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"She was screaming and crying and I was so excited."

— Shawna Peters, mother of Victoria Peters



VERN FISHER/The Herald

Victoria Peters, 6, of Seaside was born deaf, but received implants when she was very young that restored her hearing.

EARLY WARNING
SAVES HEARING

AUDITORY SCREENING FOR NEWBORNS BRINGS RESULTS

By JANE PALMER
Herald Staff Writer

It was that shopping experience every parent dreads.

A loud noise sent 18-month-old Victoria Peters into a full blown screaming fit, catching the disapproving glares and withering glances of anyone within earshot.

But the reaction of Victoria's mother was a little less typical.

"I was overjoyed," said Shawna Peters of Seaside. "She was screaming and crying and I was so excited."

Victoria was born deaf but

had recently been fitted with cochlear implants. This was the first sign to Peters that the technology was actually working.

"It was like, 'Oh my gosh, she heard that,'" Peters said.

Now Victoria is a kindergarten who loves to chatter, sing and listen to music. Peters credits her normalcy to the newborn auditory screening that caught Victoria's deafness in infancy.

"It was a miracle that she was caught so early," Peters said. If Victoria's deafness had been discovered later

her language development would have been delayed, Peters said.

Without screening, hearing impairment may not be discovered until about 2½ years of age, said Candace Pollock, a registered nurse and the coordinator for Community Hospital of Monterey Peninsula's Newborn Hearing Program. "These children can never catch up on language skills," she said.

Moreover, development of eye and motor coordination is closely linked to hearing, Pollock said. If there is

hearing impairment, then motor skills may also be delayed, she said.

Victoria is in a normal kindergarten class now. She would have been in a specialized school for the hearing impaired without the screening, Peters said.

"It is amazing what can be done for these kids when they are caught early," Peters said. "It is huge. But if it is not caught early it's really devastating."

Early detection allows for infants to be fitted with

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Victoria Peters, who has cochlear implants, would have had to attend a specialized school for the hearing impaired without the screening.

How hearing aid works

1 External processor picks up sound from environment through an embedded microphone. Computer chip inside converts sound waves into electrical signal transmitted through skin to internal receiver.

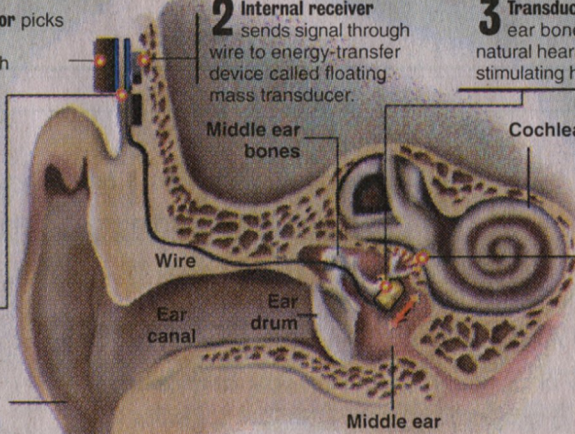
Secured with magnet and clip that attaches to hair

Auricle or ear opening

2 Internal receiver sends signal through wire to energy-transfer device called floating mass transducer.

3 Transducer vibrates middle ear bones, mimicking natural hearing mechanism and stimulating hair cells in cochlea.

4 Hair cells in cochlea pick up signals, which are interpreted as sound by brain, allowing person to hear.



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Source: Symphonix Devices Inc.; UCI Medical Center

Graphic: The Orange County Register, Haeyoun Park and Monica Edwards

Hearing

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hearing aids by 6 months of age, Pollock said. Hearing loss is currently the No. 1 birth defect in America and approximately 1 in 1,000 newborns is born profoundly deaf, she said.

November marks the 10-year anniversary that Community Hospital has been screening newborns. During that time, there have been about 100 infants who did not pass the screen and were referred for further testing. Of those infants, about 10 were found to have either total or some degree of hearing loss, Pollock said.

"Before we were doing this, many of these children were not found until toddler age and those children could never catch up on speech and language," Pollock said. "They were always behind."

Without the hearing screening, Peters said that she would never have known that Victoria was deaf until too late.

"Everything was normal as a baby," Peters said. "I even questioned her being deaf because when I held her up and talked to her she would stop crying."

People don't understand that deafness in infants can be hard to sense, Peters said. They are hungry, wake up and go to sleep just like all other babies do, she said.

"That is why it is so crucial that they get this test because you really don't



VERN FISHER/The Herald

Victoria Peters, 6, with her brother Samuel, 10, at home in Seaside. Victoria has normal language skills, her mom says.

know," Peters said. As well as being an advocate for the newborn screening program, Peters gives a message of hope to parents of deaf babies.

Victoria now has normal language skills and is able to sit and listen like any other child, Peters said. "She hears better than most of my

family do."

Peters encourages parents to meet Victoria because it is an encouragement to them, she said. People often don't understand that being deaf nowadays doesn't have to be a disability, she said.

"When I first went to talk to the school district they

didn't think that she was going to have beautiful language like she does," Peters said. "They thought she was going to have a speech impediment."

But Victoria's ability to act like any other kindergartner is due entirely to the early detection of her deafness, Peters said.

"It is so crucial for the child's development and how well they are going to do in the future," Peters said. "I wish I could scream it to every parent that has a newborn child."

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