Transcript

Dreams Made Real

- [Narrator] Several years ago, we made a documentary film called "Dream Spoken Here" about children who are deaf learning to listen and speak. Many parents expressed the desire that one day their child would be able to successfully attend a mainstream school. Five years later, we followed up with seven children from the original film to see and hear how they are doing. This is Krista. She was born deaf. She could not hear or speak. Five years ago, her parents wondered if she would ever be able to go to a mainstream school. This is Krista today.

- Hi, I'm Krista and I am 10 years old, and I go to Brookside Elementary School. My favorite subjects are math and reading. And when I grow up, I wanna be a teacher.

- [Narrator] Krista is just like any kid. She listens, she speaks, she goes to a mainstream school. You are about to see the stories of seven children who show how this can happen.

- [Audiologist] No response.

- [Narrator] Five years ago, Lila was diagnosed with a profound hearing loss. She could not hear or speak.

- [Audiologist] Okay, drop down to a low tone.

- I am completely surprised. This is much more than I ever expected, that now she's like, deaf. It doesn't seem real. It doesn't seem like this is, these results are accurate. And I just sat there kind of numb and, "Okay, now I know my child can't hear me, can't hear anything. What do I do?" And I went home and cried my brains out, so... When it does start sinking in, you think, "Well, she's not gonna have a first word. She doesn't know mommy, daddy, kitty." Simple, simple things.

- Hi, my name's Lila. I'm six years old. These are my friend, and this is where I like to play: Madison, Lily, and Sophie.

- Lila, when I first found out that she was deaf, I didn't think she'd be able to go to our neighborhood school. I really thought she'd be in special classes, be, you know, the kid that everybody kind of, "Oh, she's a little different."

- [All] "Can you name some sea animals?"

- [Teacher] Lila?

- Dolphin.

- Dolphin. Okay, there you go.

- Mainstreaming was an important goal for our family, because life is mainstreaming. And I feel mainstreaming in a classroom with all hearing children is what life is.

- [Teacher] There you go.

- That was my dream, is to have her ready to mainstream at kindergarten and go to school with all her little friends in the neighborhood.

- Beautiful. Just beautiful. Thank you, Lila.

- Her teacher said when she tests, she tests about halfway in the class. So I couldn't even begin to tell you how happy that makes me feel that she's just right there. ♪ The piggy did work very hard ♪

- Lila's mom basically looked at mainstreaming from the day she was identified. This was something that was a part of Lila's life from the very beginning, from her initial diagnosis. And I think that that's really the way we see the most successful mainstreaming working. Our parents are the children's best advocate. And we really need the parents to understand that they don't just drop them off at our doorstep, that they are full partners in this process.

- Five years ago, she only could say, "O," for open and "Uh, ah, ah," noises like that.

- Yeah, meow. Meow.

- And she had the cochlear implant surgery when she was 18 months. And then after that, you know, it was a very long process.

- [Therapist] What? A cup. A cup.

- what's he gonna do with that ladder?

- Go on up.

- [Dean] But the last year, year and a half, has been incredible.

- I'm gonna be ten in fourth grade.

- [Dean] I am so much happier emotionally, because the future is so not scary. It's still challenging. She probably works harder than the average kindergartner, but we are doing what we set off to do. She plays after school with the other kids. She's made so many new friends this year, and a lot of them, they don't really know, because her language abilities are so strong.

- Here you go.

- Hi Christopher. Oh, hello. Good morning to you. With Christopher, it's a especially poignant that he struggled so when he was little. He was premature. He had many other issues that he had to fight through.

- Hi Christopher. How you doing?

- Hi.

- Hi, Christopher.

- I remember when he first came to the school and he couldn't hold his head up. And Mom and Dad were constantly trying to support him, always giving him the most incredible loving input and with no guarantees, because Christopher had so many challenges. Many people had said to them, "Don't have too high of an expectation for him."

- [Narrator] At 16 months, Christopher received a cochlear implant.

- More.

- Mmm.

- [Narrator] Then it took several more years of specialized oral deaf education for Christopher to learn to listen and speak.

- Boats go in the water.

- Boat.

- [Teacher] Good.

- My name is Christopher. I am six years old, and I like to ride horses. "Amanda, Garrett, and Levine decided that they wanted to make their own circus."

- Okay.

- [Narrator] This year, Christopher is transitioning from a self-contained classroom at an oral deaf school into a mainstream kindergarten.

- As the parents of a hearing-impaired child, there have been many huge decisions we've had to make. But one of the toughest decisions was whether or not we should start him in a mainstream kindergarten. And I think the big concern there was, if we did it too early and it didn't work out, would that break his confidence? Will he be happy to be there? Or will he come home crying one day? Which would break your heart. And to do that was very, very difficult. To decide, "Okay, we're gonna give it a shot." ♪ Christopher, Christopher, what did you bring us ♪ ♪ We can hardly wait to see ♪

- What did you bring, Christopher?

- It couldn't have worked out better. It's just been amazingly successful.

- A rollercoaster. Did you go...

- That is very scary.

- And if it was scary, you were very what?

- Scared.

- I wasn't scared. It went so fast.

- To think back then that he would be where he is today, I could not even have imagined. Peak-a-boo! To see him running around the playground with hearing peers and feel like he's, he's their equal. There's nothing that they could do that he couldn't do, is just an incredible thing to feel and know.

- The support systems that have been put in place for him will allow him to continue to succeed. Keep pulling. And he sends a strong message: Never underestimate. Never stop and think that a child is limited, because you do not know that. You just give them the strategies, you give them the technology, the love, and the belief in them, and just magical things happen.

- What is that?

- Two dogs?

- Engine.

- Reindeer.

- Reindeer.

- Reindeer.

- I remember sitting here five years ago and wondering if Andre would mainstream and saying very, very few words in that first video.

- I'm Andre, and I am eight years old, and I go to this school called Kennedy Elementary. At school, my favorite subjects are math and art.

- And now here we are five years later, he's mainstreamed. Mainstreamed since kindergarten and is now in second grade and is just doing really wonderful.

- How are you this morning? Good to see you this morning, my friend. Are you ready for another day?

- Yeah.

- [Narrator] Andre is independent in his classroom, but he does require an FM system in the room to amplify sound.

- "One Saturday..."

- [Narrator] He also needs the support of parents, teachers, and the school district.

- "Pinkerton was first on the bus."

- Andre is on a perfect example of what a very successful transition model should take place for every student. We transitioned the whole family with the whole school. Not only one student with one staff member at the school. Actually, the school administrators got involved: the coordinator of special services, the director of special services, the principal of the school, and the staff. Sounds good. We want to ensure that this child is not going to get lost in the cracks and it's not gonna be overwhelmed by the amounts of noise and the big number of people he's going to encounter on a daily basis.

- Andre, how do you think he's feeling?

- Sad.

- Why do you think he's feeling sad?

- Because he couldn't make any sound.

- [Teacher] He couldn't make any sounds. You're right.

- You know, mainstreaming is more than just mainstreaming in school. One of the things that I was worried about with Andre was his social life. And he's proved me to be wrong, which is nice. He is very social, very social. He's got lots of things going on: sports and school and friends coming in and out. I think that's something I could say that I'm not worried about anymore. For the parents who are getting ready to mainstream, be brave. Be brave, you know? And challenge your fears. Sometimes you just feel like, you know, "I'm just so tired." You just have to have that little push. Follow your dreams, 'cause reality is right there.

- What can you tell me about this Christmas tree?

- He done in sleigh gone bye-bye.

- It's gonna go on the sleigh and go bye-bye? We were really unsure five years ago just what it would be like to actually be in the mainstream. and how she would do.

- Right here would be the cemetery. Over here would be the quarters.

- Krista's come so far in the last five years. It's just been so exciting to watch her grow and gain confidence. And she can handle her hearing aids and the FM system, and everything just seems to be going really well right now.

- "'He doesn't have any change in his pocket,' said Allison."

- Okay. Anything we could change with our sentence?

- Yeah.

- [Teacher] What can we fix on number two?

- We need quotation marks.

- Around?

- He and pocket.

- How can we put 'em there?

- Because Allison's talking.

- Because Allison's talking. Perfect. When you use the word "a deaf child," you think they probably don't function in class well. That you give them separate assignments. That you have to modify a lot of work for them. Maybe a lot of language therapy might be your impression. But with her, it's not the case. I mean, she's very, very mainstream. And I'm real lucky, because she's really assertive. And she doesn't let her hearing impairment enable her not to do well. She expects certain things. She expects to know what to do. And if she doesn't know, she's gonna ask me. Yes. Krista? The microphone is not on, so could you turn it on, please?

- Oh, sorry.

- It was awkward at first. We did not agree with our school district on what they were recommending. And we had to go through a long process of getting what we wanted and attempting to educate them on what we thought Krista needed. In the long run, it worked out great. She did very well. I think the school district is phenomenally surprised in how well she has done.

- Chapter...

- I know that I'm very comfortable with where she's at. Literally, I don't even think about her being hearing impaired.

- Walk over?

- We need to get those!

- It's been a long road, but the hardest part's behind us.

- Yeah.

- That we just feel like she's a normal kid. Are you a normal kid?

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- Here it is, okay?

- [Stone] Veronica is an amazing girl. Her grandmother brought her to us when she was almost three. And the prediction from some other educators was that she would never learn to talk.

- My name's Veronica, and I'm 13 years old, and I like to read and go on the computer a lot. And I think I'd like to go to college someday.

- [Narrator] Veronica was identified late, and it wasn't until she was seven years old that she got the cochlear implant that would change her life.

- Happy.

- I'm happy. I'm happy.

- Up until that time, communication was developing for Veronica, but it was developing at a nice pace, but certainly not what I would call a rapid pace.

- In the book, they say Damon was teased by the teachers and students because he was overweight.

- And now she reads at grade level, so her learning has really taken off in the last five years. And I think it bodes well for her future because it's accelerating. Every year, she does better and better. As the little kids we're seeing now, our kids who are identified much, much younger, enrolled in oral programs much younger. But I have no doubt Veronica will graduate from high school. She'll go to college. She's a very motivated learner. She's talking about the kinds of things that she wants to do as an adult.

- I wish that you would go to St. Mary's.

- I'm not sure I'm about to go into St. Mary's, but I'm thinking about it.

- I hope you like it.

- [Stone] Veronica will be a part of broader society, 'cause fortunately for her she has a grandmother and other family members who are very supportive, who've done as much as they can to incorporate her into the family life and the life in her neighborhood.

- Role it around.

- [Narrator] To have one child who is deaf is overwhelming for most parents. Suzy has two daughters who are deaf. And for many years, she was a single parent.

- I had to work for everything with them when they were little. It was a lot of work. For a simple sound, you would work day after day after day, and then you'd finally get a little something. Can I get a kiss? Abigail? Can Mommy, have a kiss? Could I have a kiss? But to look back five years ago and to see where they are now, it's amazing how the pieces snowball.

- My name's Abigail. I'm eight years old. I like playing with my dog Lucy. I like playing the piano and play soccer with my family.

- I'm Rachel. I'm nine years old. I go to Candelaria Elementary School. I like to play soccer, be with my friends, and play the piano.

- Now they're both in mainstream classrooms. They have hearing friends that they play with at school. They talk to them on the telephone. They play soccer. They play on a team with no hearing-impaired children. They're just regular kids. When we moved this last year and the girls started new schools in a new school district at second and third grade, we researched the schools. We came out and visited beforehand and really advocated for ourselves and the girls. And as much as we thought we had educated the school district on where Rachel and Abigail were, they still soccer were resistant to the girls coming into their school.

- Soccer is my friend...

- Before Rachel came to the classroom, we met with the parent and with a team of specialist. The specialist in this school had pretty much decided before meeting her and knowing anything about her, that these children needed to be in the school that has hearing-impaired children.

- Recommend.

- But after the mother shared her experiences and the specialist from the other school who had read all of Rachel's information, we all decided that the best placement for her would be in her neighborhood school.

- We've had a couple calls from Rachel's teacher this year with what she calls social problems on recess. As a parent, yes, you're concerned, and you want your child to behave and to do the right things, but we get a certain bit of a chuckle when we realize that yes, she's able to communicate well enough with these children to have problems. So as strange as that seems, it's been quite fun. One of the goals that we've always had for the girls was that they would be able to be independent citizens.

- I'll have a small vanilla cone dipped in chocolate.

- A small chocolate cone, please.

- They could order their own dinner if they went out to a restaurant, that they could ask for help if they needed help, that they could call home if they were, for some reason, to be lost and to have that sense of independence. And there's really nothing that they see that they can't just walk up and go do. I mean, they always feel like they belong.

- [Dean] I think it is such a hard road that you have to commit just a hundred percent to it. People truly worked with her and cared about her, support everywhere: doctors, teachers, everybody made her what she is.

- We've almost forget that he's a hearing-impaired child is the incredible part of this whole thing.

- Yeah, I think it's really an amazing transition when you go from your hopes or fears are, "Is he gonna talk? Is he gonna walk?" to "Is he gonna get invited to that birthday party?"

- Well, I think for me, just appreciate the ordinary. We can be driving in the car and she's sitting in the back with a couple of her friends just chatting and laughing, and I'm sitting in the front seat with tears going down my face, 'cause just the ordinary is so wonderful.

- He is deaf, but we always have told him, you know, it's what he is, it's not who he is, you know? Andre is Andre, and I have no doubt that he's gonna live a normal life.

- I think my dreams were the same as any parent. You wanna see them grow, be independent, to be happy, to do what they wanna do. It's amazing to see that happening. Their deafness will not stop them from doing anything. If someone had told me that nine years ago when we found out about Rachel, I wouldn't have believed them. She's worked so hard, as has Abigail, to get where they are. And now they can do anything. And they do.

- [Narrator] The research is clear. Early intervention, appropriate treatment, and oral deaf education mean that babies who are deaf can have speech and language development that approximates their hearing peers.

- [Both] Mama.

- [Narrator] For babies who are diagnosed with a hearing loss, the future has never sounded so hopeful.

- All done.

- All done.

- All done.

- Good job. All done. All done.

- He's really making nice progress.

- Yay.