

COLOMBIA

Caregiver Name: Esmeralda

Age at Implantation: 16

Child: Juan

Age Today: 17

We are often unaware of the challenges that shape the lives of others or how the world is designed for those without disabilities, and of the inequalities that arise even in the simplest daily activities. Some people are born with medical conditions, while others encounter them later in life. Such is the case of Juan.

This story begins in 2013. Juan was only five years old when he became ill, suffering from high fevers and irregular breathing. He was hospitalized for four days and later discharged into the care of his parents, who hoped his health would soon improve.



Over the following six months, Juan's parents began to notice unusual behaviours. He did not react to loud noises, such as a door slamming, nor did he turn when his name was called. His speech changed slightly, and he began turning the television volume up to the maximum. Concerned, his mother took him to several specialists. For months, the responses were always the same: "He's spoiled," or "He's just seeking attention."

Eventually, a specialist conducted a series of thorough tests and delivered an accurate diagnosis: profound bilateral hearing loss. It was then that Juan's parents understood the invisible barrier separating their son from the world of sound. Shortly afterward, Juan received his first hearing aids technology that became far more than a medical device; it became a bridge to communication and understanding.

As Juan grew, so did the technology that supported him. At school, he used an FM (Frequency Modulation) system, in which the teacher wore a microphone that transmitted sound directly to his hearing aids, eliminating distance and background noise. This allowed Juan to learn at the same pace as his classmates, strengthen social relationships, and support his cognitive development.



Like many parents of children with disabilities, Juan's parents feared rejection or discrimination from peers. **Fortunately, with the support of teachers and school administrators, an inclusive environment was created where his condition was normalized.** Over time, Juan developed a strong interest in sports and, with the encouragement of his family, joined a soccer training school, participating like any other child.

At the beginning of 2025, during a routine audiometric evaluation, doctors recommended bilateral cochlear implants, as Juan's hearing loss had progressed. A series of medical evaluations followed in preparation for surgery, an important step toward improving his quality of life.

In June 2025, at 17 years old, Juan successfully underwent the procedure. The journey had not been easy, but the results were promising. In the weeks following surgery, Juan was unable to hear, which is a normal part of the recovery process.

After the cochlear implants were activated, Juan continued attending school while participating in auditory rehabilitation sessions. When necessary, he relied on lip reading to support his learning. **His perseverance paid off: he completed his final year of high school successfully, receiving a medal for academic excellence and a diploma as the best volleyball athlete. These achievements were the result of his determination, effective auditory rehabilitation, and the dedication of an interdisciplinary medical and educational team.**

My advice to other parents is this: while cochlear implants are powerful tools designed to compensate for severe hearing loss, it is family love, patience, and support that truly make the difference throughout this long journey.