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# Příběh Kristýny se sluchovým postižením

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## Sewing Face Masks for the Silent World

The idea to sew transparent face masks came to 22-year-old **Kristýna Šimralová** even before the pandemic. The inspiration, she says, came during a class discussion in her Deaf Studies program at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University. The topic? That deaf people can become anything they want—and that all barriers can be overcome.

It's been over a year since Kristýna discovered special tools for future doctors online. Alongside a stethoscope designed for hearing-impaired users, what caught her eye was a face mask with a see-through window. Today, such masks are used not only by students, but also by children in special education classrooms in the U.S. Under photos posted online, Kristýna read glowing comments from teachers. These specialized masks are an important aid for people living in a silent world—allowing them to lip-read and, in a way, "hear" better.

Kristýna, a psychology student, has been sewing clear masks since August—ever since she got a sewing machine from her family. She admits she's been "learning on the fly." Judging by the results, she's handled the challenges well—her wardrobe now includes a few extra handmade skirts and headbands. Kristýna is a perfectionist. Her products feature clean stitching and detailed craftsmanship, more like something from a professional tailor than an ordinary student. Unlike standard cloth masks, clear ones require special care—otherwise, the sewn-in plastic window could get damaged. Kristýna's commitment to quality doesn't end with the mask itself: every one comes with a printed instruction leaflet and a QR code linking to a video guide in Czech Sign Language. And here's the personal reason behind her work: Kristýna herself began experiencing hearing loss three years ago. Being able to lip-read helps her understand others more clearly. These masks aren't just a gift to others—they support her own communication, too.

### Back to Your First Mask—What Was It Like Sewing Without Any Experience?

At first, I had no idea what I was doing. Before I even cut and pinned the pieces—following a pattern, of course—I had thoroughly studied the theory. I read all the recommendations, watched all the videos. I wanted to be fully prepared. The next day, my very first mask was tested at Tamtam (a nonprofit for children with hearing loss). It was amazing to see people smiling through the mask—and that they were happy to see each other's mouths! Even better, the plastic didn't fog up, which can be a problem with some models. The mask was a success, and it really motivated me to keep going. I decided to give them away to classmates and friends—especially those who interact with deaf people. So I bought a ton of fabric and started mass-producing them (she laughs).

### Where Are Your Masks Available?

I started in early September by giving them to my classmates. Then I offered them through Facebook—whoever wants one can message me. I also posted the sewing instructions in a sewing group, for anyone who wants to try making them on their own. Some reactions were surprising—like people questioning why anyone would wear plastic on their face, calling it awful. I guess they didn't understand the purpose. But most of the feedback has been positive. Today, for example, I'm delivering a hundred masks to Tamtam. We agreed they'd let me know if parents of deaf children—or deaf parents themselves—might want some too.



### **How Long Do You Plan to Keep Sewing?**

As long as it's needed—and as long as I have the time. I'm in my third year now, with a bachelor's thesis, essays, and other requirements ahead of me. But for now, I'm managing. At home, I've got another batch of 50 masks waiting; they just need elastic bands. If someone wants to help by donating fabric—maybe you've got unused cotton lying around—it would really help. I buy all the materials myself, out of pocket. If anyone's interested, they can write to me at [kristynasimralova@gmail.com](mailto:kristynasimralova@gmail.com).

### **Do You Know How Much Time It Takes to Make One Mask?**

I haven't calculated it exactly, but I know that sewing 50 masks takes me two full days. I start in the morning and keep sewing until evening—two days in a row. Of course, I take breaks and snack here and there. Besides sewing, there's also prep work—especially cutting out the windows, which is fiddly. Cutting windows for 50 masks takes three hours. For reference: from one A4 document protector (euro sleeve), I can cut out sixteen windows.

### **What Do You Do When You're Not Studying or Sewing?**

I dare say that in Prague right now, if you see someone wearing this specific mask design, it's probably one of mine. I'd recognize it. My first masks even used rainbow-colored thread—I liked it a lot. So that's another clue. I also try to vary the fabrics to match different styles and moods. In the summer, there was demand for blue masks with arrows; now it's more tiny flowers or polka dots. It's nice when the mask coordinates with the rest of the outfit.

### **Čím se bavíte, když nestudujete a nešíjete?**

I enjoy diplomatic simulations. The goal is to represent a country and debate a pre-announced topic with other participants—then pass a resolution. You have to find common ground. I even helped organize some events before. It's a lot of prep—my team had about 15 people putting together materials so everyone would have enough background to debate. Unfortunately, this year I couldn't join because of online classes—and I was also worried I wouldn't understand people through masks. So far, all participants have been hearing. That's a shame. I know my team would've welcomed someone with a hearing impairment, though.

### **Láká vás práce v diplomacii?**

I want to be a psychologist for the deaf—to provide care in Czech Sign Language. I feel like there are very few deaf psychologists compared to the large number of people in the Czech Republic with hearing loss—half a million hard of hearing and tens of thousands of deaf individuals. I only know of two. I believe it's crucial that such psychologists understand Deaf culture, know sign language, are aware of the needs of the deaf community, and can truly empathize with the feelings they experience.



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Source: <https://www.ukforum.cz/rubriky/studenti/7751-rouskey-pro-svet-ticha>