



Touchstone Story #9 Recycle for Sight

Photo Caption: For more than 80 years, Lions have been collecting, sorting and cleaning eyeglasses, and distributing them to those in need.

The World Health Organization estimates that more than 150 million people suffer from blurred vision due to uncorrected refractive errors, such as nearsightedness or farsightedness. The inability to see clearly can prevent children from learning in school, adults from finding work or staying employed, and older adults from living independently. Often, a simple pair of eyeglasses can bring the world into focus, but a lack of access to basic care prevents many people in developing nations from getting the treatment they need. Cost is also an issue; in a developing country a pair of glasses may cost as much as a month's wages.

However, with the help of Lions around the world and the Recycle for Sight program, Lions Clubs International is bringing clear vision to millions, one pair of glasses at a time.

Through Recycle for Sight, Lions collect new and gently used eyeglasses and sunglasses in collection bins at a variety of locations in their communities including libraries, doctors' offices, schools, sidewalks, banks and retail stores. The glasses are then shipped to the nearest Lions Eyeglass Recycling Center, where volunteers sort the glasses, clean them and determine their prescription strength. After carefully packaging the refurbished spectacles, Lions store them until they can be distributed, usually through humanitarian missions to developing nations.

Lion volunteers and eye care professionals screen thousands of children and adults during sight missions, providing them—free of charge—with prescription lenses, frames and ultimately a better quality of life. Lions also provide recycled glasses to nonprofit organizations focused on eye care, as well as to optometry college groups, religious organizations and military assistance groups, which also distribute to people in need.



Eyeglass recycling, a popular activity for Lions around the world, dates back to the 1930s. Similar to today, Lions gathered glasses in their communities processed and provided them to those most in need. For example, in the early 1960s, the Hayes & Harlington Lions clubs in England collected more than 20,000 pairs of glasses. Knowing of the need in India, they gave them to a Lions eye hospital in India, where they were processed and provided to local people.

In 1994, Lions Clubs turned their longtime efforts into an official program under the name Recycle for Sight. With a common identity and common format, the program has continued to expand and enable more people to see clearly.

Each year, Lions collect about 30 million pairs of glasses. Clubs in Australia and Japan annually send 500,000 pairs of glasses to six recycling centers in Australia. Over the past decade, more than 3.5 million pairs of eyeglasses from these centers have been shipped to locations including India, the Middle East and the smallest islands in Indonesia. By involving people from local correctional facilities, several of the centers are fostering rehabilitation by teaching skills that the inmates can use after they leave prison.

In 2013, Tokyo Sangenjaya Lions Club partnered with a national retailer to collect glasses for Australia's recycling centers in 2013. "Seeing Lions work in packaging these eyeglass, I realize how much we consume and throw away that is still in usable or even perfect condition," said one local businessman. "These eyeglasses will change someone's life."

In another part of the world, a 94-year-old man in Honduras cried, "Thank you!" after receiving a pair of Lions recycled glasses. "I can now read my Bible—the first time in 15 years."

Many people are involved in collecting, processing and distributing recycled eyeglasses, including people who decide to donate their used eyeglasses, clubs that collect and send glasses to a Lions Eyeglass Recycling Center, volunteers who process and ship



the glasses, and volunteers who organize and participate in mission distributions. The very positive result is that the quality of life is improved for people who receive this gift of sight.