



Earle Baum Center

Serving People with Sight Loss

LIMITLESS



They Spoke for Me, Even Though They Didn't Know Me

Charles Cervantes was only 28 when he was diagnosed with glaucoma. He was a truck driver at the time, and he didn't want to believe the news.

"I was in denial," he said. "I was able to fake it pretty well. Others thought my vision was better than it was because I covered it up well."

But as his vision loss continued to progress, he could no longer hide it. By the time he was 40, he had lost all sight in his

left eye and had only a keyhole of vision in his right.

He soon realized that his world was also beginning to narrow. He was no longer doing the things he used to enjoy. He had thought of himself as an outdoor person, but now he was becoming hesitant to leave his house.

Even going for a walk on the sidewalk became treacherous. "I'd move my eyes all over the place, way ahead, and up and down," he said. "But when I looked down at the ground for cracks or curbs, I wouldn't see the bushes at top and would hit my head!"

After a while it got to him. "I went into a depression," he said. "I thought to myself *this is it!*"

Then, he remembered that his eye specialist had suggested he go to the Earle Baum Center. He decided to give EBC a call.

"I didn't know what to expect. I was nervous," he said. "But every time I went, I took away information that was

really helpful. Everything they said to me, I was already experiencing. It was like Earle Baum *spoke for me*, even though they didn't know me!"

Charles began learning how to get around safely by using a white cane. "Before, I used to walk in the street because I kept getting tripped up by the indented driveways and sidewalk cracks. It was like I was drunk and I'd lose my balance. It felt dangerous walking in the street, but it was the only way I could walk," he said. "With the help of my cane, I took a walk in uncharted territory for the first time in years. I circled the block — and it's a big block — on the sidewalk!"

Senior Orientation & Mobility instructor Regina Kutches said, "Though we haven't worked together long, I see his horizons broadening. I'm excited to see what he's capable of, and for *him* to discover his capabilities. Using a cane can be a difficult hurdle, but he seemed to get right away that it's a tool that will allow him to be independent and safe."

Charles is reveling in his new sense of freedom and independence. "Now I want to learn all I



Charles Cervantes with Regina Kutches, Senior Orientation and Mobility instructor.

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Message from the CEO



I can talk about orientation and mobility, assistive technology, and independent living skills. But those terms don't describe the importance of our training. I'm starting to use phrases like "fall prevention, safe travel, and finding your way to places you want to visit," or "how to do things at home like cook, clean, laundry, manage finances, and match clothes if you can't see things very well," or "how to use a computer, tablet, or smart phone if you can't see the screen well or at all."

I describe this place and all the people that make it amazing as a school and a community center. First, imagine a strong foundation with two layers.

The first layers are our Low Vision Clinic and our Counseling programs. If you have any remaining vision, we help you find a combination of lenses, lighting, and tools to best use the vision you have. Also, vision loss is exactly that, a loss. And human beings go through a process when we lose something or someone we care about. It's normal. And getting help from a professional and others who

have gone through something similar can be helpful and often necessary to move through the process and be ready to learn new skills to live safely and independently with sight loss.

On top of those two foundational layers rest our core training classes – the school. These are the classes, groups, and professional instruction that help people learn what I mentioned above.

ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY develops the skills required to travel independently, safely and confidently. Specific instruction covers spatial concepts, sensory awareness, white cane skills, and the use of public transportation.

INTRODUCTION AND LIVING WITH VISION LOSS are group classes designed to address an individual's emotional adjustment to sight loss as well as information, techniques and equipment to lead an active life.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES evaluate a person's skills and needs, and offers instruction in the use of adaptive hardware and software. One on one instruction is offered for: computers, notetakers, cell phones, screen

readers, and Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) systems.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS teaches adaptive skills for cooking, shopping, financial and household management, clothing color matching and more.

BRILLE INSTRUCTION teaches Braille reading and writing. Practical use of Braille includes labeling foods, files, clothing, games and more.

Learning those core skills are important, and people need to practice them outside of classes to use them to lead a full life. Supported by the foundation and core training classes is our Community Center. Our Community Center programs help people with vision loss continue hobbies and interests and develop new ones. There are exercise, dance, and musical opportunities. We have classes including art history, tai chi, and yoga. We have technology and book clubs, support groups and field trips. Peer support and teaching is a valuable part of the Community Center.

You can help us strengthen the foundation, maintain the school, and enhance the community center. Your contribution will help. If you are here for us today, we can be there for you tomorrow.

Gratefully yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Dan".

Dan Needham

Please join our Legacy Society!

Become a member! Help the Earle Baum Center continue serving people with sight loss by including us in your will and estate plan. Gifts may include cash, stocks, IRAs, real estate, life insurance, charitable trusts and automobiles—all may become the means to help others in the way you or your loved ones have received assistance. Please call Bob Sonnenberg at **707-284-1088**, or email sonnenberg@earlebaum.org for more information or questions. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.



Honoring Her Son's Memory

Holly Pruettt has a very special reason for donating to the Earle Baum Center. She knows just how valuable EBC services were for her son, Jake Banister, who died in January.

Jake first learned of his vision problems when he was in the military. He had enlisted in the Navy at 18 and was about to complete boot camp when a vision test revealed that he had peripheral vision loss. He had hoped to carry on his family's tradition of military service.

After his medical discharge from the service, he got a construction job — digging trenches to put in cable lines. “He was amazing,” said Holly. “He was honorable, reliable, and very driven.”

But as his vision continued to deteriorate, his driving suffered. He started getting into little fender benders. Finally, after one that involved a child in the car, he said, “That’s it! I’m not driving any more.”

He had great relationships with his co-workers, and could usually get rides to and from work. But one day, he didn’t have a ride. He decided to walk all the way. “He didn’t tell me this until years later,” said Holly. “But he started out around midnight. He put a light on his head and started walking. He walked all night long so that he’d be there for work on time in the morning. He didn’t want to let his team down.” Jake resigned his position in regard for the health and safety of himself and his coworkers.

“He was so independent; he faked everyone out,” she said. “But his vision was worsening, and it was getting hazardous. He was only 28.”

“I was getting scared about what he’d do if his dad or I weren’t around,” she said. “I told him, ‘We need to find someone to help you.’”

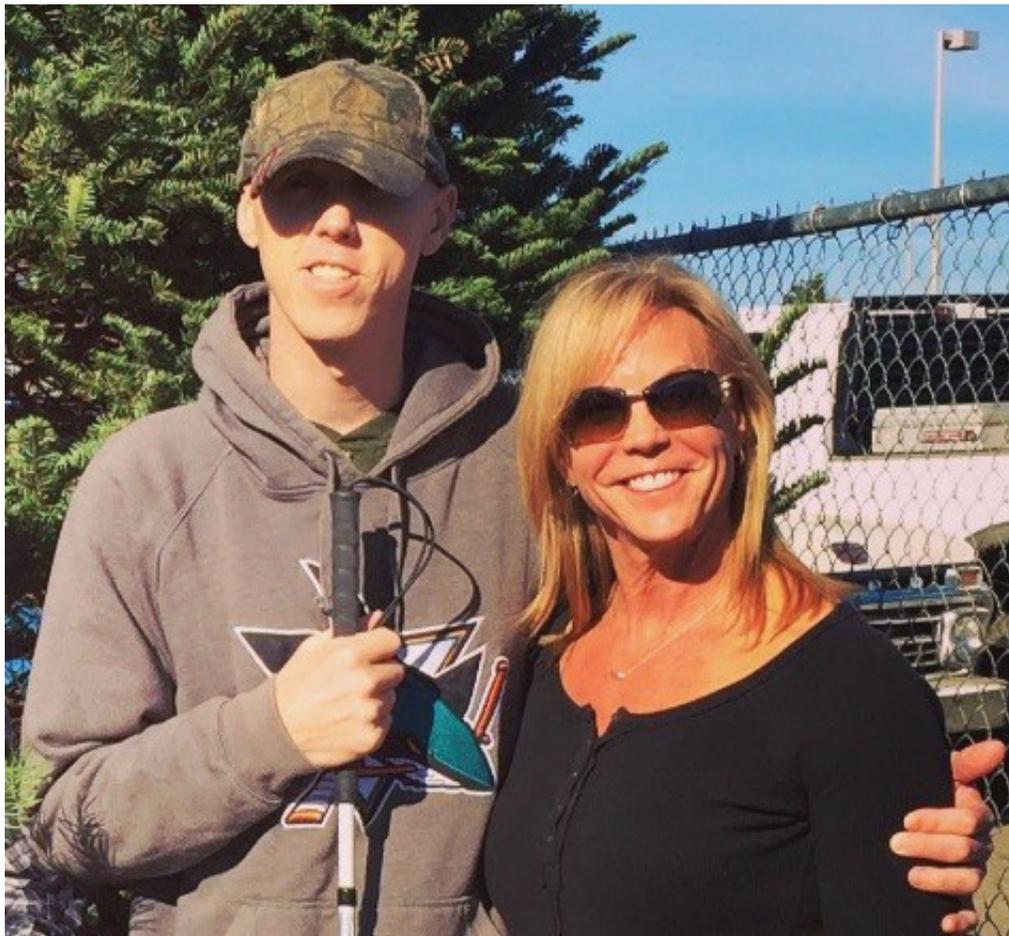
His eye specialist, Dr. Janet Caddel, recommended the Earle Baum Center, and Jake began attending two years ago. “The thing that most helped him was learning to use the iPhone,” Holly said. “That was a life-changing event. He would talk to it and get directions. He’d use the light on his phone to read. He would take a picture of a dinner menu and magnify it. It was huge for him.”

Although he was just beginning to learn to adjust to his vision loss, Jake was diagnosed with testicular cancer last summer. The disease progressed rapidly, and he died in January.

But his mother hasn’t forgotten the valuable help her son received from the Earle Baum Center. She donated all of Jake’s visual aid items so they can be used to help someone else. And she is donating \$50 per month in his memory.

“I wanted to give back to those who helped Jake,” she said. She encourages others to give a monthly gift to EBC. “You just budget it in. It’s easy, and you don’t even miss it. Even a little will do something for someone who needs it.”

*Jake and his Mom
in happier times.*



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can," he said. "I want to go back to work and need to figure out a new career. The Center has

changed my life for the better. A lot of people out there think the way I used to think — that when your

sight's gone, so is your life. But Earle Baum gave me hope." At 46, he has a lot of life left to live.

It's Like Having Invisible Arms Around You

Sharon Worlund was a flight attendant and supervisor for many years with Trans World Airlines (TWA) before coming back to Marin; there she and her partner opened Surfer's Grill on Stinson Beach. Three years ago they sold their business and retired. They are now starting a new chapter and a move.

Sharon has macular degeneration and it has progressed in the last year and a half. She no longer drives and has difficulty recognizing familiar faces and has trouble reading the books she has collected. With no public transportation in the area, Sharon is completely dependent on her partner or others to get around like so many other active and engaged people who begin losing their vision. She is finding the change to be emotionally stressful.

Her plight is not unusual, according to Counselor Susan Hirshfield. Susan has been running the Earle Baum Center's Counseling Program for 20 years. "I see people individually to work out their fears and confusion. There are practical

issues that come with vision loss, like admitting to having vision problems. A lot of people don't like to admit it, even to themselves," she said. "And it can have an impact on their relationships, as well."

"First, we deal with their fears, and then slowly get them into the training that's offered here," Susan said. "In the Living with Vision Loss class, we cover everything from the emotional aspects of losing vision, to grieving the loss, and communicating with family and friends about what's going on. We also

talk about diet and how to reduce stress. I teach meditation. We discuss self-advocacy — how to communicate with doctors, grocery store clerks, and bank tellers. We also cover emergency preparedness."

Sharon is developing a new outlook on life. She said, "When you're losing your eyesight, being at the Earle Baum Center is like having invisible arms around you." She's opening a new chapter in her life, thanks to the help she's received from the Earle Baum Center.



Sharon Worlund



Susan Hirshfield

When the federal government passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act two years ago, it set in motion a wave of repercussions that are being felt here in Northern California today. By excluding "homemakers" as a valid employment category, it eliminated government funding for counseling and independent living skills training for homemakers, like Sharon Worlund, who become blind or visually impaired.

"We're actively seeking additional support from our community to help pick up the slack," said Earle Baum Center CEO Dan Needham. "We want people in our community who are blind or visually impaired to have everything they need to regain their sense of independence and self-confidence."