

# eyes on learning

Regular visits to a Doctor of Optometry ensure kids can see their way to the best possible education.

**M**elanie Mutch, a mom of two in Miramichi, N.B. gets emotional when describing how a chance encounter with a Doctor of Optometry nine years ago solved her daughter's learning challenges – and much more.

At five, Lindsay repeated kindergarten, having been held back due to lagging literacy skills. She had a speech delay and sometimes failed to follow instructions, leading teachers to conclude she had behaviour issues, and might even be autistic. Even physical activities posed problems; in her second season of skating lessons, Lindsay still wasn't able to stand up on her blades.

"We had Lindsay's hearing tested. We took her to a child psychologist, who told us she wasn't autistic and didn't have ADHD. We even had an occupational therapist do a coordination and reflex test," Melanie recalls. Consultations with a speech-language pathologist and behavioural analyst didn't yield answers either.

The day everything changed, the Mutch family was at the office of Doctor of Optometry Greg MacDiarmid for their older son's eye exam. Lindsay was in the waiting room when Dr. MacDiarmid came out to share his findings about her brother. Something about Lindsay's manner and expression prompted him to ask about her vision history.

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– **Melanie Mutch**

Melanie told him that Lindsay had been screened through a public health program, which was part of the preschool entry process. When Dr. MacDiarmid explained that the screening test would not pick up every problem, they discussed Lindsay's school struggles and agreed to have her eyes examined.

It turned out that Lindsay was very far-sighted, meaning her eye muscles had to strain to focus up close. Essentially, "she could sustain that just long enough to pass the screening test," says Dr. MacDiarmid.

But it wasn't until Lindsay's new glasses were ready that it became clear just how much they would change her life. Overnight, Lindsay's reading level skyrocketed. Within weeks, she was skating in her club's annual ice show. And, once every bit of her mental bandwidth was no longer required to simply stand without falling, Lindsay's speech delay disappeared. "We're so thankful we went to the optometrist," says Melanie. "It just changed Lindsay's life in so many ways."

## A REAL EYE-OPENER

Eighty percent of learning is dependent on sight. To help your children reach their full potential in school, socially and at play, it's important to book eye exams:

- First at six months
- Again, between ages two and five
- Annually thereafter

Because most vision problems don't present easy-to-detect symptoms, an eye exam is the only way to tell if your child has a problem with their vision.

"Even with my training and years of experience, I could not tell my own children needed glasses until I examined their eyes at a young age," says Greg MacDiarmid, a Doctor of Optometry in Miramichi, N.B.

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