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MEDIA RELEASE

Edmontonians Give Madagascar Girl the Gift of Sight

VANCOUVER: November 26, 2008: An 8-year-old blind girl in Madagascar will receive the gift of sight this Christmas thanks to the kindness of strangers in Canada.

Andoniaina suffers from extreme myopia (nearsightedness) and is unable to receive help in her own country.

"The highest power of lenses we have here in Madagascar is not powerful enough for her. Moreover, the lenses are very ugly, heavy and with poor optics," said Dr. Henry Nkumbe, the only pediatric ophthalmologist in this island nation of 20 million.

"Andoniaina lives on a small island in the Mozambique Channel, off the southwest Madagascar coast. She and her father travelled one hour by speed boat to the mainland in Tulear, then drove 1000 km to the capital of Antananarivo to get her eyes examined, and was eventually referred to our hospital in Antsirabe, 170 km south of the capital for a second opinion," said Dr. Nkumbe.

Dr. Nkumbe contacted Seva Canada (www.seva.ca), a Vancouver-based international eye-care non-profit that has been working for 26 years to restore sight and prevent blindness in the world's poorest countries. Seva Canada has been assisting Dr. Nkumbe with the establishment of a pediatric eye-care program in Madagascar.

Seva Canada board member and ophthalmologist, Dr. Peter Nash, was shocked when he saw the little girl's visual acuity results. "She's unbelievably short-sighted and without glasses she can't see anything with any clarity beyond 12 inches. It's a highly unusual prescription," said Dr. Nash.

After getting Dr. Nkumbe's appeal, the emails started flying. Seva Canada asked Dr. Larry Louie, an Edmonton optometrist and Seva-supporter, for his help.

Dr. Louie donated the children's eyeglass frames and Wayne Trieu of I-Lab Optical ground the special glass lenses.

"Wayne just has that 'touch' and can seem to work with the more difficult lens and frames. Larry has donated the appropriate frames for Andoniaina. The process of making the glasses is very involved because it is such a specialty item and odd prescription," says Joanna Wong, Dr. Louie's wife.

Everyone is working to try to get the glasses to Madagascar in time for Christmas. The spectacles are being couriered to Toronto and will be hand-delivered to Madagascar by a representative for Sherritt International Corporation, a Canadian resources company with a nickel project under development in Madagascar.

Without these special glasses, Andoniaina will never see her own country. She would be condemned to a life of blindness, unable to see beyond her nose, unable to attend school or reach her full potential.

All of these people working together change the life of one child in need is surely what Christmas should be about.

Andoniaina is one of 500,000 children, from infancy to age 15, who become blind each year -- nearly one per minute.

With your help many of those children could regain their sight. To help or donate please contact Seva Canada toll free 1-877-460-6622, email: admin@seva.ca or visit www.seva.ca.

Dr. Louie and Wayne Trieu are available for interviews at Louie Eyecare Centre, 780-488-1999. Dr. Nkumbe can be reached by e-mail. For further information please contact Heather Wardle at Seva Canada at 604-713-6622, fundraising@seva.ca, www.seva.ca.

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