Visually impaired children in Mississippi to receive vision aids

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JACKSON, Miss. (WJTV) – Eight children in and outside of the Jackson metro area will receive high-tech vision aids from an Alabama-based nonprofit.

Sight Savers America is a nationally expanding nonprofit that facilitates eye care and provides low vision and blind equipment, along with the necessary training. All eight recipients qualify financially and have a severe visual impairment that cannot be corrected with eyeglasses, contact lenses, medical or surgical treatment.

Each child will receive a video magnifier. Five children will receive a desktop device that uses a special camera and large monitor to enhance contrast and magnify objects up to 118 times. Three children will receive portable video magnifiers that offer the same features in a more compact format with a smaller screen.

Desktop video magnifiers retail for approximately $3,000 and are not covered by any type of medical insurance. This makes them cost-prohibitive for many families. According to Dr. Dawn DeCarlo, CEO of Sight Savers America, the organization fills in that gap.

“It just lets them compete on a level playing field with their typically-sighted peers,” DeCarlo said.

The optometrist specializing in patients with impaired vision has a long history with Sight Savers America before becoming CEO of the Alabama-based non-profit. DeCarlo has referred children to the organization since 1999, and it has helped hundreds of children in the Yellowhammer State. The organization’s impact has spread to 15 other states, including Mississippi.

DeCarlo explained to WJTV 12 News that this technology is often available to visually impaired students at school. However, it usually cannot be taken home to do things like complete

homework. She also noted that state vocational services mainly focus on providing similar equipment to adults, not children.

“If we can find the money to provide the services, we provide it. We’re always looking to expand,” DeCarlo said.

Dr. Glen Stribling, a local low-vision doctor, teachers of the visually impaired, and caring residents identified and referred the recipients to Sight Savers America. The organization will train each recipient on all functions and capabilities of their new equipment as well as its proper care. They will take the technology home that same day.

A Sight Savers America telephone survey showed that the vision aids given to families have improved the academic grades, independence, reading ability, confidence and self-esteem of most children. The survey was conducted six months after over 1,000 children received video magnifiers through its Low Vision and Blindness Program.

The organization will also provide extensive follow-up until the child reaches age 19, maintain and repair the equipment as needed, and collect information to assess the impact of the device(s) on the recipient’s activities and quality of life. For more information about the organization, visit sightsaversamerica.org.

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