



## Hearing Wellness Journey #1 Episode

Welcome Kellina. Can you tell us how old you are and just a little bit about yourself?

Yeah, for sure. I am 23 years old. I am located in Canada, Toronto. And I am a deaf advocate. So especially on social media and even on podcasts. I have been on so many people's podcasts as well. And I'm been an advocate on Clubhouse as well, it's actually another audio app. So it's cool to be able to teach people how to be more inclusive on an audio app, which is pretty cool.

I'm finally graduating, this month actually, from psychology and ... Yeah, so it's really exciting. And I'm actually going to do a post-graduate certificate program in mental health, because I want it to open up my own mental health coaching business to help, those who are in need, especially in the deaf community. Because, my interest has always been helping other people and because I never met someone that is deaf and is a therapist. So it's very rare to see nowadays. I'm willing to take that step and be the first one coming out.

I love that. I do agree with you. I think there is such a need for hearing health professionals we'll say. Someone who gets it about hearing loss. Even more so if you're living it and then can help with ... So I think you're going to fill a huge need in this world. I am so happy for you! congratulations on finishing the one program and good luck in the next one, for sure!

Thank you.

That's so exciting. So can you tell us, at what point in your life did you or someone else realize that you weren't hearing so great?

I would say my hearing loss started when I was four, at the age of four. And, I would say, that day ... I went to daycare actually, and I had an ear infection. And the doctor prescribed me a prescription, ear drops, and the daycare did not follow the instruction. However, it made me lost my hearing. And so that day, when I went home, my hearing just dropped in one day. So it was unbelievable. My mom was a young mom, she had no idea what's going on. Luckily, my grandmother was actually a nurse. So she was able to speak to me on the phone. Again, I couldn't hear on the phone. So my grandmother rushed home. She thought something really



bad had happened. And I said, "No, grandma. I'm okay. It's just I can't hear." And the next day I went to my family doctor and they said, "Unfortunately, Kellina is deaf and there's nothing more we can do."

Wow! Do you remember at that age thinking, "I definitely want to wear hearing aids?" Did you get hearing aids? Did they do a cochlear implant? What was the next step?

The next step for me was to my audiologist, which is down the street from my house, when I was younger, actually. So the thing is with that, we went in. They recommend my mom two options. the cochlear implants, or a hearing aid. So again, my mom was a young mom. She was super afraid of the cochlear implants, of surgery and she goes, "No. Let's stick to the hearing aids for now until Kellina gets a little older and maybe we can move forward with the cochlear implant. So as soon as I became four, I started wearing hearing aids.

And do you still wear hearing aids?

Yes, I do. I still wear hearing aids, every day of my life. Yes.

And do you use the sister technology with the hearing aids? Do you have them connected to anything?

So my hearing aid is Bluetooth. So I connect them to my phone, iPad or any other devices that I need to help me hear, except for my iMac, because I have to figure that out? Because my family just give me my iMac for a graduation gift, but I haven't really get a chance to play with it yet, so I'm figuring that out. But I really need my iMac, Bluetooth connected really very bad. But I love my hearing aid. It's crazy. I don't know what to say, because technology improves so much over the years. So I'm really excited for the next hearing aid that's coming out.

That's cool. Obviously you're very tech savvy, and you're young and you're fresh and you want to be up on things. What kind of research do you do to look into hearing devices?

I try my best not to go on Google, because there's too many things that's true and false, questions. So I try my best to always call my audiologist, because again, I'm super close with them, since I was four years old. So they know what's best for me, at all costs. So even when I pick my hearing aids, I always have my grandma with me, 24/seven. So yeah. So I always [inaudible] my audiologist.

Awesome. Now, you said you're in Canada. So when they first identified your hearing loss, do you remember your grandmother or your mother telling you that, for whatever reason, you guys were ready to get hearing aids, but you weren't able to, for some reason? Was there any kind of conflict? I don't know how the insurance system works in Canada.



Yes. Again, my mom was young. So she didn't have a full-time job. That was a little difficult at the time. I remember she was telling me at first, because she had no idea how much the hearing aid was and she wasn't able to get benefit for me. But my mom and my grandma worked doubles, to provide for my hearing aid. And they got the one that was affordable for me, until my mom got a really good job, paying job. And that would give me benefits for insurance as well.

By now, that my grandma had up and down with the hearing aids, because she tries to find the right one for me. But unfortunately, the price for hearing aids just grew expensive, without having benefit or insurance. Luckily, my grandma's a nurse and she was able to cover some type of things, especially with the company. And, luckily, my mom, she ended up finding a really good job when I got a little ... I think I was five, six. She got a really good job with a really good company. And yeah, we take it from there.

Do you know if that has changed where you live? Where the hearing aids aren't automatically paid for children?

I'm not aware of that. I know, because I have someone that actually a parent actually, reached out to me from Clubhouse actually. And she asks me the same thing if there are any ... So I did a couple of research. There are some resources, but I highly recommend a lot of people to speak to the audiologist, because they know [inaudible] better than anybody, because you guys are our connection. So I always recommend them that.

But I know, if you're 18 and up, in Canada there are a benefit for people who have a disability. So you are qualified if you have any type of disability, especially if you get new to hearing aids or need a hearing aid, they're willing to give it to you, not for free, but ... You have to qualify for it and then they will give you it and you get the benefit of it.

Excellent. And now that you're a college student and when you get hearing aids, how do you go about doing that?

I always go in the ... I don't know the word for it in the States. It's called the Disability Services. So I always go into it. So my first year in university, I went to the Disability Counselor. I told them I needed it. The Disability Counselor accommodate me and everything [inaudible] struggling at university. it was very difficult at the first half of university, because it was a huge transition from high school to university. And that is how I go around in university. I always keep contact with my Disability Counselor. I highly recommend a lot of people, "If you don't like your Disability Counselor, find a new one and find the one that match your interest." And ...



For sure. So when you went to them, did you bring a copy of your hearing test results? Or a report from your audiologist?

I had to bring two different copies. I have to bring my audiogram, and I had to bring proof that I am me and I am actually deaf. And also you had to bring another record. I think it's like a student [inaudible]

And then from there, what accommodations are they giving you at the university level?

They were accommodating me with extra time. That's one. Two, it depends on professors, once gain. Because I know a lot of professors are really strict when it comes to accommodation. They don't want the student to take advantage of their disability, so it's tricky at the same time to get the right accommodation for you. [inaudible] Some professors allow students to retake some tests or courses if they don't meet the level they need. They'll allow extra time on tests, assignment. And that's pretty much it.

So do they have FM systems in the classrooms? Or make sure you're in a classroom where the teacher is wearing a lapel mic and you're near even a speaker of some sort?

At university, it's like a movie theater. So it's just a big room. For me, I don't rate FM system. I did when I was in my first year, but it got really complicated, to the point where professors forget to give it to me, or a professor forgot to put it on the table. Some of them may not feel comfortable wearing it. And so I respect their decision. I respect that. However, I have a note taker, luckily. So they were able to provide me a note taker who, every single one of my class ... For me, personally, a note-taker are more reliable than a FM system, because you can't really record. That's the other thing I don't like about it. So I'd rather note taker.

Got it. With your new hearing aids, are you able to put your cell phone up on the podium, possibly? Or up near the front and then go sit down and listen to the lecture? Like an FM system?

I could. But again, I don't trust people with my phone. So that's another issue. Again, it's a big room. It's like a movie theater, so you just never know who's down at the bottom, unless you sit right in front of the professor. For me, I don't like sitting in front of my professor, because I feel like they're yelling at me. Because the room is huge, they have to shout. Yeah.

Wow. So when the person takes notes for you, are they typing it or handwriting the notes?

Both.



Both?

Yes. I know one lady, I don't know how she does it. This lecture is two hours long and she writes it down. I tell her, "You don't type it?" She's "I'm old-fashioned." I'm like, "Okay, fair enough."

Is it easy to understand her handwriting?

It is, but I prefer typing, because you can share the notes and stuff. So ... ..

Yeah, totally. And then for anyone who is a student, do you review those notes right afterwards? So that you just tried to just listen, learning new information? And then at what point do you look at those notes, so that it all comes together? So it fills in any gaps that maybe you were missing?

I would say I don't check it right away. I check it every Friday, so that [inaudible] make sure I've got all my notes, make sure I catch up on everything, because you have to remember, the office hours and professors are every other week. You aren't able to check it out right away. So that's another difficulty thing about professors. But, I check my notes every weekend to make sure I'm on track with things. The only thing I will check right away, if it talks about tests or assignments or an exam, that's when I would check straight after.

Got it. Have you considered, or do you set up the visual closed captioning on your phone, during the lecture, so you look down at your phone and it is transcribing the professor's voice while you're sitting there?

I did that my first year, but I did not pick up everything. Again because the professor in the lecture, they have their own microphone. So sometime the microphone doesn't work, and they're yelling. The second thing is they will be too far away from me, even though I was sitting right on the corner, so that way it can pick it up. So that way my phone and the speaker can actually sync. It was not good. So it was really tough. ...

How much extra energy do you think you use to listen to a lecture than the average person?

It's 110%. If I can go way beyond that, yes, I will put that number, extra work. There are times where I don't want to go lecture, to be honest. There are times where I just listen for too long. I'm sorry. Especially if the class is three hours a day. I get fed up with it. I say, "I'm going, because I can't hear. What's the point?" I'm really close with every single note taker I have, in every single class I have. So I still let them know, "Okay, so I appreciate you for writing my notes." I also give them a gift card to appreciate them, because I really do. I don't know how they do it. I [inaudible] and I wish they were getting paid to do this. But some of them are not



getting paid. So I'd rather pay them on my own. And I'm like, "Here's \$100. Thank you so much." Or even a gift card, because some of them are not getting paid.

Wow !That's really [inaudible] , that you know that you appreciate them. And it's amazing what you're doing to achieve this degree. And, a lot of us take our hearing for granted and it's just something that we passively do. And for you to be so focused and show up, because you want to help more people is so great! it will pay off, for sure. Yeah. Especially I think a two-, three-hour lecture, you just want to pass out when you're done. Auditory fatigue is a thing!

Yeah.

It makes sense why you don't have energy afterwards to now go review the notes. You're like, "I'm going to bed." Do you remember the first day you got your hearing aids?

I remember it like it was yesterday.

You do? What happened?

Yeah. It was actually funny. I looked at the thing. It was so small and I'm like, "What is that?" And my audiologist said, "It's a toy." So he was trying to get me comfortable. "It's a toy to help you hear." And then he gave me this. One second. And I still have it. And it gave me this teddy bear and he said, "Look, a teddy bear with a hearing aid." And I was like, "Oh, that's so ... " ... " And because it has a green hearing aid. So it [inaudible] , so it got me excited. And then I thought, "Okay, I'll put it on." I put it on. I felt really confused at first, because I was hearing two different voices. With the hearing aid, versus with my normal hearing. So I got confused. I was picking up weird sounds, because of the ring in my hearing aid, because I wasn't used to that. So that was something. I was like, "Oh, my God, I can hear!" And my mom was so happy. And my grandma's [inaudible] She was just crying and yeah. Yeah, that's my memory of my hearing aid.

Do you still work with the same audiologist? You do?

Yes.

Who's your audiologist?

It's Kurt. I forgot the last name, but they're amazing.

That's awesome. And where are they?

They are in downtown Toronto, it's called Union Hearing Aids.



Union Hearing Aids. That's so cool. Yeah. They gave you a Teddy bear, I just love that.

Yeah. Every year, every time I get a new hearing aid, they always give me this, to build up my self esteem.

Awesome. Now, when you got to school ... Or you were in preschool, right? Daycare center?

Yeah.

What was it like? Do you remember, with the first day with the hearing aids on, what happened?

It was very hard, because I didn't know what to expect. I walked in. I remember I walked in and, the teacher, I don't think my mom told the teacher I was deaf. I think she did. They were having difficulty communicating with me, because it's a loud environment and it's a different form of daycare. I remember they were buying a FM system, they ran that big speaker. And it was so funny, I remember the students, "Oh my God, we have to find a microphone for Kellina!" And then some students, sometimes, they would go to my teacher to talk on the speaker, for fun, just to have fun. It was so cute. But I know when I was a little kid, it was a really fun time. Yeah.

What color were your first hearing aids?

It was a ... I don't even have them. It's those little small ones that you just put it in. It doesn't have the tube, it had just that little thing right here. Just that little ... Yeah.

And they were light browned?

Yeah, they were brown. Yeah.

And now you're wearing over the ear, behind the ear?

Yes.

And what color are your ear molds right now?

My ear molds are ... Before, it was a zebra. The zebra color was so cool. I don't know if I can see now, but this is the color right now.

What color is that? Is that like a blue?



Yeah. It's like a little blue. Let me it out.

But they're see-through, right?

It's sparkles, with a gray etch.

Oh, cool. Nice. I love the sparkles.

Thank you.

Super fun. What has your experience been with your friends and your family, with you wearing hearing aids? Or just in general, the fact that everyone knows you have a hearing loss?

So let's start with family first. So family, it was ... They were very emotional, because I'm the first deaf person in the family. And so it was heartbreaking for them to even think that something would happen at a daycare. And for them, it was very eye-opening. It was very rewarding for them to learn different ways to communicate with me. I guess communication was the big thing that my family had to learn from me. And especially sign language, because I'd been ignoring sign language when I was growing up, because my family didn't have the time to learn that and put it with me. And so that was a little kind of "okay". And then I went to a deaf school, actually. I went to two schools. I went to deaf school and a hearing school. So I went to school, able to balance the communication with two communities. So that was even more helpful for me, to help me understand better, what it's like to be in two different communities. So I give props to my family for that.

So until this day, my family are super overprotective. They would do anything, like they'll call the bank for me. They'll be like, "Oh, I already did it." And then I have a little sister, who is 14 years old. She does everything for me. Like she's, "No, Kellina, I'm going to call this for you." Even my little sister's so overprotective of me. And so it's really cute, everybody in my family's overprotective of me, till this day. Even though I'm 23, they always make sure I'm okay. And that's because I am super new, because now I'm going to a real world. It's so new and fresh for me, so I don't know what to expect. So I guess that's why they're super overprotective and they know what people are like.

[inaudible] For my friends are super supportive, love them to death. I still have my two best friends, since I was in kindergarten, actually, till this day. Yeah, they were ... I actually got bullied a lot of times, in grade one to grade five.





And they were the only two [inaudible] . They actually stood up for me. Until I got into grade three, four and five-ish, that's when the bullying stopped. And they said, "Oh my God, I mustn't bully Kellina." And I got to build a self-esteem and I put them down too. And I told them, I was like, "Hey, what if your mom was deaf? What if your sister was deaf? What if your dad was deaf?" you just never know.

Yeah. So I would say my friends are really supportive of me. They'll always be there. They're willing to accommodate me, especially when we do a social gathering. Because of that connection, you've got to look at their lips. And so they know what to do, I would say. Because I talk to them, they ask me a question like, "Hey, is this okay?" And, because of COVID now ... So they know that I cannot hear at all through the masks, so I spend less time with my friends now, but we FaceTime a lot. Yeah. And I like school, same thing. But, yeah.

What would you say to a child that's getting bullied right now? What would be your tip for them?

I always say, do not be afraid to tell a teacher, even though you may tell them about the bullying, keep telling them, until they fixed it. Because that's what happened to me. I got bullied so many times and they didn't fix it until I said something, until my mom came to the school and then they fixed it. So I wanted to tell kids who are being bullied right now, keep telling them. Do not be afraid. Don't ever say enough is enough. Always keep fighting. Be like I can do that. I can fight them. So don't ever think that you should allow the bullying keep happening.

So true. You have to self-advocate, but also believe that you were worthy of not being bullied.

Exactly.

I think so many kids don't believe that. They start to believe whatever the bully's saying. And it's not true. Those people obviously feel terrible about themselves, so that's why they try to put others down. Yeah. I think in the future, you'll probably help a lot of kids that are struggling even if they're not being bullied. To know that you need to work extra hard when you're young, just to do something like learning, because so much of the learning is a verbal lecture. Yeah. On your bad days, how do you show up? Show up at a lecture that you don't want to go to, and you're tired? what do you do to get yourself out of bed, and in that classroom?

I must say, I honestly just go to class for one hour. At least that is worth something. A's telling me and my ear's too tired, I would take the day off and just relax for a day and turn off my phone and watch Netflix, because I love Netflix. Who does not love Netflix? [inaudible] for a day and just take some time to just stop. And I feel like a lot of, especially college students and university students, they took so much pressure on themselves. And I keep telling people, "No, your health comes first. At the end of the day, the grade will come later." Unless knock on wood, you pass away to blame lay yourself. Like, "I should have not took this serious, where I should take a day off." And one day does not hurt to rest.



So true. I have a college student right now, and we talked a lot about study skills and learning what works for you, so that you can be successful. And knowing that you can fail something and it's no big deal, you can always retake it. Or if you're struggling and trying to figure out what works?

So what is your method? Are you a visual learner more? And what is the process? If you say, "Okay, I want to do well in this one class," what does that look like for you? Knowing that you're going to need to look at these notes on Fridays. That somebody types up for you or hand writes ... What does your study skill-plan look like?

So I have a schedule. So one day I will study the lecture note. And then the next day I study the PowerPoint. That way I'm not overwhelming myself too much. The one thing that my deaf teacher recommended me, when I was in high school and moving forward ... She noticed I study too much in one hour. The brain cannot function so much when you study for one hour. You need to give your brain a break. Okay? Study for 30 minutes. Turn off your phone, 30 minutes, study. Take a break for one hour. Or, take a break for 40 minutes, because that way your brain can cope with it. Or, take a nap after you're done studying, because that's how your brain has got all the memories. So I always recommend a lot to a lot of people in that sense of how to study. But for me, everything's been going on, going well. Because, if you're a visual learner, your eyes are tired. So you have to take the break.

Absolutely. Oh, my gosh, that's such good information, even for anyone. I never thought about that. It's great. Turn off all distractions. Study just for a half hour solid, and then give yourself a break. You will retain that information more. And, you'll be more likely to get back to the next half hour when you're ready. Brilliant! So good. Of all the things that we talked about, what's the most important information that you would like our listeners to know and understand?

I would say it's to be yourself. I always tell people do not think or compare yourself to other people. Everybody have different paths in life. That path [inaudible] You are here for a reason. You are here to choose your own path. And I feel like that's a lot with high school, college, university. People try to compare themselves to other people. And I always tell people, "It's okay to fall behind, or to go 10 steps forward." I have friends that are stressing out because of ... I don't know. And I always tell them, "Don't look at me, because I have a brand new car, or I have a house, or I have this, or ... The only way to become successful in life is actually understanding your disability, or not, if you don't have a disability. But, actually understanding yourself because, the only way to move forward and have a successful life, a successful future, you have to understand yourself, and your disability and your mental health, because that's the only way you can become successful.

Awesome. So good. [inaudible] ... what I find really interesting is that you and I met on Clubhouse, which was an audio-only app. You came into a classroom I think that I had, that was



just to talk about hearing-loss stories, which ... It's just so fantastic. So how do you navigate Clubhouse, which is all auditory? And your handle is @deafqueen. Right?

Yes.

How do you do it?

I would say, I honestly take a break from Clubhouse. I don't want people to think I'm on Clubhouse full time, because I'm not. I need a break from the boys. I would say, I have caption on the side, on my different phone, which [inaudible] on this phone. I have two phones. So I play it sometime on the speaker and let it go through the caption. Or, I just listen to it in my Bluetooth, because my Bluetooth is just like my Airbox. So it works really well. I participate in a lot of rooms that is beneficial for me and help others to be more inclusive. So that's how I navigate with Clubhouse.

Do you have any of your own rooms? Have you led some rooms?

I'm actually doing rooms with a friend of mine. Her name is Rochelle. She's another big deaf advocate as well on Clubhouse. She's amazing. Oh, my gosh, [inaudible] my mother. I've actually helped her run her rooms together, because me and her are the only two deaf people actually grown big on Clubhouse, actually. People be like, "Kellina" or "Michelle". "No, Kellina." And I'm like, "Wait, My name is damn popular too?" me and her together, been doing work on the room together. And it's called Deaf and [inaudible] . I'm pretty sure that's what it's called. So me and her have been doing that one. Every Monday we have a room now at six o'clock, 06:00 PM. Talking about the deaf experience on Clubhouse and how can you make [inaudible] on Clubhouse?

That's awesome. Is there any way that people can reach out to you or DM you? How can they find you?

Everybody can find me on my website. It's called [kellinaempowerment.com](https://kellinaempowerment.com). Twitter cutiekellina. Third thing is Instagram Deafqueenboss. And TikTok, Deafqueenboss. And, luckily, I'm starting my own YouTube channel to talk about my deaf experience and telling people what it's like in the hearing community. And it's called Deaf Queen Boss as well.

That's awesome. So anyone who's listening, or curious, we're going to have all the resources and the transcription of this, as well as you'll be able ... If you're listening to us on a podcast, truly auditorily, you'll be able to see Kellina ... Wave! And me, but we have the whole podcast closed captioned, and have the entire thing transcribed as well. So you can read it if you want, or you can just watch along. But all of Kellina's resources will be there. So feel free to reach out to her and ask her any questions. Subscribe to her new YouTube channel when it's up. And,



Kellina, I can't thank you enough for educating us, for being who you are and inspiring us all, as well.

Thank you so much for having me today.

You're amazing. So I hope to collaborate with you. And I'm going to have to check out your room with Rochelle on Mondays at six o'clock. Is that Eastern standard time?

Yes.

Okay. Perfect. All right. You have a wonderful weekend and thank you again.

No problem. I hope you have a good day.

Thank you. Bye.

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