

# Love Is Blind

## Beyond Borders

Assessing Progress and Impact in Philippines Trial Project



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# Introduction

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Every child deserves to experience the world with clarity and wonder, yet the reality is that approximately 1.4 million children worldwide are robbed of this opportunity due to blindness, while an additional 19 million suffer from visual impairment, as reported by the World Health Organization (WHO). These statistics paint a heartbreaking picture of young lives facing unnecessary challenges.

It's imperative to extend a loving and caring hand to these children, ensuring they receive the support and resources they need to thrive. By investing in preventive measures and early intervention we can shield countless children from the darkness of blindness.

Moreover, providing educational opportunities and inclusive environments for blind and visually impaired children is not just a moral duty but a testament to our compassion as a society. Every child's potential, regardless of their visual abilities, is a precious gift that enriches our collective tapestry. By nurturing and empowering these children, we sow the seeds of empathy, resilience, and hope, which are essential for our shared future.

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# Project Overview

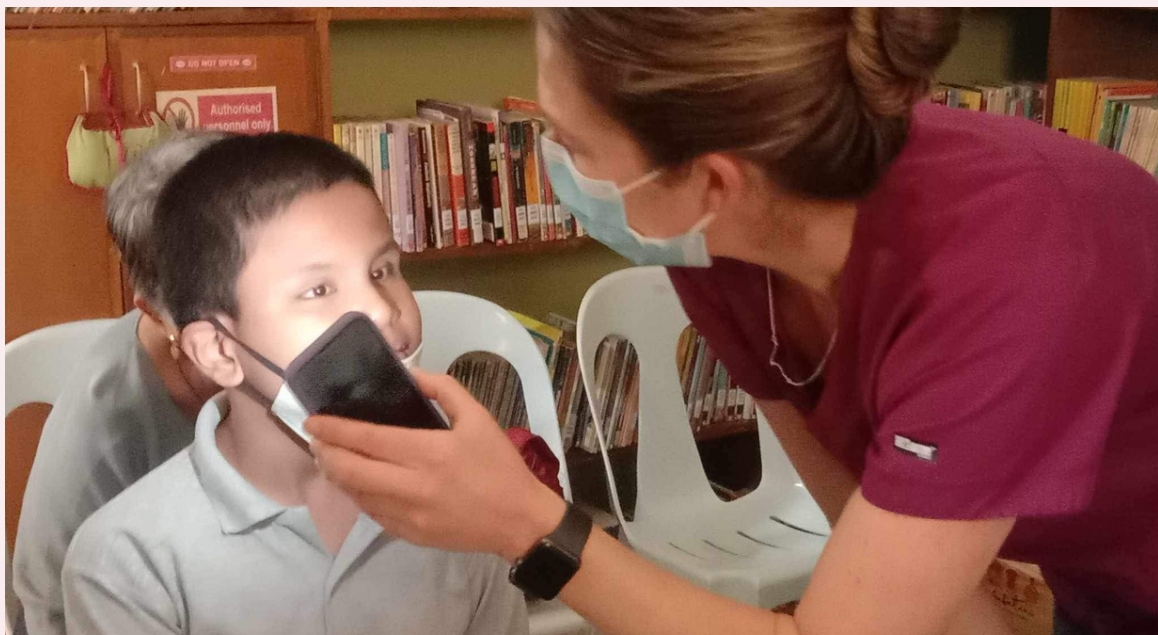
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The Philippines grapples with a staggering number of blind and visually impaired individuals, exceeding 500,000, according to the World Blind Union, with many of them living in poverty and lacking access to education. Shockingly, in 1990, only 300 blind students were enrolled nationwide.

**The Philippine Journal of Ophthalmology estimates that nearly 60% of childhood blindness and severe visual impairments in the country could have been prevented.**

Adding to the complexity is the scarcity of eye care resources in rural communities, compounded by unreliable reporting and data, as noted by The Lancet, which has identified the Philippines as having one of the lowest research outputs per capita.

Bethel's previous projects and partnerships in Cebu (the second most populous island of the Philippines) have laid a foundation of trust and collaboration within the local community, facilitating the implementation of impactful initiatives. This established network and familiarity with the region made Cebu an ideal location for our first international trial project.



# Goals & Screening Sites

Our project goals encompass both short-term and long-term objectives, beginning with identifying the pressing issues at the grassroots level. From there, we'll develop a tailored plan specifically designed to address the city's long-term needs, ensuring sustained support and positive outcomes for the community. Our primary objectives include:

1. Conduct thorough vision screenings across Cebu to identify children at risk of, or currently experiencing, visual impairment or blindness, ensuring early intervention and support for their specific needs.
2. Record and track vital data pertaining to visually impaired children in Cebu, providing invaluable insights for local organizations and institutions to enhance their support initiatives, allocate resources effectively and raise awareness.
3. Provide comprehensive training programs for teachers, caregivers, and families in Cebu to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to support and educate visually impaired children, enabling them to reach their full potential.
4. Partner with local schools and orphanages in Cebu to develop customized support plans for visually impaired children, ensuring they receive the necessary accommodations and assistance to thrive academically and socially.



In our effort to reach children in need of vision screenings, we collaborated with Optometrist Leah Tongco from The Cebu Braille Center and Corazon Clarin, the Convener of the Cebu Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Network. Together, we worked to organize and facilitate screenings, ensuring accessibility for children across various locations. Their invaluable support enabled us to bring vision screenings directly to children, fostering inclusivity and ensuring no child was left behind. The seven locations chosen were: The City of Mandaue Social Welfare Services, The Cebu Public Library, The Juanito I. King Foundation, The Barangay Pajo in Lapu-Lapu City, The Municipality of Cordova, Children's Haven Orphanage, Parkcare Playschool.



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# Methodology

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For the past two decades, Bethel has been dedicated to providing specialized care, education, and medical support to children who are blind and visually impaired. Vision screenings are crucial for children as they can detect issues that may become debilitating if left untreated. According to medical statistics, approximately 80% of learning is visual, emphasizing the importance of early detection and intervention. When our team discovered the efficiency of Welch Allyn's Spot Vision Screener, we recognized its alignment with our mission. After fundraising for the machine, we purchased it and conducted thorough testing at Barrington Pediatrics in the United States, where over 450 children were screened in just over a month.

The Spot Vision Screener is a handheld, portable device designed to quickly and easily detect vision issues in patients as young as six months old. Linked to a printer, the machine can produce a report within minutes after screening. To conduct efficient screenings, our team of four worked effectively: our Pediatric Nurse Practitioner operated the vision screener, one team member managed the printer and data via computer, while another facilitated the screening flow. If a child failed the exam, their parent or caregiver received the report to be discussed with local Optometrist Leah Tongco, who provided explanations and guidance on next steps and available resources.

**The screenings revealed startling results.**

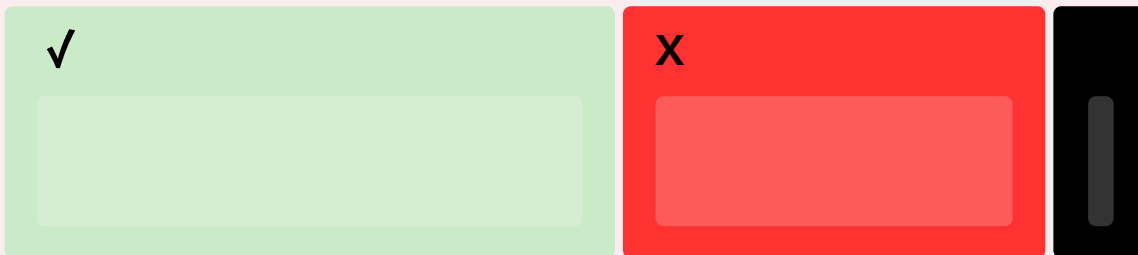




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# Key Metrics

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During the weeklong screenings, many parents and caregivers shared their worries that their children had never received eye examinations. They explained that lack of resources, the high cost of medical appointments, or simply not understanding the importance of regular check-ups had prevented them from seeking vision care for their loved ones. Unfortunately, the results were alarming.

**Shockingly, out of the 403 children and their caregivers screened, only 53.85% passed their vision check, indicating an alarming fail rate of 46.15%. Nearly a quarter of those who failed, approximately 22.36%, exhibited significant vision loss issues stemming from conditions like cataracts, ROP, and Glaucoma.**

77.64% of the failed tests were attributed to issues such as astigmatism, myopia, gaze abnormalities, anisometropia, hyperopia, and anisocoria. Addressing these issues early will be crucial for maintaining good vision and overall eye health. Failing to address these issues promptly can lead to various dangers and complications.

For instance, untreated astigmatism can cause blurred or distorted vision, leading to difficulties in daily activities such as reading or driving. Myopia, if left uncorrected, can progressively worsen over time, increasing the risk of eye conditions like retinal detachment, glaucoma, and macular degeneration. Gaze abnormalities may indicate underlying neurological conditions that require timely intervention to prevent further complications. Early detection and treatment of these eye issues are critical to prevent vision impairment, discomfort, and potentially serious complications.

# Impact Feedback



“Bethel’s screenings have helped me diagnose students' visual impairments and implement visual therapy and assessments to address their needs, both socially and academically. There are still many areas we have not reached, especially in our far-flung regions. To enhance the program, we could incorporate training sessions, workshops, and seminars for parents and teaching staff to improve their respective skills in fostering positive development in children during their formative years. Early detection, intervention, and awareness can significantly contribute to a child's development.” -Leah Tongco, OD, Cebu Braille School

“Bethel’s vision screenings have facilitated early detection of eye issues in children, enabling us to provide appropriate interventions and education on proper eye care. The equipment utilized is technologically advanced and user-friendly, particularly for children, allowing us to reach even the most remote areas, including islands. We aspire to make eye screening a routine activity and recommend it as a program to be adopted by government agencies such as the Persons with Disability Affairs Office (PDAO), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (MSWD), and the Department of Health through health centers in local communities.” -Corazon Clarin, CdiDRR Convenor



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# Sustainable Support

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Bethel's inaugural international project has illuminated the urgent need for resources in these communities. Our approach, inspired by the timeless parable of teaching how to fish, embodies our commitment to sustainable change. Having witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by countless children in the Philippines, we are compelled to act. To make this vision a reality, Bethel is embarking on a journey that needs your support:

1. **Forge Meaningful Partnerships:** We seek to establish long-term collaborations with esteemed organizations like Cebu Braille School and CdiDRR, ensuring collective impact and sustainability.
2. **Fund Vital Resources:** Your contributions will enable us to procure essential equipment such as the Spot Vision Screener, along with medical supplies and educational materials (such as building a much needed children's Braille book section in Cebu City's Public Library) crucial for our mission.
3. **Empower Through Education:** Our team will conduct comprehensive screenings and provide essential training to local medical personnel, equipping them with the skills to continue this vital work independently.
4. **Educate and Empower:** Through educational programs tailored to families, caregivers, and community members, we aim to foster a culture of understanding and support for individuals with visual impairments.
5. **Foster Local Leadership:** Our leadership training initiatives will empower local leaders to champion change within their communities, ensuring sustainable progress long after our departure.

Upon completion of our mission, we won't simply depart. Instead, we'll establish online community groups, fostering continued support and resource-sharing among families and caregivers. The Spot Vision Screener will remain with local medical staff, enabling them to screen hundreds of children monthly while collaborating with us on data collection. Together with our partners, we'll spearhead public awareness campaigns to uplift the visually impaired community.

**The statistics are staggering: over 500,000 visually impaired individuals in the Philippines, many living in poverty and deprived of education. Yet, our impact is tangible—we screened 400 children in just one week. Imagine the possibilities over a month, a year, or five years.**

# Let's Work Together

This model is not just impactful; it's financially sustainable.

With your support, we can reach more children at risk of visual impairments and blindness, changing their lives for the better. Join us in rewriting the future for these children—we have the expertise, the passion, and with your partnership, the power to make a difference.



## JOIN US

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