

## VOSH-Connecticut Returns to Nicaragua

San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua

January 9–17, 2026

*Based on a report prepared by Dr Matthew Blondin and Audrey Blondin, VOSH-CT leaders*

Between January 9 and 17, VOSH-Connecticut (VOSH-CT) returned to San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua for its annual eye care clinic, marking 25 years of continuous service to this community. The clinic was held in partnership with the Fundación Patricia Claeys, continuing a strong and meaningful collaboration. This year also marked the second year of support from VOSH/International for a small team of SVOSH-UNAN students and graduates to participate in the clinic, giving them valuable opportunities to expand their clinical skills and professional connections.

### **A truly collaborative effort**

Approximately 80 local volunteers served as translators and assistants throughout the clinic under the supervision of Dra. Rosa Elena Bello, Director of the Fundación Patricia Claeys. Their dedication was essential to the clinic's success.



*Image 1 A big collaborative effort for eyecare in Nicaragua*

This year, the team included 15 US and 2 Nicaraguan optometrists, opticians, optometry assistants, 7 US and 4 Nicaraguan optometry students, translators, medical personnel, and



*Image 2 Nicaraguan patients*

logistics volunteers. Volunteers handled blood pressure screenings, patient flow, exam form management, and ensured that the young UNAN team felt included and supported. Every role, clinical and non-clinical, was valuable and valued.

This year, the dispensary team included four opticians and six optician assistants who served the patients very effectively. VOSH-CT received many generous donations of lenses and frames, and thanks to many practices, 1800 brand new pairs of single vision and bifocal glasses were edged. These glasses make such a qualitative difference in the glasses offered to

patients keeping the line of patients moving at a steady pace. Special thanks go to: Cherry Optical Lab from Maine, which provided the complete wish list of lenses requested for the second consecutive year. VSP Eyes of Hope Donation Program, which for the fourth year, donated hundreds of women's ophthalmic frames, readers, and high-quality sunglasses.



*Image 3 US and Nicaraguan optometrists providing care*

The task of edging all these lenses into frames is an overwhelming and much appreciated task carried out by thirteen practices in Connecticut, Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire.

In addition, essential medications donated by companies such as Alcon and Americares were dispensed to patients as needed.

## Seamless planning and regular support

Each US volunteer transported a supply bag, with most arrivals carefully coordinated to ensure smooth customs processing. Once again, thoughtful planning by Dr. Bello ensured that all supplies arrived at the clinic.

The local transport provider ensured that all volunteers moved safely efficiently throughout the week. In the US, Nicole Gaynor, provided administrative support all year in preparation for the clinic.

For the fourth consecutive year, the clinic was hosted at the Fundación Patricia Claeys adult education school facility, located about 10 kilometers out of San Juan del Sur. The clinic set-up and orientation went smoothly, and community outreach before the clinic ensured the citizens of San Juan del Sur were well informed about the clinic's services and location.

## Remarkable impact

Over the four-day clinic, 4,335 patients received eyecare, bringing the total number of patients served by VOSH-CT in Nicaragua since 2003 to nearly 70,000 patients.



Image 4 Nicaraguan SVOSH-UNAN team with VOSH-CT President and the final stats

Certificates of appreciation and participation were presented to all participants. The clinic concluded with a joyful celebration dinner hosted by Mareshah Lynch and Sally Lee. This year, a piñata delighted the children.

For the Nicaraguan optometrists and students, the clinic provides a valuable opportunity to collaborate with US colleagues, learn new skills and techniques, and continue contributing to their local community.

For more information, please contact Audrey Blondin, VOSH-Connecticut at [audbl@aol.com](mailto:audbl@aol.com)



Image 5 Nicaraguan team



Image 6 Happy young patients