INDIA

Caregiver Names: Vahishtai **Child: Jehan**
Age at Implantation: 5.5 years **Age Today: 28**

When I look back on my life with gratefulness and love, I see a path that lit up, one by one, to guide me to where I am today! The belief that I would always be guided to where I need to be was strong in my heart as we moved along to find the right treatment for my son once we found out about his hearing loss. Things back then, almost 29 years ago, were quite different in India, access to information, resources for treatment, etc. Our son has a bilateral profound sensorineural hearing loss, he was fitted with analog hearing aids at 5 months of age and subsequently went on to use programable hearing aids and then digital hearing aids with an FM system. All of this along with extensive auditory verbal therapy and parent guidance helped us to develop listening, speech and language. We were able to integrate him into play school, nursery and regular school. However, we knew the effort that went into getting him this far was tremendous and we also knew that as the language of his peers started to zoom, he was finding it hard to keep pace.



When we found out about his hearing loss, cochlear implants were in the very nascent stage, especially pediatric cochlear implants. Information about whether the cochlear implant would help our son was also uncertain. **However, as parents we knew that this was the technology that may help him, and with that faith in our hearts and the support of our therapist, we went ahead with the cochlear implant when he was five and a half years.** Due to early detection, fitting him with hearing aids early on and early intervention, the brain was quick to adapt to the new signal from the cochlear implant and, within six months, he was able to hear, understand and cope with the new signal on his own and did not require my constant support like earlier, where I was literally stuck to his ear, making him listen and understand new concepts all the time!

I was at a crossroads, as I had spent six years of my life devoted to making him learn to 'listen and talk' and now he didn't need my support! This is when, again, with the support of my therapist, I was guided to look at doing therapy with other children and help them learn to listen and talk too! I could

do this for my son but working with other kids was a totally different ball game… I decided I could not do it without going back and studying…I did my Bachler of Education, specializing in Hearing Impairment, followed by a Post Graduate Course in Auditory Verbal Therapy and then went on to do my Listening and Spoken Language, Certification in Auditory Verbal Therapy (LSLS Cert. AVT).

As I went ahead in my journey with my son, I realized there was almost no support anywhere except from my therapist and a handful of parents that I would meet when I went for therapy. This is when I co-founded a parent support group in February 2007. We would meet regularly to share ideas and information and hold talks by different professionals for parents on various topics related to hearing, speech and child development.



I had the privilege of working in various capacities and in leadership positions at early intervention centres providing cochlear implants to children and also set up my private practice in 2010, providing Auditory Verbal Therapy to families of children with hearing loss. In 2023 I founded a centre for hearing, speech and child development, working with children and adults with cochlear implants.

Through my journey I have had the privilege to help support, guide, coach and empower parents to work with their children, work with the school system by learning to advocate for themselves and their children. I support families through their journey and the various stages of life that their child goes through, and work with adults with cochlear implants too!

It's been a fulfilling journey, yet there is so much more to be done! I am grateful to have wonderful teams at my centre and at my parent foundation who share the same vision and mission and each of them wanting to strive to make a difference in the lives of each individual be it a child or an adult that we work with to let them live a life without limits and thrive in society!