

How low vision aids impact my life.

In my life I have used a plethora of visual aids, from computer software such as zoom text, to a glass half-dome magnifier dubbed “the crystal ball” by my orientation and mobility advisor. Some, such as the flipper, and the amigo, I discarded for being too cumbersome and bulky. Others, such as my kindle, are not conventional visual aids, but are still some of my favorite tools for dealing with my visual impairment. My experiences with low vision aids, from high tech CCTVs to simple monoculars and magnifiers has helped bolster my independence, successes, and ability to function as though I did not have a visual impairment.

Despite their numerous differences, all of my visual aids give me the ability to function like any of my peers and classmates. The magnification software, e-readers, and magnifiers allow me to read regular print books with ease, and even enable me to read print that my peers have trouble comprehending. Since the moment I received my first magnifier, an ancient CCTV, I have been able to decrease my reliance on readers and helpful bystanders, increase my own independence and self-esteem as I am no longer forced to openly display my impairment in order to get the help that I need. My magnifiers also stimulated my love of reading and my success in

school as I was no longer bound by miniscule print and enormous, cumbersome textbooks. In fact, not long after I began habitually using magnification devices, I began to excel in math and reading, quickly rising to the top of my class in the two subjects that, due to my inability to read small letters and symbols, I had previously done poorly in.

Along with magnifiers, my orientation and mobility advisor has introduced me to the visual aids created for distance viewing, to use not only in the classroom, but also out on the streets as I gain more independence and the ability to use public transportation systems. Using these devices, particularly the monocular, my independence has increased dramatically as my parents and I feel confident in my ability to read street signs and roam the streets without supervision. I am now able to use the bus and light-rail systems to travel throughout the Sacramento area, occasionally traveling farther than my sister is allowed in her car. Thanks to these aids I am able to travel on my own, like a regular teen, and have thus developed greater confidence and respect for myself.

My new independence and abilities have not only increased my self-respect, but have also increased the respect and responsibility I am given by others, particularly parents, teachers, and children. Parents who once felt the need to shelter and protect me, now feel confident leaving their

children in my care, and occasionally enlist my help in coaching and tutoring their children. Teachers who once hounded me about my vision now leave me to my own devices as they watch me deal with my impairment independently, while coaches designate me as a supervisor for students during sports events and use me as a role model for my younger teammates. Even younger children have begun to look up to me as I am given leadership roles in schools, sports, and other extracurricular activities.

However, despite their numerous advantages, conventional visual aids have one great disadvantage, especially among children and teens. In today's society, where many teens' one and only goal is to fit in, visual aids can be discarded in an effort to assimilate with the mainstream teen population. For teens such as myself, who have felt the need to abandon some, if not all, aids, it is necessary to turn towards mainstream, modern technology in order to find a visual aid that will be effective, yet unnoticed. Computers, software, e-readers, and smartphones all have the capability to become useful, powerful, and discreet visual aids for those persons who do not wish to stand out amongst their peers. The use of this modern technology has not only provided me with an impressive array of useful devices, but has also spurred my interest in adaptive technology as I have

observed the effect of these common devices on myself and others with visual impairments.

Visual aids have played a monumental role in my physical and social life. Largely due to my use of visual aids, my independence and self-esteem have increased, therefore influencing my successes in academics, athletics, and extracurricular opportunities. Using visual aids has shown me that my albinism and visual impairment need not inhibit my success in any activity.