Glasses make a world of difference

Optometrist Dr. Beth Harper first met Irene and Aimee* when they were five and six years old. To her surprise, the girls did not speak, appeared unable to follow simple instructions, and did not make eye contact.

The girls, who were born in Haiti, had recently moved to Lynn and began seeing a doctor at Lynn Community Health Center, who was working with the family to determine the cause of their difficulty with communication. During an initial exam, the doctor noticed that both girls had strabismus, also known as crossed eyes, and referred them to the health center’s eye clinic.

Dr. Harper began with an initial evaluation. “I had to use the same kinds of tests we use on infants, such as using a hand puppet to see if they can follow objects with their eyes,” she said. “The results of all of the tests showed that both of them had extremely poor vision.”

After the girls got their glasses they came back to Dr. Harper for a follow up visit three months later. “The change in them was astounding!” she reported. “They both showed significant improvement in their ability to comprehend language, they made regular eye contact, and were noticeably more talkative and interactive with me and the staff. Although their language was still extremely delayed, they were clearly communicating more. Though there were interventions in addition to the eyeglasses, we are sure that enabling them to see clearly was a very important factor in their progress.”

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Information about pediatric eye care

Good eyesight is important to a child’s ability to learn and communicate, especially once he or she starts school.

According to the American Optometric Association, children should have their first comprehensive eye exam between the ages of six months and three years of age. “Regular vision screening by pediatricians can identify significant issues, but a comprehensive exam is important for all children before they start school—not just those who have obvious problems,” says health center Eye Clinic Director Dr. Michelle Zickel. “There are many issues that can be best treated when children are young and their eyes are still developing. Early detection can prevent more serious or even untreatable problems later.”

Many people are surprised to learn that children don’t need to know their letters, or even be very verbal, in order to test for vision problems. It is possible to test young children, and even infants, by observing eye movements and using retinal scanning equipment.

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Need new glasses? Check out Everybody’s Optical at LCHC!

Lynn has a new destination for quality prescription eyewear, thanks to Lynn Community Health Center.

Everybody’s Optical is the newly expanded retail section of Lynn Community Health Center Eye Clinic. Conveniently located on the ground floor of 20 Central Avenue, Everybody’s Optical has a large selection of eyeglasses, sunglasses, sportswear, and safety glasses for adults and children. Customers may also order contact lenses.

“We have a great selection of glasses at very competitive prices,” says Torri Rowen, Optician. “We were hearing that local residents and downtown employees thought that only health center patients could purchase eyewear here. That is not true—anyone can purchase glasses or contact lenses here. You just need to bring a current prescription from your doctor.”

Rowen has been working as an optician for 11 years and has a keen eye when fitting customers with glasses. “She helped me find the perfect pair,” says one customer. “I never would have considered the glasses I ended up with had she not made the recommendation that I try them on. She has a real sense of style.”

Everybody’s Optical accepts most forms of insurance. For more information please call 781-595-1350 or visit www.lchcnet.org/services/eye-care for store hours and more information.
Health center volunteer named “Point of Light” for commitment to literacy

On August 12th, Alex Ricciardelli, volunteer for the health center’s Reach Out and Read program, was honored as a "Point of Light" by the Daily Points of Light Foundation, started in 1983 by President George Bush. He was recognized for writing and publishing “A Small Tale: The Adventures of Melvin” to raise money for Reach Out and Read.

Reach Out and Read promotes family literacy for children ages birth through 5 years old during their checkups. This includes a free, brand-new book they can keep for their own, and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud to children. Volunteers like Alex provide key support to this program by creating literacy-rich environments in the waiting room.

Alex has been volunteering for almost two years. "I love watching the kids get excited about a book when we read together," he says. "Then when I tell them they can take the book home they really light up."

Alex noticed that some children are difficult to engage. "The greatest barrier to getting a kid to talk to me is not shyness or the ability to speak English," he says. "It is that they are always playing on their parent's phones." He decided that one way to draw children away from the small screen is to demonstrate the joys of reading and writing, thus "A Small Tale" was born.

“My goal is to raise $10,000 dollars, which would fund the purchase of 1000 books for the Lynn Community Health Center along with a cash donation of close to $6000!” says Alex. "A Small Tale" is available on Amazon.com for $9, or you can support this project at Alex's "GoFundMe" page at http://www.gofundme.com/3m08ko.

"Alex is a beloved figure in our waiting rooms," says Clare Hayes, Reach Out and Read program coordinator. "We are so proud of him for this accomplishment and very grateful that he wants to use it to benefit our program."

Pediatric Eye Care
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Dr. Harper keeps in contact with the girls’ pediatrician, with whom she regularly communicates about their progress. Because the health center is committed to coordinated care, Dr. Harper is able to easily access information about the family and their medical history. Her insights as an optometrist in turn help the girls’ doctor coordinate their care.

“This is an incredible success story, and we are hopeful that we will be able to work together to help these girls overcome the challenges they face as they start school,” concludes Dr. Harper.

*Patients’ names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Senator Elizabeth Warren’s visit to Lynn Community Health Center

Lynn Community Health Center was honored to host a visit by Senator Elizabeth Warren on Friday, July 26th. Senator Warren, Congressman Tierney, and other officials came to learn more about the health center, and particularly about our integrated care model that combines primary and behavioral health care in one setting. During a briefing and a tour of our new building, she expressed confidence that community health centers are an important part of the future of healthcare.

Her visit included a tour of the health center, during which she conversed with one of our Integrated Care Teams. Doctors, behavioral health providers, nurses, and social workers work in shared space, facilitating collaboration around patient care. Dr. Marc Sibella described the mental health needs of those he works with and said that having experienced working in an integrated care setting, he can’t imagine practicing medicine any other way. “It is truly the best way to treat patients,” he said, “and not only are their outcomes improved, my satisfaction as a provider is improved. It is a win-win here.”
Eye Clinic important piece of health center’s Integrated Care Model

Lynn Community Health Center has developed a unique, fully integrated behavioral and medical health care model to address the multiple and complex needs of high risk patients. The model involves co-location of behavioral health and primary care services and co-management of patients by behavioral health and primary care providers. The team works with other providers and specialists to ensure that those at highest risk get the care they need. The health center’s eye care and dental services are important resources for Integrated Care Teams, often working closely with them to ensure optimal patient outcomes.

James’ story is a good example. James* has lived with schizophrenia since his early 20’s. Now in his 60’s, he lives independently in the community, and, with regular support from his social worker and medical team, leads a very structured life that helps him cope.

Two years ago James’ primary care doctor observed signs of vision loss, so he referred James to the health center’s Eye Clinic for evaluation.

James has a difficult time accepting new people into his life, but was finally persuaded to visit Lynn Community Health Center Eye Care Services where he met Dr. Michelle Zickel, who confirmed that he had lost a considerable amount of vision due to advanced glaucoma.

James needed medications that could only be prescribed by an ophthalmologist, but he refused. He had come to trust Dr. Zickel and didn’t want another provider involved with his care. One day, however, James’s appointment coincided with a time when the ophthalmologist was on site.

“I asked James if I could simply introduce him,” said Dr. Zickel. “We came into the room and there was a long pause, and I thought he was going to refuse treatment—but before I even began to speak he looked at the specialist and said, ‘Well, I guess you’ll want to have a look at me.’ It was an incredible breakthrough moment! It reminded me that we have to remain sensitive to patients individual needs, and allow them to participate in decision-making surrounding their own care.”

James now has the medicine he needs and, with the support of Dr. Zickel and his entire health care team, maintains functional vision that allows him to remain living independently.

*Patients’ names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Dr. Timothy Bossie, OD joins Eye Care Team

Dr. Timothy Bossie joined the health center in August. A graduate of New England College of Optometry, he completed his residency at the VA Health Care System in Brockton, MA.

Walk-in clinic, optometry students help meet demand

Lynn Community Health Center Eye Care Services had 4900 visits last year, and the demand continues to increase.

To help meet this growing need, we recently launched a walk-in clinic two mornings and two evenings each week. “This is a great way to increase access for services,” says Director Michelle Zickel, OD. “We are generally booked out one month for routine care, but if a patient wants to be seen sooner they can stop by for walk-in care.”

The Clinic has also been able to expand its capacity with students from the New England College of Optometry (NECO). The health center has partnered with NECO since its inception in 2009, and health center optometrists are members of the NECO Faculty.

“This is a vital partnership with many benefits for both organizations,” say Michelle Zickel, Eye Clinic Director. “As faculty of NECO, we have the ability to open our practice to students. This is a tremendous benefit for our patients because we are able to increase the number of visits each day.”

I believe it is also an important way to introduce optometry students to the world of community health care,” she continues. “There is such a tremendous need in at-risk communities like Lynn. Hopefully we are doing our part to inspire others to choose a career in community health.”
To explore how you can support the health center please visit www.lchcnet.org/donate