

Kids Connect is pleased to report on an innovative grant from the Metro West Community Health Care Foundation for Natick youth. The grant provides for a behavioral vision evaluation and treatment if needed at no cost. To qualify for the program, parents filled out a simple Vision Symptom Questionnaire which listed behaviors/symptoms which they may have observed. The questionnaire can be found at the Kids Connect website at www.kids-connect.org.

In this grant, Kids Connect, a non-profit tutoring program, teamed up with Dr. John Abbondanza, a specialist in behavioral optometry. Behavioral vision screening is to evaluate the functioning of the eye muscles, not traditional vision testing.

The program, established in 2009, has afforded over 50 vision evaluations, resulting in 26 patients who have successfully completed the vision therapy program with several others currently being treated. Of the students who have completed the therapy program to date, a remarkable 48% to 68% decrease in symptoms was observed.

Vision therapy is a series of exercises that aim to improve the function and efficiency of the visual system. Children, adolescents, and adults struggling with reading, school, or work can benefit from these exercises. Patients with strabismus (eye turn), amblyopia (“lazy eye”), and vision problems related to brain injuries may also be helped with vision therapy. Patients with learning disabilities, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and special needs are at a higher risk of developing vision problems.

Symptoms include words coming in and out of focus while reading, words or letters appearing to move on the page, eye fatigue, headaches while reading, or skipping lines and words while reading. Many kids also report that they lose their place and skip over words and lines when they read. These symptoms may indicate a vision problem that can benefit from vision therapy, according to Dr. Abbondanza, and can make it harder for the students to function in school.

Vision disorders are more common than most people think. If you are interested in learning more about vision therapy, please visit Vision Care Specialists online at www.GreatVisionCare.com, or contact Debra Sayre at Kids Connect, 508-652-4211, for details about the program.