CRYSTAL CLEAR

CASE STUDIES OF BENEFICIARIES OF OUR VISION CENTRES LOCATED IN Tehsil Sohawa, District Jehlum & Tehsil Lalamusa, District Gujrat, Punjab Province of Pakistan

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Preamble

Civil Society Human and Institutional Development Programme (CHIP) in partnership with the Australia-based Brien Holden Vision Institute designed a project 'Enterprise for Sight' in an attempt to meet the need for refractive services at community and household level by establishing Vision Centres in Sohawa and Lalamusa.

The Vision Centres are aimed to provide a one-stop solution to eye health problems by providing the full range of services including vision screening, eye examination, blood pressure and blood sugar monitoring and spectacles and sunglasses for sale. Both the Vision Centres in Lalamusa and SanghOi are based on the social enterprise model aiming to provide socially useful services, employing local people and keeping good quality cost products while maintaining profitability.

The Vision Centres targets customers from all social strata of society including people living in the cities as well as those from adjoining villages. Given the magnanimity of this outreach programme, considerable attention has been given to awareness raising initiatives to market the services offered by the Vision Centre both within the cities and outside in adjoining villages. This has included introducing the Vision Centre through local CCB meetings and training community screeners to examine people for vision problems and dispense prescription glasses.

This set of case studies captures the positive impact that the Vision Centres have had on the lives of the people living in both the cities of Sohawa and Lalamusa but also those who travelled from distant villages to avail themselves of the services offered. The case studies demonstrate the contributions made by the Vision Centres on the lives of the beneficiaries both directly, by providing them with quality, cost-effective eye care, and indirectly, by reducing the negative consequences of refractive errors in terms of lost education and employment opportunities.

The case studies also illustrate how the Enterprise for Sight project has had a positive impact on the lives of those who signed up to be a part of the awareness raising initiatives. The final three case studies look into the lives of three ambitious women determined to make a difference in the society they lived in. The community screening initiatives gave them not only a source of income to support themselves and their families but also a sense of accomplishment.
Chasing Dreams

Curious: that was one way of describing her. She wanted to understand how the world worked. She was amazed by all its little wonders; from how it spun on its imaginary axis to what water was made of. And she loved the books that gave her all this knowledge.

Umme Habiba had always enjoyed science at school. She always completed her science homework first and was one of the most enthusiastic students in her class. She was 16 years old, starting 8th grade in school, when she first began to realise that she had a vision problem. She could not see the writing on the blackboard clearly and found it difficult to identify people if they were not standing close to her.

Untreated, her eye problems continued to worsen. She got her eye sight tested at school by LRBT Mandra and was consequently referred to THQ Hospital in Sohawa to purchase prescription glasses. Unfortunately, THQ Hospital prescribed her the wrong lens number: instead of -1.50 spectacles, Umme Habiba was given -3.0 ones. As a result, she got frequent headaches until one day she fainted and collapsed.

Umme Habiba and her family were unsure whether her problems were due to her eyesight problems or some other reason. Her eyesight seemed to be worsening and she was beginning to face some serious difficulties in coping with her work at school. When her parents found out about the Sohawa Vision Centre at the local CCB meeting in the beginning of 2013, they decided obtain a second opinion on their daughter's eye problems and visited the Sohawa Vision Centre in March, 2013.

Since the Sohawa Vision Centre was 30 km away from her village, she travelled to the centre by motorcycle with her parents. Given her past experience with the THQ Hospital, Umme Habiba was anxious about what to expect. However, she quickly changed her mind on arrival. She was given excellent customer service; the Vision Centre staff asked about her previous history and eye problems and took time to run all tests properly. After a computerised checkup, she was given the correct spectacles according to her prescription and she was asked to wait at the centre and keep her glasses on to ensure that an incident like the one before does not repeat itself.

The spectacles cost PKR 250, at a significantly cheaper price than other shops. Both her parents also got their blood pressure and sugar tested at the Vision Centre for free and her father purchased a pair of glasses for himself as well. Impressed with the customer care and technology, both Umme Habiba and her parents have been promoting the Vision Centre amongst their family and friends.

But for Umme Habiba, the experience has been about much more than simply purchasing glasses – it has given her the chance to realise her dream of pursuing her education further, unhindered, and to eventually become a science teacher.
Eleven years old, Muhammad Ali Asghar would wake up every day at 7.30 am sharp rubbing his eyes to shake the sleep away. After a long day at school he come back home, only to have lunch and quickly rush to the madrassa for his Quran lessons and then tuition to complete his school work. Often his mother would check whether he had completed his homework at tuitions. But all he wanted to do when he came back home was to at home in a corner playing video games on his smartphone. Had he not done enough work the whole day? And none of it made sense anyways!

His parents did not understand at first why he was so uninterested in his studies. His father was busy at work and his mother had to look after the household while managing his siblings, 2 brothers and a sister. Despite this, they had tried everything to help Ali, including signing him up for private tuition lessons after school. But nothing would work. His grades were slipping – he could not pay attention at school and could barely concentrate when he was asked to revise his lessons at home. His parents were unable to figure out the reason behind their son’s troubles.

The problem was realised in April, 2014 after they decided to visit the Lalamusa Vision Centre following a screening session in their neighbourhood. Suddenly, it all became crystal clear: Ali faced great difficulty in reading because he needed glasses to correct the refractive error. His vision was so blurred that he used to see one word as two and this was the reason why he could not study well in school and did not feel like studying when he came back home. It was not because he was not interested in school; his vision problems got in the way of his progress.

Since Ali lives in Lalamusa city, they found the Vision Centre to be easily accessible. In fact, it was a two minute walk from their house. Ali visited the Vision Centre with his father and was greeted by the staff there. After a computerised checkup, Ali was told that he was having myopia (short sightedness). He was accordingly prescribed spectacles to resolve this issue which he was able to obtain from the Vision Centre as well.

The total cost of the services he obtained at the Vision Centre was PKR 750. While his family is not well off and the only source of income for the family is the construction work that Ali’s father is involved in, they considered that the services offered by the Vision Centre were of impressive quality and still fairly affordable.

Following his trip to the Vision Centre, Ali’s performance at school began to improve and his interest in his studies grew. While he still does not enjoy history, he takes active part in all Urdu and Islamiyat lessons in his class. He also expressed a willingness to study further although he is unsure about what profession he wants to join once he has completed his education.
Young Aspirations

Kainat knew what she had always wanted to become when she grew up. She aspired to be just like her teacher at school; with long hair, spectacles, standing confidently in front a classroom with little children, her dupatta perfectly V-shaped, just like her Urdu teacher at school. She imagined herself being tall enough to reach the top of the chalk board. It would be like a dream come true.

Her mother had seen it in her too. She would feel so proud when she saw her little daughter playing Dress Up with her cousins and neighbourhood friends. She noticed that Kainat would always assume the role of a teacher. Kainat would fix her pony-tail, stand tall and strong in front of all her imaginary students with an open book poised daintily in her right hand and teach. It was in that moment that she knew that her daughter would one day make her very proud.

Kainat, ten years old, was enrolled in 4th grade at the local Government Girls Elementary School. She had always enjoyed going to school. And it was exactly this that made her mother wonder why she stopped taking an interest in her studies. She would often tell her daughter, “If you don’t study now, how will you become a teacher when you grow up?” She did not realise that her daughter’s difficulties stemmed from her vision problems until Kainat’s teacher at school told her that she should get her eyesight checked regularly as it was affecting her studies.

Kainat had been born with a slight squint in one of her eyes. In 2010, her parents got her eyesight checked for the first time from Aftab Optical Service in Lalamusa city and purchased a pair of glasses. However, in April 2014, her family heard about the Lalamusa Vision Centre due to a screening session that was conducted by CHIP in Kainat’s school. Coincidentally at the time, Kainat had lost her old spectacles. Therefore, her family decided to take her to the Vision Centre to obtain a new pair of glasses for Kainat.

Kainat lives in the village of Jatriya Khurd, Ganja which is 6 km from the Lalamusa Vision Centre located in the heart of the city. As a result she visited the Vision Centre on a rickshaw with her family, a trip that cost PKR 120. After another screening, Kainat was told that she was anisometropic; the refractive error in one of her eyes was 2.0 while the error in the other eye was 1.25. The prescribed spectacles were prepared for her accordingly at the centre and her family was happy with the service that they had been provided.

Following her trip to the Vision Centre, Kainat is happily able to participate in lessons at school. She thoroughly enjoys studying Urdu at school and is able to take part in class activities unhindered. She aims to continue working hard at school so that she can one day realise her dream of becoming a school teacher. Her mother loves and supports her daughter very much, hoping and praying to see her daughter succeed in all walks of life.
Comfortable Retirement

Chaudhry Ameer Qabil lives a settled and comfortable life. He was past the age where he would have to worry about earning to feed his family. His sons were grown up, two of them had settled in Spain while one of them was living with him. He has 9 grandchildren and enjoyed their company very much.

He had worked hard his whole life maintaining a day job and at the same time looking after his wheat fields. He had retired from his job with Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) in 2001 and spent his days working on the fields, looking after his property and engaging in voluntary community work such as improving the roads in the village he lived in.

Following his retirement, he also enjoyed the comfort of being able to sit at home and spend his leisure time watching television. However, around 6 years ago his right eye began to trouble him: it started as a little itch but eventually the pain grew. Eventually, he visited Gujjar Khan for an eye checkup and was made aware of the refractive error in his right eye.

However, the alarm bells did not start ringing until his eyesight worsened. He often blamed his own carelessness for not having tackled the problem earlier. Looking back now, he blames his excessive use of television and surma1. If he had obtained spectacles following his eye checkup all those years ago, his vision would not have been as poorly affected as it was today.

The Sohawa Vision Centre was introduced in his village, Zinda Shah Mazar, UC Pind Matay Khan a few days following the inauguration of the shop. He decided to go and visit the Vision Centre three months after the inauguration. He travelled to the centre from his village using his own car although if he had taken the rickshaw, the journey would have cost him PKR 100.

Upon arrival he was greeted by enthusiastic Vision Centre staff. After a screening and check-up, Ameer was prescribed spectacles to correct his refractive error. He purchased these from the Vision Centre as well.

The services he obtained from the Vision Centre have helped him considerably in his daily life. Learning from past mistakes, he is careful in using his new spectacles when watching television, signing important documents and driving to ensure that his eyesight problems do not worsen. He no longer experiences pain in his right eye and he was very impressed and satisfied by the quality of services provided by the Sohawa Vision Centre.

No longer facing any difficulties in his personal life, Ameer wishes to improve the condition of his village further.

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1 Surma: often described as Kohl, is an ancient eye cosmetic applied as mascara or to darken the eye lids.
Tariq Waheed lived in a cemented house in Sohawa city but he occasionally missed the life he had left behind in his village. It was where he had grown up and studied but while he had been there, all he had aspired to do was move to the city.

Tariq had studied to become a lab technician and had moved to Sohawa city in search for a job. He found the job he wanted, working from 8 to 5, settled and married and was happily living a comfortable life with his family of four children in the city.

As a lab technician, he practically spent the whole day in front of the computer screen. Four years ago, he realised that his vision would occasionally blur while using the computer. The problem began to slowly exacerbate until he decided to get his eyesight screened from an optical shop in Rawalpindi. He was prescribed spectacles with corrective lenses for a +1.0 error.

Tariq’s first experience of the Sohawa Vision Centre was on the day of the inauguration. The lab he worked in was located right next to the Vision Centre. When he lost the glasses that he had gotten made from Pindi, he decided to utilise the services offered by the Vision Centre and obtain a pair of glasses for himself.

He visited the Sohawa Vision Centre in March, 2014. Travelling to the Vision Centre was extremely convenient for him, not only because the centre is in a very central location but also because it is right next to the lab where he Tariq is employed. Since it was his first visit, he did not know what to expect but he had been told by others that he would be greeted with good service and be able to obtain good quality glasses.

His experience of the Vision Centre was no different. He was met with extremely friendly staff that helped him select the type of glasses that he wanted. After a pre-screening and checkup, the staff member at the Vision Centre confirmed his refractive error number and was able to prescribe him a new pair of spectacles accordingly. He was also able to get his blood pressure checked at the centre.

He returned home from the visit satisfied with the service he had received and happy with the quality of glasses that he had obtained for himself. Additionally for him, the added ease of access to Vision Centre was a winning factor making him decide that he would continue to avail the services offered by the centre in the future.

Tariq is currently content with his life; business is going well for him and he has been able to maintain a good standard of living for himself and his family. He hopes to continue working as a lab technician in the future.
Khansa had always been a strong girl. She was confident and self-assured. While only 13 years old, she had known what she wanted to do with her life. People laughed at her when she told them that she wanted to serve her country and join the army. “You? You will join the army? But you are so little!” they would reply sneering at her. And she would always look at them with a serious face and answer back, “But I will grow up one day.”

She had never cared whether people believed that she could do it. She continued to study hard at school knowing that her future depended on it. Enrolled in 8th grade at Al-Razi School in Sohawa, Khansa thoroughly enjoyed Mathematics. She loved her teachers and worked hard at school and home to excel in her studies because she knew that it was the key to fulfilling her dreams.

However, her eyesight problems stood in the way of her realising her goals. She remembered the first time she experienced headaches. The pain had been blinding so much so that she fainted and remembered nothing of the episode. There were bouts of complete darkness where she could not see anything until her vision returned. As the days went by, the frequency of these episodes seem to increase.

Eventually, her parents decided to get her checked. She had heard about the Vision Centre through one of her teachers, Mr. Kamran, at school. Mr. Kamran had decided to take up a job as a staff member at the Vision Centre in Sohawa city but had returned to promote the services offered by the centre in his village.

She visited the Sohawa Vision Centre in February, 2014 with her father. Since she lived in Dhairy Damyal in UC Akra Mora, a village located at a distance from the main Sohawa city where the vision centre had been located, transport was a problem. The only means of public transport to and from Sohawa city was a wagon that left at 8 am and 12 noon each day and cost PKR 90 for the round trip. Her father picked her up from school and they both made the trip to the Vision Centre on the wagon.

The trip to the Sohawa Vision Centre was an impressive one for both Khansa and her father. After a computerised checkup, Khansa was told that she had a refractive error of 0.25 and needed spectacles to improve her vision and to stop the headaches and bouts of darkness. She was able to purchase these from the vision centre and the total cost incurred by her for the services that she obtained was PKR 600.

Khansa has not experienced any headaches or blackouts since she started wearing spectacles. Her experience with the Vision Centre has once again restored her confidence that she too will one day be able to join the army and serve her country.
Grand Plans

Fariyaal had lived in Sohawa city all her life with her parents, two brothers and sister-in-law. But she had never liked the city. She did not like the narrow streets littered with garbage, full of open sewers and the unpleasant smell that permeated the air. And this was the main underlying reason behind her desire to become a politician in the future.

She wanted to improve her city and work for her country. She wanted to be the change that she wanted to see. And it was this that motivated her to work hard at school. She was one of the few girls in her school, Sina Academy, who did not go to tuitions afterwards. She worked hard on her own and comes back home from school and completes her homework without help from others.

Unfortunately for Fariyaal, she had been born with weak eyesight. She had a squint in one eye and experienced blurred vision on occasions but she had never mentioned this to her parents. She also believed that she had fallen once at the age of 11 which had further damaged her eyesight. Since her vision problems went by untreated, they continued to exacerbate until she decided to visit the Sohawa Vision Centre.

She first heard about the Vision Centre through her brother. After learning about, she disclosed her vision problems to her parents who decided to take her there immediately. Living in the main city, she experienced no difficulty in travelling to the Vision Centre since it is very centrally located on the main road. She was able to walk to the Vision Centre with her mother and brother.

Fariyaal visited the Vision Centre three months ago. She was greeted by the staff members. After a computerised screening and checkup, Fariyaal was told that she was anisometropic. One of her eyes had a refractive error of 1.75 while the other had an error of 1.50. Accordingly, she was prescribed spectacles that she had to wear throughout the day to ensure that her eyesight did not deteriorate any further. She was able to obtain the pair of glasses from there as well. The total price that she paid for the services she obtained from the centre was PKR 350.

Both Fariyaal and her family were happy with quality of service they had received and considered the glasses to be good value for money. But for Fariyaal, this all meant more than that – she felt that she had been given a chance to continue striving for her goals unhindered and unobstructed. Her previous problems had all been eradicated and she no longer faced any difficulties in reading or identifying people in front of her.

Moreover, the experience has made Fariyaal determined, now more than ever, that she can one day become a politician to improve the quality of life in her little neighbourhood. She aims to improve the narrow streets of her village and establish a functioning and effective sewage system.
In His Shoes

Amber Naz had grown up watching her father actively participating in communal decision making activities and contributing to the development of her little village, Arnial Phool. She respected him for it and hoped to one day be able to fall into his footsteps. She wanted to serve the community she had grown up in, just like her father.

It was for this reason that she had decided to become a LHW guiding women regarding their personal health issues. Employed full time, she earns PKR 8,000 for the services she provides as a health worker. She spends her day advising women of the importance of antenatal and post-natal checkups and also regarding the importance of immunisation.

And it was the same reason that she had decided to pursue a career in education. Having completed her intermediate level education from Government Girls High School in Mangla, she had gone onto complete her bachelor of arts. She is currently undertaking undergraduate level courses in education and teaching and is in the midst of preparing for her final semester at university.

It was this passion of working for her community and serving her village that motivated her to sign up to work under CHIP engaging in community eye screening and dispensing prescription glasses. Under the programme, Amber received two days of training in eye screening giving her full command over screening people in her village for eye problems and in determining whether someone needed glasses.

As part of this initiative, thus far Amber has screened 17 women and dispensed 3 pairs of glasses earning in total PKR 600. She will be using this money to purchase some more glasses to correct near-vision allowing her to carry on with the initiative. She aims to continue screening women and other elderly people in the village for any potential eye problems alongside her regular work as a LHW.

Given that her village is located 17 km away from the Vision Centre in Sohawa city, she believes that she plays an important role in helping people overcome any difficulties they face in their daily lives due to easily correctable eyesight problems. Amber believes that the training sessions conducted by CHIP go a long way in benefitting those women and elderly people in the village that have limited mobility and access outside the village to get their eyes checked from qualified eye care service providers.

Her participation in all these activities gave her the sense of accomplishment that she had only seen in her father’s eyes all these years. As an active member of the local community organisation, Amber felt that her roles as a LHW and now community screener fed to her passion. Not only did both the roles complement one another, they also allowed her to serve some of the most vulnerable segments of her community, women and elderly people.
Giving Back

Farzeena considered herself lucky to be married into a family that was so involved in the communal activities that were conducted in the village. Both her father and mother-in-law were active members of the community organisation and had always encouraged Farzeena to participate as well. Even though her husband worked overseas, he too always took part in communal activities when he returned to Pakistan.

While she herself had never obtained any formal education past grade 10, she valued it and made sure that all of her children went to school. She helped them get ready school in the morning and also assisted them with their homework when they returned home from school. She spent most of the day busy with household chores but also often helped her father-in-law on the field next to their house and in managing their livestock.

Alongside being a responsible mother and daughter-in-law, Farzeena had also dedicated her life to serving her community and the village she had grown up in. She had trained as a human rights worker and supported the women in the village that were suffering from domestic violence at the hands of their husbands, fathers, brothers and in-laws. She conducted confidence building and conflict management workshops for other women to help them overcome their domestic problems in a passive manner. She also actively organises awareness raising communal activities such as theatre performances to increase knowing of women rights at a village level.

In November 2013, Farzeena heard about the opportunity for becoming a community screener as part of a project being conducted by CHIP. She decided to sign up for the opportunity immediately. It was her ideal job: she would be able earn a source of income for herself and at the same time be able to give back to the community as well by helping people overcome the difficulties they faced in their everyday lives due to vision problems. She was given two days of training in eye screening allowing her to independently examine people for eye vision problems and to determine whether they may need glasses.

Between November, 2013 and March, 2014, Farzeena was able to screen 51 people. Most of these people were approximately 35 to 40 years of age. Furthermore, out of a total of 51 people that she had screened for eye vision problems, 34 were women. Of these 51 people, she was able to dispense 10 near-vision glasses earning a total of PKR 2000. Farzeena aims to reinvest this money in buying more near-vision glasses and to continue working as a community screener.

According to Farzeena, the initiative developed by CHIP has proved to be very useful especially for women whose mobility is severely restricted. She wishes to continue being able to help other women in the village, empowering them by helping them overcome their fears and problems.
Busy Bee

Shagufta loved the sense of fulfillment that took over after every patient visit. She loved being complimented on how well the community organisation was doing. And she absolutely loved being thanked for her support by all those women in need. She did not know how many people felt this way about their jobs but she loved all of hers.

She started her day early, waking up every day before sun rise to say her morning prayers. She would then prepare breakfast for her son and the rest of the family before sending him off for school. By 11 a.m. she would be done with all of her work around the house, ready to kick start her working day.

She was as busy a working woman as they get. She was a full-time LHW, employed by the Pakistani government. She was responsible for household visitations spreading awareness about mother and child care. She was the primary go-to person for women in the village for all such health related issues.

She was also very actively involved in the local affairs of her village. She played the integral role of vice president in the village community organisation. She participated in all sorts of communal decision making and sought responsibility for the development of the Dhok Taliyan.

She had also been trained as a human rights worker for her village. As part of this position, she helped women survivors of domestic violence get through and improve their personal lives. She arranged for confidence building and conflict management sessions with these women, offering them a helping hand and the support they needed to fight for their rights.

Therefore, when she heard about the Enterprise for Sight project and the community screening initiative CHIP had started in her village, she was amongst the first to jump the bandwagon. She realised quickly after two days of training in eye screening that she would be able to perform this role effortlessly alongside her role as the LHW.

Following her training sessions in November, 2013, Shagufta has managed to screen 53 people in the village most of which were women falling within the 16 to 35 age bracket. Till March, 2014, she had managed to sell 27 prescription spectacles to people with refractive errors earning a total of PKR 3,700. She has decided to continue with this position, investing most of her savings to purchase more spectacles to dispense.

Shagufta enjoyed being the service provider and regarded her position as a very useful one especially for women with mobility issues. She understood very well that a lot of women did not give any importance to their eye and many were not even aware of how easily curable refractive errors were. And it was for this reason that she wished to continue working hard to empower the women in her village.