

didn't want to admit was hard. I cried a lot sometimes in Kieren's office, at home mostly. I was dealing with 20 odd years of repression and it was the hardest thing I have had to face.

From the time the application was sent within a week the assessor came to our site, again another rollercoaster and many more tears. But Kieren took it all in his stride I was truly lucky to have found such a supportive bunch of people in a workplace, they were moving heaven and earth to help me and I am so grateful to them all.

Once the assessor came out within 2 or so days we had her report she sent it off to Job Access and within I think it was no more than 24 hours we had the green light they approved it.

I will soon be getting my brand new ears and for the first time in my life I am excited about it I am truly looking forward to being able to hear EVERYTHING again. I can't wait till we go down there and get fitted, no more sneak attacks up behind me, no more soft voice I can't hear, no more missing things in meetings or what the clients are trying to tell me. And I owe it all to two people who wouldn't give up until they got the ball started Julie and Annika, and one manager named Kieren who has fought for me all the way when things went wrong. And you know what I think through this whole experience I have perhaps finally come to terms with my deafness. I still get teary but I think its still part grief but more part happiness.

My life can begin. ■

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## Howard reveals lifelong hearing problems

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Former Prime Minister John Howard has spoken of his problems with hearing loss since childhood. - By Danny Rose

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John Howard has welcomed the Australian trial of a potentially revolutionary service for the hearing impaired by sharing details of his own lifelong battle with deafness.

"I was diagnosed with a bad hearing deficiency in primary school when I was about nine," the former prime minister told reporters at the launch of the ACE Web Captioned Telephony (Cap Tel) trial on Friday.

"I sort of limped along with it until it packed up badly when I went to university."

Mr Howard said as his hearing deteriorated he turned to hearing aids - "big ones with cords on it" - until a series of operations in the 1960s restored some of his hearing. "The last 15 to 20 years I've had these tiny ones (hearing aids) which I'm wearing now," he said. "I was accused in my political life of not listening, by all manner and sundry of people but that's what you might expect in politics."

The Sydney-based event was the first official engagement in Mr Howard's new role of ambassador for the advocacy group Deafness Forum Australia.

It was the launch of a two-year Australian trial of the latest in telephone captioning technology now available in the United States. Working in a similar way to captioned television for the hearing impaired, the service provides an almost instantaneous transcript of everything said by the person on the other end of the phone.

An operator acts as a silent intermediary in the process, repeating their responses in a way that allows a computer program to turn them into text.

A hearing impaired person can read these responses off a computer screen or from the display of a customised home phone or compatible mobile phone.

"We could see the real-time character of the communication - nothing delayed or 'over and out' in the conversation," Mr Howard said after he watched a demonstration of the service operating on an iPhone.

"I can only imagine the enormous pleasure (this would give) an elderly man or woman who hasn't been able to have a decent telephone conversation for the last five years."

The trial is funded by the not-for-profit group Australian Communications Exchange (ACE) but it would require an estimated \$25 million over four years to make it available to the nation's three million hearing-impaired.

ACE says Cap Tel should replace an existing transcription service as it is more flexible and can churn out 108 words a minute - more than double the rate of the conventional service.

"It just opens up a whole new world, to be able to use a standard telephone and have captioning support so they know what the other person is saying to them," said ACE chief information officer Tony Bennetts. "And on an iPhone, it's completely portable - you can live a normal life and communicate using the systems and the tools we all enjoy." ■