



Earle Baum Center
Transforming the Lives
of People with Sight Loss

LIMITLESS



Let's Work Together to Bridge the Gaps

Many people who are blind or visually impaired live in remote areas where services aren't readily available. The Earle Baum Center works in partnership with other agencies to bridge those gaps and improve people's lives.

Robert Brewster was having trouble finding vision services where he lived in West Virginia. He had lost his vision in one eye due to a traumatic injury when he was 4 years old. At 35, the sight in his

other eye began to fail. "I noticed I was squinting more, especially in the sunlight," he said, "and I was having trouble driving at night." He became legally blind in 2007. Now, at 50, his vision is like looking through a tunnel.

"I had a family member who was totally blind and had a guide dog," Robert said. "He got along fine – just as well as someone with sight." So, Robert decided to get one. But when he contacted

Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB), he learned that he would first need to have orientation and mobility training (O&M) and learn to use a white cane. With a mental map, and information from his other senses, he would be able to learn how to direct the dog to a destination.

There is a nationwide shortage of O&M Specialists who teach these skills. But as a delivery partner for GDB's Orientation & Mobility Immersion Program, EBC is now able to help GDB clients like Robert become "guide dog ready."

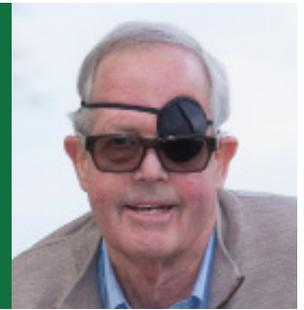
Regina Kutches has been working as an O&M Specialist at EBC for ten years, and was eager to take part in the program and use GDB's proprietary curriculum. Preparing someone for a guide dog is somewhat different than the normal curriculum. "We pay more attention to the auditory and environmental cues that will help a client figure out where they are spatially," Regina said. "There's a difference in the sound of passing an open doorway when walking down a hallway. The hum of an air

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With help from O&M Specialist Regina Kutches and the rest of the staff at EBC, Robert Brewster has new skills, new devices, a new job, and the opportunity to get a guide dog.

Message from the Director of Development



Dear Friend,

In this issue of *Limitless*, we'd like to tell you about some unique partnerships. I have a unique partnership with my guide, Langley. My dog brings smiles to the people I meet and helps me break the ice. We walk fast together, and he keeps me safe.

For the past year, the Earle Baum Center has embarked on another unique partnership – with Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) in San Rafael, where I got Langley. GDB selected EBC to be one of its official delivery partners for its Orientation & Mobility Immersion Program. EBC's Orientation and Mobility Specialists are helping GDB clients refresh their

knowledge of using a white cane and using their senses other than sight to keep track of where they are and where they need to go next. With these crucial skills, clients are prepared to take the next step and see if a guide dog is the right mobility choice for them.

While they are in this immersion program, we invite them to access our other services, including counseling, technology, independent living skills training, and our Low Vision Clinic. They learn about tools and devices that can help them cope with the challenges of blindness and low vision. For many of these people, it is an incredible opportunity to get help that may not be available where they live.

As you will read, this innovative program is already proving to be a tremendous success.

Thanks to you, EBC is able to offer a safe and trusting environment for people who are blind or visually impaired to learn practical, relevant skills that will keep them safe. It is just one of the many ways you are helping us transform people's lives by restoring their confidence, independence, and joy.

Warm Regards,

Bob Sonnenberg
Director of Development
Interim CEO

Let's Work Together to Bridge the Gaps *(continued from page 1)*

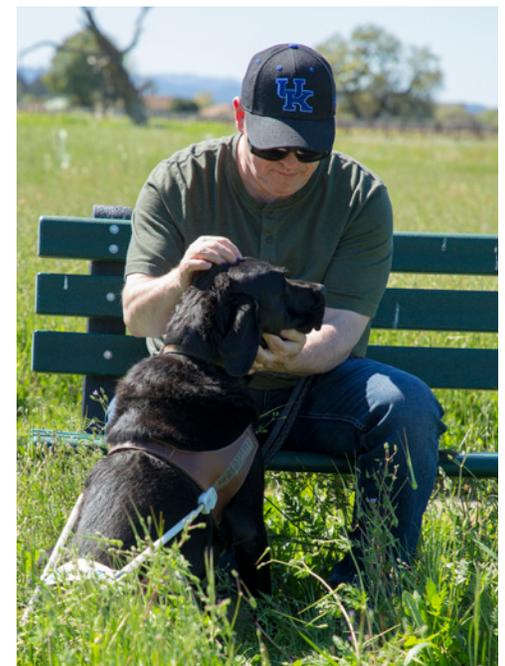
conditioner can mark a location. We focus less on the tactile information the client gets through the tip of the white cane."

In addition to learning O&M skills, Robert took advantage of the range of EBC services – from independent living training to counseling, adaptive technology, and the Low Vision Clinic. Regina referred him to resources in his home area so that he may be able to get coverage for magnifiers, glare shields, and other devices that can reduce his eye strain and protect his remaining vision.

"It's easy to just give up when you're losing your vision. You feel

helpless," Robert said. "But I tell people, 'Don't be afraid to ask your eye doctor if there are more resources that can help you. Ask what kind of skills you can learn.' This last week couldn't have been more perfect for me!"

Just as he returned home, Robert's job as a Walmart People Greeter was being eliminated. He was given the chance to apply for a job as a Customer Host. Armed with his new tools and skills, Robert got the job, and a raise! "It makes me feel ecstatic to know I still have a bright future," he exclaimed. "I'm still going to be independent – it's overwhelming!"



Robert Brewster

Why I Give: Andrée MacColl

Andrée MacColl honors the memory of her partner Elizabeth Cooley by carrying on her work in support of the Earle Baum Center. She hopes to spread the word about EBC so that people will gain a better understanding of blindness and the services that are available to help them.

The couple first came to Sebastopol in 1995. Elizabeth had just retired from a successful career as a clinical psychologist, and she was eager to devote her energies to woodworking. But soon after the move, she discovered she had macular degeneration.

“That put the kibosh on woodworking!” Andrée said. “Elizabeth was terribly depressed and in denial at first. She didn’t disguise her feelings. But she was someone who loved life, and wanted hers to be meaningful. She reached out to the Earle Baum Center for help. It was fabulous for her.” In the ensuing years, Andrée had a front-row seat to the impact of EBC’s services. “Elizabeth’s

life changed in so many ways because of her vision loss. EBC helped her make the best of it.”

Elizabeth once said, “When I came to the Earle Baum Center, it was as if somebody threw me a rope.” Once she was able to adjust to her new life, she developed a positive attitude. With her signature beret, white cane, and encouraging manner, Elizabeth was a wonderful role model. She was often asked to join in EBC group activities. “Why sit at home and grumble when you can make a difference?” she would say. She served on EBC’s Board of Directors, and set up a scholarship fund to help EBC clients overcome financial barriers to assistive technology, independent living skills, orientation and mobility, and senior services.

After Elizabeth died in 2011, Andrée was inspired to continue to promote support for the Dr. Elizabeth Cooley Scholarship Fund that her partner founded.



Andrée MacColl honors her partner’s memory by supporting EBC.

“It is a way for me to pay tribute to Elizabeth’s memory,” she said. “It gives more meaning to my life to be involved in this way. I don’t know of another place like the Earle Baum Center. It is really unique. I’m always touched by the people I meet when I go there. We are very fortunate to have such a place here to help people get over the humps and deal with low vision and blindness. I’m very impressed by EBC.”

SAVE THE DATE

Saturday, September 21, 2019 | 10am – 3pm
Earle Baum Center Celebrates 20th Anniversary
Your Vision, Our Focus

Join us for our annual community open house. Visit our beautiful campus at Earle Baum Center, 4539 Occidental Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95401.

Save the date, and bring friends and family to meet us and discover our thriving community and innovative programs and services. See you there!



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Rusty No More!



Under O&M Specialist Maura Wong Cooper's expert guidance, Phillip Daigle will soon be ready to apply for a new guide dog.

Phillip Daigle had to admit that his cane skills were getting rusty. He'd first learned to use a white cane 14 years ago after losing his sight due to glaucoma. But thanks to the Earle Baum Center and Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB), he's walking with renewed confidence.

For 10 years, Phillip traveled with Detroit, his black Labrador retriever guide from GDB, until the dog developed cancer. Phillip lives in Crowley, Louisiana, and like many people with vision loss, especially in rural areas, he found himself becoming isolated. "Without a dog, I stay in the house," Phillip said. "I read books on the computer or play guitar. But I need to get out and do things. A guide dog would motivate me to do that." A guide dog would make the two-and-a-half-mile walk down his parish road more inviting. And it would also inspire him to visit

the guitar store that's three miles down the road.

When Phillip contacted GDB for a successor dog, they told him he first needed to refresh his orientation and mobility skills (O&M) by participating in GDB's Orientation & Mobility Immersion Program at one of its partner



Phillip Daigle

organizations. "They wanted me to go to a one-week immersion program at EBC," he said.

Maura Wong Cooper teaches O&M at EBC. "It can be hard for someone going through this process. Their best friend, companion, and mobility aid passes away, and now, they're forced to re-acquaint themselves with their cane. My job with Phillip was to reassure him that his skills and abilities were still present – he just needed to pull them back out from his mental archives."

"I had a great time," Phillip said. "Maura taught me a lot. I guess there have been a lot of changes in O&M since I first took it. She taught me things about crossing a street that I didn't know."

"Typically, I work with someone for two hours a week over 18-24 months," Maura said. In the week-long training designed by GDB, she covers three to four lessons in one day. "I call it the 'spaghetti effect' – you throw all this information out and see what sticks. But the folks that come through this program are really quite special. They're open to it. They have to be willing to trust a complete stranger from day one. They give their trust to me, and I really appreciate it."

"It's just like learning to swim – you start by staying near the edge of the pool," Maura said. "But later, you learn to let go and swim out into the middle. By the end of the week, Phillip was walking straight down the block. It was a fantastic transformation!"