



News from the Lions' State Sight Project -

Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation

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573/443-1471

Amblyopia Screening-Preserving The Sight Of Our Children

The response to the Amblyopia Screening Program has been remarkable. In May 1998, MLERF began offering the program statewide. Requests for screens have been so overwhelming that the Foundation has begun calling on Lions to assist at the screens.

Notices are sent to the local Lions Club notifying them of a scheduled screen in their community and asking for volunteer help. Interested Lions are then assigned simple duties to help assist the technician. In order to fulfill all of the requests coming in, the Foundation needs not only volunteer support, but also additional funding for this program. The cost for an amblyopia screen is approximately \$10 per child; this covers the cost of the film, equipment, staffing, evaluations and mailing correspondence.

The Foundation wants to screen as many young children as possible for amblyopia, which is difficult to detect unless an eye care specialist tests a child specifically for it. Poor vision from undetected amblyopia is often the root of an affected child's scholastic and behavioral problems. Frequently, the child will not show signs of vision problems until they reach school age, when it is often too late to correct the disorder.

One child, 5-year-old Kevin Pape, did not show any signs of vision trouble. After recent testing through the amblyopia screening program, his results showed possible symptoms of the disease. A visit with an eye doctor revealed that he had astigmatism and Kevin was fitted with prescription glasses. Glenda Pape, Kevin's mother, expressed surprise at her son's diagnosis, "I didn't think Kevin had any problem and I didn't notice anything unusual." Since Glenda was unaware that her son had any vision trouble, she felt she had no reason to have his eyes checked by an eye doctor. It may have been years before his astigmatism was detected and treated.

The amblyopia screening program may have saved Kevin from the lifetime of vision trouble that his family members have suffered. His grandparents have worn glasses throughout their lives and his uncle has amblyopia. Unfortunately, his uncle's vision problem was not discovered until he started having trouble in school. "It (Kevin's diagnosis) didn't scare me because we are a family that wears glasses, and if he needed glasses he'd just have to wear them," stated Glenda. Because the astigmatism was detected so early, Kevin's glasses may come off next month, just after his 6th birthday. "The doctor said if all goes well at the next checkup, he won't have to wear them anymore."

The Amblyopia Screening Program is an effective tool in the Foundation's mission of sight preservation. The need and demand for this program is prevalent, but funding is needed to allow this program to reach its full potential and help the young children of Missouri. To learn more about this program you may call the Foundation at (573) 443-1471.



Kevin Pape, 5-years-old, shows off his new glasses while working on the computer.

Recipient Thanks Lions For Eye Care Assistance

As a widow, Mrs. Weckherlin lives on her late husband's pension. She suffers from diabetic retinopathy. She can't afford health insurance, or the out of pocket expenses for treating her diabetes. Mrs. Weckherlin is not alone in her inability to pay for her medical care; there are hundreds of needy people. Fortunately for Mrs. Weckherlin and others, MLERF's Eye Care Assistance program is here to help.

Mrs. Weckherlin was denied or ineligible for government aid. In 1997, Mrs. Weckherlin's daughter Sandy heard about our eye care assistance program through a Lions Club member she works with named Fred Fairman. Mrs. Weckherlin applied for our program and was accepted. Sandy says she and her family will be forever grateful to the Lions of Missouri for the Eye Care Assistance Program. "If it wasn't for companies like yours I don't know what I'd do for her eyes," stated Sandy, "She couldn't afford eye care otherwise. The diabetes has really done a number on her eyes. She has glaucoma, cataracts, and diabetes."

The Eye Care Assistance Program pays for diagnostic testing and minor eye care for people who need ongoing treatment like Mrs. Weckherlin. Surgical expenses can be covered through this pro-

gram and with the help of Knights Templar. Gratis corneal tissue is also provided. Routine eye exams and eyeglasses are not covered under this program, since most clubs handle this on a local level. The Eye Care Assistance Program works with participating facilities throughout Missouri to provide care as close to a patient's home as possible. Providing care close to home is important to patients not only for convenience, like Mrs. Weckherlin for example, who must get checkups every 3 months, but to also to minimize the patients' travel costs.

The Eye Care Assistance Program fills a large gap in the need for affordable health care. Currently, there are 24 active patients in the Eye Care Assistance Program. The average cost per patient is \$800 a year. There are many more people throughout the state that need help through the Eye Care Assistance Program. If you know of someone who needs assistance with ongoing eye treatment, or if you would like to sponsor a patient in your district, please call us at (573) 443-1471. Mrs. Weckerhlin's daughter Sandy spoke for all the Eye Care Assistance patients when she stated, "I really don't know what we would do without your help."