

# Speech pathology gives lads a leg-up to join in

Technology lets boys hear much more of their world

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YEPPOON father-of-two Jason Hirning recalls being very self-conscious growing up with a hearing aid.

His hearing impairment was picked up when he was in year 1, and he remembers the stigma of wearing a hearing aid and a very rare visit with a speech pathologist at his school.

For Jason, now a high school teacher, times have very much changed and technology had come a long way.

"Hearing aids now look like a fashion accessory, like a tiny ear clip," Jason said.

The access to a speech pathologist has also changed.

When his twin sons, Chris and Nick, were born, Jason and his wife Gail wanted to get their hearing tested straight away.

But it wasn't until the boys were four years old that it was confirmed they both had a hearing impairment too, in both ears.

Gail said while some of the warning signs the twins showed were typical of children, such as standing really close to the television, she said there were other signs too.

"Their language wasn't the same as others and they didn't know words for things they should have," Gail said.

After getting fitted out with trendy fluorescent hearing aids to help with their hearing, the boys still needed work on their speech.

Gail said they were lucky to have heard about the *Learn To Say* program through their GP and the boys now do web-cam speech pathology lessons with the Brisbane-based centre from their home in Yeppoon.

Gail says within six months the boys caught up nearly one and a half years in speech.

The boys each take part in a lesson one day a week on separate days.

"It is hard work and there is a lot of time

spent reinforcing the lesson."

But Gail said the benefits were definitely worth it.

"Their speech is noticeably better on the phone – people at the other end can actually understand what they are saying.

"It's also made a huge difference with making friends and they are able to join in with the other children and play games.

The boys are both about to turn seven and Gail said they have come a long way since starting at Sacred Heart School and starting speech pathology.

Academically, they can now keep up with the other students and take part in any activity.

Describing them as "typical ratbags", Gail said the best thing was seeing them grow to be more outgoing.

"They are confident now."

"They have come a hell of a long way."

This week is Speech Pathology Week 2009, a

week to raise awareness of the types, causes and impacts of communication difficulties.

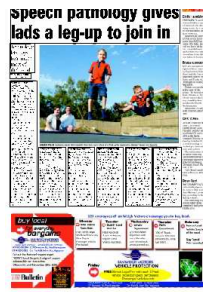
This year's theme, Communicate to Participate, highlights how communication is essential for connecting with others and participating in discussions, decisions, social events and work activities.

Gail and Jason encourage any parent who is concerned with their children's speech or hearing to simply go and get it tested, and if necessary get speech pathology help.

"If they don't have the speech ability they will always be one step behind the others," Gail said.

Visit [www.speech-pathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speech-pathologyaustralia.org.au) for more information or contact your local GP.

■ See tomorrow's *Morning Bulletin* for Len Turner's emotional story of how a stroke robbed him of his communication skills.



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**SPEECH WEEK:** Gail and Jason Hirning with their twin sons Chris and Nick, who have come along in leaps and bounds.

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