In July of 2019, Charlie was sleeping in the cab of his truck at a truck stop. He was suddenly jarred awake when the unsecured cargo from another truck came crashing down on him.

Charlie lost his vision, his driver’s license and his career.

But Charlie was used to sudden change. His 17-year-old technology company was one of the casualties in the recession of 2010. He adapted, earned his Commercial Driver’s License and started hauling stage equipment for bands across the country.

So, he certainly wasn’t going to let vision loss stop him. Charlie had already earned his associates degree. He decided now was a good time to go back to school to complete his bachelor’s degree.

After a rigorous selection process, including an oral presentation before an academic and student panel, Charlie was accepted into Northwestern University’s unique organization behavior program in the fall of 2019.

“Since my vision is greatly diminished, I had to find new ways to access all the information for my classes,” Charlie explained. “Northwestern’s Accessibility and You program helped me find the resources I need — text-to-speech, PDF review and accessible textbooks.

“Now that I am in my final year of classes, I decided it was time to get additional training.

“Mobility training certainly has its challenges. It is a big change, and I am discovering a lot of things about myself. It is almost like learning to walk all over again.”

“Charlie’s experience as a truck driver seems to translate well into orientation

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In-Home Training is a Great Option

Suzie first came to Second Sense in 2013. She learned new skills and found some new friends. But, since she was the sole caregiver for her aging mother, she soon had to stop making the trek from Batavia to Chicago.

Recently, Cristina — one of those new friends — told her about our in-home training. After just a few lessons with Cody, our Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, Suzie feels so much more comfortable using her iPad.

She is texting with Cristina and other friends. And, she is using Facetime so other family members can see her now 99-year-old mother.

Suzie is also taking and emailing photos for virtual doctor appointments. She is making shopping lists in the reminders app and listening to podcasts as she does chores around the house.

Her last lesson was on using BARD to listen to audio books. “I don’t have much time during the day to read,” Suzie shared. “So I read when I go to bed. It is a little treat before I fall asleep.”

Once she finishes with learning the iPad, Suzie is hoping for some training on all the tasks that fill her day. From preparing meals, to organizing her home, to caring for her mother, Suzie is hoping to learn some new skills that will make these tasks easier. Less frustrating. And, maybe give her some more free time.
“It is wonderful that you are utilizing the community you serve. Brad told me that I was his first student. His personal experience brings a fresh perspective to the training.”

~ Charlie

“Eleni and Brad both seemed impressed!”

Charlie is looking at several options to put his degree to work. One is to start his own firm, with the mission to increase the awareness of the benefit of including staff input in business decisions.

“Our mobility instructor, Eleni, is currently supervising an intern. Completing an internship is a requirement toward both a degree and certification as a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist.

Once he completes his internship, Brad will be the first blind graduate of Northern Illinois University’s orientation and mobility program.

“Brad offers a fresh perspective to the training,” Charlie observed. “I am learning from him and Eleni.

“And, I think they are both learning from each other.”

Charlie is also impressed with Eleni and Brad.

Even during the pandemic, our training staff are seeing clients.

They take all measures they can to ensure the safety of their clients. Masks are required. Social distancing is maintained whenever training allows.

“I am amazed by the staff putting themselves in harm’s way to help me.” Charlie shared.

“Eleni and Brad both seemed impressed!”

Brad, an intern working toward his certification as an orientation and mobility specialist, helps Charlie use his cane to determine his position on the sidewalk after crossing the street.

skills,” Second Sense’s mobility instructor Eleni said. “He already knows how to use cardinal directions and street numbering systems to plan his route.”

Charlie agreed with this. “During my last lesson, I determined the direction I was heading because I felt the warmth of the sun on the right side of my face.

“Eleni and Brad both seemed impressed!”
Teresa Uses Her New Skills to Research Colleges

Teresa lost her vision just a year ago. But, she already has plans for her future.

“Life doesn’t stop, and neither do I,” Teresa declares.

Teresa tried learning JAWS, a screen-reading program for computers, on her own. But, it was “super frustrating!”

She started working with Joe, our computer instructor, at the end of July and has already made huge strides.

“Joe is sharing so many shortcuts.” Teresa said. “Before, when I went to Gmail, JAWS would read all the information across the top of the screen and all the menu options first. Then it would get to the email.

“But, with a simple shortcut, I can tell JAWS to go right to the email. It saves time.”

“Teresa puts in a lot of time outside of our lessons to practice on her own. This is vastly accelerating the completion of her goals,” Joe said.

One of those goals is to go to graduate school to become a vision rehabilitation therapist.

Teresa spent time during training putting the skills she was learning to practical use. This is an important part of our training — making sure our clients know how they can use the skill they are learning in their daily lives.

Joe and Teresa researched the universities that offer vision rehabilitation degrees. Teresa learned to navigate the websites, complete forms and use shortcut keys to find the information she wanted.

“Joe did more than teach me about JAWS. He told me about his experience at Northern Illinois University in their vision rehabilitation program. That was awesome!” Teresa exclaimed. “It is one of the reasons I have decided to apply to NIU.”