

South Africa

Caregiver Name: Carmelita
Age at Implantation: 1

Child: Leah
Age Today: 10

This is my beautiful daughter Leah. She was born on July 7, 2015. She looked like a healthy, cute little baby. We did not expect that she would be born deaf. At the age of 9 months, it was confirmed that Leah had bilateral hearing loss. It felt like the world was crumbling down on me, but I quickly realized that I had to get out of that hole and accept her for who she is.

As a mother, I wanted my daughter to have a normal life, and being deaf felt far from normal at the time. I did not know that there was technology that could possibly change my daughter's life. All I could see was her using her hands to communicate and it broke my heart, my wish was for my only child to speak, and I knew that might not be possible.



After 2 months, I received a call saying that I needed to bring Leah to an early intervention centre where deaf children learn to speak. **In that moment as a mother, I knew I had to get my child there without even knowing where it is or how it would help us.** Then, I did some research about the centre and the first thing that popped up was 'did you know deaf children can speak?'. From then on, I knew we were in the best hands.

My biggest challenge as a mother was the cost of the cochlear implant, even though this was the only option for baby Leah, as parents we knew we couldn't afford to give our child the gift of hearing out of our pockets. We would lay awake at night thinking how we could do this to make it possible for our daughter to hear. This was one stressful part of our journey. We were blessed beyond our dreams when an audiologist answered our prayers that we had been crying for. They managed to get a sponsor so that Leah could have her cochlear implant. Without that, to this day, my husband and I would not be able to give her this gift.

Our greatest support was the interventionist and audiologist involved in Leah's journey. We were so lucky to receive these two diamonds on our path. It was hard work, but to know that we as a family were supported by these professionals made everything so much easier. They walked every step of this journey with me. We shared so many tears together but also made so many memories that will forever be a part of Leah's life. They encouraged me when I thought it would not work out, push us when they saw the potential in Leah and celebrate her achievements. **My family's support also played a big role; they supported us emotionally and helped us in any way possible even though finances were never possible for us as a low-income family.**

My child's greatest achievement is her ability to listen, follow instructions, speak, read and write. When I look at her today, sometimes I think about where my child would fit in this world without her cochlear implant. But she lives her life like a normal girl who is always ready to give her best.

My advice to parents starting this journey is to put in all of your effort and always have time available to ensure your child does not miss any appointments. Remember it is very important to always have eyes open and ears on, this way you get the best benefit from the cochlear implant. It is a lot of hard work in the beginning, but after time it becomes natural. As a parent, you need to put all of your dedication into your child. Each child is different, but all I ever wanted was for my child to understand me. I am so grateful for how far we have come.

When we started this journey, I had to leave my job because my daughter needed me more at the time. With the support from a centre here, we had access to cochlear implants and all of the necessary knowledge. We are truly grateful for this amazing team.