

# Seeing the Whole Picture!

by Kathy PUNCHES '96, Director of Public Relations and Marketing

For more than a decade, Defiance College's McMaster School for Advancing Humanity has been working with partners in Belize, engaging in community-based research with under-resourced populations. This ongoing commitment has resulted in numerous initiatives benefiting countless individuals and families.

One of those initiatives took shape a year ago when McMaster School representatives delivered a retinal camera apparatus to the Belize Council for the Visually Impaired (BCVI). The equipment was donated by ProMedica, and shipping costs were covered by Defiance Lions and Defiance Rotary.

That project has opened the door for expanded efforts that will potentially affect the lives of hundreds of Belizean children.

McMaster School Dean Mary Ann Studer, administrative assistant Rena Rager, and four Defiance College students arrived in Belize last May to conduct their annual team projects, and during that time performed nearly 1,200 visual acuity scans in four schools in the Orange Walk District.

Because many children in Belize do not receive eye care, representatives from BCVI asked Studer if vision screenings could be performed during the McMaster visit. BCVI staff trained the Defiance students in how to do screenings and accompanying paperwork. Of those children who were screened, 190 were identified for referrals to receive further testing by an optometrist. Data gathered from these screenings may be used to design protocol to target visual acuity screenings to particular ages in the future.

Studer said the screenings were conducted in addition to all of the other projects the Defiance team planned in local schools and communities. They viewed the eye screenings as an important task that needed to be done. "Just because you're poor doesn't mean that you need eye care less," Studer said.

She applauded the students for their efforts. "The team worked 12-hour days in 100 degree weather to get everything done," she said.

Vision screenings may be expanded in the future. Studer said BCVI staff members are discussing what they would like the Defiance team to do next year and have suggested having an optometrist travel with the DC team to take part in screenings. She sees great value in gathering another year of data.

The McMaster School for Advancing Humanity allows students the opportunity to combine personal and classroom knowledge with research to improve the human condition around the world. Teams of students, faculty and staff have been working with partners in Belize and Cambodia since 2005, and in its newest location, Panama, since 2014.

Between 2002 and June 2016, the McMaster School supported more than 100 faculty and staff Fellows and Associate Fellows and more than 260 student Scholars as they engaged in community-based research with under-resourced populations one family, one village, one school at a time.

Multi-disciplinary learning communities work together for an entire year preparing, traveling, and re-entry processing. This year-long commitment on the part of students, faculty and staff is unmatched among models of short-term educational travel and results in the fulfillment of strategic learning outcomes and high levels of learning.



From left: Caitlyn Pavel, Maddie Homan, Zach Roush, Zack Reed, and Dean Mary Ann Studer.

Any Defiance College student can apply to participate, regardless of their academic major.

The McMaster School for Advancing Humanity was founded in 2002 with a generous endowment from Harold and Helen McMaster. The mission of the McMaster School is to educate students to become committed global citizens, who through their McMaster experiences gain an understanding of the importance of individual liberties in improving the human condition. ◆



**BCVI**  
BELIZE COUNCIL FOR  
THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

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Monday - Friday  
8:00am - 4:00pm

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Red Cross Building, Jabiru Street, Orange Walk T

