

Miami Lighthouse Receives 2008 Healthy Vision Award From The National Eye Institute

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired is one of fifty institutions in the U.S. to receive the 2008 Healthy Vision Community Award from the National Eye Institute (NEI). The award recognizes the achievements of Miami Lighthouse in the field of providing essential vision care to school-age children, and includes a check for \$10,000 that will support ongoing efforts to ensure that children in Miami-Dade County receive complete vision care. NEI, part of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, is a government agency established by Congress in 1968 to protect and prolong the vision of the American people.

The award, which will support the efforts of the Heiken Children's Vision Program at Miami Lighthouse, is earmarked for research and public outreach that helps prevent and treat visual impairment in children. Miami Lighthouse will make presentations to Miami-Dade County School staff, parents, parent-teacher associations (PTA) and community referral agencies to raise awareness of the Children's Vision Program. New program literature in English, Spanish and Creole will inform teachers and parents about the importance of early vision care to education, and encourage participation in the Children's Vision Program.



Low Vision Specialist Cori Pappas, Heiken Vision Program Co-Manager of Vision Services, fits a young man with eyeglasses.

“We are delighted to be working with NEI,” said Miami Lighthouse CEO Virginia A. Jacko. “The aims of the Healthy Vision initiative are a perfect fit with the goals of Miami Lighthouse and its Children's Vision Program, as we expand our mission to include eye health and education.”

Miami Lighthouse acquired the Heiken Children's Vision Program in July 2007. Through a cooperative agreement with Miami-Dade County Schools, the mobile optometric unit has provided free vision care and eyeglasses to thousands of economically disadvantaged schoolchildren who failed state-mandated vision screenings. According to CEO Virginia

Jacko, a second optometric unit is being mobilized to expand free eye care service to more financially disadvantaged children in both Dade and Monroe Counties.

The Heiken Advisory Committee was established by the Miami Lighthouse President and CEO to maintain relationships with community groups such as Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Health Connect Teams, foundations that have supported the Heiken Program, the optometric community and pediatric ophthalmologists. These stakeholders have provided expertise and support to ensure its continuing success.

The Dade County Optometric Association established the Heiken Children's Vision Fund in 1992. "The merging of nonprofits to make better use of resources is an emerging trend," said Dr. Steven Marcus, President of the Health Foundation of South Florida. "By consolidating Heiken with Miami Lighthouse, a larger agency with similar interests, all of the resources for overhead can go directly to client service."