

Public Health – Case Study



Name: Ermias Hernair
Sex: Male
Age (in 2018): 24
Location: Eritrea
Region: Africa
Program: Optometry Development

Ermias is an optometric technician who recently graduated from the School of Optometry at Asmara College of Health Sciences in Eritrea. He is one of the first optometric technician's to qualify in Eritrea, trained locally without having to move overseas to access optometry training.

Many countries in the developing world do not have optometry as an established profession, which unfortunately leaves an ever-enlarging gap in provision of eye care services. Brien Holden Vision Institute works with local partners, government and universities to build optometry from the ground up, investing funding from supporters like Optometry Giving Sight, to establish sustainable solutions in the form of optometry schools and vision centres.

This is the case in Eritrea. Funding support from Optometry Giving Sight contributed to establishing an academic vision centre, which serves the community in two ways. Firstly, to provide increased access to local eye care services and secondly offering a supervised clinical environment for the optometry students to gain valuable practical experience. Ermias is currently serving his practical internship at one of the vision centres supported by Brien Holden Vision Institute in Asmara.

"I was initially attracted to the program at the School of Optometry because it was something new and exciting. I wanted to work in health care, so it seemed like a good career choice," he explained with a cheeky smile. "However, as soon as I began the course, I realized what an important profession

optometry is. Literally, my own eyes opened to the great need in my country. I don't think I had considered how important sight is to everyday life. Now with my training I get to help people and help change their lives, which is a great experience for me," he said.

"My favourite part of my day is when a patient puts on a pair of spectacles and sees the world clearly for the first time in years or ever. It's a crazy thought when you see it in this way. This makes me so very happy," he said. "When they break out into that disbelieving smile, it makes my heart smile with them," said the young man.

However, Ermias is not content to remain an optometric technician. He has big plans for his future and having an impact in his country. "I want to upgrade myself and work hard to become an optometrist," he explained. "If the degree program becomes available to me, I will definitely pursue it," he said. "Becoming an optometric technician is just the first step in my optometric career. I am looking forward to bigger and better things. I want to help all the people in my country to see clearly," he said.