

**Headline:** 'It all left in the blink of an eye'

**Outlet:** Sherwood Park News

**Date:** Feb. 15, 2018

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**Link:** <http://www.sherwoodparknews.com/2018/02/15/it-all-left-in-the-blink-of-an-eye>

In December 2015, then-20-year-old Sherwood Park resident Kevin Michael-Gagne woke up with a “giant hole” in his vision from his right eye.

Visiting an optometrist before being rushed to the Alberta Retina Clinic, doctors eventually discovered the arteries in Michael-Gagne’s right eye had been leaking blood, crushing the retina.

Six months later, Michael-Gagne woke up to discover the same thing was happening to his left eye.

“I was depressed and lost,” Michael-Gagne told The News. “Everything I had and was working towards was disappearing from my life. My quality of life had been drastically affected. I lost everything — my vision, my home, my girlfriend, my dogs, my career.”

Michael-Gagne was a first-year apprentice welder when the odd eyesight incident took place, and had only 20 hours of work left before he could return to school for his second year.

“My dream was coming true,” he said.

Feeling lost, Michael-Gagne moved back in with his parents.

“Imagine what it’s like to be 20 and feel that you have it all — then to wake up one morning and have nothing at all,” he said, noting he’s also had to quit extracurricular activities such as his participating in Jeep and off-roading clubs (“Now I lost my Jeep, and my friends went away with it”).

“It all left in a blink of an eye. My vision left and it took my life. I was so depressed and lonely, and spent so much time in the dark. Many times, I contemplated suicide, thinking it would take my pain.”

To date, Michael-Gagne has lost 95 per cent of his vision, noting he still has limited peripheral vision with a major sensitivity to light. He has spent the past two years visiting specialists and repeatedly going through testing.

A new solution has been put forward to Michael-Gagne, now, through technology called eSight glasses — electronic glasses for the blind.

“It is the only clinically validated device in existence that enables those living with vision loss to see, be mobile and engage in virtually any activity of daily living,” eSight states on its website. The device is worn like a normal pair of glasses and, according to the company, “restores sight for someone who is visually impaired.”

Michael-Gagne gave the technology a try: “I put them on and I could see again. I was me again. Mom and I burst into tears. With these glasses, I can have my life back. I can make a difference. I can fulfill my dreams.”

With those goals shifting, Michael-Gagne noted he now wants to become a master framer and build homes.

“With these glasses, I can work on the computer to do some assignments in class,” he explained. “I can travel unassisted to NAIT.”

The problem is the cost associated with eSight technology, ranging from around \$10,000 to \$15,000. As such, Michael-Gagne is hoping to collect donations to help him regain his vision.

“I want to be me again, the man who works hard and enjoys life... After trying these glasses on, I

not only saw a glimpse of what I had lost, but of what I have to gain — my independence, my quality of life,” he said.

Michael-Gagne noted that outside of work, his battle has led him to set new community-oriented

goals, such as working with Millennium Place to create a program for people with vision loss to be able to play sports, with other hopes of increasing awareness for those struggling with vision loss.

“As a child, growing up in Sherwood Park, I was enrolled in a program called Kids as Clowns. We hosted the Mayor’s Walk, we participated in Canada Day celebrations, painting faces of the youth in Sherwood Park, and entertaining the community,” he explained.

“We spent many days with the elderly... Later on, all my neighbors knew me as the guy who would help with anything — moving furniture, carrying groceries, pushing stuck cars, shoveling driveways, mowing lawns, you name it. I was the guy to call for any kind of help. That is who I want to be again.”

To date, Michael-Gagne’s fundraising efforts have amounted to nearly \$1,100 collected. Those wishing to donate to the cause can do so by visiting [giving.esighteyewear.com/KevinM-G](http://giving.esighteyewear.com/KevinM-G) or [gofundme.com/esight-for-kevin](http://gofundme.com/esight-for-kevin).

A bottle drive is also being hosted on March 3, when residents are encouraged to drop off their empties at Trendz Optical in Sherwood Park, located at 48 Brentwood Blvd., between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m.