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Meet

Julie Ripley-Kelly



Beyond Silence: A Story of Communication and Community

For Julie Ripley-Kelly, being deaf is not something that happened to her; it is simply who she is.

Julie is a material handler at Autosystems in Belleville, Ontario. Born deaf and raised in a city with one of Ontario's largest deaf communities, she grew up surrounded by people who communicated the same way she did. Her sense of belonging was never in question.

“I just belonged,” she shares, a simple statement that reflects a lifetime of community support.

For Julie, sounds can only be heard if they are extremely loud. American Sign Language (ASL) is her first language and the one in which she feels most fully herself. When communicating with non ASL speakers, she relies on direct eye contact for lipreading or uses written notes when needed. In a busy manufacturing plant, communication and safety go hand-in-hand. Julie moves through her

day with a strong awareness of her surroundings; scanning for forklifts, reading visual cues, and relying on gentle taps on the shoulder from coworkers when the bell signals the next break.

At Magna Autosystems, inclusion is woven into everyday practice. The team works hard to ensure that all employees feel valued, including members of the deaf community. Interpreters are provided for meetings, interviews, and training sessions, offering Julie full and equal access to information. Even birthday celebrations include interpreters, allowing her to participate in conversations and laughter alongside everyone else. “That’s what I love,” she says.

“They really welcomed our community.”

Through this article, Julie hopes to address a common misconception. Deaf individuals can perform every task that hearing individuals can. The only difference is the inability to hear.

“We just can’t hear, but that is it,” she explains.

Deafness exists on a spectrum, and experiences within the community vary widely. Her guidance for colleagues is simple and approachable: Show patience, learn a few basic ASL signs, write information down when needed, and make an effort to include others.

“We would love for you all to attempt to include us.”

For Julie, the deaf community feels like one large extended family that is supportive, resilient, and proud. Her story is a reminder that inclusion begins with effort rather than assumptions, and that true communication is rooted in connection long before it is rooted in sound.

Did You Know?

Early-onset hearing damage is becoming increasingly common due to the overuse of headphones and earbuds. To help protect your ears, try following the **60/60 rule**:

Listen at **no more than**
60 percent
volume

for

no longer than
60 minutes
at a time



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Exploring the Five Senses: How We Experience the World

When we think about how we move through our days, crossing a busy street, enjoying a favourite meal, or recognizing a friend's voice, our senses are quietly working in the background.

Sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch form a rich, interconnected system that helps us understand our environment. Although each person experiences their senses differently, they all contribute to independence, well-being, and quality of life.

It is so important to take care of our 5 senses. Imagine not being able to taste your mom's homemade cookies, listen to your grandchildren giggle, or not see the face of your loved one anymore. When one of the 5 senses start to act up, it can indicate a larger underlying health problem. Continue reading to learn more about what our different senses do.

TASTE AND SMELL

The Duo Behind Flavour and Safety

Did you know that most of what we call "taste" is actually smell? When we eat, aromatic molecules from our food travel to the back of the throat to the olfactory nerves in the nose. These nerves then send a message to our brains, turning the signal into "flavour." We also experience flavour through our tongue. Our tongues have tiny bumps on them called papillae with taste buds inside. These sensory cells help us taste sweetness, sourness, saltiness, bitterness and even a type of taste called umami. When our food molecules reach our taste buds, another message is sent to our brains, helping us understand what we are eating.

Our nose and tongue are not only for tasting flavour, but also play a huge role in our safety. Our sense of smell can act as a little built-in hazard protector. In a whiff, our nose can tell us if there is smoke, chemicals, or something we should not be inhaling in our environment. Our nose and sinuses are also our front-line defence for bacteria and dry air; humidifying and cleaning up each intake of air before it moves deeper into our bodies. Make sure to read the article on "Oral and Nasal Care: The Gateway to Better Health" to keep your upper respiratory healthy and full of flavour.

HEARING

A Bridge to Connection

While we often think of our ears as the body parts that stick out from our heads, they are actually responsible for one of our most important senses: Hearing. Our ears pick up sounds through vibrations, or sound waves. These vibrations funnel into our outer ear (the part you can see) and travel deep into the ear canal (the part you cannot see). From there, the sound vibrations reach tiny hair cells in the inner ear. When these hair cells are stimulated, they create an electrical signal that is sent to the brain for processing.

Our sense of hearing allows us to communicate, understand the world around us, and even support our nervous system. Hearing also plays a big role in cognitive health, helping us build neurological connections and maintain strong social relationships.

Hearing changes often happen gradually and can go unnoticed for a long time; we call this hearing loss. Hearing loss is very common. More than 1.5 billion people worldwide experience some degree of hearing change. With such a powerful sense, it is important to take care of our ears and our hearing. Check out our article on "Everyday Ways to Keep Your Ears Healthy," for some sound advice.

TOUCH

The Foundation of Awareness

Touch gives us information about texture, temperature, vibration, and pressure. It helps us balance, grip objects, and move safely through our environment. Touch also plays an important role in how we build connection with others and experience the world around us.

Our nerves play an important role in our sense of touch. As we age, our nerves can become more damaged, which can lead to numbness. Numbness can be a warning sign that something deeper is going on in the body. It can be caused by circulation problems, underlying chronic diseases like diabetes, or even vitamin deficiencies. If you are noticing a change in touch, such as tingling, reduced sensitivity, or numbness, it is important to talk with a healthcare provider. Treatments may include lifestyle adjustments like increasing physical activity or eating a heart-healthy diet.

In some cases, simple changes like improving your workstation setup to support proper ergonomics can also help.

SIGHT The Sense That Guides Us

Vision plays a central role in how most people experience the world. It supports learning, reading, mobility, depth perception, and emotional connection. At the back of the eye, the retina contains rods that help us see in low light and cones that allow us to perceive colour. These signals travel through the optic nerve to the brain, where they are shaped into the images we rely on every day.

Vision can naturally change over time, and conditions such as high blood pressure, high blood sugar, or high cholesterol can influence eye health. Many vision concerns can be prevented or managed with early detection, making regular eye exams (every 1 to 2 years) an important part of maintaining independence and safety.

A few simple habits to keep your eyes healthy:

- Wear sunglasses with 100 percent UV protection year-round.
- Use the 20-20-20 rule during screen time to reduce strain: Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.
- Stay hydrated to support healthy tear production and reduce dryness.
- Manage chronic conditions that affect blood vessels, including those in the eyes.
- Small mindfulness practices can also enhance visual awareness. For example, during a walk, try a "colour scan" by noticing one item of each colour of the rainbow, an exercise that blends observation with relaxation.

LISTEN UP

Everyday Ways to Keep Your Ears Healthy

Your ears work hard from the moment you wake up until you fall asleep. They collect sounds, send messages to your brain, and help you stay balanced and aware. Since they do so much, it is important to take care of them every day. Here are two simple ways to keep your ears healthy.

1

Let your ears clean themselves

The ear canal naturally keeps itself clean. Earwax is not dirty. It protects your ears by trapping dust and germs and by keeping the skin inside the canal moist. Overcleaning can remove this natural protection and may cause irritation or infection.

How to care for earwax safely:

- Gently wipe the outer ear with a washcloth after showering. Do not put anything inside the ear canal. Cotton swabs can push wax deeper or injure the eardrum.
- If you feel blocked, have trouble hearing, or think you have too much wax, speak with a healthcare professional. They can remove buildup safely with the proper tools or prescribe ear drops.

2

Protect your ears from loud noise

Loud sounds can damage the tiny hair cells inside the inner ear. These cells do not grow back. When they are damaged, hearing loss can slowly develop, and many people may not notice the change right away.

How to protect your hearing:

- Wear earplugs or earmuffs during loud activities such as concerts, using power tools, or working with loud machinery.
- Keep earbud or headphone volumes low. You should still be able to hear someone speaking nearby.
- For example, when listening to music with earbuds, keep the volume just over halfway and take a 5 minute break every 60 minutes.
- Schedule regular annual hearing tests with a licensed hearing professional.

For workplace hearing concerns, contact your health and safety department. Wear proper protective equipment when required. Small daily habits can help protect your hearing for many years to come.



Oral and Nasal Care: The Gateway to Better Health

Your nose and mouth play a big role in how you breathe, speak, eat, and even how you feel each day. They are also apart of your body's first line of defence, keeping out germs, allergens, and other irritants. With just a few simple daily habits, you can help yourself breathe easier, feel more comfortable, and support your overall well-being.

Nasal Health

Breathing may feel effortless, but the nose works continuously to ensure that the air we breathe is warm, moist, and clean. Tiny hairs and mucus trap dust, allergens, and germs before they reach the lungs. Seasonal allergies, dry air, and environmental irritants can interfere with this process, leading to congestion and discomfort in the nose, eyes, and throat.

TIPS TO KEEP THE NOSE HEALTHY:

- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated and keep nasal passages moist.
- Use saline sprays or rinses to help clear irritants and prevent dryness.
- Use a humidifier to add moisture to dry indoor air.
- Avoid smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke, which can irritate nasal tissues.
- Limit the use of medicated nasal sprays, as overuse can worsen congestion.



Oral Health

Taking care of the mouth does more than support a bright smile; it also plays an important role in how well our bodies function. Saliva and beneficial microorganisms help protect teeth and gums from harmful bacteria. Good oral hygiene helps maintain this balance and lowers the risk of tooth decay, gum disease, infection, and tooth loss.

Poor oral health can affect the entire body. Harmful bacteria from the mouth can enter the bloodstream through inflamed gums and can increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Bacteria from our own mouths can also be inhaled, increasing the risk of respiratory infections.

TIPS TO KEEP YOUR MOUTH HEALTHY:

- Brush teeth for two minutes, twice a day.
- Use fluoride toothpaste and a soft-bristle toothbrush, replacing it every three to four months.
- Brush the tongue to remove bacteria and floss daily.
- Limit sugary foods and drinks.
- Visit a dentist regularly for check-ups and professional cleanings.
- Avoid tobacco products.

Did You Know?

Most synthetic candles release harmful chemicals that can cause respiratory irritation and reduce indoor air-quality. Next time you are picking a candle, choose one made from 100% natural waxes like beeswax, soy or coconut.

Mental Health Corner

Supporting People With Sensory Disabilities

It is common to feel unsure about how to interact with someone who is deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or who has low vision. Simple, thoughtful actions can help make your interactions respectful and inclusive.

For individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing:

Begin by getting their attention with a gentle wave or a tap on a shared surface. Face them directly and keep your mouth visible to support lip reading. Speak clearly at a natural pace, without raising your voice unless they request it. If you are uncertain, you can ask how they prefer to communicate. If an interpreter is present, remember to speak to the person rather than the interpreter.

For individuals who are blind or have low vision:

Introduce yourself at the beginning of a conversation and let the person know when you are leaving. If you would like to help with something, always ask first. If they accept, allow them to hold your elbow and describe the surroundings as you walk together. Avoid grabbing their cane or guiding them without permission.

Service dogs assist people with many types of disabilities, so do not touch or distract them while they are working. Above all, avoid making assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Treating others with respect helps create a welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone.



A Sensory Boosting Supermeal

Creamy Chickpea and Carrot Curry

Preparation Time: **15 minutes**
Cook Time: **35 minutes**
Total Time: **45 minutes**
Serves: **4**

Nutritional Facts (Per Serving)

330 kcal	calories	18 g	protein
50 g	carbohydrates	15 g	fat
14 g	fibre	5 g	saturated fat
14 g	sugars	150 g	sodium

Ingredients

3 tbsp	olive oil
1 large	yellow onion, chopped
4–5 large	carrots, thinly sliced (see instructions)
1 (400ml) can	plant-based milk (try light coconut milk or almond milk)
1	bell pepper, diced
4	garlic cloves, sliced
2 tsp	fresh ginger, minced
1 (540ml) can	chickpeas, no-salt-added, drained and rinsed
1 (250ml) can	diced tomatoes, no-salt-added
1 block	extra-firm tofu, pressed and cubed
2 tsp	curry powder
1 tsp	turmeric
½ tsp	cumin
1 cup	water
1 cup	peas
3 tbsp	fresh cilantro, chopped
½	lime, juiced

Directions

1. Sauté the onions and carrots

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat.

Add the onion and 3 sliced carrots. Cook for 10 minutes, until the onions lightly brown.

Transfer to a plate and let cool.

2. Blend the creamy base

Add the cooled onions and carrots to a blender with all the plant-based milk and purée until smooth.

3. Cook the remaining vegetables

In the same pot, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil.

Add the bell pepper, garlic, ginger, chickpeas, and the remaining carrots.

Cook for 5 minutes.

4. Simmer the curry

Add the diced tomatoes, tofu, curry powder, turmeric, cumin, water, and the blended onion-carrot mixture.

Stir well, bring to a boil, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes or until the carrots are soft.

5. Finish

Turn off the heat. Stir in the peas, cilantro, and lime juice.

Optional: Serve hot over brown rice or quinoa.

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We would love to hear from you!

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