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Sandra Salas (center) with two patients who received free eyeglasses. Photo courtesy of the OneSight volunteer team in Paraguay.

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Volunteers give gift of vision

Eye doctors, opticians travel the globe

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Andrea Lypka / MyFoxTampaBay.com

TAMPA - Sandra Salas says she makes the blind see. The Lutz optician recently returned from her second trip from South America as part of a team that provided eye care and glasses at no cost for thousands who needed it.

Salas has been volunteering for four years with [OneSight](#), a non-profit organization that provides free eye care and recycled eye wear for millions of people worldwide.

With 31 other volunteer doctors, opticians, and support personnel from Italy, Germany, and the U.S., Salas recently spent two weeks at a global clinic in Paraguay.

"We were able to give 13,000 pairs of glasses to the people of Paraguay. If they did not need prescription, we would give them sunglasses," Salas said.

She said that in Mexico -- where she volunteered in 2006 at two global clinics -- the organization donated 32,000

eyeglasses in just two weeks for those who needed them the most.

Most of the eyewear was donated glasses collected at [drop-off locations in Tampa Bay](#) and other cities.

Salas says she wants to give vision to those who need it but can't afford to pay for glasses or treatment.

"We see that many cannot afford to get eye exams or a pair of glasses. We have the resources, let's get back to the community because vision is so vital," she said.

The pictures taken by the medical team show Paraguay through their eyes: people standing for hours in long lines and hoping to get the needed eye glasses. For Salas and the teams working at the global eye clinics, a thank-you from a person who receives a pair of glasses is worth more than monetary rewards.

"I saw people who cried after they put on glasses for the first time," she said. "For many, this was the first time they have seen the world and their family. That made me realize the impact I have as an eye care professional. I impact them not for one day but often for life."

According to OneSight, one in every four school-aged children in the U.S. suffers from poor vision. Thanks to partnerships with local Lions Clubs and other non-profit organizations, schools, and businesses, OneSight offers community eye care through in-store and outreach programs.

In December, Salas says she will volunteer for the "Vision Vans" that will spend two or three days at different schools in Tampa, Orlando, Jacksonville, and Fort Myers. Salas says that these programs focus on providing vision care for children. The volunteers are able to treat more complicated eye conditions and refer children to specialists.

"Even though our focus is the children, we are not limited to children, and we won't turn anyone away," she said.

Salas says the community service they provide is especially important in today's economy.

"I believe in the organization and I am willing to spend my time even if I am not paid, because I can make a difference," she said.

To find out about free eyecare programs in Tampa Bay, call Sandra Salas at 813-949-3909.

If you would like to donate frames and lenses, volunteer, sponsor or find out more about the organization, go to [OneSight.org](#).

The video of the team's volunteer work in Paraguay is [here](#).

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