

Focus

Your magazine from  Sightsavers **Spring 2024**

Sharing the joy

You've helped free more children like Lanoi from blinding trachoma and we can't thank you enough

You're creating joy and hope

I'm really thrilled to bring you this issue of Focus – your first for 2024 – because it gives me the chance to thank you for the huge difference you make to so many people's lives.

As I'm sure you remember, last year was the 20th anniversary of Sightsavers Ireland, and it was a great chance to reflect on some of the amazing achievements supporters like you have been part of.

With your wonderful help, over the last 20 years, Sightsavers has carried out more than 8.7 million cataract operations to restore people's sight, supported over 1.7 billion treatments for neglected tropical diseases such as trachoma, carried out more than 216 million eye examinations, dispensed more than 6.1 million pairs of glasses, and supported more than 190 thousand children with visual impairments and other disabilities to attend school.

We've also trained over 8,856 health workers to gain professional qualifications, provided over 1.13 million eye health training sessions for eye health and education professionals, and over 3.3 million training sessions for local volunteers. The figures are phenomenal, and behind every one of them is a person whose life you've helped transform.



Abigail



Luyando



Prodinah

Remember little Luyando from Zambia, who featured on the cover of your last issue of Focus? Because of your generosity, she and her sister Abigail and cousin Prodinah received the sight-saving cataract operations they desperately needed.

All three girls now have the freedom to be themselves, play with their friends and embrace their futures full of confidence and independence. Thanks to you and our talented and dedicated staff, we can give more children the life-changing treatment they need to enjoy the futures they deserve.

My warmest wishes,

Ciara Smullen
CEO Sightsavers Ireland



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Lanoi (right), with her mum, Mesikana (standing), little sister, Teresian, and uncle, Sayianka, outside their home

Goodbye trachoma!

Together, we can beat this painful, blinding disease – and we’ve got our sights set on Kenya



Joel hands Lanoi’s antibiotics to Mesikana

It’s the world’s leading infectious cause of blindness, and it’s caused pain and misery for countless generations. But, thanks to supporters like you, five of the countries where Sightsavers works have already eliminated trachoma. We’re hoping Kenya could be one of the next.

“I love my job and it gives me a lot of emotional satisfaction,” says Dr Maurice Abony, surgeon and Sightsavers’ Programme Manager for trachoma in Kenya. “You go to a community where people are on the verge of going blind from trichiasis [advanced trachoma]. But by carrying out a 20-minute surgical procedure you can reverse the whole scenario.”

Since our work in Kenya started, we’ve supported mass drug administrations to treat children and adults with trachoma and protect whole communities. Dr Abony and his fellow surgeons have performed countless operations to correct people’s in-turned eyelids, a painful and potentially blinding symptom of trichiasis. Working tirelessly beside them are amazing community health volunteers like Joel, who distribute antibiotics, help identify people needing surgery, and raise awareness about the importance of washing hands and faces to stop the disease from spreading.



Dr Abony is passionate about saving people’s sight

© Sightsavers/Tommy Trenchard

Seeing Lanoi smile

Her smile says it all. Four-year-old Lanoi no longer has trachoma, and she can enjoy her childhood again!



Photos: © Sightsavers/Sam Otieno

Lanoi desperately needed help when our team found her. With her sore eyes streaming she was in a lot of pain, like many children and adults in her village. Concerned about her daughter, Lanoi’s mum, Mesikana, had been washing Lanoi’s eyes with clean water. But the infection wouldn’t go away. Thankfully, Joel identified the problem and arranged for Dr Abony to come and examine the whole community.

When Dr Abony arrived, the children lined up and waited patiently as, one by one, he gently examined their eyes. Joel then measured each child with a dosage pole to determine the correct level of medication and handed out antibiotics. Dr Abony also told their families about the need to continue treatment and wash hands and faces regularly to prevent the disease from returning.

A few days later, Lanoi’s eyes were clear, and her infection was gone. And the whole community is now better informed about trachoma. “I am now aware that you can think it’s a small eye problem, but if you neglect it, it can lead to blindness,” explained Lanoi’s uncle, Sayianka. “I will advise other parents whose children have similar conditions that they need to make sure they clean their children’s eyes and get the right medication.”

Seeing is believing

Our eye screening camps in Malawi are saving sight and creating a huge ripple of positivity towards eye health

Overjoyed at having his sight restored by cataract surgery, Wilson (below) has become an advocate for eye health in Chikwawa, Malawi – sharing his story with neighbours and encouraging them to get treatment.



"I became a programme ambassador because when I saw the goodness that had been done, I didn't want to keep it to myself," he told us.

One of those neighbours was Alice, who also had cataracts, but who had heard frightening stories about surgery. "People said that when you go into theatre your eyes will stop seeing, and you will never see again," she explained. "I was afraid, but Wilson reassured me."

False beliefs about medical treatment can be common in rural communities. But by talking about their own positive experiences, people like Wilson are helping to dispel the fears.

Rose Mbwinja (below right) is spreading the word too. One of the interpersonal communicators we support, she walks door to door, telling people when the eye camp is visiting and urging them to go. Run by optometrist George Richard and ophthalmic officer Rex Bwanausi, the camp is always very popular.



Rex carefully examines a patient's eye at one of the screening camps

"Mr Bwanausi does a commendable job in our area," Rose explains. "To the point that if you just say 'Mr Bwanausi is coming' it is like a president is coming. You will find that a hundred and more people will gather."

Rex and George (right) spend the day carefully examining people's eyes and talking to them about their eye conditions. They provide medicine for minor conditions and refer those with cataracts for surgery. Examining so many people is a long and arduous task, but it's something the two men do with patience, warmth, and efficiency – inspiring trust and confidence.



With her sight restored after cataract surgery, Alice and her son, Lino, beam at each other in delight

Photos: © Sightsavers/Bennie Khanyizira/Homeline Media Malawi



Help support our amazing teams

Rex, George, Wilson, Rose and many others like them are showing that cataracts and other eye conditions can be treated. People's sight can be saved and restored. If you'd like to send an extra gift to help us, we'd be really grateful. Thank you.



Eye health hero

In Sierra Leone, Dr Jalikatu Mustapha is championing women's eye care and better access to eye health services

Dr Jalikatu is currently the only female ophthalmologist in Sierra Leone and has recently been appointed as the country's Deputy Health Minister. As we near International Women's Day on 8 March, we're paying tribute to this remarkable woman – and to everyone fighting for fairness and inclusion.

"In Sierra Leone, accessing eye health services has always been more difficult for women than for men," explains Dr Jalikatu. "It's one of the areas I'm passionate about, and we're now targeting women more with health campaigns.

"We're offering free outreach services for women and girls in particular, to get them to come to the hospital. And one of the ways that Sightsavers helps is by subsidising the cost of surgery or treatment."

In 2020, Dr Jalikatu became manager of Sierra Leone's national eyecare programme. She also received an Eye Health Hero award from the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) in recognition of her work.

Now, as Deputy Health Minister she has an even bigger opportunity to continue transforming the country's eye health.

"I really look forward to continuing working with you all to take eye health and health care forward. Eye health remains a top priority for me, and I would like to lead the ministry's efforts in this area. I hope this leadership position gives me a better platform to advocate for eye health. I am really excited, and I can't wait to see all we can do."

"People were coming who were completely blind and didn't have the will to live. And then the next day, the transformation after just a 15-minute operation was more than anything I'd ever seen. They were completely different. They had regained their independence. And that was what inspired me to go into ophthalmology"

Dr Jalikatu

SHIP sails ahead

Thanks to supporters like you, our innovative school eye health programme is transforming children's lives in Pakistan

SHIP stands for School Health Integrated Programming and it's taking eye health into classrooms – ensuring children with visual impairments are identified and receive the help they need.

Through SHIP, teachers are trained to screen their students for a range of refractive errors and eye conditions, including short and long-sightedness and cataracts. They refer any students with vision problems to mobile optometric technicians, who provide free glasses to those who need them, carry out further tests and arrange treatments such as cataract surgery.

We launched SHIP in Pakistan in 2018 and, so far, we've screened more than 107,300 children. Zahra is one of them.



Embracing every moment

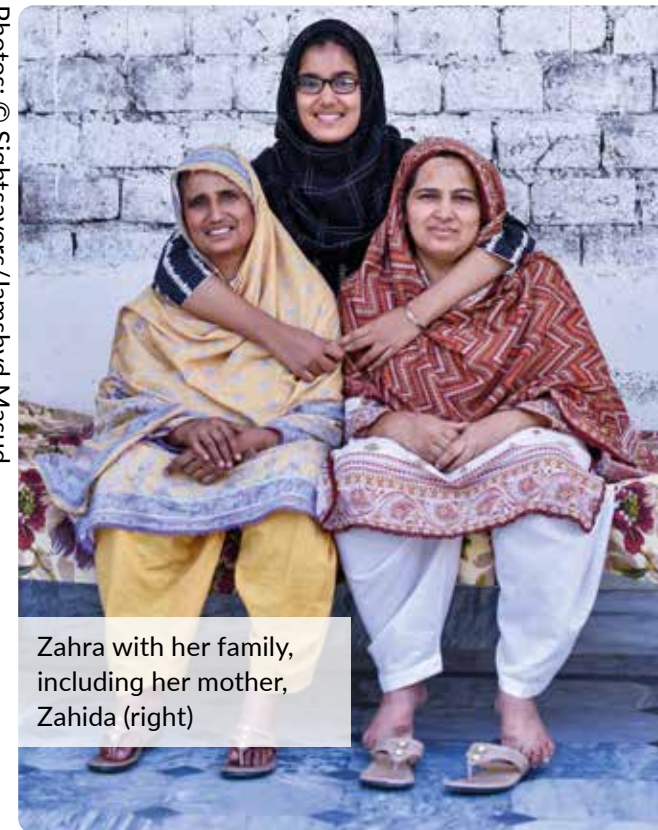
With her eyesight problem corrected, Zahra is now thriving at school and can do all the things she loves.

Around two years ago, 14-year-old Zahra began having eye issues and headaches. The doctor prescribed eye drops. But then her father sadly died, and life became very difficult. "Everything stopped," said Zahra's mother, Zahida. "Our restaurant business closed, then Zahra's grandmother died and one of her uncles developed kidney failure."

Both parents had been determined their daughters would gain an education. But with the family under so much pressure, Zahra kept quiet about her worsening eyesight and struggled on at school. Then, her teacher told her about SHIP, and it changed everything.

After having her eyes examined, Zahra was given glasses to wear and since then she's never looked back. "Before, I used to ask my friends to help me," she told us. "Now I can see the chalkboard clearly. My glasses have been a very positive addition to my life."

Photos: © Sightsavers/Jamshyd Masud



Zahra with her family, including her mother, Zahida (right)

Man of vision



Meet Ezekiel Benuh, who is based in Cameroon and manages our Irish Aid programmes across West Africa

Eye health, inclusive education, political participation and economic empowerment for adults and children with disabilities are

key areas of Sightsavers' work in Cameroon, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Senegal. Through our partnership with Irish Aid, we're working to strengthen and improve all these things – and we're steadily making progress.

We also supported community social workers to identify children with disabilities, help families get the right support, and promote positive messages about including children with disabilities in education. Plus, we helped local councils adopt disability inclusive approaches. **Today, more children with disabilities are attending school and people are much more informed and positive about their abilities and potential.**

“Creating long-term change is vital”

Our partnership with Irish Aid means we can implement long-term programmes to save sight, tackle debilitating diseases and achieve a more equal, peaceful, and sustainable world. We're also grateful to our supporters for helping us reach out to those who might otherwise get left behind.

When I see a child with a disability thrive at school, or an adult with a disability become a local councillor or decision-maker it shows that change is really happening, and it makes me want to do more.



“I believe that every child should be able to go to school and enjoy an education”

When Sightsavers first started its inclusive education programme in Cameroon, many children with disabilities were missing out, especially girls. To overcome the problem, we trained teachers to identify and address their students' needs, use Braille, and make small yet significant changes, such as seating children with visual impairments at the front of the classroom.

Thanks to our partnership with Irish Aid, more children with disabilities are going to school and learning alongside their peers



© Sightsavers/Rodrig Mbok



© Sightsavers/Hudson Chirwa

Gift in memory

Donating in remembrance of a loved one is a meaningful way to celebrate their lives, whilst also helping others

Every gift we receive is precious. But gifts in memory are especially touching. They're given by kind-hearted people to celebrate the lives of someone they have loved and respected. And they can make a real and lasting difference to a child such as Luyando (pictured above), who might otherwise have their life needlessly shattered by sight loss.

Gifts in memory can come from an individual or a group of family and friends, and they're often made because the person who has passed away was a great supporter of our work. Making a donation means the person's passion for saving sight and helping others can live on – something that can be hugely comforting.

To learn more about making a gift in memory, please visit www.sightsavers.ie/gift-in-memory or contact our Supporter Care Manager, Michael on **01 230 0059** or by emailing mbreslin@sightsavers.ie

Remembering Howard

We're grateful to the family and friends of Howard Dalzell, for making a kind gift to Sightsavers in his memory

A lifelong supporter of humanitarian and development causes, Howard was a Sightsavers Ireland board member and a Trustee on our Global Council. When he sadly died last year, a memorial service was held at Crinken Church, Bray, and his family kindly asked that donations in his memory be made to Sightsavers.

We'll be forever grateful for Howard's dedication to our work, and for the thoughtfulness of his family in acknowledging his tireless commitment in this very special way.



On your marks, get set, go!

The clock is ticking towards Ireland's biggest marathon on 27 October. Will you join Emma and run for Sightsavers?



With only 35 places left for our supporters, you need to grab yours now. We asked our Head of Communications and Public Affairs, Emma, why running the Dublin Marathon is so important to her.

Why have you chosen to run the marathon for Sightsavers Ireland?

It was an easy choice to make. I'm always in awe of the work done by our teams on the ground in the areas of eye health, disability inclusion and inclusive education – and how much this changes people's lives. I hope that doing my little bit this year will raise some awareness of what we do and inspire more people to get involved with us.

Is running your sport?

Gaelic Football is my primary sport, so running the marathon will completely take me out of my comfort zone. But I'm determined to do it. I've been impressed by the range of ages and abilities of the people taking part, and this year is my year to get involved.

Can you share your fundraising ideas?

I'll be using social media, but I'm also aiming to host a coffee morning at work and organise some other in-person events to bring people together and raise awareness of what we do. My personal favourite is a virtual race night – a real crowd pleaser!



© Irish Life Dublin Marathon

What are you most excited about?

I'm very excited about the race day – it always has a brilliant atmosphere, and I'm really looking forward to being part of it for the first time!

Sign up today!

Contact our Supporter Care Manager, Michael on **01 230 0059** or at **info@sightsavers.ie**

Date: 27 October 2024

Registration fee: €100

Fundraising goal: €2,000 – enough to fund 18 sight-saving child cataract operations

If you would like to chat about your Dublin marathon fundraising plans or if you want help with ideas, just give Michael a call.