Kids Can Succeed With Low Vision

Eye doctors provide special services across Kansas

Wichita, Kan. – Eleven eye doctors were honored during the Kansas Optometric Association’s Fall Eyecare Conference today for participation in a program serving more than 1,000 Kansas students who remain enrolled in their home school districts despite severe vision impairment.

Doctors participating in the program, known as KanLovKids, provide early intervention through high school students with visual evaluations, specialized tests and other services and support.

“KanLovKids is about helping children attain and sustain independence even if they are legally blind,” said R. Tracy Williams, optometrist and Director, Low Vision Service at Loyola University Chicago, who presented plaques during the KOA meeting at the Wichita Airport Hilton. “When glasses or surgery no longer will help, KanLovKids helps students learn to cope so they can succeed in school and in life.”

KanLovKids – the Kansas Lions Statewide Low Vision Program – is an initiative of the Kansas Lions Sight Foundation, which includes members of all Lions clubs in Kansas, KOA, the Kansas State School for the Blind, and KC Blind All-Stars Foundation.

The Lions of Kansas (Multiple District 17) received the first-ever Lions Clubs International Foundation grant for low-vision services in the United States, according to Kendall Krug, a Hays, Kan., optometrist who presented a program on low-vision services during the conference and who was one of the 11 eye doctors honored.
The $71,000, two-year grant supports not only service to students, but also training for optometrists, assistants, school personnel, early childhood educators and parents. In addition to service in doctors’ offices statewide, low vision clinics are held in multiple locations statewide, often with assistance from Lions Club members.

KanLovKids helps students who have low vision or are legally blind, according to Anne Nielsen, a Lion and outreach director at the Kansas State School for the Blind.

“A good example is Melissa, a high-school senior who recently received her first low-vision evaluation even though she has had low vision since birth,” Nielsen said. “The evaluation revealed a condition that had gone undetected for 18 years. The doctor was able to advise her on special aids and training so she can have an independent life after high school.”

Unlike a standard eye exam, doctors delivering low-vision services use different evaluation equipment, different methods and special test charts scaled for those with only partial sight. The doctor may recommend specialty glasses, spectacle-mounted telescopes, special optical magnification devices, or tinted lenses, among other things. The doctor also may recommend special training, instruction in the use of special electronic or computer devices or referral to other professional services such as orientation and mobility.

“We are very grateful to the Kansas Lions Sight Foundation for its support over the past five years and to the Lions Clubs International Foundation for its very generous grant recognizing our success serving Kansas children,” Krug said. “The funds will enhance the KSSB’s long-standing low vision program and help us reach even more students across the Sunflower State.”

In addition to Krug, Kansas optometrists honored for KanLovKids participation were Joseph Maino, Kansas City; Shane Kannarr, Pittsburg; David Nelson, Topeka; Todd Zerger, Salina; William Park, Wichita; Dawn Williams, Garden City; Kristina Post, Wichita; Mark Wahlmeier, Colby; and Robert Hoch, Garden City. Also honored was Linda Lawrence, a Salina ophthalmologist.

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