

Vision program meant big strides for young Hatter - Medicine Hat News

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A program designed to identify and help children with visual problems has made all the difference to a local 8 year old boy.

Riley Wilks, Grade 3, looks pleased with his sassy glasses and he's made big strides in learning.

"Vision is a huge chunk of how well a child will do," said Dr. Kerrie Schwandt of ClearView EyeCare in Medicine Hat who gave Riley his initial eye test. "If you can get them in kindergarten, for the first eye test, you manage to eliminate the catch up process there would otherwise be."

Riley's mom, Leigh Wilks, says she'd first noticed a problem when one of Riley's eye's seemed to be turning. In retrospect she also remembers him holding books very close to his eyes.

Most kids won't identify their need for glasses until the age of 11 or 12, said Schwandt.

"With glasses Riley is able to see better and is doing much better at school," said Leigh. "His attention span has also increased."

Ideally Schwandt would like to test all children at age three, which is when they are able to provide some feedback during an examination. However, babies as young as six months can have their vision tested.

Alberta Health and Wellness covers the cost of eye exams for children and free glasses are provided under the Eye See Eye Learn program by Alberta Association of Optometrists.

To encourage eye exams for all students in Alberta, pre-school and kindergarten students are given packages from the Alberta Association of Optometrists (AAO) to take home to their parents as a reminder. There are also classroom visits with the program's mascot Fribbit.

Last year the program supplied 1,600 pairs of glasses to kindergarten students in the province - about 9 per cent of all who were given an eye exam. Research shows 80 per cent of a child's learning is visual.

For additional information call toll free 1-800-272-8843 (ext 232) or look online:
<http://www.optometrists.ab.ca/eye-see-eye-learn>