

Eyes To See With



By Sandy Dawson, PhD

Many people, I'm sure, have experienced the challenge of their arms being too short to hold the paper, or the book, or the bible, far enough away so that their aging eyes could still read clearly. When this begins to happen, many of us look for “reading glasses” at Long’s, Costco, or the Dollar Store.

But what do you do if you live on a remote Pacific island that doesn't have a Long's, or a Costco, or their

equivalent? What do you do if you live on a “neighbor island” an hour or more by boat from the nearest village? It was these two questions that gave rise to a solicitation to Honolulu Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) staff and the staff of the elementary section of the Institute for Teacher Education in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i for discarded reading glasses of all strengths, shapes, and colors. This plea for support garnered upwards of 100 pairs of glasses—not just reading glasses, but sun glasses and prescription glasses, as well.

Subsequently on a recent trip across the western Pacific region served by PREL, the glasses were shared. The first such sharing took place at the hospital on Yap where the eye specialist there joyfully took all the prescription glasses. He said it was impossible for people to get such glasses, and that he would make sure the glasses were matched with appropriate people.

In Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae states, and on Majuro, the stories about the distribution of the glasses were similar. People gleefully tried on glasses, and exclaimed loudly when the printed word again became visible to them. Smiles and laughter came forth as they tried pair after pair. All the glasses were claimed, the last few pairs destined for remote atolls in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The glasses project had a huge impact in comparison to the little effort it took to collect and distribute the glasses.

Sandy Dawson, PhD, Director, MENTOR Project, PREL, may be contacted at dawsons@prel.org.

If you would like to donate eye glasses to this effort, please drop them off at PREL or mail them to PREL, Attention: Sandy Dawson.

