

## **World Council of Optometry (WCO) “Advocacy for Eye Health” Program Positively Impacts “Vision for the Future” Pediatric Outreach Program**

The WCO “Advocacy for Eye Health” program, presented by the WCO and the Brien Holden Vision Institute (BHVI) Academy, aims to develop individual optometrists who can return to their world regions and help move optometry forward by building the WCO’s advocacy strategy and enabling the course for future advocates. The program was a combination of online training followed by an in-person training held following the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress of Optometry in Hyderabad, India in September 2017.

“Vision for the Future” is a pediatric outreach program started at the Indiana University School of Optometry (Bloomington, Indiana, USA) in 2015. The program’s goal is to work on a state, national and international level to improve the quality of pediatric vision care. In Indiana the program is targeting children enrolled in Head Start programs, and has grown at a much faster rate than expected. Having started in a single county in Indiana, the Vision for the Future program has now expanded to five counties over the past three years, with more Indiana counties waiting to join the program.

WCO member, Don Lyon, O.D., M.S., Director of Residencies, Indiana University School of Optometry explained, “With this rapid growth of the Vision for the Future program in Indiana, I knew I needed additional education on how to utilize the information we would receive to affect change in how pediatric vision care is perceived and implemented in this population. For example, in Indiana all children enrolled in Head Start are mandated to receive a comprehensive dental examination but are only required to have a distance visual acuity screening performed.” The goal of Vision for the Future, (which was created through the WCO’s Advocacy for Eye Health Program) is “To ensure that all children enrolled in a Head Start program in Indiana are provided with a comprehensive eye examination at ages 3 and 5.”

Because of the potential to impact the Head Start population through the Vision for the Future program, Dr. Lyon applied, and was accepted, into the WCO Advocacy for Eye Health 2017 program. “The weekly educational modules, which were a mixture of online presentations, and video conferences, were expertly presented,” he said. “Program assignments focused on important details of each module, and feedback on the assignments given to participants was designed to help expand their thinking. Also, the modules built upon each other to guide the participants on how to think through design and implementation of an advocacy program for their topic.”

The program culminated in a face to face two-day meeting with participants and educators following the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress of Optometry in Hyderabad, India. This meeting gave participants additional information and knowledge each would need to complete the Capstone Project which was the last part of the educational program. Dr. Lyon continued, “The level of knowledge and experience the presenters shared was outstanding. The presenters communicated their years of experience and vast knowledge in such a manner that someone new to advocacy could easily understand. The educators also showed they cared about each project and participant. They wanted us to succeed, to achieve our goals.”

Dr. Lyon went on to say that the WCO Advocacy for Eye Health program helped him see the big picture and understand the steps it takes to make an impact. “I know the impact will not occur overnight, he said. “I realize there are barriers that must be overcome, and education of shareholders that must occur as we move through the process.” With the education this course provided, Dr. Lyon said he knows he will be able to navigate the process to achieve Vision for the Future’s program goals.

Currently the Vision for the Future program is in the screening and educational stages. Dr. Lyon is in the process of gathering data, educating optometrists, parents, and educators on the importance of pediatric vision care in the Head Start population in Indiana.

“We are creating shareholders who can help us as we move through the advocacy program. Most importantly, we have a timeline, and a plan of action, which would not be possible without the WCO Advocacy for Eye Health program. My advice is if you have an idea, or potential of an idea, enroll and complete the WCO’s Advocacy for Eye Health program. Put the work in and it will help you achieve your goals. Plus, you will get to work with amazing individuals.”



Don Lyon, O.D., M.S.  
Director of Residencies, Indiana University School of Optometry

For more information about the Vision for the Future program, contact:  
Dr. Don Lyon, [dwlyon@indiana.edu](mailto:dwlyon@indiana.edu)



Sandra Block, O.D., M.Ed., MPH, FAAO, FCOVD  
Professor, Illinois College of Optometry

For more information about the WCO's Advocacy for Eye Health program, contact:  
Dr. Sandra Block, WCO Public Health Committee Chair, [sblock@ico.edu](mailto:sblock@ico.edu).

Vision for the Future Program in action at the Head Start Center in Indianapolis, Indiana (used with permission).



#### **About the Head Start Program**

Head Start promotes school readiness of children under 5 from low-income families through education, health, social and other services. Since 1965, Head Start has represented a national commitment to America's most vulnerable children and has opened a window of opportunity for 27 million people who have gone on to achieve success in all walks of life.. For more information, [click here](#).