

GEORGIA

Caregiver Name: Sopho
Age at Implantation: 3

Child: Zakaria
Age Today: 6

My name is Sopho, and I am the mother of 6-year-old Zakaria. Zakaria has severe bilateral hearing loss. He uses a hearing aid in one ear and a cochlear implant in the other, attends auditory and speech rehabilitation therapy, goes to kindergarten, hears, speaks, and I believe he lives a full and happy life, just like his peers.



However, before we got here, our whole family went through many difficult and emotional moments. **From the very beginning, we faced numerous challenges. Zakaria was born at 35 weeks of gestation, spent two months in the intensive care unit, and fought until the very end to survive.** When I learned about his diagnosis, he was five months old. I did not know what I was dealing with, so I started visiting clinics, had many consultations, searched for as much information as possible, and decided that he should be fitted with hearing aids at the age of one. This decision changed our lives.

Together with Zakaria, our family learned what was important for him to live a typical life, so we began auditory and speech therapy. This was a very interesting process that did not end in the therapy room—it continued at home, during walks in the yard, while visiting others, during play, and while carrying out daily routines.

Zakaria used hearing aids for two years; however, at some point I realized that his progress had stopped. What we were doing was no longer enough. After consultations, gathering

information, and a lot of consideration, my child underwent cochlear implantation in 2023. We moved on to a new stage—new technology, new rules. Rehabilitation continued, and his progress became faster and faster. **After the implantation, I look at my child and realize that he is a different person—more confident, more cheerful, and happier.** He is able to communicate with everyone: he plays with his peers, meets new people, and is preparing for school.

The most important thing the implantation gave us is that Zakaria learned how to make hearing part of his everyday life—during play, conversation, and in kindergarten. **To all parents whose children have a similar diagnosis, I want to say that these children have amazing potential and need our support. We must teach them self-acceptance and how to live together with assistive technologies.** The work does not end with cochlear implantation or hearing aid fitting—the work truly begins after they are fitted.

