

Annabel and the Stories for Lipreading committee kept things running on Zoom during lockdown.



The website has nearly 100 story films online.



# Lip-reading takes a lot of effort

Sally Jenkins discovers how an organisation supporting those with hearing loss is reaching people all over the world.

**A**NNABEL HERVEY-BATHURST is one of the team behind the Stories For Lipreading website and suffers from hearing loss.

Her own hearing started to deteriorate 13 years ago, when she was in her late thirties.

Although young, she was suffering from typical “old-age” hearing loss, caused by damage to the tiny sensory hair cells in the inner ear.

Hearing aids helped, but Annabel wanted to find a way to cope with a disability that would only get worse over time.

“I found a lip-reading class and it was fantastic,” Annabel says. “The tutor

explained how lip-reading works, so you can identify words and lip-shapes which are easily confused.

“The class gave me the space to come to terms with my hearing loss and the confidence to admit the disability to other people.”

There is a shortage of trained lip-reading tutors, and people with hearing loss often have other issues which make it difficult to attend classes.

“I felt that with today’s technology it must be possible to help those who couldn’t get to classes,” Annabel says.

As an English teacher, Annabel knows the power of a good story, and with the backing of three of her lip-reading tutors, plus a volunteer technical wizard,

Stories For Lipreading was born.

The website provides videos of stories being read aloud and gives those with hearing loss the chance to practise lip-reading skills and enjoy good writing at the same time.

The story scripts can be printed as a learning aid, subtitles are available via YouTube, and the videos can be rewound if there is a difficult part that needs a second look.

“Many of our writers are professionals who have generously donated their stories to us,” Annabel explains.

“We prefer stories based in everyday settings so the vocabulary is recognisable and useful for our users to practise.

“The characters must be convincing and engaging, and story length is really important, too.

“Lip-reading takes a lot of effort; a five-minute story video could take a lip-reader much longer than

that to decode, replaying tricky parts several times.”

The story readers are all trained lip-reading tutors or lip-speakers.

When reading, they preserve ordinary speech rhythms and don’t slow down or distort words by over-emphasis.

They must find a balance between using enough facial expression to engage the lip-reader, but not so much that it distracts from the lip-shape.

Stories For Lipreading was launched in 2017 with nine stories, including a factual piece and three story jokes – ideal starting points for anyone new to the site.

There are now nearly 100 story films, with more in the pipeline.

“Our website is accessed by users from all over the world,” Annabel says.

“We have evidence that speakers of other languages are using it to support them in learning English.”

All of this is provided free of charge by a tiny organisation run by dedicated volunteers. ■

**For more information, visit [storiesforlipreading.org.uk](http://storiesforlipreading.org.uk).**

