

Transforming Vision Care in Jamaica: Honouring the Legacy of Professor Louis Grant

In the vibrant heart of Jamaica, where access to quality health care has long been challenged by inequality and limited resources, a quiet revolution in vision care began in 1991. At its helm was the inspiring legacy of professor Louis Grant, whose dream of equitable health care found lasting momentum through the determined work of educators, health care professionals, and international partners. Among them was the School of Optometry at the University of Waterloo. It forged the Gift of Sight Program with the Foundation for International Self Help (FISH) Medical, Dental, and Eye Clinic — a partnership that served more than 30,000

Jamaicans and reshaped the way vision care was perceived across the island.

Bridging Borders Through Vision

The Gift of Sight Program initially flourished with shared funding from Waterloo and FISH, offering biannual eye care clinics staffed by optometry interns. When funding ceased in 2003 due to budget constraints, the program defied odds, surviving through the generosity of service clubs, pharmaceutical and optical companies, Waterloo students, and countless supporters in Canada and Jamaica.

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Figure 1. University of Waterloo vision care team at Foundation for International Self Help (FISH) Medical, Dental, and Eye Clinic, 2014



Each mission delivered:

- Medications, including glaucoma treatments, anti-allergy drops, and artificial tears
- Optical supplies, including frames, lenses, and reading glasses
- Services, including eye exams at schools, industries, churches, and clinics
- Custom lenses, including complex prescriptions crafted in Canada and shipped to Jamaica

Championing Eye Care for All

A key mission was to reverse the perception of FISH as a substandard care facility. Through strategic outreach, the program delivered professional eye care to:

- Government offices, including the prime minister's office, Jamaica Constabulary Force, and Airport Authority

- Major industries, including Wisynco, Seprod, and Facey Commodity Co.
- Churches, schools, and hospitals across multiple parishes
- Civic associations and underserved communities

These efforts underscored a belief that vision care should never be a privilege — it is a right.

Building Local Capacity and Leadership

Beyond patient care, I led initiatives to modernize and professionalize the Optical Services Department at FISH. These included:

- Digital inventory systems for frames and lenses
- Staff training in customer service, screening, and dispensing
- Youth mentoring programs — resulting in leadership roles for trainees in major dispensaries
- Workshops and seminars to elevate internal practices

Our goal was to make FISH a premier destination for affordable, world-class vision care in Jamaica.

Dreaming Bigger: Optometric Education in Jamaica

In 2007, I proposed establishing a School of Optometry at the University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech), supported by the University of Waterloo and FISH. The idea was revolutionary: to train Jamaican optometrists locally, supported by a rigorous clinical foundation at FISH and academic partnership with Waterloo.

Despite early enthusiasm, the initiative faltered due to resistance from:

- The Jamaica Medical Association, opposed to optometrists using diagnostic and therapeutic agents
- The lack of consensus within the optometrists association and FISH administration
- The absence of a feasibility study — required to support the program's viability

Ironically, the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, launched a successful optometry program in Trinidad in 2009, the same year the Jamaica initiative failed. In Trinidad, collaborative care between ophthalmologists and optometrists helped transform eye health outcomes — an achievement I hoped to replicate in Jamaica.

Grateful Reflections

The journey was paved with challenges, but also with solidarity, service, and spirit. I extend heartfelt thanks to:

- Ms. Caroll Fofanah for championing FISH's reputation and securing community support
- Ms. Dian Brown-Sewell for managing outreach logistics
- The Jamaica Constabulary Force for facilitating transportation
- Mr. Rufus Chan and family for consistent hospitality and advocacy
- Ms. Marilyn Smith, my tireless co-leader and cornerstone of these missions
- All student interns, whose dedication kept our vision alive

Continuing the Legacy

Professor Grant's dream of accessible health care lives on in every child screened, every lens fitted, and every life impacted through our work. The FISH Clinic stands not only as a provider, but also as a beacon of what cross-cultural collaboration, dedication, and compassion can achieve. My hope is that future leaders will carry the torch further, because clear vision is more than just optical. It's a matter of hope, dignity, and justice.

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