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Salus University, Women’s Prison Partnership Offers Dual Impact

Elkins Park, Pa. — The Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO) at Salus University and its patient care facility, The Eye Institute (TEI), are known for a longtime commitment to serving communities through both academic and clinical optometry. Thanks to a new partnership with the State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Cambridge Springs, located in Crawford County, Pennsylvania, the University will deepen its community impact.

Through the pilot program, which will be marked by a launch event **Thursday, April 7 at 9:30 a.m.** at **Marshall Street Elementary School in Norristown, Pennsylvania**, the women who are incarcerated at SCI Cambridge Springs will make approximately 200 pairs of glasses this academic year for TEI’s “Looking Out for Kids” (LOFK) School Vision Program. A dual-purpose program, the glasses will benefit economically disadvantaged children throughout the Norristown, Upper Darby and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, School Districts as well as the incarcerated women who are working toward becoming certified opticians through the prison’s reentry program. Support for the partnership between Salus and the correctional facility comes from two Pennsylvania state legislators; the House Democratic Whip, Representative Jordan Harris (Philadelphia), and the Democratic Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Representative Matt Bradford (Montgomery). Both legislators had toured the University with Salus President **Michael H. Mittelman, OD ‘80, MPH, MBA, FAAO, FACHE.**

“The partnership can potentially impact and enhance the work both organizations are already doing,” Representative Harris said. He continued, “Identifying projects and partnerships among organizations across Pennsylvania such as Salus and Cambridge Springs is one of the most valuable tools to spur opportunity and strengthen our communities.”

Since establishing LOFK in 2007, TEI works closely with school nurses to deploy the Mobile Vision Care Unit, also known as the “Big Red Bus,” to schools throughout Philadelphia and its surrounding school districts to provide vision screenings and comprehensive eye exams if needed. Collaboration between both programs at the University’s TEI and the prison was strongly encouraged by both representatives.

“This expansion will help remove learning barriers for more local school children who need access to vision services while simultaneously preparing the female inmates an opportunity to participate fully in society following their release,” Representative Bradford said.

The state-of-the-art optical lab at SCI Cambridge Springs was established in 1999 and supplies eyeglasses to 23 state correctional institutions and one motivational boot camp operated by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections as well as state hospitals, the state police and other agencies. According to the American Board of Opticianry, the prison hosts the only accredited prep course for optician certification in Pennsylvania, and 54 incarcerated females currently hold the certification at Cambridge Springs.

“We are thrilled to be partnering with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Cambridge Springs Optical unit to provide high quality, cost-effective glasses to our Looking Out for Kids and other vision outreach programs,” Dr. Mittelman said. “This relationship provides a wonderful opportunity for those learning how to become an optician to gain valuable experiences in making glasses for a wide range of age groups while at the same time serving to help build a bridge for these individuals to a viable profession that provides a sustainable income for them. Salus and our patients also gain a great source of high-quality optical devices made with care and commitment.”

Dr. Brandy Scombordi, pediatric optometrist at TEI and coordinator of the School Vision Programs, hopes the project continues to grow with the goal of extending the program’s vision resources to an entire school district and nonprofit organizations throughout the community.

“The women in the prison, many of whom are currently separated from their own children, were extremely excited when we explained the program and told them the glasses will help underserved children,” Dr. Scombordi said. “They were thankful for the extra work and thrilled to learn the glasses they’re making will benefit children who are facing hardships they too may have faced prior to being incarcerated.”

About Salus University

Salus University, founded as the Pennsylvania College of Optometry in 1919, today is a diversified, globally recognized professional academic center of learning that offers a wide range of degree programs in the professions of Optometry, Audiology, Physician Assistant, Blindness and Low Vision Studies, Biomedicine, Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology and Orthotics and Prosthetics. Salus operates four clinical facilities in Philadelphia and Montgomery counties that provide highly specialized vision, hearing and balance, speech-language pathology and occupational therapy services. The University has more than 1,200 students, and more than 14,000 alumni worldwide. For more information, please visit www.salus.edu.