

## Kalahari vision

Three schools and five remote Kalahari communities in the Northern Cape have received free eye care,

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Loubos Primary School is a dustbowl on the edge of the Kalahari Desert, close to the border with Namibia.

This is one of three schools in the remote Kalahari that was visited recently by a free eye clinic. It is an a



and the nearest optometrist is more than 300 kilometres away, even if people could afford the cost of transport and spectacles once they got there – which they can't.

Last year, the small communities of Askham, Andriesvale and Welkom benefited from free eye care clinics. Now more than 200 schoolchildren and 320 other patients of Rietfontein, Philandersbron, Loubos, Groot Mier and Klein Mier have also received the eye care they deserve.

This is thanks to the efforts of Fish Hoek optometrist Keith Reid, and sponsorship from Ethix Eyewear (who donated spectacle frames), Hoya Hill Optics SA (who sponsored the lenses and fitting), Optical Trade Links and General Optical (who supplied spectacle cases), and Welch Allyn (who donated a rechargeable lithium ion handle for a retinoscope).

Reid referred 30 patients, mainly for lens implants, and prescribed 210 pairs of spectacles. Thanks to the sponsors' generosity, the patients – many of whom had done without because they simply can't afford the "luxury" of vision – paid nothing for their glasses. The total value of these spectacles is more than R90 000.

There is much sadness here: children with eye problems as a result of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome; a high number of patients who are blind in one eye as a result of untreated infections. But there is also the joy of providing a new window on the world for those with impaired vision. One 18-year-old literally burst out laughing with delight when Reid put her script up in the trial frame. An old man who arrived through a swirl of dust on a donkey cart was thrilled to get glasses so that he could see properly to mend his fences and keep his goats from wandering into the road.

Having already completed 16 free clinics in remote areas, Reid hopes to extend these clinics soon to other poor communities in the Northern and Western Cape. All that is needed is further sponsorship for items such as lenses, frames, fuel and accommodation.