

INDIA

Caregiver Name: Meenu

Age at Implantation: 3 & 5

Age Today: 22 & 27

My journey as a mother of two children with hearing loss spans over more than twenty years, filled with fear, courage, learning, and heartbreak. What remained, despite all odds and at every step, was hope. And as I sit down to look back on these twenty years today, it is with hope that I write my story. I hope that, through my story, another mother might find some semblance of strength.

When my son was born, we noticed very early that he didn't respond to sounds. He was diagnosed with profound hearing loss at birth. At the time, we had no family history of hearing loss and very little awareness of what one did in such circumstances. We did not know what the future would look like for our child. Doctors advised hearing aids and speech therapy, and we followed every instruction with full faith, hoping things would improve.

Our own lack of awareness, guidance, and facilities was one of our biggest struggles. Rehabilitation services were limited, information was scarce, and social acceptance was lower than one would like to think. The emotional toll of seeing our child struggle, while we ourselves were still learning how to support him best, was almost unbearable.

The biggest challenge of my life came when I was searching for cochlear implantation options for my son. During one of those hospital visits, we decided to get our daughter's hearing checked as well—almost randomly, thinking it would just be a routine test. The moment her results came back, revealing profound hearing loss, will always be etched in my memory as one that still sends chills down my spine. Five years later, having to face the same reality again left me completely shattered. I didn't think I was prepared to go through the same fear and uncertainty again.

Our son received his cochlear implant at the age of five and a half years, which was considered late. The decision was extremely difficult—financial stress, fear of surgery, lack of social support, and uncertainty about outcomes all weighed heavily on us. The hope that this access to sound will secure him a future was worth every struggle. With our daughter, we had experience. It helped us act faster and make quicker decisions. She received her cochlear implant at the age of three. Although the pain was the same, we were stronger, more informed, and more determined this time.

The greatest support throughout our journey came from dedicated doctors, rehabilitation professionals, and speech therapists. Rehabilitation has become a part of our daily life — but not just as something done in clinics. As parents, we learned that consistency, patience, and belief are as important as technology.

One of our greatest achievements today is seeing both our children live confident and independent lives. Our son, now 27 years old, is working in a government job in the communication sector. Our daughter, now 22 years old, is working in a multinational company, managing her professional life with confidence and pride. **Watching them communicate, work, and stand on their own feet feels like a dream that once seemed impossible.**

Over the past twenty years, I have seen many positive changes in society. Awareness has increased, acceptance has improved, and schools are more inclusive than before. Yet, this journey remains challenging for parents. The first step must always be self-acceptance. Parents must focus strongly on rehabilitation and

be prepared to face discrimination and societal challenges. We need to be ready at all times—to fight our own fears first and then stand up for our children against the world.

My advice to other parents is simple: identify hearing loss early, do not delay intervention, trust the process, and never underestimate your child's potential. The journey is long and difficult, but with timely support, rehabilitation, and unconditional love, children with hearing loss can achieve more than we ever imagined.