



TRAINING MISSION IN SAINT-LOUIS, SENEGAL

From March 21st to 31st 2019, volunteers Dr. Marie-Chantal Hudon and Dr. Nicole Vachon, Optometrists, went to Saint-Louis, Senegal to give the first training session on primary eye care to the staff of the new Program of Prevention and Fight against Blindness (PPFB) which opened in January 2019.

A PROMISING NEW COLLABORATION

After a two-week mission during which 2 000 patients benefited from eye exams and pairs of glasses, IRIS Mundial is continuing its collaboration with the Association St-Louisienne pour la Vue (ASV) to help them offer long-term eye care services. Thanks to a grant from the Quebec International Development Program (QIDP), a two-year Program for the Prevention and Fight Against Blindness (PPFB) was launched in January 2019. The objective of the program is to improve the visual health of women and men of the region of Saint-Louis in order to improve their quality of life and to enable them to participate actively in the socioeconomic development of their community. The community will be provided with a visual care facility thanks to the construction of a Community Clinic and the purchase or donation of equipment. The program will also provide eye screening in remote areas and, if needed, further examination at the community clinic and eye surgeries at the regional hospital of St-Louis. Furthermore, awareness raising and education sessions on visual health and hygiene will be offered to the population.



The team, composed of two nurses, an optician and an administrative assistant, work in collaboration with an ophthalmologist. In order to foster autonomy and sustainability, the program will also focus on the transfer of knowledge to the staff. Various training sessions will be organized on primary eye care and on management of health structures. Dr. Marie-Chantal Hudon and Dr. Nicole Vachon went to Senegal last March for this purpose.

FIRST TRAINING FOR THE STAFF OF THE PROGRAM



Dr. Hudon and Dr. Vachon were our pioneers, initiating the first in a long series of training programs. Their mandate was to teach the members of the team about the anatomy of the eye, refractive errors, the main eye diseases present in Senegal, screening tests to be performed and referencing to the ophthalmologist who

« The trainers were very dynamic, clear and precise in their explanations. This strongly helped our motivation to participate. We do not regret at all that you are our partner ».
Mrs Aïda Sarr, nurse

comes every month to provide secondary eye care. The two nurses and the optician took part in the training. The administrative assistant, who wanted to learn about visual health, decided to join them. They expressed a strong interest in all the workshops, especially the educational videos and the use of ophthalmic instruments!

Dr. Hudon reflected: *“I was so impressed by the level of knowledge and skills of the team members. We were able to go through the topics much faster and cover more topics than expected. They were thirsty for knowledge and the discussions were rich and constructive.”*



DONATION OF EQUIPMENT AND DELIVERY OF EYE GLASSES



Thanks to generous donations from our partners: the IRIS store of Rouyn Noranda and Innova, our two trainers left Quebec loaded with precious ophthalmic equipment.

They first went to visit the Ophthalmology Service of the Saint-Louis Regional Hospital Center and were able to donate equipment. During the November 2018 mission, IRIS Mundial volunteers offering eye surgeries in the hospital had noticed the lack of equipment in the ophthalmology service. Therefore, a slit-lamp biomicroscopy and an autorefractor were given in the presence of the vice-president of the hospital.

Furthermore, a non-contact tonometer and another slit-lamp microscopy have been donated to our partner, the Association Saint-Louisienne pour la Vue

(ASV) in order to equip their future community clinic.





Finally, Dr. Hudon and Dr. Vachon had the pleasure of delivering glasses to five children who received eye examinations during the last mission in November 2018. Mihaela Mara Somogyi, optician - head of the dispensary during the mission of November 2018 explained that: *“we travel with 6000 pair of eye glasses so we can be sure to find an adapted pair of glasses for each of the 2000 patients that we see, but in some cases people have vision disorders that are so specific, we are unable to offer them immediately”*. Mihaela came back to Canada with prescriptions for the five patients who had specific needs (strength of -16, -17 or major astigmatism of -6, -7) and got the lenses cut thanks to the generous support of Nikon and the New Look Laboratory¹.

When the two optometrists returned, the glasses were given to the children waiting for them. Dr. Hudon testified: *“the mother of the little boy who received a pair of glasses (strength of -12.5 to one eye and -16 to the other) was so grateful that she cried. It was a very moving moment for all of us”*.



THE FIRST MOBILE CLINICS

The presence of the two trainers also provided the chance to start the program’s outreach activities. Two mobile clinics were organized as practical training exercises. The first one was held in a school and benefited children while the second one was held in a remote community of Saint-Louis for the benefit of adults. Mobile clinics enable the examination of people who cannot easily access eye care services. They get an initial screening and are referred if necessary to the community eye clinic in Saint-Louis for an in-depth eye examination.



77 patients were seen during those two mobile clinics by the members of the team under the supervision of Dr. Vachon and Dr. Hudon. 73 pairs of glasses were sold at a social price adapted to the financial means

of the beneficiaries. It is important to start selling the glasses, even for a symbolic amount, to ensure the viability of the program. The mobile clinics were also an opportunity for the team to carry out awareness raising and education on visual hygiene and visual health that are essential in order to prevent blindness and visual disorders.



Back in Canada, Dr. Vachon testified: *“my experience in Saint-Louis can be summarized as a wonderful accomplishment, a memorable stay with plenty of interesting encounters, sharing and new discoveries. I wish the team all the best in working towards their aims in this partnership with IRIS Mundial”*.

¹ We extend our thanks to IRIS Iberville and IRIS Ste Rose who assembled the lenses and glasses in time to be sent with the two optometrists.