

ECFA newsletter.

Eye Care for Africa was founded in 2017 by Hawkes Bay based Optometrist Niall McCormack.

It was formed to provide real eye care to some of the most marginalised groups in the countries of Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Kenya. It all began when Niall accepted an invitation to provide eye care to an orphanage in Uganda.

This experience motivated Niall to make a difference and upon his return to New Zealand 'Eye Care for Africa' was created.

The charity is now an official charity registered with the NZ Charities Commission.



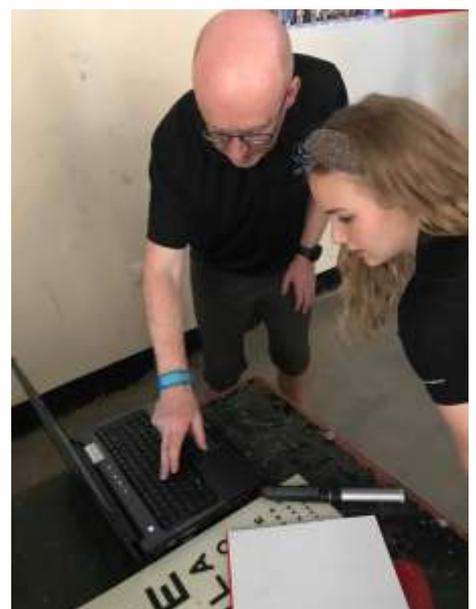
The Biggest Adventure of my life.

Hannah Martin reports of her experiences accompanying Eye Care for Africa to Tanzania and Kenya in July 2019.

On the 3rd of July 2019, I set out for the biggest adventure of my life. I had the absolute privilege of assisting Niall in his most recent overseas volunteering trip to Kenya and Tanzania.

It was an adventure filled with lots of joy, excitement and laughter, but it was also an adventure filled with overwhelming heartbreak, that I had to learn to direct into motivation.

Everywhere we were, I loved being in awe of the life that was going on around me. Africa is incredible. One of my favourite highlights of the trip was when we were in one of the many, tiny tiny Maasai villages, in the middle of absolutely nowhere. The way these people live in 2019 is mindblowing. They build their tiny homes out of mud, sticks and leaves, surrounded by African wildlife, and make their shoes out old tires they find. They wear layers and layers of beautiful jewellery that they have created and tartan like blankets. Men tend to have not just one but many, many wives, and they carry around a chief spear and graze their cattle all day. We had the absolute privilege of spending an entire day in this village, testing eyes and getting to know the people. I don't have any words



> HANNAH MARTIN & NIALL MCCORMACK

that could possibly explain just how truly amazing it was. They greeted us with such joy, showed us inside their homes, cooked us chicken broth, taught us to dance and sing some of their tribal songs and just lavished their love all over us throughout the day.

Another one of my favourite moments was on our last full day in Africa. Traveling back to Mwanza for our flight out the following day, Niall, being the exceptional person he is, insisted that we took a small detour and stop in at a family's home after meeting a young man named Marco the day before.

Marco is 29 years old. He was led by his elderly grandfather to Golden Grace, a 2-hour walk from their home, in hope after hearing about the Eye Clinic Niall was running there. After waiting for hours and hours, Marco was finally able to be examined. It became evident very

quickly that something was seriously wrong with Marco's eyes, he couldn't see at all. It turns out, Marco lost his sight only 3 short months before to what was found to be the inheritable condition called Glaucoma. The Glaucoma was so far progressed that there was absolutely nothing that could be done to restore his sight. Tears filled my eyes from across the room as this was being translated in Swahili to Marco. We went to Marco's home the next morning to test the eyes of his blood-line relatives, as there is a high risk that they might also have or develop Glaucoma at some stage in their life. It was found that Marco's younger 19-year-old brother has early risk factors of Glaucoma and the grandfather has Glaucoma in his right eye. Everything possible is being done to ensure that they get treated, something very difficult for a family living in poverty in Shinyanga with no specialists even heard of.

A beautiful little girl with multiple scars across her face. A tiny, little boy excitedly chewing on a broken CD he has picked up from somewhere. An older relative sweeping the dirt floor, trying to make the place look presentable.

An Uncle smoking and drinking goodness knows what at 11 o'clock on the beautiful Sunday morning, right next to the children. And some children, watching quietly from across the compound, too scared to come close. These people were likely to have never even seen a white person in their life, let alone have one come to their home to test their eyes. It was quite an experience for us all.

I am blessed and grateful beyond measure for this morning, this opportunity, to enter into the life of this family for a while, to sit with them in their situation, and to love on them. This day with this family was my favourite day of the entire trip. It was nothing near extravagant, and that's what I loved about it. Broken humans loving on other broken humans. It really is just the simple, little things in life that matter most.



Beautiful children with malnourished pot bellies and torn clothes surrounded me. A beautiful little girl with multiple scars across her face. A tiny, little boy excitedly chewing on a broken CD he has picked up from somewhere.



There were too many of us to fit inside their tiny concrete home, whilst Niall was checking their eyes, so I stayed outside.

Within seconds I was surrounded by intrigued little brown faces and had little brown fingers braiding my hair and little brown hands stroking my white Mzungu skin. Beautiful children with malnourished pot bellies and torn clothes surrounded me.

The work and care that Eye Care for Africa was providing on this trip changed so many lives for good. It was so rewarding to be a part of this incredible team and experience this personally.

I don't think I could ever thank Niall and the team at Eye Care for Africa enough, for providing me with this life-changing opportunity. Africa has captured my heart in ways I could never have imagined. I have always had an interest in a medical career option, but after this trip, I now feel so certain and confident that I want to study to become a doctor and return to Africa. For me, this trip was just the beginning, the beginning of the rest of my life. Asante Sana!

If you would like to help and give a little to this worth while cause please check out Eye care for Africa at www.givealittle.co.nz

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from the  Spark Foundation