



## Eyesight is “priceless” Bangladesh patient embraces return to independence

Horibala, from the village of Godashimla, Bangladesh, likes to keep busy. The 65-year-old finds joy and motivation in her favourite pastimes: sewing and travel.

But for years, she was unable to enjoy these activities as her eyes clouded over with cataracts.

“I couldn’t see at all,” she recalls. “Even when I closed one eye to see anything, it was blurry. I felt helpless.”

As her eyesight faded, she found herself depending on others for almost everything. Simple tasks like washing clothes, making a meal or even lighting the cooking stove were impossible.

Things turned around for Horibala after a visit from an optometrist from the Madarganj Vision Centre, run by our partners at Symbiosis Bangladesh, who was doing a door-to-door survey. The optometrist referred Horibala to our partner institute, the Dr. K. Zaman BNSB Eye Hospital in the nearby city of Mymensingh, for bilateral cataract surgery.

Thanks to the generous support of donors like you, her sight was finally restored.

The medication she received at her follow-up appointments relieved the discomfort of watery eyes after surgery. Soon, she regained her ability to see.

“Now, I can do everything. There’s a big difference between being able to see and not seeing at all,” she says. “For the past year, I’ve been able to work, sew and even travel. My life feels normal again.”

Now overflowing with gratitude for her regained sight, Horibala acts as an advocate in her community, encouraging people to take care of their eyes.

“I tell everyone: if you have an eye problem, don’t wait. Go to this hospital and get treated immediately. Being able to see again is priceless!”

**Thank you for helping to bring eye health care to those who need it most!**



Emmanuel and the Vivekananda Netralaya team climb the trail to Bhes Gaon in Uttarakhand, India.



Choti, who received eyeglasses through our outreach program, greets the team in Bhes Gaon.

### Notes from the field

## Reaching the heights in the Himalayan foothills

My recent visit to Uttarakhand, India, was an eye-opening experience, showcasing the profound impact of our projects. In January, I joined a team from our partner institute, the Vivekananda Netralaya Super Specialty Charitable Eye Hospital, during a community outreach exercise in the rugged terrain of Rudraprayag, where many villages are accessible only via steep, challenging footpaths. Since 2021, our team has tirelessly brought eye care to the doorsteps of those in the area. Whether braving freezing winters, scorching summers, relentless rains or storms, their commitment has never wavered.

What touched me most was witnessing elderly men and women blessing our community health volunteers with heartfelt wishes for good health and long life. It's moments like these that remind us of the true essence of service – not just

By Emmanuel Benia Tanti,  
Program Manager



Emmanuel joined our team in India in 2021. As a Program Manager, he oversees programs in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, often joining teams in the field to check in with partners and monitor projects. He has a Master of Social Work and has been working in the development sector for 15 years. He lives in Shillong, Meghalaya with his wife and two sons.

reaching but becoming a part of the community. Mountains may test our resolve, but they also teach us resilience and purpose. My sincere appreciation to the entire team for their steadfast dedication to transforming lives in these challenging conditions.



Christian Labonte (back row, fifth from the right) was inspired to raise money for Operation Eyesight after volunteering with us in the summer of 2024. In December, he presented Robyn Wilson, our Manager of Fund Development (on Christian's right), with a cheque for \$5,018.

## High school finance club students raise more than \$5,000

Airdrie, AB high school student Christian Labonte doesn't do things by half measures. So, when he decided to raise funds for Operation Eyesight, he set an ambitious goal of raising thousands, and enlisted the help of his school finance club to help him reach it.

Christian launched his peer-to-peer fundraiser, called "Invest for Sight," in October 2024. By the time it ended in December, he had engaged 55 students from finance clubs across North America. Participants learned how to invest in the stock market while raising money for Operation Eyesight and collecting prizes Christian had gathered from corporate sponsors.

At the cheque presentation event at his school, Christian was joined by members of his finance club as he shared results and thanked donors,

sponsors and participants. School Principal Scott Bloxham, Airdrie Mayor Peter Brown, City Councillor Tina Petrow and Christian's family were also on hand to help him celebrate.

Christian says that managing a fundraiser helped him learn skills and experience he can use in university and beyond.

"Fundraising is a good opportunity for students to experience leadership at their young age, and it helps in giving initiative to their passion," he says. "You develop skills when you work on a project, develop time management."

**Like Christian, you can raise money to mark an occasion, as part of a corporate initiative or simply because you're enthusiastic about our cause. [operationeyesight.com/fundraise](https://operationeyesight.com/fundraise)**



Celebrants pose in front of the Kafue Gorge Eye Clinic during its inauguration on December 6, 2024.

## New eye clinic brings accessible care to more than 16,000 people in Zambia

Eye health care is more accessible than ever for people in Zambia's Chikankata District, thanks to the new eye clinic at the Kafue Gorge Hospital.

The clinic was inaugurated in December with music, dance and speeches. We supported the construction of the building and provided ophthalmic equipment and furnishings, all made possible by the generosity of donors like you.

Zambia Country Director Phiri Kennedy says, "This is a proud moment for Operation Eyesight. We will continue to support the government through this and many other interventions, to take services closer to the people and prevent avoidable vision loss. We urge the community in Kafue Gorge to fully utilize this service to prevent people from losing sight unnecessarily."

The clinic now offers a variety of services, from comprehensive eye exams to surgical services and referrals. The OneSight EssilorLuxottica

Foundation, our longstanding partner, is supporting the project by equipping the optical shop to dispense eyeglasses.

Beyond the 16,000 people directly served by the clinic, there are another 15 health centres that refer patients to Kafue Gorge Hospital, meaning our investment in this new eye clinic will benefit thousands more people – and their families – in the surrounding districts.

There are many ways to help us reach even more people with life-changing eye health care.

- Become a monthly donor
- Leave a gift in your will
- Gift stocks and annuities

Learn more at

[operationeyesight.com/waystogive](https://operationeyesight.com/waystogive)

"I am grateful for the opportunity to join this incredible global team, and look forward to working closely with our supporters in Canada and around the world."

– Kris Kelm, our new Global Director of International Programs



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## Introducing Kris Kelm, Global Director of International Programs

In November 2024, Kris Kelm joined us as our new Global Director of International Programs. Based in Ottawa, Kris brings with him years of experience and connections in the eye health and development sectors, which will serve him well as he leads our program teams, builds new partnerships, and oversees our government and stakeholder relations.

Like many in the development sector, Kris didn't set out to work in philanthropy – he just sort of fell into it. He had been working at EssilorLuxottica, a producer of ophthalmic lenses and eyeglasses, when a chance meeting with the director of the company's new philanthropic arm got him involved in charitable efforts. After a few years of running pilot projects, he found himself accepting a new position within the OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation Canada.

"It just resonated with me, to have that level of impact on improving somebody's life by being able to provide better vision," he says.

Now, he is working to prevent blindness and restore sight across the globe.

Since joining Operation Eyesight, he's helped lead us through our involvement in the passage of Bill C-284 here in Canada, a project he'd already been engaged with in his previous role. The Bill will enact the establishment of a national strategy for eye care.

Kris points out that given our 60-year history of bringing eye care to remote, rural and underserved communities, we can speak credibly on how we might approach things here at home.

On a recent trip to see some of our projects in Ghana and Zambia, Kris reflected on the insights that Canadian policymakers can take from some of our countries of work.

"Canada's behind, in a sense, in our recognition of vision health as a priority," he says, "I think we can learn as a country from the other nations that have come before us in prioritizing vision care nationally."

Learn more about  
Bill C-284

