

Amber Needham rides toward vision care for all

Vision, Our donors | April 6, 2023

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Imagine cycling long distance across Ontario. Now, imagine cycling long distance across Ontario with a visual impairment. Fundraising champion Amber Needham did just that. As a grateful patient, Amber felt compelled to give back to the very place that helped her through her vision journey – the Donald K. Johnson Eye Institute at University Health Network (UHN).

In 2014 after a tragic incident, Amber Needham suffered severe damage to her cornea and lost her vision. For treatment, she was referred to UHN's Dr. Clara Chan, ophthalmologist and cornea surgery specialist at Toronto Western Hospital.

To restore her vision, Amber required a corneal stem cell donor transplant. Since there's no stem cell registry to connect tissue donors with recipients, Amber was lucky to find a perfect donor match on her own, and the transplant was a success. Amber has since suffered a second unrelated vision loss incident, but with the groundbreaking care she received at UHN she maintains partial vision.



Amber didn't let visual impairment stop her – in fact, she wrote a book called *The Blind Girl Sees* which describes her journey as a patient coping with visual disabilities. But Amber's effort didn't stop at her book, she had another idea: to raise \$80,000 to support Dr. Chan's work at UHN. She wanted to give back to Dr. Chan and the ophthalmology department that helped get her vision back.

Amber's idea blossomed into a fundraising event called Tandem Ride for Sight, where Amber and her friend Mike, a cycling enthusiast, would ride a tandem bike across Ontario to promote her book and raise awareness for the cause. Amber and Mike embarked on a 2,500 km tandem bike tour across Ontario – starting in St. Thomas on July 4, 2022, and ending at Toronto Western Hospital – where she started her vision journey – on August 20, 2022.

To raise funds, she started an online [fundraising page](#) through UHN Foundation. The platform allows Amber to promote the event through email and social media and easily collect donations for this important cause.

The goal of Tandem Ride for Sight was to raise awareness for diseases of the cornea and get a start on her \$80,000 goal. Proceeds from the event and her book sales will go to support Dr. Chan's work at the Donald K. Johnson Eye Institute, with hopes to help start a corneal stem cell transplant registry.

"For me, it was an absolute must that I do something to give back so it's easier for the next person," says Amber. "Dr. Chan suggesting a stem cell donor registry, much like a bone marrow registry, would be so much easier for future patients."

After everything she has been through, Amber has persevered and is not giving up and is now working towards her next fundraising event. Amber will continue fundraising for UHN until she reaches her ultimate goal of \$80,000.

Thanks to Amber and her efforts, UHN's world-renowned clinicians and researchers will continue their mission to slow vision loss and preserve and restore sight.

Start your fundraiser today!

UHN Foundation's online fundraising pages are an easy way to make an impact on the future of health care at UHN. The platform supports individual or group fundraisers, and each page can be customized with your fundraising story and goals. Donors will receive a tax receipt by email for their gifts. To start your own fundraiser visit [UHNfoundation.ca/fundraise](https://uhnfoundation.ca/fundraise).