

From Communities to Classrooms: Celebrating World Hearing Day Through Connection, Creativity and Science



By **Alison Hawkins-Bond**, Junior Science Academy Outreach Manager

Each year on 3 March, World Hearing Day highlights the importance of hearing health and inclusive communication. This year's theme, "From communities to classrooms," perfectly reflects the spirit of Macquarie University's Junior Science Academy (JSA) programs for children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH).



Image: Supplied by JSA.

For many years, JSA has partnered with Parents of Deaf Children (PODC) to build supportive communities where children and families can connect, learn and thrive. In every hands-on science experiment and creative workshop, accessibility is embedded from the outset. Assistive technology, Deaf Mentors, Auslan interpreters, small group sizes, adapted session plans and staff trained in Deaf Awareness ensure that every child can participate fully.

When access comes first, confidence follows.

Why Community Matters

Most children who are DHH attend mainstream schools, often as the only child with hearing loss in their class. While hearing aids and cochlear implants offer significant benefits, they do not remove every barrier. Classrooms and playgrounds are busy, noisy environments, and listening fatigue is real. Missing parts of conversations or struggling to follow group discussions can affect both learning and social confidence.

Limited access to teachers, interpreters, or peers who use Australian Sign Language (Auslan) can also deepen feelings of isolation. Research shows that children who are DHH may experience higher rates of anxiety and difficulties engaging socially than their hearing peers. Stigma and bullying can further compound these challenges.

Opportunities to meet other children who truly "get it" are rare but deeply meaningful. In shared spaces designed for them, children are not the only one. They are not different. They belong.



Accessible, Joyful Learning in Action

The JSA and PODC Science Program began in 2018 through the vision of Macquarie University hearing researcher Dr Chi Yhun Lo. Families, researchers, educators and industry partners came together to design a program shaped by the strengths and needs of children who are DHH — not adapted later but intentionally built that way from the start.

Today, the growing community includes partners from the Australian Hearing Hub, including Hearing Australia, National Acoustic Laboratories, Cochlear Limited, NextSense, The Shepherd Centre, Hear For You, Hearing Matters Australia, Soundfair and The Child Language Lab.

Small class sizes (capped at 14), captioning, printed instructions, assistive listening devices and Auslan support allow children to focus on curiosity, creativity and connection. Deaf Mentors from Hear For You bring invaluable lived experience, serving as powerful role models and helping children feel proud of their identity.

Importantly, all programs are free of charge, made possible through partnerships, grants, donations and community goodwill.



Image: Supplied by JSA.

From Community Strength to Classroom Confidence

The impact extends well beyond a weekend workshop or holiday program.

Children return to school with stronger self-advocacy skills, new friendships, and renewed

confidence. Many report feeling more empowered to ask for clarification, request accommodations or explain their needs to teachers and peers.

As one parent shared:

“Most deaf and hard-of-hearing children are mainstreamed and advocating for themselves at school. It is important, but it can be difficult. It is great for them to enjoy a camp with other students and adults who ‘get it’ about deafness.”

Another parent wrote:

“She really appreciates having something special just for DHH kids... she feels comfortable and relaxed knowing people will be aware of her needs.”

The children echo the same message:

“My favourite part was meeting other deaf people.”

“Sharing the experience with other DHH kids made it easier for me to speak up when I couldn’t hear.”

These moments of belonging ripple outward into classrooms, friendships and futures.

Growing Impact and New Directions

What began in 2018 as a pilot with 12 children has grown to 48 annual enrolments. In 2025, the program delivered its first regional initiative in Coffs Harbour in partnership with the NSW Department of Education’s long-running Deaf camp. Demand now exceeds available places in Sydney sessions.

By 2027, enrolments are projected to exceed 72 children, driving a dedicated fundraising campaign to expand scholarships, accessibility technologies, and regional outreach.

With support from the City of Ryde, expansion is already underway. During Harmony Week on 21 March 2026, PODC and JSA will launch the first DHH Creative Kids Academy:

- **“Many Ways to Say Hello” (Years 1–3)**
– exploring communication through art, movement, sign and simple science.
- **“Code, Culture & Connection” (Years 4–6)**
– blending creativity, Deaf culture, hands-on science and collaborative challenges.

Alongside these sessions, Parent Pods provide practical strategies, peer support and connection reminding families they are not alone.

Recognised as a finalist in the Engagement Australia Excellence Awards, the JSA and PODC programs continue to spark change socially, educationally and emotionally.

As we reflect on World Hearing Day, one message stands clear: when communities invest in belonging, classrooms and learning environments can become places where every child can thrive. And perhaps among these

young learners is Australia’s next scientist, innovator, or advocate—proof that access and connection open doors to extraordinary futures.



For more information about the Junior Science Academy DHH Programs contact jsaschools@mq.edu.au

To register for the PODC DHH Creative Academy program go to <https://events.humanitix.com/creative-kids-academy-x-parent-pods>

FROM COMMUNITIES TO CLASSROOMS:

Hearing care for every child

World Hearing Day 2026
3 March



Act now so no child is left behind due to ear or hearing problems.