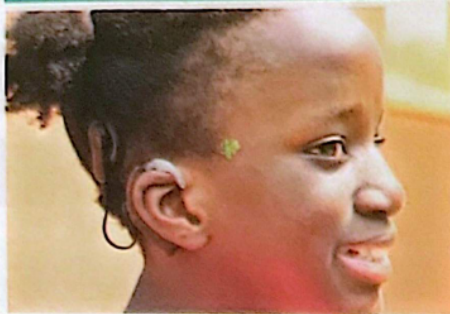


THE OTHER OPTIONS



"Government should invest in training local experts so that they are able to conduct cochlear implant surgeries and also make them affordable."
MR MOSES TALIBITA, LEGAL OFFICER UNHCO



"Since some hearing impairments are drug related, parents should be careful not to buy over the counter drugs."
DR RICHARD BYARUHANGA, ENT SURGEON



"If one cannot afford a cochlear implant, they need to acquire a hearing aid (which is a bit cheaper) and also learn sign language."
LOIS NAKIBUUKA, COUNSELLOR

Cochlear implants: Solution to hearing impairment

Every parent wishes to have a healthy child and when their daughter lost her hearing, Eddie Mukaaya and Edith Asingwire did all they could to remedy this. They share their challenges and success with Lilian Namagembe.

...FROM COVER

"It was definitely a joy that she started talking shortly after the first implant was put. Eventually, what had brought us [to the US] had happened. Her hearing had greatly improved even with one implant."

However, Mukaaya wanted to see her do better. The desperate move to raise money to have the second implant done landed him a well-paying job in one of the companies in the US. Through this, he was able to facilitate the cost of the second implant which was carried out in 2012. Although it came at a higher cost, his job offered insurance which catered for most of the bills.

Every day, the then three-year-old would have to be dropped at the rehabilitation centre for continuous auditory-aural therapy that would go on for months.

Since it was hard for Mukaaya to work and take Asaba for the therapy everyday, his wife and second daughter joined them to fill the gap.

With the second surgery done and Eleine able to speak and hear normally, the family returned to Uganda which ended their four-year stay in the US.



While wearing her implants, Eleine Asab'awebwa is able to hear and speak well. She has aspirations to become a model in future. PHOTOS BY LILIAN NAMAGEMBE

INSPIRATION

Considering the dim future ahead of the little one and many others in her condition, Mukaaya made a bold decision to dedicate his life towards helping families who find themselves in the same situation.

He started His Voice Uganda, a charitable organisation that seeks to serve less privileged and hearing impaired children in Uganda.

The NGO also works to meet the physical, spiritual, educational, and social-emotional needs of the individuals and to empower them to reach their full potential and active participating members of the community.



Asab'awebwa with her mother Edith Asingwire (left).

Maintenance

Maintaining the implant is another hurdle the family has to en-

sure since no company supplies the implant spare parts including the batteries and cable locally.

Mukaaya says it is not cheap to maintain the device and they have to engage a supplier in the US to supply them with back-up batteries.

Also, some parts on the implant break or wear out which requires the parents to prepare at least \$4,000 (about Shs14m) a year for maintenance.

On her part, Asab'awebwa has grown to take responsibility and ensure the implants last longer. For example, she has learnt to recharge the batteries herself and during night time, she disconnects the implants to avoid unnecessary damage.

"When this happens, she stops hearing and her speech changes. It's audible but not understandable," her mother says.

At school, the Primary Six pupil is as active as any other student. However, she faces a challenge when she sweats and the implants get blocked due to sweat or when her colleagues inquisitively disconnect her cables. For this time, she stops hearing completely.

"When she cannot hear or clearly comprehend a concept in class, she becomes sad. We talked to the school administration and all her classmates and teachers about her condition. Academic materials are reviewed in advance so she knows what will be discussed," her mother says.

Further assistance

To manage her condition more effectively at school, her mother says they are engaging the school to come up with an individualised academic plan.

She, however, says that although such a condition would have broken Asab'awebwa, she is instead strong and more resilient.

The mother says the 11-year-old has been trained and developed advocacy skills and is willing to share her story with others.