# Paraguay

**Caregiver Name: Clara** **Child: Elías**
**Age at Implantation: 2.5** **Age Today: 5**

Elías is a five-year-old boy from Paraguay who was born on November 6, 2020, at a local medical center, at 37 weeks of gestation. He required intensive care and was hospitalized for a total of 32 days. During that time, he suffered cardiac arrests and other serious complications. Those were very hard days, filled with uncertainty, but thankfully they had a happy ending.

At that time, basic hearing screenings were not routinely performed at the hospital. I began researching on my own and found a private institute where Elías underwent his first hearing test, otoacoustic emissions (OAE), which he did not pass. We were asked to repeat the test at six months, this time with auditory brainstem response testing (ABR). That was when we received the news: Elías had bilateral hearing loss—severe in his left ear and moderate in his right.

As a family, we went through a grieving process. It hurt deeply. As a mother, I cried, felt powerless, and was overwhelmed with doubts. We didn't know how to face this reality. Questions flooded our minds: How much would hearing loss aids cost? Are there speech therapists in our city? Will we be able to afford everything? At the same time, Elías was also diagnosed with non-progressive chronic encephalopathy, which required even more therapies and consultations with multiple specialists.
What helped us react quickly was his father's optimism. We purchased hearing aids and found a speech therapist—an angel who appeared at just the right time. She worked at a private institute and specialized in auditory-verbal therapy. Although she lived in a city near the capital, she traveled to our city, to provide therapy. **She became our greatest support, along with our determination as parents to learn and help our son.** We took online courses, received reading materials, practiced constantly, and learned to understand hearing loss better.

Through those courses, I learned about cochlear implants and the incredible benefits they offer. Unfortunately, due to their cost, they were not accessible to everyone. It was also through our speech therapist that we were introduced to a foundation. There, we met wonderful people with big hearts, deeply empathetic to our daily struggle.

After many therapy sessions and limited progress, our speech therapist recommended that Elías be evaluated as a candidate for a cochlear implant. This time, I did not cry—I felt joy. **I knew the biggest obstacle would be the cost. Both of us work as employees, and realistically, even a full year's salary would not have been enough.** Still, we saw examples of other families who succeeded, and we decided to pursue this dream.

Our fundraising campaign was called *"Elías Wants to Hear You."* **We organized raffles with donated prizes, distributed donation boxes, and friends hosted benefit events.** The support came not only from people in our city, but also from relatives in other cities and even other countries. Although I am naturally introverted, I overcame my fear and spoke to the media. Through all these efforts, we managed to raise 50% of the required amount.

I will be forever grateful to the foundation. They donated the remaining funds, covered the surgery, and continue to support us with audiological evaluations, implant programming, and therapy. Because implantation is only the beginning—it also requires constant monitoring, therapy, and daily practice to achieve results.

Today, Elías—despite his encephalopathy—crawled at two years old and began walking at four. He has been in physical therapy since he was seven months old and continues with multiple therapies, including speech therapy, psychology, physical therapy, early stimulation, and equine therapy. He attends preschool, received a cochlear implant in his left ear at two and a half years old, and continues to use a hearing aid in his right ear.

Although he does not yet speak clearly, we communicate with him by talking to him constantly. **He understands us, follows instructions, and responds in his own way.** We hope that the dream of hearing his words will come true very soon.

**And as a piece of advice—one you didn't ask for, but I want to share—educate yourself as much as you can so you know how to help your child.** Don't be afraid. The pain will pass. Do everything possible to provide the necessary devices and therapy and repeat at home everything you learn. Everything comes in its own time. Have faith, stay strong—it is possible.