



Attacking Poverty...
...from a Visual Perspective!

Visual Compassion (VC) is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit. VC functions both locally and internationally in an effort to reduce world poverty.

The premise is very simple. If you cannot see properly, you can not be educated properly. Aside from water and basic medical care, education stands as the chief limiter of change in any area of poverty on our planet. Visual Compassion believes that one of education's chief limiters is proper vision care. All studies continually cite one of four people under the age of 18 needs some form of visual assistance. This number increases to nearly 100% of people once they reach 38 years of age.

Basic optics presents a solution and an even bigger dilemma: how do we provide the needed eyeglasses? To meet this need, Visual Compassion's mission is to establish a global distribution system of eyewear and eye care that encompasses economical eyeglass production and training centers for optical related job skills. Through the provision of access to needed vision services so that people can see clearly at school and work, as well as access to employment skills that will assist them in providing for themselves and their families, we seek to empower people to actively improve their life circumstances and rise above poverty.

Our field experience has helped to support the premise of eye care's impact on education both locally and abroad. Children in developing countries are often removed from the standard classroom when they can not see properly and put in "special" classrooms. By providing screenings and eyeglasses to the children of Ecuador, VC has given them an equal chance of success. A simple pair of eyeglasses has enabled adults to return to jobs that they could no longer perform due to poor vision. Our eyeglasses have provided improved vision and quality of life to the elderly in need of ocular surgeries that are either not available due to providers, finances or health issues. Surveys of women receiving eye care through the VC eye clinic at Volunteers of America consistently show that access to vision care improves their ability to complete assignments, stay focused, and successfully graduate from their rehabilitation program. The limiting factor of bringing good vision to any of these populations is rooted in the costs of production and the distribution of eyeglasses.

We have focused our efforts for the past two years on developing pilot programs

that control these costs and that build upon strengths of existing organizations to develop a more unified and efficient production and distribution system. We have selectively chosen global organizations such as the Salvation Army, Volunteers of America and the Lions Club to run these pilot programs. The intent is rapid replication once a smooth process, good data and proper funding are achieved.

We currently run two pilot eye clinics, one in the Salvation Army and one in the Volunteers of America. These facilities provide "free" eye exams and low cost prescription lenses to the medically underserved, including homeless individuals, individuals coming out of the prison system and participants of drug rehabilitation programs. The vast majority of participants do not have insurance to cover the costs of eye care and over 90% of them have been found to need eyeglasses to see properly. We have also supervised the development and training of the Conroe Noon Lions Club's recycling/manufacturing lab. This lab has saved over \$10,000 in nine months by making children's eyeglasses versus outsourcing them.

Our 2008 goals center on creating the roots of a global distribution system. Goals and initiatives for 2008 include the following:

Renewed Vision Community Eye Clinic:

This is a joint project of Volunteers of America and Visual Compassion. This will be a true community clinic with normal paying services available to all. Our primary goal is to create an optometric/retail facility that functions as a job training center for multiple optical career paths. The concept is that most participants of drug rehabilitation or homeless programs are quite capable of being gainfully employed, but lack of viable job skills and perceived unemployability by potential employers present barriers to self sufficiency. By providing optical training in conjunction with employment experience, VOA and VC are working to bring down the walls these individuals are trapped behind and help them successfully reenter society as contributing members.

The secondary goal of the eye clinic is to expand our "Vision Pass" voucher program to provide "free" eye care to various social services programs in the Greater Houston area, including homeless shelters, re-entry programs and drug rehabilitation facilities. Individuals accessing services at the VOA and Salvation Army pilot clinics currently receive an eye exam and a donated frame for "free" but are required to assume a small fee of ownership for their lenses. We have had interest from other agencies in accessing these services, but have only been able to accept referrals from them on a limited basis. The Renewed Vision Community Eye Clinic will allow us to expand voucher services to clients of additional social services

organizations, impacting hundreds more lives each year than can be accomplished currently.

The third goal of the eye clinic is to create "mission" eyeglasses for international use during our optical lab training pathway. VC currently runs mission trips in Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, and Peru. Over 3,000 glasses to date have been placed on the eyes of the poor in these counties. By having participants create mission eyeglasses as part of their optical training program, VC will have the beginnings of a stable and low-cost production program.

Visual Compassion's plan is to replicate the eye clinic/training program concept within two years and have ten centers running within five years (one per each targeted major city). The ultimate plan is to bring the community vision center and training program concept to all major cities in the United States.

We are currently seeking sponsors for the Renewed Vision Community Eye Clinic to assist with the start-up costs of the clinic, as well ongoing eye care and eyewear product donations. Sponsors will be recognized during the grand opening and its associated press releases, and naming rights for exam rooms are available.

EyePunk.com:

Visual Compassion is launching an e-business under the d.b.a. of EyePunk to provide an income stream for the development of our eyewear distribution network. EyePunk allows for the purchasing of contact lenses and eyewear online, with all profits going directly into developing our distribution network and providing eye care for the poor. A marketing strategy has been devised and we are actively seeking the cooperation of merchandizing vendors to open the doors to their products for such a worthy global cause. Corporate sponsorships for the website are still available.

Distribution Network:

The Houston area and Quito, Ecuador are the first places where we are establishing laboratories, clinics, and training programs. Our next steps will be in Haiti and Malawi. Equipment and product donation networks are an active part of this process, and we are currently seeking additional assistance in securing these resources.