

The start of a journey in Jamaica

By Emily Krok

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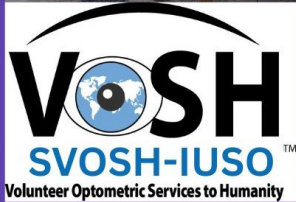
My name is Emily Krok - I am a second-year student at the Indiana University School of Optometry currently serving as our chapter's SVOSH President-Elect. This March, I had the privilege to attend our biannual service trip to Negril, Jamaica to perform vision screenings, eye exams, and follow-ups for the local primary school students. Over the four days we were in clinic, we were able to provide care for 1,518 children across 8 schools.



I'm sure I'm not the first person to try and fail to put into words how incredible the experience was. The screening days were somehow both a marathon and a sprint, allowing us to see as many students as we could manage. On exam and follow-up days, I got to watch the sharp, confident decision making by the experienced doctors on our team as they diagnosed and formulated treatment plans with our limited resources. I marvelled at the pure light and joy radiating from the kids as I got to show them how our "magic glasses" work to measure stereo, or what the inside of their eye looks like using our portable fundus camera. I'll never forget one third-grade girl who asked a million questions before proudly telling me, "One day I'm going to

be an eye doctor just like you." I encouraged her to keep working hard in science and math, and she promised she would. Seeing her curiosity and determination, I have no doubt she'll accomplish extraordinary things.

But of all the inspiring things I got to witness, I was most struck by the effort that Dr. Connolly and the rest of the team at See Better Learn Better have put into ensuring that these kids are able to receive eye care that is not just high-quality, but also *sustainable*. I've always been skeptical of service trips that visit a community



The team in Jamaica

only to leave and never return. We all know that eye care, especially for kids, is a service that requires consistent follow-up as kids grow, prescriptions change, and glasses get damaged or lost. But Dr. Connolly has built relationships with the administrators of the schools so that she can visit yearly and follow-up with the kids who need it. Seeing how universally loved she is by the community was evidence enough that she always follows through, and

that she is making a real, tangible difference in the lives of these children. One day, I'd love to see it taken a step further by empowering local volunteers with the tools and training to conduct screenings, make glasses, and handle repairs themselves, allowing them to take a big step toward true self-sufficiency.

This experience has undoubtedly shaped who I am and who I want to become as a clinician. My eyes have been opened to a world that needs and deserves the help I can give. And I'm just getting started.

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