

EYE on SIGHT

CCB EYECARE CARIBBEAN NEWSLETTER



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April 2012



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Our Vision for Haiti



The streets of Port-au-Prince were abuzz with activity as we navigated our way through the Haitian Capital. Two years after sections of the country were devastated by a cataclysmic earthquake there's evidence that life is slowly returning to normal, but on the other hand, there remains stark reminders of the event that will be forever etched in the history books.

A great portion of Haiti's already fragile infrastructure was destroyed when the 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck on the afternoon of Tuesday, January 12, 2010. Although the quake lasted only 10 to 20 seconds, buildings tumbled like stacks of cards, killing over 300,000 people and forever changing the lives of 1.5 million in and around the Capital City.



Haitians are trying to move on with their lives, but the road is a long and hard one.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYnti32-Tos>

One of the many organisations that have had a presence in Haiti over the years is the **Caribbean Council for the Blind-Eye Care Caribbean (CCB-Eye Care Caribbean)**. In partnership with the Société Haitienne d'Aide aux Aveugles (SHAA) and Sightsavers, eye health has been the point of focus. It was with this mandate that a team from the **CCB-Eye Care Caribbean** led by Chief Executive Officer, Arvel Grant, visited Haiti in February 2012.

"We have been doing work in Haiti since the mid-80's; back then we were doing work to prevent blindness in children and since then we have developed a very significant programme across Haiti in partnership with SHAA. SHAA has been a member of CCB since the late 1980's. Over that period, we have been involved in a number of programmes, including eye health programmes, programmes for educating children who are blind or visually impaired and programmes for the training of men and women whose sight cannot be restored".

With a population of over nine million, it is estimated that just over eighty thousand (80,000) persons are blind and of that number five thousand (5,000) are children.

"We also know that close to two hundred and forty thousand men, women and children have severe loss of sight which classifies them as low vision. This means that three hundred and forty to three hundred and fifty- thousand persons in Haiti are either blind or have severe low vision."

Glaucoma

Haiti has its fair share of problems, with Glaucoma being one of them.

Glaucoma – "the thief of sight" is

prevalent not only in Haiti but also in the wider Caribbean. With poverty being one of the leading causes of blindness, Haitians with Glaucoma risk loosing their sight.



"Glaucoma is very money dependent, because more than five-million Haitians live below the poverty line, it becomes very difficult for them to find the money required to purchase the eye drops needed to manage Glaucoma. As you know, the type of Glaucoma from which persons who are black and brown suffer is very dependent on the continuous use of medication for the rest of their lives. Because of the low level of income and the high levels of unemployment in Haiti, - the majority of Haitians with Glaucoma are likely to go blind from the condition because of their financial situation," he said.



Operating Theatre at St Marc Hospital

Our Partners

The **Caribbean Council for the Blind-Eye Care Caribbean** works closely with our partners Sightsavers, out of the United

Kingdom, and with support from the European Commission we have been developing eye health services at Health Centres and Out-Patient Departments. We are also in the process of putting operating facilities in place at some locations.

We assisted with the development of Eye Clinics and Operating Theatres in Cap Haitien and the development of the Eye Department and Operating facilities in Gonaives, and more recently we have committed a significant amount of resources for the development of the Eye Department at the Eliazar Germain Hospital, and we are also moving in the direction of developing facilities in the area of St Marc.

Adjustment to Blindness Services.

One of the big successes of our work in Haiti is the Adjustment to Blindness Services.



"We have been working with SHAA over the years to put in place Adjustment to Blindness Officers in each of the ten Provinces across Haiti. Although we are not reaching every person who is blind in Haiti, we have a significant impact in each of the Regions; the challenge to us now is to find resources so more and more of the 80,000 persons who are blind in Haiti can have access to those services.

On this trip to Haiti, one of the highlights was the opening of SHAA's new Headquarters. SHAA recognised **CCB-Eye Care Caribbean** for its years of service in the country.

"CCB and SHAA have been working together for many years; and over the last 25 years we have done a lot together.

Today is a very special day for SHAA, after the difficulties of the earthquake when SHAA lost its offices were very worried for all of you. Today we are very happy for all of you; we look forward to continuing to work in Haiti over many more years," said CEO – Arvel Grant.

With SHAA's new Headquarters now up and running, the work continues and CCB-Eye Care Caribbean looks forward to a bright future in Haiti.

Over the next two or three years, with the significant support from the European Commission and Sightsavers, along with the resources generated from within the Caribbean itself, we hope that we will be able to continue to make an impact in terms of preventing blindness among Haitians and restoring sight where possible. But, at the same time, we think that we will be able to continue the effort of teaching adults and children whose sight cannot be restored how to live with blindness and to make a contribution to the development of their families, the community and the country in which they live," he said.



Eliazar Germain Hospital



Entrance to the St Marc Hospital



From the Desk of the CEO - Arvel Grant

The quarter ending March 2012 saw some very positive results in relation to our efforts to achieve a Caribbean compliant with the objectives of Vision 2020: The Right to Sight.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

You will recall that during the 4th quarter of 2011, Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister, Baldwin Spencer and his Finance Minister, Harold Lovell paid a follow-up visit to the Fiennes Institute in Antigua, where they presented residents and staff with 38 pairs of prescription glasses, courtesy of **CCB-Eye Care Caribbean**.

During that visit, the Prime Minister and Finance Minister committed broad support to the work of **CCB-Eye Care Caribbean**.



(l-r) Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer, Arvel Grant and Finance Minister Harold Lovell

In the first quarter of 2012, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda kept its commitments through the following actions spearheaded the Minister of Finance.

- Directives to his Custom and Inland-Revenue Technicians to finalize the paper work which will provide relief from all import charges and other taxes re the work of **CCB-Eye Care Caribbean** in Antigua and across the Caribbean.
- Convening an Inter-Ministerial Meeting of Permanent Secretaries and Technocrats, to facilitate the transfer of a previously identified building to **CCB-Eye Care Caribbean** on the basis of a long lease.

- **CCB-Eye Care Caribbean** and the Government are working together to complete transfer of the premises to the Council within a matter of months, so that operations can begin from that location by the end of Summer 2012.

In addition to housing the Council's administrative and programme activities, the premises forms part of **CCB-Eye Care Caribbean's** National and Sub-Regional programme to ensure affordable, available and accessible eye health services to the poor and near poor in Antigua and Barbuda and the rest of the Eastern Caribbean.

JAMAICA



In Jamaica, during the 1st quarter of 2012, construction work began to establish a suite of theatres and related activities at the Mandeville Regional Hospital. The refurbishing activities will be completed by mid May.

In the quarter under review, our effort to launch a series of Vision 2020 related Research Projects gathered momentum with the following activities:

- The Universities of the West Indies and The Mico University College are working towards the implementation of a number of Post Graduate Studies, commencing in the summer of this year.
- Additionally, a protocol for the implementation of up to four national-level Glaucoma Surveys, has been completed, and a series of weekly conference calls will be launched on Tuesday 24th April, to refine the document and move towards the training of data collection personnel and the collection of data in August. (*cont'd page 5*)

HAITI and GUYANA



Haiti and Guyana swung into focus with finalization of lists of equipment for Vision Centres and Operating Theatres in both countries.

Dr Rameza McDonald, the region's newest Ophthalmologist has returned to the region to take



up her post as the Ophthalmologist at the Linden Regional Hospital in Guyana.

Dr. McDonald was trained at the Foundation Vision in Paraguay, on a scholarship from CCB-Eye Care Guyana.

Denise Godin- Making a difference

"Good job, good job, keep following the pencil.... good job, you're such a smart boy," said Denise as she waved a brightly coloured pencil before her young patient.

At an early age, six-year old Daniel was diagnosed with Nystagmus - a term used to describe fast, uncontrollable movements of the eye. He also has other complications.

He sat in Denise Godin's Office at the St Lucia Blind Welfare Association (SLBWA) filled with excitement as his eyes darted around the room. It was obvious that he was looking forward to this session.

One by one he identified objects in a book and played games while being closely observed by Denise who is the Eye Health Officer at the SLBWA.

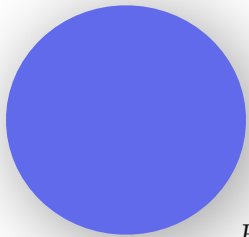


http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsKg_ashROc

"Here you go with a nice shade of sunglasses - thanks for stopping by," chimed Denise when the session ended. Before heading out the door, Daniel walked up to Denise and gave her a big hug.

This scene is all too familiar for Denise - a Neonatal Nurse from Canada, who has made St Lucia her home.

"I am a Neonatal Nurse which is as far from vision as anyone can get, but in a sense it is related. I moved to St Lucia with my husband twenty-two years ago."



I belonged to a Charity Group that did some support work here (in St Lucia), years ago. They were began an Eye-Screening Project called “Eyes for Life” and as a Volunteer, I was doing School Eye Screening in 1989 and I loved it.

Denise returned to Canada where she completed her Degree in Nursing and shortly afterwards returned to St Lucia. It was then that the SLBWA called.

“The SLBWA through the Ministry of Health had recognised that they needed a position for a Prevention of Blindness Officer who would deal with the sensitization of the public to blindness and low vision, to do school eye screenings, etcetera, so we met and I was hired. So I’ve been doing this for a long time”

Her job is her passion and she gives credit not only to the SLBWA but to the Caribbean Council for the Blind–Eye Care Caribbean.

“With all the connections facilitated by the CCB-Eye Care Caribbean, we have made tremendous progress. I met one of the Training Nurses (or Nurse Trainer) for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), who suggested that I return to Canada and take a one-month training workshop on low vision. So I got very good training in low vision shortly after I started working here, and it has continued from there.”

Low Vision is the loss of eyesight that makes everyday tasks difficult. A person with low vision may find it difficult to accomplish activities such as reading, shopping, watching television, driving a car and even recognizing faces.

“I deal mainly with children, it just happened that way because low vision covers a wide spectrum from congenital blindness to untreated cataracts. But adult clients move to

Eye Care St Lucia then they come back to see me once they have all of the refractive treatment, medical and surgical treatment. If they are living with low vision, they come to me so I can help them with Low Vision Aides.

A Project that has been close to Denise’s heart is the “Kids InSight” Project.

For the past ten years a group of Specialists has been visiting the island to attend to hundreds of children in need of various forms of pediatric ophthalmic interventions. Childhood blindness cannot be addressed in St Lucia due to the lack of Pediatric Eye Doctors and there are no Low Vision Specialists.

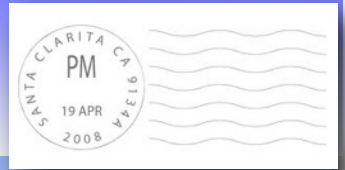
“I am a part of the Coordinating Team in St Lucia; the beauty of this Project is that it has become a national Eye Health Programme in St Lucia. Even though it is unofficial, Pediatricians refer to us, Eye Specialists refer to us and certainly Schools and Community Health Centres refer to us, because they now know that we have a solution for children who live with debilitating eye conditions. So I have become very busy with just that one Project”.

The Project is successful, but we have a lot of children who are living with eye conditions that may not be totally treatable or may not be totally curable.

Denise Godin has her plate full, driven by her passion for children and her overall commitment, her journey from Canada to St Lucia has been an interesting and fulfilling one that is still in progress.



Jamaica Society for the Blind's Mail Appeal



"Persons with low vision fly a little below the radar; we are not at either extreme of the spectrum; we are not fully sighted but we are not blind. It is a very challenging experience. I was told that there was no treatment,

no cure...I have lived the experience. I have problems reading. When you have low vision you are not necessarily understood. You look educated, but you cannot read; we have difficulty writing, signing our own names and filling out forms, recognizing faces and so on" - Collette Robinson, a Manager with the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUCZRj8KxoQn>

In 1954, a group of Jamaicans suffering from blindness and visually impairment made a petition to the Queen expressing concern about their living conditions on the island, which was still under British Rule. In May of that year, the Jamaica Society for the Blind (JSB) came into being with the assistance of the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind.

Before the JSB came into existence, the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind served in areas of welfare and the distribution of Glaucoma drops.

As the years progressed, additional services were introduced; there were activities related to blindness prevention; an adjustment to blindness programme came into being and library and information technology services were provided.

Today fifty-eight years later, the JSB wants to have an even greater impact on the community with the establishment of a Low Vision Centre.

To this end, on March 19th, 2012, another step was made in fulfilling that dream with the launch of a Mail Appeal with the hope of raising J\$50-million (US\$ 580,000).

The Governor-General of Jamaica, Sir Patrick Allen, who is also the Society's Patron, launched the appeal at Kings House - the Official Residence of the island's Head of State.



Sir Patrick lauded the JSB for this initiative especially as Jamaica marks 50 years of Independence.

"This bold fundraising initiative is part of the Society's vision to extend the services offered to persons who are blind and visually impaired by establishing this Low Vision Centre.

The (Jamaica) Society for the Blind is in no way afflicted by the lack of vision".

He stated that while the Society is embarking on what seems to be a mammoth task, it is one that is by no means insurmountable.

"When completed, this Project will have far reaching impact on the more than one hundred and four thousand persons who are blind or visual impaired. The Mail Appeal, which I launch today, is your opportunity to contribute to this worthwhile venture. I encourage all Jamaicans, organisations and individuals to respond in a favourable manner. As Patron of the JSB, this Project enjoys my fullest support and it is with this in mind that I launch the Mail Appeal and I encourage each Jamaican to support this successful venture."

Governor-General's Presentation visit

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWN1MdaEKhw>

"The Jamaica Chamber of Commerce supports the JSB's Annual Appeal and this particular appeal to launch the thrust towards a Low Vision Centre. We strongly urge our membership and others within the Private Sector Community to support the work of this outstanding organisation" - Milton Samuda -President of the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce-

Presently, Low Vision Services are virtually non-existent in Jamaica.

"It is with this need that the JSB is motivated to seek funds for the project to ensure that Low Vision Services are available, affordable and accessible for those who need it. The JSB has remained committed to its mandate to provide blindness prevention, restore sight and provide services for those whose sight cannot be restored. Most of the persons in Jamaica with vision loss need assistance," said Mary Mitchell Coombs, Chairperson of the JSB.



The Low Vision Centre will benefit persons such as Collette Robinson, who was diagnosed with Macular Degeneration twenty-four years

ago. Macular Degeneration is a condition in which the cells of the macula, which is the central portion of the retina, become damaged and stop functioning. The retina is a thin layer of light-sensitive tissue that stretches across the back of the eye.

Mrs. Robinson who is the Manager of Social Prevention and Gender Unit with the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) shared her story at the function to launch the Mail Appeal.

"Persons with low vision fly a little below the radar; we are not at either extreme of the spectrum; we are not fully sighted but we are not blind. I have problems reading. When you have low vision you are not necessarily understood. You look educated, but you cannot read. I want to commend JSB for this move that they are making," she said.

According to the Minister of Health in Jamaica, the number of Jamaicans with low vision is expected to grow in keeping with the anticipated increase of the aging population.

The Low Vision Centre will be on the compound of the Jamaica Society for the Blind located on Old Hope Road in Kingston.

You can assist, just by contributing to this worthwhile venture, because it is only with your help that the Jamaica Society for the Blind will be able to help those faced with visual challenges live useful and productive lives.

Donations can be made at any Branch of the National Commercial Bank to JSB's Account Number 304082623.

**Donate
Today!**

**Support the Jamaica
Society for the Blind's
Mail Appeal !**

**Jamaica Society For the Blind
ph:876-927-6757 or 876-927-6759**

Email :jsb@cwjamaica.com

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Sightsavers



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Societe Hatienne d'Aide aux Aveugles (S.H.A.A.)



St Lucia Blind Welfare Association



Jamaica Society for the Blind



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Please donate to CCB Eye Care Caribbean.



Donations may be made via our website
<http://www.eyecarecaribbean.com/act-now/make-a-donation>

Our Mission.....

Our Purpose.....

Our Goal.....

Our purpose is preventing blindness and visual impairment while restoring sight and creating opportunities for persons whose sight cannot be restored.

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