

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

# **New data shows deaf children can keep pace entering mainstream school**

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2010:** As young hearing-impaired graduates from The Shepherd Centre make their final preparations to begin “big” school, new data released today shows they can expect to do just as well in their language and vocabulary development as their mainstream peers.

Preliminary data analysis from The Shepherd Centre shows that the vast majority of hearing impaired children who graduate from the Shepherd Centre to a mainstream school will score in the “normal” range; for vocabulary (79 % of children are in the normal range) and language (71 % of children are in the normal range) as they enter school.

Around 84% of the general population of children will be in the normal range for language and vocabulary skills.

The data is derived from a sample of 41 Shepherd Centre students who were diagnosed through the NSW SWISH newborn hearing screening program and who graduated from The Shepherd Centre’s Early Intervention Auditory-Verbal Therapy program into mainstream schools in 2007, 2008 & 2009.

The similarity between the scores for hearing impaired children and mainstream kids would have been unheard of ten years ago, where just integrating a hearing impaired child into a mainstream school was seen as a major achievement. In many cases children over a decade ago would have had very poor communication skills.

According to Acting Director of the Clinical Program at The Shepherd Centre, Aleisha Davis, the main developments underpinning these results are early diagnosis, improved technology and improved early intervention. Universal newborn screening in NSW was introduced in 2002, this has made a big difference.

“The average age of children with hearing problems joining the Shepherd Centre program is now eight weeks, whereas a decade ago the average age was over two years. Fitting the children early with the latest hearing devices allows them to participate in Auditory-Verbal therapy from a very early age. Early diagnosis, early fitting and early intervention are the keys to success,” said Ms Davis.

The Shepherd Centre was the first fully Auditory-Verbal Therapy Early Intervention Agency in the country starting 40 years ago. Today the centre has five internationally certified Auditory-Verbal therapists, which is 28% of those certified in NSW, 14% of those certified in Australia and approximately 1% of those in the world with this level of professional certification and ongoing mentoring.

“The results of this study show that these children, who have a range of hearing loss from profound to mild are achieving results that were unimaginable just ten years ago. This is a great outcome for parents of children with hearing loss, as well as the children themselves who can go on in life and lead fully normal integrated lives reaching their full potential,” said Ms Davis.

“Cochlear implants have also made a huge difference to the prospects and outcomes of children with severe and profound hearing losses. In many cases now, with early diagnosis and cochlear implants and early Auditory-Verbal therapy through early intervention programmes, their communication skills are excellent and many people would not know they were actually deaf.”

The clinical team at the Shepherd Centre will continue to test, analyse and report on the progress of their graduates. Data on speech production is currently being collected and will be analysed in the near future.

**ENDS**

**For more information, interviews or for media enquiries regarding students and personal case studies contact Margo Field (0408 451 693; [margo@palin.com.au](mailto:margo@palin.com.au)) at Palin Communications (02 9412 2255).**