

BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS AND AMERICA'S BEST EYEGASSES & CONTACTS: TRANSFORMING KIDS' LIVES THROUGH VISION CORRECTION



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For many kids with academic or behavioral problems, glasses could change everything

Short attention span, hyperactivity and low reading comprehension are often symptoms of a vision issue. Excessive smartphone use has been linked to childhood myopia. So what's a parent to do? Simple: Take your kid for an eye exam.



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Eye exams are essential, but not enough kids get them. This charitable partnership envisions changing that.

A program arrives in Los Angeles later this month that will provide comprehensive eye exams and, if necessary, prescription glasses to children who are members of a participating Boys & Girls Club in Southern California.

For many kids with academic or behavioral problems, glasses could change everything

By BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF AMERICA AND AMERICA'S BEST CONTACTS & EYEGLASSES
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An eye exam might be the first step in transforming a child's life for the better. (Photo courtesy Boys & Girls Clubs of America)

Doctor of Optometry. But Patel knows how quickly and profoundly a simple pair of glasses can transform a child's life. She's seen it firsthand.

"I once examined a 6-year-old boy," Patel recalled. "He walked into the exam lane very quiet and timid ... One eye was clearer than the other and he was having a hard time interpreting what he was actually seeing. At the follow-up exam, [he] ran into the exam lane, jumped into the chair and had a huge smile on his face — he had just tried on his new glasses. The improved vision ... made a huge positive impact on this child's ability to interact and learn."

According to the American Optometric Association, a large nonprofit organization of optometric doctors and professionals, academic and behavioral problems in young people are often linked to vision issues. Additionally, childhood myopia is on the rise. So a charitable partnership between Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) and retail eyewear brand America's Best Contacts & Eyeglasses is especially timely, as is the program's arrival in Los Angeles as a new school year begins.

"One of the keys to preventing learning and behavioral issues is early detection and intervention for any sort of uncorrected vision," said Patel, who is also vice president of physician practice management at National Vision, the company that operates America's Best. "The symptoms [of] Attention Deficit Disorder and uncorrected vision can sometimes be similar. To distinguish between the two, it's important to have a comprehensive eye exam."

That's why the BGCA-America's Best partnership offers free vision screenings to Club members and then, based on screening results, a complimentary eye exam by a licensed optometrist at a nearby America's Best location. If a child needs prescription glasses, America's Best also provides them — free of charge.

Through the partnership, more than 11,000 children have received vision screenings in cities including Atlanta, Portland and Dallas since 2015. The program made its Southern California Debut in Anaheim in February and in L.A. at the end of last month. One of the first Boys & Girls Clubs where screenings are available this school year is in Whittier.

"Sometimes kids don't understand what's going on, and not being able to see well definitely has an impact both on their confidence or them feeling a little bit different," said Oscar Hernandez, executive director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Whittier. "Giving them the opportunity to see well, I think, enhances their ability to focus."

Good vision is crucial to children as they work their way through school, where reading

Good vision is crucial to children as they work their way through school, where reading, writing, computer and chalkboard work are daily requirements. According to optometrists, kids who unknowingly struggle from uncorrected vision may avoid visual work, muddle through with lower levels of comprehension or ability, or suffer discomfort and fatigue.

According to recent research by the American Optometric Association, one in four children has a visual problem that affects their learning and may exhibit behaviors associated with distractibility and hyperactivity, or even be labeled as having ADD, when all they really need is a simple pair of glasses.

So how do eye exams actually work?

"The optometrist performs a series of tests to measure where and how the light focuses in the eye," Patel said. "If the light focuses in front of the retina, it is called nearsightedness or myopia. If the focus is behind the eye, it is called farsightedness or hyperopia."

What's been widely described by researchers as a myopia epidemic among young people has been linked to spending more time reading on smartphones and spending less time outdoors. This phenomenon is most apparent where poverty is highest, but often goes undiagnosed due to children not receiving annual eye exams.

To date, 94% of the children provided eye exams under the BGCA-America's Best partnership had trouble seeing and received a free pair of prescription glasses, according to America's Best.. With more than 4,300 Clubs nationwide — and America's Best operating 630 locations across the U.S., including many in the L.A. area — the program's impact on the country's youth has profound and far-reaching potential.

Free vision testing is just one of an array of benefits associated with a Boys & Girls Club membership. While fees vary by Club, it is always affordable — even as low as \$5 per year.

"Our main focus is youth development: academic achievement, good character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyles," Hernandez said.

Partnerships such as these help Clubs work toward their mission to enable all young people to reach their full potential.

If your child isn't yet involved with your local Boys & Girls Club, you can find a location

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Sunglasses are cool, but eyeglasses are even cooler. (Photo courtesy Boys & Girls Clubs of America)

During the month of August, the eyes have it. Why? Because no fewer than *three* vision-related awareness campaigns are observed during the eighth month of the calendar year: August is National Children's Vision and Learning Month; National Children's Eye Health and Safety Month; and National Eye Exam Month.

The point of these campaigns is to educate parents and teachers about the crucial link between vision and learning in children and the critical importance of regular eye exams for everyone, but especially for kids, and especially as a new school year begins. According to researchers, identifying and correcting a youth's vision problem can positively impact academic performance, confidence, social activity, and even behavior.

If you're a parent, the best way to observe the ocular occasions of August is simply to take your child to the optometrist this month — or any month — for a routine eye exam. Fortunately, a program is arriving in Los Angeles later this month that will provide comprehensive eye exams and, if necessary, prescription glasses to children who are members of a participating Boys & Girls Club in Southern California.

And guess what? It's all free of charge, and that includes the glasses.

The transformative power of youth vision correction is the motivation behind the program, a

charitable partnership between Boys & Girls Clubs of America and retail eye care and eyewear brand America's Best Contacts & Eyeglasses.

"Because a lot of young kids are shy, or they don't know anything is wrong with them, they oftentimes won't speak up [about vision issues]," said Oscar Hernandez, executive director, Boys & Girls Clubs of Whittier. "So they go the rest of their life feeling a little different. As they continue to grow through school, they continue to fall further and further behind."

For more than 150 years, Boys & Girls Clubs have helped children most in need to realize futures as productive, responsible and caring citizens. Its more than 4,100 Clubs nationwide serve nearly 4 million young people annually, through both direct membership and community outreach. Meanwhile, America's Best operates 630 retail stores across the country (including many in the L.A. area) offering quality eyewear at affordable prices, with more opening monthly.

To date, through the Boys & Girls Clubs and America's Best partnership, more than 11,000 children have been screened in cities throughout the country, including Atlanta; Portland and Dallas.

"We have a long-standing passion for helping the optically under-served," said Bob Stein, chief philanthropic development officer at National Vision, the company that operates America's Best. "We're very good at providing optometric and optical services to people, and Boys & Girls Clubs are very good at protecting kids and giving children a safe place to gather. So, it was a perfect combination of children who have a need and [our] remedy. It's like it was meant to happen."

Both National Vision and Boys & Girls Clubs have home offices in Atlanta and, incredibly, some 94% of America's Best retail locations sit within 10 miles of a Boys & Girls Club, making this partnership something of a natural fit. The need for free and easily accessible vision screening was clear when the collaboration began in 2015, with around half of American children having not had an eye exam in the preceding two years, according to a 2016 report from optical industry trade association and nonprofit The Vision Council.

The program works by first screening children at a local Boys & Girls Club, with a signed permission slip from a parent or guardian. Based on screening results, a child may then be referred to a licensed optometrist at an America's Best location for a free eye exam. To date,

94% of the children who had an exam received new glasses courtesy of America's Best, with a list of more than 100 stores. There is no charge whatsoever to Boys & Girls Club.

choice of more than 100 frames. There is no charge whatsoever to Boys & Girls Club

members.

Hernandez said screenings will begin to be offered to members of Boys & Girls Club of Whittier between now and September, as schools citywide go back into session. By the end of this year, America's Best plans to offer free screenings and glasses to approximately 20 Boys & Girls Clubs in the L.A. area.

"A pair of glasses, for a child with even a moderate prescription, is an inflection point in the path of their life," Stein concluded. "It literally can change a child's life."

If you aren't yet involved with your local Boys & Girls Club, you can find a location nearest to you and apply for membership [here](#).

—Paul Rogers for *Boys & Girls Clubs of America* and *America's Best Contacts & Eyeglasses*



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