



Perspectives

Abel and Gia Face Vision Loss as a Team



"It was so helpful to take the classes together. My instinct is to coddle. I'm a caretaker."
~ Gia

Vision loss doesn't just affect the individual. It becomes part of life for all their family and friends.

"No one signs up for this," Abel said. "Caretakers all of the sudden are on the hook."

"Abel was looking for independence," Gia explained. "He did not find that at other organizations, but we immediately sensed that the staff here fostered independence."

"I found Second Sense through an Internet search," Abel added. "I was wonderfully surprised. The environment was so inviting and welcoming."

Abel and Gia participated as a team in

training. Gia learned the same skills for some areas — like cooking — and simply observed for others — like mobility.

She took an active part in Human Guide training. This technique allows two people to travel as a team. The pair learns verbal and non-verbal ways to communicate changes in the environment, like doorways.

They learn how to position themselves and their grip to give the person with vision loss the greatest sense of safety, control and dignity.

"We use the Human Guide technique often," Gia shared. "We have modified it for ourselves and the way we walk together."

Gia and Abel also learned cooking skills as a team.

"As a young adult, I worked in kitchens, through high school and college," Abel explained, "I found a beauty in the chaos of a kitchen — sharp objects, people walking fast and people shouting to be heard over the noise."

"Cooking was a time we spent together," Gia added.

So, Abel and Gia learned safe techniques for using sharp knives, methods to organize ingredients, and how to use tools to ease the frustration of cooking with vision loss.

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Walking out their door. Jotting down a phone number. Sending an email.

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When Magnification Isn't Enough



Sabiha uses ZoomText Fusion to navigate the Internet.

“People who are partial are always trying to use the vision they still have.”

This is how Sabiha explains one source of her frustration using technology.

Sabiha took training to learn JAWS, a screen-reading program. But, she found that “JAWS was just too much for me.”

However, with her recent decline in vision, she found that magnification wasn't enough anymore.

So, Sabiha asked Joe, our assistive technology instructor, if there was a way she could combine speech and magnification.

“It was so refreshing to see Sabiha take the initiative.” Joe said. “To accept that she needed to make a change. So many clients want to hold onto using just their vision. Even when it is frustrating and stressful.”

Joe and Sabiha worked with ZoomText Fusion, which adds speech to magnification. The user selects when to use speech cues and key commands.

“I learned what works with ZoomText and what works better with JAWS. When I started working with Joe it just all seemed so natural.”

“I find that JAWS can be cumbersome on the Internet. So I use magnification combined with the JAWS shortcut keys. My vision can reinforce that I am using the right shortcuts and that they are getting me where I need to go.”

“Before this training, I was getting away with just my phone. Sabiha shared. “But, being the mother of two pre-teens, I needed a quieter space to do my creative writing and research. I also find it much more productive to work at a laptop.” ●

Working as a Team

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“One of the problems I had is that I retained a hope that this is temporary. That I will gain my full vision back. Now I know this is my new normal.”

~ Abel

“We have been able to enjoy cooking together again. Abel likes big chef knives. With the technique he learned, he is back to his old self.”

“Providing these classes is very important for individuals to re-engage in normal activities,” Abel said.

“To reacquaint themselves to activities they used to do freely and without thinking when they had sight. It is very important to being part of humanity.”

Abel and Gia selected training in all of the different areas of vision rehabilitation training. Because there is no set curriculum, our clients are able to choose the training they want. The training they need. The training they will use on a daily basis.

“Losing my vision has been almost an organic process, rather than a mental process,” Abel explained. “If I feel it, if I let it happen organically, I can go through the process in my own personal time line.”

In addition to Human Guide, Abel took mobility training. He learned to use a white cane to both identify himself as visually impaired and to “read” his environment.

“Vision is part of the fabric of society,” Abel shared. “To be divorced from that, to be part of a different society, you can feel very embarrassed. Which can be paralyzing.”

“It was freeing when I was told I don’t have to apologize for bumping into people with my cane. That they are the sighted ones and should be looking out

for me.”

Abel, who used to be in the advertising end of the fashion business, appreciated the methods taught in training. “This is the way you do the task – cross the street, cut up vegetables. There is a certain beauty in minimalism.”

“It is such a complex state of being – unlike aches and pains. Your brain can isolate that pain. It is easier to cope with it. But, when your sight is gone, you cannot isolate it because you are floating in it. I had the sense I had this blanket over my head. It was wrapped around me and I couldn’t take it off.”

“I think Second Sense is a wonderful gift. Those who support it should be very happy that they do so.” ●

Passionate Focus Rescheduled

Passionate Focus, our annual art exhibit featuring the work of artists with vision loss, has been rescheduled to June 17. You can check out all the artwork on our website: www.passionatefocus.org.



Whispering Birches by Rose Kamma Morrison



What They Call Me 2: Untitled by Yvonne Shortt

Kira Learns the Ins and Outs of Public Transit



Kira's Soundscape app will announce intersections along her ride. It is one of the ways she can keep track of when she is close to her stop.

Kira can see shapes, colors, shadows and movement. But she can't see any detail.

She recently moved to Chicago from Nashville. Kira received mobility training there, but has never experienced public transit on the scale of Chicago's CTA.

"Part of the reason I moved to Chicago was for the public transit," Kira explained. "I graduated from college last year and am looking for a job. Public transit will give me more options."

Mobility training for public transit covers every step of traveling on a bus or train to get to your destination safely. Clients have to know how to access information about schedules and routes. And, they have to know how to use that information to plan the best route.

The best route for our clients is not necessarily the quickest or shortest trip. It is the trip that gets them where they want to go safely. So they have to know about intersections they have to cross, about stations that aren't accessible and whether sidewalks are present.

"I have been working with Eleni to familiarize myself with Chicago and the transit system. It has been an adventure!"

Kira and Eleni, our mobility instructor, spent 19 hours together — traveling routes, riding buses and navigating 'L' stations.

Using all she learned and her Soundscape app, Kira has been traveling independently for a few weeks. Now she is focused on finding a job. We wish her the best of luck! ●



Transit training includes learning to use the Ventra card to pay the fare.