

## **2009-2010 Fellow**



Dr. Lexie Malkin

I first learned of the Lions Low Vision Fellowship when one of my mentors in my residency program printed out the informational email he had received and left it on my desk. He didn't know much about the program and I wasn't sure what my post-residency plans were but something about the low vision fellowship resonated with me. I filled out my application, flew down to Baltimore for an interview and then returned to New York to anxiously wait. When I was offered the position of the first Lions Vision Rehabilitation Fellow, I was ecstatic—I felt like I was on my way to finding my “home” in optometry.

My optometric journey began during my sophomore year at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. I was entrenched in my psychology and linguistics courses to fulfill the requirements of the joint major and I found myself drawn to the coursework related to vision and visual development. Optometry seemed like the perfect fit with its foundations in comprehensive patient care and evidence-based medicine. I entered NECO as the Red Sox were in the midst of what would turn out to be a historic season and The Elder's Right to Sight Collaborative was underway. Faculty provided opportunities for first and second year students to become involved in this

community outreach project to understand the ways that visual impairment impacted older adults living in Boston public housing. It was during these experiences that my passion for low vision developed.

Although I gained valuable patient care experience during optometry school and in my residency, there is nothing that could substitute for the intense learning experience of the low vision fellowship. To say that the fellowship changed my life as an individual would be a disservice - the fellowship has allowed me to become a teacher and mentor to so many others who are now beginning their low vision journeys.

The fellowship and my subsequent time at Hopkins introduced me to the national and international low vision communities. I developed the skill-set to speak to small support groups, to large rooms of Lions club members and to present my research in front of the leaders in the field. I honed my clinical skills, and developed my own practice style so that I could care for patients in hospitals, private clinics and even on an RV with the New England Eye On-Site mobile van.

After completing the fellowship, I split my time between Johns Hopkins and a low vision private practice for 6 years. Two years ago, I returned to Boston to join the faculty at the New England College of Optometry and to help grow the low vision program. Since joining the NECO faculty, I have been working closely with Nicole Ross, who is also a graduate of the Lions Low Vision Fellowship. She and I are expanding the clinical program, increasing low vision education and mentoring students as they take on low vision research projects. We have initiated a strong collaboration with the LV Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad, India and we were so proud as we saw Lions logos throughout the hospital and at the optometry school.

Inspired by my mentors in the Lions Fellowship, I have been working to develop relationships with the many organizations in Massachusetts who serve the blind and visually impaired. I have students shadowing me in clinic and joining my research and outreach projects. My fellowship helped shape the course of my career and I hope generations of future optometrists will have the opportunity to be similarly inspired.