California’s Western U InSight Children’s Eye Care Program helps women, families and children

The Western University of Health Sciences (Western U) College of Optometry was a 2012 recipient of the Healthy Eyes Healthy People® (HEHP) grant by the AOA and Optometry Cares® – The AOA Foundation for its Western U InSight Children's Eye Care Program.

The overall goal of the program was to increase the number of children, especially those age 5 years and younger, who receive an annual comprehensive eye exam, as a result of community engagement and education.

Health professionals engaging communities, populations

The key message for ODs from this program is that health professionals should actively engage targeted communities and educate parents about their children’s eye health in meaningful ways. This is especially important when addressing health disparities and hard-to-reach populations.

In support of the Western U InSight Children’s Eye Care Program, an outreach event was held in early October in collaboration with the YWCA San Gabriel Valley, which operates the WINGS Program (Women in Need Growing Stronger), a domestic violence shelter, outreach, and education program.

The YWCA WINGS program emphasizes health education with women and families in critical need of housing and basic needs.

There is a critical need for eye care services because many YWCA clients have school-age children and have been unable to get them regular eye care.

Western U students and faculty members provided eye exams to children and adults at one health intervention and education event, and health and safety education was provided by other partner agencies for accessing additional services.

The event was a partnership project between the Western U College of Optometry, WIC (Women, Infants & Children nutrition program), Headstart (early education program), Project Sister Family Services, the host city and police department, among many others.

For this hard-to-reach population, free services do not always result in high demand; however, by working with trusted community partners, this event was a success, and more than 100 parents and children participated. A follow-up event was scheduled two weeks following the original event to provide additional care and/or eyeglasses to those who needed them.

Western U has also pro-
### Health professionals engaging communities, populations

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### Staffing the WINGS program

Jennifer Marentacchi, outreach coordinator for the WINGS program, and Miki Carpenter, director of Health Sciences, described the role of health professionals in engaging communities.

### Western U students and children

Western U students and children participated in the WINGS program, providing a unique opportunity for hands-on learning and community service.

### The WINGS program

Western U students and children provided services to families in need, emphasizing the importance of community engagement in health care.

### Contact information

Contact Sue Chiles at slchiles@aacu.org for more information about the WINGS program.