Emma’s Story: The Winner’s Circle

When runner #10706 crossed the finish line at this year’s Asics LA Marathon, a 26.2 mile run brought an entire family’s story full circle. Her name is Emma Leitzinger and her t-shirt read Blind Childrens Center, representing the first school she attended. In many regards, Emma was no different from the other 25,000 runners on the course that day. Watching her race past with a long, natural stride, she seemed like a born runner. But to hear her parents tell it, her road to the finish line wasn’t always so clear.

“It was a year before we learned something was really wrong with Emma’s vision,” her father Jeff remembered. “The ophthalmologist told us, without much empathy, ‘this girl is blind.’ People are good at diagnoses, but not so good at finding you the right help. We just weren't getting the answers we needed.”

A timely referral from Dr. Mark Borchert at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles led the Leitzingers to the Blind Childrens Center. “I called up,” Emma’s mother Janet said, “and they told us to come over and check it out. Just like that. As soon as we entered the building, we knew we were home. Finally, we had answers.”

Mawardi Golf Challenge Shatters Records

On February 19, twenty-one golfers took to the San Gabriel Country Club to raise money for the Blind Childrens Center. Now in its 15th installment, the Mawardi Golf Challenge has continued to grow, with this year’s record-breaking tally topping $160,000. Chaired by visionary friends of the Center, Tetsu Tanimoto and Richard French, this year’s Challenge was emceed by Board President Greg Grande. The Challenge would not be possible without the generosity of its lead sponsors—The Youssef & Kamel Mawardi Foundation, The Gibney Family Foundation and the John & Ursula Kanel Charitable Foundation. A profound thank you to everyone who made this great day possible! See inside spread for a full Mawardi Golf Challenge infographic
Dear friends,

It’s hard to believe it’s been more than twelve years since I first joined the Planned Giving Committee at the Blind Childrens Center. What began as a desire to make a difference has grown into a lifelong passion. As many of you know, once you’ve stepped foot in the Center, your life has been changed forever. I served as a committee member for two years before deepening my involvement and joining the Center’s Board of Directors in 2005.

During the last ten years, I’ve seen concerned parents arrive at the Center in search of help and support for their newborns. Watching these same students graduate to volunteer at the Center, which gives parents and children alike confidence and ready to take on the world, has been incredibly rewarding. Through my involvement, my own children have been moved to volunteer at the Center, which gives me great satisfaction as a father. You simply can’t measure what you get back when you give. If you would like to become more involved, as a volunteer, donor, or Board Member, I urge you to contact the Center and find out how you can make a difference.

Thank you,

Greg Grande
President of the Board of Directors

Emma’s Story from the cover

After three years in the Center’s inclusive setting Emma moved on to a local private school where she was the only student with a visual impairment. But the skills she acquired at the Center helped her to adapt and thrive. Today, she is a junior at Santa Clara University where she is majoring in psychology. She plans to continue to graduate school and pursue a career in nutrition and fitness, inspired by a growing passion for running.

It started four years ago when Emma began working with personal trainer Yuichi Ohi. “He suggested I try running and I really loved it,” Emma said. “Running gives you time to think, and it’s a great stress reliever.” On the weekend, she typically runs outdoors with Yuichi in Los Angeles; during the week she trains on the treadmill at her university’s gym.

Before long, Emma had run her first half-marathon—13.1 miles. One day Jeff suggested she try a marathon. At first Emma was daunted by the proposition, but she and Yuichi came up with a plan. Slowly building up her mileage, Emma would be ready for the 2015 LA Marathon. An avid skier, as well as distance runner, Emma’s advice to other young people who are visually impaired is, “You can do anything you set your mind to, you just have to do it differently.”

Jeff, who has been a Board member at the Center for nearly ten years, decided to add a fundraising challenge to his daughter’s run. In the weeks leading up to the race, he worked tirelessly, offering to match all contributions up to $30,000. “When I thought about what’s closest to my heart, it’s the Blind Childrens Center,” Jeff said. “It forever changed the course of Emma’s life, and we want to make sure the Center continues to change lives for future generations of children.”

Mawardi Golf Challenge from the cover

Yuichi Ohi and Amy Montoya with Emma on race day.

Our newest board member Azadeh Shladovsky is a woman of many talents — an architect and designer best known for her artful furniture collections. Her projects encompass residential, commercial and retail environments, and most notably furniture design. Her collections have won critical acclaim from publications including Elle Decor, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, Interior Design Magazine, C Magazine, Angeleno, and Architectural Digest. Last October, Azadeh debuted a 6-minute short film called “Unscene” and art installation at her new studio in Los Angeles.

Azadeh is also a passionate philanthropist for children’s causes. She and her husband founded Malena’s Foundation to honor the memory of their daughter Malena and are major donors to the Blind Childrens Center. Azadeh recently shared, “The Blind Childrens Center has brought so much light into my life and the lives of children and families in Los Angeles. I’m proud to support this amazing organization as a member of the Board of Directors.”

Lighting the Way to Tomorrow

There are many ways to give to the Blind Childrens Center. A planned gift today ensures a bright future for generations of students and their families.

If you would like to find out more about including the Center in your estate plan, please call Kimberlee Jones at 323.664.2153 EXT 304 or email Kimberlee@blindchildrenscenter.org.
Wish List

Items listed here are used every day at the Blind Childrens Center. Your donations greatly benefit the children and families we serve. Thank you for your continued generosity.

- School supplies
- Digital video camera
- Children’s sun hats & baseball hats
- Children’s sunglasses
- Balls for outdoor play
- Bandaids & non-latex gloves
- Braille paper
- $25 Target gift cards
- Boom boxes
- Bubble machines
- Scooters for the yard
- Playhouses

Contact Kimberlee Jones
Director of Development
kimberlee@blindchildrenscenter.org
323.664.2153

Thank You LA BIG 5K and ASICS LA MARATHON Athletes and Volunteers

BCC alum Omar Nunez and family at the LA Big 5K. Omar’s sister Ariana ran the 5K along with Center Assistant Teacher Yanet Huerta and dozens of other supporters.

Blind Childrens Center volunteers and athletes came out in force again in 2015, at both Saturday’s LA Big 5K and Sunday’s ASICS LA Marathon. More than 100 volunteers were on hand each day to cheer on our athletes and raise awareness for the Center and our life-changing programs.

UCLA Delta Gamma collegians Kelly Moon and Chapter President Kaylee Gomer ran 26.2 miles and raised more than $2,000 to support the Center.