



THE EYE OPENER

WINTER 2024

Creating a Pathway to **VISION. FOR ALL. FOR LIFE.**



“The glasses really help her, but she did not have the words to tell us she needed them.”

- Kehala Two Bulls

Most of us don't think about our vision. We see well, either thanks to good vision genetics, corrective glasses or contacts, or in some cases, vision correction surgery, like LASIK. And that is music to our ears!

Through LifeSight's mission – Vision. For All. For Life. – vision-related outreach raises awareness about how to protect and preserve vision and advocates to ensure routine eye care is a priority, whether for a 6-month old infant or an elderly individual. For those in our community facing barriers to routine eye care, due to cost or other concerns, LifeSight's outreach helps to bridge the gaps that preclude access.

One of the most significant ways we do this is through KidsFIRST Free Vision Screenings. KidsFIRST administers free vision screenings to children 6 months of age through 5th grade. Nearly 64,000 children have benefited from KidsFIRST Free Vision Screenings.

Often parents believe children naturally have good vision. Furthermore, children generally do not know they are having difficulty seeing. They only know their own experience and may not realize they have blurry vision.

Data captured by KidsFIRST Free Vision Screenings shows nearly 15% of children screened, almost 10,000 children, have been referred to an eye doctor for treatment because of an undetected vision disorder identified by a KidsFIRST Free Vision Screening.

The good news is, when caught early, most childhood vision problems can be treated, as expressed in an email from Kehala Two Bulls, a parent whose 4-year old daughter was referred to an eye doctor due to risk factors detected in her KidsFIRST vision screening. “I feel a deep personal gratitude to LifeSight for helping us know early that our youngest has a strong astigmatism. The glasses really help her, but she did not have the words to tell us she needed them. Thank you.”

In an ideal world, every child would see an eye doctor for their first eye exam between 6 to 12 months of age. Then visit again, at least once, between 3 to 5 years of age, before starting first grade, and annually thereafter.

While a vision screening does not take the place of a complete eye exam, for many families KidsFIRST Free Vision Screenings, which are administered at area public and parochial schools, preschools, and childcare centers, are vital to preventing vision-threatening conditions – essentially, identifying children who may have vision disorders so they can be referred to an eye doctor for treatment.

Of added significance is a recent study undertaken by LifeSight and University of South Dakota Sanford School of Medicine volunteer student researchers that looked at how children from lower socioeconomic statuses are at increased risk of having undiagnosed vision problems.

The study compared vision screenings administered by KidsFIRST in Title I and Non-Title I Rapid City elementary schools. (Title I is a federal program that distributes funds to schools with at least a 40% student population from low income households.) Findings show Title I schools were associated with a considerably higher referral rate, 24.9%, compared to 11.4% at Non-Title I schools, giving marked impact to the outreach of KidsFIRST Free Vision Screenings and LifeSight's ongoing advocacy in closing the gap regarding access to eye care to ensure children's long-term health and wellbeing.

All LifeSight community outreach is at no cost to program recipients. It is possible only through the financial support of donors, like you, and we need your help. Your donation – be it \$5, \$500, or \$5,000 – is critical in creating the pathway to Vision. For All. For Life. We would be immensely grateful for your support.

LifeSight exists to protect and preserve vision, restore sight, and support eye-related research to promote eye health for all.

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YOU ARE TRANSFORMING LIVES!

Year end is a wonderful time to reflect on successes and look forward to what is to come. You have contributed to our success, and we thought you would enjoy reading about a couple exciting things you helped make possible in 2024!

Most heartening is the celebration of our 100th Gift of Sight surgery. Gift of Sight transforms lives, giving recipients back their vision and reclaimed independence and livelihood, through the support of generous donors, like you, and program partners like area ophthalmologists, optometrists, and Dakota Lions Sight & Health. There are few things more joyful or meaningful, and as you read this, Gift of Sight surgeries for three more individuals are under way.

In September, our seventh research manuscript, "Poverty and Vision: The Effect of Title 1 Status on Vision Screening Referral Rates in School-Aged Children in Western SD," was published in *Ophthalmic Epidemiology*. Since 2013, LifeSight has had a collaboration with University of South Dakota Sanford School of Medicine student volunteers to conduct in-depth studies on vision and eye health in our region. It is exciting to work with these bright, enthusiastic medical students and we feel fortunate that one, Dr. Taylor Slingsby,

returned to Rapid City to practice ophthalmology, joined our Board of Directors, and now oversees our research projects with Sanford School of Medicine student volunteers!

As we celebrate our success, we also want to express our gratitude to the Board of Directors and staff recognized on this newsletter cover, who deeply value and are genuinely dedicated to transforming lives every day through giving sight.

This is the season to believe, and we feel immensely blessed that you believe in our cause and are transforming lives through our mission: Vision. For All. For Life.

Wishing you peace, health, and ever present moments of joy throughout the holiday season and into the New Year,

Ronda Gusinsky
Executive Director
LifeSight



Ronda Gusinsky

A PARTY WITH A PURPOSE!

Casino Royale Charity Affair is always something we look forward to each year to celebrate our mission with friends, old and new, and raise funds to support our one-of-a-kind vision outreach.

Thanks to supporters like you, event sponsors, promotional partners, volunteers, and auction and event donors, more than \$330,000 in net proceeds have been raised over the past decade. Aptly named a "Party with a Purpose," these funds underwrite programming to provide for the unmet vision needs of children and medically underserved adults, particularly persons of low socioeconomic status, who lack access to routine eye care.

We would also like to extend our thanks to **Helene Duhamel** of the Pennington County Sheriff's Office and **JD Hewitt** of Hewitt Land Company for joining us for the festivities as emcee and auctioneer, respectively!

Mark your calendars for our 13th Annual Casino Royale Charity Affair on Saturday, September 27, 2025, at the Hilton Garden Inn Rapid City!



CASINO *royale*

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 28, 2024

Presented by



and supported by



Support our mission. ☐ **YES!** I want to support the vision-inspired outreach of LifeSight.

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I WANT TO DONATE: \$ _____ ☐ My Check is Enclosed ☐ Contact Me at the Number Above For My Credit Card Information

After completing this form, please place form, along with your check, if applicable, in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Postage required.

Thank you for your generous support of our cause.

LifeSight is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Your gift is tax deductible as allowed by the IRS. LifeSight may acknowledge donors in public relations materials unless donor requests to remain anonymous.

NEWS BRIEFS

2024 YFS KIDS FAIR | This year, LifeSight once again took part in the YFS Kids Fair, providing **KidsFIRST Free Vision Screenings** for children aged 6 months through 5th grade to help identify vision problems early to decrease the impact an untreated condition may have on visual development and ensure children can see well! Of the 465 children who received free vision screenings, 69 had risk factors detected and were referred to an eye doctor to determine what may be causing their vision problem.



Our thanks to an enthusiastic group of volunteers, including students from University of South Dakota Sanford School of Medicine, for supporting this effort, and to Monument Health, for sponsoring the sunglasses given to children receiving a vision screening.

SOUTH DAKOTA OPTOMETRIC SOCIETY 2024 SPRING CONVENTION LifeSight was excited to be included in the April 25-26 spring conference of the South Dakota Optometric Society, the professional organization of optometrists in South Dakota.



We enjoy this opportunity to engage in conversations with eye care professionals from across the state to learn about their practices and share information about LifeSight's community outreach, as well as network with other organizations involved in the eye care community.

2024 SCHOLARSHIP AWARD | We are pleased to congratulate **Julia Reynhout**, recipient of the **2024 Dr. Paul L. Zimmerman Memorial Scholarship**, which is awarded through an endowment established by LifeSight at the University of South Dakota Sanford School of Medicine.



"It is an honor to be chosen for this gift of support," Julia wrote. "I am excited for my rotations this last year before residency training begins, particularly in Ophthalmology, and look forward to submitting my application and interviewing for a residency position in the field. Having a chance to be part of a patient's journey to better vision is very rewarding and I hope to return to South Dakota to serve patients in my home state after residency."

THANK YOU KIDSFIRST VOLUNTEERS | We are most grateful to our amazing group of KidsFIRST program volunteers who have dedicated close to 400 hours this past year to assist LifeSight in administering free children's vision screenings. **We celebrated these fantastic folks in September at our annual Volunteer Picnic & Salute and were pleased to congratulate John Brown as our KidsFIRST Volunteer of the Year, and John and his wife, Bobbi Brown, as Volunteer Couple of the Year.** John and Bobbi joined our KidsFIRST volunteer program in 2022 and have already made a huge contribution to our cause and community. Our deepest thanks to each and every member of this amazing group who have huge hearts for volunteerism!



WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

We are excited to announce the addition of three new members to our Board of Directors, who bring valuable expertise to further our mission and guide our organization toward future success.

DR. DWAYNE ICE has been in practice for 41 years, graduating from the University of Houston College of Optometry. He moved to Rapid City in 1983, and prior to partnering with Drs. Scott and Elizabeth Ellender at VisualEyes Eye Clinic, owned and operated Vision West Eye Care. He is a member of the American Optometric Association, Sports Vision Section, and South Dakota Optometric Society, and certified in Ocular Pharmaceutical Therapeutics. Dr. Ice and his wife, Barb, have two children. Daughter, Gelea, followed in her father's footsteps and is an optometrist in Seattle, WA, and son, Brandon, lives in Rapid City and works for Beka Ditching Corp.



DR. RYAN SCARBOROUGH grew up in Hayes, graduated from high school in Pierre, and received his Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from South Dakota State University. Between undergraduate and professional degrees, he served as an AmeriCorps VISTA in inner-city Cleveland, OH. He received his optometric degree from Ohio State University and furthered his education with an accredited residency from the Marshall B. Ketchum University in ocular disease and primary eye care at the Kayenta Arizona Indian Health Center. In 2014, he joined the staff of Black Hills Regional Eye Institute. He previously served on the LifeSight Board from 2014-2022, presiding as Chair from 2016-2022 until becoming term limited. He continued to be engaged with LifeSight, working on strategic initiatives, and looks forward to rejoining the Board in 2025. He also volunteers at Complete Health, providing optometry exams to underserved patients. He and his wife, Patricia, and their three sons, enjoy outdoor activities and spending time on the family ranch.



MATT SLEEP, a native of Spearfish, SD, studied Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Business at South Dakota State University, the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and the South China Agricultural University in Guangzhou, China, graduating with a degree in Agricultural Business from South Dakota State University in 1991. In the spring of 1992, Matt started his banking career working for First Interstate Bank of Commerce in Gillette, WY. Matt spent 31 years working in the banking and financial service industry. The last 16 years were spent in First Interstate Bank's Wealth Management division in South Dakota, where he was a vice president and wealth advisor managing assets for individuals, businesses, trusts, and institutions. In the spring of 2023, Matt was named CEO of Butte Electric Cooperative, Inc., a rural electric utility provider. Matt had previously sat on the Board of Directors of the Cooperative prior to moving to Rapid City.





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