



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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Inmates helping visually impaired people around the world

Pierre, S.D. – Visually impaired people thousands of miles away from South Dakota are getting a new look at life with help from an unlikely source: prison inmates.

Two inmates at the South Dakota State Penitentiary clean and repair used eyeglasses that are donated through programs such as the Lions' Club Recycle for Sight.

Dr. Phil Lundquist of Sioux Falls has also trained the inmates to use a lensometer, a machine that measures the power of a pair of eyeglasses. Inmates determine the prescription of the glasses and record the prescription so the glasses can be easily sorted.

Members of the South Dakota Optometric Society and other volunteers package the glasses to be shipped to Mexico as part of a program started by Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity (VOSH), an organization of optometrists and other interested individuals who are dedicated to providing vision care to people around the world who can not otherwise afford or obtain it.

Since January of 2004, the inmates have completed more than 13-thousand pairs of eyeglasses. "We have forty apple boxes full of eyeglasses ready to go," said Lundquist. "This is really a program that changes people's lives."

"The inmates benefit from participating in the program as well," said Interim Warden Daryl Slykhuis. "The inmates in the eyeglass shop enjoy going to work everyday knowing they are making a difference."

Lundquist and others also travel to Mexico each year to examine residents and distribute eyeglasses to those who need help with their vision. Lundquist says next February will mark the 29th consecutive year of their professional mission trip.

For photos of the inmates working on the eyeglasses, see the DOC website at:
<http://www.state.sd.us/corrections/EyeglassRepair.htm>