

For Immediate Release: July 24, 2018

HUGE GLOBAL PRODUCTIVITY BOOST IN SIGHT

As the first Global Disability Summit takes place, new evidence of how a simple pair of glasses can improve workers' productivity and reduce poverty is published.

A trial of Indian tea pickers, has shown that the provision of glasses improved their productivity by 21.7 per cent – and for those aged over 50 the increase was 31.6 per cent. This represents the largest ever recorded productivity increase from any health intervention.

If the improvement was replicated across India's crop industry it would mean an extra \$19 billion in growth from productivity gains alone.

With 2.5 billion worldwide suffering from poor vision and no access to glasses, the research demonstrates the crucial role of glasses in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The findings - in a study called PROSPER [PROductivity Study of Presbyopia Elimination in Rural-dwellers] published in the *Lancet Global Health* today – will intensify the pressure on companies all over the world to ensure that their workers have access to glasses, which can cost as little as \$1.50 to produce, and other eyecare treatments. It will also add to the growing clamour for large companies who operate in poorer countries to provide free work-based sight tests, meaning the findings could have a game-changing impact on the way companies prepare their staff for work.

Prosper is the first ever randomised controlled trial to explore the link between clear vision and productivity, representing a significant step forward in our understanding of the role of clear vision in accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals. The trial, which involved 750 mainly female workers on plantations in Assam, showed that the daily weight of tea picked by those given glasses increased by over 5 kilos, which translated directly into increased income for the tea-pickers and their families.

The research was sponsored by Clearly, a global campaign to bring clear vision to the 2.5 billion people worldwide denied it as quickly as possible. It was carried out in collaboration with VisionSpring, a social enterprise dedicated to providing affordable glasses across the world, and Orbis, a global organization fighting avoidable blindness worldwide.

James Chen, founder of Clearly, said today: *'700 years after glasses were first invented we now have conclusive proof of the link between clear vision and productivity. Poor vision is the scandal the world forgot and affects a third of the world's population. Solving this issue will accelerate progress against the UN's goals on health, quality education, decent work, gender equality and poverty elimination.'*

Ella Gudwin, President of VisionSpring, shared: *"We now know definitively that a simple pair of reading glasses transforms workers' productivity, not just in offices but in agriculture. This has profound implications. It means there is a cost effective and easy way to boost both household income and business performance in lower income communities. While the study focused on tea estates, we see broad applicability across a wide range of labor intensive workplaces."*

A spokesperson from Amalgamated Plantations Private Ltd, owners of the tea garden where the trial took place said: *"There is a clear and certain case for improving vision and providing sight tests for our business' employees. It makes work more productive and more rewarding, and at the heart of this study there is a clear message for businesses like ours – good vision is vital to what we do. This is a turning point in awareness of the impact of clear vision on our tea garden's wellbeing and productivity. We are happy to have played a leadership role in this study and, along with Clearly, VisionSpring and Orbis, will fully support the policy recommendations that emerge as a result."*

Professor Nathan Congdon of Queens University Belfast and Director of Research at Orbis International, the study's principal investigator said: *"We thought it was crucial to demonstrate that performance even of tasks which may not seem obviously visual can be boosted so impressively by glasses. Nearly 90% of workers were still wearing their glasses by the end of the study and virtually*

all were willing to pay to replace them if needed – people knew they were benefitting from better vision.'

Through its *Clear Vision Workplace* program, VisionSpring enables businesses to ensure their workers, quality control teams, and managers see clearly, and helps companies achieve their worker well-being objectives. This year alone VisionSpring will screen the vision of 60,000 people working in agriculture, apparel and home goods, and provide them with the glasses they need. Through public-private partnerships, millions of workers around the world could see well and do well.

Clearly will write to leading businesses sharing the results of the trial and urging them to introduce work-based sight schemes.

– ENDS –

Notes to editors:

For more information on this story, a copy of the PROSPER report, or to arrange an interview with Dr Nathan Congdon or a Clearly representative in the UK, or Ella Gudwin from VisionSpring in the US please contact:

Beth Gray - Clearly@wearesevenhills.com, +44 20 7199 6185

Nadia Rivera – nadia.rivera@visionspring.org +1-917-887-3019

Photos and footage from the trial are available on request.

About PROSPER (PROductivity Study of Presbyopia Elimination in Rural dwellers):

The PROSPER trial, is the first randomized controlled trial to show a link between good sight and work performance. It has shown for the first time that providing a simple pair of reading glasses, can very significantly improve productivity of rural agricultural workers. The trial was carried out over a period of three months in tea-plantations in Assam, India, with reading glasses given to 750 mostly-female Indian tea pickers, aged between 40 – 50 +years. The daily weight of tea picked increased by 5.25 kilogrammes a day (21.7%) overall when compared to controls over a three-month period, with the largest increase seen in those over 50, with an increase of 31.6 %. The effect on productivity is larger than any other health intervention reported in the scientific literature trials for low and middle-income countries. Nearly 90% of workers were still wearing their glasses by the end of the study, and virtually all were willing to pay to replace them if needed—a sure sign of how much the glasses were valued. Presbyopia, the gradual decline of near vision, is a nearly-universal part of aging. It affects over a billion people worldwide, making it the most common cause of vision impairment globally.

About Clearly:

Founded in 2016 by James Chen, Clearly is a global campaign working to bring clear vision to the 2.5 billion people worldwide denied it, so that everyone can realise their full potential. It is estimated that 90% [Please check. I'm pretty sure it's 80%] of cases of poor vision worldwide could be solved by a simple pair of glasses – a solution that has been around for centuries. Clearly is urgently working to get a pair of glasses to everyone that needs them by campaigning to raise the profile of the issue around the globe; championing best practice and innovation, and connecting the people committed to tackling this issue so that we can all be a catalyst for change.

<http://clearly.world>

About James Chen:

Born in Hong Kong, James Chen is the third generation in a family of successful businessmen and entrepreneurs. In 2011, he set up the charity Vision for a Nation in Rwanda, with the aim of providing nationwide access to eye care and affordable glasses to a country of twelve million people. A stunning success, eye-care services are now available to all and two million people will have received a vision screening by the end of 2017. In 2016, he launched Clearly, a global campaign to enable access to glasses for everyone in the world. His book 'Clearly: How a 700 Year Old Invention Can Change the World Forever' explains his mission to help the whole world see clearly and identifies the barriers to delivering access to glasses for all. His ambition is that if a human is to set foot on Mars in the years ahead, everyone should be able to see it.

About Professor Nathan Congdon:

Professor Nathan Congdon, MD, MPH, is Uliverscroft Chair of Global Eye Health at Queen's University Belfast. He is also Director of Research for ORBIS International, and is also Professor of Preventive Ophthalmology at Zhongshan Ophthalmic Center (ZOC) in China. Prof Congdon's work is focused on improving the quality of eyecare in areas of limited resources, especially in rural Asia. He received an AB degree from Princeton University and an MPhil from Cambridge, both in Oriental studies, and received his medical and health education at Johns Hopkins University. He has received the Asia Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology's highest recognition for blindness prevention work in 2009 and a Chinese government Thousand Man Plan award in 2011. Dr Congdon's research on improving the quality of eye care in areas of limited resources has been supported by the World Diabetes Foundation, World Bank, NIH, UK MRC, BCPB, several NGOs and the governments of China and Hong Kong. He has over 197 peer-reviewed publications.

About VisionSpring:

VisionSpring is a pioneering, international social enterprise accelerating the uptake of affordable eyewear among people who earn less than \$4 per day in emerging and frontier markets. Founded in 2001, VisionSpring uncovers latent demand for vision correction; conducts community, workplace and school vision screenings; trains others to do the same; and supplies radically affordable, durable eyeglasses. VisionSpring has distributed 4.4 million pairs of eyeglasses, providing vision correction in 43 countries with over 200 NGO, corporate, government and health partners. VisionSpring has been recognized for its innovative work with the Skoll Award; social entrepreneur fellowships from Draper Richards Kaplan, the Aspen Institute, and the Schwab Foundation; and honors from World Bank, Duke University, *Fast Company*, and Tribeca Film Festival, among others.

www.visionspring.org

About Orbis:

Orbis is a global non-governmental organization that has been a pioneer in the prevention and treatment of blindness for over 30 years. With our network of partners we mentor train and inspire local teams to fight blindness in their own communities. We believe that no one should live a life of unnecessary blindness, simply because of where they were born. Orbis transforms lives by delivering the skills, resources and knowledge needed to deliver accessible quality eye care. Working in collaboration with local partners including hospitals, universities, government agencies and ministries of health, Orbis provides hands-on ophthalmology training, strengthens healthcare infrastructure and advocates for making eye health a priority. Orbis operates the world's only Flying Eye Hospital, a fully accredited ophthalmic teaching hospital on board an MD-10 aircraft.