

TECHNOLOGY

Mary Bell (deafened) and Teresa Brasier (hearing) come up with suggestions for cheap technology to help with everyday challenges.

Low-tech hits the highspots



1 **Personal Listening Device (PLD)** – this is one of our favourite gadgets and we have found many uses for it. We use the Sonido (c£55 + neckloop c£12.50 from RNID) which works in conjunction with the T setting on hearing aids. It needs a 2.5mm plug to 3.5mm socket adaptor (c£3) to enable you to plug external devices into the line-in socket.

2 **PLD + MP3 player, computer** or anything else with a 3.5mm socket. Use the adaptor to connect the MP3 player with a 3.5mm jack to jack (c£6) to the PLD to enhance the sound quality and volume. Mary says it is worth persevering with this,

especially if you have a profound hearing loss. What you hear with this technology will not be the same as

when you were hearing. However, it is surprising how much of the gaps your brain will fill in, especially if you train it by listening to music that you know well. She is back listening to Status Quo and the heavy rock of her youth.

Shopping Guide

Accessories etc can be readily obtained from the usual suppliers such as Connevans (www.connevans.com) and Gordon Morris (www.gordonmorris.co.uk). Maplin (www.maplin.co.uk) is very good for connectors and their staff are very helpful at knowing how to plug gadgets together. RNID's Shop can be found at www.rnid.org.uk and they have a money-back guarantee so you can buy products and try them to see if they work for you.

3 **PLD + guitar.** Use a quarter inch plug to 3.5mm socket adaptor (c£3) from the output of your guitar into the PLD with the 3.5mm jack to jack.

4 **PLD + car radio + friend.** Listening to music in the car is one way to while away those long drives but if you can't hear the in-car stereo then how can you listen with a friend? We tried listening to music together by putting the MP3 player through the stereo and Mary using her PLD but Teresa was at risk of being deafened herself. So we thought of another way that preserves the hearing of the hearing. You will need: PLD, MP3 player, in-car transmitter (c£15), 3.5mm jack to jack (c£6) and a 3.5mm two-into-one adaptor/splitter (c£3). The splitter takes the signal from the MP3 player via the PLD to the person who is deafened, and via the transmitter and the car radio to the hearing person. Problem solved.

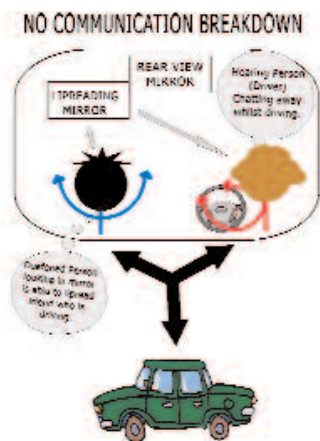
5 Teresa thinks she is the first counsellor in the UK to offer counselling in written English via **laptops**. She felt it was unfair to expect her newly deafened clients to lipread, and demeaning to the client to pass notes across the table. She had worked with electronic notetakers so has adapted their system of linking laptops for use in the counselling room. Encourage other professionals (eg social workers, audiologists, GPs) who see deafened people regularly to use this system to communicate in written English if you find they don't book external communication support (eg electronic notetakers). They will need two laptops/netbooks, a crossover network cable (c£10) and a free download of RealVNC. For more information contact Teresa (*details in panel, facing page*).

6 Using Skype, make free voice, video and text calls to friends on the internet. Deafened person speaks, hearing person types. If you are a very good lipreader and your hearing friend has a webcam you may cope with a loop or PLD plugged into the computer and



lipreading.

7 Trying to talk in the car can be very frustrating, especially if you need to lipread. Use a mirror (c£15 from Halfords) to enable the passenger to lipread the driver. Combine with a PLD and you will be chatting away as you used to. Note: we do not encourage you to do this the other way round – ie with the driver lipreading.



8 Pagers are great – and can be pricey. Try buying a set of remote control plugs (c£10). Plug into a light and the person “paging” can switch on the light remotely to tell the deafened person that they are required.

9 Use a high powered bedside light on a timer switch to wake you up in the morning (c£3). Or your mobile phone may have a strong enough vibrating alarm to wake you up if you put it under your pillow.

10 Improving your viewing: BBCi now has subtitles available for streamed programmes and downloads. Other On Demand channels vary but worth checking what is available. Recording: video tapes don't record subtitles. DVDs do. Digital recorders (eg Sky+, Virgin V+ or Freeview PVR) do and you can turn them on or off as you require. However, not all programmes and digital channels carry subtitles. For easy to read information on digital TV recording visit www.radioandtelly.co.uk/pvr.html

11 PLD + building loop (eg church, conferences). If you struggle to hear using the building's installed loop then try using the PLD on the T-setting to boost the loop system.

12 Texting/SMS. Almost everyone who has a mobile uses it for texting. If you're unconfident about texting then some deaf organisations run courses to help. Or, visit the store where you got your mobile and ask for instruction.

13 Even if you are unable to use your mobile for voice calls you can still have a sort of a conversation. Turn

on the speaker of your mobile and when the other person speaks you will feel the vibration (only works with some phones). Develop your own code for regular answers. For yes we use “yes yes” (which produces two buzzes at the other end) and “no” (producing one buzz) for no. Ask closed (yes/no answer) questions and if you're good at 20 questions then you can extract a lot of information from your hearing friend.

MOBILE PHONE CODES



14 Carry a small whiteboard round with you; install one in your kitchen or living room to save you hunting for a scrap of paper and a pen.



Meet the authors

Mary Bell (left) is an art and music therapist. She became deafened nine years ago when she contracted meningitis. She is a Hearing Concern LINK volunteer. Teresa Brasier is a counsellor. She has been instrumental in setting up Lothian Deaf Counselling Service which provides free counselling to deaf, deafened, hard of hearing and deafblind people in Lothian (Scotland). Contact Teresa.brasier@lifeskillscentres.com, and Mary Bell – chattyartist@yahoo.co.uk

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