

Armenia

Caregiver Name: Naira
Age at implantation: 1

Child: Erik
Age Today: 6

I want to tell the story of my son, Erik. He was only 9 months old when I first suspected that his hearing was weak. Why at 9 months? Because after he was born, he did not undergo the hearing screening — the device was broken. They called us back a month later, but even then, it was still not working. Day by day he seemed active; he reacted, he even fell asleep to the “shhhhh” sound, but my inner voice would not let me rest. One day he was playing with his back to the window.

I entered the room and called his name several times, but he did not respond. When I clapped loudly, he jumped. At that moment, we decided to take him for examination. In Yerevan, at a medical centre, we learned the hardest and most painful news of our lives — our miracle had grade 4 severe hearing loss. **The doctors told us that there was no surgery that could restore his hearing. This was the biggest challenge for our family.**

Not only to accept reality, but also to fight against it when you are told there is no solution. But we, as parents, could not accept it. We began searching for possibilities and found a solution — cochlear implantation.



We learned that this surgery was already being performed in Armenia, and many children were already hearing and speaking thanks to it. We registered at a medical centre. The doctors' optimism gave us strength, and we decided that no matter what, we had to operate on our son. **However, a new and very serious problem arose — the financial issue. We did not have the necessary amount of money. It was during COVID, my husband was a serviceman, and soon the war began.**

My husband was sent to the front line. Those days were full of fear and uncertainty. This was the hardest period of our journey. After the war, when we learned the surgery date, we started fundraising.

And here we felt our greatest support — the support of people. Our call for help spread on social media, and the whole world came to help us. In just four days, the necessary amount was raised.

That support gave us faith that we were not alone. On November 27, 2020, the long-awaited surgery was finally performed. We thought everything was over, but in reality, it was the beginning of a new and difficult journey. We started attending sessions with a teacher of the deaf so Erik could learn to hear and speak. At first, it was very difficult. He did not want to sit, he cried, he was nervous. We also visited a psychologist.

The conclusion of all specialists was the same — he had a delay in age-appropriate development but no intellectual or behavioural disorders. Over time, everything began to change. Erik said his first words, then phrases, then sentences. Today, he is almost 7 years old and has great achievements. He plays chess, does pottery, and plays sports. At school, I would not be mistaken to say that he is one of the good students. He especially loves mathematics. He creates his own problems, solves them, and asks me to give him new ones. His achievements are our greatest victory.

This journey taught me a lot as a mother. And my advice to other parents is this: Never ignore your inner voice. Early diagnosis and early intervention can completely change a child's life. Do not be afraid to ask for help and never give up. Your faith and your work can create miracles. At the same time, it is very important that families receive greater support after cochlear implantation. Not only is the surgery important, but also the long-term rehabilitation—the support of teachers of the deaf, psychologists, and specialists, as well as state and social programs that will help children fully integrate into society.

Our journey was difficult, but today, when I hear my son's voice, I understand that the whole struggle was worth it. Erik is our proof that faith, love, and perseverance can change destiny.