El Deafo Premiers on Apple TV+ with CI Recipient Lexi Finigan as the Voice of the Lead Character

El Deafo is a new animated series streaming on Apple TV+ about a young girl who loses her hearing and learns to embrace how that makes her special. El Deafo is based the 2014 best-selling graphic novel authored by Cece Bell about her own childhood hearing loss caused by meningitis. In the animated series, the main character is voiced by 12-year-old Lexi Finigan, a 7th grader from South Florida who loves math, golf, cooking and listening to Taylor Swift through the Bluetooth on her cochlear implants. Lexi graciously answered ACI Alliance’s questions about her experience with the show and her experience as a cochlear implant recipient voicing Cece.

Q: Were you familiar with El Deafo before you auditioned for the show? How did you hear about the show? I was familiar with El Deafo before I auditioned for the show because I had read the book. I heard about the show because my mom received an email from one of the staff at the University of Miami where I received my cochlear implants, so I auditioned and I was selected.

Q: What was your first impression when you first read the story and the script about the character and how her deafness is her superpower? I thought it was really incredible that a person thought of their deafness as their superpower. I would have never thought of that!

Q: Does the way your character in El Deafo approaches her deafness resonate with you about how you see your own journey with hearing loss and your cochlear implant? When I was younger, I was very confident about my cochlear implants. I was much younger than Cece when I lost my hearing, and I received my cochlear implants when I was nearly three years old. I couldn’t hear anything before, so my mom says that I was just excited to hear things. Every day I discovered a new sound. But, when I started middle school, I went to a different school than all my friends. I had similar worries as Cece. I was worried about making new friends or people treating me differently, just like Cece. I realized that I was easily able to make new friends, so I was worrying over nothing. I am trying to be more confident, and most kids think that the technology is pretty cool.

Q: What were your impressions of making the show? Did anything surprise you? I was very surprised how many people were involved in this project! The animators, the director, the sound engineers. I learned a lot. It’s so cool how many people wanted to be part of this project.

Q: What does seeing a story like this told on such a popular platform like AppleTV+ mean for you? What do you think it will mean for others? I think it is so amazing how I can help deaf people who feel like they are alone. This series can help inspire them and show them that they aren’t alone, and they can do anything they set their mind to! It also can help open the minds of people about the everyday struggles of people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

ACI Alliance is a not-for-profit membership organization created with the purpose of eliminating barriers to cochlear implantation by sponsoring research, driving heightened awareness and advocating for improved access to cochlear implants for patients of all ages across the US. www.acialliance.org