

SPECTACLES ON WHEELS

People with limited mobility have trouble getting to the optician to buy glasses. So Tal Tepper comes to them

What do you do?

I'm an optometrist and I run a service called Optica ad Habayit that offers solutions for all those who need glasses but aren't able to leave the house. This includes geriatric patients in wheelchairs or those who live on upper floors and can't go up and down the steps; people in geriatric wards; and people who use respirators such as those with degenerative muscle diseases, or depend upon an oxygen tank. Almost all these people need glasses in order to function with their daily tasks, as well as to do things that pass the time, which for them is an endless commodity. If I can help them read and watch television, I've done a lot.

How did the service start?

I was working in an optical store and left because I wanted to devote all my time to this: to providing the service of making house calls. My grandmother was in a wheelchair in an old-age home, and she was told she had to go to an

optometrist for an eye exam. Getting her to the store was a huge operation: We needed an ambulance and a nurse to accompany her, to help move her from the wheelchair to the chair for the exam. This is very hard for someone in that condition. And you have to remember that a pair of glasses is not like a chair that you pick out and then they deliver it to your house. You have to come back to have them fitted, to make sure they sit on your face properly. That's when it hit me that this was a really vital service, and that it must be accessible to all.

Do you charge a higher fee?

I work with the same price list that they use in the optical stores. The price includes the eye exam, the glasses and another visit to deliver the glasses and make sure that everything is okay. Plus there's also a one-year guarantee to come back to the customer's home in case of any problem. The only difference is that I charge for the visit even

if the person doesn't order glasses, since I devote time to this and transport all the equipment. I basically bring the whole shop to the customer's house.

Aside from those with impaired mobility, are there others who use your service?

Yes. There are people who hate to go to a store, or who are very busy. So sometimes I do eye exams in an office – like at a law firm, for instance.

Can you tell me about a particularly memorable customer?

Once I got a call on a winter night to come right away to a distant moshav. It turned out to be a family that wanted the mother – who was terminally ill with cancer and had just days to live – to be able to see everyone clearly before she died. She had glasses but couldn't see anything with them. She was able to use the new glasses for a week before she died. After the shivah, her son called to thank me for making



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Tal Tepper

it possible at least for her to see her children and grandchildren in her final days. This was an unusual case where they spared no expense. Usually it's different: When terminally ill patients are involved, either they opt not to spend anything on glasses at all, or ask for the cheapest kind, knowing that time is short. Here it was the opposite: They wanted the best, the most expensive and the fastest."