

SUDDEN STUTTER

At 16, Jade had to learn to speak all over again

During a drama class rehearsal at school, I got ready to say my lines, but when I opened my mouth nothing came out.

The more I tried forcing myself to say something – anything! – the more scared I became.

The school called my mum, Nikki, 42, and she took me to see a GP in our home town of Croydon, England.

By now, I was severely stressed so he sent me off to the local hospital. The great fear Mum and I had was that, at 16, I'd had some sort of brain injury.

All tests proved negative, so I was discharged.

For the next few days I struggled to speak and, after a painfully long time, would manage to get a single word out.

People had to finish my sentences or pass me pieces of paper so I could scribble down a message.

A month later, Mum, my step-dad, Brad, brother, Billy, seven, and I moved to Sydney.

There I saw a speech therapist and psychologist, and was finally diagnosed with a severe stutter.

"It may have been triggered by anxiety about the move to Australia," the psychologist said.

I agreed it had been a huge upheaval leaving behind my big sister, Chyna, 20, and all my friends. I'd been worried about it for a long time and my fears had manifested as a stutter.

It was now June 2007 but, because my speech



Me public speaking

and confidence were at an all-time low, Mum and I agreed it might be best for me to start school the following year. This gave me a good six months to try to regain my lost voice.

I went online and came across The McGuire Programme. As soon as I read about it on their website, I felt sure it was right for me.

It involved an intense four days of exercises, and fortnightly support group follow-ups. There were also public speaking assignments.

Courses were held in various locations around Australia, so I went to my nearest one in Sydney. The courses were run by former stutterers who understood exactly what I was going through.

On my first day, the course convenor explained, "This course isn't a cure, we just provide the tools to help you along."

I was taught a new way of speaking which involved

using my diaphragm differently and taking regular, deep breaths.

By the third day, something clicked and I started improving rapidly.

Mum cried when she came to see and hear our public speeches, saying, "I'm very proud of you!"

It's 14 months since I started stuttering and my voice is back to normal. I'm now in Year 11 at Castle Hill High School, in Sydney, where I'm loving drama again.

And, I'm relieved to say, delivering lines is not a problem anymore!

Jade Vincent-Hall, 18, Castle Hill, NSW.

Visit The McGuire Programme website at www.beyondstuttering.com.au or phone 1300 134 543 for more details.

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Dr Vered's FACT FILE

- Stuttering is a disruption in the normal flow and pattern of speech.
- The disruption may occur within words or in between words.
- Occasionally eye, facial or body movements accompany the stutter.

● Stuttering often arises in children between the ages of two and six but it usually resolves as they grow older. However, around one per cent of adults have a stuttering problem, with men more commonly affected than women.

● There's also thought to be a genetic component to stuttering, so it can occur more frequently in some families. Changes in areas of the brain involved with speech and language also appear to be involved.

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