

VOSH Kenya
May 23 to June 6, 2009

Our VOSH Kenya team, consisting of seven Berkeley optometry students, three SCCO students, two optometrists (Dr. Robert Rosa and Dr. Beverly Smith), and six church volunteers, recently returned from an eye-opening and rewarding vision screening trip in Nakuru, Kenya. The team provided over 900 eye exams to patients, giving over a third prescription glasses and the majority new sunglasses. Some patients were also treated for eye infections, dry eyes, and inflammation.

After 9,500 miles and three plane rides, we finally arrived halfway around the world in Nairobi. Bubbling with anticipation on the three hour bus ride to Nakuru, we watched the lush green landscapes and smiling faces that Kenya had to offer. The first stop for the team was ROHI Children's Organization, a Kenyan run school and orphanage the team learned about through Regeneration Church of Oakland. ROHI is home to three hundred orphaned, abandoned or destitute children. The team was amazed to see the school's primary and high school facilities, self-sustaining farmland and animals, and friendly, hospitable students and staff. The team had a wonderful time working with the ROHI students, who were all extremely cooperative, bright and engaging. The children were always fun to interact with, especially when they were modeling their new sunglasses. The team was also able to give vision exams to the ROHI staff, the local villagers and the students' guardians.

The next group of patients the team worked with was the children from the Mission in Action orphanage. Mission in Action (MIA) is an orphanage of 40 children, ranging from several months to 4 years old, created by Australian couple, Mary and Ivan Budulica. The VOSH team loved the adorable and well-behaved children from Mission in Action, so much so that they gave away finger puppets they used during the exam. The team also had a chance to visit the MIA site, holding babies in the infant ward, playing with the children in the playground, and getting to know the Budulica family.

The last group of patients was at a local landfill known as 'The Hilton.' Our team had the good fortune of being allowed to use a local school as a clinic site, since we were initially planning on using a bus. There were several translators provided by a local church since most of the patients were not able to speak English. Unlike at the schools, where English is taught at an early age, the people at the local landfill could only speak Swahili. This also provided a new challenge for the optometry students and optometrists, but we learned quite a few new Swahili phrases.

To decompress and relax after five grueling days of clinic, the team took part in the many fun activities Kenya has to offer. Of course, a trip to Kenya would not be complete without a safari. Taking us along for an Animal Planet worthy visit to the Maasai Mara were our three amazing drivers and tour guides, Victor, Bernard and Martin. Not only did we get to see giraffes, elephants, and cheetahs up close and personal, we were lucky enough to stay at the beautiful Mara Serena resort. The adventure was packed full of exotic animals, beautiful landscapes and even getting stuck in the mud. The team also had the chance to visit a bead factory created especially to help single mothers. All the girls walked away with beautiful jewelry and some of the guys had one-of-a-kind gifts to bring back. The Berkeley and SCCO students also had a chance to visit the giraffe house, a reserve where visitors can pet, feed and kiss giraffes.

Not only was the trip eye-opening because the students were able to experience a completely new culture, but it was rewarding to be able to help so many Kenyans. Being a joint VOSH trip, with optometry students from both Berkeley and SCCO, the students were able to bond and teach other new

techniques. Dr. Robert Rosa's calm and professional demeanor, expert skill and technique, and ability to put patients at ease were an exceptional model for the students. Dr. Beverly Smith's enthusiasm and eagerness to help, supreme organization, and bountiful knowledge was uplifting and inspirational to the students. The combination of both doctors, in addition to the six volunteers, provided a great resource for the students to build a well-oiled, warm and spirited vision screening team. As one of the Kenyans pointed out after watching our first day of clinic, it is easy to put a group together, but it takes hard work, open minds and a collective purpose to work as a team.

Figures:

1. The team spotted a cheetah stalking prey on their safari in the Maasai Mara.
2. The doctors rest before another clinic day at ROHI Children's Organization. (From left to right, Jessica Duran, Charlie Ngo, Elizabeth Je, Kim Nguyen, Anh-Thu Huynh, Joy Harewood, Rachel Grant, Heejin Kang, Celia Futch, Lavender Orr, Dr. Robert Rosa, Dr. Beverly Smith).
3. The team performing retinoscopy on children at ROHI. (From top to bottom, Dr. Robert Rosa, Joy Harewood, Anh-Thu Huynh, and Heejin Kang)
4. The team, including the church volunteers, poses with the children of Mission in Action orphanage and the Budulica family in their playground.
5. The children at ROHI Children's Organization jump for joy after a successful vision screening.