

# TRAINING MISSION IN LABROUSSE, HAITI

## *Primary eye care for all!*



From March 14<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> 2018, volunteers Dr. Rashi Reskalla and Dr. Sylvie Sarrazin, Optometrists, went to Labrousse in Haiti to give full training on primary eye care to all nurses at the *Notre-Dame de Lourdes de Labrousse* health centre.

### SUSTAINABILITY IN THE DELIVERY OF EYE CARE IN THE AREA

Since its establishment in 2010 with FODES\*, the permanent eye care program in Labrousse has received management, training and funding support from IRIS Mundial. Over the years, funds have been granted and seven training missions have been organized in Haiti to support the program. The objective of the current one-year part-time phase is to enable the program staff and the partner to become autonomous, since the program will become independent next June. In order to sustain the services on offer and to ensure that knowledge and visual care persist with professionals in the area, a decision was made to train all the nurses at the centre on how to provide primary eye care. Thus, after more than 16 hours of continuous travel by plane and car, the two IRIS Mundial volunteers were warmly welcomed very late in the evening in Labrousse, this small isolated village in the mountains of the department of Nippes.

*\*Local Partner : Fondation pour le Développement économique et social*



## TRAINING FOR ALL NURSES

Dr. Reskalla and Dr. Sarrazin had the mandate to train all nurses on the eye's anatomy, refractive errors, the main eye diseases present in Haiti, screening tests to be performed and referencing to the ophthalmologist who comes every month to provide secondary eye care. Four Labrousse nurses and a new nurse from the IRIS Mundial permanent program in Limbe participated in the training. They expressed a strong interest in all the workshops, especially during the presentation of educational videos and in the use of ophthalmic instruments!

*After the training Ms. Marjorie Millien, one of the Labrousse' nurses told us that she learned a lot, including how to interpret a prescription for glasses, and that she would like the trainers to come back to Labrousse.*

Dr. Reskalla testified: "I discovered a passion for teaching during this training mission. To see passionate nurses such as these, who want to help people in their country, gave me a good reason to get up every morning. I will return there without hesitation and I am convinced that the new knowledge acquired in the Labrousse village will serve thousands of people."

## SERVICES NECESSARY FOR THE COMMUNITY

In the mobile clinics organized with the nurses, the two IRIS Mundial volunteers were able to evaluate the extent of the visual problems in the area: a man with hyper-cataracts who could not see any light, people with very advanced glaucoma, a man with total loss of his left visual field in both eyes and who had difficulty walking, etc. For most of these patients, it was the first time they had had visual care. In addition, the two optometrists met a 67-year-old man named Pierre, who came to a mobile clinic hanging on his son's arm. He has been blind for 6 years and had no independence since then, because his cornea is opaque in both eyes. He had previously been told that there was no treatment for his case. "The only thing we had for this patient was a white cane for moving about. So, we taught him how to use it and he left with a big smile and without hanging on his son's arm!" Dr. Reskalla told us.



## CHALLENGES DURING A MISSION ABROAD

During the pre-departure training, the first information conveyed to the volunteers who go on missions is: "the only rule is to expect the unexpected". Dr. Reskalla and Dr. Sarrazin quickly learned this on one of the mobile clinics organized during the trip. After 2 hours of driving in a truck with the team, they arrived at a remote locality named *Des Sources* to provide eye care to about 30 people while supervising the nurses work. Some of the tests had to be done outside because the only place available to host the team was under a roof that housed toilets! Apart from having to adapt to hard working conditions, the trainers were happy to see that the subjects taught were well assimilated by the nurses, who offered a satisfactory service to the patients.

On their way back, torrential rain started, making the road dangerous and forcing the team to stop because the truck got stuck in the mud. When the rain stopped, the truck was still stuck, so the team had to walk for 3 hours to return to the health centre. "Walking in the mountains on a clay road where it was hard to remain upright was quite an experience for me," said Dr. Sarrazin. Fortunately, an excellent "made in Haiti" shepherd's pie was waiting for them on their return and helped the regain their strength.

**After her return, Dr. Sarrazin testified: "How can I describe my experience? I will summarize my trip by taking inspiration from the Serenity Prayer: *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.* Before leaving, Miss Édith, one of the nurses, gave me a hug and told me that my teaching was very good. At that moment, I realized I had made a difference, as the prayer expressed so well. I think I have achieved my goal; I believe I have succeeded in bringing a piece of hope to Haiti! "**

