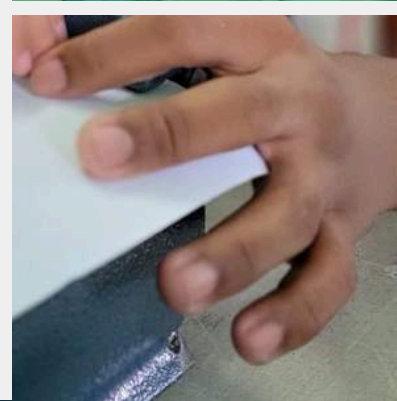
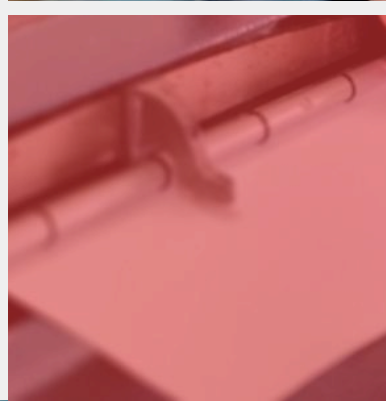
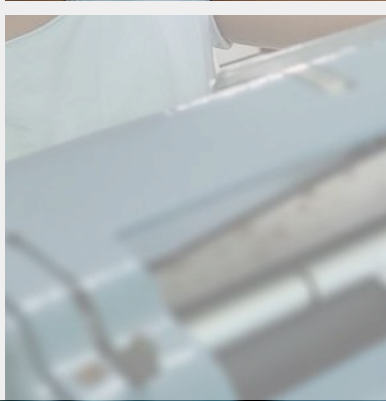
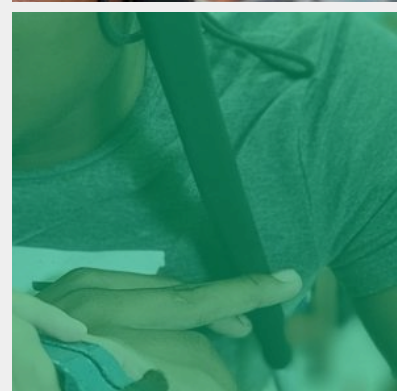
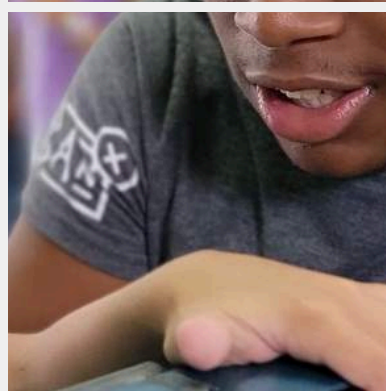
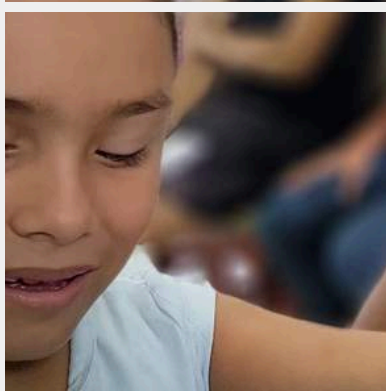
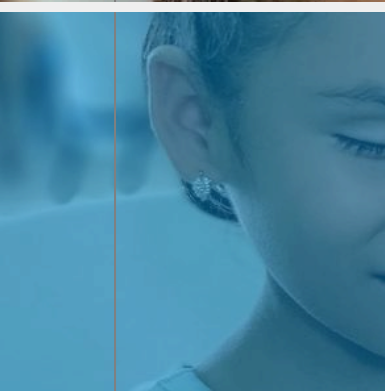
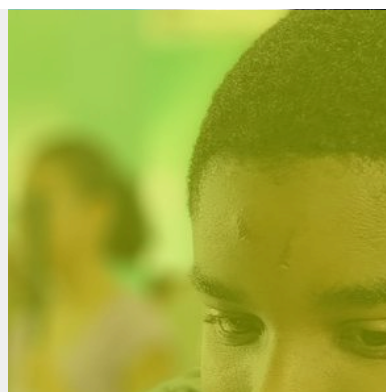


# Annual Report

2023



Belize's national,  
comprehensive eye service  
for all



# Mission & Vision

The Belize Council for the Visually Impaired (BCVI) is a non-profit organization committed through a Comprehensive Program, to prevent and cure blindness, restore sight and to rehabilitate and educate people who are blind to enable them to use their talents and abilities to live independent lives.

The Belize Council for the Visually Impaired (BCVI) has a vision of a Belize where no one is needlessly blind and those who are irrevocably blind are integrated as equal members in all aspects of society.

**Headquarters:**  
National Eye Clinic  
Lions Building  
Princess Margaret Drive  
Belize City

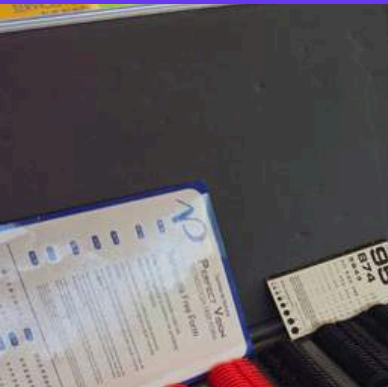
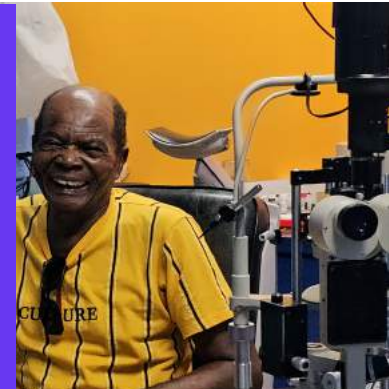
**Accountant:**  
Felix Reyes  
Chartered Accountant  
5760 Meighan Avenue  
Belize City

**Bankers:**  
Belize Bank Ltd  
Albert & Regent Streets  
Belize City

**The Belize Council for the Visually Impaired is a Company Limited by Guarantee and is Registered as a Non Government Organization—Certificate No.12/02**



**Primary Eye Care**



**Secondary Eye Care**



**Rehabilitation & Education**



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# Message from The Board and Director

This year, we'd like to highlight a much more important voice - our Rehabilitation Programme, from the perspective of a parent who has been a part of the BCVI family since her daughter, Angelique, was a baby.

“I write today with a heart full of gratitude and admiration for the incredible work that BCVI has done over the past years. The unwavering support and dedication of all the rehabilitation officers, both past and present, have played an instrumental role in shaping my daughter's education journey.

We are eternally grateful to BCVI for providing not just education, but a platform of hope, strength, and guidance for children like my daughter. Your commitment to their well-being and development has not gone unnoticed, and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for everything you do.

Through your efforts, you have instilled in these children a sense of resilience and determination, qualities that will serve them well in their future endeavors. We recognize the challenges we face, yet your steadfast support never wavers, and for that, we are truly thankful.

As we celebrate the class of 2024 graduates, we want to extend our sincerest appreciation for the support and guidance you have provided to them through their journey at BCVI. Your positive impact on their lives is immeasurable, and we are confident that they will carry the lessons learned and the values instilled with them as they embark on their next chapter.

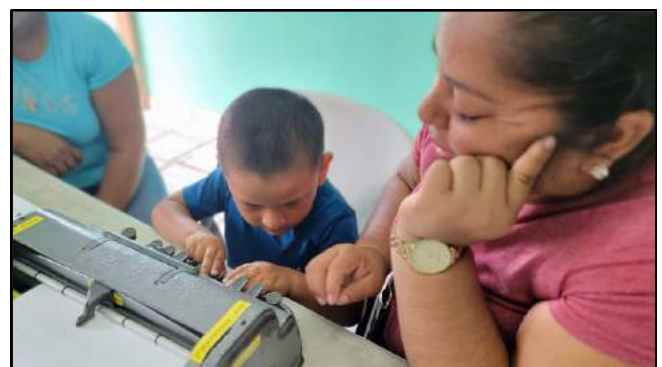
Please know that your efforts do not go unnoticed by us, the parents, and we are forever grateful for the profound difference you make in the lives of these children.

Once again, thank you for your tireless dedication, patience, and unwavering support. We pray that BCVI continues to thrive and positively impact more lives in the years to come.

Ms. Annette Waight & Family



Angelique with Juan at BCVI's 2023 Summer Camp



Annette supports a new student learning Braille at BCVI

# The BCVI Team

## EXECUTIVE BOARD

Executive President  
Joan Musa  
Vice President  
Donovan Reneau  
Secretary  
Alice Riveroll  
Treasurer  
Sheena Castillo  
Legal Advisor  
Oneyda Flores Piper

## EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Kamela Palma  
Regina Fonseca  
Hugo Moguel  
Carlos Dominguez  
Marshall Nunez

## MANAGEMENT & SUPPORT STAFF

Carla Ayres Musa - Executive Director  
Mark Mitchell - IT Officer  
Clifton Borland - Equipment Maintenance Officer  
Carmencita Cruz - Finance Officer  
Mirza Vasquez - Administrative Assistant  
Carol Martinez - Custodian  
Kathleen Tillett - Custodian  
Kurt Burgess - Messenger/Driver

## REHABILITATION

Sagrario Clarke - Coordinator  
Mya Musa - RFO

## PRIMARY EYE CARE

Jacqueline Graham Hemsley - Primary Eye Care Manager  
Freddy Nicholson - Programme Officer/ Senior Optometrist, Belize City  
Jahira Vasquez - Optometrist, Belize City  
Michelle Young - Diagnostic Technician, Belize City  
Afeini Lewis - Ophthalmic Assistant, Belize City  
Lysette Pren - Ophthalmic Assistant, Belmopan  
Elvia Bonilla - Optometrist, Orange Walk  
Elia Slusher - Ophthalmic Assistant, Orange Walk  
Magali Sabido - DR Grader, Orange Walk  
Anna Salam - Refractionist, Dangriga  
Daniel Choc - Optometrist, Punta Gorda  
Luveana Bol - Ophthalmic Assistant, Punta Gorda

## OPTICAL LABORATORY

Karina Samuda - Lab Operations Manager  
Arzel Flowers - Lab Administrative Officer  
Alfred Borland - Optical Technician  
George Berry - Optical Technician

## SECONDARY EYE CARE

Dr Zoraida Diaz - Ophthalmologist  
Angela Choc - Nurse in Charge  
Mara Burgess - Ophthalmic Assistant  
Drianna Mendez - Data Entry Clerk  
Sr Alice Lewis - OR Scrub Nurse

# 2023 Highlights

## Service Delivery

- Vitrectomy Programme - Referrals for Vitrectomy which averaged at approximately five annually (pre-COVID), totaled 30 in 2022. Drs Zac Koshy and Lennox Webb of Scotland donated equipment and supplies over the course of three years. With support from Ayr Hospital and Bausch & Lomb as well as many friends and donors in the UK, the first vitrectomy surgeries were done at BCVI in September. Prior to this, patients had to access care in Guatemala. We found that only 20% of our patients were able to do this. Fifteen Vitrectomy surgeries were done in 2023. A first for Belize's National Eye Service!
- Clinic locations - As part of our MOU with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, BCVI was thrilled to open our doors in Belmopan at the Western Regional Hospital in 2023. Although we do not have a full-time Optometrist at the moment, the clinic is being supported by a full-time Ophthalmic Assistant and rotating Optometrists from our other clinics
- Diagnostic Lane - In order to effectively meet the needs of our patients, we have dedicated a lane at our Belize City location to Fundus Imaging, Visual Field Testing and OCT exams.



## Human Resources

- Scholarships - Adarsh Charitable Foundation continues to support BCVI's path to self-sustainability by way of scholarships in Optometry with one new candidate commencing his studies in 2023. We are looking forward to having one of our Optometrists and one Ophthalmologist return in 2025.
- Staff development - Freddy Nicholson (Programme Officer) and Visiting Specialists continue to provide training in eye care for our clinical and rehabilitation teams. As many staff members are quite new, we provide basic training in eyecare and the leading causes of blindness in Belize. International visitors have also supported our team and patients throughout the year with provision of services as well as training. Increasing the capacity of our specialized staff members is essential in strengthening our programme.



# Primary Eye Care

In addition to our five Primary Clinics located throughout the country, BCVI also conducts outreach clinics to towns, villages, schools and businesses. Our teams of Optometrists and Ophthalmic Assistants screen and examine patients presenting with eye problems. Through our Optical Lab BCVI is able to provide high-quality, low-cost options to our patients. Those who cannot benefit from glasses are referred to the Ophthalmologist in the Secondary Eye Care Programme.

In 2023, BCVI examined a total of 11,585 (3,000 more than in 2022). This increase was also visible in the numbers of prescription glasses dispensed which increased by more than 1,000 compared to the previous year.

**Total Patients examined (Gender and Age)**

<b>Adults</b>	9,844	<b>Male</b>	4,297
<b>Children</b>	1,741	<b>Female</b>	7,288

**Orange Walk, Corozal & San Pedro**

Examinations 2485  
 Prescription glasses 703  
 Readers issued 565  
 Referred to Ophthalmologist 490

**Belize**

Examinations 5031  
 Prescription glasses 2117  
 Readers issued 702  
 Referred to Ophthalmologist 615

**Cayo**

Examinations 969  
 Prescription glasses 334  
 Readers issued 88  
 Referred to Ophthalmologist 257

**Stann Creek**

Examinations 1420  
 Prescription glasses 419  
 Readers issued 188  
 Referred to Ophthalmologist 425

**Toledo**

Examinations 1680  
 Prescription glasses 528  
 Readers issued 527  
 Referred to Ophthalmologist 330



# Secondary Eye Care

Patients seen at our primary clinics and are in need of further examination are seen by BCVI’s Ophthalmologist Dr Zoraida Diaz. Dr Diaz provides secondary services at all five clinics throughout the country. In 2023, a total of 2,231 patients were seen at the SEC and District Clinics.

## Patient Testimonial

"It was a surprise to me! I didn't expect that I would get such a professional service."

"I feel like I've been born again!"

Visiting surgeons and specialists are able to treat patients who have already been identified and referred by Dr Diaz and the local team. Cataracts remain the leading cause of blindness in Belize. In 2023, our team restored vision to 319 patients through phaco and manual small incision cataract surgeries. We also resumed pterygium surgeries (4) and continue to treat children in need of surgery (24) thanks to World Pediatric Project. We are fortunate to have Ophthalmic Nurse, Sister Alice Lewis supporting Nurse Angela Choc in the operating room.



Patients with Glaucoma are treated by Dr Diaz with medication and monitored regularly. Through our decade-long partnership with Storm Eye Institute, four patients also received Trabeculectomy laser treatment due to uncontrollable pressure from Glaucoma.

Blindness due to Diabetic Retinopathy continues to increase nationally and we are thrilled to be able to resume our imaging both in-clinic and on outreach in order to identify, educate and refer patients in need of treatment. Retinologists Dr Inder Singal, Dr Lennox

Webb and Dr Andrew Merkur visited Belize and conducted more than 200 laser treatments throughout the country.

After four years of planning, Dr Zac Koshy and Dr Webb implemented the Vitrectomy Programme in September, performing 15 of the tertiary care surgeries. The duo also performed cataract surgery for four patients with severe retinopathy. This marks a historical moment for Belize’s eye care service!





# Rehabilitation & Education

In 2023, we received a total of 34 new clients taking Belize's Blind Register up to 1,476 people. With this case number, Human Resources remain a big priority and we were thrilled to welcome Mya Musa to the team in the role of Rehabilitation Field Officer (RFO) for Belize District. Pre-recorded training sessions with Joan Samuels were very helpful as well as guidance from Education Coordinator Sagrario Clarke. However, we have identified the need for practical training which we hope to conduct in 2024 with former Rehabilitation Coordinator, Joan Samuels and Canadian Low Vision Specialist Sheila Jamieson.

The rehab team successfully organized and hosted the first low vision clinic of the year. This clinic provided vital services to individuals with visual impairments. Some clients were transferred to the blind list, as they have lost their remaining vision since their last assessment. The RFOs began rehab training to fit the unique needs of each client. Magnifiers, glasses and telescopes are prescribed and donated to all patients as needed.

Our students and families were overjoyed that BCVI was able to host our Annual Summer Camp for the first time since 2019! A total of 23 clients attended, supported by their chaperones, 12 volunteers, 4 Special Education officers and BCVI staff. We are extremely thankful to our donors and to Stella Maris who kindly hosted the camp. The clients enjoyed the various trips and activities, which included going to Goff's Caye, watching a movie at Princess, and a trip to Guanacaste Park hosted by the Belize Audubon Society. While Technology and Orientation and Mobility were the focus of the camp, the clients especially enjoyed interacting with their peers, playing games and partaking in arts and crafts.

BCVI continues to work alongside the Ministry of Education and NaRCIE to provide orientation for teachers. As we move forward, the RFOs remain committed to serving individuals with visual impairments and promoting community-based rehabilitation. We will continue to host clinics, conduct outreach activities, and provide support to both new and existing clients. Our goal is to ensure that all individuals with visual impairments have access to the resources and assistance they need to thrive.



# Visitors & Volunteers

**We are fortunate to have the support of Optometrists, Ophthalmologists and Specialists throughout the year who provide treatment for our patients and continued education for our team.**

Benji Chandra, an Optometrist from the UK, visited BCVI for the first time, providing clinical support and training in primary and secondary care. Optometrist from the US, Hal Breedlove, also supported the PEC programme, examining patients in our primary clinics throughout Belize. These visits have been a huge help as we are short on Optometrists to staff each of our five clinics.

Dr. Kinloch Nelson's team visited seven schools in the Cayo District, screening more than 850 students and teachers. Approximately 300 refractions were done and 62 patients were identified as needing glasses - all of whom received thanks to support from Grace and Unity Church who partnered with BCVI to have the glasses generated. Dr Micheal Baughan and his VOSH Team returned to BCVI in September examining hundreds of patients in Belize City and prescribing glasses for those in need.

Dr. Baxter McLendon visited in January and July during which he examined 175 patients throughout the country at BCVI's satellite clinics and provided laser treatment for Glaucoma.

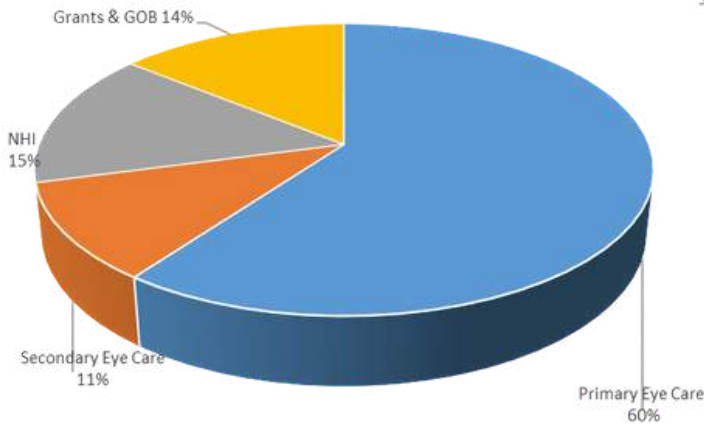
Dr. Michael Wong & Team visited in January, our first cataract mission for the year, during which he examined 60 patients and performed 45 surgeries including glaucoma trabeculectomy. Storm Eye Institute's (SEI) first visited three times in 2023. The teams led by Dr. Chuck Beischel, Dr Matt Nutaitis and Dr Eliza Barnwell examined a total of 64 patients and performed 56 cataract surgeries. During his visits in May and October, Ophthalmologist Dr David Boes examined more than 100 patients and performed 73 cataract surgeries. We were thrilled to welcome back Dr Edgar Ogaldez who performed 52 manual cataract surgeries in two days! Dr Juan Pablo Tovar, a colleague of Ogaldez, also from Guatemala, visited BCVI twice in 2023 - his first visits to BCVI! He examined 85 patients, performing 71 cataract surgeries and a pterygium surgery as well! Ophthalmologists from the Far Eastern Medical Hospital in Taiwan (FEMH) returned to BCVI and performed cataract, oculoplastic and pterygium surgeries.

We are fortunate to still have support from World Pediatric Project (WPP) who continue to provide surgeries and treatment for children in need. Although issues with the phacoemulsification machine prevented them from conducting cataract surgeries, the team operated on 22 children needing strabismus surgeries.

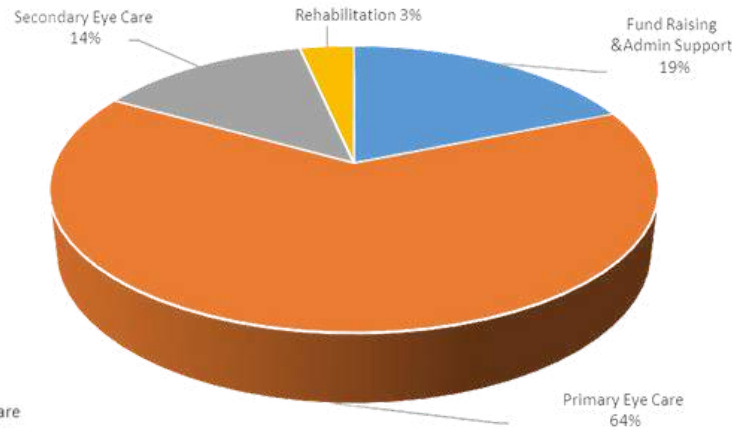
In addition to supporting the Scholarship programme for Belizeans in eye care, Dr. Inder Singal continues to provide much-needed treatment for people throughout Belize. During his visits in 2023, Singal examined 160 patients provided retinal laser treatment for 90 patients. He is also supporting the development of the Vitrectomy Programme at BCVI implemented by Dr Zac Koshy and Dr Lennox Webb in September when they performed our first 15 procedures despite limitations with equipment. Dr Andrew Merkur a Retinal specialist from Canada visited BCVI twice for the first time in 2023, examining patients and providing laser treatment for patients throughout the country. Dr Merkur has been instrumental in not only conducting vitrectomy surgeries, but also providing essential supplies.

# Sustainability

Income BZ\$1,629,458



Expense BZ\$1,731,294



BCVI’s primary eye care continues to be our largest source of income, supporting our rehabilitation programme which is offered free of cost. Government of Belize continues to support and we were fortunate to receive the NHI Contract in Ophthalmology for Orange Walk (in addition to the continued contracts for Southside Belize City and Southern Region). Adarsh Charitable Foundation continues to fund scholarships for our students in eye care with four currently in the process of completing their studies.

Despite an increase in income of about \$300,000 from the previous year, we still took a loss of approximately \$102,000. This is due, in part, to the five additional staff members hired countrywide as well as the global increase in the cost of supplies for our Optical Lab.

In addition, since 2020, BCVI has been tracking the total amount of assistance provided to patients who are unable to pay for services in the primary and secondary programmes. This continues to increase as do our patient numbers and in 2023, our assistance totaled about \$72,000.



# Looking Forward

BCVI continues to focus on Staff Development as we see an increase in turnover of employees. With Freddy Nicholson taking on the role of Programme Officer, our aim is to provide continuous training and support for our national team. This will become easier when we are fully staffed with Optometrists in our District Clinics which we anticipate will be in 2024 and 2025 when two students return to BCVI from Optometry Certification in Guatemala.

Community-based service delivery remains at the heart of BCVI's programmes and we look forward to increasing outreach services to schools with the support of Pediatric Ophthalmologist Dr. Millicent Peterseim who will work along with the Orange Walk Team in 2024.

Blindness due Diabetic Retinopathy remains a concern, particularly in the Northern Region where the incidence is higher and uptake for laser treatment is low. BCVI will be expanding our reach in the Orange Walk District with education and screening in the hopes of identifying patients in need of treatment. With a steady rotation of Retinologists we will be able to offer continued support for those in need. These specialists will also provide more regular vitrectomy surgeries for patients in Belize.

BCVI data shows that 80% of our patients with Diabetes access our service via referrals from provider within the National Health Insurance (NHI) programme. With coverage now extended to Orange Walk, we are hopeful that this will improve patient education to live more healthy lifestyles and prioritize eye care to reduce blindness due to diabetic retinopathy.

Glaucoma is another area of concern and we are fortunate to have the support of retinal specialist Dr Inder Singal who will be visiting more frequently and is also in the process of acquiring laser equipment to treat patients and hopefully reduce the incidence of blindness due to Glaucoma.

BCVI's former Rehabilitation and Education Coordinator, Joan Samuels, has provided virtual training sessions and support for our Rehabilitation Field Officers (RFOs). In 2024, we hope that she will visit Belize to conduct practical training in Orientation and Mobility and Daily Living Skills.



# Thank You

We are grateful for the support from our partners, friends and volunteers who make our wonderful work possible.

Ministry of Health and Wellness  
 Ministry of Human Development  
 Ministry of Education, Culture, Science & Technology  
 NaRCIE/Special Education Unit  
 Women's Department  
 National Health Insurance  
 Adarsh Charitable Foundation  
 Dr Inder Singal  
 Help The World See  
 BCVI Foundation  
 SEE International  
 Lions Clubs of Belize  
 Belize Red Cross  
 Rotary Club of Belize  
 Embassy of Taiwan  
 Appliance World  
 Bowen & Bowen  
 Sea Charters of Belize  
 Princess Cinema  
 Belize Audubon Society  
 Oceana  
 Sagicor  
 Reef Resort  
 Quality Poultry  
 DFC  
 Design Depot

Dr Zac Koshy  
 Dr Lennox Webb  
 Ayr Hospital, Scotland  
 FEMH Taiwan  
 Bausch & Lomb  
 Alcon  
 Storm Eye Institute  
 World Pediatric Project  
 Dr David Boes  
 Tom Angell  
 Dr Andrew Merkur  
 Rick Soller  
 FEMH Taiwan  
 Gilvano Swasey  
 Tropic Air  
 Itz'ana Resort  
 Rhythm Reef Caye  
 Monarch Counselling  
 Three Star Chicken  
 Sun Breeze Company  
 CZMAI  
 Print Belize  
 Brodies  
 Madisco  
 Habet & Habet  
 Castillo Hardware  
 Mrs. Liza Zelaya & Family

The Belize Bank Limited  
 General Equipment  
 Belize Foam Factory  
 Great Belize Productions Channel 5  
 Channel 7 Belize  
 Southside Meats  
 Belize Diesel  
 Belize Chamber of Commerce  
 A&R  
 Angelus Press  
 BEL  
 Belize Mills  
 BNE  
 SSB  
 Nigel & Elly Bolan  
 Felix Reyes  
 Grace Kennedy  
 Fort George Hotel  
 Santiago Castillo - Save U  
 Western Dairies  
 Westrac  
 Zeta

*Thank you!*

"I am really grateful and happy to be a part of BCVI. What motivates me is that at the end of the day I have served and made a difference in people's lives especially the most in need."

Freddy Nicholson  
 Senior Optometrist /Programme Officer



"I really and truly feel that if BCVI had not existed for the past 43 years, the average person suffering from any eye condition would not get the treatment they need. That pushes me to show up every day and share my experience and valuable information to both patients and staff."

Jacqueline Graham Hemsley  
 Primary Care Manager

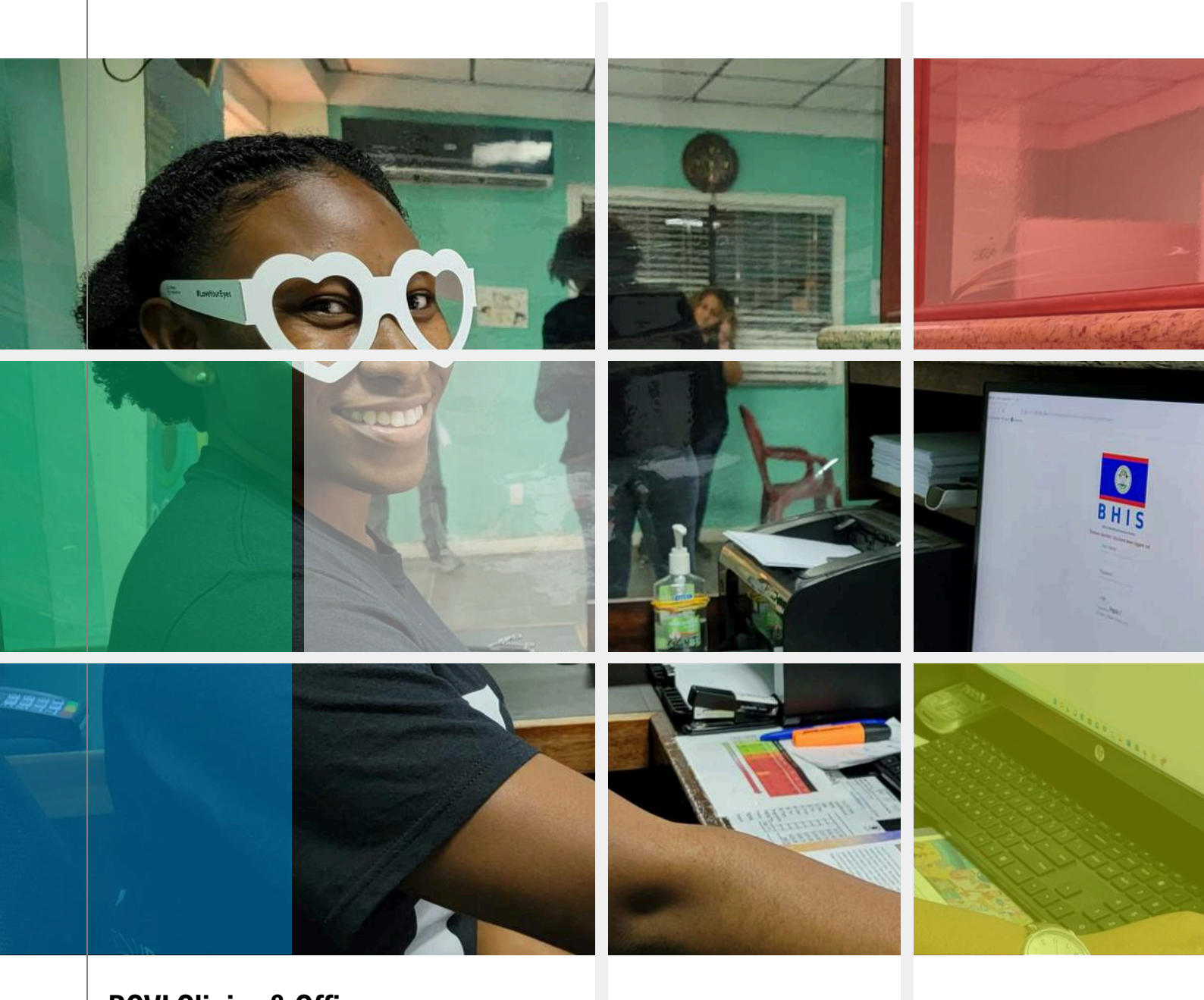


"I love my job when I can help the most needy, especially the elderly since it reminds me of my father. I love doing outreach since we get to reach out to more people."

Elia Slusher  
 Ophthalmic Assistant



We interviewed some of our longest-serving team members on why they have enjoyed working with us.



## BCVI Clinics & Offices

### **Belize City Primary & Secondary Clinics**

Lions Building  
Princess Margaret Drive  
Belize City  
Phone - 223-2636

### **Belize City Rehabilitation Center**

Lions Building  
Princess Margaret Drive  
Belize City  
Phone - 610-5438

### **Belmopan**

Western Regional Hospital  
Floriana Avenue  
Belmopan, Cayo  
Phone - 611-8352

### **Orange Walk Town**

Red Cross Building  
Jabiru Street  
Orange Walk  
Phone - 322-0227

### **Dangriga**

Southern Regional Hospital  
Hummingbird Highway  
Dangriga, Stann Creek  
Phone - 522-0452

### **Punta Gorda Town**

Main Street  
(next to hospital)  
Punta Gorda, Toledo  
Phone - 722-2025