

UKRAINE

Caregiver name: Natasha
Age at Implantation: 2

Child: Yegor
Age Today: 10

We are a family from Ukraine. Our youngest son, Yegor, is 10 years old. He was born at 25 weeks of pregnancy and spent a long time on artificial ventilation. As a result, he lost his hearing and was diagnosed with bilateral sensorineural deafness while still in the perinatal center.

Yegor received his first cochlear implant only at the age of 2 years and 7 months. Between 2015 and 2019, there was very limited state support for cochlear implantation for children in Ukraine, and very little public information about the procedure. **The government funded only one implant per child, and there was a waiting list of around 400 children. From the age of 11 months until his surgery, Yegor wore very powerful hearing aids, but unfortunately, they did not provide enough support for his hearing loss.**



Because there was so little information available, we had to search online ourselves to learn about the surgery, its risks, and the possible outcomes. When Yegor turned two, we went to the ENT Institute where children were placed on a waiting list for implantation of one ear. Yegor was number 374, and we were told we might have to wait years. We did not want to lose valuable time, so we decided to pay for the surgery ourselves. At that time, one implant cost about €30,000 — an impossible amount for an average Ukrainian family.

We started a fundraising campaign and contacted many Ukrainian charitable foundations, but unfortunately, we often received refusals because hearing loss was not considered a priority. Another mother of a child with a cochlear implant told us about a Foundation, and she helped us find a way to purchase an implant at about half the usual price. Following her advice, we also contacted another German foundation which granted us €6,000. The rest of the funds were raised within four months thanks to the generosity and support of many compassionate people.

In April 2018, we purchased a cochlear implant, and in May 2018 Yegor underwent surgery. His rehabilitation went very well — he learned to hear and speak successfully. At the age of six, he was enrolled in a mainstream primary school in Ukraine because of his good progress. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of war, he was unable to start first grade there.

In 2022, our family moved to Germany, where Yegor entered a regular German primary school class. With only one implant, he experienced difficulties understanding speech in noisy environments, so in 2023 he received a second implant in Germany. With the support of hearing services, his classroom was equipped with microphones for teachers and students and an FM system.

Today, Yegor is in the 4th grade. He completes all assignments and takes tests at the same level as children with typical hearing. He still has some challenges, such as understanding word endings and speech in noisy situations, but overall, he communicates well, watches cartoons, listens to music, and is learning German and English.

Based on our experience, we strongly encourage parents of children who have indications for cochlear implantation not to lose valuable time and to consider implantation as early as possible. No modern hearing aid can provide a child with the same level of hearing access, speech development opportunities,

and chances for social integration as a cochlear implant. Consistent rehabilitation after implantation is also extremely important, as well as continuous development of listening and communication skills.

Unfortunately, even before the war there were serious challenges with funding cochlear implantation in Ukraine. During the war, the situation has become even more difficult, as many adults who lost their hearing now also require implants. In most cases, only one cochlear implant is funded, which limits opportunities for many children and adults who need bilateral implantation.

There is also another major challenge — the lack of state funding for external equipment and rehabilitation. If external components break after the warranty period, families must pay for their replacement themselves. All post-implantation therapy and rehabilitation sessions are also paid for privately. For most Ukrainian families, this represents a huge financial burden and creates a significant challenge in maintaining proper hearing development.

Despite all these challenges, we are grateful for the opportunities Yegor has today. He can communicate, learn, and participate fully in school and social life. His journey shows that with timely cochlear implantation, proper rehabilitation, and strong family support, children with hearing loss can achieve their potential and integrate successfully into mainstream education and society.



We hope that sharing our story will encourage other parents not to delay cochlear implantation when their child has a clear medical indication. Early intervention, ongoing rehabilitation, and support in school can make a life-changing difference. It is also our hope that funding and support for children and adults with hearing loss in Ukraine will improve, so that no family has to face these challenges alone.