



Vision Aid Overseas

TRADE AID
—UK—

Supporting the development of sustainable eye care services in Zambia

In 2014, the Trade Aid UK Foundation made a donation of £5,000 to Vision Aid Overseas to support an optometry training project to Zambia. A team of five optometrists from the UK travelled as Professional Volunteers to the Chainama College of Health Sciences in Lusaka to provide teaching support and practical refraction training to third-year Optometry Technologist students.



Background

Zambia, as with many African states, has a population suffering due to a poor healthcare system and weak economy. Ranked 164 out of 187 on the UN's Human Development Index¹, millions of Zambians are unable to afford even the most basic necessities. At 64% of the population, Zambia has one of the highest percentages in the world of people living below the poverty line². Eye diseases are among the top ten high morbidity diseases in the country and with over 120,000 blind people in Zambia and 3 million people suffering from uncorrected refractive error, one in six individuals need the help of an optometrist. Yet Zambia's 2006–2011 Eye Care Plan estimates that there is just one ophthalmologist per 1 million of the population. The severe lack of eye care facilities in Zambia is creating millions of preventable eye health issues.

Vision Aid Overseas has been working to transform access to eye care in Zambia since 1999. We have established eight Vision Centres across the country with plans to set up one more in 2014. Vision Centres are places where all members of the community can receive affordable eye examinations and, if needed, a high quality pair of spectacles. Vision Aid Overseas is a member of the National

¹ UN HDI. 2012. <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/ZMB.html>

² UNICEF. 2012. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/zambia_statistics.html

Prevention of Blindness Committee and plays a key role in the development of optometry services in Zambia. Working with Chainama College of Health Sciences since 2008, we were instrumental in developing their Diploma in Optometry; raising funds for the construction of the Optometry department and helping to develop the course curriculum. Vision Aid Overseas is committed to increasing the quality of teaching and provision of eye care services in Zambia.



The Project

A team of five optometrists travelled to Lusaka for two weeks from 10 – 25 January 2014. The team's objectives were:

1. To provide training to the optometry students at Chainama College of Health Sciences
2. To provide eye examinations to patients in Lusaka
3. To raise awareness of the Vision Centres at University Teaching Hospital (UTH) in Lusaka and Kabwe by explain to patients the services they provide and making referral for dispenses.



The team undertook practical, clinical training at Chainama College in the mornings and afternoon and alternated the students attending classroom lectures so as to maximise the number of volunteers able to provide clinical supervision. During the clinical training, patients were invited to have full eye examinations, undertaken by the students and supervised by the Vision Aid Overseas team, and were prescribed spectacles.



The classroom training focused on specialist optometric techniques such as paediatric refraction, cross-cylinders (for patients with complex requirements) and visual field screening. The subjects were all planned to enhance the standard modules provided on the course.

Feedback from trainees was excellent and they all felt that the impact of the training was highly beneficial and valued the input of made the Profession Volunteers. In addition, 260 patients were provided with high quality eye examinations during the two-week project and patients needing spectacles were referred to the Vision Centres at UTH or Kabwe. As soon as the training was completed the students started 3-month hospital placements. This would give them an immediate opportunity to utilise the skills taught by the Vision Aid Overseas team.



Project Impact

The impact of this project is to enhance the availability of eye care services in Zambia and to ensure that Optometry Technologists have the skills needed to provide high quality eye care to their patients. Before Vision Aid Overseas' programme there were not Zambian-trained optometrists in Zambia and the only optometric services available were provided in high priced private clinics. This meant that the vast majority of patients were unable to access eye care services. Vision Aid Overseas' project in Zambia has transformed access to eye care across the country. Through the provision of training to Optometry Technologists and the development of a nationwide network of Vision Centres, eye care is now available in the public sector to 84% of Zambians at Province level and 17% of Zambians in their local district. The provision of high quality training is absolutely critical to this intervention, and the project supported by Trade Aid UK has had a direct impact on the quality of training Vision Aid Overseas has provided.



Ultimately the benefits of Vision Aid Overseas' work will be on the quality of life and livelihoods of people from Zambia. Children will have the opportunity to go to school; mothers and fathers will be able to work and earn an income to support their families; and people will be able to escape disadvantage and poverty through the power of good sight.

Thank you to Trade Aid UK for your support.