

**For Information Contact:**

Robert Bessel

860.324.8267

rbessel@yahoo.com

**For Immediate Release**

## **Lions Find 12% of Pre-school Children Have Vision Problems**

### ***Free Screenings of 41,224 Children Save Sight, Improve Learning***

**Cromwell, Conn. – December 10, 2015** – Connecticut Lions' vision screenings of 41,224 pre-school children have uncovered 4,888 vision issues, many that threaten the child's sight. The Lions plan to screen every child in Connecticut between the ages of six months and six years.

"This program could help thousands of Connecticut children see and perform better in school," said Daniel Uitti (pronounced "witty"), one of three chairmen of Kidsight USA in Connecticut, a Lions program to provide free eye screenings to young children.

Eye screenings for children as young as six months are now possible with camera-like devices that take highly accurate measurements of a child's eyes in seconds. The child sees and hears digital birds chirping while the camera does its job.

Most parents of pre-school children do not suspect that anything may be wrong with their child's vision. Young children lack the ability to articulate a vision problem, and routine pediatric exams rarely detect serious eye conditions.

Experts estimate that as many as five percent of children have amblyopia — commonly known as "lazy eye." At an early age, the child's brain is learning to use his or her developing eyes. If one of the child's eyes shows a blurry image, the brain will sometimes "turn that eye off." The older a child gets, the greater the risk that the brain will teach the eye not to see permanently.

In Bristol, Amy and Derek Werner were surprised by screenings of their twin daughters' eyes. "We never thought that anything was wrong with their vision," said the couple. "The Lions Club screener showed that their eyes refracted light differently. A full vision exam by an ophthalmologist resulted in a diagnosis of amblyopia – a condition where one eye has 20/20 vision while the other eye is extremely weak. The doctor explained that if this condition had not been treated within the next year or two, our daughters could have completely lost vision in the weaker eye."

Detecting other vision problems in the early school years may also improve academic performance since educators say that 80% of learning is visual. Most vision screenings do not occur until a child has problems learning or paying attention in school.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and The American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus endorse photoscreening for young children as a part of regular vision checkups.

To ensure that children are screened, Connecticut Lions have been encouraging public school districts to allow them to conduct eye screening as part of the regular battery of tests required of kindergartners.

To date, Connecticut Lions have screened 41,224 of the approximately 200,000 pre-school children for eye diseases. Lions Clubs around the state are raising money to augment the six vision screening devices that the Lions currently own. The Lions plan to screen an additional 24,000 children by July 1, 2016.

The Lions' goal of screening all pre-school children in Connecticut has one major impediment: lack of parent awareness of the risks facing their children if these diseases go undetected.

"Without parental consent, we cannot screen a child's eyes," said Uitti. "Our task is to get the word to parents of these youngsters so they can help prevent a lifetime of vision and learning issues."

#####

### **About Lions and Kidsight USA**

Lions Clubs International is the largest service club organization in the world. Its 1.35 million members in more than 46,000 clubs serve communities in more than 200 countries and geographical areas around the globe. Since 1917, Lions clubs have aided the blind and visually impaired, championed youth initiatives and strengthened local communities through hands-on service and humanitarian projects.

KidSight USA is supported by Lions Clubs International Foundation, which offers matching grants to Lions involved in vision screening. The foundation has awarded \$2.2 million in grants since 2000 to support children's vision-screening programs in the U.S. Two manufacturers of vision screening devices, Plusoptix and Welch Allyn, Inc., have also partnered with KidSight USA to provide financial support for the development of the program.

For more information about Lions Clubs International, visit [lionsclubs.org](http://lionsclubs.org).