



OPTOMETRY GIVING SIGHT

world sight day  
challenge

# ESTABLISHING OPTOMETRY IN MALAWI

## AN OGS SUCCESS STORY



Malawi is one of the poorest countries on earth. For many, life is a day-to-day struggle. For far too many, that struggle is made even more difficult by vision impairment.

“There’s still the same shortsightedness, myopia, hyperopia astigmatism. Everybody over the age of 40 still needs reading glasses. There are still kids who have the same problems here that there are in the developed world, except these kids haven’t been treated,” said Sanchia Jogessar, OD, Malawi School of Optometry at Mzuzu University.

Despite a population of more than 16 million people, Malawi had no native optometrists. That is about to change. Sanchia moved here from South Africa expecting to stay for just six months. “This is a beautiful country and there is so much that can be done here, and there’s such a great need for eye care services and research.”

To satisfy that need, Mzuzu University optometry students, with funding from Optometry Giving Sight, conduct outreach to students and other children like those at the Chicengowa Primary School. Under the watchful eye of their instructors and a team of volunteers providing mentoring support, the future optometrists hone their skills in these settings in a critical component to an educational program that trains degree-qualified optometrists through a four-year degree program.

On one day at Chicengowa, more than 300 children are examined, along with their teachers, parents, and grandparents.

“We see people in their 40s, 50s, and 60s who’ve never had eye exams before. And it’s just those moments of enlightenment for the patients when they put on that pair of glasses or you have that conversation and that disease is diagnosed,” said Ryan Kloepper, OD, Canadian Vision Care.



### LOCAL OPTOMETRISTS SERVING LOCAL PEOPLE

Without local optometrists, diagnoses might often go without follow up. Training Malawian optometrists to practice in their home country will change that. “These optometrists being here creates something for people to come back to, so that they don’t have to rely on external aid all the time,” said Jogessar.

Student Stella Mwalwanta spent the morning conducting visual acuity tests. “It helps us to know the relevance of what we are learning in class. Because you can’t understand some of the theory until you get into clinic and actually practice it. Because some of the theory, you can’t understand it until you get into clinic and you practice.”

Stella’s classmate, Symon Chikumba, wanted to become an optometrist after his father suffered from low vision and could not get help. He worked hard to get into the program at Mzuzu University in anticipation of the day he can help other people’s fathers and mothers to see their world and their families more clearly. “We didn’t have quality eye care services. These organizations coming in means that people will be able to get those services. And it will help them a lot,” said Chikumba. “Vision being the best gift that God gave to mankind. If you don’t have it to the fullest, if you don’t see 6/6 you cannot do better things, you can’t achieve a lot of things in your life. With low vision, you can’t maximize your potential.”



### ANSWERING THE CHALLENGE

Fostering long-lasting sustainable eye care is the goal of Optometry Giving Sight and its partners. Here in Malawi, that goal is becoming reality. Lives are changing for the better. And that change is being driven by the people of Malawi themselves.

### FUNDED BY OGS—AND YOU

Much of the equipment at this outreach clinic and at Mzuzu University was funded by Optometry Giving Sight. Without this support, students here might never achieve their dreams. “You can train somebody to use equipment that they’ve never seen before. So the fact that we have access to all the equipment, even similar equipment that I would’ve had access to in Dublin, it makes a huge difference to their scope of practice, what they’re able to detect,” said Elaine O’Donoghue, Mzuzu University Optometry Instructor.

Getting to a higher level of preparedness took a giant leap forward on World Sight Day in 2012. That’s when the keys to a new Academic Vision Center were handed over to the university. A significant contribution toward construction of the building was donated to Optometry Giving Sight by Canadian optometrist Allan Jones and the charity Canadian Vision Care. Jones and his team of volunteer optometrists were in Malawi assisting at the outreach clinics. He says the work of Optometry Giving Sight in training local optometrists will pay long-term dividends.

“There are lots of groups that come and do eye care for one day. But that’s not really sustainable eye care. We proverbially will give them the fish. They’re teaching them how to fish. And that’s what’s going to be beneficial,” said Alan Jones.

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