

Belize Council for the  
Visually Impaired

**2022**

**Annual  
REPORT**



**BCVI**

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# OUR VISION & MISSION

## BCVIs 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

## BCVIs Mission

The Belize Council for the Visually Impaired is a non-profit organization 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**

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT & DIRECTOR

"Love Your Eyes" has been the theme for global eye care events over the last two years. The message continues to resonate within BCVI as we work year-round to love your eyes.

After a two-year wait, we were thrilled to finally welcome back our international Ophthalmologists and resume surgery and treatment for blinding conditions such as cataract and diabetic retinopathy. With students returning to school, we were also able to conduct screening sessions for children, many of whom who hadn't seen the Optometrist in two years. Families in our Rehabilitation and Education appreciated the home and school visits to support clients in need of community-based services.

Loving your eyes is what we do – whether that is through service, education or awareness. For World Sight Day, we were thrilled to partner with the Speaker of the House and the Government of Belize in providing eye exams for the Members of Parliament to highlight the importance of eye care as a priority in health.

Without your support, achieving our goals would not be possible. We look forward to our work together in 2023!



Joan Musa  
Executive President



Carla Ayres Musa  
Executive Director

*Thank You!*

# 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  
Dr Natalia Rodrigues  
Sharon Pollack

## MANAGEMENT & SUPPORT STAFF

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

## REHABILITATION

Sagrario Clarke - Coordinator  
Sabrina Castro - RFO Assistant  
Arjenis Ruiz - RFO Assistant



## OPTICAL LABORATORY

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

## PRIMARY EYE CARE

Jacqueline 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  
Michelle Young - Ophthalmic Assistant, Belize City  
Afeini Lewis - Ophthalmic Assistant, Belize City  
Elia Slusher - Ophthalmic Assistant, Orange Walk  
Yarinemi Burgos - Ophthalmic Assistant, Stann Creek  
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  
Drianna Mendez - Data Entry Clerk

# 2022 HIGHLIGHTS

Human Resources remain a huge focus for BCVI, whether it's training, hiring or professional development. Thanks to support from Dr Inder Singal and the Adarsh Charitable Trust we were thrilled to welcome back our first two Optometrists who received scholarships to certify in Guatemala, Jahira Vasquez and Daniel Choc.



Senior Optometrist Freddy Nicholson has accepted the role of Programme Officer and will be working closely with the Executive Director on the comprehensive programme and national services BCVI offers. Freddy undertook a course in Global Eye Health with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine as part of his introduction to the new role.



Staff members across the country were thrilled to have had our first Staff Trip since 2019 giving them the opportunity to reconnect and bond. BCVI also held a Mental Health in Healthcare Session for its national team given the effects of the pandemic.



In an effort to reach more Belizeans in need, BCVI has partnered with the Public Service Workers Trust (PSWT) which will provide essential eye care and treatment to thousands of people throughout the country.



BCVI has officially become a member of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). For years, we have taken part in their global campaigns on eye care and in 2022 we once again joined in the Love Your Eyes Campaign calling on Belizeans and the Government to make eye care a priority. One of the highlights was the eye screening at the National Assembly during which we had an opportunity to examine each Member of Parliament and discuss the importance of eye care.



Executive Director Carla Ayres-Musa had the opportunity to meet HRH Catherine, the Princess of Wales on her visit to Belize during which they discussed the impact that the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust has had on the national eye care programme.

# PRIMARY EYE CARE

In addition to our four Primary Clinics located throughout the country, BCVI also conducts outreach clinics to towns, villages, schools and businesses. Our teams of Optometrists and Ophthalmic Assistants screen and examine patients presenting with eye problems. Through our Optical Lab BCVI is able to provide high-quality, low-cost options to our patients. Those who cannot benefit from glasses are referred to the Ophthalmologist in the Secondary Eye Care Programme.

In 2022, BCVI examined a total of 8,291 patients countrywide:

Adults	6961	Female	5081
Children	1330	Male	3210

## Orange Walk, Corozal and San Pedro

Examinations	1856
Prescription glasses	597
Readers issued	512
Referred to Ophthalmologist	298

## Belize

Examinations	3997
Prescription glasses	1664
Readers issued	335
Referred to Ophthalmologist	554

## Cayo

Examinations	308
Prescription glasses	169
Readers issued	61
Referred to Ophthalmologist	57

## Stann Creek

Examinations	1339
Prescription glasses	493
Readers issued	171
Referred to Ophthalmologist	229

## Toledo

Examinations	791
Prescription glasses	425
Readers issued	398
Referred to Ophthalmologist	78



# PRIMARY EYE CARE

BCVI continued countrywide primary care services despite losing two Optometrists to private sector. We are fortunate to have ongoing support from Adarsh Charitable Trust in the area of capacity building through human resources. Two Optometrists returned from their training in Guatemala and an additional Belizean has received a scholarship to commence Optometry training in January 2023.



Orange Walk, despite losing their Optometrist late in the year, continued providing eye care services to the people in the District as well as outreach to San Pedro in partnership with the San Pedro Lions, and in Caye Caulker thanks to support from the Caye Caulker Village Council.



To cover the gap in Optometrists, we continue to collaborate with teams such as the US Army with whom we conducted eye clinics in Corozal. BCVI was also fortunate to have had two visits from US Optometrist Dr. Hal Breedlove and his wife LeeAnn who conducted outreach and base clinics throughout Belize.



We remain committed to continuing development of our Ophthalmic Assistants (OAs) and Optometrists. Programme Officer Freddy Nicholson and Primary Eye Care Manager Jacqueline Graham Hemsley conducted monthly training sessions on topics ranging from measurements for eye glasses to low vision clinics. These sessions will continue in 2023 and expand to include all District Teams.

# SECONDARY EYE CARE

Patients who are seen at BCVIs primary clinics, and in need of further examination, are referred to our clinical Ophthalmologist. Although the Secondary Eye Clinic in Belize City sees the most patients, Dr. Zoraida Diaz and visiting doctors also examine patients in district clinics. In 2022, a total of 1,819 patients were seen at the SEC in Belize City, with an additional 200 seen out-district.

Due to the lack of specialist visits since 2020, we have noticed a continued increase in the numbers of patients diagnosed with irreversible blindness. While many can receive cataract surgery to improve their vision, there was a total of 23 patients with irreversible blindness ranging in age range from 5 months to 92 years old. The primary causes are Glaucoma and Diabetic Retinopathy.

We were thrilled to welcome our international surgeons back as of April 2022. Throughout the year, these incredible teams with support from with our local staff performed 238 cataract surgeries, 16 strabismus, 16 pterygium and more than 200 retinal laser treatments.

Evidence of the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen in the astonishing number of referrals for Vitrectomy which typically average at approximately five annually, but in 2022 totaled 30. These patients much travel internationally to receive the procedure.

BCVI has been fortunate to have the expertise and skills of Sister Alice Lewis, Ophthalmic Nurse, and former Nurse-in-Charge of the Secondary Eye Care Clinic and Operating Unit. Sr. Lewis has been providing training and support to our newest Nurse-in-Charge, Teona Ruiz. Together, they provide support to visiting surgeons both in the clinic and in the operating room.



# VISITORS & VOLUNTEERS

As we celebrated 10 years of partnership with World Pediatric Project (WPP), we were thrilled to welcome their newly-elected President Vafa Akhavan who visited BCVI to learn more about the services and our partnership in children's eye care.

Dr. Millicent Peterseim visited BCVI to discuss potential collaboration on a national school screening project

Dr. Hal Breedlove – Optometrist visited BCVI Belize City, Dangriga and Punta Gorda Clinics for his first trip to Belize. We hope he will return to conduct clinics in 2023

Dr. Chuck Beischel, Dr. Christina Choi and Dr. Sudeep Das of the Storm Eye Institute – performed 18 cataract surgeries before the mission was cut short due to a team member testing positive for COVID.

Dr. David Boes Cataract Surgeon – visited twice in 2022 performing a total of 89 cataract surgeries and noted the complexities that the long wait times for surgery have had

Dr. Inder Singal Retinal Specialist – examined 179 patients in Belize City, Orange Walk and Dangriga and performed 123 laser procedures.

Dr. John Ghobrial visited twice in 2022 and performed a total of 15 cataract and 16 strabismus surgeries

George Magrath and the team from Storm Eye Institute performed 19 cataract surgeries

Dr. Edward Hurst and Dr. Andy Lee performed 23 cataract surgeries

Dr. Edgar Ogaldez visited BCVI and performed 61 cataract surgeries in three days

Dr. Courtney Kraus and the World Pediatric Project team visited BCVI during which they examined 36 children and performed 12 strabismus surgeries and 6 cataract surgeries



# REHABILITATION

Belizeans throughout the country who have been diagnosed as irreversibly blind are referred to BCVI's Rehabilitation and Education programme. Using a community-based approach, clients across the life cycle are given the support and devices needed to live as independently as possible. At the end of 2022 we had a total of 21 newly blind people, the majority due to Glaucoma and Diabetic Retinopathy.

With only two rehabilitation officers, human resource limitations remain a concern for the organization. However, after three years of intermittent service due to the lingering pandemic, we were thrilled to resume our home and school visits countrywide. BCVI's rehab staff continued training for teachers of students who are blind, and conducted low-vision clinics in Orange walk and BCVI's newly-expanded clinic in the Belize City Lions Building.

We were thankful for visits from Minister of Education Hon Francis Fonseca and his CEO Mrs. Dian Maheia to discuss continued partnership and support from the Ministry and their special education unit, NaRCIE. Once school resumed, we had approximately 45 children registered in mainstream schools throughout the country ranging from 4 years old to 17 years old.

In an effort to raise funds for BCVI and in celebration of our 40th anniversary, The Ice Cream Shoppe created a special "Mystery Flavour" for the month of May. The ice cream was white and beige giving no indication of the answer forcing ice cream lovers to use the senses of taste and smell, along with identifying textures to guess the cereal-based flavour. The Ice Cream Shoppe contributed funds to BCVI to purchase much-needed equipment for the children in school.



# IN MEMORY OF VIC

## *In Memory of Victor David Chan*

It is incredibly difficult to summarize the life of someone who meant so much to the BCVI team and our family. Everyone who knew or saw Victor walking around Belize City with his white cane knows that he was blind. It's the things very few people may have known about Vic that I'd like to share - he was smart, funny and caring.

Victor became a part of the BCVI family at a very young age. He started losing his sight when he was in Infant 1 and this is when BCVI's Joan Musa and Joan Samuels started providing rehabilitation and education support to ensure he received a solid education. He eventually became totally blind with only some light perception but, as we can all attest, he never let that stop him.

Victor started working for BCVI in 1997 as a messenger and receptionist, navigating the streets of Belize City to the banks, stores and business places on behalf of the organization. He was the best Brailist in the country, producing Braille textbooks and novels. He assisted in the Braille production of the Harry Potter Series and thoroughly enjoyed reading through every single one!

With a passion for music, Vic along with fellow clients Hector Hoare and Charlie Chiac, formed a band and played at events throughout the country. Many of the staff members shared his passion for music and we enjoyed discovering new songs from him. He was our brother, and we were his family.

His family meant everything to him. He was one of the primary income earners for his mother, siblings, nieces and nephews, always ensuring they had their bills paid and groceries in the house. He adored his mother and losing her was hugely devastating for Vic.

Without possibly ever realizing it, Victor has left a huge impact on our country - those of you who saw him, a blind man, effortlessly and confidently walking the streets, the many children who were able to follow along in class with their Braille books, participants at health fairs who watched in awe as he demonstrated his Braille skills by typing their names out, those of us who had the privilege of working with him and those who were honored and lucky to call him family.

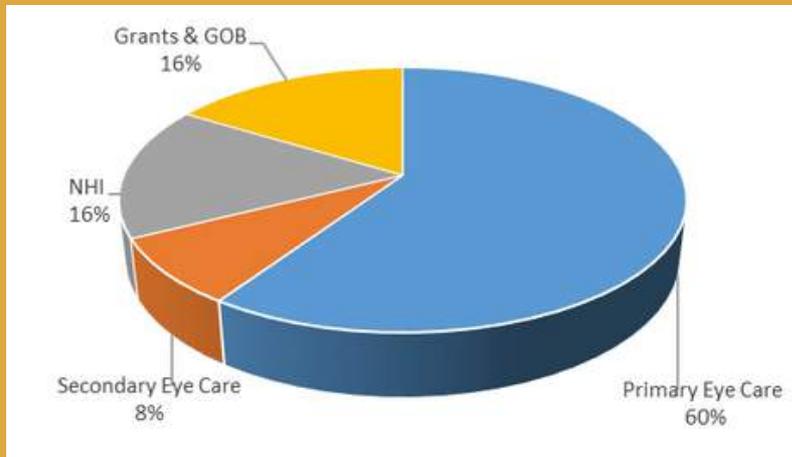
We miss you terribly "brother".



# SUSTAINABILITY

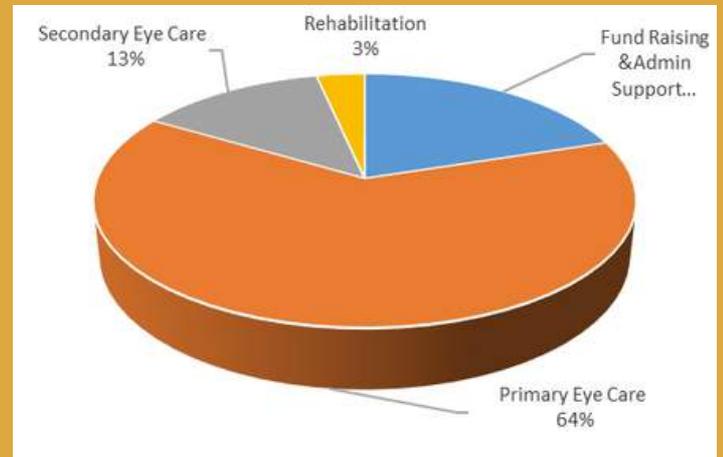
## Income

BZ\$1,307,865



## Expenditure

BZ\$1,267,496



BCVI's mission is to ensure that every single person presenting with an eye problem is given the service and support needed regardless of personal finance. Our fees for services and support from local and international partners such as the Government of Belize, local Lions Clubs, SEE International and visiting surgeons, are what help keep the organization self-sustainable. Since 2020, BCVI has seen a significant increase annually in the amount of assistance being given to patients across our primary and secondary programmes and in 2022 this exceeded BZ\$73,000.

Our largest source of income continues to be from the sale of glasses and we are grateful to Help The World See, our partners of more than 20 years, who continue to source the most affordable optical supplies which allow us to offer high-quality, low-cost options.

We were fortunate to have renewed our contract with the National Health Insurance (NHI) which provides glasses, cataract surgery and laser treatment for its insured patients. The return of our surgeons resulted in an increase in the number of NHI surgeries performed contributing significantly to our income. A similar agreement with the Public Service Workers Trust will allow us to reach more patients in need of both primary and secondary eye care.

# LOOKING FORWARD



BCVI is looking forward to resuming our full-time clinic hours and to the addition of our Belmopan Clinic, allowing us to increase the number of patients we are able to examine and treat.

In our mission to remain accessible for all Belizeans, BCVI will be submitting a bid for the National Health Insurance (NHI) Ophthalmology tender in the Orange Walk District which is expected to roll out in late 2023. The services would include those already offered by BCVI, but with support through insurance, we expect an increase in referrals and therefore an increase in uptake of treatment for blinding eye conditions such as Diabetic Retinopathy which is a leading cause of blindness in this District.

We will continue to focus on human resource development in 2023, as we continue to strengthen our capacity. We look forward to offering two Scholarships in Optometry in the upcoming year thanks to Adarsh Charitable Trust. The Cuban Medical Brigade, via the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW), is also committed to providing one Optometrist who we will place in Orange Walk Team to provide eye care for patients in the Northern Region. With support from the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Technology (MoESCT) we look forward to increased support in human resources for students who are blind.

Our staff and clients in the Rehabilitation Programme are looking forward to resuming our Annual Summer Camp in 2023 which will be the first since 2019.

Thanks to a brilliant team of Ophthalmologists and Retinologists, BCVI is planning to trial Vitreoretinal surgeries, a service not readily available in Belize. We also look forward to strengthening our school screening services in partnership with the MoESCT and International Pediatric Ophthalmologist, Dr. Millicent Peterseim. This would include training for teachers in conducting basic visual acuity screening and will allow us to formalize the service we are already providing in schools.

# THANK YOU

BCVI has much to be thankful for.

The service that we are able to provide is truly a work of partnership and giving. Our staff members countrywide compassionately dedicate their days to helping anyone in need. Visiting surgeons and volunteers, both international and local, as well as donors make it possible to treat patients with blinding conditions and to rehabilitate those who are irreversibly blind. Whether a pair of eyeglasses, medication for Glaucoma treatment or in-home orientation and mobility support, we are fortunate to celebrate another year of service.

Ministry of Health & Wellness  
Ministry of Education, Culture, Science & Technology  
Ministry of Human Development  
National Health Insurance  
Adarsh Charitable Trust  
Lions Clubs of Belize  
BCVI Foundation  
ALCON  
SEE International  
World Pediatric Project (WPP)  
Storm Eye Institute  
Public Service Workers Trust (PSWT)  
Image Factory Art Foundation  
Ambassador of India in Belize, Arun Hotchandani  
Ice Cream Shoppe  
Prokera  
Habet and Habet  
Joan Musa  
Yasser Musa  
Gilvano Swasey  
Dr Inder Singal  
Tom Angell  
Dr David Boes  
Richard Soller

*Thank  
You!*

# **BCVI Contact Information**

## **Main Office and Administration**

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Ph.: 501 223 2636  
Email: [bcvibze@gmail.com](mailto:bcvibze@gmail.com)

## **Primary and Secondary Eye Clinics**

Eye examinations, prescribing and dispensing glasses, treatment and surgery  
Lions Building  
Princess Margaret Drive (next to KMHM)  
Belize City  
Ph.: 501 223 2636

## **Rehabilitation and Education Services**

Princess Margaret Drive  
Belize City  
Ph.: 501 610 5438

## **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 2025

