



## COLLABORATIVE LOW VISION CLINIC IMPROVES CARE

The *Low Vision Clinic* at Blind Children's Learning Center operates as a partnership with the *Southern California School of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University*. Associate Professor Catherine Heyman, O.D. operates the clinic and shared its origins, evolving purpose, and what visual impairments look like today.

### **Blind Children's Learning Center: How did this collaboration begin?**

**Dr. Catherine Heyman:** It began with Elizabeth Caloroso, OD in the early 1990s. She believed children with visual impairments were written off far too often, but that eye examinations and intervention could improve visual processing and efficiency skills.

### **BCLC: How do children benefit from the *Low Vision Clinic*?**

**CH:** Our goal is for children to have as much functional vision as possible, but we can't achieve that without early intervention. We saw a baby years ago who was initially diagnosed as completely blind, but our exam detected some visual function. With the proper support, he is now a high school student capable of visually processing his environment.



*The Low Vision Clinic offers a full range of optometric services and remains a coveted training opportunity for optometry residents.*

### **BCLC: How is the Low Vision Clinic utilized as a training facility?**

**CH:** Residents extend their training by one year to specialize in treating children. Residents specifically seek out the *Low Vision Clinic* at BCLC since experience with this unique population is difficult to find.

### **BCLC: Have visual impairments changed in the last 25 years?**

**CH:** Yes. Medicine makes it possible to save more premature babies, but they have more complex needs, including vision. Twenty-five years ago, detached retinas were a leading cause of blindness in babies. Improved treatment has

changed that. We are now more likely to see diagnoses like Cortical Visual Impairment, which involves damaged pathways between the eye and the brain. In this case, the visual impairment is not caused by the eye itself, but rather how the brain and eyes communicate.

### **BCLC: How has the clinic's purpose evolved?**

**CH:** There is simply more collaboration. In the *Low Vision Clinic*, we are the first ones looking at the rehabilitative aspect of a child's visual impairment. Then, a team of experts work directly with the child to provide direct services and implement recommendations.

# GIVING MORE BABIES THAN EVER A STRONG START IN LIFE

With the need for early intervention services growing, identical toddler twins Analyse and Luciana give not one, but two faces to a program that is delivering big results for babies and families.

Born premature, the girls spent their first two weeks in the hospital. Modern medicine helps more babies survive a premature birth, but there is a higher risk of health complications, including vision loss and developmental delays. Their father, Fernando, recalls, "Once we arrived home, we noticed the twins' eyes never stopped moving. They could not hold our gaze."

Their pediatrician was concerned that the girls might be blind. Further testing revealed that hydrocephalus was putting pressure on the optic nerve, inhibiting vision. After successful surgery, vision improved to an extent, but the girls needed ongoing support to address the remaining visual impairment and overall developmental delays.

That's when Analyse and Luciana began receiving services in the *Global Infant Development* program of BCLC. The Center



*Early intervention services may be a "giggle-fest" for Analyse and Luciana, but the skills they gain will provide greater access to their surroundings and learning materials for years to come.*

works with the twins and their entire family in their home to reach key milestones.

Infant Specialist Nancy exposes the girls to techniques and equipment that maximize functional vision. For this busy family of six, "Receiving services in the home is huge. The girls have so many appointments, I'm not sure we could make them all," says Fernando.

One year into the program, BCLC's knowledgeable therapists and specialists have helped the girls make significant gains. "I can tell their vision has really improved," shares Fernando. **"Now when I blow the girls a kiss good night, they blow kisses back."**

**You can empower children and families during a critical period by sending a gift to Blind Children's Learning Center today!**

## THERAPISTS BLEND WORK AND PLAY TO HELP BABIES ACHIEVE GOALS

**"The first few years of a child's life are a particularly sensitive period in the process of development, laying a foundation...for cognitive functioning; behavioral, social, and self-regulatory capacities; and physical health"** (RAND Corporation).

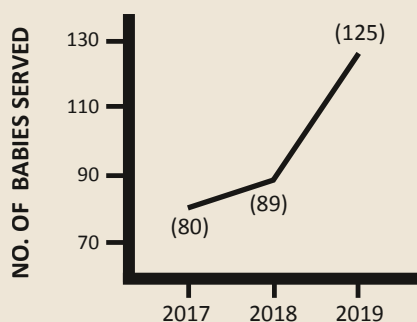
Visual impairments place babies at risk of developmental delays since a majority of early learning occurs through vision. This makes early intervention a top priority.



Pediatric therapists engage babies by utilizing toys with auditory and sensory feedback. For example, physical therapist Katrina encourages crawling by placing a musical toy out of reach. Then, she can assist with gross motor skills like tucking a knee under the body.

"I know a child is progressing as they crawl further with less help," says Katrina. "It's so rewarding to see the look of pride on a child's face after they do something new."

### NEED FOR EARLY INTERVENTION SOARS





*Guests dine in the dark at Vision Beyond Sight, held at Marconi Automotive Museum on February 21, 2019.*

## IT TAKES A VILLAGE

In 1962, a group of adults formed Blind Children’s Learning Center. One of their main motivations was to address the isolation they felt within society.

Blind Children’s Learning Center now hosts three annual events that not only raise critical funds, but bring together a village of current students, families, alumni, supporters and the greater business community.

In October, golfers tee’d off for the **Dr. Frank Villalobos Fall Golf Classic** at Yorba Linda Country Club. The event featured a lively auction and inspiring testimony from 18-year-old Lucie, a recipient of Braille and white cane mobility

instruction through BCLC.

The second annual **Vision Beyond Sight** delighted over 300 attendees with an immersive dining in the dark experience this February. The most successful event in the Center’s history recognized Bob and Nadine Hall for 25 years of empowering children and families at BCLC.

***“Never give up on a child.”***  
***-Bob Hall***

“Our founders would be overjoyed that thousands of people have attended events to support and celebrate individuals who are blind and visually impaired,” said Vision Beyond Sight Chair Jeri Konopisos.



*Orange County Delta Gamma Alumnae walk in ‘service for sight’ each year to support children and families at BCLC.*

Finally, the landmark **15th Annual Destination Independence 5K Walk** presented by Tustin Auto Center brought over 600 walkers and volunteers together to celebrate the accomplishments of BCLC’s students and alumni.

The power of community has a profound effect—this year, special events raised more than \$430,000 to provide adaptive education, therapy services, Braille, mobility training, and more! BCLC is thankful to our sponsors and participants for creating more opportunities for children with visual impairments and their families to thrive.



*Nadine and Bob Hall were honored at the second annual Vision Beyond Sight.*

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