked about how taking tests with my hearing was really rough for me, but in this self-directed school. You take tests when you want to, so when you finish a unit that has a test at the end of it, your teacher will sign a test slip and say OK. Have seven days to go write this test and then you go to the test center and the test center person gives you your test. In that kind of setting, it was really easy for me to just take my hearing device off and just focus on my tests because it was just me alone in that test center as opposed to having a whole bunch of students around me while writing the exact same test, even you know there would be, I would be in Grade 9 writing a math test and there would be a grade fall next to me writing their math test. It's just kind of environment was for what it's worth, I think really good for people with hearing loss. I think even though it's not meant for that.

**Karen**

Well, that is really a unique experience and was it a school in your neighborhood? How did you find?

**Sofia**

It's part of the, so it's part of the Toronto District School Board. Just a regular. It's not a private school or anything, it's just it was actually my elementary school's home school, so I didn't really have much of a choice. Know my sister went to elementary school with me and then she went to that one because it was. Closest to our house. And then I also. So went to that one just because of that, we wasn't until down the line that I realized how beneficial it was for me hearing wise, but it really wasn't a conscious decision. Was, in hindsight, that I realized, wow, this was actually really good for me to be in this kind of.

**Karen**

That is so interesting 'cause it it's really about becoming more independent, right? As a high school student in terms of your own learning, that's that's really interesting. May what was your high school like, look a little different?

**Sofia**

It did, so I actually went to like a regular high school. I think for many other students like me, when we went to so I went to Don Mills in person in Grade 9 and then COVID hit. So my high school experience was kind of skewed after that. So basically I was in person just like a typical high school student. Had classes take place in different classrooms. So we would kind of just like navigate ourselves and transition to different classrooms with lockers. So I think that was pretty. And then when COVID hit in, I think it was like March 2020. Basically our March break just got extended for like a few years. So we were just like online and then I think grade 10, I was fully online and then grade 11 I was. I think I went back, but then they had like this quad masters system where you had like two classes each day that were like extremely long. If I, if I remember correctly. And then. Honestly, it was like it was a blur, but grade 12 I went back in person and then it was basically just like the regular schedule as before, like pre COVID. So yeah, I'd say my experience is relatively similar to like most students in the High school setting. I think for me, the biggest challenge in that type of Environment was just like background noise. It's just like when there's noise in the background. Really hard for me to focus. And I think in high school, there's kind of less support that kind of just like maybe in elementary school or middle school, you'd have a teacher just come to you and visit you and ask, you know, how are things. I think in high school. It was mainly just like learning how to and becoming used to and becoming more comfortable with advocating for yourself and navigating like different like everyday life. On your own. But I'm really thankful that I had really supportive. Who? You know, when I talked

to them about my condition, they tried their best to, like, make me feel comfortable and accommodate me in the classroom. I think my high school experience was actually really enjoyable and memorable.

### **Karen**

That that's so you had so many good points. I wanna talk about. But I I I wanna hear Annika. If you could just tell me whether your brother had a particularly different experience from. What you've heard so far?

### **Annika**

So his experience sounds pretty similar to Maze, except that his school wasn't doing COVID. But I remember like him mentioning that there would be tennis balls on the chairs in his classroom and to like, reduce background noise when his teacher were talking to the FM system. That was, I believe, was connected to his hearing aid. But I think there were still challenges that. Came with learning in a classroom with many others like me mentioned with like all the noise.

### **Karen**

Yeah, I think you know this is this is an important question about being independent and advocating for yourself. In high school, you know, we talked about, you know, this the, the known difficulties of a classroom. So I just want to talk about that from a high school point of view. It probably depends on how big these classrooms are and how well set up they are 'cause you're not in one place anymore. As Usain. You're moving from class to class, so one class. Might have been better than another class. You may have more students in one than another. Do you? Like something that was particularly like helpful in one class and difficult in another.

### **May**

I think for me, so a typical class would be around 30 students. Maybe slightly less, but around that number and for most typical classes like typical subjects like math or English. It was like a typical environment where you have like columns. So I think for that it was easier for me to recognize which position would benefit me the most, but for other more specialized courses like. A technology course where you were situated in a computer lab with computers kind of. Position like in auau shape and then the teacher was like at the front and so sometimes I think it's a bit of a compromise. Most of the time it's fine, but sometimes it's like, you know that it's easier for you if you. Sat in this particular direction. But then you know you also wanna sit with your friends and maybe there's, like, you know, sometimes there's a bit of compromise for me. Maybe it's because growing up I've kind of

become used to and more like a lot more comfortable. By the time I got to high school with like approaching teachers and then telling them if, you know, I could sit at a special position or just letting them know that. This condition, so I think it. I didn't struggle too much with navigating the classroom, and I think like for most of my teachers, they were able to project with a clear voice. I know for I think. In maybe it was grade 11 when we were still kind of in the COVID and like this strange school schedule that like teachers are still wearing masks so that I remember was a little bit difficult. At times, especially when certain teachers. It's a bit harder to hear them more clearly with their mask on, so I remember actually some teachers wearing mikes, which was really helpful. So yeah, that's that's what I remember.

### **Karen**

Little bit about the equipment and that kind of thing. And then you make a good point that that would probably have been even harder during the pandemic with masks. But I just wanna talk about. You know. Positioning makes a lot of sense to me that you know different classes are going to be set up differently, and now you get into one room. You got to figure out like where the best place is going to be for you and your balancing between, you know, friends. And and that kind of thing. Sophia, if you were you smaller classrooms, did you? You didn't really have a classroom situation like that to navigate, right?

### **Sofia**

Yeah, we didn't have classes, so I never had to. It didn't matter where I sat because there wasn't any classes. Kind of hard to imagine, but let's say for example. You know that we have 4 periods in a day and I know that I wanna do biology, chemistry, math. And gym in one day. So like there were some courses that were class specific. Like for example gym.

### **Sofia**

Like study would it would be kind of like there would be 20 different activities and you sign up for 10, so there would be like golf, swimming and there would be all these activities and you would sign up for it and then you would get an e-mail. That would let you know OK from this week to this week, on Tuesdays at 2:00 PM. We meet so that would be like our class and then it would be the same thing for certain. Chemistry things you would have to do labs for. So it would be sign up for a lab day or whatever. It was very, very much like university in that way. And so for me, I think what was super helpful is that within the school system. Instructions were not given to you verbally. All the instructions that we received were via e-mail or via our homeroom mail, which is super helpful because I know I'm not missing anything. But for those times where we would, I would sign up for a seminar. Let's say I'm confused about a chemistry unit. I wanna the teachers offer

seminars. For those optional for those who wanna like learn more and engage with the content. In those cases, it would be maybe Max 15 people who would show up, so that would be obviously super helpful for me because there's really minimal people. And the other thing that I remember being really helpful is that. In that setting. They would have specific rooms for quiet and for so if you're there to just do group work and hang out with your friends, there's a different section for that. And then for those of you that wanna do quiet work, there's a different section. It's just really, it's really hard to kind of explain My school without people thinking it's just so crazy, but.

**Karen**

It no, it works well for you, learning a lot about, you know. What different experiences are in high school?

**Sofia**

But I think this one was definitely it was really great for someone like me and I don't think just for someone just with hearing loss. But I think for all array of people who maybe need different kind of learning because everybody's at a different pace.

**Karen**

Yeah.

**Sofia**

And so that was really helpful. It also it kind of like was nice for me because I wasn't singled out in the same way that I was in elementary. To be honest, I don't think anybody in high school looking back knew that I was deaf. Like I don't think anybody knew because. There was nothing to kind of kind of like what May said going from class to. Now you're kind of with different people throughout the It's not the same as an elementary school, where you're sitting in one class.

**Sofia**

Class all day long and and same people know what you're doing all the time.

**Karen**

Right.

**Sofia**

Was easy to sneak off to your with your special itinerant teacher without anything.

**Karen**

Well that that came up last time was an interesting point about privacy, right? In elementary school, you guys. Were saying that, you know, an announcement over the PA system is sort of difficult places. That you know, you have no way of deciding how to share the information around your own. Needs or your hearing loss or any of that so. May was talking about actually. So that's like a personal decision for yourself to say to teachers. Hey, you know, this is this is a situation. So I need AI need a special place. How did you? You know, did you feel uncomfortable or did you feel, you know, positively about that disclosure? And maybe, just maybe, tell me a little bit about how you would enter those conversations. Would it? Would you try to be alone? Was it you know? Yeah, it's helpful. So yeah, go ahead.

### **Sofia**

Was gonna say I was gonna say that I never. I didn't tell any of my teachers. I don't think a single one of my because of my high school experience was so unique. There was no, it's I don't even think it was that I was embarrassed. I just think that I never needed to because my conversations with my teachers were always one-on-one. I never needed to

### **Karen**

So when you didn't need to, you just preferred just to keep it to yourself.

### **Sofia**

Exactly. But the difference is that I did tell them, but not to advocate for myself. Think it was always. Kind of like my party. So like I would be their student for six months and then all of a sudden, I don't know, maybe. They would either hear of it through a friend or they would they. Would say something like. Sorry I'm deaf. Like if I don't hear something that they say they'll be, they'll say Sofia, I was talking to you, and then I'll turn around and say sorry, I was deaf and then they'll say. And then I was like, no, I really AM. And then it's like a whole. Oh my gosh, how could you have been my student for six months? I didn't know. I think I always liked that attention when I was younger because it kind of made me feel good, like I had some kind of superpower or something. Umm. Because I grew to appreciate it as I got. How cool it was that we're just able to talk and communicate in this way and I never appreciated how truly. Awesome. That was when I was younger.

### **May**

I actually I agree with Sofia in the sense that usually when I feel like there's no necessity to disclose my hearing loss that I typically don't, even if it's with teachers. The one of the main reasons why. I approach teachers and talk to them about my condition is because a lot of teachers like to make seating plans and especially like when the term just started. They like



to, you know, on the first day you choose a spot and then they're like. Do you guys wanna change your? Because if not, then I'm gonna write your names down, and then let's just keep it like this. And so for those reasons. That's why I kind of like, you know, wait maybe after. I usually do this on like the first day maybe, or second day. And I like, you know, speak to the teacher one-on-one, maybe privately. Just telling them like, is it OK if you move me to like the front? And especially if like on the first day I missed the first day or if like I didn't choose the spot, I ideally want to sit in. Then in those circumstances, I typically would. Approach them and I think how I became more comfortable with advocating for myself is I think just like it's become a practice that I have to kind of develop. Ever since I was like really young. Because. Like although I had an IEP, I think it was more efficient and straight forward to just like let the teacher know. And yeah, it was. I remember being kind of nervous. Talking to teachers, especially when you know, like, I'm not really familiar with that. And especially when I had to do it myself. I wasn't with my parents or. I waited until class ended and then I would approach them on my own and just, you know, like I felt a little awkward and a bit nervous, a little intimidated. But I think the reaction that I got from I'd say majority of my teachers was really welcoming and really supportive and I think that Kind of allowed me to become more comfortable with. Advocating for myself and then kind of disclosing my. Personal information I think in that process I kind of learned like it's OK and you know, the teachers, they're really there to support you in the learning environment. Yeah, that's that's.

**Karen**

You had a very clear. Idea of what you wanted from the teachers. That's super helpful. Annika, do you remember? For you know, any discussions you had with your brother around? That kind of, you know, trying to get through high school or get teachers to understand what he needed.

**Annika**

If I'm being honest, I'm not completely sure but I think his hearing loss was more like something that's more personal to him. But I know that he did get. called there, like people who are kind of set up with the person to help them out, that like help them through high school.

**Karen**

Maybe a resource person I don't know,

**Annika**

Yeah, yeah, something like that, a resource person. But yeah, I.

## **Annika**

I know for sure like he got accommodations in terms like the FM system, he would try to get teachers to wear the FM system and you know, approaching them like like me and Sophia said, like he had to advocate for himself to, for them, to like to ask them to wear the FM system in front of. Class. Maybe you know, indicate to them how to properly use it if they've never seen it before. So yeah, I mean, I think like just also listening to Sophia and may definitely have to advocate yourself when it comes to this. 'Cause like like Sophia said. Some people like this aren't aware you know, so like Sophia had a teacher for six months, but like, they weren't even aware that she was deaf. So it's like, definitely. Like this girl and I like, really commend you guys for, like, advocating for yourself. And I think that you guys probably had to learn to do that before other people.

**[MUSIC]**

## **Maria**

And that was Part 1 of episode 3. I hope you enjoyed the conversations about the high school experience with hearing loss as well as self-advocacy. In Part 2, we'll be looking at technological supports in the classroom, what schooling looked like during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as experiences that changed and impacted the lives of our team during high school.

**[MUSIC]**

## **Karen**

Thank you for listening to this episode of the Here Hear Podcast Season 4. I hope you enjoyed this conversation. I want to give a shout out again to the here here podcast team. Nimrat Chani, Mei Wang, Maryam Othman, Sofia Olaizola, Maria Khan, Annika Gasee, as well as my colleagues that are involved. Laura Carinci, an audiologist here at the hospital for Sick Children, Dr. Sharon Cushing and Dr. Blake Papson also. I hope you enjoy this music which was performed and composed by Dr. Blake Popson. Thanks for listening.

## **PART 2**

**[MUSIC]**

## **Karen**

Hi and welcome to the Here Hepodcast. This is season 4. We are a team at the hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada. We are hearing healthcare professionals, researchers and clinicians who are aiming to understand and possibly improve quality of life for people

with hearing loss. In season 4 of the Here Here podcast, I had the distinct pleasure of turning the microphone inward to our Hear Here podcast team to hear their very valuable insights and thoughts. So you're going to have the distinct pleasure of listening to Maryam Othman, May Wang, Nimrat Chani, Sofia Olaizola, Maria Khan and Anika Gasee.

**[MUSIC]**

**Maria**

Welcome to Part 2 in the latter half of episode 3, we're going to continue our conversation about all things high school. We'll be chatting about technological supports and other supports in the classroom, what virtual schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic looked like, as well as what experiences shaped the lives of our team during high school. I hope you enjoy.

**[MUSIC]**

**Karen**

Now I wanna bring in. Have one more person joining our. Maria, do you wanna tell us a little bit about yourself and why you're?

**Maria**

Yes, hello, my name is Maria, I am a second year audiology student at the University of Western. I just came back from class, hence my late appearance. We were talking about virtual care, which is quite interesting. Besides for that in terms of the lab, I've been here for quite a while. My younger brother is a bilateral cochlear implant user who got me interested. Field of audiology. Here I am in both the lab and degree wise.

**Karen**

So, so now we're talking about equipment. So you know, in the past we talked about, you know, the tennis balls that go on the chairs and the tables to try to reduce noise, cause noise is really the hard part. Of listening in any situation, but definitely in a classroom. And you know what I'm hearing from May and Sophia's like, no equipment at in high. No, not and I I think I I heard that even in you know the earlier years of school, you don't love it. Whereas Annika's brother did have an FM and some of that discussion with teachers and advocating for himself may have been around like that. That equipment.

Just wearing it, using it and that, and that's complicated 'cause now you've got many different teachers and you've got to like, take the equipment and you've got to instead of just doing that once in a morning with one teacher, now you're handing that equipment to multiple people over. Course of the day, which is. Stressful so. I guess I want to hear from

Maria and Annika. What did you? That something? That they talked about at home. What were the strategies to use it or not use? What happened to the FM system and was there a change from like Grade 9 all the way through grade 12? A little bit. You know things can evolve. In the use of these things, So what. Yeah, I.

I think I think I think you'd be frustrating if the teacher doesn't know how to use it properly or I'm not sure exactly how the technology works, but if they're not speaking into it properly and like maybe using it makes it worse for my brother if they're not. Do. Have. It properly and I also think another aspect. Of the FM system specifically is. It's something that, like the whole class kind of sees. When they're using the microphone. So I think depending on how the the person, how the person feels about their hearing loss. I think that can maybe be a reason. Like if maybe they're feeling more insecure, I think that could maybe be a reason that, like leaves them away from asking the teacher to use the FM system because it's something that everyone can see and they may ask questions about it. And that may not if someone doesn't want to bring attention to their hearing loss, it could be like a struggle for them in that type of way.

**Karen**

Maria, what do you have to say about FMS?

**Maria**

For my younger brother that he never used, FM like ever that was ever like a conversation we had at home or even at school because he had his IEP and his resource teacher and like elementary school to high school. It was barely a thought. So it's quite interesting because when I'm in clinic and when I see patients who have hearing aids and especially our high school students, they rarely from what I've seen FM is not quite used and often times they're like we don't need it anymore. The parents are like I notice my kid doesn't really like it anymore, so we're just not going to bother for the younger kids. FM is like that's the thing they're using. But I noticed with the older kids it's not much. Of a thing that's being used.

**Karen**

Yeah. So if if noise is a problem. We've heard, you know, FMS are not being used to try to mitigate that, which I think is we just have to like come to. 1The realistic notion that maybe some they could have been beneficial, but there's, you know, resistance to using them for lots of different reasons in high school. So they're probably not used very often. That's what I'm hearing from you guys. I mean, as an audiologist, of course, you want to know that everybody is using, like, all the equipment and all the opportunities. But the reality is that

that maybe not right. So what? You know what's the consequence to that? I think you know. I've heard, you know, at least having a discussion with the teacher gives some sense of. You know some sensitivity to the to the issue and so forth. You think there's any position of seating for sure? Is there anything that? Maria, you think worked for your brother or, you know, was it? Did you hear him talk about noise in the classroom at all?

### **Maria**

In the classroom, noise hasn't really been a concern of. It's just outside noise that's horrendous for him that if you try to call out his name, you can't hear like in a busy mall. But in terms of the classroom, he's never brought it up as an issue.

### **Karen**

Well, that's also a really good point is that you know, you're starting as you get older to learn. Your own capabilities in different situations, and so you're trying to figure out what works for you in every different. And I I do think that there's an important part around this independence, but before before I talk a little bit more about that. And you know what it means to be a high school student? I wanna talk about, you know, the the pandemic part cause the masks were. You know, in particularly tough for people with hearing loss. It may be in in class like you know what? Just they may brought this up. I just want to hear. The recollections of experiences of hearing loss during the pandemic. I think for me. It was probably grade 11. I think most teachers it was fine because they projected. But there were a few.

### **May**

Occasions where I had a teacher who. Like it sounded more muffled when they wore a mask. And the thing that I realized because after speaking with like, you know, my friends who are in the same class. It seems like my experience was also shared by others that didn't have hearing loss. So I think in in some aspect I didn't really feel like I was experiencing something super unique. Like for the teachers where, you know, I was thinking, Oh my gosh, you know, like it's kind of hard to hear. It seems like everyone else in the class seems to be like experiencing the same challenges, so I think it's just something that like, you know, you felt like the entire class just had to cope with. So I think. Yes, there were challenges, but it didn't really feel super unique to me because I had hearing loss. Yeah.

### **Karen**

Makes sense? Makes.

**Karen**

So it's the muffled sound. I I would think. You know also. You lose a lot of cues when half of the face is covered, so there's a lot of visual. What do you have? Any other thoughts on that? Anyone else about that time?

**Sofia**

Thankfully, I was out of high school by the time COVID hit, so I never. Had to deal with. I'm really happy about because I think university when I was in university at the time and I think that. We never. My mom was a high school teacher, so I saw how much back and forth you guys had me. She's also a teacher in Toronto. It was a lot of back and forth, back and forth. You're not in person. It seemed very chaotic, whereas I think university just kind of stuck. To the whole virtual thing for a few years before we went back. So for me. Thankfully it was just zoom and obviously that comes with its own challenges, but at. You can hear everybody loud and clear with your computer. So I never had that experience, but I do remember that time and masks just being. Really, for me, I never in my life realized how much I relied on visual cues until we started wearing masks. Yeah. I it it was just so innate for me. That I I never actually realized. I am reading people's lips a lot more than than. I even realized I was, you know, I it was particularly difficult because it would be the mask. And then the Plexiglas. There was two layers of barriers. There you know whether it would be going to buy something at the store or I worked in the hospital at the hospital for Sick Children throughout that entire time and. Obviously, being a hospital, there was a lot of extra precautions put into place, but as a result of that I honestly did not hear anything ever. I never felt so deaf. Then in the pandemic that was like the first time I really realized. That I. Hearing and then I I can relate. I think what May said is absolutely right as you realize that other people aren't hearing either. It's not just you. That was helpful. To see that regular hearing people were having a hard time with it as well. But yeah, it was definitely a tough time. For for hearing. Yes, it it really was so. Any other comments on the pandemic and experiences from? A hearing point of view.

**Annika**

I was just wondering how you guys found like learning online or if it was like self modules or if it was like recorded lectures I was just. Was just curious how you guys. Felt about that. I know in grade 10 when I was like fully online.

**May**

It was basically synchronous classes, but virtually so like we would attend class at a specific time and then there would be like a teacher there and then you know because everybody is kind of new to this virtual system, there would be lots of technology issues and like back. Forth. But I think what really helped me. Were captions and I really appreciated it when my teachers, like maybe not just for like, you know, people with hearing loss, but just in case, you know, international students or, you know, other students that find it helpful, they have the. Captions available on the zoom, so I think that was really helpful and I think captions in general. Or is this something that I heavily rely on in my everyday life when I'm I don't know, like relaxing, watching dramas or just like my profs sending us videos to watch on our own time. I usually turn the captions on. Because I find that when I just solely rely on like. Audio a lot of the times it's easily it. It's a It's really easy for me to get distracted and then just miss out on key words. And so I typically, you know, like when possible. I turn on the captions and then sometimes, like I might have to go back to like the recorded sessions and rewatch some of the parts that I missed out on. Yeah.

### **Karen**

Yeah, I think you know one of the. Most interesting things about the pandemic, I mean, we all went through something at the same time all over the world, which is. Kind of hard to even imagine that we were the whole world shut down, but we learned. It's amazing as humans what we do, and I'm just looking at all of you guys online. In your little boxes here, as we're having this discussion, I mean, I didn't do that regularly before the pandemic. I definitely do that more often now. Because we learned how to do it efficiently and definitely. Having captions is something I also got used to. Having situations where I couldn't hear. Is something that speaks to me. You're. There was many times that. I felt myself trying to get around a barrier. To talk. Somebody and then, no, you can't do that. But just the natural try to trying to put yourself into a better listening situation. So I I I definitely understand all of that. And it's just, it's interesting to know what everybody's you know what, what the pros and the cons were during that pandemic. I think you know, we we adapted, right? We're all here. And having learned something.

I feel like you guys all. Or nobody really needed more therapy in high school. In terms of language support. And. Now you know managing the devices you were already quite familiar with all of these. For somebody who has new hearing loss either as you know a teenager or as an adult. Getting used to all these things is. So I can totally see having some sort of. You know discussion, you know, support. Education, ongoing information. That we aren't providing, particularly in adults, really because it's not accessible or it's not available to reasonable to ask people to come back weekly, for example, to a hospital or to a clinic

or whatever the whatever the setting is. So I can see. That the appeal of an online. Management and care, that's a little different. And also there's mobility and we live in. I mean moving around today, it was like, what was it, -20 or something today, so. You know, there's no risk of falling on the ice when you're inside in your virtual. So there's there's lots of practical things around doing things this way, but there is a social cost, and that's my last thing that I want to talk about today and I I don't want to talk about all the different things. That. Like I would love a longer discussion about social issues, but I do wanna talk about it in terms. High school is. You know, high school is such a a crazy place. Wonderful place to to explore your own social being. So tell me about your friends and what you found fun and what you did as a high school student.

### **Sofia**

So basically for self-directed school, the coolest thing about it that I think is that it was there was no division between grades between grade Nines, tens, 11th and 12th. Everybody was kind of just in because the math department wasn't specific to Grade 9 for instance, it was. You'd be hanging out with all kinds of different grades, so. My other friends went to a regular high school. I was the only one in my elementary school friend group who went to the self-directed 1 and it was because my sister went so I had to go to. Didn't have much of A choice, but I. I liked it ultimately because one thing that they always used to say to me is, oh, is your friend in grade 12. I was in Grade 9, right? Normally the grade. Hanging out with the grade nines in a regular school, so I really. Enjoyed it? And how did we become friends and be through sports? Sports was a big thing in our school, I think, because. It was self. There was no risk of missing classes to do the games or to do practices and things like that, so I was definitely really, really involved in sports all throughout high school. And so I when I look back on high school, all I think about is just. Practice in games and the gym and it's just all I can see in the back of my head. Which sport was your favorite? So my number one was soccer. So we would do the indoor season and then we did the outdoor season. So that was pretty much all year. But I was also a swimmer, so that was only during the winter, it was indoor. So I was always swimming and soccer, so I would. I would basically. We would go to, we would go to practice at Lamouro Collegiate, which was across the street from our school and we would go at 7:30 in the morning and then we would go to school after. And then after school, I would have.

Soccer practice and that was pretty much everyday for the whole year, but it was a lot of fun. I I was involved in athletic councils and so I look back on high school and I just see. I just see sports. Really. Was a great time. I really loved it.

### **Annika**



I know my brother was big on sports like he played hockey and baseball a lot and like on school sports teams. And yeah, I was like definitely a lot involved with like his team mates.

**Karen**

So that was a big part of. High school and so. Yeah, he's like a very big sports guy. He loves sports.

**May**

There were like no sports in my school. I'm just, like, not athletic at all, I'd say.

**Karen**

But I did.

**May**

There were a lot of other opportunities that I got involved with, such as like being on a yearbook team and also starting my own club called the. So we started out as a chemistry club and then we kind of expanded that to cover life sciences. We called it. Life Sciences Club and then we'd have. Biweekly meetings after school. So in that like position I was able to like develop, you know, cool experiments that we as a club would do together. Such as like extracting DNA from fruit and then on top of that, we also helped like people in the in the club prepare for like. Like the Avogadro Chem 13, I think exams. So yeah, I think. Not athletic at all, but was very eventful as well.

**Karen**

Absolutely. There's lots of ways to get involved and to to be with your peers, and it sounds like you guys were really doing some fun science that speaks to me. I love that you were engaged in science right away.

**Sofia**

I have a question about musical instruments, so I was just gonna say I don't know if it's because of. The fact that I'm deaf, but I've never been very well. I've never had talent for music in that way. I did in elementary school do choir, piano and guitar. And I was not good at any of those things. And then in high school, I was in the bands and I played the trumpet, but I used. Just pretend to play at the concerts so there would be four other trumpet people next to me, and I would. The buttons, but I wouldn't actually blow into the trumpet so. And that's how I got my band in the first years of high school, but before my mom let me drop it. mean, I've just never been good for music. I love listening to music, but I just I Can't Sing. I can't play any instruments. And I know it's not because I'm deaf,

because I've seen lots of, you know, deaf contestants on America's Got Talent. And, you know, dancing with the stars. I'm sure it's just. A me thing.

## **May**

I think I'm kind of like the opposite in every way, so I don't do sports, but I do play piano. I started when I was around 8 years old. I think in grade 11 I was able to obtain my associate's diploma and piano performance from the Royal Conservatory of Music. So it was a pretty long and extensive journey. It was probably one of the most invested activities, were extracurriculars I had, and I think I think it's actually had like a huge impact on how I view my hearing loss and also how. Develop. Like abilities to adapt and kind of navigate, you know, various aspects of my life. I think piano has had, like music has had like a huge. Impact on how I developed throughout my childhood.

## **Karen**

What do you think is special about music and the piano to you?

I think for me. Being able to, I think. Perhaps not just me, but even maybe my family or those around me. We typically think like, you know, I was born with hearing loss. So it's kind of like my Achilles heel. But being able to. Go from that point of view and reach maybe like a degree of. Excellence. That's not typical is to me, a way that I kind of prove to myself that. I was able to overcome my Achilles heel and it can be overcome and I can also do better than average. So I think not just it's had like a really big impact on how I viewed my hearing loss. Perhaps when I was younger, I used to think, you know, it was something that was hindering me. But now I feel like it's almost strengthened my background and profile and made me unique. And then on top of that, I think.

The process of being like learning how to master a skill has also allowed me to kind of apply those experiences to other fields. I feel like as I got better in piano, my skills in math, which is also my weakness. Had also improved I think. Just my experience learning others other. Subject Areas, I think it's kind of in some way helped me become better at those subjects too, so I think. Yeah, it's had a like a huge impact on my life. And although it's, it was pretty hard and I know like I'm pretty sure there were some difficulties, particularly associate with my hearing loss, like for example, even at level 10 or you know. Ear CTI still had. Like if you ask me to just sing abcd like CDEFG or like do re mi fa so e like just right now I might have to like. Kind of work around a bit and then you need to do some trial and error to get that note. And also like like the hearing test of the of the practical exam, I often struggled with like identifying the correct intervals, even though like I was already at pretty

high level. I think some of those aspects I kind of I feel like it's part probably because of. Know my hearing. But I'm glad that I was able to of Like find a way around those challenges and. Like like these achievements have kind of boosted myself. Esteem. I think in many ways. That is so great that you shared that. So so interesting.

**Karen**

Any other sorry guys. Any other comments on that?

**Sofia**

I was just gonna say. To me, that well, first of all, that's amazing. Love to hear a story like that. But similar to what you said about you know, it being your Achilles heel in that. And I resonated with what you said around the feeling of not just being good at something but being better and exceptionally good. Compared to others who have more of an advantage in in achieving these things because they're able to, you know, hear the notes to their Max capacity. But I think that's how it was for me. Because I was told. I mean when I was born in 2001. The advice that was given to my mom was to not put me in swimming lessons. That was the advice. That was given to her when I got my cochlear. Was that, you know, she won't be able to hear in water. So don't put her in swimming lessons. And because my mom is my mom, she ignored that advice and put me in swimming lessons. From the age of two years old. So I became a really good swimmer and I was competitive swimming by 10. So I think I was. I resonate with that a lot because it wasn't until I was 14 or 13 when waterproof options become became available, and by that point I had already had my first CPR certification. And I had done all of that without even being able to hear at all. So I think you know, I always felt really good about my ability to. Swim. That is good. Without ferrying, I have.

**Karen**

Impressive.

**Annika**

A question.

**Karen**

Yeah, yeah, you did that without. Without your devices on in the.

**Sofia**

Because I had. You had no devices like around the pool on the side of the pool. Amazing.

**Annika**

I have a question.

**Sofia**

At all, until I was 14, that's when the first one came out and I started wearing. And even then, at 15 years old, I became a swim teacher. And I was teaching swimming for all throughout high school, and I would just wear. My device recklessly. Without anything. But you know, I wasn't the one Dunkin my head in, so it was OK if I had to save a child, then I would've had to make a decision between my hearing aid and and the child. But no, I was always super proud of myself for that. And it goes. There's people you meet in life along the way who will encourage you. I had. You know, a swim coach who, when he found out that I was deaf 'cause, I was always have to be a conversation, right? Mom would always have to every new swim instructor that I had, we would have to tell them I can't hear.

**Sofia**

It would be a lot of making sure you get the instructions when her head is out of the water. 'Cause, you know, I'm sure all of you know that when you're poolside, it's a lot of coaches screaming. At the kids in the water while they're in the water. And obviously I could never hear that, but I feel like maybe may for the same way that the same kind of peace that piano brings you is what swimming gave me because I couldn't hear in the water. So it just it felt. Like it was just me and the water, and I was so good at it. And I can't hear anything. And it was just focusing purely on swimming and nothing else. And so. Yeah. And then what I was saying about meeting people on the way is that one of my coaches. When he found out I was deaf in that first class. The next week, he showed up to class. With a white board and he was writing all of his instructions on the. So I would be like doing a front crawl and for the listeners I'm demonstrating breathing on the side of a front crawl. You know you do 3 strokes and then you. I would look up and he would be holding a whiteboard in front of my face. Like kick faster or you know this or that or whatever the instruction is. And so, you know, it's people like that that you meet who, who can really make or break an experience. And I really think you know. That was definitely something that uplifted me and encouraged. with my swimming journey. Desite not being able to hear. So yeah.

**Annika**

So I have a question. So you mentioned you did competitive swimming, right? So at competitions, how do you hear like the gun to like, start the race? So it would also, I think this was just like accessibility in general, but basically there would be a flashing light at the same time that there would be a gun. So my coach would always make sure that I was in the position the first board, so that would.

**Sofia**

Next to. The where the signal would come from. I would look down, but I would be able to see the flash and I would go. So yeah. Anyway, eventually once I really got 'cause, I started competitive something at 10. When you're 10, is not that serious. It wasn't until I was maybe 15 that it started to become really serious, and by that point I would wear the waterproof device. At the competitions, because the waterproof devices suck. They're. They're still horrible, but what competitive swimming they were. OK, 'cause. You're wearing a swim cap, so the swim cap would secure into place like I would never have a problem during competitions. Is more for leisurely swim. That they're not so great. 'cause, you don't wanna be wearing.

**Sofia**

A swim cap when you're going to your friend's house for a pool party, but that's for a different day, a different conversation.

**Karen**

Yeah, we. We'll, we'll talk about all of that. Let's remember though, we will talk about it, but anything else, I mean that is such an interesting part of how you. You're amazing people and and this is, you know, beautiful to hear. Thank you for sharing all of that. Is there anything else? I'm looking at Maria and Annika. If you can think of anything that you thought.

**Karen**

I was thinking about hockey and the helmets and the devices and like. It's. He's not a quiet sport. And how? But your brother never complained about it. About hearing. Did he wear the devices during hockey or not?

**Annika**

I'm honestly not sure. I know in one of his ears like he's only deaf in one of his ears, so I know when he's not wearing his cochlear implant, he can still hear. Mean I. It's not as obviously it's not as good as when he's wearing the implant. But yeah, I know he loves hockey. He loves baseball. Well, yeah. And he he still plays his sports today. So it's great. OK guys, I feel like we've had some really good feel like I I can see you all as high school students.

**Karen**

You're well beyond that now. Not well beyond it. You're you know, you're definitely young adults. Again, I learned so much every time I talk to you guys and I really appreciate it. And I know people will really appreciate listening to this too.

**[MUSIC]**

**Karen**

Thank you for listening to this episode of the Here Hear Podcast Season 4. I hope you enjoyed this conversation. I want to give a shout out again to the here here podcast team. Nimrat Chani, Mei Wang, Maryam Othman, Sofia Olaizola, Maria Khan, Annika Gasee, as well as my colleagues that are involved. Laura Carinci, an audiologist here at the hospital for Sick Children, Dr. Sharon Cushing and Dr. Blake Papson also. I hope you enjoy this music which was performed and composed by Dr. Blake Popson. Thanks for listening.