

Dr James Muecke AM

2020 Australian of the Year, Eye Surgeon & Blindness Prevention Pioneer

Dr James Muecke AM has dedicated his career to the prevention of blindness and ophthalmic research. An ophthalmologist based in South Australia, in 2000 he founded the not for profit organisation Sight For All, which is dedicated to fighting all causes of blindness with projects in Aboriginal and other Australian communities, as well as in Asia and Africa.

James' contribution to blindness prevention was recognised with the titles South Australian of the Year and Australian of the Year for 2020.

An authentic and passionate keynote speaker, James tells the story of his life, the communities he has worked in and the impact that his organisation, Sight For All has had. He also speaks, with compelling evidence and conviction, about the need to prevent the leading cause of blindness in adults - type 2 diabetes - a disease that impacts nearly one in every 10 Australians and is now recognised as a "looming catastrophe for our health system".



More about Dr James Muecke AM

With 80% of world blindness avoidable - and almost 90% in poor countries - Dr James Muecke AM treats blindness as a human rights issue.

Since starting his medical career in Kenya, he has been passionate about fighting blindness. In 2000, he co-founded Vision Myanmar at the South Australian Institute of Ophthalmology. The \$1 million program has developed and operated eye health and blindness initiatives in Myanmar.

Inspired by this program's success, James co-founded Sight For All, a social impact organisation aiming to create a world where everyone can see. With programs in Australia, Ethiopia and nine countries across Asia, Sight For All not only restores sight but alleviates poverty and improves the life expectancy of its patients.

James creates low-cost programs to fight blindness through research, education and infrastructure. He and his team of international volunteers also provide comprehensive training for colleagues in Sight For All's partner countries, so that they can offer clinical services and train more doctors on the ground. Additionally, Sight For All supplies state of the art equipment for the



establishment of eye hospitals.

The organisation's unique 'teach a man to fish' approach is having an extraordinary ripple effect. In Myanmar, where a 2007 Sight For All study found that nearly half of all blindness in children was preventable or treatable, the organisation subsequently trained paediatric ophthalmologist Dr Than Htun Aung and then set up the first paediatric eye unit for the country. Dr Aung now trains two to three paediatric ophthalmologists every year, and Sight For All has established a further two paediatric eye units in the country. Ten years after Dr Than Htun Aung returned from training in Australia, he and his trainees are providing 30,000 treatments every year.

In regional areas of Myanmar, nurses have been trained to undertake screening programs, and general ophthalmologists in Myanmar have been trained and equipped to perform high quality cataract surgery, glaucoma screening, and retinal screening, in particular for diabetic eye disease. As a consequence of the clinics being set up, and Sight For All's training programs, thousands of people are now being identified who were previously undiagnosed with glaucoma and/or diabetic eye disease.

James donates 40 hours of personal time weekly to Sight For All, and is intimately involved in projects in Ethiopia, nine Asian countries, and mainstream and Aboriginal communities of Australia. His leadership, determination and passion has improved eye health and helped alleviate poverty and disadvantage.

Client testimonials

“ James was a keynote speaker at the 2017 Social Capital Conference, a peak event for the social innovation and entrepreneurship community. His address held the audience spellbound - and received a steady flow of praise for quite some time after the event. James has the rare ability to seamlessly present both a strong rational case for change, and to humanise it. His combination of deep professional insight and personal stories is powerful. Certainly, the tremendous and selfless work he, and the Sight for All team, are doing is a story that many more people must hear.

- *Social Capital*

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