

KENYA

Caregiver Name: Mary
Age at Implantation: 2

Child: Kenzi
Age Today: 3

We did not know our daughter had hearing loss. To us, she was just a quiet and peaceful baby. We had no reason to suspect anything was wrong.

Everything changed the day her grandfather came to visit. He was outside splitting firewood using a loud power saw machine. The noise was extremely loud. But our daughter did not jump, turn, or react in any way. Grandpa immediately sensed something was not right. He mentioned it to her father, and that simple observation began a journey we never expected.

We started moving from one clinic to another — first a pediatrician, then an ENT specialist, and finally to a children's speech and hearing loss organization. After several tests, we were told the words no parent is prepared to hear: profound hearing loss.

We were crushed. We felt confused, scared, and helpless. Some family members were in denial and questioned the diagnosis, while others advised us to wait for a miracle. We were told, "Maybe she will speak later," or "Just pray and give it time." Deep inside, we wanted to believe that too.

But the hearing loss organization stood by us. They explained everything patiently and clearly. They connected us with other parents who were walking the same path. Seeing other children with hearing devices gave us hope. It helped us move from denial to action.

Our daughter was fitted with donated hearing aids. We were told they might not bring much improvement because of the severity of her hearing loss, but they were important to stimulate her ears while we explored the option of a cochlear implant.

Then we heard the cost of a cochlear implant, it was in the millions of shillings. For an ordinary family like ours, that felt completely impossible. We wondered how such a life-changing opportunity could be so far out of reach.

The hearing aids did not seem to make much difference, and that was painful. Still, we were encouraged to keep using them consistently. At the same time, we prayed and searched for help. We visited many religious and spiritual leaders. We received all kinds of advice — some comforting, some confusing, and some strange. We were simply desperate for anything that would change our child's situation.

Then one day, the hearing loss organization told us that donated cochlear implants had arrived in Kenya. **We moved quickly; completed all the required medical tests and waited anxiously at the national hospital. There were more than 300 families hoping for the same opportunity.**

When we were told our child had been selected, we cried. She was chosen because of her young age and because we had used hearing aids consistently. She received one implant. We felt incredibly grateful — and also aware that many families went home disappointed.

The surgery itself was not the hardest part. The real work began afterward — switch-on day, mapping appointments, learning how to care for the processor, attending therapy, and planning for school. Accessing rehabilitation services is still a major challenge. We travel long distances and spend money we do not always have. Many parents in our support group face the same struggle.

But despite everything, we have seen a beautiful change in our daughter. Her personality has blossomed. She now enjoys making sounds and listening to herself. Every morning, she wakes up and asks for her processor to be put on. It is her way of telling us that sound is sweet. Watching her respond to sound fills our hearts in a way we cannot fully describe.

If we could speak to another parent at the beginning of this journey, we would say: trust the testing, seek help early, and do not delay. Use hearing aids consistently. Connect with other parents. Do not walk this journey alone.

We are thankful for the chance our daughter received. We hope that one day, access to cochlear implants and therapy will not depend on donations or luck. Every child deserves the opportunity to hear and to reach their full potential.