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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Hanah's story

Five-year-old Hanah has been profoundly deaf since birth. The heartache that the Sempel family experienced increased tenfold when they discovered that the only school available to meet Hanah's needs – Aurora – was located in Melbourne, a four hour round trip from their country home of Drouin.

With their two other children attending local schools, a home, work and family support in Drouin, they were confronted with the agonising decision of having to choose what was right for Hanah versus what was best for their family.



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Initially, they sent her to the local kindergarten, where she was often left on her own, excluded from games and activities by teachers and hearing children. A specialist deaf visiting teacher service once a fortnight simply was not enough. It was clear that her most crucial learning years were being severely damaged because she was not receiving the adequate specialist resources she so desperately needed. On the verge of despair, they sought help from Deaf Children Australia, a charity which represents the 16,000 deaf and hearing impaired children throughout Australia.

Deaf Children Australia offered to provide Hanah and her family with accommodation in Melbourne so that she was able to access the early invention and specialist deaf education services of Aurora. It is a service that DCA provides to many rural Victorian deaf and hearing impaired children living in isolated areas where no deaf education services exist.

Since September 2005, Amy has watched Hanah transform from a shy and uncommunicative to a confident, happy child. At Aurora, not only does she receive a bilingual education of both oral speech and Auslan, she also has daily speech therapy and physiotherapy sessions. It is no accident that she can now communicate with family and new school friends.

Hanah, her mother and her siblings now have a three bedroom 'home away from home' in Blackburn South, a ten minute walk from Aurora. Hannah attends school from Monday to Thursday and on Friday evening, they drive home to spend the weekend in Drouin.

Amy is clear how Deaf Children Australia helped her family. "Hanah would not be where she is today without the support that Deaf Children Australia. I can't imagine what it would have been like to uproot our whole lives so that Hanah could go to Aurora. Steve would have had to quit his job, we would have had to sell our home, and leave our family and friends. It would have been a nightmare.

"There are people out there who obsess about owning the most fancy house or sports car. All I long for is for Hanah to be able to communicate and get an education that most hearing kids take for granted. Hanah is one of the lucky ones. It is so unjust that deaf children in country areas don't get to do whatever they want because there are simply no schools for them."

Deaf Children Australia have now launched The Women's Liberation Lottery, the proceeds of which will go towards raising \$1 million to build a house for other children like Hanah. Please call 1300 667 728 or see [www.liberationlottery.com](http://www.liberationlottery.com) to buy a ticket.

***For more information or to request an interview, please call Julie Postance at Deaf Children Australia on 9539 5362 or [jpostance@deafchildren.org.au](mailto:jpostance@deafchildren.org.au).***