Imagine going to school for eleven years not being able to read; worrying that peers would find out your secret, feeling you were different from others, thinking that you just weren’t as smart, dodging requests to read out loud, fighting a losing battle to keep up with your classmates, and knowing it was just a matter of time before you couldn’t fake it any longer. If you can relate to these challenges, then you know how Charles Stewart of Pocatello, Idaho felt as he made his way through public school.

Charles came to Curlew Job Corps in May of 2004, at the age of twenty. His initial reading tests revealed that he could read at a second grade level. In November of 2004, Stewart was seen by Dr. Eric Hussey, O.D., FCOVD. in Spokane, Washington. Dr. Hussey is doing research on the use of prototype vision goggles that use flashing light to correct a type of vision impairment called intermittent suppression. Intermittent central suppression occurs when either eye repetitively “shuts off” its picture for a few seconds. During the suppression period, the suppressed eye can wander slightly off target. Then, when its picture returns, visual confusion will result until the formerly suppressed eye can regain its aim, only to have the problem repeat in a few more seconds. The visual world with suppression is unstable and confused. “I had to read things over and over and I still couldn’t understand what I was reading.” Charles lamented.

Charles was diagnosed with intermittent central suppression. Shortly after, Charles began using the vision goggles. “I began by reading 30-45 minutes every other day. I read simple books like Dr. Seuss. At first I felt kind of dizzy from the strobe lights.” It took about a month to see results. “I couldn’t stop reading!” Stewart said excitedly and added, “I have been reading a lot of history books like Blackhawk Down and Uncle Sam’s Boy about WWI. I never thought I’d look forward to reading!”

Charles’ last reading test shows marked improvement. Now reading at nearly a ninth grade level (8.8 on a Test of Adult Basic Education) Charles and his family are proud of his efforts. “It’s changed me. I can see myself being successful now.” Stewart stated. “It was scary to think of a future without being able to read.”

Charles plans to join the Army to get further skills after he gets his G.E.D. and finishes the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners Pre-Apprenticeship program at Curlew Job Corps. He hopes to someday be a general contractor.

Charles’ story is not unique to the Center. Over a dozen participants have improved their reading, due in a large part to Dr. Hussey’s vision therapy. Charles was anxious to tell his story. He ended our interview by saying, “Who knows, maybe I might even try going to college.”

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