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Better Sight for Bridgeport Students

Helen Keller International Awarded a Grant of \$20,000 from the Fairfield County Community Foundation to Support the ChildSight® Connecticut Program in Bridgeport

Bridgeport, Connecticut, January 11, 2010 – ChildSight® Connecticut, a program of Helen Keller International (HKI), has received a \$20,000 grant from the Fairfield County Community Foundation to provide free vision care for students in Bridgeport public schools. This is the second year that the Community Foundation is supporting this important program.

ChildSight® Connecticut’s 10-year history of “bringing education into focus”™ matches the Foundation’s goal of improving the quality of life for local youth. Launched in 2000, ChildSight® Connecticut aims to improve the eyesight and academic potential of underserved children in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and New London. The program goes directly into public schools to provide vision screenings, prescription eyeglasses, and referrals – free of charge. ChildSight® targets children between ages 10-15, the age range when refractive error (near-sightedness, far-sightedness, astigmatism) typically manifests.

Most of the children served by ChildSight® have extremely limited access to basic health care, let alone vision coverage – a disparity that has deepened in the past year. Without eyeglasses, children with poor vision are at a major disadvantage in school. Students must have clear, healthy eyesight to see the chalkboard, read their textbooks, and focus on classroom presentations or the opportunity to gain a valuable education is severely diminished.

ChildSight® bridges this gap. In marginalized communities in Connecticut, where thousands of families live in “hidden” poverty, the need for ChildSight® is significant. Additionally, in Fairfield County, which reportedly is the wealthiest county in the state, public schools are struggling to close one of the largest achievement gaps in the nation. Faced with mounting economic hardships, a growing number of families and schools look to ChildSight® to provide basic vision care to their students.

Aided by this \$20,000 grant from the Fairfield County Community Foundation, ChildSight® Connecticut will provide free, on-site vision screenings for 3,000 middle-school students in Bridgeport. Of these, ChildSight® will provide approximately 600 students with free eyeglasses and refer up to 30 students to a qualified ophthalmologist for further evaluation and treatment, as needed. With clear vision, these students will have a basic tool they need to focus in the classroom and to build their potential for future academic and vocational success.

“The Fairfield County Foundation understands the need for high quality vision care for young students in order to promote their healthy development and to help them learn, which is why we are again supporting the work of ChildSight® with Bridgeport Public School students,” stated Yolanda Caldera-Durant, Program Director at the Fairfield County Community Foundation.

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About Helen Keller International and ChildSight® Program

ChildSight® is the domestic program of Helen Keller International (HKI). The mission of HKI is to save the sight and lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Founded in 1915 by Helen Keller and George Kessler, HKI is one of the oldest international nonprofits working to fight and treat preventable blindness and malnutrition. HKI is headquartered in New York City, and has programs in 21 countries in Africa and Asia as well as in the United States. HKI programs combat malnutrition, cataract, trachoma, onchocerciasis (river blindness) and refractive error. For more information, visit www.hki.org.

HKI established ChildSight® in New York City in 1994. The program currently serves children in seven U.S. states: California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio and Texas. Since its inception, ChildSight® has screened over 1.2 million children in the U.S. and has delivered over 150,000 pairs of free eyeglasses to children who needed them. For more information, visit <http://www.hki.org/preventing-blindness/vision-correction-childsight/>

About Fairfield County Community Foundation

The Fairfield County Community Foundation promotes the growth of community and regional philanthropy to improve the quality of life throughout Fairfield County. Individuals, families, corporations and organizations can establish charitable funds and contribute to existing funds. The Foundation also provides philanthropic advisory services, and develops and leads initiatives to tackle critical community issues. It is in compliance with the Council on Foundations' national standards for community foundations. The Foundation has awarded over \$110 million in grants to nonprofits in Fairfield County and beyond. For more information, visit www.fccfoundation.org.

