



NEWS RELEASE

WSD Mobile Vision Care Unit removes vision barrier for hundreds of students

November 7, 2017 (Winnipeg, MB) – Winnipeg School Division (WSD) has introduced a mobile vision care unit that is quickly making a major difference in the lives of students. Led by Sean Sylvestre, the group of doctors of optometry together with their licensed opticians, started doing comprehensive eye exams for students in schools in early October. In its first four weeks, the Mobile Vision Care Unit has examined over 770 pairs of eyes and changed lives for almost half those students.

“We’ve just begun our work and already our unit has prescribed glasses for 310 students at four schools in WSD,” said Sylvestre. “I cannot tell you how amazing it has been to be able to impact so many students. I’m really pleased to partner with WSD to ensure these kids have access to vision care.” Sylvestre notes that all exams are conducted by licensed doctors of Optometry.

A total of 20 WSD schools are taking part in the vision care program which grew out of a need identified in the division’s Read2Me program. Read2Me is targeted, small group instruction with the support of a teacher, educational assistant, co-teacher and technology that leads to significant literacy gains for students involved.

“Our work with students in Read2Me made us aware of vision as a potential learning barrier for many of our students, particularly those living in poverty,” said Fatima Ramjiawan, WSD Clinical Support Services Area Service Director. “Last year, Mr. Sylvestre ran a pilot with us to provide optometric services to 328 students during a seven-day event. From that, 246 pairs of glasses were delivered, free of charge, to students at six of our schools.” It was, however, just a beginning, said Ramjiawan.

WSD Student Services identified a tremendous need for vision care for the entire student bodies of schools that have socioeconomic challenges – which is what the WSD Mobile Vision Care Unit program is now providing, coordinated through Volunteer Services.

A provision of the program is to provide prescription eyewear to the students through direct-billing of third party insurance, employment income assistance, non-insured health benefits or donation. As part of the mobile vision care program, the costs of the eye examinations are billed directly to Manitoba Health, ensuring the testing is provided at zero cost to the school or the student. This year alone, Sylvestre and his team have donated 112 pairs of glasses.

WSD was established in 1871 and currently has 78 schools, 33,000 students and 6,000 employees. Its purpose is to provide a learning environment that fosters the growth of each student’s potential and provide equitable opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills and values necessary for meaningful participation in a global and diverse society.

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