



reflections

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Third World Whirlwind: NSU Optometric Team Gives Back with Mission Trip

Honduras might seem a world away for some, but for Dr. Alissa Proctor, Northeastern State University associate professor in the College of Optometry, the third world country is just a summer memory away.

This summer, Proctor and optometry colleague Dr. Ashley Brooks, and a several students from the NSU College of Optometry participated in a mission trip to provide vision care to the residents of Roatan, Honduras. The team of two doctors and nine optometry students was able to help about 460 people during the four-day trip.

Students who participated with the mission trip included Candace Acord, Lori Barton, Jamie Dunn, Ryan Emrick, Sarah Gallagher, Phillip Tabor, Summer Hilton, Lindsey Chomiuk, and Preston Smith.

“The leading cause of preventable blindness in third world countries is lack of glasses,” said Proctor. “Our trip was especially important during this time in history for Honduras. With the political coup, tourism is down and much foreign aid has been limited. The island is so beautiful, yet the people have such need.”

The team got on a bus each day at 8:00 a.m. and drove a windy, hilly road to get to the vision clinic, which was set up in an Outreach Ministries church. Proctor said that at least 50 people would already be waiting when the team arrived each day.

The patients were sent through different stations at the clinic, including ocular and health history, visual acuities and retinoscopy, which is a time-saving method of determining an estimated prescription for a patient by using a machine. Overall, 2,000 pairs of glasses were distributed and some pairs will be mailed back. Thirty-three patients were found to have cataracts and referred for surgery.

Proctor considers the trip a success and a great learning experience for the students.

“Our students worked really well as a team,” she said. “It was a great experience for them and I’m glad I could take part. I enjoyed watching them step out of their comfort zone and shine during this life-changing experience.”

Proctor hopes they can do another mission trip in the future. She wants to hold fundraisers and set some foundation for an effort called Students Volunteering Optometric Services to Humankind.

“Our team was excited to partner with the optometry school and NSU to go out into the world and bring vision care to those who had none,” Proctor said. “We can’t do this without the support of the optometry school and NSU. We are very grateful for everyone who helped.”