The Lasting Legacy of VOSH Corps

John Dan Twelker, OD, PhD, FAAO

Chair VOSH/International Education Committee

The history of VOSH Corps began with a challenge. The Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation based in Australia wanted to address uncorrected refractive error by engaging optometrists from countries where the profession was well established to teach optometrists in countries where optometry was just getting started. There was one main obstacle. Most optometrists from Europe or the United States, for example, demanded a much higher salary than the Foundation could sustainably pay. At one of the annual optometry meetings, Dr. Greg Pearl, President of VOSH/International (2009-2011), approached Brien Holden with a suggestion. VOSH/International could help recruit new optometry graduates from the United States or Canada to teach abroad only for their expenses based on the Peace Corps model. Brien Holden stopped walking, looked directly at Dr. Pearl and in his thick Aussie accent said, "Prove it, mate!" And with that challenge, the VOSH Corps program was born.

VOSH Corps was initiated in 2011. VOSH/International would recruit optometrists and the Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation would administer the program. Optometry Giving Sight served as the main donor. They would find placement opportunities and co-manage the day-to-day details with the optometry school. Over the years, nine optometrists joined the effort. .



Dr. Jerson Desiderio, VOSH Corps (2016-2017), Makerere University, Uganda

- Sara McGowan, OD, MS – Mzuzu University Optometry, Malawi (2012-2017)
- Justin Manning, OD, MPH – UNAN Optometry, Nicaragua (2015-2017)
- J. Daniel Twelker, OD, PhD – MMUST Optometry, Kenya (2015)

- Ben Konig, OD – UNAN Optometry, Nicaragua (2017-2018)
- Jerson Desiderio, OD – Makerere Optometry, Uganda (2016-2017)
- Robert E. Molter, Jr, OD – Ho Chi Minh City Eye Hospital Optometry, Vietnam (2016-2026)
- Kim Molter, OD – Pham Ngoc Thac University Optometry, Vietnam (2016-2026)
- Mirage Shaw, OD - Pham Ngoc Thac University Optometry, Vietnam (2019)
- Jemini Patel, OD – Makerere Optometry, Uganda (2019-2020)

Dr. Sara McGowan wrote, “My five years with VOSH Corps in Malawi were some of the most meaningful of my professional life. I arrived thinking I would be teaching optometry, but over time I realized that our work was about much more than clinical skills.”

“We were helping create and define a profession within their country. We faced challenges that went far beyond the classroom and clinic—professional recognition, regulatory hurdles, scope-of-practice questions, and the difficult and tedious work of establishing optometry’s place within the healthcare system. Conversations shifted from clinical skills to curriculum development, professional advocacy, leadership, and the challenges of educating the next generation of optometrists. Over time, they increasingly took ownership of the future of the profession.”

“The legacy of VOSH Corps is found in those individuals and in the profession they helped build. Organizations may come and go, but the impact of investing in people continues long after. I am grateful to have played a small part in that journey towards providing eye care to everyone, everywhere.”

Dr. Justing Manning wrote, “VOSH Corps was one of the hardest, most challenging, and most rewarding experiences of my life. It changed the entire course of my career from a leadership and people development standpoint. I was just communicating with some of my former students a few weeks ago - each with their own private practice in Managua. The students graduating from UNAN are reshaping the optometry in Nicaragua and are advancing scope of practice and what an optometrist does for patients.”

“Reflecting now a decade later, my time there was incredibly short. I had the opportunity to interact with three different classes of students and if I left any mark, it was inspiration. Sharing what optometry has become in the United States inspired them as to what optometry could be in their country. They’re still doing it.”

Dr. Robert Molter wrote, “Truly, the VOSH Corps experience through the funding/contracts from Brien Holden Foundation was a tremendous experience and opened our world to optometry development.”

Drs. Robert and Kim Molter started their assignments there, teaching, of course, but over time the development evolved. “Last year I didn’t do direct teaching at all,” wrote Dr. Molter, “but rather an in-depth curriculum review (was completed) of the two programs to see if there had been any drift in the past ten years. There have been some changes in both schools but roughly they are both still on the right track and any United States optometry student would recognize the program.”



Dr Kim Molter, VOSH Corps (2016-2026), Pham Ngoc Thac University, Vietnam

Most recently, Dr. Kim Molter primarily ran teacher development programs which were directed at our former students who are now in charge of the classroom teaching.” Dr. Robert Molter wrote, “The past ten years that Kim and I have been involved with the Vietnam Optometry project have been amazing and the experience of a lifetime.”

VOSH Corps was a good idea in its time and place. Over time, the Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation reoriented its geographical and program priorities. VOSH/International has also increasingly focused on strengthening optometric education by mobilizing its existing expert volunteers for shorter, more targeted assignments, including both North-to-South and South-to-South collaborations. As a relatively small organization, VOSH/International cannot safely and effectively recruit and place optometry recruits on a long-term basis. Even so, the legacy of VOSH Corps lives on and is evolving into more sustainable and locally owned initiatives. The optometrists trained by VOSH Corps teachers will continue to provide eye and vision care throughout their careers, and some of those optometrists will go on to teach new generations of younger optometrists. In this way, the beneficial effect of VOSH Corps will continue providing eye and vision care in a lasting legacy.

For more information, contact Dr Twelker at twelker@vosh.org