Virginia Jacko uses community partnerships at Lighthouse

By Abraham Galvan

Serving over 90,000 children and families a year through programming and services, the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind & Visually Impaired’s Virginia Jacko 15-year legacy as president & CEO continues – inspiring younger generations along the way.

Growing from a little bungalow house in the 1950s to a nearly 200,000-square-foot facility at 601 SW Eighth Ave., the nonprofit has created initiatives throughout the years to cater to the blind and visually impaired in Miami-Dade County.

Emphasizing in diversity, equity and inclusion, services include job readiness/placement classes, pro tools manual lessons, a cortical visual impairment collaborative, classes, pro tools manual lessons, and a job readiness/placement services, the Miami Lighthouse offers mostly face-to-face services, which requires leadership that really knows the needs of the community, Ms. Jacko said, “and one I would like to spotlight is Cameron Sisser, who recently was promoted from vice president to senior vice president of public equity and inclusion, services.

Under Ms. Jacko’s leadership, “I never saw myself being in a nonprofit organization where you’re serving food to the homeless or you’re planting gardens at the school. My parents were always very philanthropic,” he said.

Before joining the nonprofit, Mr. Sisser was working for then state senator and current Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber as a legislative aide, and “that’s why Virginia hired me really was for fundraising,” he recalls.

One day, Mr. Sisser said, he sees himself running a nonprofit as prestigious as Miami Lighthouse.

“’If you want to take over another nonprofit, go get a fundraising certificate,’” he recalls.

Mr. Sisser said the nonprofit had a contract with the Florida Department of Health for about $160,000 and now it has expanded and we’re receiving state funds of almost $1.75 million, he said. “I’m super proud of that, to be able to grow it, and that means our elected officials in Tallahassee see the benefit and their return on investment.

About 5% of low-income schoolchildren receiving a comprehensive eye exam are referred for medical intervention for retinal tears, glaucoma and other eye abnormalities that left undetected could lead to permanent vision loss, Mr. Sisser added. Approximately 73% of the nearly 130,000 children examined annually through the Heiken program required and received prescription eyeglasses, confirming the importance of a follow-up eye exam after a student fails the state-mandated vision screening.

“Always had something instilled in me, and I attribute that to my parents for always bringing me to a nonprofit organization where you’re serving food to the homeless or you’re planting gardens at the school. My parents were always very philanthropic,” he said.

“I never saw myself being involved in a nonprofit," he said.

Before joining the nonprofit, Mr. Sisser was working for then state senator and current Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber as a legislative aide, and “that’s why Virginia hired me really was for my government relations acumen," he said.

“I never saw myself being involved in a nonprofit,” he said.

Newly promoted Cameron Sisser learned the science in fundraising.

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