

## Association of Clinicians for the Underserved (ACU) 2021 Vision Service Program Patient Impact Stories

At ACU, we recognize the value and importance of patient stories to help community stakeholders understand the impact that health centers have on people's lives. As such, we asked that health centers work with us to identify patient stories. Our goal was to collect ten (10) patient stories across health centers that received vision services grants earlier this year. With the support of this grant, ACU was able to provide \$100 gift cards to patients who shared their stories. ACU asked each health center to identify two to three patients who could share 1) challenges they may have had in accessing vision care and 2) the impact that the vision care program has had on their quality of life. In identifying patients to share their stories, ACU asked health centers to consider:

- Consumer representatives on their Board of Directors and Committees.
- The social determinants of health that patients experience and any benefits from having the vision program located in the same place where patients receive primary care.
- Those who are best served in a language other than English or who benefit from the cultural humility and responsiveness of the care team.

### *Candy, 62*

Candy is a long-time volunteer at the Literacy Council in Columbus, Ohio. When she noticed a decrease in her vision over 10 years ago, Candy initially thought that poor lighting was making it difficult for her to read the print in books. After some time, she realized that something was affecting her vision as she engaged less and less in one of her favorite hobbies, reading. At the time, she did not have health insurance, so when she received a referral to a vocational school program where she could receive affordable eye exams and glasses, she jumped on the opportunity. However, the clinic schedule made it difficult for her to continue receiving services there, so she had to look for more accessible options. It was then that she decided to get vision services from PrimaryOne Health which is where she regularly sees the doctor.



Candy credits her eye care provider, Dr. Gregory Graves at PrimaryOne Health, for not only improving her eyesight but also her quality of life. Having access to affordable care and eyeglasses at PrimaryOne Health helps her engage in activities that are meaningful to her like reading and bird watching. Candy also thanks Dr. Graves for showing her how to be more engaged and responsible for her own health care. His attentiveness to her needs and willingness to include her in medical decisions has set the standard for when she receives care elsewhere.

*Dennis, 56*

Dennis has been uninsured and unable to afford insulin for his diabetes for more than two years. While insurance is available through his wife’s job, the monthly cost of the insurance premiums on top of copays, deductibles, and limited coverage for prescriptions make it unaffordable. Without being able to get consistent diabetes care and without insulin, Dennis’ diabetes was not adequately managed and resulted in a toe amputation in March 2020. Dennis was discharged from the hospital following the amputation the same day that the country shut down due to COVID. With everything shut down and many care providers fearful of spreading COVID, Dennis was unable to schedule any in-person appointments to monitor the progress of his healing after the amputation and he eventually started having issues with infections. On top of that, he applied for Medicaid but was rejected because his wife made just enough money to make him ineligible. This left him with no option but to go the local emergency room when he needed care. His health continued to spiral downward, and his diabetes began affecting his eyesight so much that he can no longer see well enough to drive.

Only in the last few weeks did Dennis learn that he could receive vision services at Family Health Services of Darke County. His optometrist, Dr. Lindsey King, connected him to primary care services to manage his diabetes and is helping him navigate the Medicaid application process. According to Dennis, this is the first time he’s met an eye doctor who has helped him push through the necessary hoops to get the care he needs. While he is still waiting for his paperwork to finish processing, he stated that he has finally found hope and finally feels more in the Christmas spirit. Dennis watched his mother and father give up when dealing with major health issues, and he resolved to never give up and kept fighting. Now, he is thrilled with Dr. King and the care he is receiving at Family Health Services of Darke County.

*Gary, 73*

Gary decided to get vision services from PrimaryOne Health in Columbus, Ohio after the doctor he sees for diabetes care urged him to get checked out by an optometrist. Over two years ago, Gary started having difficulty seeing at night and was experiencing slight headaches. Little things like watching TV became difficult. He looked around at other providers around Columbus, but few accepted Medicaid/Medicare for optical services. He also received a quote for \$700 for glasses which was not feasible especially in addition to the cost of the exam. Gary was happy to find out that PrimaryOne Health would accept his insurance for vision care. Gary stated that he does not know what he would have done if he was unable to receive services at PrimaryOne Health as it was getting hard driving anywhere. Now, he is able to see well enough at night to drive and engage in social activities like going to bible study.



*James, 59*

James, a resident of Denver, Colorado credits Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) for not only saving his vision, but also his life. In only a matter of a few weeks, his vision began to quickly deteriorate to the extent that he could not continue working his job at a local mall. He initially sought eye care services around Denver, but his sight had worsened and he had difficulty filling out the forms needed to receive care.



At James's first visit at CCH, his optometrist told him that the pressure in his eyes was so low that he needed to be seen at the hospital immediately. CCH set an appointment for him at a nearby hospital, but James was worried about how he was going to get across town in such a short time by bus, which was his only mode of transportation. To assist James, CCH staff member, Nancy, arranged transportation to take him to the hospital.

During his visit at the hospital, he discovered that he had glaucoma and cataracts which would require surgery, but this would not be the end of his health issues. A short time later, James had surgery to remove his cataracts, but his blood pressure was so low, that the surgeon was not able to fully sedate him for the procedure. That meant James had to have his cataracts removed while under only local anesthetic. With the help of CCH, James was able to get follow up care to manage his blood pressure, attend all of his post-surgery follow up appointments, and access the prescriptions needed to improve his health. Now that his eyesight has vastly improved and he is receiving support to manage his health care needs, James is able to engage in the activities that allowed him to live more independently.

*Jesús, 64*

Jesús began visiting the Northside Clinic at North Texas Area Community Health Centers about eight years ago to get routine medical care for diabetes and high blood pressure. The Northside Clinic was life saving for Jesús who lacked health insurance and previously experienced barriers to accessing health care services and much needed prescription medication. Due to his uncontrolled diabetes, Jesús' eye health began deteriorating and the blood vessels behind his left eye were damaged to the extent that he required surgery.

Jesús, who is best served in Spanish, received linguistically and culturally competent care from his team of providers. He has managed to lower his blood sugar significantly and now has his diabetes under control. Additionally, he was also able to get referral to a specialty clinic to receive the eye surgery to repair the damage in his eye.

*Marcos, 50*

Due to losing most of his eyesight from untreated diabetes, Marcos lost his job and was unable to pay rent which resulted in him losing his housing. Marcos was first seen by Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) in Denver, Colorado while receiving temporary shelter through the City of Denver after sustaining injuries from a serious fall related to his vision loss. CCH outreach workers, who regularly visit

shelters and camp sites, worked with Marcos to identify a number of unmet health care needs related to his traumatic injury and vision loss. The outreach workers connected Marcos to primary care at CCH where he now receives diabetes treatment and works with a multidisciplinary care team to develop a plan to manage his diabetes. In developing the plan, the team took into consideration Marcos' housing situation, which impacted his ability to store insulin, and the cognitive impact of his traumatic injuries. To make things safer for him and to provide him with a place to store his insulin, CCH staff helped get him into an apartment. Additionally, he was connected to CCH's eye clinic where optometrists made referrals to specialty eye care and also guided him through the process of applying for Medicaid which is necessary for him to receive specialty services.

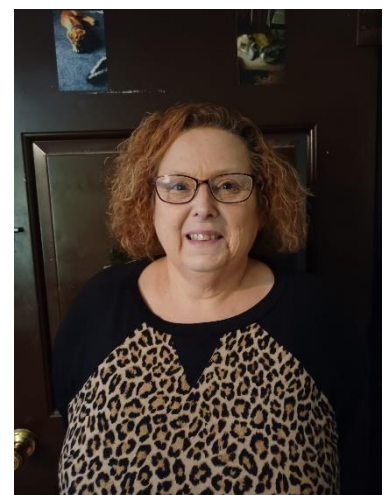
### *Stacy, 50*

Stacy has family history of macular degeneration and glaucoma and watched her mother and grandmother's quality of life deteriorate due to vision loss. For this reason, Stacy has always been vigilant about eye care. Stacy had been receiving vision services for several years at Family Health Services of Darke County when she started noticing a change in her vision. At first, she noticed that all the paperwork she did at her job was becoming harder to see. Staring at the computer screen all day gave her headaches. Then, it started to become difficult to drive, and she even had to give up one of her favorite hobbies, reading, as it became too difficult to see the print on the pages.

After about a year of dealing with eye issues, Stacy decided to ask her optometrist for help. At her next appointment, her optometrist performed an optical exam which revealed that she had glaucoma. When Stacy's insurance wouldn't pay for the prescription she needed to treat the glaucoma, Family Health Services of Darke County helped her get the medication through their in-house pharmacy. Stacy and her family were so impressed by the help she received that now Stacy's mother and siblings all receive care at Family Health Services of Darke County to monitor their eyesight.

### *Theresa, 60*

Theresa lost her insurance when her husband passed away in early 2021. With a family history of cataracts and other eye problems, Theresa has always been proactive about scheduling checkups with her optometrist, but after losing her insurance, she was not sure how she would be able to continue receiving eye care. Furthermore, she was concerned about the cost of replacing her glasses that she had recently broken by accident. Without her glasses, it was becoming increasingly difficult for her to do her job as a grant writer for a local non-profit as she could not see anything in much detail. Despite being uninsured, she was able to access eye care services at Family Health Services of Darke County in Greenville, Ohio where she had already been receiving medical care for several decades. The cost of receiving eye care was on a sliding fee scale which meant it was adjustable to Theresa's income.



Staff at the clinic helped Theresa get a new pair of glasses at an affordable price, which she states, has made it possible for her to maintain her job and continue writing grant proposals for good causes.

*Thumper, 59*

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) in Denver, CO has been Thumper's health home for roughly three decades where she receives medical, behavioral, and vision services. Thumper is grateful for the services she receives at CCH as they are the only clinic around that accepts her insurance. Furthermore, she states, they have helped her with many other needs including finding affordable prescription medications as well as stable housing when she having difficulty affording rent.

Early in 2021, Thumper noticed that her vision started getting blurry, and it was increasingly difficult to see at night. Through her visits with the optometrist at CCH, Thumper discovered that she had cataracts which would require surgery. Without a ride, Thumper was concerned about how she would get home from the hospital after surgery as she would have to wear a patch on each eye. Additionally, the bus ride would be over an hour each way. Fortunately, CCH was able to set up transportation to and from the hospital for the cataract surgery as well for her follow up appointments. CCH also helped her get new glasses at no cost which has helped restore her vision.

*Yolanda, 59*

Yolanda has been a patient of Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Services (HSNHS) for the last 8 years because they provide a wide array of services including medical, dental, and vision. Yolanda states that when she went to other providers in the past, she had difficulty staying consistent with her care because she would have to schedule separate appointments for medical, dental, and vision on different days which translated to multiple days off work and multiple back and forth trips. When Yolanda learned that she could receive all these services under one roof at HSNHS and schedule all her appointments on one single day, she made the switch. Now, she could see her medical doctor, dentist, and optometrist and only take off one day of work. Furthermore, she feels that having all her care under one roof improved the quality of her care because all her doctors can see notes in her medical record and can collaborate and communicate with each other about all her health care needs.