Vietnam, March 2025

Testimonial by Troy Neilson

Going on an AMIGOS trip has been an aspiration of mine since before I even started optometry school. Outreach and providing equitable access to care is something that has always been deeply important to me, and I've tried to say "yes" to as many local outreach opportunities as my schedule allows. I've seen firsthand how something as simple as updating a five-year-old pair of glasses can transform someone's life—from 20/50 to 20/15 vision, and with it, renewed confidence and function.

Participating in a trip to Hanoi, Vietnam was a special and unique experience that has strengthened my desire to continue in this profession.

The optometry profession in Vietnam is relatively new, with their first graduating class just six years ago. It was truly special to partner with the optometry school in Hanoi and work alongside students, doctors, and volunteers to provide care to many children across three clinic days. Our first clinic was held at a school for the deaf and mute—a perfect place to start, since my Vietnamese vocabulary was pretty limited! This challenge sharpened my non-verbal communication and reminded me that compassion often doesn't require translation.

One moment that stood out happened early in the trip. A young girl took it upon herself to make sure I found someone who could help translate during her exam. She was serious and determined, and after my classmate translated her words, I learned she had said: "Tell this uncle he is not good at pointing at the





letters on the chart." It was humbling. I adjusted my approach immediately, determined to be more deliberate and precise. Later, when I placed a trial frame on her with just -0.75D in each eye, everything changed. Her expression softened instantly into a beaming smile. The prescription was small, but the impact was enormous. It's a moment I'll never forget.

Each day, we worked alongside students and professionals from Hanoi's optometry and ophthalmology programs. The clinic setup was thorough—we used an autorefractor, automated lensometer, slit lamps, and performed trial frame refractions with retinoscopy as needed. I was grateful for the opportunity to improve my clinical skills, especially with 90D undilated exams. Since coming back, I've noticed that I feel more confident and capable in clinic, and that's a great feeling.

Being immersed in Vietnamese culture, even briefly, also deepened my cultural awareness—something that will make me a better clinician for years to come. Witnessing optometry grow in a country where the profession is still young was inspiring, and reminded me why advocacy at every level—local, national, and global—is so important.

Of course, the food was incredible. The people were kind and welcoming. And the work we did was very meaningful. I feel so fortunate to have been a part of this trip and to carry these lessons forward.