



PRESS RELEASE

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Little Peeps program launches in Helena, providing free eye exams and glasses to 14 local children

Helena, MT — Fourteen local students were given comprehensive eye exams and glasses free of charge last month through the program Little Peeps, the first initiative of the nonprofit organization Mountain Health Gives. The students were identified as needing follow-up care after a vision screening by the school nurses of the Helena Public Schools, and the care was provided by optometrists and opticians at Helena Vision Center. Children who were identified as needing care but were unable to participate in the clinic in May will be able to receive the service throughout the summer at Helena Vision Center.

Helena school nurse Francis Leonard said of the program, “Little Peeps has been a great resource for the nurses of Helena Public Schools. It has granted access to vision care to our students who have not been able to afford eye exams or glasses.”

Little Peeps was chosen as the first initiative of Mountain Health Gives in part because of a large-scale, randomized study by Johns Hopkins University, completed in 2021, that found that students with uncorrected vision are more likely to have low self-esteem, to fall behind in school, and to have behavioral problems. And, according to the American Optometric Association, one

in four school-aged children have a vision problem that, if left untreated, will affect their learning and personal development.

In addition, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, it is estimated that only 51% of kids who are covered by employer insurance plans have an eye exam and glasses benefit and that more than 52,000 children in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming aren't covered by a health insurance plan at all.

Fortunately, early detection and corrective measures can help prevent eye problems from creating long-term issues for children, giving kids the opportunity to achieve better academically and keep pace with their peers.

Last October, Mountain Health Gives received a gift of \$750,000, directed to the organization by trial attorney and former Montana State Auditor John Morrison from the Butler Class Fund, to help launch Little Peeps.

This summer, Mountain Health Gives is reaching out to communities throughout Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming to determine if the Little Peeps program can help provide vision screenings, eye exams, and glasses to kids in need in their communities. If your community is in need of these services, please contact Mountain Health Gives Executive Director Molly Severtson at molly@mountainhealthgives.org.

Learn more about Mountain Health Gives and Little Peeps at www.mountainhealthgives.org. If you would like to support the mission of Mountain Health Gives to help fill gaps in healthcare through programs like Little Peeps, please visit www.mountainhealthgives.org/donate.

Caption for photos: Sixth-grader “Jenna” was one of the 14 local kids who received an eye exam and glasses free of charge last month through the Little Peeps program, presented by

Mountain Health Gives. The event was a collaboration between Mountain Health Gives, Helena Vision Center, and Helena Public Schools.

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