



BCVI

Annual Report 2017

Belize Council for the Visually Impaired



The Vision

The Belize Council for the Visually Impaired's vision is of a Belize where no one is needlessly blind and those who are irrevocably blind are integrated as equal members in all aspects of society.

The Mission

The Belize Council for the Visually Impaired is a non-profit organisation committed, through a comprehensive programme, to prevent and cure blindness, restore sight and to rehabilitate and educate people who are blind to enable them to use their talents and abilities to live independent lives.

Headquarters:

National Eye Clinic
Lions Building
Princess Margaret Drive
Belize City

Accountant:

Felix Reyes
Chartered Accountant
5760 Meighan Avenue
Belize City

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Belize Bank Ltd
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Belize City

For tax deductions US donations
can be sent to:

BCVI Foundation

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Impaired is a Company Limited by
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BCVI's focus is on improving the quality of life for Belizeans experiencing eye problems, while remaining sensitive to the specific needs of children, men and women in each stage of life.



Rehabilitation Field Officer (RFO) Liza Williams Zelaya provides math lessons for a child in school, using a cubarithm slate and cubes.



Ophthalmologist Dr Zoraida Diaz and OCT Technician Lysette Pren assist a patient who is undergoing an OCT exam.

Message from the Executive President

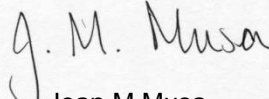
Reaching out and Touching lives

In our work at BCVI it takes many people, working as a team, to help accomplish our goals of preventing blindness and assisting people who are blind to be able to live independently. Each of our staff, Board Members and volunteers contribute to our successes whether it is providing a pair of glasses for a schoolchild, a Braille book or laptop for a child who is blind many activities have to be completed to reach our end goal. You may be keeping the books, cleaning the floor or assisting with a surgery our work couldn't happen without you.



However I should like to single out a very special man whose contribution cannot be measured and it is with a heavy heart that I mention the passing of our Honorary President and Founder, William “Chi Chi” Fonseca. Mr. Fonseca’s vision and positive spirit helped develop a national comprehensive eye care programme that aims to help all Belizeans. His experience as a teacher who served in schools throughout Belize and on finally becoming the Chief Education Officer made him realise the importance of education. On losing his sight he retired from government service but not from the teaching profession. Mr. Fonseca used all his life experience to sow the seeds of an organization that would touch the lives of visually impaired Belizeans. He was a mentor to me as I embarked on a new career and his caring direction has stayed with me over the years in developing an organisation which we both have been proud to serve. His greatest love was passing on his experience by teaching Braille and other educational topics to young students who have gone on to become independent, upstanding citizens.

Mr. Fonseca, who regularly attended BCVI’s Annual General Meetings and Summer Camps, will be greatly missed not only by our team, but also by our clients whose lives he impacted tremendously.


Joan M Musa
Executive President

Message from the Executive Director

In reflecting over the past year it is fulfilling to see how BCVI has continued to grow and develop. We continue to strengthen the skills of our staff to be able to improve the lives of people in need of eye care.

In 2017 our Primary Eye Care Clinics provided services for more than 13,000 people across the country while the Secondary Eye Care clinic received more than 5,000 patients. For the first time in three years, we were able to increase the number of sight-restoring cataract surgeries to more than 250!

Last year we celebrated 20 Years of BCVI's Annual Summer Camp. The two-week event continues to be a highlight of the Rehabilitation and Education Programme on which BCVI was founded. Our three Rehabilitation Field Officers (RFOs) provided community based support to 49 children preparing for or already registered in school as well as 38 clients who were newly diagnosed as blind or low vision. We were happy to welcome a retired teacher to our team which will strengthen our capacity for support in the education programme.

Our dedicated team is rewarded by the smiles on the faces of those who are able to see after a cataract surgery or to witness a child's joy when using his/her laptop for the first time. With your support, BCVI continues to work toward the goal of eradicating needless blindness and improving the lives of those who are irreversibly blind.

Thank you all for your kindness and commitment to helping the people we serve!



Carla Ayres Musa
Executive Director

Organisational & Staff Development

BCVI was established in 1981 and has since gradually developed a truly comprehensive eye service: adding and improving services as the available resources allowed. We have successfully developed a range of services which support the needs of blind and visually impaired people whilst also actively working to prevent eye problems which can lead to blindness.

In 2017 BCVI:

- ◆ With guidance from Shaun Finnetty and his team at Belicana Consulting and Development Limited (BCDL), assessed the eye care programme to strengthen what has become our primary source of income. Activities included meetings with Senior Managers and interviews with team members in the Primary and Secondary Eye Care Programmes.
- ◆ BCDL also facilitated a Strategic Thinking Session for all staff members and a few members of the Executive Board. The results included strengthening of BCVI's core values, identification of key issues helping and hindering the organization's development and the conclusion on the way forward for BCVI.
- ◆ As a result of the work with BCDL an Action Plan 2017—2018 was produced and is being implemented along with the National Eye Health Strategic Framework.
- ◆ Executive President (EP) Joan Musa and Executive Director (ED) Carla Ayres Musa met with the CEO and DHS in the Ministry of Health. The meeting was held to update the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two entities which has since been signed. It was agreed that the MOH would continue to support the National Eye Health Programme by increasing support for human resources within BCVI.
- ◆ Through the LINKS programme established with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine Pippa Williams and Chloe Cornes provided a week long training in grading for Diabetic Retinopathy for our three screeners/graders. Anna Salam, Randy Williams and Magali Sabido successfully completed the final exam for the DR Imaging Grading Course through the UK's NHS. Further support from LINKS and the Queen Elizabeth Jubilee Trust Fund will be provided for 2018 to enhance their skills.
- ◆ Finance Officer Carmencita Cruz attended an Intermediate Excel Training Course in February. A large number of BCVI's reports are submitted using Excel. Mrs. Cruz will now be able to provide additional individualized training for team members.
- ◆ Dr. Matt Nutaitis, Glaucoma specialist from Storm Eye Institute, provided a half day training session for BCVI's Eye Care team and administrative members. The lecture which provided information on the eye disease, also demonstrated surgical techniques in Glaucoma treatment.



BCVI's Strategic Planning Session

- ♦ In April ED Carla Ayres Musa attended the Digital Marketing Session held by IdeaLab Studios. BCVI has long realized the power of social media and this session helped link the importance of presence online via websites and blogs to improve patient education and to hopefully increase visits from Optometrists and Ophthalmologists as well.
- ♦ Dr. Baxter McLendon conducted a training session along with Programme Director Lyn Garcia for BCVIs Optometrists and Secondary Eye Care Team. The purpose of the meeting was to standardize changes to the referral system regarding the three main causes of blindness. Cataract, Diabetic Retinopathy and Glaucoma procedures were reviewed and updated to improve the data collection and referral process for patients.
- ♦ BCVI was included in the Medical Symposium held by the National Health Insurance (NHI) and Belize Medical and Dental Association to explain BCVIs national efforts to reduce blindness due to Diabetic Retinopathy.
- ♦ Joan Musa and Carla Ayres Musa attended the opening of the Stanford Vision Clinic at the Lions' Den in San Pedro. BCVI has been partnering with the Lions for decades to provide monthly clinics on the island. With support from local non-profit organization Belize Kids, the equipment and the clinic space were fully updated and through Stanford University, they have started to bring more eye doctors to San Pedro. Our staff continue to do monthly optometric clinics in cooperation with Lions and patients from the Stanford Clinics needing correction are referred to our regular monthly clinics.
- ♦ Dr. Millicent Peterseim of the Storm Eye Institute provided training for the SEC Team and Programme Manager on Caring for Children in the Eye Clinic. The session was extremely beneficial and the information, including

supporting video links, will be shared with BCVI's team throughout the country to help improve the eye exam process for children in the clinics.

- ♦ Executive Director Carla Ayres Musa attended PAHOs 3rd Annual Meeting of National Eye and Ear Care Programmes in Columbia with representatives of the Ministries of Health from countries across Latin America and the Caribbean. Carla presented on the current situation in Belize with regards to eye health.
- ♦ BCVI held its End of Year meeting in December. The meeting and luncheon brought all staff members together to not only review the year's activities, but to discuss challenges and solutions in each programme area looking forward to 2018.



Secondary Eye Care Team at the End of Year Meeting

Staff Members, Board Members and Representatives

Elections were held at our Annual General Meeting in July and the 2017-2018 Board members are:

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Executive President	Joan Musa
Vice President	Donovan Reneau
Treasurer	Sheena Castillo
Secretary	Milagro Garel
Legal Advisor	Dolores Balderamos Garcia

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Alice Riveroll
Gina Fonseca
Kamela Palma

MEMBERS

Sharon Pollack	Jose Encalada
Joe Garel	Leonides Quellar

At the end of 2017 BCVI had a total of 36 staff carry out all its activities.

ADMINISTRATION

Carla Ayres Musa - Executive Director
Leolyn Garcia - Programme Director
Mark Mitchell - Diabetic Retinopathy Programme Manager & IT Officer
Carmencita Cruz - Finance Officer
Elihugh Pitts - Driver & Messenger
Carol Martinez - Custodian

REHABILITATION

Liza Williams Zelaya - Senior Rehabilitation Officer
Elvia Sierra - RFO, Cayo and Southern Districts
Sagrario Clarke - Itinerant Teacher, Northern Districts
Victor Chan - Rehabilitation Programme Assistant
Norma Rios - Rehabilitation Programme Assistant

OPTICAL LABORATORY

Andrea Haylock - Lab Administrative Officer
Merryl Hernandez - Assistant Lab Administrative Officer
Clifton Borland - Equipment Maintenance Officer
Rudy Cocom - Optical Technician

PRIMARY EYE CARE

Jackie Graham Hemsley - Primary Eye Care Manager
Elvia Bonilla - Optometrist, Belize City
Monique Lovell - Optometrist, Cayo
Rita Witzil - Optometrist, Orange Walk, Corozal, San Pedro
Arisel Mosqueda - Optometrist, South
Oscar Hoare - Ophthalmic Assistant, Belize City
Michelle Young - Ophthalmic Assistant, Belize City
Elia Slusher - Ophthalmic Assistant, Orange Walk
Coronada Villafranco - Ophthalmic Assistant, Dangriga
Daniel Choc - Ophthalmic Assistant, Toledo
Ivorie Mendez - Ophthalmic Assistant, Cayo

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY SCREENING

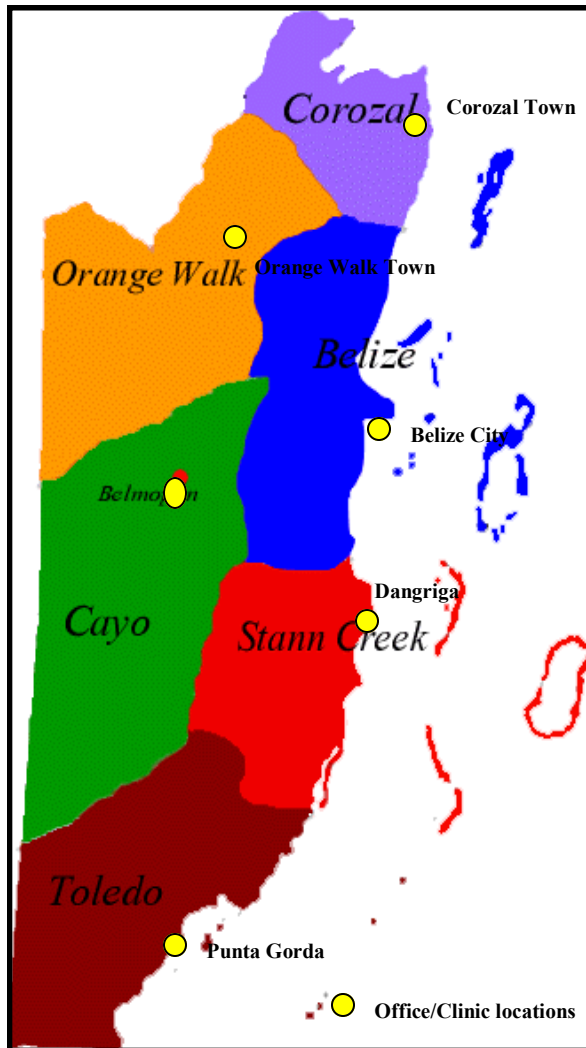
Lysette Pren- Screener/Grader, Belize City
Magali Sabido - Screener/Grader, Orange Walk & Corozal
Anna Salam - Screener/Grader, Stann Creek
Randolph Williams - Screener/Grader, Toledo

SECONDARY EYE CARE

Dr Zoraida Diaz - Ophthalmologist
Caroline Usher - Nurse in Charge
Natasha Flowers - Practical Nurse
Sagri Rodriguez - Administrative Officer
Mara Burgess - Ophthalmic Assistant

Improving the Vision of all Belizeans

The first step for entering BCVI's comprehensive eye programme is to attend one of five primary eye clinics (PEC) strategically located around the country. At these clinics you will meet the BCVI team made up of an optometrist and an ophthalmic assistant. A full eye examination offered free of charge will reveal whether your problem can be treated at this level with a simple medication or a pair of glasses. If the problem is more serious the optometrist will refer you to BCVI's secondary facility in Belize City.



In 2017 a total of 748 PEC clinics were conducted and **11,945** people had eye examinations at our five Primary Eye Clinics and outreach clinics.

Of the total **11,945** examined:

Children – 2,320 Adults – 9,625
Female – 7,205 Male – 4,740

A total of 4,786 prescription glasses were produced (an increase of 783 over 2016) and an additional 745 reading glasses were dispensed. 788 people were referred to a BCVI ophthalmologist by our optometrists for further evaluation and treatment. This examination could take place when an ophthalmologist visits their local clinic or at our main referral facility in Belize City.

The following is a breakdown by district of the examinations & glasses provided:

BELIZE		CAYO		ORANGE WALK/COROZAL/SAN PEDRO		STANN CREEK		TOLEDO	
Clinics	221	Clinics	122	Clinics	210	Clinics	149	Clinics	39
People Examined	4,690	People Examined	1,094	People Examined	3,186	People Examined	2,374	People Examined	601
Prescription glasses	2,251	Prescription glasses	551	Prescription glasses	1,622	Prescription glasses	1,189	Prescription glasses	741
Total Population	83,524	Total Population	75,046	Total Population	98,774	Total Population	34,324	Total Population	30,785

Comprehensive Eye Care



Primary Eye Care Clinics

BCVI would not be able to provide its wide range of services without its well trained and dedicated staff. At the Primary Eye Care level the staff includes an Optometrist and Ophthalmic Assistant. They also work with the Rehabilitation Field Officer (RFO) who helps identify and refer patients in their communities and set up out reach clinics. With the reopening of our Belmopan Clinic we have five PEC clinics in full time operation.

Optometrists

BCVI has 4 full-time optometrists on staff and also utilizes volunteers and optometrists from the Cuban Brigade. The optometrist is trained to diagnose vision problems and eye diseases as well as prescribe eye glasses. They assist with the identification of patients needing surgery, provide their pre and post op surgical care and refer patients to the ophthalmologist for medical management and treatment of their eye conditions.



Ophthalmic Assistants

The Ophthalmic Assistant (OA) works along with the optometrist to provide administrative support at clinics and to ensure smooth running of the offices. They also assist with the dispensing of prescription glasses, referral of patients and the financial accounting. They are taught to screen for eye conditions and, in the absence of the optometrist, can refer patients with suspected serious problems. We have taken on a number of new OAs so that in our busier clinics there are two OAs, with defined roles.

Primary Eye Care Manager

Although having this role for a number of years Jackie Graham Hemsley has only now been able to assume this role full time. With her many years as our OA in Belize City and her time as optical lab administrator she is able to identify weaknesses, upgrade clinics and train new staff as well as provide improved coordination with the optical lab.



Programme Director/Senior Optometrist

Leolyn Garcia has been busy training all PEC clinic staff to upgrade their clinic skills so that they can identify vision problems, correct them and identify eye diseases early in order to prevent avoidable blindness. This is a key role as Lyn ensures we are providing an optimal level of care and our team has all the resources needed to carry out their work.

Many activities cross over from Primary Eye Care to Secondary Eye Care and this is the advantage of having all levels of care within one organization as it makes for easy referrals using a triage system so that urgent cases can get early attention.

Patient Database

All the information on patient visits whether at the Primary or Secondary level is entered into the Belize Health Information System (BHIS). This follows continuity of care for individual patients and is part of the Ministry of Health system. It is also helpful in the production of our reports. In order to cope with our increased patient numbers BCVI's IT Officer worked with Mr. Ian Smith and the BHIS Team to upgrade the capacity of our server.

The Optical Lab

The optical lab has gone through many changes and has now developed into an efficient production unit that can handle the production of up to 700 pairs of glasses a month. Thanks to Help the World See who is our source for high-quality low-cost frames and lenses. The addition of more up-market frames is keeping many of our patients coming back.

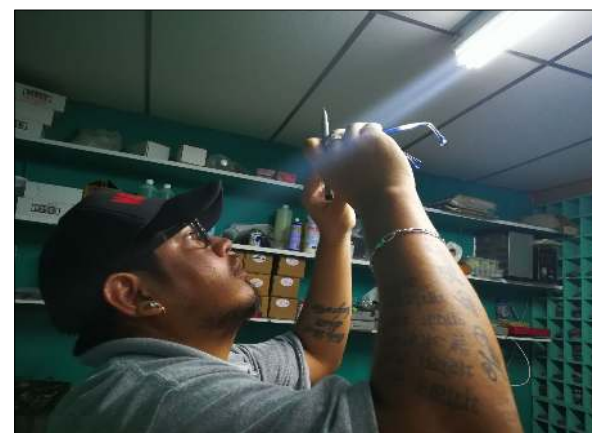
Retinopathy of Prematurity

Dr. Zoraida Diaz continues to examine premature babies at risk of developing Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) in the NICU. In 2017, 47 babies were examined of which seven were identified with varying stages of ROP and two were referred to Guatemala with stage 4 ROP. Unfortunately, the babies cannot travel until they are discharged.

Diabetic Retinopathy Screening and Treatment Programme

Dr. Diaz along with the Optometrist from Orange Walk Rita Witzil, DR Programme Manager Mark Mitchell and Executive Director Carla Ayres Musa attended the Vision 2020 LINKS DR Net Workshop in Jamaica. Since the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) has taken over management, the countries involved have been assigned a partner in the UK from whom we will be able to receive training and guidance for the remaining year of the project.

In 2017 we screened a total of 1312 patients with Diabetes throughout Belize. Of those, 459 were found to have some reduced vision or pathologies and of those, 29 were found to have advanced Diabetic Retinopathy in need of laser treatment. A total of 195 patients (new and old) received laser treatment from BCVI's full-time ophthalmologist and visiting specialists.



Treating Eye Diseases and Vision Loss

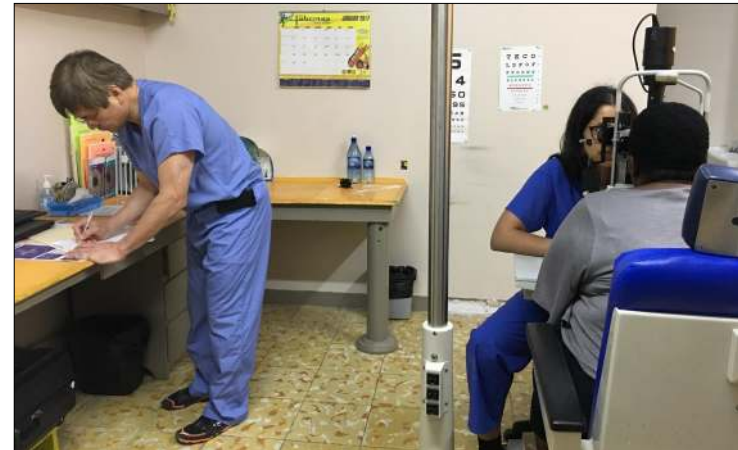
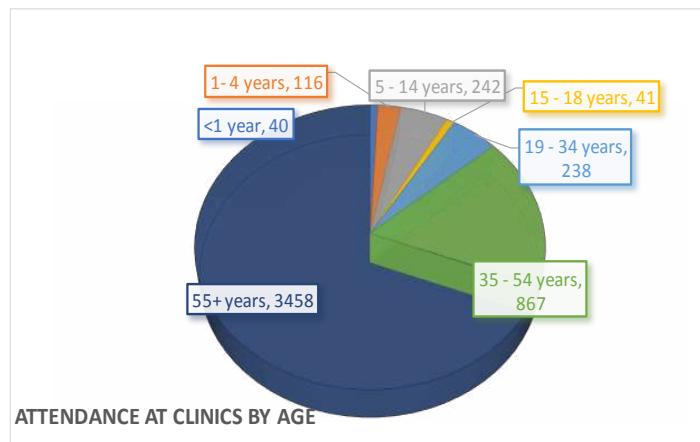
The National Eye Clinic (NEC) continues to be our main referral centre for secondary eye care. However, we are expanding these services to the district levels, when ophthalmologists are available, to provide easier access for patients.

Our full-time ophthalmologist Dr. Zoraida Diaz sees all patients identified as needing further evaluation and treatment. She refers those needing surgery or further specialist treatment to visiting volunteer specialists. In 2017, Dr Diaz performed 3685 examinations at the NEC and 13 visiting volunteers did a total of 1317 examinations. Of these the majority of visits were for pre and post cataract surgery, glaucoma and retinal problems.

Thanks to our volunteers we increased the number of cataract surgeries from 135 in 2016 to 264 in 2017. We were also able to conduct 5 strabismus and 49 pterygium surgeries.

At the SEC 135 laser treatments were performed for diabetic retinopathy with an additional 7 patients receiving laser for glaucoma treatment. In the districts, visiting ophthalmologists performed additional laser treatments for both DR and Glaucoma.

We are thankful to our visiting ophthalmologists who provided treatment for patients in 2017. (See pages 17 & 18 for details)



Dr Wong and Dr Sharma examine patients on their first visit to BCVI



Dr Baxter McLendon preps patients for cataract surgery with Dr. Edgar Ogaldez

Rehabilitation

Just as the Primary and Secondary Eye Care Programmes, it is equally important to identify our rehabilitation clients at an early stage of their vision loss. Whether a baby is born blind or an older person needs to adapt in the work place the earlier they are provided with counseling and training the less will fall behind in attaining their milestones or have to make radical changes in their lives. It is also important to sensitize the client's family and community members as we do not live in isolation and need support for all aspects of life. This is the reason that BCVI takes a Community Based approach to Rehabilitation (CBR).

Programme Highlights of 2017



◆ BCVI collaborated with The National Institute of Culture and History (NICH) through The Goldson House for Democracy and Patriotism for their three-day summer camp. The camp was held to commemorate the 94th birthday of Hon. Philip S. W. Goldson, who was blind due to glaucoma and continued to work twenty one years thereafter. On the 17th of August Elvia our rehab officer presented on BCVI and displayed the equipment used in teaching blind persons. The importance of inclusion of blind persons in main stream society was also discussed. Victor made a presentation on his experiences as a visually impaired individual in the workforce. The coordinator hopes to make this collaboration an annual event.

◆ BCVI partnered with UNICEF for their Early Childhood Development Conference during which Carla Ayres Musa presented on the services available for children at BCVI.

- ◆ We are very proud to announce Rowan Garel received the Cho Ta-Kuan Fervent Love of Lives Award! The foundation honors people who have displayed selfless acts of love toward humanity – something Rowan has been doing since he was only 11 years old! Rowan and his mother, Milagro, travelled to Taiwan in September to attend the ceremony and receive the award.
- ◆ The Taiwan Embassy and the Image Factory Foundation worked along with the Cho Ta-Kuan Foundation to translate the children's book "Climb Walk Dive Adventures of Rowan Garel" which will be launched and shared throughout Taiwan in the next couple months.

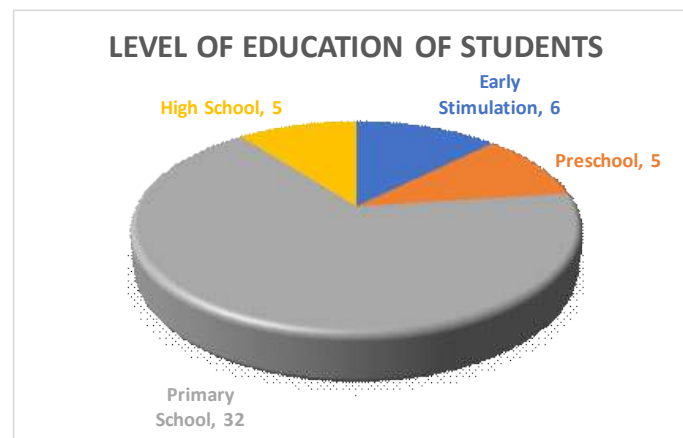


Education for All

Our Education programme would not be the success it is without the preparation of the students through early stimulation. They need a strong foundation to achieve their maximum potential and to be able to live independently. We recognise the contribution of the classroom teachers who are so willing to learn and support these 54 special children in their classrooms in various schools around the country. Parents and family support play a vital role and in some instances parents support each other in working with their children by knowing they are not alone and that they can learn from each other's experience.



BCVI's Rehabilitation Assistant Victor Chan demonstrates the use of the Braille Typewriter to a sighted person. This skill is quite impressive and visitors enjoy receiving their names printed in Braille.



Book Production Unit

In 2017 BCVI had available and catalogued:

Audio Books	107
Books scanned and edited	21
Braille books embossed	5
Books used with NVDA (speech software for the computer)	16
Braille books donated	5

Summer Camp 2017

In 2017 we celebrated 20 years of BCVI's annual summer camp, which was a truly remarkable milestone. Twenty-three children from throughout the country gathered with their guardians for the two-week event. Students work alongside their peers with support from our Rehabilitation Field Officers (RFOs) and BCVI's first-ever Itinerant Teacher. Parents, siblings and family members were also included in the lessons to ensure continued support at home.

Each child received his/her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with targets set out for subjects ranging from Braille reading to Math skills and they performed exceedingly well. Students were particularly excited to attend the computer classes where different skills had been identified based on the level of knowledge.

Summer Camp is also a time to provide additional support in daily living skills. It has been identified that several students were in need of further training in Orientation and Mobility, which was provided on the camp site and around the city. Socialization is also a key part of the event and the highlights for children, parents and staff are the field trips to Goff's Caye, Ramada Princess, Bacab and Channel 5's KTV! Art classes conducted by Gilvano Swasey and his team are more diverse now and include story time and an introduction to Yoga!

This annual event is a wonderful opportunity not only for the children to gather, but also for the parents who often times find support from others who have been in the programme and who are able to see the children are excelling, despite having a visual impairment.



Helping Hands – Visitors and Volunteers

Ophthalmologists

Dr. Baxter McLendon visited us several times during the year. He examined and treated hundreds of patients throughout the country and at our Secondary Eye Clinic and Operating Unit in Belize City. Dr McLendon is also instrumental in arranging additional surgical support from visiting surgeons from the USA and Visualiza in Guatemala.

Dr. Courtney Kraus and World Pediatric Project visited from January 7th – 13th during which they saw 85 children and performed 26 surgeries, procedures and evaluations under anesthesia.

Dr. Raj Maturi, retinal specialist, visited BCVI from January 18th – 20th during which he examined 65 patients, performed 28 lasers and administered 5 intravitreal injections for patients needing treatment.

Dr. Michael Wong, Dr. Priya Sharma and Nurse Annice Bacsik (Wills Eye Hospital) visited from January 30th – February 4th. As the visit was unexpected, BCVI advertised the clinic for patients with reduced vision from Cataract. The SEC Team screened 60 patients. A total of 34 were referred for various eye problems. The Team performed 32 cataract surgeries.

Dr Kim Warren and Dr Faisal Haq visited in February. They examined 34 patients and performed 15 cataract surgeries.

Dr. Matt Nutaitis and Dr. Jake McMillin of Storm Eye Institute visited for one week in March during which they performed cataract surgeries and examined patients with Glaucoma. As a specialist in Glaucoma, Dr Nutaitis also assessed the capacity of the organization to perform Glaucoma surgeries and provided a half-day session for all staff members on the second leading cause of blindness in the country. Dr. McMillin also provided training in the use of the OCT Machine for Lysette Pren, Camera and OCT Operator at BCVI.

BCVI worked along with the US Mederete Team for one week in Ladyville during which more than 500 patients were screened. Referrals were made for eyeglasses and specialist care, and eye drops and sunglasses were dispensed.

Dr. Inder Singal visited Belize City, Orange Walk and Dangriga in May during which he examined more than 100 patients and administered 99 lasers treatments.

Dr. Edgar Ogaldez visited from Visualiza in Flores, Guatemala to provide much-needed cataract surgery for BCVI patients. Over the course of two days, Dr Ogaldez performed 73 cataract surgeries alongside Dr. McLendon.

Dr. Joseph Lally visited in November during which he saw 27 patients and performed 7 cataract surgeries.

Dr. David Boes, Nurse Nancy Mayernik and their team visited our secondary eye clinic in January, May and December during which they examined 186 patients, of which 116 received cataract surgery.

Dr. Mae Millicent Peterseim and Ryan Rhodes visited from Storm Eye Institute to conduct school screenings, examine children in the secondary eye care clinic, conduct surgery for strabismus, assist Dra Diaz with eye examinations in the NICU and provide a training session on eye examinations for children.

Far Eastern Medical Hospital (FEMH) Taiwan's Dr. Chang examined 60 patients and performed 8 cataract surgeries during their visit in August.

Optometrists and groups assisting with refractions

Dr Lee Peplinski, Mrs. Rayanne Peplinski and their team of students worked in the Stann Creek District (Placencia, Seine Bight, Maya Center, Georgetown, Santa Rosa) where they screened more than 500 people, dispensed more than 200 reading glasses and issued 44 prescriptions for glasses.

Grace Trinity Church and Dr Kinloch Nelson returned early this year to screen children in the Cayo District. Along with BCVI's team, they were able to refract 124 children 94 of whom received prescription eye glasses thanks to a contribution from Dr. Nelson's group.

Mary Ann Studder and Rena Rager along with students of Defiance College joined our Orange Walk Team for training in visual acuities after which the team conducted screening school sessions in villages throughout the district. They screened a total of 1163 students and referred 187 to the Optometrist for further evaluation. We look forward to our continued partnership with the Team.

Rick Martin, a volunteer Optometrist from the US, spent a month at our clinic in Punta Gorda examining patients and providing prescriptions. He promises to return in 2018.

In June we welcomed volunteer **Benjamin Lee**, an Optometrist attached to Hillside Clinic in Toledo, who offered his services for one month on a part-time basis at our clinic in Punta Gorda. We are grateful for the support in examining patients, prescribing glasses and referring patients needing additional examinations and/or treatment.

VOSH Pacific Team visited Cayo in August where they saw a total of 347 patients and prescribed 325 glasses.

Other visitors

Cova Bascaran and Marcia Zondervan of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine visited BCVI. LSHTM are the new managers for the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust Caribbean Programme. The visit in June was to learn more about the Belize Programme and provide information on the LINKS system which is being introduced in September at a workshop in Jamaica.

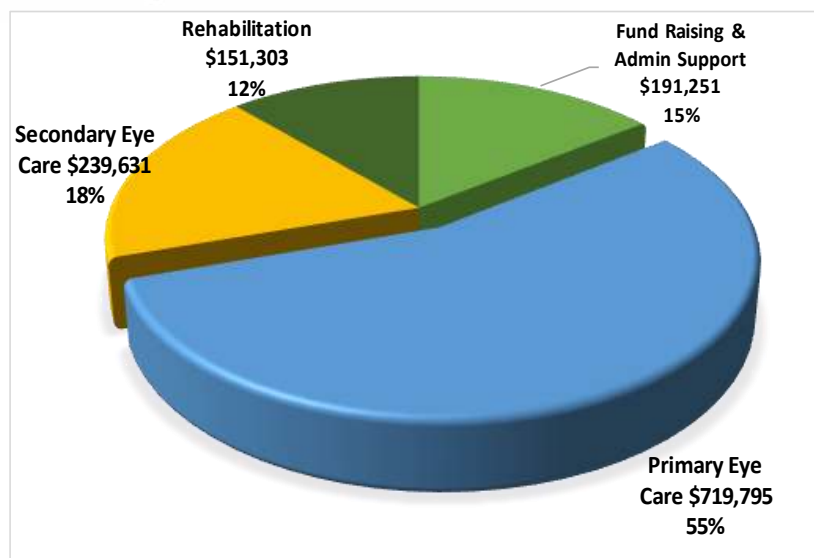
Ambassador Shabazz and Key School visited Dangriga, along with **Glaucoma Specialist Dr. Alyson Hall**. The group provided support in school screening, while Dr Hall conducted exams on patients at BCVI's base clinic. From February 20th – 23rd, the volunteers screened 741 students while Dr. Hall examined 66 patients with Glaucoma.

Belize High School (BHS) Student Emily Vernon volunteered with us in the Secondary Eye Care Clinic in Belize City. Emily, who hopes to have a career in Ophthalmology, was a huge help for BCVI's Ophthalmologist Dr. Zoraida Diaz.

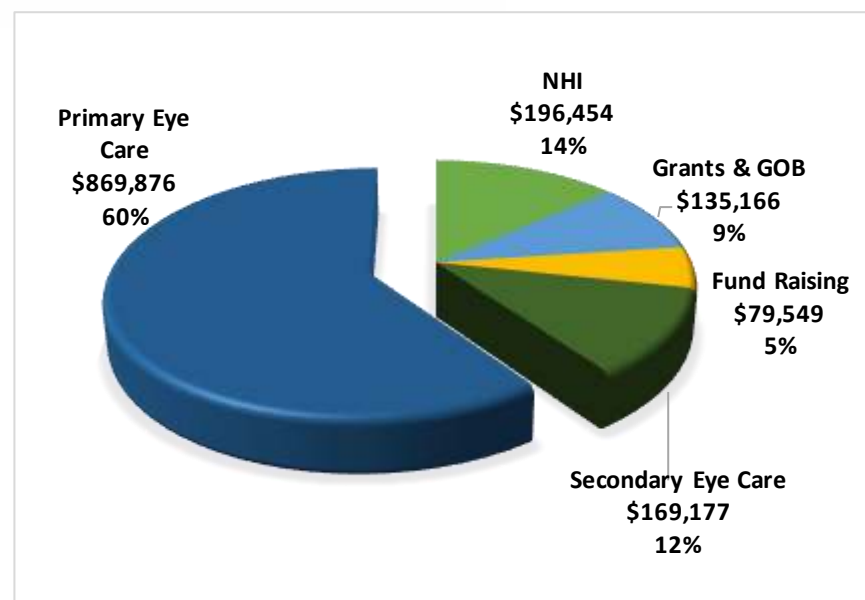
2017 – Financial Review

In 2017 we experienced an increased demand for services and decided that we needed extra staff to provide administrative assistance at both the Primary and Secondary Clinics in Belize City and at the Optical Lab. Also, two ophthalmic assistants were added to the south of the country, one based in Dangriga and the other in Punta Gorda. This has resulted in having time to create more streamlined procedures and decrease the pressure on existing staff. We have been able to support these positions through increased revenue from our Primary and Secondary Eye Care services. We have seen this steady increase over the years and believe with a more efficient service we shall only grow further and will increase our sustainability.

Total Expenditure \$1,301,978



Total Income \$1,450,222



We have experienced a steady increase in our overall revenue over the years. However, we have changed our income streams dramatically. From an NGO relying on projects and grants we are a not for profit enterprise, that provides quality care at affordable prices. Any profit earned over the year is put back into the organisation so that we can grow in all areas.

In 2017, as mentioned, we decided to increase our staff which means not only an increase in expenditure through salaries but also the expenses that are increased as a result of the work they do. However, over the past 10 years our income from glasses has increased from \$300,000 in 2007 to over \$800,000 in 2017. This can be attributed to having all our primary eye care clinics open and being regularly staffed with an optometrist. The support from the optical lab is invaluable but they can only produce the amount of prescription glasses that are sent in to them. The cost of frames and lenses needed to make up the glasses has seen a significant increase and we are working on a more efficient ordering system.

Planning for the future

Investing in Our Sustainability

In 2017 we concentrated on evaluating our performance and planning for the future with particular focus on strengthening our sustainability. BCVI has been able to remain sustainable due to the growth and success of our Primary Eye Care Programme which focuses on the reduction of blindness due to Refractive Errors. The Strategic Thinking session held in 2017 along with an assessment of the PEC Clinics and Lab has provided us with a good base from which to start our planning for the future in order to remain sustainable.



When discussing the need to increase sustainability one cannot help but consider the financial management system. In 2018, BCVI will partner with Accounting for International Development (AfID) based in the UK, who will send an accountant to review the current system and offer ideas on a way forward.

We cannot deny that BCVI's national and comprehensive service is essential to the country of Belize. However, given the limitations of a non-profit, we are faced with challenges in meeting the high need of patients and clients. Human Resources continue to be a concern and moving into 2018, we plan to strengthen the organization by assessing our needs in terms of additional staff as well as training for our existing team.

Two Ophthalmic Assistants (OA) will receive a certification in refractions from Aravind Eye Hospital in India. Once they return, they will be working with Programme Director and Optometrist, Lyn Garcia to help screen patients at the primary level who need glasses. We continue to work along with the Cuban Medical Brigade who provide Optometrists on a two-year contract which is helpful given the lack of trained professionals in country. The Ophthalmologist in our Secondary Eye Care Programme examines thousands of patients annually, referring those needing treatment to visiting surgeons. This is an overwhelming task for one person. Therefore, BCVI will explore options in 2018 for increased ophthalmologist support. The services offered in our Rehabilitation and Education Programme impact an important portion of the population, and with only two Rehabilitation Field Officers (RFOs) and one newly-hired Itinerant Teacher, there is a need to assess our capacity and a way forward.

BCVI will continue to work toward sustainability through strengthening of services, human resources and management. We look forward to working along with our various partners in 2018 to be able to provide sight restoring treatment as well as rehabilitative support for those who are irreversibly blind.

Thanks to our friends and supporters

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Belize Water Services
Radisson Fort George Hotel
and Marina
Unicomer Belize Limited



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