



Altruistic eye doctor sees what happens when kids' vision doesn't get tested

When young children have trouble learning to read, sometimes it's because they can't see well enough in class.

Della Chow, a Vancouver optometrist, finds this happens alarmingly often, so she urges parents to take their children for a complete eye exam before kindergarten — ideally, at the age of three.

Kids don't need to know the alphabet to have their vision tested, she says.

If schoolchildren don't see well, it ends up becoming more than just being a reading problem, says Chow, whose Kitsilano-based practice is called Della Optique.

Children who see poorly or whose eyes get tired in class can easily become inattentive and then badly behaved.

"Then they get their eyes checked and they get glasses" and the problems go away.

"The parents feel so guilty!"

The B.C. Association of Optometrists points out that one in five children entering school has a vision disorder and that 80 per cent of a child's learning is based on vision.

Chow knows she's right about children needing early eye exams because she herself didn't get one.

Her vision wasn't corrected until she was in Grade 3, and it turned out she needed a strong prescription for nearsightedness.

"I don't know how I even got to Grade 3," marvels Chow, a graduate of the University of Waterloo's doctor of optometry program who has been in practice for 15 years.

Some kids have excellent distance vision, so their parents mistakenly think they're fine when, in fact, they can't focus on close work.

Chow believes so strongly in vision testing as a precondition for literacy that she has donated \$5,000 to the Can-West Global Foundation's Raise-a-Reader campaign. This makes her what's called a bronze sponsor.

With the provincial government matching all the money donated in the campaign, her generous contribution is doubled.

"I'm so excited that my \$5,000 is turning into \$10,000," says Chow, who is encouraging other optometrists to donate.

Della Optique, Optometry and Eyewear

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