

BCVI Annual Report 2021



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

Bankers:

Belize Bank Ltd
Albert & Regent Streets
Belize City

The Belize Council for the Visually Impaired is a Company Limited by Guarantee and is Registered as a Non Government Organization— Certificate No.12/02

Contents

- 4 Message from the President & Director
- 5 Staff, Board and Representatives
- 6 BCVI at 40!
- 7 - 8 Primary Eye Care
- 9 Secondary Eye Care
- 10 Rehabilitation
- 11 Looking Forward
- 12 Financial Review 2021
- 13 Thanks to our Friends and Supporters



From the President & Director



This year BCVI was proud to be celebrating its 40th Anniversary! Four decades of eye care. Four decades of growth and service to the people of Belize. We are thrilled to be able to share another Annual Report with you considering the tumultuous year we have all faced due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic and its effects on our health and economic stability, particularly of non-profit organizations like BCVI.

Going into 2021 we knew that services like BCVI's, catering to the most vulnerable population, would be more essential than ever and this has rung true over the last year. The long-lasting and far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic are visible in every aspect of our lives especially with regards to health care and finances.

While we have seen downward effects financially, our patient numbers continue to increase steadily and we look forward to being able to fully resume services like community-based rehabilitation and cataract surgeries in 2022. Through it all, we know that without you, our patients, partners and volunteers, BCVI would not be where it is today.

Thank you all for your continued support!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. M. Musa".

Joan M Musa
Executive President



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carla Musa".

Carla Ayres Musa
Executive Director

The BCVI Team

EXECUTIVE BOARD

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

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Kamela Palma
Regina Fonseca
Sharon Pollack
Dr Natalia Rodriguez

At the end of 2021 BCVI had a total of 33 staff to carry out all its activities countrywide.

MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT STAFF

Carla Ayres Musa - Executive Director
Mark Mitchell - IT Officer
Clifton Borland - Equipment Maintenance Officer
Carmencita Cruz - Finance Officer
Mirza Vasquez - Administrative Assistant
Jacqueline Acosta - Administrative Assistant
Carol Martinez - Custodian
Kathleen Tillett - Custodian
Maria Rowland - Custodian
Kurt Burgess - Messenger/Driver

REHABILITATION

Sagrario Clarke - Itinerant Teacher, Northern Districts
Arjenis Ruiz - RFO Assistant

OPTICAL LABORATORY

Karina Samuda - Lab Operations Manager
Arzel Flowers - Lab Administrative Officer
Alfred Borland - Optical Technician
Shakeel Flowers - Optical Technician
Rudy Cocom - Optical Technician

PRIMARY EYE CARE

Jackie Graham Hemsley - Primary Eye Care Manager
Elvia Bonilla - Optometrist, Belize City
Freddy Nicholson - Optometrist, Belize City
Rita Witzil - Optometrist, Orange Walk, Corozal, San Pedro
Leyanis Alvarez - Optometrist, South
Anna Salam - Refractionist, Stann Creek
Randolph Williams - Refractionist, Toledo
Lezli McCulloch - Ophthalmic Assistant, Belize City
Sabrina Castro - Ophthalmic Assistant, Belize City
Elia Slusher - Ophthalmic Assistant, Orange Walk
Luveana Bol - Ophthalmic Assistant, Toledo

SECONDARY EYE CARE

Dr Zoraida Diaz - Ophthalmologist
Teona Ruiz - Nurse in Charge
Angela Choc - Practical Nurse
Magali Sabido - Ophthalmic Assistant
Mara Burgess - Ophthalmic Assistant

BCVI at 40!

It started with one man's vision ...

William Fonseca wanting to help people who like him, were blind.

It started with two women ...

Joan Musa and Joan Samuels committed to improving the lives of Belizeans who were blind ...
and then it grew.



The Belize Council for the Visually Impaired, which began in the 1980s as a small branch of the Belize Red Cross, expanded and strengthened under the guidance of two extraordinary leaders, Mrs. Joan Musa and Mrs. Joan Samuels. With support over the last 40 years from many local and international partners such as The Belize Red Cross, the Lions Clubs of Belize, Lions International, Sightsavers, CBM, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and The Government of Belize, the organization now know as BCVI introduced programmes to prevent blindness, restore sight where possible, and has continued its rehabilitation and education services for those who are irreversibly blind.

In 2021, as we look back at the incredible progress that has been made, we are awestruck at how a small non-profit, non-governmental organization with a staff of two could grow into what is now the only public provider of comprehensive eye care services, with a staff of 30 spanning the country of Belize. We celebrated the 40th Anniversary with a National Photo Challenge which brought to the forefront, the importance of eye care and what it means to our Belizeans. The top eight photos were selected by members of the Board as well as local artists and educators. Winners enjoyed prizes from resorts and companies across the country who supported the campaign.

Thanks to the Image Factory Art Foundation, Yasser Musa and Gilvano Swasey BCVI also launched a series of audio-books and podcasts featuring client Juan Reina as he explored arts and crafts on a journey throughout Belize. The videos, which aired on YouTube brought immense awareness to the ability of someone who is blind to function independently and to learn, perhaps even on a much deeper level, than most of us with sight are able to.



Primary Eye Care

Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, BCVI operated five Primary Eye Care Clinics strategically located around the country. We have since had to close the Belmopan Branch due to high rental costs and in July 2021 started renting the HelpAge Building twice monthly to examine patients and prescribe glasses. At each location and outreach clinic, an optometrist performs a complete eye examination including a refraction test to check if the vision will improve with glasses. Assisted by an ophthalmic assistant, the patient can select from a variety of frames to suit their pocket. The prescription lenses are accurately made up at our glasses production unit and dispensed back to the patient at their local clinic. Our aim is to ensure that all those needing glasses receive them at a cost they can easily afford.

Country wide a total of 8,958 examinations were performed:

Children – 1079
Female – 4857

Adults – 6637
Male – 2859



Orange Walk, Corozal and San Pedro	
Examinations	1939
Prescription glasses	803
Readers issued	340
Referred to Ophthalmologist	214
Belize	
Examinations	3938
Prescription glasses	1855
Readers issued	396
Referred to Ophthalmologist	464
Cayo	
Examinations	114
Prescription glasses	45
Readers issued	15
Referred to Ophthalmologist	23
Stann Creek	
Examinations	1946
Prescription glasses	576
Readers issued	169
Referred to Ophthalmologist	315
Toledo	
Examinations	1021
Prescription glasses	341
Readers issued	323
Referred to Ophthalmologist	145

Primary Eye Care

After a year of uncertainty, BCVI's clinic continued to operate under increased health safety measures in 2021 to reduce the spread of COVID-19 among our patients and staff. BCVI's national team was among the first in the country to be vaccinated against the virus.

Minister of Health and Wellness visited BCVI's Clinics, Operating Unit and Rehabilitation Resource Center in Belize City. We discussed our Memorandum of Understanding and ways in which to strengthen the eye care programme in Belize. This decades-long relationship is way ahead of the United Nation's first ever resolution on vision calling for "whole of government approach" to eye health in order to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



In July the Lions BCVI Expansion of the building in Belize City was completed. This newest addition now allows a fully comprehensive eye service under one roof with the addition of a Rehabilitation Resource Center for people who are blind. The Rehabilitation team and Braille Production Unit were previously located in a separate building in Belize City. Having the service physically connected to the clinics will allow for quicker referrals between the Ophthalmologist and Rehabilitation Field Officer. We can already see the improvement through our Low Vision Clinics for patients with severe low vision which have been the most successful in years.



OA Lezli McCulloch measures the segment height for a patient's bifocal glasses.

With the opening of the 2nd lane in Belize City halfway through the year, BCVI hired three new Ophthalmic Assistants (one of whom will also support the Secondary Eye Care Clinic). Training continues for these OAs in BCVI's protocols and COVID-prevention measures. The National Health Insurance (NHI) renewed BCVI's Ophthalmology Contract with increased support since the reduction brought on by the pandemic in 2020.

Equipment Maintenance Officer Clifton Borland has been overseeing and training Alfred Borland in the Optical Lab while Shakeel Flowers (returning Lab Technician) helps to keep the output of glasses steady. Due to the global impacts on production we have noticed an increase in the cost of supplies to produce our prescription glasses. However, we continue to work with patients to ensure they receive their glasses whether through payment plans, assistance or the NHI.

Secondary Eye Care

Patients seen at the primary level whose vision cannot be corrected with glasses or who are found to have further eye problems are referred to BCVI's Secondary Eye Care Programme. Dr. Zoraida Diaz continues to provide eye care services for such patients both at our Secondary Eye Care Clinic (SEC) in Belize City and at our district clinics countrywide. We are thankful to see the numbers of patients accessing secondary services has increased steadily after the decrease due to COVID-19.

The SEC in Belize City saw a total of 1,600 patients who were referred from our primary eye care clinics throughout the country. Dr Diaz saw an additional 214 patients at our District Clinics. Statistics continue to show the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as many patients (particularly those with Diabetes) have presented with irreversible vision loss.

Due to the uncertainty with COVID-19, there were no cataract surgeons in 2021. This is unfortunate as the waiting list is now more than 500 patients. However, Retinologist Dr. Inder Singal visited in early June to provide much-needed examinations and treatment for patients in Belize City, Orange Walk, Dangriga and Punta Gorda. Dr Singal examined more than 300 patients countrywide in one week and performed 228 laser treatments. An alarmingly high number of patients (34) were referred for vitrectomy with Dr Byron Deutschmann in Guatemala.



Dr Singal examines a patient for retinal changes in PG

In August, The World Pediatric Project (WPP) partnered with BCVI to bring Dr. Millicent Peterseim, Dr. Carolina Adams and Dr. Thomas Bohannon. The team examined 63 patients (from 7 weeks old to 19 years old) and performed 21 surgeries for children from throughout Belize: 7 cataract surgeries, 1 corneal opacity, and 13 strabismus.

All patients undergoing surgery are instructed to present a negative COVID-19 test taken at least 48 hours prior to their clinic visit. Thanks to the Central Health Region and Belize Diagnostic Center for assisting our patients with testing.

We continue to assist the KMH in the treatment of eye emergencies. Patients who do not require surgical treatment are seen and treated at BCVI as long as our Ophthalmologist is available. Those requiring surgery are sent over to the KMH for care.



Drs Peterseim and Adams perform pediatric surgeries

Rehabilitation

In 2021, a total of 42 newly blind and 4 new low vision patients were referred to the Rehabilitation Programme from the Secondary Eye Care Programme. The majority of patients were diagnosed with irreversible blindness due to Glaucoma and Diabetic Retinopathy.



Rehabilitation Resource Center, Belize City

BCVI finally moved into the newly-constructed Rehabilitation Resource Center and Braille Production Unit, made possible through funding from Lions Club International Foundation and the Lions Club of Belize City. The center will allow children and adults in need of additional support beyond our daily Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR).

Low Vision clinics resumed with Optometrist Freddy Nicholson and the turnout has been wonderful. While we are able to dispense glasses and magnifiers to improve the vision for some patients.



Student, diagnosed with low vision, is fitted with a telescope to improve his sight

Joan Samuels, BCVI's former Rehabilitation Coordinator, conducted a virtual Community Based Rehabilitation Training Session over the course of two weeks with Rehabilitation and Education Coordinator Sagrario Clarke, Rehabilitation Assistant Arjenis Ruiz and Executive Director Carla Ayres Musa. The team was also joined by US-based Orientation and Mobility Specialist Paul Fields who will be volunteering with BCVI in 2022.



BCVI client Daeyan Arda supports Brianna Choc with Braille as part of her piano training

With the support of volunteers, including client Juan Reina, the Rehab programme continued scanning & editing books for students; providing supplies and services such as orientation and mobility for clients throughout the country.

UNICEF, Ministry of Education and RESTORE Belize provided a scholarship for one client and the Belize City Chamber of Commerce partnered with the Embassy of Taiwan to offer a grant for entrepreneurs with disabilities which was won by a client in BCVI's Income Generation Programme. Concluding the year, News 5 Belize broadcasted on Great Belize Television produced a segment on children who are blind and the impacts on their lives due to COVID-19.

Looking Forward

As BCVI continues to provide accessible and affordable eye care for all Belizeans, we are mindful of the growing need in human resources in all areas of our comprehensive programme.

Thanks to Dr Inder Singal and the Adarsh Charitable Trust, BCVI is looking forward to the return of our Optometry students, Daniel Choc and Jahira Vasquez, who will complete their training in 2022. The newly-trained staff will provide coverage in our Toledo and Orange Walk Clinics, respectively. Adarsh Charitable Trust has offered a third scholarship in Optometry which will be granted in 2022. Our two scholarship recipients of the Medical School and Ophthalmology Programme (2019) and Specialization in Ophthalmology (2021) continue to train and are expected to return in a few years.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness has allocated a space for BCVI in their new Outpatient and Rehabilitation Center in Belmopan which will allow us to resume full-time clinics in the Cayo District for the first time since 2020.



A client, newly diagnosed as blind, receives a cane

With the planned re-opening of schools in 2022, we look forward to resuming school screening sessions as we recognize the significant decrease in the numbers of children seen over the last year. With support from Pediatric Ophthalmologist Dr Millicent Peterseim, we plan to prepare a School Screening project which will allow for training and increased screening of school-aged children.

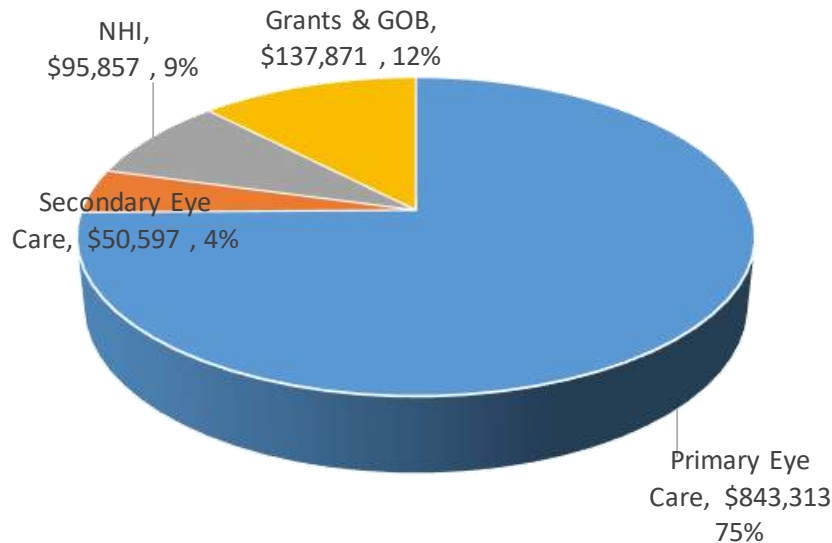
Hiring and training Rehabilitation Field Officers (RFO) remains a top priority for 2022 with plans for a visiting Orientation and Mobility Specialist to provide hands on training for our Rehabilitation Team. Although BCVI's services have extended past rehabilitation and into schools due to a shortage of trained professionals in the government sector, The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Technology (MoESCT) has committed to supporting the education component of the programme for children in school through strengthened cooperation with the Ministry's special education unit, NaRCIE. Minister Francis Fonseca has committed to providing two trained Itinerant Resource Officers (IROs) to be seconded to BCVI. These additional team members will provide much-needed support for students in the Central and Southern Regions.



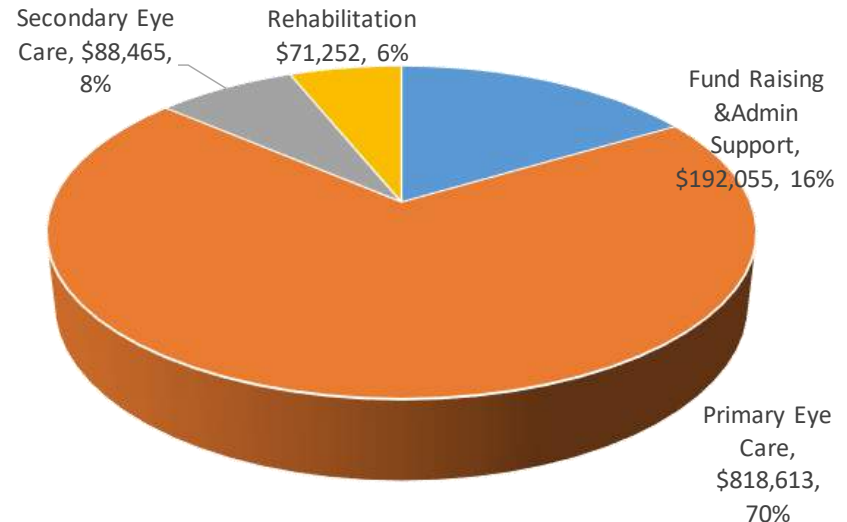
Dr Kiria Mayen, Ophthalmology Resident, training in Guatemala

2021 – Financial Review

Total Income \$1,127,638



Total Expenditure \$1,170,385
Not including capital expenditure



We are happy to report that BCVI has made it through another year of financial constraints due to the economic uncertainty that is still affecting Belize and the world. As a result of prudent management and support from our partners, patients, volunteers and team BCVI was able to continue serving the Belizean in the past year.

The included 2021 Financial Review pie charts reflect the reality that we had to close our clinic doors on several occasions during the year in review due to surges in COVID cases. In addition, several of our local grants were decreased and international volunteers were unable to visit Belize to carry out much needed surgeries and treatment. BCVI is able to remain sustainable thanks to income from fees for services which help clinic doors open. We did however, note an increase in the amount of assistance

given to patients who were unable to afford our fees. This, combined with the increase in the cost of eye care supplies, led to a deficit in 2021. Despite that, our audit showed some improvement compared to 2020.

The National Health Insurance (NHI) resumed services for glasses, laser surgeries and diabetic eye exams. Notably, expenditure increased due to the return of our national team resuming their roles and our clinics fully functioning once more. As we celebrate 40 years of serving the Belizean people with Primary Eye Care, Secondary Eye Care and Rehabilitation programs we thank our partners and the Belizean people for their financial support and confidence respectively. We are looking forward to better financial stability over the coming years.

Thank You!

Ministry of Health and Wellness
Ministry of Human Development
Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and
Technology (MoESCT)
National Health Insurance (NHI)
Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)
Help The World See
Lions Club International Foundation (LCIF)
Lions Clubs of Belize
Rotary Club of Belize
Sunrise Rotary
SEE International
ALCON
The BCVI Foundation
Cuban Medical Brigade
Storm Eye Institute
Joan Musa
Thomas Angel
Dr David Boes
Dr Baxter McLendon
Rick Soller
Dr Lennox Webb
Dr Inder Singal
Dr Millicent Peterseim
Dr Byron Duetschmann
Adarsh Charitable Foundation
Kinloch Nelson & Grace and Holy Trinity
World Paediatric Project (WPP)
World Paediatric Project (WPP) Belize
Appliance World
Fabrigas Belize Ltd
Universal Customs Brokers Agencies
Social Security Board
Alaia Autograph Collection
Maya Island Air

Image Factory Art Foundation
Gilvano Swasey
Yasser Musa
Brodies
Miramar
Lydia's Guesthouse
Brisa Oceano Resort



**Ministry Of Human Development,
Families & Indigenous Peoples' Affairs**
Equality and Inclusion



BCVI Contact Information

Belize City

Main Office, Administration and Rehabilitation

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Belize City

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Primary and Secondary Eye Clinics

Eye examinations, prescribing and dispensing glasses, treatment and surgery

Lions Building (next to KMHM)

Princess Margaret Drive, Belize City

Ph.: 501 223 2636

Regional Offices

Orange Walk & Corozal

Red Cross Building

Orange Walk Town

Ph.: 501 322 0227

Stann Creek

Southern Regional Hospital

Dangriga

Ph.: 501 522 0452

Toledo

BCVI Building

Punta Gorda Hospital

Ph.: 501 722 2005