

# The Dallas Morning News +

Northwest Dallas residents receive eye care, exams through nonprofit



*Donna Haas examines Rita Sanchez's eyes at the North Dallas Shared Ministries. They help low-income, qualified residents with the help of volunteers from The Oak Cliff Lions Club.*

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In the early hours of a recent Friday morning, optometrist Donna Haas examined a patient's eyes in the rear of a mobile vision bus.

Haas volunteers once a month with The Oak Cliff Lions Club at North Dallas Shared Ministries, a nonprofit and one of 25 organizations receiving funds from The Dallas Morning News Charities in 2014.

The nonprofit, which serves residents in Northwest Dallas, including Farmers Branch and Addison, operates primarily from the help of volunteers —about 40 to 50 each day. The center offers qualifying, low-income residents a wide variety of care, including school uniforms and supplies, a food pantry,

dental care and tax-preparation assistance. It also helps adults to see clearly by offering eye screening and eyeglasses programs.

The organization has served the residents of Northwest Dallas for the past 31 years , and it has offered the eye care program for close to 20 years, said Judy Rorrie, executive director at NDSM.

Rorrie said the organization initially began as an emergency aid center. Throughout the years, the organization added different programs, many of which are aimed at helping residents achieve stability.

Some of the additional programs that were created to further that goal included an employment assistance program, English as a Second Language instruction and eye care —to help residents secure a job if they had vision issues.

“We exist to help people in times of immediate need, but then we want to help them achieve stability for the long-term,”Rorrie said.

When the eye care program began, Rorrie said the nonprofit worked with a local optometrist who performed the exams for free, and NDSM paid for the glasses. About five years ago, the doctor retired and the nonprofit was in search of a program that would help participate with the eye care program.

That’s when Rorrie said she approached The Oak Cliff Lions Club to see if any local chapters would be interested in helping the cause.

The nonprofit holds vision screenings on the first and third Thursday of each month. NDSM added an additional screening on the fourth Thursday of the month in October, Rorrie said. On the second Friday of the month, Haas, along with members of The Oak Cliff Lion’s Club, helps patients in the Lions Sight and Tissue Foundation of District 2-X1 mobile eye care bus.

“They come back and they’re screened, their prescription is written, the prescription is filled, glasses are delivered back to us, and we call the clients, and they come pick up their glasses, and we pay,”Rorrie said.

While the eye care program previously served children and adults, the current program is only available for adult vision.

Individuals or families who wish to receive assistance from NDSM have to fill out an application. Depending on the type of service that is requested, the organization verifies information about clients such as proof of residence or household income.

While the organization focuses on 20 specific ZIP codes, if an individual comes to the clinic and asks for food or is in need of glasses, the organization can help on a one-time-only basis.

When patients come in for an eye screening, that is the only service they can receive on that particular day, Rorrie said. However, the client can come on another day for a different service.

Dallas resident Dolores Tovar, 32, visited the clinic on a recent Friday for the eye care program. Tovar has received services from the nonprofit for about three months, she said, including the job search program, dental care and food from the pantry.

'I've been trying to get in to [see] a doctor but, you know, everybody asks like for insurance and you don't have it, you're not working, you're not able to get the services,"Tovar said.

Carrollton resident Haas, 41, said The Oak Cliff Lions Club contacted her to volunteer with NDSM because she has helped with some of the Lions Club's children's vision clinics.

The optometrist provides monthly services to clients at NDSM pro bono. She does this, she said, because she feels the need to give back to the community.

"The people that come there really are trying to get back on their feet or get things back together. And a lot of them just need to be able to see, and so giving them a pair of glasses makes a huge difference," Haas said.

Dallas resident LaTricia Iglehart, 49, said she's been a NDSM client off and on for about 10 years. Iglehart, who visited the nonprofit recently for the eye care program, said she's also participated in the nonprofit's clothes closet and food pantry, and had help paying her bills.

'I really recommend the organization,"Iglehart said. "They're really good with helping people."

Haas said it's been very rewarding to work with the patients at NDSM, whom she added might not be able to get a job simply because they cannot see.

"To me, it seems, I take it for granted, but it is such a blessing to these people, just giving them a pair of glasses so they can see,"Haas said.

When she's not volunteering her time with The Oak Cliff Lion's Club, Haas operates out of her office in North Dallas at Trinity Vision, where she said she's visited by some of the clients who have successfully gone through the NDSM program.

'I saw them on the bus, I saw them at North Dallas Shared Ministries,"she said. "They got a job and they're back on their feet and they're doing well, and then they came and looked me up. And now they come to my office as like regular patients, which is really cool."

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## MORE INFO

North Dallas Shared Ministries is at 2875 Merrell Road in Dallas.

The nonprofit offers free eye exams and eyeglasses to qualifying residents in 20 ZIP codes in Northwest Dallas, including Farmers Branch and Addison. Screenings are held on the first, third and fourth Thursday of the month, and prescription eyeglasses and an optometrist visit are held beginning at 9 a.m. on the second Friday of the month. Exams are first come, first served.

For additional information, call 214-358-8700 or visit [ndsm.org](http://ndsm.org).

<http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/northwest-dallas-county/headlines/20141121-northwest-dallas-residents-receive-eye-care-exams-through-nonprofit.ece>