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Enterprise for Sight

Case Studies of Beneficiaries from Rural Areas of Punjab, Pakistan

Researched and Compiled by Civil Society Human and Institutional Development Programme (CHIP)

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Community is often taken for granted when all aspects of life are going as planned and there are no hardships that one needs help with. When the water is running, the food is plentiful, and one’s family can sleep at night knowing that they are financially stable, there is often a lack of recognition and acceptance that all these things are not possible without the internal support of our respective communities that we belong to. Although as individuals we work hard to produce outcomes from our labor, and as we try to be successful in any tasks that we partake in, there is a network and a system in place that allows for that success to happen. When there is unity in the struggle to make ends meet, and every individual understands their responsibility to facilitate a harmonious environment, there is cohesion among neighbors and families that builds strong ties that last a lifetime.

Tehsil Sohawa is comprised of a main city center, which serves as the center for commerce, and the surrounding villages where most residents of the Tehsil live. Life in the village is a drastic change from the city, as rural access to urban areas is often limited by distance and lack of transportation. The residents that live in the villages are often farm workers or shop keepers. A typical family home includes multiple generations, and the income collected by the wage earners is often just enough to cover basic necessities, but nothing more. This means that in the event of severe illness or emergencies outside of the daily routine, there is often no way to finance such cases, or it takes months to save up for such spending.

An individual’s eyesight is an asset that should never be taken for granted. If ever one’s vision begins to weaken, it should be taken care of immediately, as a prolonged period of time without corrective measures will lead to faster deterioration in sight. The isolation in the villages creates a lack of awareness about important topics surrounding health and hygiene, including access to medical treatment such as vision care. In some cases, the medical professionals that are available are not properly trained and unable to give effective medical advice or provide proper treatment.

The creation of the Vision Center in Sohawa was an extremely unique and beneficial intervention for the city and surrounding villages. The establishment of the Center was through the collaboration of the Brien Holden Vision Institute and the Civil Society Human and Institutional Development Programme (CHIP). The Center includes a front desk with a variety of frames readily available, a vision screening room with all the necessary equipment, and a room equipped to create specialized lenses. The services are provided by professionally trained doctors and staff members. The affordability of the services and products attracts customers to seek out the Center and is necessary to be successful.

The Vision Center in Sohawa as an isolated resource cannot function to its maximum potential, but requires that there is effective facilitation in order to raise awareness to the surrounding communities about the services offered and its benefits to individuals who require vision assistance. CHIP’s role in facilitating the access to resources and work to further strengthen existing relationships with community members helped to enhance the capabilities of the Vision Center to reach more people in need. The collaboration of both these entities resulted in many school and community vision screenings in which hundreds of community health practices. Once this process is begun, individuals who have received assistance are able to spread the awareness of this service to others in the community. This ripple effect relies on the interaction of the society and individual intention to build one another in a positive way. In the following case studies, the individuals received eye care through these methods and expressed life changing sentiments about how the improvement in the health of their eyes contributes to their success today.

Not only is the utility of this Center necessary to provide for the immediate needs of the community members, but also the effects penetrate to create a healthier social environment. The lack of medical attention to eyesight often creates a demoralized outlook on life and builds frustrations that can transfer from an individual, to the family, and even further to the community. The strengths that come from within the individuals to create a strong community generate a prosperous environment for a clear future.
Young Student Regain Confidence

Naveed Zafar stood out as taller than the rest as he sat in between two students in a room full of students. The classroom seemed large enough to fit 30 students, yet only 15 young boys sat huddled together on the 6 benches available for use. The teacher stood at the head of the room in front of a dusty chalkboard and announced the next activity. Each student scrambled to take out his or her book and open it to the appropriate page. Although Naveed appeared to be at least 4 classes ahead of the other students, he pulled out the same book, carefully adjusted his glasses, and began silently reading along with the rest. He is 18 years old and in grade 6. He does not suffer from any mental or physical illness, but rather he did not achieve high enough marks to pass on to the next class for some time. Since grade 4 Naveed had noticed that his vision was very weak, in fact, so weak that it was impairing his ability to perform well in school. After appealing to his parents for help, he visited a local doctor multiple times who gave him a full eye exam. The doctor determined that he did not need any tools to correct his vision, but rather he should periodically put rose water in his eyes in order for them to heal back to normal. For years, Naveed and his family accepted this diagnosis and took the doctor’s advice. Meanwhile, this myth that was believed to be a cure did not actually address his weak vision, and as a result his eyesight continued to deteriorate. He would strain his eyes to see so much that his eyes would often water and cause him pain. This went on for years, and eventually Naveed’s psychological and emotional health also began to suffer. Naveed no longer took an interest in study or sport. At his worst, he could not even see the blackboard from the first row in class and could not academically keep up with his peers. He wanted to keep batting with his friends, but his vision impaired his ability to participate and interact with others on the field. When the Government Elementary School of Ghederyam, where Naveed studied, arranged for a vision screening on campus for students and community members, Naveed was eager to seek help. Naveed was able to get an accurate screening of his vision, and was referred to the Vision Center in Sohawa. After visiting the Vision Center he was diagnosed with myopic vision, which requires assistance with distance vision. From the Center he obtained a proper pair of glasses that corrected this issue. Naveed was now able to see the chalkboard from anywhere in the classroom, and his attention turned back towards his studies. He was able to enjoy learning again, and his focus returned to excelling in school. Once again Naveed batted with his friends and his physical activities could resume with his peers without any strain. Along with the glasses, Naveed was given accurate medical advice about how often to wear his glasses so that his eyes were never strained or caused him pain, and he learned to properly care and clean for his glasses so that he could maintain healthy habits throughout his life. The access to vision support is a necessity to everyone starting at a young age, as the lack of proper care can lead to a complete loss of vision. The Vision Center screening at Naveed’s school may have been the only opportunity for Naveed to receive the necessary attention and care to fix his problem that began to grow as a result of his weak eyesight. The community and school screenings that took place throughout Sohawa brought tremendous results for individuals on a deep personal level, which improved their quality of life.
Asghar Bibi grew up in the same village she is living in now, Hadri Mohala, and is grateful for the community she is surrounded with. Her giving nature and her desire to spend time in prayer keeps her at peace and creates strong relationships with those around her. Her modest home, with basic furnishings, a well-kept kitchen, and just enough beds to sleep on, felt like a real home. Her friendly face looked as though she has always been smiling and cheerful throughout her life, and her demeanor seemed rather anxious to meet new people and extend her hospitality to those that came to visit or spend some time with her or her family members. Asghar Bibi had no complaints about the place that she lived in, nor did she speak negatively of anyone in the community. Her only complaint in life as of now was that for years she was unable to see properly. Her eyes would become so strained to see far away objects that she had a hard time distinguishing between a tree and a person, cooking over a fire, and even worse she often had trouble seeing the ground and could not walk without stumbling. Performing regular chores became actually painful, and for 2 years her left eye would periodically water for hours. Her son was familiar with the newly established Vision Center and suggested that she make a visit. Asghar Bibi was reluctant to agree, as she had already invested so much time and money into seeking treatment elsewhere. There was another vision center about an hour away from her home that her daughter, Rubina, took her to. The transportation there was in itself very expensive, and the diagnosis the center made required that she purchase pricey glasses and medication for an infection, and that she spend an entire week under their care. Her means of living barely covered her basic necessities at her home, as the family income depended on her retired husband’s pension. Rubina made some sacrifices to make the 3 lengthy trips to the center financially possible. She stopped spending money on her children in order to save up for her mother’s eye treatment. Yet even after the many journeys to the center and money invested, she continued to have problems seeing clearly. Asghar Bibi finally agreed to go to the Vision Center close to home. It only took 5 minutes by rickshaw to reach the center, and within 15 minutes she was done and ready to go back home with a new pair of glasses. The cost was a fraction of what she had paid earlier, and she did not have to take out an entire day to get results. “The staff had a very caring attitude and were quick to get me everything that I needed. They knew exactly what the problem was and they took care of me right away,” she recalled happily. Although Asghar Bibi regrets that her daughter made sacrifices in her own home for her mother’s sake, she is grateful for the Vision Center service that has allowed her to regain her normal lifestyle without any pain. The care of her family, which she so unconditionally nurtures, helped support her visit to the Vision Center. As a community member that has seen her village grow and change, Asghar Bibi is ecstatic over the new vision facility that is affordable, close in distance, and serves the immediate needs of those around her. The Center not only replaces the need to seek far away treatment, but is a facility that is practical and attentive to the needs of their patients.
“How much for this box of crackers?” Sheer Tariq studied the label on the package and hesitated, and finally answered the customer, “80 rupees”. The customer made the payment, and carried on his way, but Sheer Tariq had an anxious feeling about the transaction that he did not want to admit. Later that day he checked the box of crackers again for his own satisfaction, and affirmed his doubts with his wife: he had told the customer the wrong price because he could not clearly see the price sticker, which read 60 rupees. “I was so embarrassed with myself. I don’t know what the customer is going to think about me if he looks at the price himself at home and sees that I gave him a higher price than what was written. I don’t want him to think I am dishonest,” Sheer Tariq recalled. Sheer Tariq had felt for about 4 years that his eyesight was deteriorating, and in the past year this issue began interfering with his means of living when he began struggling to read at his shop. He has been running a corner shop in the middle of the village out of a room in his 2 bedroom home. It is his family’s only means of income for his two sons and wife, who also help out daily at the shop. The shop was more than a full time job and only left him enough time to spend a few hours with his children at the end of the night. The issue with his vision began to affect him on a psychological level, as he came to fear that his regular customers that sustained his business would stop coming by because they felt they were being cheated. Sheer Tariq was at Jumma prayer one Friday afternoon when he heard the announcement for the newly opened Vision Center. This caught his attention as he knew that his vision needed to be addressed, but he did not know where or how to seek help. Immediately he thought that the vision services would just provide a vision screening and diagnosis, almost like a camp. However, he was surprised at the Center after the visit. A friend in the community told him about the location and led him directly there. Sheer Tariq spent a total of 20 minutes at the center where he got his blood pressure checked, eyes diagnosed and a recommendation for glasses was made. Although financially strained, he was able to purchase the glasses for only 500 rupees with the assistance of a friend who he was able to pay back later. Sheer Tariq left very satisfied and he immediately felt his spirits lifted, as he could read the newspapers again, and function properly at his store. He no longer felt doubt in his abilities to run the store and be honest with his customers. Sheer Tariq felt at one point that his livelihood, which his family depended on, was at risk, but he now knew that there was a solution that he could rely on. The strength of the community that brought the Vision Center to his attention, as well as the community member that facilitated and helped financially support him create a strong system of support for the Vision Services offered which were not previously available. “I couldn’t believe how easy this whole process was. The staff at the Center was very helpful and what surprised me the most was how cheap the glasses were. I never thought I could afford to correct my eyesight, but I am hoping I can bring my children here for help as well.” Sheer Tariq now feels confident that he can share the information about the Center with those that come into his shop, but also take one of his son’s to get his eyes checked.
Muhammad Ellahi is a man of many trades, but what he loves most about his life in Sohawa is the community. “The people of Sohawa are very good people, but the number of poor are too high,” he stated with great sorrow, “but it feels good to do charity and give to the community.” He participates in the local government as a counselor and also performs volunteer work whenever he can. He not only dreams of speeding around in fancy cars as his own aspirations, but also wants to be more engaged in charity work for the people around him. In order to keep the bills paid he drives his own car to provide transportation for people around town. Mohamed’s troubles with his vision became noticeable 2 years ago when he was having difficulty reading the numbers on his mobile phone. The issue only got worse from here and soon it became near impossible to see any text on his phone. This problem also began interfering with his ability to drive his vehicle, a high risk to take if he wanted to continue in this line of work. Mohamed would keep trying to see objects near him, but this only lead to intense headaches that would leave him unable to work for hours. As an individual deeply immersed in the community, he heard from a few members about the new Vision Center. He was skeptical for weeks until the day he step foot inside the Center. The other vision centers he visited in the past year were far to reach, and out of his price range. The closest ones with the best care were in Gujar Khan and Rawal Pindi, which are too far to venture to on a normal workday when these places were open. This made Muhammad feel hopeless, as these places were not only too out of reach for himself, but also for others in the city who needed vision services. As Muhammad is familiar with the main city in Sohawa, he immediately noticed that the new Vision Center had opened up and was fully functioning. He wanted to check it out of sheer curiosity and skepticism at first, and was surprised with what he had stumbled across. Upon entering the Center he felt relieved and excited that the people seemed genuine and the facility itself was well kept with the best machines and variety of glasses. “I couldn’t believe that there was such good quality eye care available near my home. I wish this place was open sooner for others to have access to,” he said. What impressed him the most was the quality of the machines they staff was using and how after his screening he was able to choose what he wanted from a wide variety of frames, which he had never seen before at any other centers. “The entire process was quick and efficient for someone who does not have time to waste.” After the first visit he was ready to re-engage with his normal activities, as he received all the services necessary in less than 30 minutes. The Center provided a vision screening, an accurate diagnosis, and prescription for glasses. Muhammad received training for how to care for his glasses and some tips about hygiene. His overall experience he described as “exceptional” and since his visit he continuously refers other people to the Center. Muhammad’s work as a key community member can continue uninterrupted and he can confidently speak of the vision services as an affordable and beneficial place for the community. He hopes that the Center continues to do the work they are doing, and remains accessible and well known so others may experience the same positive process he did.
“This city is in a water crisis,” said Abdul Aziz, “the supply is very low and the population keeps growing.” Abdul Aziz has vast amounts of knowledge about this lack of basic supply in Sohawa, as he delivers water tanks to a few villages as his means of living. His hope is that he can find a solution for the lack of this basic resource soon, as the issue will only become worse in the near future. In addition, his skills and abilities make him a successful Zakat Committee Chairman, but his vision troubles could have lead him to become extremely inefficient at all of his work. He studied in his youth up until his FA, however he did not complete this level, as he lost interest in studies after some time. Abdul Aziz carries no regrets, as he is able to provide basic necessities for his 4 children, and enjoys having free time to sit around and chat with friends. His jovial nature and will to do good are a sign that he has unconditional motivation to address the real issues that plague his hometown.

As his vision became more unclear over time, basic day to day activities were challenging and he feared this would inhibit his ability to contribute his time and efforts, and also affect his livelihood. When Abdul Aziz would read the newspaper, the sentences would appear unclear, and the words were sometimes mixed around. Work as the Zakat Chairman of his district was going to suffer if he did not seek help, as it required that he is able to read and write clearly to create lists and handle basic accounting functions. The frustration that he felt during this period of time only built up and lead to a demoralized attitude. Upon insistence from a friend who also visited the Vision Center, Abdul Aziz finally made a visit. He hesitated for weeks after he found out about it, as he had visited vision centers in other cities before and did not find them helpful. “The staff at the other centers seemed unprofessional and always in a rush. They just wanted to sell the customer glasses instead of treat them as patients who needed medical advice.” However, the Vision Center in Sohawa was a different experience. “The staff was very patient with me and listened to my issues before trying to tell me what I needed. They seemed well trained and genuinely interested in addressing my problems,” he recalled. His pessimistic attitude about the services offered changed after the first 20 minutes in which he received an eye screening and full diagnosis and prescription for glasses. The environment and attitude of the people changed his mind instantly and he is glad he took the risk and listened to his friend’s advice. He was able to purchased the glasses and go on his way quicker than he had ever imagined. Since then Abdul Aziz referred about 75 other people that he has come into contact with over the past 2 months. He was always grateful that his friend insisted upon going to the Center and hopes that others will take the chance after he explains to them how good and affordable the services are. Although he is engaged in community work already, he tries to continue expanding his help by promoting what he knows to be of good quality and a tool for improving life. He hopes he can accurately transfer this enthusiasm for the Center itself to whomever he can meet and have a conversation with, as he strongly believes that the services offered would be of great benefit to the city and surrounding villages.
Khusheer Begum was born in era different from ours. Her childhood should have included a basic education to be at the least literate. However, at the time there were no schools established in her village, and it was rare that girls even attended schools at all. She regrets the lack of opportunities that she had while growing up, but no one would ever suspect these sentiments from her in any initial conversation. Khusheer Begum’s character exudes a motherly warmth that makes one feel right at home. Her only son provides for the entire family, which includes herself, husband, her daughter in law, and young child. She made sure that education was a part of her son’s youth as she never had the chance, and to this day he is grateful, as his literacy allows him to run a corner shop in the village. Khusheer Begum enjoys catching up with friends, but rarely ventures far from home. However, when she does leave her house she is sure to make the most of it, often by going on foot. It was on one of these journeys to the market that she noticed 1 year ago that her vision was no longer clear when assessing far distances, which made for a dangerous situation. She knew that if she did not address this problem at once, it would only cause her vision and overall health to deteriorate even more. The lack of resources that she knew about was frustrating, and for that year she did not address her eyesight and tried to continue working without any assistance. One day, her son’s Mother in Law, Asghar Bibi who was mentioned earlier, highly recommended and insisted that Khusheer Begum visit the new Vision Center and seek an accurate diagnosis and treatment. Khusheer Begum wanted to of course trust her advice, but had her own skeptical conception of what this place could possibly provide for her, when she knew that so many other clinics did not provide proper care. In addition, she was nervous because did not know what to expect from the diagnosis. She feared that the Center would tell her she needs surgery and did not want to receive any bad news as such. Her son insisted that she visit as soon as possible, for fear that she may get worse, and even worse, injure herself while trying to continue her daily routine. Her family was able to financially provide all that was required, which was no easy task, in hopes she would agree to go. Without further notice, Khusheer Begum decided not to let her fears impede her everyday life and took off after a few days by herself to the Vision Center via rickshaw. Within 30 minutes she had gone through all the standard procedures, such as a blood pressure check, eye screening and diagnosis, and finally a prescription for a pair of glasses which she bought immediately. She was relieved that the diagnosis was not more serious and appreciated the professional staff and machines. “I was so happy that my condition was not worse than I thought and so happy with the service. Everything was professional and precise, it made my fears disappear,” she said. Her determination to address her vision allowed her to once again make her trips to the market on foot safe and efficient. She continues to complete her household chores as usual, but with a little more enthusiasm and hope that the future of her family and community will be enhanced through institutions like education, and services provided by the Vision Center.