

# Health

# World vision

A Leeds family so struck by the plight of people on the other side of the world are changing their whole lives to help. **Katie Baldwin** reports

**M**ILLIONS of the world's blind people could see again if they could have a simple cataract operation.

It seems inconceivable that something so routine in the Western world could leave those living in much more difficult circumstances with such a devastating disability. And that's the inspiration behind a new charity set up by a Leeds family. Joyce and Henri Samoutou are determined to use their medical expertise to help those facing a life without sight.



**USING THEIR EXPERTISE:** The Samoutou family - Joyce and Henri, with children Cherissa, Ezra and Karis - who have set up the charity New Sight

Hong Kong-born Joyce, currently a GP in Seacroft, met husband Henri in Africa. Henri, originally from the African country of Gabon, is a

senior ophthalmic technician with surgical skills so he can carry out eye operations. He previously worked for a charitable eye project in Gabon and saw first hand the need for eye surgery and the difference it could make to people's lives, with patients travelling for days to receive life-transforming treatment. That project was so successful that it is now self-sustaining. Now the couple plan to set up a similar centre in the Republic of Congo, where Joyce said the need was even greater. "We have seen in Gabon an old man who had not seen his wife for 25 years," she said. "A boy of eight had never seen his mum, and for him to see her

for the first time, it was priceless. "In Congo, we know the need is even greater." She said that the country had never had an eye centre which could do surgery, so easily treatable eye conditions such as cataracts resulted in blindness. "Currently, it is estimated that four in five people who are blind in the Congo are blind as a result of cataract, which can be easily reversed by a simple operation costing around £50," she said. "When Henri spent four days there in April 2010, he was completely overwhelmed by desperate patients, many of whom waited for months, even years, and travelled for days to see him." The couple have set up their charity

New Sight and they are aiming to raise £100,000 to enable them to move to Congo next year. "Four out of five people who are blind don't need to be," Joyce said. "Out of those four, for more than 80 per cent of them we would be able to sort something out with a simple cataract operation." Joyce will run the administration of the centre as well as educate their three young children Cherissa, six, Ezra, two, and Karis, one, and is hoping to work in a local charity hospital. Henri will treat patients and work towards the centre becoming self-sufficient. The couple will have to live in conditions very different to those in West Yorkshire, with electricity only available twice a week and water coming from rain collection tanks.

## Passionate

But Joyce said they were looking forward to being able to transform people's lives. "We feel very passionate about it," she said. So far the couple have collected £35,000 towards their £100,000 target. They hope that will increase even



**SUCCESSFUL CENTRE:** An operation is performed at the eye clinic set up by Henri Samoutou in Gabon, Africa and, *right*, a patient celebrates regaining his sight

