

All eyes on success of Indian visit



Sikh Union Club members Harbans, Gumman, Palvinder Chana and Sarinder Marwaha who travelled to the Punjab to deliver hundreds of spectacles donated by the people of Coventry. Photograph: David Thomas DT250209 GLAS.1

ALMOST 700 people benefited from free eye care when members of the Sikh Union Club in Coventry visited India.

Armed with 400 pairs of used glasses and £6,000, the volunteers organised a four-day eye camp in Jalandhar, Punjab, to offer people free eye tests, glasses and operations.

Over the four days in March 681 people were seen by the team of local doctors and opticians, 83 had cataract surgery and 11 had minor eye surgery. Around 300 pairs of glasses were also given out.

From all the money raised, £20 went towards one cataract operation, plus 10 months of aftercare treatment.

Bali Singh Panesar, spokesman for the Sikh Union, said: "Eye problems are very common in India but people can't afford the eye care they need."

"Over here eyesight is one of the things we take for granted but in India not everyone can afford it."

"One of the main contributing factors to poor eyesight is that they don't use sunglasses and their eyes take a lot of beating which starts eye conditions like cataracts."

"Sunglasses are only about 60p out there but people think these are a luxury and don't think they are necessary. There

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is a lack of education about these things."

Money for the Gift of Sight project was raised through various charity events, including a charity walk last summer and donations from members of the Sikh and Hindu temples and other businesses and organisations. Used glasses were also donated by generous Coventry residents.

Mr Panesar, of Kingsbury Road, Coundon, added: "It was a life changing experience for all the people that went out there. So many people told us that we had changed their lives, they were so grateful to us, and all we did was deliver the project. There were tears in my eyes at times."

Mr Panesar told the Times about one 70-year-old woman who benefited from the treatment.

He said: "This woman was still working and had a sweet stand in the village. She fended for herself and said that with her deteriorating eyesight she couldn't see things all the time and her business was going down."

"She was so thankful that she had got her independence and livelihood back and could go back out with her trolley and sell stuff again."



A doctor performing an eyesight test on a patient during the Sikh Union eye camp in India.



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