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Basic low vision training for education staff, teachers, and parents

Dates: 16th and 17th December 2013

Location: Kitwe, Copper Belt, Zambia

Venue: Kitwe School of Nursing



Introduction

As an effort to stimulate the knowledge on low vision among stakeholders (parents, teachers, and educational officers) the Kitwe Hospital Eye Department organized a two-day low vision training for two groups in December 2013. The first group had their training on 16th December; it involved educational officers and teachers working in different primary schools. The second group had a mixture of education officers, teachers, and parents. In total there were 54 participants attending the training. The training was held at the Kitwe School of Nursing and was facilitated by Elizabeth Kishiki from Kilimanjaro Centre for Community Ophthalmology (KCCO) and Florence Mwansa from Kitwe Hospital. The training was funded by Royal Dutch Visio.

The objectives of the training programme were for participants to:

- ✓ Understand visual impairment and low vision
- ✓ Understand the necessity of having **vision regularly assessed by eye care professionals.**
- ✓ Understand the importance of receiving and using the prescribed devices
- ✓ Appreciate the need/importance of using print instead of Braille for children to effectively use their remaining vision.
- ✓ Understand the need for children with albinism to protect their skin
- ✓ Share with specialist teachers & other education staff why children need spectacles and/or low vision devices and how to use them.
- ✓ Teach teachers and parents to appreciate their role and responsibility for assisting children with low vision.



Participant Expectations

The training started with participants sharing their expectations from the training:

- ✓ To know the meaning of low vision
- ✓ To learn the difference between low vision and blindness
- ✓ Understand the difference between low vision and visual impairment
- ✓ Know how to identify children with low vision
- ✓ To have practical knowledge on how to use low vision devices and be able to help learners with low vision in how to use these devices

The Programme

There were two one-day training programmes. The first day included educational officers and teachers. After an introduction, the programme exposed participants to simulating glasses in order to help them to appreciate some of the difficulties faced by people with low vision.



The agenda was geared toward helping the participants gain a better understanding of what low vision is and the educational needs of children with visual impairment. Participants had multiple opportunities to discuss the needs of children with low vision and challenges that teachers and parents face in assisting children with low vision. They also discussed signs and behaviors that would help them detect eye problems in children and learned functional implication of eye diseases. A movie on effective use of low vision devices inspired participants to appreciate that devices greatly assist people with low vision.

The training went well and the teachers were very keen during sessions. They asked questions and shared the knowledge they had on assisting students with low vision. Before this training most of them believed that pupils with low vision will eventually go blind and that the majority of them are slow learners, which was the reason they thought made it difficult to assist these students. They also considered it as a disturbance to others when a child with low vision struggled to copy class notes from their fellow students. It was discussed that children with low vision are not equal in terms of their vision needs and that each child needs to be treated according to his/her need. However, there are some general features which are applicable to the majority of them.

It was explained to participants how to use different techniques (considering elements of vision) to assist children with low vision in and outside the classrooms. Teachers were advised to involve a child by asking him/her which ways suits him/her the most before using new techniques with the child.

Reported by: Elizabeth Kishiki



The second day had a mixture of teachers, parents, and education officers. A few children and adults with low vision were invited to share their life experiences with low vision. Mercy, a young girl with low vision, was given a chance to give her life experience which was very impressive and touching. She explained the importance of providing proper support to children with low vision. She appreciated that she is receiving a lot of support from her parents, teachers and her friends at school which helped her to be among the best students at school. Her mother also urged her fellow parents to love their children with low vision, treat them fairly, and to be tolerant as sometimes they can be unintentionally disruptive.

At the end of the training, participants had the opportunity to evaluate the training giving strong and weak points including remarks for improvement on the weak points, of the programme. Specific comments were as follows:

- ✓ The content was relevant and effective.
- ✓ The facilitation was very good and it was easy to understand the material.
- ✓ The participation was superb. Group work helped to share ideas.
- ✓ The simulation exercise was an “eye opener” of what it really means to be a person with low vision.
- ✓ The mixture of participants enhanced understanding of the subject matter.
- ✓ One day is not enough to address the many concerns raised.
- ✓ Recommend having such trainings at least twice a year.
- ✓ Would like to receive a certificate for attending the training.
- ✓ The programme should continue because it helps to learn practically how to help children with low vision.
- ✓ Programme organizers should be time-conscious. The training started late and that made us finish late as well.

General Observation and Conclusion

In general the participants were very cooperative and had a lot of questions to ask. They were delighted that the training has added an important aspect to their knowledge of how to assist children with low vision. They also mentioned that they have realized they can still help students with the limited resources that they have. Many of them felt that the workshop provided knowledge and skills that would be very useful for their work.

