



USAf 2025 OPEN CALL FOR IMPACT CASE STUDIES

Title of the Impact Case Study: Improving Vision and Empowering Futures – The University of Johannesburg Optometry Department’s Partnership with Camp Sizanani

Submitting University: University of Johannesburg

Name, position and email address of Contact Person: Prof Nabeela Hasrod, HOD, Department of Optometry, nabeelah@uj.ac.za

Summary of the Impact:

Since 2023, the Department of Optometry at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) has proudly partnered with Camp Sizanani, a dedicated non-profit organisation empowering orphaned, vulnerable, and at-risk youth in South Africa. Through this inspiring collaboration, the Department has offered comprehensive vision screenings, vital eye health education, and free eyeglasses to children and adolescents involved in Camp Sizanani’s transformative programs in Johannesburg and its surrounding areas.

As of August 2025, UJ Optometry has made remarkable strides:

- Screened 563 children aged 6 to 18 years.
- Provided 220 pairs of spectacles.
- Enhanced educational outcomes, quality of life, and psychosocial well-being for children from marginalized backgrounds.

This initiative not only combats avoidable blindness and uncorrected refractive errors but also champions equitable access to healthcare, aligns with SDG 3 (Good Health), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). This embodies UJ’s mission to cultivate graduates and academic work that create a meaningful societal impact.

Underpinning Academic Work:

The Department of Optometry is passionately committed to tackling visual health disparities across South Africa. This dedication is grounded in compelling research evidence that underscores the importance of vision care within the community:

- Vision impairment stands as a critical public health issue, with the South African Optometric Association (SAOA) estimating that a staggering 11 million South Africans face the risk of vision loss. Notably, uncorrected refractive error emerges as the predominant cause of this concerning trend (SAOA, 2023).
- Children represent a particularly vulnerable demographic. Research reveals that 20–30% of school children in South Africa grapple with visual difficulties, many of which unfortunately go undiagnosed and untreated (Naidoo et al., 2013). This lack of diagnosis can impede their ability to learn effectively, casting a shadow over their educational journey.

- The intricate link between vision and education cannot be overstated. Poor eyesight is closely associated with lower literacy rates and diminished academic performance, leading to long-term socio-economic disadvantages that can perpetuate cycles of poverty (UNESCO, 2021).
- Marginalised groups, especially orphans, face heightened risks in this context. With approximately 2.7 million orphans in South Africa, many of whom struggle to access even the most basic health services, these children are particularly susceptible to the detrimental effects of untreated visual impairments (Statistics South Africa, 2021).

The Department's outreach initiatives are multifaceted, intertwining teaching, learning, and research. Aspiring optometrists gain invaluable hands-on experience in community settings, mentored by dedicated faculty members. This practical training is complemented by meticulous service data collection, which informs crucial research into child eye health, accessibility, and health promotion strategies, ultimately aiming to enhance the visual well-being of the community.

Narrative Description of the Impact:



1. The Orphan Crisis in South Africa

South Africa faces a daunting challenge, contending with one of the highest rates of orphanhood in the world. The pervasive impacts of HIV/AIDS, widespread poverty, and continual social instability have led to millions of children navigating life without parental care or in precarious living conditions. These vulnerable youths are exceedingly susceptible to a myriad of adversities, including malnutrition, emotional and psychological struggles, diminished educational opportunities, and inadequate access to essential health services (Sherr et al., 2017).

In response to this pressing crisis, Camp Sizanani has emerged as a beacon of hope, providing structured life skills programs, comprehensive psychosocial support, and health and wellness initiatives designed to uplift and empower these children. A vital partnership with UJ Optometry further enhances this support network

by tackling an often ignored yet critical factor in a child's learning and development: the importance of good vision. Through these collaborative efforts, the initiative aims to enrich the lives of orphaned children and pave the way for a brighter future.

2. Vision Impairment in South Africa

Did you know that an incredible 80% of vision impairment can be prevented or treated globally? (WHO 2022). In South Africa, however, avoidable blindness and uncorrected refractive errors are still alarmingly common, particularly among children in underserved communities. Challenges like cost, lack of awareness, and limited access to optometry services contribute to this issue. Thankfully, through Camp Sizanani's wellness initiatives, the Department of Optometry is making a real difference! Children receive comprehensive eye exams at no cost, and those in need of corrective lenses are thrilled to receive free spectacles, generously sponsored by the department. Together, we're creating a brighter future!

3. Vision, Education, and Better Learning

The connection between vision and learning is deeply impactful. A child who struggles to see clearly faces significant challenges in reading, writing, participating, and building their self-esteem. Research shows that untreated vision issues are a major factor in school drop-out rates and can severely limit a child's prospects (Resnikoff et al., 2020).

Through the UJ–Camp Sizanani partnership, we are working to support children who might otherwise be left behind. For many of these children, receiving a pair of glasses can be transformative, opening up a world of opportunities in their education and social interactions. It empowers them to fully engage in school, participate in camp activities, and thrive in their everyday lives.

4. The Department's Contribution and Achievements

Since October 2023, the Department has participated in Camp Sizanani's Health and Wellness Drives. Here are the details of the events:

- October 2023 (Marshalltown, Johannesburg): 135 children were tested, and 56 pairs of spectacles were dispensed.
- May 2024 (Poortje Camp): 140 children (ages 6–12) were tested, and 52 pairs of spectacles were dispensed.
- October 2024 (Hekpoort Camp): 145 adolescents (ages 13–18) were tested, and 53 pairs of spectacles were dispensed.
- May 2025 (Poortje Camp): 143 children (ages 6–12) were tested, and 59 pairs of spectacles were dispensed.

Looking ahead, in October 2025, we expect to have over 140 children at the Hekpoort Camp. In total, **over 563 children** have been tested, and **220 pairs of spectacles** have been dispensed in just under three years.



5. Societal Impact

This work showcases significant societal impact across various domains:

- Health Equity: Providing free, high-quality eye care services to underserved youth.
- Education: Enhancing school readiness, participation, and academic performance.
- Community Development: Fostering healthier, more empowered communities.
- Student Training: UJ Optometry students gain practical experience, cultural competence, and a sense of social responsibility.
- Partnerships: Establishing sustainable collaboration between academia, civil society (Camp Sizanani), and the private sector.



6. Looking ahead

The Department of Optometry at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) is committed to expanding its partnership with Camp Sizanani. Our vision is to enhance outreach efforts throughout Gauteng and beyond, ensuring that more children in underserved areas have access to quality eye care. We plan to incorporate digital health tools for screening to improve the efficiency, accuracy, and scalability of our services. Additionally, by publishing the outcomes of these initiatives, we aim to influence national child eye health policy, reinforcing UJ's commitment to social impact and ensuring that no child's future is hindered by preventable or uncorrected visual impairment.

7. Evidence and Sources to Corroborate the Impact



CAMP SIZANANI LIFE SKILLS

Suite 303, 3rd Floor, Renaissance Centre,
16-20 New Street South, JHB, 2001
+27 (11) 339 1582

NPO No: 125-095 | PBO No: 930-036-322

2024 CAMP SIZANANI LIFE SKILLS: ASIKHULISANI HEALTH & WELLNESS DRIVE

Dear Mr. Mhlope

On behalf of the Board of Directors, management, staff and beneficiaries of Camp Sizanani Life Skills (CSLS) I will like to convey our deepest gratitude to you and your Team for honouring our invitation and coming through to our inaugural "Asikhulisane" Health and Wellness Drive which is part of Psychosocial Support Services, and was hosted on 25th May at Pohopedi Primary School at Poortjie.

The purpose of the Health and Wellness Drive was to provide our 150 beneficiaries from the ages of 6-12, living in the 6 communities and 3 children's homes served by Camps Sizanani Life Skills with efficient and professional, educational and health information and services which focused on oral hygiene, vision and nursing care as well as HIV and AIDS life skills lessons

We are particularly grateful your Team's insightful and entertaining presentation about the roles and functions of an Optometrist; the importance and practical ways of caring for our vision; the most common and severe eye infections and their impact on the whole body.

The presentation also touched on the Health care facilities that provide free eye care treatment and services. We also appreciate the pro-bono comprehensive Optometry services to our 127 beneficiaries and this included 127 eye tests, a donation of 58 prescription spectacles and identification of 10 Campers that require further Ophthalmology intervention.

We thank you once again for the humane manner in which you and your team interacted with our staff, beneficiaries and other stakeholders that were invited to the Drive. We value your friendship and all the efforts you made to holistically uplift the life's trajectory of our orphans and vulnerable children and giving them an opportunity to lead healthy and productive lives as well as having brighter and sustainable future.

Our sincerest thank you

DMC Mokheema!!!

Ditlhare Mokheema (Head Social Worker)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PHILIP LILIENTHAL,
ROSS RICHARDSON, PROF. NONTEMBEKO BILA, DAVID MILLER,
NOZIPHO KHUMALO, GORDON MTAKATI



- SAOA (2023).** Estimates on vision impairment in South Africa.
- Statistics South Africa (2021).** Demographic and social data on orphans and vulnerable children.
- Naidoo, K. et al. (2013).** Prevalence of refractive error and visual impairment in South African schoolchildren. *Ophthalmic Epidemiology*, 20(3): 185–193.
- UNESCO (2021).** Education and vision: Global evidence on the role of sight in learning.

- e) **Resnikoff, S. et al. (2020).** Global magnitude of visual impairment. *The Lancet Global Health*.
- f) **World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022).** World Report on Vision.
- g) **Sherr, L. et al. (2017).** Orphans and vulnerable children in South Africa: A crisis of care. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*.

1. Summary and conclusions

The partnership between the Department of Optometry and Camp Sizanani is a powerful testament to how academic efforts—through research, teaching, and community service—can truly transform lives. By tackling avoidable vision issues faced by orphaned and vulnerable youth, this initiative not only improves health and education but also brings hope and new opportunities to hundreds of children.

Moreover, this collaboration enriches the academic experience at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) by offering students invaluable hands-on learning opportunities. It helps shape the compassionate health professionals of tomorrow and fosters a sense of trust and connection within the community.

Looking ahead, the Department is eager to expand its outreach, embrace digital health tools, and share its findings to enhance our understanding of children's vision and its impact on learning—both nationally and globally.

This case study encapsulates the essence of UJ's Strategic Plan 2035, illustrating how a commitment to academic excellence can create profound, positive change in the world, filling it with hope for a brighter and clearer future for our children.

Signed off on behalf of the University by:



Dr G Castrillón
Senior Director: Division for Teaching Excellence
University of Johannesburg

Date: 12 September 2025