

PARAGUAY

Caregiver Name: Ruth
Age at Implantation: 4

Child: Benjamin
Age Today: 12

Benjamín was born with Down syndrome, along with everything that comes with that condition. During his early years, he was a very healthy child, with no major difficulties. However, when he was around a year and a half old, we began to suspect that he was not hearing properly.

We carried out all the necessary audiological tests, and he was diagnosed with profound bilateral sensorineural hearing loss. That was when we first heard about cochlear implants and their cost. My husband and I looked at each other and thought it was impossible—we didn't see how we could achieve that goal in such a short amount of time.

We began to educate ourselves. We met people, joined parent support groups with children who had hearing disabilities, started reading, learning, and discovering a completely new world for us. After that, we made the decision to ask for help from different institutions and organizations to cover the cost of the implant since the support from the government was very limited.



Another major challenge was finding professionals who were able to work with two disabilities at the same time. It was not very common to find specialists experienced in both intellectual disability and hearing loss, and it took a great deal of effort to find professionals willing to take on that challenge and believe in Benjamín's potential. At one point, we even considered moving to another country in search of additional support. We were told that we would have to give up our Paraguayan nationality to become citizens elsewhere and gain access to the implant. After much reflection, my husband and I decided to stay in Paraguay and continue seeking help here.

This entire journey lasted until Benjamín was almost four years old. Finally, we received a donation from an organization that covered the cost of the device. Benjamín was four years and nine months old when he underwent the surgery, and we were overjoyed. The activation of the implant was one of the most emotional moments of our lives. **I remember speaking to him and saying, "Benja, Mommy is talking to you," and he turned around to look at me. That moment is one we will always treasure.**

After that, we faced yet another challenge: finding a speech therapist who could accompany him throughout his rehabilitation process. Once again, this was one of the most difficult parts due to the limited experience available for working with both conditions together.

Today, Benjamín is very happy with his implant. While he can hear, verbal expression remains challenging because of his Down Syndrome. However, he understands, he comprehends, he enjoys life and the moments he lives. He communicates in different ways, and that is extremely important to us. We truly believe that the implant has helped improve his quality of life. Perhaps not in the

same way as it would for a child without an intellectual disability, but we clearly see progress and positive changes, and that fills us with satisfaction.

Our message to other parents is to never give up. The earlier you seek help, explore options, and knock on doors, the better. Do not lose heart. Cochlear implants can be incredibly beneficial. Even if you feel tired, take a breath and keep going with renewed strength. All this effort becomes the driving force to give our children a better quality of life. We encourage all parents to always seek the best for their children, never give up, and remember that the work done within the family is the most important and fundamental part of a child's journey with a cochlear implant.

