

FAMILIES WITH BIG DREAMS FOR THEIR CHILD WITH HEARING LOSS

Dr. Teresa Caraway: As a new parent, there is a lot on your mind. And if your baby has failed their newborn hearing screening or just been diagnosed with hearing loss, then there's even a little bit more on your plate that you're juggling. And you may be wondering at this point in the journey, is this all going to pay off? Is this worth it?

It seems like you're juggling a lot and you have more questions than you have answers. When you think of your child's future, what do you think of? Do you think of them playing sports with their neighborhood team, going to regular school with their siblings? Perhaps it's pursuing their dreams and love of dancing or singing. Whatever that is it's not only possible today, but probable with the proven path of listening and spoken language.

In this video, I want to show you stories from families who have been right where you are. I want to invite you to meet Fletcher. He failed newborn hearing screening. Was quickly diagnosed with severe to profound hearing loss. Received his hearing aids and cochlear implants quickly. Why? Because his family wanted him to listen and talk. They knew that it was important to their extended family that they wanted Fletcher to be a full participating member and doing all the cousin and family things. So, let's see how it all turned out.

Fletcher's Mom: When he was diagnosed with his hearing loss, it was on his one month birthday. It was really hard finding out that he hadn't been hearing me that whole time. So, I used I hum on his head because I was like, well, maybe the vibrations or something, you know. My mind went down a dark hole.

I was just afraid that he was going to be alone, silent and helpless. Every Sunday night, my parents have all of us over for dinner. I was kind of imagining all of us talking and laughing and him just not getting to participate in it. I immediately thought of all the things his dad and my dad do with the kids, like going the lake and going the river and going hunting, and he's going to be excluded from all that stuff. His world just got really small.

Fletcher's Dad: Fletcher, what is that?

People: Aww

Fletcher's Mom: Fletcher, where's your ear? Yay!

Fletcher's Dad: Whenever we have free time, we just go hang out in the garage doing real projects or just having fun. Just like that. Now let's mark it. Perfect.

Fletcher: Did it.

Fletcher's Dad: All right, good.

Fletcher: One of my favorite projects from the garage is making the big swing.

Fletcher's Dad: We were literally best buddies.

Fletcher's Mom: Fletcher has eight cousins. When we found out about Fletcher's hearing loss, I didn't think he'd get to play sports with them. Now there's four of them that go to golf.

Fletcher: I like golf lessons.

Golf Coach: I want you to line up, turn your body round a bit with this foot here. But this fit. There you go, like that. That's what I want right there. That a boy Fletcher, that was a great shot.

Fletcher: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Fletcher's Dad: All the sporting teams here. They're just regular kids at the regular school. There's no special accommodations for what he does.

Dr. Teresa Caraway: And let's meet Cici. Her parents had a love for music, and they couldn't wait to share that with their baby. That Cici was born 13 weeks early and failed her screening and then was diagnosed with profound hearing loss. But look at her today and her wonderful passion for dancing.

Cici: My first dance class was when I was doing ten, and I remember hearing my tap shoes and I was just moving my feet and moving my feet and I could just hear each sound I was making with my tap shoes and with ballet, modern, jazz. I love to hear the rhythm and I just love moving to the music.

My name is Celicia. Most people know me as Cici and I love to dance.

Cici's Mom: Music has always been a part of our lives. We love jazz. We love hip hop, gospel music, classical music. You know, everything. And so it was really heartbreaking to get her diagnosis of deafness. CiCi has profound sensorineural hearing loss in both ears. We wanted her to be able to communicate with others, and we just felt by her learning to talk was one of those avenues that was going to be able to help her be successful.

There really was an urgency to get her the right technology because the younger kids are you want to get as much language in as possible. When I realized that she was pretty serious about dancing, I started to sort of take a step back and I thought, I don't really know any professional deaf dancers. I don't know any deaf dancers.

Does she really have a shot at this? Who's going to take her serious? I don't want to let her continue doing this and set her up for failure. Can she do this?

Cici: So, for our dance school, we do three shows each year. The first show that we do in January is called The Little Dancer, which is made up of ballet company.

This year I danced the lead role and I felt very proud of myself because I was the first African-American lead dancer.

Cici's Dad: I think the people don't really know her, but they see her dance. They probably don't have any idea that she's deaf at all.

Cici: My dance goals are to become a professional dancer in a contemporary ballet company.

Dr. Teresa Caraway: And let's meet Zach. Zach has a tenacious mom as she knew that she wanted a listening and spoken language outcome for her baby. I want you to watch Zach as he becomes an Eagle Scout, participates fully in all of his high school activities and grows up to be a terrific young man.

Zach's Dad: When we first got the diagnosis, we didn't know what we were going to do.

Zach's Mom: The audiologist came in and said, Zachary does have a severe to profound hearing loss and he continued to talk. But I didn't hear much after that. And they said, what are your goals for Zachary immediately is that I want him to be able to talk.

I want him to be able to listen to me, tell him I love him. I want him to be able to listen to our family. I want him to be able to listen to music. I want him to learn to listen and talk. If you can get amplification on a baby as soon as possible, the outcomes of them being able to learn to listen and talk are 100 times greater than if you wait, because every word that's spoken is more vocabulary to his brain.

Zach's Dad: Getting that message to the insurance company was difficult. I still remember the one lady on the phone saying, You don't put hearing aids on a baby. What are you What do you mean you need this paid for?

Zach's Mom: I knew that I needed to fight for what he needed. And I continued to be persistent and to talk and find just the right person that would actually hear what I was saying.

Zach's Dad: His mom went to bat and fought and fought and fought for him. And look at what that hard work has paid off to.

Zach's Mom: Everything that I was fearful of. All those fears are gone. I don't have any fear that he can't step out into the world and do anything that he wants to do.

Zach's Dad: With the help of listening and spoken language, Zach has just far exceeded any plans we had for him.

Zach: Hands up, hands up.

Zach's Mom: Zachary has the opportunity to work at the YMCA. He is a sports official as well as a camp counselor. Since he is a teenager, the kids look up to him a little bit. He's giving them instructions on what to do, what not to do.

Zach's: I want to be a good role model to younger kids that might think they don't have a bright future because they have hearing aids and because they're deaf or what people tell them. None of that matters. It shouldn't slow you down. It shouldn't stop you at all.

Dr. Teresa Caraway: These are just a few stories of what's possible for your child. If you'd like to learn more and hear more about other Inspire and encouraging stories, click the link below. And it's our hope that someday your child's story will inspire and encourage others as well. Thanks for watching. We hope you'll subscribe and check out [HearingFirst.org](https://www.hearingfirst.org) below.