



- News from the Lions' State Sight Project -

# Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation

404 Portland Street Columbia, MO 65201 www.mlerrf.org

573/443-1471

## THE SEARCH IS ON...

### Volunteers needed to assist in vision screening for children

The Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation is expanding its vision screening program in order to screen more children for symptoms of Amblyopia (lazy eye).

Amblyopia is poor vision in an eye that does not develop normal sight during early childhood and the other eye becomes the stronger or more dominant eye. Amblyopia can be treated successfully if detected early in life, usually before the age of five. If left untreated, amblyopia can lead to monocular blindness. With this in mind, MLERF targets day cares and preschools as the main location for their vision screens.

MLERF is searching for interested individuals, both Lions and non-Lions, to assist MLERF in the screening program. MLERF is looking for volunteers who would like to be involved in conducting the vision screens within their Lions Club Zones. These volunteers will have the title of Zone Area Project Manager (ZAPM). All ZAPM's will attend a hands-on training



Are his eyes precious or what? Be a ZAPM volunteer and he gets to be in the amblyopia screen.

course to learn how to conduct a screen. While the ZAPMs will schedule and conduct the actual screens, the local Lions Club will be asked to provide one or two members to assist at the screen.

"We're encouraging the buddy system with the screens," explained Lion Wendy Bahr, Assistant Director at MLERF, "If we have two ZAPMs in each zone, they can work together at the screens or alternate responsibilities."

***"MLERF and the Missouri Lions are providing a wonderful service to the children in our own hometowns, and at the same time, inspiring the community and generating interest in the local Lions Clubs."***

***Wendy Bahr  
Assistant Director, MLERF***

The duties of a ZAPM include contacting the preschools and day cares within their zone, to schedule a screen and send information explaining the process and parental consent forms. The ZAPM will then conduct the vision screen and send the photographs on to MLERF to be analyzed.

Some of the requirements to be a ZAPM are as follows: Good vision, able to see well in darkened areas; Steady hands while holding 6 1/2 lb. camera at waist level while seated in a low chair; Access to phone and email or fax, must be available to work six to eight weeks out of the year, in two week intervals. Screens are held weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. (Approximately 16 hours of actual amblyopia screen time within a two-week period, three to four times per

year.); and finally, must enjoy working with large groups of children.

"While the requirements may sound overwhelming, they're really not," stated Lion Bahr. "We've stated the extremes in order to attract those individuals who are really interested and committed to the project. If there are two ZAPMs in each zone, they can share the duties and we have small luggage carriers to transport the camera and equipment with. The work involved is minimal when you only have to do it in two week intervals, three or four times per year."

ZAPMs will be fully trained on how to set up and conduct the screens. Upon completion of the training course, then they may decide whether or not the ZAPM position is right for them.

Lion Bahr stated that the Amblyopia Screening program is an opportunity for the Foundation to provide another service within the Lions' communities. "MLERF and the Missouri Lions are providing a wonderful service to the children in our own hometowns, and at the same time, inspiring the community and generating interest in the local Lions Clubs," stated Lion Bahr, "as a result, this program may not only save a child's sight but inspire the parents to become Lions members as well."

Anyone interested or knowing of someone who may be interested in volunteering as a ZAPM, should contact their District Sight Chairman or call the Foundation at (573)443-1471 to get a volunteer application form. Completed forms can be mailed to the District Sight Chairman or to the Foundation at: Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation, ZAPM Volunteer, 404 Portland Street, Columbia, Missouri 65201.

# The Impact of a Simple Screen and How it has Affected One Child's Life

*The following interview with Krissy Hewett, mother of 4-year-old Elijah King, an Amblyopia Screening program recipient, details the importance of amblyopia screenings for all young children. MLERF is relying on the support of the Missouri Lions to ensure that success stories like Krissy and Elijah's continue. Here is how MLERF's Amblyopia Screening program has made a difference for one little boy.*

### **Krissy, please share your experience with your son Elijah receiving an amblyopia screening from MLERF?**

I received a notice in my parent file, about the amblyopia screening program, and that the Foundation would be coming to the school to do the screenings. I signed the permission card and thought, 'Well, it can't hurt.' I was not concerned about whether Elijah might need glasses or not.

A couple of weeks later I got a notice in the mail from the Foundation suggesting I take Elijah to his physician to have his eyes checked. Well, that bothered me a little bit. As a parent you start thinking, 'Oh no, what is wrong with my child?' I did not even know what amblyopia was.

Elijah's doctor referred us to a specialist at Children's Hospital and I was very distraught; I still did not know what amblyopia was. So, I went to the library and I found out it was not bad at all, it just meant his eyes were not developing properly. But, I really was shocked when I found out he had astigmatism in both eyes. I had no idea. The specialist asked me how I found out about Elijah's vision problem so I told him about the Foundation's amblyopia screening program, and he said "That is excellent, it is really wonderful that they are doing screenings at the preschools."

The doctor prescribed eyeglasses for Elijah that he must wear all the time.

### **What changes could you detect in Elijah after he began to wear eyeglasses?**

Well, he really likes wearing his

eyeglasses. He does not sit as close to the television screen as he used to. I noticed that whenever he does not have his glasses on, he backs his head up to focus on the person's face. I was shocked at the example the doctor gave me of how Elijah sees with astigmatism, so I cannot imagine what it was like for him before he started wearing the eyeglasses.

### **What would you tell other parents about the program?**

I would definitely recommend it to other parents. I worked in special education, in the school district, for two years. Many of the kids on my special ed caseload really did not belong in special education. We would have their eyes checked and they would have sight problems. But the kids did not know that they were not seeing right. And that really made me sad.

### **What do you think of the Amblyopia Screening program?**

I think it is a great program to keep going. By wearing glasses at an early age, it will help to possibly correct Elijah's astigmatism a little bit. When Elijah's eyes stop growing, at age 10 or 12, they might be able to do a corrective surgery that would correct the astigmatism to the point that he could wear contacts. The specialist said this would not be possible if the astigmatism had been discovered later in Elijah's life.

I'm very grateful to the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation for helping us and bringing this program to our attention. And I think that Elijah will greatly benefit from having this sight problem detected early, as he gets older.

*Elijah's story shows how vital the Amblyopia Screenings are to save the sight of young children. Elijah's astigmatism probably would not have been discovered so early without MLERF's screening. Clearly, the partnership between the Missouri Lions and the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation must continue so that improved vision is possible for all Missouri children.*



Elijah King and his mother Krissy Hewett, are all smiles after Elijah received help through the Foundation's Amblyopia Screening Program.

## LCIF Awards \$200,000 Grant to Amblyopia Program

The Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation was awarded a \$200,000 grant for the Amblyopia Screening program, from the Lions Clubs International Foundation. The Amblyopia Screening program detects symptoms of amblyopia or 'lazy eye' in preschool aged children. The program is offered as a free service to children. The screenings are usually conducted in daycare centers and preschools.

The LCIF grant will enable MLERF to expand the program, substantially increasing the numbers of children screened. During the last fiscal year, over 4,000 children were screened for amblyopia. MLERF's goal for the new fiscal year is to screen 28,000 children. The grant will also enable MLERF to conduct clinical research studies to compare different methods of amblyopia screening.

The first installment of the grant was presented to the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation's Board of Directors at their quarterly meeting on September 11th, 1999.