

## Cochlear implant with Steven Mifsud

Chantal Boyle

Welcome to The Sunflower Conversations with Chantal. Joining me today is Steven Mifsud Mifsud MBE. Steven Mifsud is profoundly deaf, and joins us today to talk about his cochlear implant, which is a small, complex, electronic device that helps provide a sense of sound, which enables him to hear. Hi, Steven Mifsud. How are you?

Steven Mifsud

I'm great. Thank you for inviting me on this podcast. Been looking forward to it.

Chantal Boyle

So up until receiving your implant, what tools did you use to communicate?

Steven Mifsud

Gosh. Well, okay, it's a mixture of things. So I was diagnosed as profoundly deaf when I was two years old. So over the past 40 years, the equipment I've used had just evolved and changed. So I started off with a huge box device on my chest. So if, you imagine Darth Vader from Star Wars got the big electrical device on his chest. And then this wire that used to go to my ear. And then, they got smaller and smaller. And then, I had the under behind-the-ear hearing aid, which were a hideous beige colour. Honestly, the people who design the colour of hearing aids should be sacked. And now, I have a cochlear implant. But it's important to point out that the hearing aids are not necessarily the main tool that somebody would use. Everybody's different. But myself, I have used a combination of lip reading, body language, facial expression, and then the syllable that the hearing aid would provide. And when you used a combination of all those tools, you then get some form of eligible communication.

Chantal Boyle

So you've mentioned 40 years, you've been using hearing aids.

Steven Mifsud

43 years ago, I got this huge hideous box thing on my chest. And with the wires to my ears from this box, I used to remember when I was at school, I used to do craft with scissors and cut paper. And all of a sudden the sound would just disappear, and I'd end up crying. And the reason that is, is because I used to cut the wires.

Chantal Boyle

They weren't very child friendly. Is that the kind of hearing aid that all people with hearing loss would have, or was that one designed for children? The big box?

Steven Mifsud

It was generally, one of the first sort of electrical hearing aid. My grandparent bought me my first hearing aid, because they weren't widely available at that point. My very first early stages of learning how to literally listen. We didn't have this audiology boost and all the technology we have today. My teacher used to put a balloon to my face on my cheek and used to speak to the balloon on the other side, and then I would feel the vibration. And the first way to learn how to lip read and communicate is through the use of syllable. So hello, two syllable.

Chantal Boyle

So the hearing aid helps you pick up the syllables more clearly?

Steven Mifsud

No, I wouldn't say clearly. If you talk about the cochlear implant, which we will go into shortly, that's when I started to get clarity. The old hearing aids from the big box to the slightly smaller box, to the behind the ear hearing aid, what they used to give me is a underwater muffle type sound. They used to whistle horrifically, and it didn't give me anything like high pitch sound. There were lots of sound that I couldn't hear, such as a dog whining or when you watch horror movies and you might see a knife scraping against the metal. I wouldn't hear any of that. So what the old hearing aids used to give me was a muffled sound, but I could just about tell how many syllables there were in each word.

Chantal Boyle

So it takes an awful lot of brain power to combine the lip reading with the recognizing the body's natural communication. So facial expressions, as you said, gestures with your hands, your arms. I use my hands quite a lot.

Chantal Boyle

And then combined with these sounds that's, as you say, gave you the rounded picture of communication.

Steven Mifsud

Now, looking back, that explained why I find communicating with certain people easier. So if you go through Italy or with the Mediterranean, Malta, which is where half my family are from they're so expressive and they use their hands a lot. So there's so many visual clue. Where with, if you speak to somebody who's quite stern or in a bad mood, it's really difficult because their face is so strained. That's why I have to try and listen more, and listening doesn't come naturally. We rely so much on the facial expression. I don't think people are aware of how much, how many clues they give out. So if you look at the pandemic which we're just coming out of hopefully now, with the mask, I can't hear. I can't understand with the mask, it's so difficult.

Chantal Boyle

Yes.

Steven Mifsud

That's because a mask covers the facial expression, it covers the lip reader. And you actually talk differently when you've got a mask on.

Chantal Boyle

Pandemic has been a nightmare for people with hearing impairments or hard of hearing. Would you mind actually explaining to me, is there a difference between if I use the expression hard of hearing or profoundly deaf?

Steven Mifsud

I tend to flip between the two. If I'm within the deaf community or I go to a deaf club, I'll say I'm deaf. I see myself as somebody who has a hearing impairment. I'm hard of hearing.

Chantal Boyle

Yes.

Steven Mifsud

Actually, I am profoundly deaf.

Chantal Boyle

Yeah.

Steven Mifsud

So I think it's more a personal preference. So people as they age and lose their hearing, they become hard of hearing.

Chantal Boyle

Right.

Steven Mifsud

People who have no sound will call themselves as deaf. I don't really think there's a clear answer. And I think you've got the deaf community, and then you've got the people who have a hearing impairment. While we're on that subject, when I had my cochlear implant, I actually lost quite a few friends because so many people, and rightly so, are proud to be deaf. And they can't understand or grasp why someone would want to leave that culture and have a cochlear implant. Everybody has their own personal reason. Mine is that I

believe that we live in a hearing world, and I want to succeed and do that if I can. I've been [inaudible 00:08:01] 20 years, you may have the same set of tools and you can succeed.

Chantal Boyle

Yes.

Steven Mifsud

It's just personal preference.

Chantal Boyle

And if you are in the deaf community, does that mean that you sign?

Steven Mifsud

Doesn't necessarily have to mean that, no. Signing doesn't necessarily come that easy to everyone.

Chantal Boyle

Yes.

Steven Mifsud

But I'm just delighted now with the recent development, that British Sign Language has been recognized as an official language. Cornwall with about 400, 500 people speaking, and that was recognized as a language before British Sign Language was.

Chantal Boyle

Just goes to show how a disability is overlooked, how that wasn't recognized before, when it should be obvious, it is a language.

Steven Mifsud

Yeah.

Chantal Boyle

It's used throughout the UK, and different countries have their own sign language, don't they? So in America I know it's ASL for American Sign Language.

Steven Mifsud

Yeah. And so we have the British Sign Language. You have the American Sign Language. And do you know what the difference is between the two sign languages?

Chantal Boyle

I do not know.

Steven Mifsud

Okay. Both straightforward, and it's something that the listener would learn. The British Sign Language, you do with two hands, generally. And ASL American Sign Language tend be one hand.

Chantal Boyle

I didn't know that.

Steven Mifsud

Ok.

Chantal Boyle

I was going to make a guess. And then I thought, no, don't guess. Just be honest and say, you don't know. I was going to guess that it was around... I don't know. The different accent, but that doesn't make any sense. Does it?

Steven Mifsud

There are actually regional differences in sign languages. A lot of people don't know, in Northern Ireland, they will sign things differently to say, Wales or England. I don't class myself as a BSL user. And if you ask me to sign a few words now, I will struggle. However, if you plonk me in a group of people doing sign language, it automatically comes into my hands and I can start doing that.

Chantal Boyle

Yeah.

Steven Mifsud

And it's surreal.

Chantal Boyle

It sounds like your very first hearing aid, the technology was perhaps, maybe in its infancy, technology wise. Would you describe your hearing aids that you've had over the years, over the 43 years as an object of power? Do you remember how you felt when you first got your very first hearing aid?

Steven Mifsud

Vaguely. Yeah. I hated it. As a child, I was set in my ways of looking at people's faces, and suddenly I didn't even know it was noise. I didn't understand that concept. So if you take somebody whose blind and suddenly you give them the ability to see, they don't understand what green is, or red is. They don't know what grass looks like. It's hard to conceptualize. And I remember suddenly having the extra sensory, because I hated it. I really did not like it. But what I do remember is, I remember my mum's voice and I knew it was my mum, and I can't explain it. Everybody else, was just noise, but my mum's voice used to really come out in the sound. In terms of whether it's being an object of power, I wouldn't say I've had those feelings.

I would say it's the powerful tool in the case of when you want people to shut up and not talk to you anymore. That I can just plonk them off, and I'd go into this world of silence. When I don't have my hearing aids on it's like I'm in this bubble. I'm in outer space where there's nothing, no sound at all. It's surreal. And I actually think quite a few people who can hear, get jealous of that ability. So, when I go to bed at nighttime, I take my hearing aid out, and I don't hear a thing. And I've tried going to sleep wearing my hearing aid, but it's impossible because I can hear the bedsheets rustling. I can hear the cat's footprint. And I'm like, how does anybody go to sleep throughout, with all that noise going on?

Chantal Boyle

It's very interesting, because people comment on things like that when they're in the countryside and not in built up areas, about the peace and the tranquility. From your point of view, you will still be picking up on all of those finite sounds of the bees humming, and maybe the grass moving, and the trees rustling, in built up areas. You've got that. But you've also, for example, at the moment I can hear in the background, the sound of an industrial machine. There's delivery vans whizzing around everywhere. There's a lot of noise pollution isn't there, in built up areas?

Steven Mifsud

Yeah.

Chantal Boyle

I guess that's why people use meditation, is to remove themselves from the noise. Isn't it?

Steven Mifsud

Yes, I would guess so. And when we were talking about technology, originally the hearing aids were analogue. So you always had like this solid electric bass that was quite comforting. And then they switched the hearing aids over to digital, and this is where they were very selective in what you could hear. I did not get on with those at all. I got really frustrated. And I felt like, because I didn't have that electric bass, that a blanket had been taken off me. And I felt really insecure. And just going back to the object of power, what's quite

interesting is, if I take my hearing aids out and I'm in a group of people, my character changes.

Chantal Boyle

Does it really?

Steven Mifsud

Yeah. I suddenly become this very vulnerable person that needs to hide. And I don't want to talk to anybody. I get really anxious, and I look for others to comfort. It's surreal. And then you put the hearing aid back in and suddenly I'm this person, shoulders go up, confident. And it's incredible how, yeah, this device just gives me the sort of supreme feeling of confidence.

Chantal Boyle

And presumably, that is because you have throughout your life been used to having a hearing device of some sort or another. Whereas, when you were talking about the deaf community, who are very proud of being deaf, they haven't experienced what it is like to have sound. And therefore, they don't feel that they have lost a sense.

Steven Mifsud

A lot of my friends, particularly my best friend, Steve. Steve, who I work with, he is more comfortable without his hearing aids on. And he actually feels like that the hearing aids are an inconvenience. They are something that he has to use in order to fit in the world out there. And it irritates him, so he'll go all weekend without wearing hearing aids. But then when he gets a phone call or FaceTime, he'll be pretty much like, ah, and then he'll have to put his hearing aids in. Whereas I am the opposite. I need it. I need the tool, because I want to succeed. I need that layer of confidence around.

Chantal Boyle

And I think that's really important point to make, in that no two people are the same, are they? In how-

Steven Mifsud

Correct.

Chantal Boyle ... we feel about everything. And interact with the world can be different, slightly different. Neither one is wrong. And that's really important, isn't it, when you talk about disability that you talk to the individuals?

Steven Mifsud

And I think this where a lot of that anger stems from the deaf community in some way, because they're thinking, why are they trying to fix us? Because obviously, we have the

social model of disability and the medical model of disability. Just for the people listening, the medical model is about providing devices or medical care to help solve a problem. The social model is about adapting to society, so everyone's equal. So I think a lot of people in the deaf community particularly, have this anger of why we must have a cochlear implant? Why must we have hearing aids in order to fit into society? I agree with that perception, and I think we're going there, but we are living in the here now. And by me making the choice of wearing a hearing aid or a cochlear implant, I want to succeed in the now.

Chantal Boyle

So what was the decision making process to have your cochlear implant? You've had that for eight years now, haven't you?

Steven Mifsud

Yes.

Chantal Boyle

Is it quite a major operation?

Steven Mifsud

Huge. I won't go all graphic, but basically they put a magnet inside your head. So they drill a 10p coin size slot in your skull, put a magnet in. And then from that magnet, you have a little wire that got dragged through your cochlear. And the cochlear looks a bit like a snail. So the inner side of the snail will be the low bass, and the outer side of the snail would be the high pitching. Which is actually why, as you get older, you lose a lot of the high pitching because the outer part of the snail is exposed.

Chantal Boyle

Yeah.

Steven Mifsud

And the inner side is very well preserved. So what they do, the cochlear implant, they thread the wire through, then on the outside, you have a hearing aid, which is a magnet. That slots on the internal magnet and when there is sound, the wire will pulsate or activate, depending on if it's a high pitch sound or a low pitch sound. The operation itself is about three, four hours. I wouldn't say it was pleasant, but the reward was great.

Chantal Boyle

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So would you say from the hearing aid that you had before, what was the improvement, sort of percentage wise?



Steven Mifsud

Where do you start? Huge. Enormous. And I've actually got a list of things in front of me that I would like to run through. So before the cochlear, I would just hear syllables and very muffled sounds. Then I remember, I had the operation in November, then the following January, they switched it on. Immediately, I got a case of nausea, because it was like sensory that I had never experienced before. All I could hear straight away was like this sort of Mickey Mouse squeaky voices. I thought, I haven't gone through this operation for this, but suddenly the squeaky voices started to get clearer and clearer. And what the squeaky voices were, was the nerve ending and the brain trying, was saying, right, this is new to us. What is that? We need to categorize it. We need to feel it. And then suddenly it got clearer and clearer.

And I remember, I just started hearing all these different things. You would hear radiators clicking, clock ticking. When I'm watching a football match, I would hear a whistle. I would hear the ball actually being kicked. I would hear, in Formula One, I like watching Formula One, all I would hear before would just a (whir) noise. Now, I could suddenly hear the gears changing that (gear changing sound), and it was just surreal. It was so overwhelming. Another thing that struck me is that I thought my wife sounded so weird.

Chantal Boyle

Really?

Steven Mifsud

And- Yeah. I was like, why do you speak like that? And still it's like, well, I'm partly from Liverpool, that's why. And when-

Chantal Boyle

So you hadn't picked up on her accent before.

Steven Mifsud

Yeah, this is another thing. So all the men sounded more or less the same, women sounded more or less the same. Older, middle aged and younger, I could sort of differentiate, but all of a sudden everybody had a different voice and it was just mind blowing.

Chantal Boyle

I can't imagine. And when you said that those high pitched sounds was your brain sort of working everything out, putting it where it needed to be. Did that process take a month, a minutes, hours, how was that?

Steven Mifsud

The reason I'm laughing is because I'm still learning now.

Chantal Boyle

Are you?

Steven Mifsud

And at first high pitched sounds were absolutely unbearable. So if somebody opened a package of crisps I had to leave the room. I couldn't stand it. Or if somebody was scraping a knife on a plate, or if a dog is whining, all these high pitched sounds, I would just be like, how do people live with that?

Chantal Boyle

Yeah.

Steven Mifsud

This is horrific. Over time, I've sort of got used to it, and I'm not hearing it as much unless I'm specifically trying to hear it.

Chantal Boyle

Yes.

Steven Mifsud

Another thing is my wife, bless her she bought me two Blu-ray box sets when I got my cochlear implant. The first one was The Fast and the Furious and said, listen to this, and feast your ears on that.

Chantal Boyle

How awful.

Steven Mifsud

All the engines, the car engines, I was just blown away. And I just sat there staring at the TV, like, you can't swear on a podcast, just like, what the sugar have I just heard.

Chantal Boyle

Yeah.

Steven Mifsud

And the other one was Star Wars. So I am a big Star Wars fan, but I never realized that the light saber actually made like this humming noise, and the ignition noise, which is so amazing , like (saber ignition sound).

Chantal Boyle

Yeah.

Steven Mifsud

I can't hear it enough. There are so many unnecessary noises, they're very distracting. And I can actually sometimes get very overwhelmed by it.

Chantal Boyle

Is it connected to an app, like the technology behind it, are you able to sort of say, well, I'm in a crowded environment, so I just want to zone in on the people I'm talking to. Or are you able to turn the volume down? How does it actually work?

Steven Mifsud

Cochlear implants have evolved as well. So the one I first had eight years ago had two or three different settings, which was one, cut the background noise out. Two, do half the job, and three, cut nothing out. The one I have now, which is more smaller and discreet, has Bluetooth. And oh my gosh, Bluetooth has been revolutionary, it's the bigger jump in my hearing in, gosh, like forever. So Bluetooth, I can now, it's just Bluetooth to my mobile phone or an iPad. Because what you've got to remember is with a hearing aid, you've got the sound, the hearing aid microphone picks up the sound, so you lose some of that quality in between.

Chantal Boyle

Yes.

Steven Mifsud

With the Bluetooth, it goes straight into your head. So you bypass microphones and all of that, and it goes straight into your head. I can watch an iPad movie on a train, I don't hear the train or anything. Just hear the movie up full blast.

Chantal Boyle

It sounds amazing. Really, just fantastic. So the Bluetooth enables you to go directly into a technical device. And do you still have the other options of being able to take the volume half down and...

Steven Mifsud

Yeah. I got so excited telling you about the Bluetooth and I forgot your actual question. So yes, I can turn the hearing aids up and down, but still having the sensory all the time is overwhelming. So for several hours a day, I would take my cochlear implant off. So I can go into my wall of black, dark, no sound when I need that ultra focus. So if I am on writing a report, or if I'm losing a game on FIFA on PlayStation, I take my cochlear off and become this supreme powerful being.

Chantal Boyle

Yes. You mentioned that you take it off to sleep in. Do you dream in sound or not?

Steven Mifsud

Did you pre write this question? Because it's an awesome one. I'm not sure.

Chantal Boyle

Oh, one for you to note then when you have your next lovely dream. Maybe you don't... Some people don't remember their dreams. My dreams are super vivid, and people often think I'm telling fibs about them the next day, when I start recounting them. I do it so much that they actually go I don't want to hear anymore about your dreams thank you. But yeah, it'd be interesting to know that. So you'd have to come back to me on that one, Steven Mifsud. And why do you wear the Sunflower?

Steven Mifsud

Having a hidden disability is one of the biggest barriers people can face. Hugely, so if you take myself as an example, I was talking about this big hearing aid, and then they shrunk over the years. And this showed people that I have an impairment. I have a disability. I require, may not require, a little bit of extra help. So people would see somebody deaf approaching, okay, that person has a hearing impairment, they then get 5, 6, 7 seconds to sort of prepare themselves. As my hearing aids have shrunk and got smaller, my hidden disability barrier had just got bigger and bigger and bigger. So now, even though I have a small hearing aid and I can hear much better, I don't get any help from people anymore. So the first part of the conversation, which is critical, I completely miss, because they might be looking down, they may cover their mouth.

It's only when they see my hearing aid on the side, they realize I have a disability. So in order to negate that, I wear the Sunflower lanyard. So because, people can see it from a distance. Now, this lanyard does not say, I am a disabled person. It just says, and it's optional whether somebody wears it or not, it's saying, I may or may not require additional assistance. Please just be a bit more gentle with me. Please just be aware that I may need some help. And that is why I wear the Sunflower lanyard. I wear it in areas where I may struggle. So if I go to a supermarket counter, if I'm checking in at the airport, if I'm boarding an aircraft, if I go to a concert venue, if I go to an exhibition, I'll wear the Sunflower lanyard.

Chantal Boyle

That's great to hear that you wear it in such a, in all areas of your life, and it supports you in that way. And that it enables you to enjoy things, experiences, journeys, that might have been more difficult without it because we've talked about objects of power. And when I spoke about that, that was about your hearing aid being obvious, which then gives you the power, in that people can see and recognize, as you've just explained. And now the Sunflower has become your new objects of power, in that sense.

Steven Mifsud

It's a tool.

Chantal Boyle

Yes.

Steven Mifsud

It's not really something to indicate, oh, I'm a disabled person. It's something that I use as a tool, when I need it to make my life easier.

Chantal Boyle

Yeah. And that's the good thing, isn't it? Is that you choose when you need to wear it.

Steven Mifsud

Just like my hearing aid.

Chantal Boyle

Yeah.

Steven Mifsud

It's an additional tool in my armour, the tool box.

Chantal Boyle

Yeah. Have there ever been any occasions that you can think of, because you spoke about quite a few things there, concerts shopping, traveling at the airport, have there been any occasions where it hasn't been recognized? And you've felt, wow, this really would've made a difference, if the people recognized the Sunflower here.

Steven Mifsud

Totally. For an example, Saudi. Saudi Arabia, I went into the airport, landed in Saudi, wearing my Sunflower lanyard. It didn't mean anything. And suddenly I felt like I'd lost one of my biggest tools. So I then had to queue, and there were lots of people moving around and I got really anxious. And people just spoke really fast to me. And it was like, I just lost one of my main coping tools. And I think the Sunflower lanyard is such an important tool to raise awareness of. When I was working as the director of accessibility at Expo, for me, it was very important to leave a legacy and raise awareness of the Sunflower lanyard. And one of the ways I did that was I got a picture with her Excellency, at Expo, holding the Sunflower lanyard. And overnight, I'm clicking my finger, things completely changed. And suddenly you could wear the Sunflower lanyard at Dubai airport. You could wear it at Dubai mall, at the theme park in Dubai. The Sunflower lanyard needs everybody to take a role in raising its awareness.

Chantal Boyle

Yes.

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You fly a lot. What things do you need to be careful with, with the cochlear implant when you are at an airport? Anything?

Steven Mifsud

So when you go through security, they scan your bag, and then you get into a small cube for the x-ray machine. People see me wearing a Sunflower lanyard, and suddenly they would discreetly escort me to a different entrance. So I can have a hand search instead, or a different type of machine. Without the Sunflower lanyard, I would then get to the front of the queue, get into a commotion with the security officer. He didn't understand, the people behind me get a bit restless, and think I'm causing problem and somebody come. And that, is all avoided where in the Sunflower lanyard. Not having the recognition of the Sunflower lanyard just makes some of the things so much more difficult. And if you take me for an example, somebody who has a hearing impairment and have a cochlear implant, all these voices shouting at me that I haven't heard before.

Chantal Boyle

Oh. Yeah. That must be really, really horrible. And as you said, it's a very anxiety inducing experience anyway, isn't it? Without the additional pressure of all this noise. Apparently the statistic I heard the other day is that when you're on an airplane, one in four people are not actually comfortable to be on the airplane. One in four people, actually experience some apprehension or anxiety about flying. So if the Sunflower can help to reduce that, then that reduces the temperature for everybody. Doesn't it?

Steven Mifsud

Totally, and talking about aircraft. I don't wear my cochlear implant when I'm on the airplane, only when the drink trolley is going by.

Chantal Boyle

You don't want to miss it.

Steven Mifsud

Yeah. Because I want my Bloody Mary and Jack Daniels.

Chantal Boyle

What has the pandemic meant for people who are deaf or who have hearing loss?

Steven Mifsud

I'll tell you one word that disabled people have faced during the pandemic, and particularly those that are hearing impaired. Just one word, isolation, huge isolation. The technology of video calls with subtitles is not what it was at the beginning of the pandemic, lots of swear words, blanks out. Not basically, what the conversation is going on about.

Chantal Boyle

Yeah.

Steven Mifsud

We could be talking about having a nice day and the subtitles would be talking about microwaves and gardens.

Chantal Boyle

Oh, really bad. That's really bad.

Steven Mifsud

Yeah.

Chantal Boyle

Isn't it?

Steven Mifsud

Yes. And going out, everybody was wearing a face mask. When you cover half a face, you lose, not only just the lip reading, you lose the facial expression. It actually felt like accessibility had regressed so much.

Chantal Boyle

And it became very apparent with the briefings, the daily briefings from the government. And there wasn't any BSL signers.

Steven Mifsud

Yeah.

Chantal Boyle

The isolation, the communication isolation of a whole sector of society wasn't thought about. Was it?

Steven Mifsud

Totally. Yeah. And not just the daily briefing, but also the instruction on how to avoid COVID.

Chantal Boyle

Yeah.

Steven Mifsud

They were not given in sign language. They were not given in braille. They were not given in large print. It was tech for being horrific, we now, as a societal have had a reboot in many areas. We've learned new lessons. We value new things. We have an increasing medical care. We have a raised awareness, disabled people. We have better technology solution for subtitle. So the pandemic, even though it's taken from us, it has also given us lots of things. And not just in the isolation and the accessibility, but look at the environment as well. What happened in nature, the water got more clear again, nature grow. The birds came out. The foxes came out.

Chantal Boyle

That was a beautiful thing about the awfulness of it all, was seeing nature repair itself and start to flourish again. And removing all of the waste that we as human beings have been polluting our world with for years, upon years, upon years. Do you have any advice for me or for other people when speaking to somebody who is profoundly deaf or has a hearing impairment?

Steven Mifsud

Yeah. Please just be patient. We might need things repeating twice, and also don't be afraid to try and emphasize your words. And try and speak normally. Try and use your hands, if you can, try and point and give visual clues. If you're wearing a mask, please just try pull it down just for a fleeting moment. I think the key thing is just patience. And always try and face that person as well.

Chantal Boyle

Face on. Thank you. And I have to ask you, because it is an incredible achievement. You have MBE after your name. Why were you awarded the MBE?

Steven Mifsud

Oh, I was awarded the MBE, last year in June. Of what can I say, it's the biggest honor of my life. And I got my MBE for my work toward building a more inclusive world, and exporting British expertise. But when I received my MBE from the Duke of Cambridge, I was amazed at how deaf aware he was.



Chantal Boyle

Oh really?

Steven Mifsud

So of course, I had my Sunflower lanyard on. They asked me, do you have access requirement? The subtle changes they made for me were incredible, and made my day so much better. So for instance, as I was about to approach the Duke of Cambridge, I had the bow my head, the background choir suddenly stopped when I spoke to the Duke of Cambridge. And I said, thank you so much. And he said, yeah, they briefed me. I've got a little dossier next to me. And I just thought, thank you so much. And he was just saying, he's really trying to accentuate his words.

Chantal Boyle

Yes.

Steven Mifsud

And so, yeah. So the Sunflower lanyard helped me when I met Prince William.

Chantal Boyle

Yeah. Yeah. That's great. And in doing so you gave... Everybody's richer for it, aren't they? When you are able to just make slight adjustments in how you approach things, so that everyone is included. And you learn something while you're doing it.

Steven Mifsud

Yeah. And one piece of advice I would give, for what it's worth.

Chantal Boyle

Yes, please.

Steven Mifsud

Is, never be content. Never, ever, ever be content. Because once you are content, you will never evolve, you will never grow. And always push yourself and slightly out of your comfort zone, because then that step you take becomes your comfort zone. Then you take another one, and another one, and another one. And when you stop and look back, you think, oh my gosh, look how far I've come.

Chantal Boyle

Well, I think that, that is a marvellous space to, place rather. Marvellous place to bring our conversation to a close. And thanks so much for telling me and everybody else about cochlear implants. I can't believe the advances in technology. It's absolutely mind blowing. I'm so pleased how it's been supporting and enabling you to get out there and push your

idea of inclusion for everyone. And taking it to places in the world where it might not have even been really thought about before. Thank you for everything that you do.

Steven Mifsud

Thank you for having me on the podcast. Been an absolute pleasure.

Speaker 3

If you would like to share your Sunflower story or conversation with us email [conversations@hiddendisabilitiesstore.com](mailto:conversations@hiddendisabilitiesstore.com). Find out more about us or listen to this recording again by checking out our insights page at [hiddendisabilitiesstore.com](http://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com). You can also find us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. Please help, have patience and show kindness to others and join us again soon. Making the invisible, visible with the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower.