

## Colette's Journey

Colette was diagnosed with bilateral severe-to-profound hearing loss when she was three weeks old. As a parent, you are never prepared for that type of news. To say we were overwhelmed by the journey that lay ahead of us would be an understatement. Having a child with hearing loss was not the life we had pictured for ourselves, and the unknown territory was scary. We decided early on that we would do everything in our power to provide her with the same opportunities as those of her hearing peers.

After Colette's initial diagnosis, we did many hours of research and considered all modes of communication for her. We decided that cochlear implants were the best fit for our family. Research suggested that the earlier the implant was in place, the better chance our daughter would have to develop speech and language. Our goal became to get her implanted and activated before the age of one.

Colette was fitted for her first pair of hearing aids when she was six weeks old. We struggled with getting a "good fit" due to how small her ears were. We spent many days trying different retention devices and battling the feedback that was inevitable from the high-powered hearing aids. Colette never liked wearing her hearing aids. When we would try to put the ear molds in her ears, she would fuss and turn away. Our audiologist, however, stressed the importance of keeping them in as much as possible despite her protests. We knew that no matter how little, any sound that could stimulate the auditory nerve would better prepare Colette for the day when her cochlear implants were activated. We persevered and continued to use them until she was ten months old. She was then able to undergo surgery for bilateral cochlear implants.

The three weeks prior to her cochlear implant activation were full of anticipation, nervousness, and excitement. We were ready to start teaching her to listen. Our early intervention teacher had been diligently working with Colette for months to prepare her for this day. With her hearing aids, Colette was only able to detect very low frequency sounds like the beating of a drum. We utilized her small amount of hearing as best we could and had taught her to turn and look over her shoulder when she recognized a sound.

The changes we saw in our daughter post-activation were almost immediate. It was clear that her implants had opened up a world of sound that she had not yet experienced. We had high hopes for Colette, but her quick progress surpassed our expectations. Within weeks of activation Colette was able to locate a variety of sounds, even from a distance. We also began to notice changes in her pitch. She started to squeal and vary the intensity of her babble.

It was apparent that Colette loved this new world of noise around her. When we would read stories to her, she would sit patiently in our laps to listen whereas before it was hard to get her to focus for more than a few seconds on any type of book. If we connected her processors to our TV streamer and put on music, she would begin to bounce and smile. When our dog would bark, she would sign “dog” and point to her ear as if to say “I heard that!” If her coil would fall off, she would crawl to me and show me that something was wrong. She wanted me to put it back on her head. When her hearing aids would fall out, she would simply ignore them or put them in her mouth to suck on. With the implants, it was different. She wanted to hear.

Colette just turned four years old in September and celebrated her third “hearing birthday” in August. We have worked very hard to help Colette continually progress in her listening and spoken language skills. During her time with early intervention, our teacher did an amazing job of providing us with activities and teaching us skills that would aid Colette’s development. At three she aged out of early intervention, and we were sad to have to say good-bye to the teacher that had become so dear to our family. However, she helped us navigate the transition to the Wake County Public School System, and now we are in great hands with new service providers who continually push Colette to work hard and achieve her speech and language goals.

Colette’s journey inspired me to become involved with EHDI as a parent partner. I am a strong believer and supporter of EHDI’s 1-3-6 goals. I have seen firsthand what early identification and intervention can do for a child. By working with EHDI, I hope to be an advocate not only for my daughter but for all families who have a child with hearing loss.