



Report to the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind  
April 20, 2015  
by Virginia A. Jacko, President & CEO  
Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Inc.

MIAMI LIGHTHOUSE MISSION STATEMENT:

*To provide vision rehabilitation  
and eye health services  
that promote independence,  
to collaborate with and educate professionals,  
and to conduct research in related fields.*

Founded in 1931, Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Inc. is Florida's largest and oldest private, nonprofit agency. We provide eye health services to underserved schoolchildren in 67 Florida counties and vision rehabilitation and training for the estimated 60,000 residents living in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties who are blind or visually impaired (estimate from *Prevalence of Visual Impairment in Florida by County*, Florida Association Agencies Serving the Blind, 2013). According to this estimate, Miami-Dade County has the largest number of visually impaired residents of any county in Florida.

Miami Lighthouse ranks nationally among the top 2% of the 8,000 nonprofit organizations evaluated by Charity Navigator based upon sound fiscal management and responsible use of donor dollars thus ranking as one of the elite 160 nonprofits in the nation that have received a 4-star rating from the national evaluator Charity Navigator for seven years in a row. Of the organizations followed by Charity Navigator, only about one in four gets a 4-star rating and, indeed, to accomplish this for seven continuous years is most significant.

Miami Lighthouse has been continuously accredited by the National Accreditation Council for Blind and Low Vision Services (NAC) since 1978. This accreditation confirms our agency's adherence to best practices based upon our self-evaluation of NAC standards and indicators and their on-site reviews. CEO Virginia Jacko serves on the Board of Directors of NAC, and Chief Program Officer Carol Brady-Simmons serves as an on-site peer reviewer for agencies seeking NAC accreditation.

## **National Recognition:**

Through our continued collaborations with the academic community, Miami Lighthouse has gained a reputation as an innovator in vision rehabilitation and has, in keeping with our mission, contributed to expanding the number of vision rehabilitation professionals. During 2014 our certified low vision occupational therapist provided eight-week practicum internships for twelve occupational therapist students from Florida International University and our Orientation and Mobility staff supervised five O&M interns from, Florida State University and the University of Massachusetts. In past years we have also provided Orientation and Mobility internships to students from Stephen F. Austin State University, University of Pittsburgh, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Western Michigan University, Texas Tech, and the University of Northern Colorado.

In collaboration with Second Sight and the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, Carol Brady Simmons, COMS and Raquel Vander Biest, OTR/L and CLVT are providing rehabilitation services to the tenth patient in the U.S. successfully completing the artificial retinal implant surgery.

In order to offer our comprehensive Braille music course to a wider audience not limited by geography, we recently debuted our distance learning Braille music curriculum. This first-of-its-kind online instruction for Braille music, developed over a two-year period by Miami Lighthouse instructors makes Braille music learning available to students worldwide. Students who complete the course are delighted to have access to the same information their sighted music peers have on sheet music (see attached flyer).

Our innovative programs and best practices have been featured in national peer-reviewed journals in the field of vision impairment and in non-profit publications:

- "Implementing the Principles of Universal Design during Fieldwork" manuscript pending peer review for acceptance in the professional journal *OT Practice*.
- "A New Synthesis of Sound and Tactile Music Code Instruction in a Pilot Online Braille Music Curriculum," *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, March-April 2015, pp. 153-157 (copy of article attached).
- Blind Babies Play Program: A Model for Affordable, Sustainable Early Childhood Literacy Intervention through Play and Socialization," *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, May-June 2013, pp. 238-242."
- Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program," *Optometry: Journal of the American Optometric Association*, Volume 83, Issue 1, January 2012, pp. 42-46.
- "Mainstream Employment in Music Production for Individuals Who are Visually Impaired: Development of a Model Training Program," *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, September 2010, pp. 519-521.

- "Intervention through Art for Adults Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired," *Journal of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired*, Volume 2, Number 1, Winter 2009, pp. 9-11.
- Building a Rock-Solid Board/CEO Partnership: Talking with CEO Virginia Jacko," *Nonprofit World*, May/June 2009.
- "Leading and Managing Governance Change," *Nonprofit World* May/June 2008
- "Let's Give the Blind Better Access to Online Learning," by Virginia A. Jacko, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 8, 2011.

**Recent Awards and Recognitions**

2015 Florida Blue Foundation Sapphire Awards: Outstanding Organization. The Sapphire Awards honor outstanding individuals, programs and nonprofit organizations in community health care, or health care related fields, whose work is distinguished by leadership, innovation and achievements in community health.

2015 Beacon Council Distinguished Industry Award for Education

2014 Miami Lighthouse was selected as a 2014 Miami Marlins Charity Partner from nearly 200 local charities competing for this distinction, and funding from the Marlins Foundation was used to underwrite comprehensive eye exams and glasses for inner-city school children through our Heiken Children's Vision Program.

2014 Molina Health Care of Florida Community Champion Award

2013 Switchboard of Miami Most Valuable Non-Profit Award

Total number of employees 68: all certified staff involved in delivering instruction (CVRT, COMS, CLVT and TVI) provide services consistent with professional certification and license requirements and NAC expectations, and all children's specialists hold INSIGHT and VIISA certificates, and all six of our staff who teach technology hold State of Florida Division of Blind Services endorsement in assistive technology in screen reading and screen enlargement.

Miami Lighthouse Services  
January 1, 2014 - December 31, 2014

<b>DOE/DBS Programs</b>	<b>Clients Served</b>
Blind Babies	100
Transition	38
Vocational Rehab	157
Independent Living	180
<b>Alternative Rehab Services</b>	<b>Clients Served</b>
Music	200
GED/Family Empowerment	86
STAR/Braille Technology	73
Senior Group Activities	141

Low Vision Services	3,876
Heiken	<u>8,482</u>
Total FY2014 clients	13,333

### **Program Descriptions:**

- *The Early Intervention Program* provides high quality services for visually impaired blind babies, toddlers and their parents. Through individualized child and family plans, the program provides developmental training for young children as well as addressing their needs and builds upon the assets of the adults in each child's life. Program goals include facilitating developmental functioning of participating children (ages birth to five); increasing the level of parent involvement in their child's development; and increasing the capacity of other service providers to address visual impairment problems.
- *The Transition Program* is a year-round program that provides youth 14-22 the opportunity to develop skills to enter the workforce or post-secondary education. Students learn important life skills like home and personal management, assistive technology, job readiness, orientation and mobility, social skills and community integration. They are able to prepare their own meals using safe techniques, and learn how they can label and organize their own home. Students keep up-to-date resumes, participate in job interviews and are able to prepare for careers through on-the-job training, especially through internships. As part of our High School High Tech initiative, our Industrial Advisory Committee assists in providing job experiences. The overall goal of our Transition Program is to help these students reach their full potential; for some of the students improving Braille Literacy is an important component of their curriculum.
- *The Vocational Rehabilitation* program is for clients that are either working or want to go back to work. The program provides comprehensive training in self-help skills, computer/adaptive technology and job readiness. Job Placement Services are available to VR clients. Other services provided through the program include orientation and mobility, low vision services, personal and home management.
- *The Independent Living Program* is for individuals who are not employed and intend to remain in their homes. These clients have the opportunity to receive orientation and mobility training and personal management instruction. They can also receive basic computer training, participate in our Senior Group Health and Activities Program and receive low vision services as well as counseling services. Our independent living program consist of two age groups; Independent Living Adult Program (age 54 and under) and Independent Living Older Blind (Age 55 and over).
- *The Music Program* provides innovative year-round music education initiatives targeting sighted and visually impaired young adults, utilizing music appreciation, instruction and exploration as the tools to foster work readiness skills and enhance self-efficacy and positive peer relations. It paves the way for our students to enter mainstream careers and for post-

secondary education in the field of music and provides the opportunity for blind musicians to learn how to work and perform in a sighted world. For adult musicians interested in sound engineering or musical instrument digital interface for creating tracks, classes are available that lead to sustainable employment in the music or sound engineering industry. The program also provides music appreciation for the children in our Summer Training and Recreation Program (STAR) as well as, our Senior Group Health and Activities Program (SGA).

- Our educational empowerment program is made up of two components. *The Family Empowerment Program* which provides workshops for parents/ caregivers of our students with the goal of enabling them to be more involved in the literacy of their visually impaired child. The *Adult Basic Education/ GED and ESOL* programs empower our adult clients to earn their GED, to position themselves for future employment.
- The *Summer Training and Recreation Program (STAR)* is a six-week summer camp providing services to blind or visually impaired children ages 5-13. The program offers fun, engaging, and enriching activities focusing on literacy, technology, physical fitness, social skills development, art and music. Two Saturdays of each month and school holidays are also devoted to *Braille and Technology literacy*. These programs help children sharpen their life skills, learn computer skills and reinforce their Braille literacy.
- The *Senior Group Health and Activities Program* offers leisure activities that also aid in perfecting one's blindness skills. Ceramics and Arts and Crafts improve dexterity necessary for Braille comprehension. Field trips to local parks, malls and other areas of interest, group discussions, language classes, nutrition management and exercise classes are also available. These clients become part of a peer community.
- The Low Vision Program provides comprehensive functional assessments and eye examinations that link individuals to rehabilitative services and/or assistive devices and optics. These low vision services are specifically designed to assist individuals in utilizing their remaining vision to achieve an active lifestyle and maintain their maximum independence. Exams are provided under the supervision of a low vision consulting optometrist assisted by a certified low vision occupational therapist and licensed dispensing optician who assist and guide low vision clients about which specific devices can help a person utilize his or her vision to its fullest potential. In our Vision Solutions Center, low vision patients/clients have access to special magnifying devices to assist with specific tasks, for example, talking devices like watches, thermometers and glucometers; bold line markers, hand-held magnifiers, special glasses to watch television, electronic magnification, computer-screen-reading software, and miniature spotting scopes are also available.
- The *Heiken Children's Vision Program* was created in 1992 by the Dade County Optometric Association, and merged with the Miami Lighthouse in 2007. Using four mobile eye care units and community optometrists, the program provides free comprehensive eye examinations including dilation and prescription eyeglasses to financially disadvantaged students statewide

who have failed state-mandated school vision screenings and do not otherwise have access to a comprehensive eye examination and glasses when prescribed. This program in collaboration with our network of 2,000 optometrists has provided access to excellent vision care for more than 85,000 underserved and uninsured schoolchildren throughout the State of Florida since 1992. This incredibly successful program has been cited in *Optometry: Journal of the American Optometric Association* as a national model which other states should adopt, and has received numerous awards for helping children from underserved communities.

In February 2013 the Board of Directors approved our “Strategic Vision for Expansion of Programs in our Center of Excellence Initiative” which focuses on six initiatives over the four-year period from 2013-2016:

1. Meeting the Needs of Visually Impaired Children
2. Providing Career Guidance and Job Placement
3. Meeting the Needs of Visually Impaired Adults, Especially Seniors
4. Innovating through Advanced Technology
5. Collaborating with Academe
6. Positioning Miami Lighthouse for Health Care Reform

This Strategic Vision identifies those areas where Miami Lighthouse must continue to expand and to evolve to meet the growing need for vision rehabilitation, training and eye health services. An update on progress of Strategic Vision Initiatives is on our web site at:

<http://miamilighthouse.org/Docs/StrategicPlanningAccomplishments2013thu2016.pdf>

Our Sash A. Spencer Educational Empowerment Center—a project to enable more blind teenagers and adults to transition successfully from high school to higher education or mainstream employment—was dedicated on October 7, 2014. At the end of 2014 forty-seven visually impaired adults were taking classes to both learn English and attain their GED in this new fourth-floor space. Other activities held in this area include our Family Empowerment Program, meetings of Miami-Dade County Public Schools Teachers of the Visually Impaired and sessions such as Community Based Organizations participating in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools Million Dollar Literacy Challenge.

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