

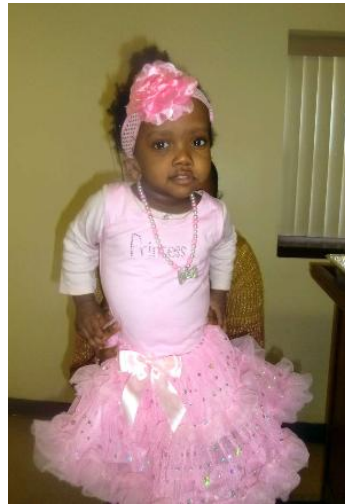
Nutley resident Gina Thomas wants families of children with hearing loss to know that they're not alone.



The Thomas family will represent Team Princess Giana in the Hearing Loss Association Garden State NJWalk4Hearing on Sunday. Pictured, from left, are Stanley, Giana, Gina and Steeve Thomas. Giana Thomas was born profound deaf.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GINA THOMAS

The Thomas family will represent Team Princess Giana in the Hearing Loss Association Garden State NJWalk4Hearing on Sunday. Pictured, from left, are Stanley, Giana, Gina and Steeve Thomas. Giana Thomas was born profound deaf.



Two years ago, Thomas, a **Bloomfield** native and mother of two, felt like she had nowhere to turn after her daughter Giana was born profound deaf in both ears.

"When we first found out [about Giana], it was devastating for us," Thomas said. "We didn't know where to turn."

Now, Thomas is helping raise

awareness about hearing loss.

On Sunday, Thomas, Giana and a group of 40 people will represent Team Princess Giana in the Hearing Loss Association of America's Sixth Annual Garden State-NJ Walk4Hearing in West Windsor.

"We found out there's so much help out there," Thomas said.

This year will mark the second year that the family has taken part in the walk. Last year, the team surpassed its \$1,000 goal, raising \$4,000.

This year's goal is \$2,000. "We tripled our walkers [for this year]," she said.

Thomas recently moved to **Nutley** from **Bloomfield**.

"One of the reasons we moved to **Nutley** was because we found out [the town] was pretty good with disabled children," Thomas said.

Giana is slowly learning to hear and speak, following a Cochlear implant she received a year ago.

The implant is a small, complex, electronic device that helps to provide a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard of hearing, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

"The implant consists of an external portion that sits behind the ear and a second portion that is surgically placed under the skin," according to NIDCD.

To donate, visit the Walk4Hearing website and select Giana's team. You can also email gina_petrus@yahoo.com for more information.

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