

## **WORLD HEARING DAY: AN OPEN LETTER**

19b Clarke Street  
Gate Pa  
Tauranga 3112  
Aotearoa New Zealand.

21<sup>st</sup> February 2020

Kia Ora,

My name is Dr Lewis Williams, PhD, I am a Māori academic and also a recent cochlear implant recipient.

In recognition of World Hearing Day, I would like to share with you my story and the life changing benefits the cochlear implant has had on my life and the lives of other New Zealand adults living with a severe hearing disability.

My slide into deafness began when I was 31. By 50 my hearing was custard! Just ask my friends.

Watching my world get smaller and smaller, despite my best efforts, was very difficult. Much of my life became about just keeping my head above water. I call that stage of my life "Getting to Can't". It takes a lot to get me to that place.....I'm a fighter.

So much so, I wrote an article for the New Zealand medical journal about living with a severe hearing disability in New Zealand, entitled, "Untreated severe-to-profound hearing loss and the cochlear implant situation: how policy and practice are disabling New Zealand society."

I'm now just five months out the other side of a cochlear implant. Getting to the start line for the publicly funded op, was a huge tussle. Luckily, thanks to the gods, I got to the right people in more or less the "nick" of time.

Now my life is changing fast - for the better. No longer solely concerned with holding on for grim death, I am finding I have room to move. As a result, I'm now writing a series of poems DEAF UNLEASHED about my experience. They cover a range of themes, from the personal to the political and I have enclosed one of these poems about my journey: "Becoming Stone," for you today.

I ask you to listen to our voices and to help change the lives of NEW Zealand adults living with a severe hearing disability by increasing the funding for the adult cochlear implant programs so a minimum of 120 implants are available each year.

Currently there are just over 200 adults waiting on an ever increasing list for an implant. You can change this.

Na,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lewis Williams', is positioned above the printed name.

Lewis Williams