

Better vision for NYC students is in sight

Helen Keller International focused on NYC with ChildSight®

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The name of Helen Keller is known around the world as a symbol of courage in the face of overwhelming odds, yet she was much more than a symbol. She was a woman of luminous intelligence, high ambition and great accomplishment who devoted her life to helping others.

Keller's courage in the face of adversity — she lost both her sight and hearing at 19 months old due to illness — as well as her dedication to helping others are the legacy left behind by the author and political activist who died in 1968. They are the heritage her namesake nonprofit Helen Keller International holds at the heart of its mission today — saving the sight and lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Formed in 1915 by Keller and New York City businessman George Kessler, Helen Keller International is among the oldest international nonprofit organizations devoted to preventing blindness and reducing malnutrition. While most of the New York City-based nonprofit's efforts are globally focused, here in the city it operates a program called ChildSight®, through which it administers vision screenings and provides glasses for vision-impaired students in school, free of charge.



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- Dr. On Lam, optometrist for ChildSight®

Of the 285 million people around the world who are blind or visually impaired, 80% of the time their loss of eyesight could have been prevented. The rate of blindness in children is staggeringly high worldwide — one child goes blind every minute — and Helen Keller International is doing everything it can to reduce this rate.

Here in New York City, ChildSight® sends licensed optometrists directly into public, parochial, charter and alternative schools to screen students for vision disorders. Last year alone, they worked with 110 schools.

ChildSight® serves poor communities with limited access to vital healthcare services.

To date, the program, which started in 1994, has screened more than 650,000 students and delivered nearly 90,000 pairs of free prescription eyeglasses to students in need.

“In some cases,” Daniels says, “some of these students would not have ever received eyeglasses. This program is much needed. Glasses are such a simple tool, but necessary for the students to be able to function on a day-to-day basis in the schools in order to learn.”

One in four children is affected by nearsightedness or other common vision problems. Most of them, says Dr. On Lam, an optometrist for ChildSight®, do not even realize their eyesight is impaired.

“Most kids don’t even know that they need glasses,” he says. “They just see the world as it is until you give them their first pair of glasses, and they’re like ‘Oh, that’s how you’re supposed to see.’”

ChildSight® New York operates through the generosity of supporters including the Lavelle Fund for the Blind, Inc., 21st Century ILGWU Heritage Fund, Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation, The New York Community Trust, and TOMS®. For more information on Helen Keller International and its ChildSight® New York program, visit childsight.org or call (212) 532-0544.



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