

At first glance VOSH, (Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity) sounds like another organization that is asking for your donations.

Behind the scenes is a different type of organization. Yes, there are some funds involved that are raised for this organization, but this is the tip of the iceberg.

VOSH provides eyecare and eyewear to indigent people around the world.

When attending a VOSH mission trip it appears to really flow well. There is real organization to the trip. But if you have ever attended one of these trips, you quickly realize that to make the trip happen, it is a mountain of work up front.

We have workers collecting eyeglasses from many states and organizations. These are then funneled into the local VOSH chapters. These chapters catalog the glasses according to prescriptions and type of lens. We have men's, women's, and children's eyeglasses. It takes countless hours of work to organize this 14,000 pairs of eyeglasses and put them in an organized fashion to be filled according to the doctors prescription. For every hour of time spent on the mission trip, there are hundreds of hours behind the scene getting prepared.

The next challenge is to transport medical equipment across the borders. It sometimes becomes very frustrating and an exhausting effort. Well, getting the equipment across the border is sometimes easier than getting it back into the United States.

Once the date, time, and place is acquired, as well as the equipment and glasses are organized, the next challenge is to get workers. All of the workers are volunteers and spend their money to deliver care to the citizens of the countries. Sometimes we stay at "about" a one star hotel, and needless to say, conditions are not like back home.

Now a whirlwind of activity begins upon arriving at the site. The "exam" rooms need to be built, the equipment needs to be set up, glasses need to be placed in an orderly fashion, including the sunglasses we bring for all the people we serve. Then the process of processing patients begins. There is really quite an assembly line process and it is very efficient. We start with entrance vision, automated refracting, internal eye exams, refractions, and eye glass dispensing. The entire process works well.

Now, the joy of the activity happens. The experiences of providing care for the patients is beyond what most professionals can comprehend. One must remember that these patients will never again in their entire lifetime get eye care. Can you personally imagine what your life would be if you did not have corrective eyewear?

The joys are too numerous to mention. But to name a few, people will sometimes hug you as hard as possible in appreciation of their new found vision. Some tell us if they had any money, they would give it all to us. Just watching the smiles, tears, and happy faces created makes all the hard work from all team members worthwhile.

In parting, it has always been my opinion that no one person on these trips are any more or less important than anyone else. Remember, a wheel only works if all the spokes are there to support the entire wheel. One of the major driving forces we need to process the number of patients is doctors, be they O.D.'s or M.D.'s. The more the merrier so to speak, as this is where prescriptions are generated for us to hand out glasses. So, please volunteer, recruit a volunteer, and join us on a mission trip.

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