

# Children's Vision Massachusetts Story Bank

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**A**t a vocational high school in northern Massachusetts, a 17-year-old student received a comprehensive eye exam at school, on the New England Eye On-Sight mobile vision clinic. He was diagnosed with amblyopia, a condition that is more difficult to treat as children grow older. It can cause blindness in one eye; in fact, it is the leading cause of blindness in people under age 45.

"I always knew I had a vision problem," he said. He had been telling his parents about his difficulty seeing, and asking to have his vision checked, since he was three years old. When asked why he had not been to an eye doctor, the teenager reported that as the oldest of six children, his parents had not had time to take him. Nobody else in his family had a vision problem, and his parents did not take his complaints seriously.

Ms. Tattersall recalls, "I remember feeling so terrible for him. Here was a teenager who really wanted to get on in life, and, as a child, couldn't convince anyone to take him to an eye doctor."

"This patient sticks in my mind because even though it is an unsuccessful story from the perspective of the need, we can learn a lot from it. Here was a child who wanted help, and we all failed him. If somebody had diagnosed and treated his amblyopia by age five or six, this young man probably would have developed normal vision. If the circumstances had been different, there could have been a vastly different outcome."

Even if children know they need help, it is not always possible for them to get it without assistance. Much of Ms. Tattersall's time is spent helping parents understand complicated insurance benefits, the importance of vision screening and follow up care, and how to support children in their communities after a vision problem is diagnosed. Ms. Tattersall states, "So much more can be done to improve the vision and eye health of children; there must be an increased awareness of the importance of early detection and care, and the right systems in place to support this."

*Paulette Tattersall, Dip. Pharm, MSc, is the Pediatric Program Director of the New England Eye On-Sight Mobile Vision Clinic.*



Children's Vision  
Massachusetts

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