

Empowering the Next Generation of CI Users



Kennedy Patlan Kennedy Patlan, a 24-year recipient of bilateral cochlear implants helped us open CI2019 in Miami by sharing her experience and empowering future users. Kennedy graduated magna cum laude from Syracuse University and currently resides in Washington, DC. Here are highlights from her well received speech to the conference attendees.

1997. I received a cochlear implant on my left ear. For the first years of my life, I wore a body worn sound processor. My mom would help me wrap the belt around my waist and tried to help me keep the processor on as much as possible. Despite my mom’s worries about the looks I received, I confidently requested she send me off to school with two pigtails, my processor on full display.

2004. I have a new processor. It is significantly smaller, but my life gets significantly larger due to the possibilities of being implanted at such an early age. But during elementary school games of telephone, I remember wishing that my friends could pass their secrets on to my right ear. One day I asked my parents, “Could I get a second implant?” And immediately, as they always do, my parents worked to make sure that I could succeed.

2005. The day after my 9th birthday I receive my second implant. While I can't remember my first surgery, I do remember the difference in my scars. My parents and I are amazed at the difference in speed, efficiency and surgical incisions that had developed over the years. We are equally impressed by the opportunity children are afforded as bilateral implantation became normalized.

2014. I’m a freshman at Syracuse University on a full tuition scholarship. I know I would not have made it there without my cochlear implants. Not because it made me a unique applicant, but because growing up with implants has given me many lessons in resilience and empathy. It taught me the importance of advocating for myself, a skill that once embarrassed me every time my Mom got on the phone with the principal. Being a CI kid is much more than being gifted with sound—although that is pretty incredible. It is a social, personal, and sometimes political identity that transforms you. I encourage you all to equip your parents and patients with the information they need to understand that they have the power to leave lasting change in their own lives, as well as the lives of many others through their unique experiences.

2019. I am a full-time employee at a national nonprofit in Washington, D.C. I belong to a unique community and as I have gotten older, I have seen more of me in film and in art. I have seen fellow recipients become audiologists and politicians. It has been empowering to witness the success of my fellow 1990s CI kids as we get acclimated to this thing called adulthood. From school to sports to dating and careers, we’re figuring it out and making it happen one sound at a time. I am one of 38,000 kids in

the United States to receive a cochlear implant. I want to thank you for giving me the ability to speak and defining success for myself without any boundaries. Whether you're a surgeon, audiologist, a researcher, a speech pathologist, or an educator, you belong to our community. I am excited for the next generation and I'm so excited for the field.