

MY JOURNEY: THE VISION AWARENESS PROGRAM

By Marietta Richman

Through my experiences and connections as a lifetime member of the Girl Scout, a Girl Scout Gold Award Recipient, a Pre-Optometry Student at George Washington University, and a Paraoptometric Staff Person, I felt it important to launch a program that would connect the Girl Scouts with Optometrists to further the importance of quality eye health and vision.

In the summer of 2017, I worked with my regional Girl Scout Council, New Jersey Society of Optometric Physicians (NJSOP) and The Richard J. Favreau Health Foundation to develop that dream. The Favreau Foundation, named for a past president of the NJSOP, is a charitable organization founded to promote and further the common good and social wellbeing of at-risk populations residing in New Jersey. Once all organizations approved the Vision Awareness Program, NJSOP helped launch it at their Winter CE Program in February 2018. At that point, Optometric offices across the state of New Jersey began to connect with Girl Scout troops.

An important feature of this program is that it is catered to all levels of Girl Scouts. There are activities and topics that are geared to the very young Daisies and Brownies as well as the upper grade levels including the more career driven Seniors and Ambassadors.

The main requirement is to visit an Optometrist's office or have an Optometrist visit the troop. I designed a two-sided document with a flyer on one side to attract Girl Scout troops and the other side with the requirements to earn the patch. This way the document can be displayed in doctors' offices. I also connected through social media with Optometrists in New Jersey and other states, helping to grow the program. My parents have spoken at NJSOP events to the doctors and their staff to familiarize them with the program.

In February 2019, one year since the launch of the program, approximately 1000 Girl Scouts have earned this patch across the state of New Jersey. Now that the Girl Scouts are benefitting from learning about the importance of eye health and vision care in New Jersey, my next goal is to reach out to the American Optometric Association, our national organization, and offer this to all state affiliates.

To learn more about the Vision Awareness Program, visit <http://eyecare.org/site/girl-scout-activities-for-save-your-vision-month-in-march/>

VISION AWARENESS PATCH

PROGRAM

Visit a Doctor of Optometry or have one come to your meeting. Locate an Optometrist near you by calling NJSOP at 609-323-4012 or by visiting NJSOP.org and click on the Find-A-Doctor search tab (www.njsop.org/aws/NJSOP/pt/sp/find).

And complete 2 activities below:

1. Not everyone has 20/20 vision. Learn about nearsightedness, farsightedness and astigmatism and how glasses or contacts can help.
2. Children often experience vision problems that are not easily detected. Learn how vision can affect school activities and how a Doctor of Optometry can help.
3. Learn about Camp Marcella, a summer camp in NJ for blind and visually impaired children. Are services available in your community for a person with impaired vision?
4. National Save Your Vision Month is March. Make a poster for your school that promotes eye health and good vision practices.
5. Learn about a career in Optometry. How do you become licensed? What percentage of women are Optometrists? What's an average salary?
6. Run an Eyeglass Donation Drive. Contact a local service organization that collects them. A suggestion is to visit <http://www.lionsclubs.org/EN/how-we-serve/health/sight/eyeglass-recycling.php>
7. Do "activities in the dark". Divide the Scouts into pairs, having one girl put a blindfold on and the other girl be non-blindfolded. The blindfolded girl should try some basic activities such as buttoning or zipping a coat, tying her shoe, writing her name, etc. The non-blindfolded girl should lead her, explain what she sees and guide her to keep her safe. Then trade roles. Discuss: How did it feel to not be able to see? How did you accomplish simple activities? What would you do if you met a blind person?