



THE CREATIVE

As a seven year old cochlear implant recipient and aspiring animator, Dave Carter never imagined he would one day have the honour of his work being preserved as part of Australia's filmmaking history at the National Film and Sound Archives. An internationally-acclaimed stop motion and clay animator, he attributes his deafness as an integral part of his success.

When you lose one of your senses, the others can become more acute to compensate. "No doubt my deafness has been great training for animation," says Dave. "My first language was 'visual', I didn't speak until I was four, and watching TV was visual storytelling. I'd just have to fill in the dialogue."

An honours graduate, Dave completed his design degree in 2003 but really started to carve out his career at the age of 14 after a work experience stint at an animation studio. He stayed in touch with the studio over the years doing part-time work with them during university, mostly menial jobs, but one that gave him a chance to spend time in an industry he loved. While he learned animation principles through the studio and his degree, his unique techniques are self-taught.

Not only was Dave diagnosed at five months with profound deafness, but also with the developmental disorder dyspraxia. He was enrolled at The Shepherd Centre in Sydney but at the age of three his teachers concluded he would

Dyspraxia refers to difficulties with coordinated movement in which messages from the brain are not effectively transmitted to the body. It can result from acute damage to the brain (such as head injury or stroke) or be a part of a dementia disorder that develops gradually later in life. There are a number of variations of this disorder that can lead to difficulties in performing single or multi-level motor tasks such as catching a ball, holding a pencil or getting dressed. In developmental verbal dyspraxia the child has difficulties performing the mouth/tongue movements necessary to form sounds, leading to problems with speech.

UPSIDE OF BEING DEAF

need to learn sign language in order to communicate.

Determined that her son would learn to speak, his mother took him to Canada to join Judy Simser's Auditory-Verbal Programme at The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. Now available in Australia through The Shepherd Centre, Hear and Say and other centres, the aim of Auditory-Verbal Therapy is to develop a child's spoken language through listening using parents, relatives and care-givers as the child's main educators and role models.

Now aged 30, at seven Dave was one of the first children born profoundly deaf who received a cochlear implant in Australia. In 2008 he received his second implant.

Initially the technology was so new and unfamiliar for the audiologists that for Dave it was an extremely painful experience. He recalls in the early days throwing his processor across the room during mapping session because it felt like his head was being zapped with electricity.

Over time he settled into the implant and began to recognise speech through endless hours of listening sessions with his mother, who continued to work on his speech and language at home three hours a day until he was 13. "Because I was heavily dependent on lip-reading prior to the implantation, lips at home were obscured to encourage me to concentrate and listen with the implant". At school where he was still lip-reading, he was able to establish word connections with what he was reading on lips and hearing, which sped up the effectiveness of the implant.

Because of his mother's determination and dedication, Dave was able to attend regular school and university. Despite, or perhaps because of his challenges, Dave achieved more than the average fully hearing school boy. He played championship basketball, skied for the school team, was published in an anthology of young Australian poetry and was a weekly contributor of comics for the school newspaper.

"The implants have had an enormous impact on my life," says Dave. "Without

them I would not be able to work as an animator or have developed the friendships and relationships I have across a wide spectrum of social backgrounds. My personality would not be as confident and outgoing and I wouldn't be the travel bug that I am."

His work has taken him on adventures to Japan, Cuba, Russia and across Europe and the USA, often travelling solo. In 2010, his series of films commissioned for

The Animation Show, an annual touring festival showcasing the world's greatest independent animated short films in cinemas across North America, required Dave to make director's appearances for the post-screening Q&A sessions in Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York. "It was fantastic to experience a live audience reacting to my films on a cinema screen and to share my thoughts on the process with the crowd afterwards." Featuring in the tour also led to "rave reviews" of his work in the Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, People and Time Out magazines.

A painstakingly slow craft, animation requires infinite patience as every second of film is made up of 25 frames and only



eight frames can be shot in a minute. In late 2006, a Sydney gallery showcased to an audience of 200 people, six of Dave's

Auditory-Verbal Therapy (AVT) helps children learn to use their hearing aids or cochlear implants to listen to their own voices, voices of others, and environmental sounds. AVT also follows natural language and speech development. Through daily one-on-one time with your child you can help your child integrate hearing, language and speech into their daily communication.

short films that were created over nine months, officially launching his career as a stop motion animator. "Animation gives me an immense satisfaction that is incomparable in other creative arts" says Dave "as it covers not only fine art with colour, form and space working together,

but filmmaking, acting, storytelling and comedy."

His recent film 'How to Lose Weight in 60 Seconds' takes some of the ridiculous weight loss methods being promoted

and has fun with them in animation. During a shoot Dave can work 14 hours a day using a range of mediums including paper cut-outs and clay. The story determines the technique, so a film about weight loss wouldn't work if the characters are lightweight two-dimensional paper cut-outs! Working out of a studio in his house, it took Dave two months, day and night, to create this film with clay characters. "Working with clay can be difficult. During a long shoot, clay actors start slouching and get a bit sloppy!"

As an independent animator he receives commissions to make short films, promos and music videos for clients like MTV/Comedy Central and Sony BMG. His work has also been selected for film festivals worldwide. Over 2010-11, 'How to Lose Weight in 60 Seconds' will feature in 16 film festivals around the world including the prestigious Annecy International Animation Festival in France, Anima Mundi in Brazil and Just for Laughs in Montreal, Canada. It was chosen as a finalist for the Best Australian Animation at the 2010 Sydney Film Festival and won the Audience Award at the 2010 Melbourne International Animation Festival.

Eager to set an example for hearing-impaired teens about what you can achieve if you set your mind to it despite any challenges you might face, Dave is a mentor for the guidance and support program 'Hear for You' (www.hearforyou.com.au).

By Neville Lockhart and Helen Lowy.