

OEI Podcast Episode #1
(Hosts: Audra, Alle, Betsy and Mary Catherine)

Audra

Hello and welcome to “Have you Heard” a listening project. On this podcast we’re going to share tips, stories and practical advice to help people with hearing loss stay connected. If you or a loved one have a hearing loss or maybe you work with those who have hearing loss, this is the podcast for you and we are so very excited to have you join us. I’m Audra, I am one of four hosts and I have three other wonderful ladies who are going to be joining me today and I am going to introduce each of them to you here in just a minute. All of us work for OEI which stands for Outreach, Education and Installation on behalf of CapTel Captioned Telephones. A captioned telephone is an amplified phone which works just like any other telephone but it does have one very important addition. If you can’t hear what somebody says you can read word for word what the other person is saying on the bright display screen. The CapTel was designed excusably for those with hearing loss and it’s actually available through a federal program at no cost to anyone who has a verified hearing loss and the cool thing about it is that there is no monthly fees or contracts so it’s really an amazing program. Today we just wanted to introduce all of our hosts to you so you can get to know each of us better and we’re just going to have a short round table conversation. And don’t forget make sure you want to stay to the end of the episode cause we’re to give you details on getting your very own captioning telephone if you need one. So without further ado I would like to introduce the rest of our hosts. So we have Allen Rhames from Southern California (Alle...hi from southern California), we’ve got Mary Catherine Hess from the Dallas, Fort Worth area (Mary Catherine says greetings) and we have Betsy Randle from the Ventura and Santa Barbara California area (Betsy... hello everybody). Yay....I get to work with all these wonderful ladies and I can tell you right from the bat that these are amazing people so I’m so excited that we’re all able to do this together. As outreach educators that means that we’re out in the community, we’re raising awareness about hearing loss and the captioning phone program. We also work very closely with hearing health professionals, veteran’s services officers, independent and

assisted living communities and really any health care professionals that work with those who have hearing impairments. So we are just a resource and we do the best that we can to support those with hearing loss. So we're just going kind of chat and hopefully you'll be able to get to know each of us. Betsy I'm actually going to hand it off to you so that we can get to know you so Betsy if you can tell us a little about yourself.

Betsy---- (2:40) Okay, mm, I got into CapTel Captioned phones because my friend is the president of the company. And I was sort of at a turning point in my life and I wanted to try something new and she said I think you'll be good at this cause you're good with people and I really am I love love communicating with people especially seniors so it was um being a seniors myself that's okay but anyway ha-ha. Older seniors or anybody that was having hearing loss and I found myself kind of really naturally drawn to this this a new venture because it's such a rewarding thing to do. To go into someone's home and set up the phone for them when they haven't been able to talk on the phone and hear anybody and communicate with their loved ones and all of a sudden they're seeing words and understanding what's being said to them in a way they didn't have before and they just tear up or light up like light bulbs and its quite wonderful and moving so it's been very gratifying to do that and since I myself have been diagnosed with hearing loss recently which is sort of a kind of a no brainer since my mother had hearing loss um I'm moving into the world of really doing taking care of that myself and I have great empathy for people who have struggled with this it's a it's a challenging thing to not hear what other people are saying and you feel kind of left out so anyways all been a big blessing for me to just to venture into this world of helping people and sharing something wonderful so that's pretty much my schpiel.

Audra--- (4:18) Awesome! Thanks for sharing that Betsy, that's really amazing that you're able to take what you have been going thru in your own life and kind of redirect that to help somebody else I think that's wonderful (ahh thanks) and that's what makes you so awesome (ahh thanks). Next we're going to hear from Alle. Alle if you don't mind telling us a little bit about yourself.

Alle--- (4:37) Thank you Audra. I would love to tell you guys a little bit about myself. I started doing outreach on behalf of CapTel back in 2008 so it's been about 12 years now. I continue working for OEI because of the work that we do. It just makes such a huge difference on people's lives and I don't think I could ever not do that now. When I first started I realized that there were actually many people in my own life who suffered from hearing loss. It began by noticing my grandfather who suffered from severe hearing loss which included Meniere's disease. Which is actually really interesting in terms of what it is and what it does to the body. Then as the years went on I actually realized that I myself suffered from tinnitus which is a different form of hearing loss. Most people know it as ringing of the ears which causes hearing loss and it's really difficult to deal with. After I had my first baby in 2018, it tremendously inclined so that's been difficult and interesting for myself to deal with. Actually working for this company I've been able to understand cochlear implants which I find really really fascinating. Cochlear implants really make a change in people's life's, a serious change and seeing that change going from someone who's completely unable to hear anything at all to suddenly been able to hear it has changed my life. Those are really the interesting aspects of this job that I've been able to take a way and I get to immerse myself with every day.

Audra—(6:05) That's really cool too, so you're the second person who has a personal experience with this is like something that you deal with in your own life and being able to translate it into helping people so I just want to highlight that that's kind of why I love CapTel is because it's kind of filled with these people who want to support and want to help and want to really help make a difference in somebody's life. Let's hear from Mary Catherine and see a little bit more about you so share with us Mary Catherine all about yourself!

Mary Catherine—(6:32) I'm Mary Catherine and I am soooo thrilled to be part of this first podcast. I came to OEI from different point of view. I did my undergraduate degree in communication disorders and deaf studies and then went on to study American Sign Language as part of my graduate degree at Galette University. And I've spend the better part of 20 years working and serving

deaf or hard of hearing individuals. In particular what I am most interested in is communication access and technology. So that really lends itself to this work that I'm doing now. My journey with relay or the telecommunications relay services actually started 20 years ago. CapTel wasn't a thing back then but I was offered this opportunity to work with a state relay program and back then we were installing TTYS' and video phones for our deaf clients and we were installing voice carryover phones for our hard of hearing clients. Since that time I've done a number of different things. I've worked at the commission of the deaf and hard of hearing. I've worked as a sign language interpreter. And most recently I've worked in public health where I was making sure babies got their hearing tested at birth. In the last job I was on the side of technology I was working in software development and it was a wonderful career. But at the end of 2016 I was ready to make a change and that was when this opportunity with OEI was presented. And I was a little nervous about it, I didn't think it was something I could do. Marketing, installations being out in the community but I was ready for the challenge. So I was so excited when I finally made the decision. Because I felt so liberated I was ready for this change. And what I've really enjoyed about this job it's not only the installation side of it and the marketing side what I really like is the advocacy side. I enjoy working both with our clients as well as with our providers who are taking care of them and then advocacy work has also bled over into my own life. My mother recently was diagnosed with hearing loss and it was no small fee getting her to an audiologist. My husband was diagnosed and I recently was diagnosed with hearing loss. Two of the three have hearing aids, I'm the hold out but I will soon be getting them and I'm excited to see how it's going to impact my life. Just like my colleagues talked about with our clients, when we see how our technology impacts their life and they have that aha moment where they say "I can finally call my kids again or I can talk to my Doctor on my own" it's an incredibly gratifying experience. So I love this job and that's been my journey, it's been an interesting one and I'm so grateful to be here.

Audra---(9:41) That's really awesome and I think it's neat that you and I have something in common actually I too studied American Sign Language in college and that was because my Spanish teacher was from France so the accents were

just a mess and I couldn't I couldn't do it and I found an American Sign Language course and I pretty much took to it like fish to water I'm a very visual learner so that's how I kind of first got involved in working with people who are hard of hearing or deaf. I used to work at T-Mobile back in the day and if anybody remembers the sidekick... Right...

Mary Catherine (10:14) I remember the side kick well, every deaf person had a side kick.

Audra--- (10:18) Oh I know because they were all coming to my T-Mobile booth. I lived in Ocala, Florida and they were coming from like Orlando like these hours and hours they would drive to come to my T-Mobile booth cause I was the only person in the state of Florida who knew sign language. So when the sidekick came out I came to work one day and there was like a line of deaf people wanting me to help them either with customer service or set their sidekick up and so that was kind of like my first introduction I just thought it was really really neat. Flash forward several years, I am I made a friend in Florida, was an older gentlemen named Robert, I met him outside of a grocery store one day and we just kind of got to talking and Robert had a hearing loss and I remember he said you know could you help me check my voicemail? There's something going on. So I checked his voicemail come to find out he had done a reverse mortgage and was getting his house repossessed and he didn't understand what was happening because they would mail him paperwork and he didn't understand it but because his hearing loss was so profound even with hearing aids, whenever he tried to call and ask questions, he couldn't hear. So you know when I saw that CapTel was a thing, and I was like I wish I would've known this several years ago when Robert was living here that I could've gotten him a captioning telephone and he could've read and heard everything. It was really game changing for me because there were many times that Robert would call me and ask you know can you help me get groceries or can you take me to the doctor and I'd say sure I'm working until about six I'll come pick you up and he'd say okay great see you in 10 minutes. And I'm like Robert no I'm not gonna be there in 10 minutes it's gonna be a couple of hours and he sat outside in the Florida sun for hours waiting on me because he couldn't hear me say it's going to be several hours before I can come to you. So when I learned... I was sad. It was heartbreaking you know cause he was in his 80s

it's too hot for him to be waiting but because he couldn't hear over the phone and he couldn't text it was just difficult. So when I found out about CapTel and I found out about the program it's just... It's in my heart to help people. And I think if you haven't caught the theme so far all of us really care about you know pouring into somebody else's life, supporting them and helping them and helping to make a difference and that's one of the reasons why I really love what I do because as the other ladies have said it's you don't know how much you're gonna cry when you set up somebody's phone and it's the first time they've gotten to talk to their grandbaby cause I have a 4 year old and if he's standing in front of me I don't understand what he's saying right cause he's 4 so then imagine to have a hearing loss and try to talk to your youngest grandchild and can't because you can't hear them and can't understand them like the first time I saw one of my clients did that there was like I'm crying she's crying her husband's crying like it was just so moving and I really love that we have the opportunity working for CapTel to make these you know help make a difference in somebody's life and I think that's why all of us are here and that's why all of us love what we do and we love this program.

(13:07) (For sure! Absolutely!! Yeah!!)

Audra --- (13:10) Wonderful! Well man I wish this conversation could go on forever but we do want to keep these podcasts short we know that people have a lot going on. That's actually all the time we have for today's episode but if you guys take one thing away I hope that you will take away that you know there's a lot of great resources if you have a hearing loss or you're just kind of starting on that journey of being diagnosed with a hearing loss. There's lots of resources and lots of wonderful people who want to support you so do not be afraid to ask for help because it's out there. And just like I said earlier if you would like to learn more about CapTel and the captioning phone program or even how to get your own captioning phone again there's no cost for the phone there's no cost for the service if you have a verified hearing loss. Make sure that you visit www.oeius.org that's www.oeius.org and please don't forget to join us next time because we are gonna be talking about how to stay connected and avoid isolation during quarantine which is a super important topic so you want to be there for that. So that's all we've got, thank you so much for joining us today at The Listening

Project, in the meantime don't forget to subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss out. And this is Audra, this is Betsy, this is Alle and this is Mary Catherine. We just want to remind you to stay safe and stay connected. Have a great one guys. Bye.