Jake Noyd knows his cochlear implants give him super power—the power to hear! The six-year-old kindergartner is “on fire” thanks to the support of his family and an intensive early education program. Jake’s mother Tami spoke with ACI Alliance about the remarkable benefit of cochlear implants for Jake.

ACIA: How did you learn that Jake had a hearing loss?

TN: Jake had his hearing screened at birth. He did not pass the initial screening, or the screening after that. Initially it was thought to be due to fluid in his ears but multiple screenings confirmed hearing loss and we were referred to Vanderbilt University for further testing. He was diagnosed with a profound hearing loss due to the Connexin 26 genetic mutation. Jake is the only person on either side of our family to have hearing loss.

ACIA: How old was Jake when he received his cochlear implants?

TN: He received his first around his first birthday. After we saw how great the first cochlear implant was and how well Jake responded, we decided to get the second one four months later. Tennessee Medicaid covered the surgeries, devices, and related services.

ACIA: What did you do as a family to support Jake’s progress as a spoken language user?

TN: We don’t treat Jake any differently than any of our other children. He is younger than his siblings (who are 18 and 20 years of age) so he’s often the center of attention, but our expectations of him are the same as those we had for his siblings.

One difference in his upbringing is the time we invested in early intervention. Because of his deafness and our choice that he communicate verbally, I commuted to the Mama Lere Center at Vanderbilt (45 miles each way from our home) at least four days a week until Jake was five years old. He attended the toddler program, the three-year-old and four-year-old programs.

Supporting Jake is an ongoing process. Now that Jake is older, he is able to express his preferences. We can adjust the settings on his sound processors to meet his needs.

continued
ACIA: Jake is now in kindergarten. How is he doing in school?

TN: After Jake graduated from the Mama Lere Hearing School, he attended a Pre-K special education multi-class. He did so well he was treated as a typically developing child.

In September 2016, he started kindergarten and did very well. He is truly a success story. He is performing on grade level and is reading and counting right along with all of his peers. There is an FM system available for him to use. He is “on fire” and enjoys his time in the classroom. Jake received the “High Flying Eagle Award” for kindergarteners, awarded to students who are good examples, kind, and helpful to their peers.

ACIA: How do Jake’s friends and classmates support him in school?

TN: Jake’s classmates know that he wears cochlear implants so that he can hear. His kindergarten teacher explained the hearing technology he uses to the class at the beginning of the year. I don’t think his classmates even think about them any more. He’s just like any other kid in the class.

We did meet a boy once who was so intrigued by Jake’s cochlear implants that he wanted cochlear implants too though he didn’t have a hearing loss. We’ve told Jake that his cochlear implants make him bionic. The other boy wanted to have super powers and be bionic—just like Jake!

ACIA: Do you think that Jake would have the same educational opportunities if Medicaid hadn’t provided coverage for his cochlear implants and related services?

TN: Absolutely not! We moved quickly because I did a lot of research and decided that we couldn’t put off cochlear implants until later if Jake was going to be a successful spoken language learner. Tennessee’s Medicaid and TennCare Select (disability insurance) support of our child made possible this opportunity. We are so grateful.

ACIA: Do you have any words of wisdom for families that are just starting to consider cochlear implantation as an option for their child?

TN: I would advise them to take it one day at a time. It’s a learning process every day. You have to be willing to put in a lot of work if you want them to be successful. But it’s worth it. Jake can enjoy music and listen to the voices of his family. He is doing well in his neighborhood school. We would do it all again in exactly the same way. Jake has a great future!