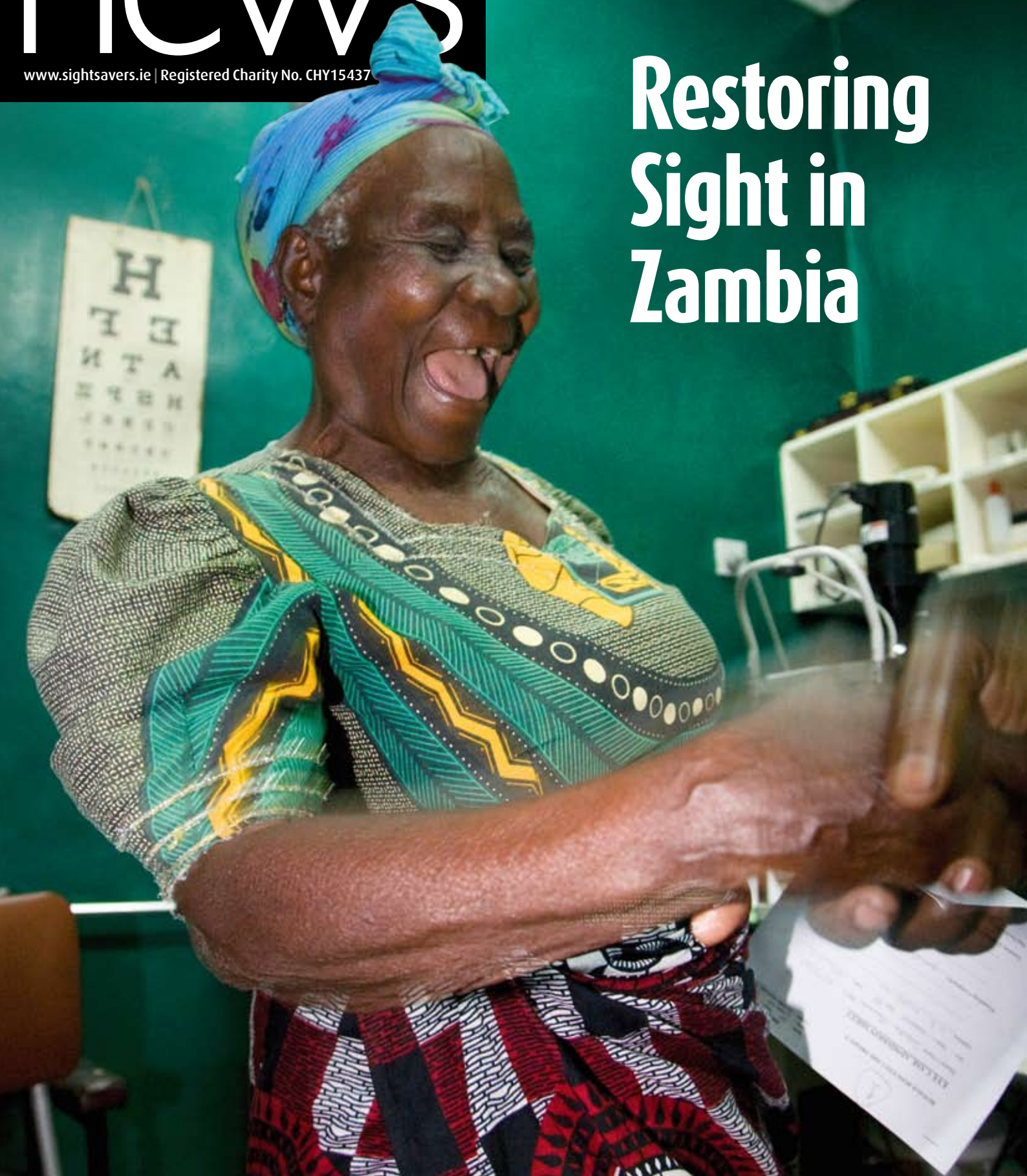


sightsavers news

Winter/Spring 2008

www.sightsavers.ie | Registered Charity No. CHY15437

Restoring Sight in Zambia



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:
Life-changing trip | Education campaign | World Sight Day

sightsavers
INTERNATIONAL



Welcome

Happy New Year and welcome to the first edition of Sightsavers News for 2008. It has been a difficult start to the year in both Kenya and Pakistan. The unrest, particularly in Kenya, has created a very difficult working environment for Sightsavers and our partners. Sightsavers Kenya was forced to close for a number of days, but our dedicated team re-opened the office as soon as it was safe on 7 January. On page 6 you can read about two excellent projects being supported by Sightsavers Kenya – one to tackle trachoma and a second to produce much-needed eye drops locally. I hope you will also enjoy reading about our work in Zambia, where volunteers, a drama group, schools, traditional healers and one very dedicated eyecare team at Ronald Ross hospital come together to bridge the gap between hospital eyecare and the community.

Also in this edition, you can read a very personal account from Christy Butler, a Dublin Bus driver who has been fundraising for Sightsavers for a number of years. Christy recently got a chance to visit some of our projects while he was in India.

Thanks to all of you who supported our Christmas and Gift of Sight campaigns. This year, with your continued support, we look forward to reaching even more people through our programmes. We will also be expanding our campaigning work as part of the Global Campaign for Education. You too can make a difference by joining our campaign to ensure that no child misses out on the chance of an education.

John Fleming, Head of Sightsavers Ireland

WINTER/SPRING 2008

Sightsavers International

98 Patrick Street

Dun Laoghaire

Co Dublin

Tel 01 663 7666

Email info@sightsavers.ie

Website www.sightsavers.ie

About Sightsavers

Sightsavers is the country's leading charity combating blindness in the developing world. Sightsavers' vision is of a world where no-one is needlessly blind.

We work with partner organisations in the poorest and least-served communities to help establish and support permanent activities that prevent and cure blindness, restore sight and provide help for people who will never see.

Donation hotline (24/7)

1850 50 20 20

Website

www.sightsavers.ie

sightsavers

Registered Charity Number CHY 15437

IN THIS ISSUE

3	Cover story Bridging the gap between a hospital and the local community in Zambia	
6	Update International and local Sightsavers news	
8	Life-changing trip One fundraiser's journey to see first hand what a difference he can make	
10	World Sight Day A focus on childhood blindness	
11	Photo story An Indian boy's sight restored by surgery	
12	Saving sight How your signature could be priceless	

Tabitha waves goodbye as we drop her back home after her sight restoring surgery

Eye care in the heart of the community



Sightsavers' Vicky Astbury visits northern Zambia to see how a unique partnership between traditional healers, volunteers and teachers – not forgetting a group of young actors – is delivering eye care to rural communities.

Everyone in the room stopped talking when Tabitha had her bandage removed. The doctor gently peeled off the tape which held the patch in place over her right eye. There was a momentary pause; then Tabitha laughed and reached out for his hand. The operation had been a success – she could see for the first time in seven years. Totally overcome, I had to go and have a moment to myself outside the door. A few minutes later I came back to find 72 year-old Tabitha dancing around the room. She'd just had an eye test and the

vision in her right eye was pretty near perfect.

Tabitha was free to go home the same day. She didn't seem to mind sharing the back of the truck with about ten other people – all of whom were being taken home from the hospital after successful cataract operations.

Back in her village, neighbours came out of their houses to marvel at a sight they never thought they'd see – Tabitha weaving her way between the huts in the village completely unassisted. "I feel

Please turn over ▶



Bridging the gap between the

like I'm already in heaven!" she told us when we said goodbye.

Without the Sightsavers-supported Ronald Ross Eye Care Project Tabitha might not ever have had her sight restored. She'd heard about the possibility of treatment for her blindness through her church, just one of the partners with whom Ronald Ross is working to make sure the community links up to the eye services at the hospital.

The project was set up by the inspirational Dominic Mwale four years ago. His interest in community eye health, he tells me, stemmed from the fact that he often had red painful eyes as a child, as did his brothers and sisters. Unfortunately the health clinic was miles away and his family too poor to travel, so there was no way of finding out what was wrong, or getting treatment.

"It wasn't until I was much older I found out that the eye problem we'd had as children was trachoma and that it could be cured using ointment," Dominic says. "It was then I decided to specialise in eye health and train to be an ophthalmic clinical officer."

Determined to achieve his goal, after his general medical training Dominic managed to raise enough money to go to Malawi and enrol on the Sightsavers-supported Ophthalmic Training Programme.

A few years on, Dominic now works in partnership with Sightsavers, heading up the Ronald Ross Eye Care Project in Mufulira, northern Zambia. I was lucky enough to spend a week with him and see how his passion for eye health has resulted in an amazing collaboration between government, volunteers, traditional healers and teachers – not forgetting a group of young actors – which is taking eye care to the very heart of the community.



“ We use drama in our own local language to encourage people to attend the clinic if they have eye problems.”

Comfrey Sikanyika, 20 years old, member of Ronald Ross Eye Care Drama Group

Drama group

The drama group, which is made up of visually impaired and sighted actors from local schools, was set up by Ronald Ross as a way of conveying eye health messages to remote villages.



“ One of the main parts of my job is to teach people about eye hygiene. The most important drug is health education.”

Gabriel Katantala Mutale, 32-year-old primary eye care worker

Community volunteers

Gabriel is one of the 30 volunteers trained in primary eye care by Ronald Ross. He now finds and helps people in his community with eye problems, including his grandmother, who had cataracts and was able to have her sight restored at the hospital.

eye hospital and the community



ZAMBIA FACT FILE		
Population	11,043,312	(IRELAND 4,040,185)
Land area	752,610 sq km	(IRELAND 70,270 sq km)
Under-5 mortality	192 per 1,000	(IRELAND 6 per 1,000)
Life expectancy	38 years	(IRELAND 77 years)

When we examine the eyes of the patients we don't use the spirits. If they have a problem with the eyes we tell them to go to the clinic.

Beatrice Kanto, traditional healer from Kanto, Mufulira



Traditional healers

Since attending workshops run by Ronald Ross, over 25 healers in Mufulira now refer patients with eye problems directly to the hospital, having learnt that many of the traditional methods of eye treatment are potentially harmful.



HOSPITAL

Since the Ronald Ross Eye Care Project started, the number of people coming for eye treatment at the hospital has increased by 260 per cent.

Before we start the screening we carry out health talks - telling students about the different types of eye diseases and how to avoid them.

Beauty Chima, 31-year-old teacher at Butondo High School, Mufulira



Schools

Beauty, a teacher at Butondo High, attended a workshop run by Ronald Ross and now screens pupils for eye problems. Each school in Mufulira has a teacher with specialist eye knowledge working in partnership with the Ronald Ross eye care team.

sightsavers Update

All the latest from around the world

Athy comes together to save sight

Starting life as a variety show, this annual fundraising event, with the help of the generous people and businesses of Athy, has grown into the most successful pub fundraiser ever held for the charity. This year €7000 was raised, pushing the fundraising efforts of the Immigrant Bar past the €30,000 mark.

As well as being entertained in the exciting variety show, the people of Athy may have found themselves waylaid at a toll on the bridge that saw passers by dig deep to help save sight and change lives in some of the developing world's poorest communities.

"This wonderful fundraising effort is a fantastic example of how a community in Ireland can come together and support some of the world's poorest communities by changing the future for people who are blind or visually impaired" says John Fleming, Head of Sightsavers Ireland. "The money raised by the Immigrant Bar will allow us to help many people who otherwise could lose their sight or never get the chance to live independently because of their blindness."



Darran Flynn, Mark Redmond, Gobo McConville and Paddy Reid from the Immigrant Bar present John Fleming, Head of Sightsavers Ireland with a cheque

Focus on Kenya

The last few weeks have been a very difficult time in Kenya. Our Kenyan office reopened on 7 January, after closing for a few days as a result of the recent unrest. Nancy Thuo and her team in Sightsavers Kenya continue to work to support our partners in their invaluable work. In recent months Sightsavers Kenya has achieved some key goals, including a major trachoma treatment plan and a self-sustaining project to produce eye drops locally.

Blitz on trachoma

Sightsavers has been working together with Masai elders and government to tackle trachoma in Kenya.

The much awaited trachoma mass treatment was launched at the heart of the Amboseli National Park at the foot of Mt. Kilimanjaro. However, it wasn't always easy to convince people of the safety of the treatment, so on the day of the launch Masai elders and senior government officials publicly took the dose of Zithromax, which clears up the trachoma infection, to instil confidence in the local community.

Government, NGOs and faith groups were involved in rolling out the treatment over the next month – a great step forward in preventing trachoma which accounts for 19 per cent of total blindness in Kenya.



Masai elders help convince the public that Zithromax is perfectly safe

Not just a drop in the ocean

Sightsavers has received €150,000 over two years for a self-sustaining project in Kenya. The donation from mobile phone operator Safaricom Limited, an existing Sightsavers corporate partner, will go towards the Local Production of Eye Drops (LPED).

Sightsavers' partner, the Kenya Society for the Blind (KSB), has been producing eye drops since 1990, and the KSB Eye Production Unit currently churns out 120,000 bottles of eye drops per year. The unit should now see production increase to over 500,000 per year in the next four years.

The need for quality, low-cost eye drops in a country like Kenya is enormous: it is estimated that 3.4 to 5 million Kenyans per year suffer from eye problems that could be treated with these drops.

Such a production unit is traditionally not a profit making enterprise but, if it is well managed, the LPED unit has the potential to make money for the Kenya Society for the Blind, to fund other eye care activities such as rehabilitation and cataract surgery.



A woman receiving eye drops

A big thank you

Mrs Rosemary Bond, Mrs Joyce Ashmore and all their friends in Sandymount, who organised a coffee afternoon and sale of work in aid of Sightsavers, to mark World Sight Day. They raised a fantastic €1000, well done ladies!



Education for all and a chance to get in the Guinness Book of Records

It is a global tragedy that 72 million children are still going without an education – many of them in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, according to the latest report by UNESCO.

A third of the children who are out of school are disabled, and in Africa, 90 per cent of children who are disabled do not get the chance to go to school.

Sightsavers is a member of the Global Campaign for Education which promotes education as a basic human right. Our goal is to put public pressure on governments and the international community to fulfil their promises to provide free, compulsory public basic education for everyone; in particular for children, women and the most disadvantaged – but we need your help to do this!

Every year the Global Campaign for Education holds an Action Week. This year during Action Week (21–25 April), the Campaign is organising the World's Biggest Lesson.

Join us!

If you would like your class or school to become part of the Guinness Book of Record World's Biggest Lesson attempt then contact Ruth Coleman, Communications & Advocacy Manager on rcoleman@sightsavers.ie or **01 6637666**

The lesson will take place on 23 April and can be held at either 8am or 3pm. Come join our global classroom and help us to make education a reality for the 72 million children who can still only dream of the chance to learn.



Nine-year-old Nabirye (left, playing hide and seek with her friends) went to school for a term but was asked to leave as the school did not feel they could cope with a blind child

Sightsavers



Young entrepreneurs nail it

This Christmas four enterprising 6th class students from Kilbrin National School in Kanturk set up and managed a successful nail bar mini-business during lunchbreaks. Lydia, Emma, Michelle and Tammy, with support from their teacher Ms O'Riordan, managed to raise an amazing €430 with their novel idea. With each girl taking responsibility for a different part of the business, they managed to organise nail painters, posters to advertise the business and an accounts book.

Having read about Gift of Sight, the girls were determined to do their bit to make a difference, and carefully chose their gifts.

"The children have derived great enjoyment and satisfaction from the project, as I have myself" says Ms O'Riordan. "Hopefully our little

donation will go a long way to helping others." In fact, their hard work will mean that 14 people could have their sight restored through cataract operations, 16 people could be given freedom and a new life through the gift of white canes, 20 people could get glasses, 100 school children could be screened for sight-related problems and a whole community could be protected from river blindness for an entire year.



Community corner



Welcome to Community Corner. Now is the time of year when many of us promise ourselves that we will eat healthily and get fit – if you would like an extra reason to become fit this year why not set yourself the challenge of running in support of Sightsavers in one of the many upcoming events.

5 May Belfast City Marathon

2 June Flora Women's Dublin Mini-Marathon

2 June Cork Marathon

27 October Dublin City Marathon

Call us for a t-shirt and information pack. Getting sponsorship is now even easier, just register and collect sponsorship at www.mycharity.ie

If running is not your thing, why not get some inspiration from the update section on what people have been getting up to in support of Sightsavers.

Thank you...

Margaret Dunne from Tallaght in Dublin raised over €500 by getting her friends and work colleagues to buy Gift of Sight vouchers over Christmas.

The children of St Joseph's College Lucan in Dublin who got together to send €50.

Colin O'Mahony and his fellow pupils in the CSPE class of St. Colmcille's Community School Knocklyon in Dublin who ran an astro football competition to raise money.

Elizabeth Swift from Finglas who, with the help of family, friends and co-workers, has raised a fantastic €2000 over the last four years by collecting small change and cashing in refunds from Dublin Bus tickets, proving that great things can happen by taking one small step to support our work.

Grace O'Brien



Life-changing trip

Christy Butler's journey to see what a difference his fundraising makes

On a recent visit to India, arrangements were made by Sightsavers International for me to visit one of their partner's clinics in Gujarat State, near the town of Bharuch.

Having fundraised for the charity for three years, I had only dreamed of such a visit and was eager to see for myself the amazing work being carried out by Sightsavers for the needlessly blind of the developing world.

It soon became clear that working at SEWA Rural Clinic is more a vocation, a way of life, than a job. Its motto, 'For the poorest of the poor' is very appropriate. Its catchment area comprises 2 million people from 130 villages, 99.9 per cent of whom are poor, and covers an area bigger than Leinster.

Accompanied by Dr Adjid, an ophthalmologist, and Adjuntra Sunva and Mahesh, part of the Outreach Team,

I was taken to see the results of the clinic's outreach work. In a small house in the first village we visited I spoke to Vanitaben, who is blind, and has been helped by Sightsavers International to set up her little shop. Since opening her shop she has become a respected member of the village and is able to provide for herself.

The next call brought us to visit a man who, although totally blind, is well able to harvest his crop and to provide for his family. Sightsavers International helped to set him up with the purchase of the land.

In another village we met Radhiben, a blind woman who runs an electric flour mill. The village had come to depend

on her to run the mill. She was able to provide for her family and to become a valuable member of the community – again, with the help of Sightsavers International and SEWA Rural. These are just three examples of the work carried out by the Outreach Programme and Sightsavers International.

Many elderly people in India believe that cataract is a disease of old age and have to be coaxed to come to the clinic/hospital for treatment. As they are found and examined, a 20-seater bus provided by Sightsavers International to help the Outreach Team, ferries them to the clinic for treatment, some from 100 km away. After the operation they are returned to their village. A follow up is carried out by an ophthalmologist in a Landrover provided by Sightsavers International. Due to the vast area covered by the clinic, the bus and Landrover are essential to the smooth running of the Outreach Programme.

The next day, 20 new arrivals were being prepared for surgery. Feeling a little apprehensive as I went to watch a cataract operation, my initial fears soon receded and I became engrossed in the operation. I followed the ophthalmologist's delicate movements on a screen above the operating table, as he removed the cataract using tiny instruments. It looked simple, took less than 20 minutes and cost about €25. Such a small amount to restore someone's eyesight. Twenty more operations followed.



Vanitaben now makes a living from her shop



All photos Christy Butler

'Radhiben is now a central part of community life in Fokdi village'

Afterwards, I went back out to visit a rural primary health care centre supported by Sightsavers International. Located some 50 km from the main clinic, it is manned 24/7 by a young man. He lives on the premises with his wife and son. He is a paramedic with huge responsibilities, in the front line, so to speak, of the Outreach Programme. Once again, equipment and transport play a major role in the successful running of this Primary Care Facility. This is more than a job to this young man, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for the

poorest of the poor. It's a vocation! I was honoured to meet him. He did not wish to have his photo taken or his name mentioned.

Returning to the clinic I had the privilege of presenting awards to three young men. They too would be setting off the following day to man a primary care facility. So much depends on them.

I had an amazing time, a life-changing time, at the clinic. It gave me a greater perspective of the work of Sightsavers International and its partner organisations in Jhagadia District of

Bharuch and also on life itself.

Unnecessary blindness is hard but combined with poverty and harsh living conditions, it makes life unbearable. Having witnessed at first hand the work of Sightsavers International and SEWA Rural clinic in just one small corner of the developing world I shall endeavour to give more time, energy and commitment to my fundraising activities in the future. My major objective is to make the Dublin Bus Pull bigger than ever and to make the people of Ireland more aware of the fantastic work being carried out by Sightsavers International in the developing world.

INDIA FACT FILE		
	Population	1,096,917,184 (IRELAND 4,040,185)
	Land area	3,287,260 sq km (IRELAND 70,270 sq km)
	Under-5 mortality	93 per 1,000 (IRELAND 6 per 1,000)
	Life expectancy	64 years (IRELAND 77 years)

**Miriam O'Callaghan
helps to raise awareness
on World Sight Day**



Lensmen & Associates

A day to remember

Childhood blindness takes centre stage in our round-up of last year's World Sight Day

Celebrated on the second Thursday of October, World Sight Day is an opportunity to raise awareness of avoidable blindness with key decision makers, other organisations and the general public, in both Ireland and the countries in which we work. This is done through a diverse range of activities and events.

As the theme was 'childhood blindness', our north India office decided to speak to children about issues of the eye. This culminated in a hotly contested 'eye quiz' with participants from 13 schools in Bhopal. School children in Bengal held a candle rally on the eve of World Sight Day. In Ireland, pupils from Scoil San Treasa in Dublin helped Miriam O'Callaghan to raise awareness of the 1440 children who go blind on World Sight Day – and every day. "It is terrible to think that so many children around the

world go blind needlessly and miss out on the chance to go to school that everyone deserves" says Miriam.

In Ghana, school children marched through the streets of Apam, and in Tanzania, the Institute of Arts in Bagamoyo organised songs and drama to deliver key messages about problems that face blind children.

"World Sight Day is dedicated to raising public awareness about the prevention of blindness among the communities

where Sightsavers' partners are working," said Antony Joseph Nellissery, Area Representative for Sightsavers in north India. "These activities are intended to increase the uptake of various services that are available to prevent blindness. It is also an occasion for our partners to reaffirm their commitment to preventing blindness and improving quality of life for visually impaired people."



Children in India holding a candle rally on the eve of World Sight Day

Sightsavers

A new life for Manoj

When ten-year old Manoj from India went blind three years ago, his parents thought he would never see again. But Sightsavers' partners gave him back his sight, and an opportunity for a better future. The theme for last year's World Sight Day was childhood blindness, and helped to raise awareness of how quick and simple it can be to change the lives of other children like Manoj.



1 The problem

Born with cataract in both eyes, Manoj lost his sight completely when he was seven. He was identified through a screening camp in his region run by the Kiawah Trust, and referred to the Sankara Hospital.



2 Getting help

Manoj had to visit Sankara Hospital twice to have each of his eyes operated on.



3 The operation

Manoj's surgery is a much more delicate procedure than adult operations. A general anaesthetic is used for child cataract surgery, and the number of hospital staff required is greater.



4 An anxious wait

His father was very anxious, and shed a few tears while waiting for his son to wake up from his operation.

5 The moment of truth

Manoj is well behaved and sits still while his bandage comes off. After he has eye drops and vision testing, he says he can see out of both eyes.



6 A brighter future

Before his first operation Manoj would just listen to lessons in school, unable to see, and sit on his own during playtime. Now he looks forward to joining in and playing with his friends and family.

