Ribbon Cutting for the Grand Opening of our Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC Classroom Expansion

Miami Mayor Francis X. Suarez, other elected officials, civic leaders and donors gathered to celebrate the Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC classroom expansion. Originally a 900-square-foot bungalow house in the 1930s, Miami Lighthouse’s facility now encompasses over 150,000 square feet of space dedicated to education, training, research and vision enhancement for the blind and visually impaired from babies to seniors. The expansion campaign was funded by private donations in response to two challenge grants from local philanthropists. The project, which was completed in nine months, was made also possible by the investment of Northern Trust New Market Tax Credits and Enterprise Community Investment, Inc.

Honorary Board Director Scott Richey, City of Miami Commissioner Jeffrey Watson, City of Miami Mayor Francis X. Suarez, CEO Virginia Jacko, Mrs. Sash A. Spencer, Christine Stiefel, and Board Chair Charles Nielsen

A Division of Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Inc.

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Ribbon Cutting for the Grand Opening of our Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC Classroom Expansion

“The collaboration of Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Wolfberg Alvarez & Partners architects and Miller Construction Company, who sponsored the event along with Starbucks, and the timely assistance of the City of Miami assured that a temporary certificate of occupancy was granted prior to the start of the fall 2021 semester so that visually impaired kindergarten, first- and second-grade students enrolled in our Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC were able to move into their new classrooms on August 23rd,” said President and Founder Virginia A. Jacko.

Launched in 2016, our early learning program offers a nationally recognized inclusive pre-school and pre-kindergarten classroom environment for students ages one through five, half with and half without vision impairment. The new specialized classrooms for visually impaired early elementary school students include instruction from both licensed classroom teachers and licensed teachers of the visually impaired.

CHARITY NAVIGATOR SCORE DECEMBER 1, 2020

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired has received 13 consecutive 4-star ratings, the highest rating possible from the nation’s premier independent nonprofit evaluator Charity Navigator, placing us in the 99th percentile of the over 9,000 charities in the U.S. rated by Charity Navigator.

We are among the elite 67 charities that have attained perfect scores for Financial Health as well as Accountability & Transparency resulting in an overall score of 100. Charity Navigator states that organizations achieving this exceptional score execute their missions in a fiscally responsible way while adhering to good governance and other best practices that minimize the chance of unethical activities.

Fewer than one percent of the thousands of charities rated by Charity Navigator have earned perfect scores.
Dear Friends of Miami Lighthouse,

For nearly a century, Miami Lighthouse has been growing. Indeed, in August we completed an additional 30,000 square feet of early learning classroom space to our existing 120,000 square-foot facility. With sound fiscal management and generous donor support, we are working to meet the needs of people of all ages affected by a vision disability.

To highlight our growth, think about 1948 when our land and building were appraised at $65,000, when total cash on hand was $13,000, and total investments in stocks and bonds were $49,381. Our President that year was Dr. Bascom Palmer. Wouldn’t he be delighted to see our growth as well as the fulfillment of his dream to establish an eye hospital in Miami, the present-day Bascom Palmer Eye Institute for which our Miami Lighthouse provided the seed funds in the 1950s to launch his dream?

We continue to dream and to implement our vision. This is why we are known as a national center of excellence in vision rehabilitation. We also serve as a nationally recognized center of excellence for inclusive early education. Our Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC is an Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment, a national early learning program accreditation that recognizes early learning centers for operating high-quality programs, and holds the Gold Seal Quality Care program designation from the Florida Department of Children and Families.

To sustain our early learning initiative, which includes our Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC preschool, pre-k, kindergarten, first and second grades, I ask that you join me in contributing to the $1 Million Matching Challenge, and your gift will be doubled. If you have not visited our Academy (photo on the front cover) you are missing a special treat, and I encourage you to call Cameron or Virginia to take a tour, spend time in either the first or second grade, and personally witness students learning to achieve our motto: “It’s possible to see without sight.”

We count on your support to ensure continuation of our tradition of excellence, and we thank you for your help in sustaining our incredibly important mission.

Sincerely,

Charles J. Nielson, Chairman, Board of Directors
Focus on Our Students

Our Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC welcomed students back to school on August 23rd. This year is special as we had had second graders join our Academy for the first time. As we celebrated the Grand Opening of our classroom expansion, excitement was in the air. To sustain our nationally recognized programs for children ages one through eight, it was announced at the ribbon-cutting ceremony that a very generous philanthropist will match donations up to $1 million to support Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC sustainability. Your continuing generosity is crucial to sustain Miami Lighthouse’s vital mission of educating blind early learners. To have your donation supporting our Academy doubled by this matching challenge, please go to our website: www.miamilighthouse.org.

Miami Lighthouse Student is a Finalist in the International Braille Challenge

We are so proud to tell you about nine-year-old Jeremy “JJ,” one of our talented students, who was a finalist in the international braille literacy competition. JJ was among finalists from 50 U. S. States and Canada competing in the Braille Challenge, a test of reading and writing skills for blind and visually impaired children. He was one of only 10 finalists in his age group.

JJ was diagnosed with bilateral retinoblastoma, a form of pediatric cancer, when he was 15 months old, eventually rendering him completely blind. At age three he began learning the fundamentals of braille. Today he is amazingly adept on his braille tablet, which was especially important during the pandemic when he was able to do his assignments in Microsoft Word in braille and then email them to his teachers who received them in regular print.

Transition Students Experience the Amazing OrCam

Three of our Pre-Employment Transition Services students, Emily, Diandre, and Marnel, have each received an OrCam device thanks to Miami Lighthouse. OrCam is the portable, wearable, lightweight smart camera for blind and visually impaired individuals that reads printed or digital text aloud and identifies faces, products, and paper money in real time. Diandre said, “I have an interest in the law and helping people out. I want to be a lawyer. I think this OrCam is really going to help me achieve that goal.” According to Marnel, “The OrCam has allowed me to be more productive in life. Not only has it enabled me to be more efficient in my work, I now have the opportunity to compete in a fast-paced work environment where the size of the print does not dictate the quality and value of my work.”
Miami Lighthouse Teens Take the Field with the Miami Marlins

Miami Lighthouse music student Kaden performed the “Star Spangled Banner” on his trumpet at a recent Miami Marlins baseball game with Zachary, our Director of Music Programs. Kaden participates in both our Transition and Music Programs. After initially learning to play the piano, he began playing the trumpet about five years ago. He is proficient at reading Braille music, which is the only way a blind musician can read musical notation.

Blind and visually impaired participants in the Miami Lighthouse’s Pre-Employment Transition Program for teenagers enjoyed Marlins Impact Day at the ballpark courtesy of the Miami Marlins Foundation and UKG. Their visit began with a beep baseball game on the field followed by a touch tour of loanDepot Park led by the Miami Marlins staff. Beep baseball is a form of baseball that can be played by people who are visually impaired using a ball that emits a beeping sound. Miami Lighthouse’s Transition Program students are taught to hit the ball using their sense of hearing.

Miami Lighthouse Teens at Miami Seaquarium

Miami Lighthouse Transition summer program students ages 14 to 18 spent the day and experienced a private interaction with dolphins, sea turtles, stingrays and birds through the Miami Seaquarium’s touch tour. With the help of trainers and animal keepers, our students used their other senses and hands to learn more about local and foreign wildlife. The students were exposed to a multisensory experience by feeding, playing with and petting the animals at the Miami Seaquarium.

Florida Panther Hockey Clinic Exposes Miami Lighthouse Students to a Special Sensory Experience

Miami Lighthouse Transition Program teenage students got the opportunity to take part in a hands-on hockey clinic thanks to the Florida Panthers Foundation. The teenagers played floorball in the bowl of the BB&T Center. Prior to the clinic, they also participated in a career development panel. Miami Lighthouse has been the recipient of a Community Champions grant from the Florida Panthers Foundation to help us provide financially disadvantaged Florida students the opportunity to receive eye exams and prescription glasses at no cost through our Florida Heiken Children’s Vision Program.
Students Enjoy a “Delicious” Summer Camp Field Trip
Our young students recently enjoyed an on-campus “field trip” provided by The Real Food Academy during which they discovered the benefits of “real food” and how to use natural, alternative ingredients to make healthier meals. Wearing chef’s hats to transform them into “chefs for a day,” they learned cooking techniques such as how to mix and measure ingredients, preparation of fruit kebabs, and how to knead dough while making pizzas. Our thanks to The Real Food Academy for providing our students with a deliciously memorable day.

Preparing Students for Back to School during Children’s Eye Health and Safety Month
August was Children’s Eye Health and Safety Month, and Miami Kids Magazine and our Florida Heiken Children’s Vision Program provided free eye exams and glasses for financially disadvantaged students as part of back-to-school celebrations. Over 50 schoolchildren received a comprehensive eye exam with dilation. With prescription glasses provided by our Heiken Program, these students in need will have clear vision and the opportunity to achieve academic success. The goal of our statewide Heiken Program is to promote health equity for underserved schoolchildren.

The crucial services provided by our Heiken Program are confirmed by American Optometric Association (AOA) research that shows one in four children has an undiagnosed vision problem. “Good vision is critical for many classroom tasks. A comprehensive eye examination for students is one of the most important ‘to-dos’ as children head back to school, and yet it is often overlooked. Without an eye exam, many children will suffer from undetected vision problems, and some may even be misdiagnosed as having a learning disorder,” according to the AOA.
Events

Young Professionals Host Lighthouse Legislative Luncheon

The Young Professionals of the Lighthouse (YPOL) hosted our annual Lighthouse Legislative Luncheon on July 14th. The event honored Miami Lighthouse champions that included local, state and federally elected officials and was hosted by the law firm of Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman. The Florida Legislature, Florida Department of Health and Florida Department of Education Division of Blind Services financially support our Florida Heiken Children’s Vision Program as well as our Senior Group Health and Activities Program. Representative Nicholas Duran and Representative Michael Grieco presented a check for our Heiken Program on behalf of the Florida Legislature. Guests also enjoyed a tour of our award-winning facility, where they witnessed firsthand how Miami Lighthouse is using technology to level the playing field for the blind and visually impaired.

Miami Lighthouse Leads the Way to Corporate Website Accessibility

Miami Lighthouse held a highly successful Website Accessibility Seminar on June 15th that featured a panel of experts to explain how and why business, corporate and professional websites need to be fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. The seminar was attended both in-person and virtually via Zoom. Panelists included Robert Fine, Esq., a shareholder at Greenberg Traurig, P.A. and disability rights attorney; Virginia Jacko, President and CEO of Miami Lighthouse; and Miami Lighthouse’s Technology Director Bill Rivera and Technology Manager Jorge Hernandez. Our thanks go to our partners in this important project: Greater Miami Beach Hotel Association, Greater Miami Convention & Visitor’s Bureau, and Miami-Dade Beacon Council. The issue of website accessibility for the disabled is a topic being actively explored in state and federal courtrooms across the United States as well as in legislative updates to the Americans with Disabilities Act.
September was designated CVI Awareness Month to promote public recognition of Cortical Visual Impairment, the leading cause of pediatric visual disabilities in developed countries. Because of the prevalence of this condition, Miami Lighthouse is creating a CVI Center to ensure that the learning content for students with CVI is stimulating and ultimately helps the child read and progress in school to reach their individual potential. In our new initiative, Miami Lighthouse is collaborating with parents of children with CVI, pediatric ophthalmologists at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute including Miami Lighthouse Board Director Dr. Craig McKeown, educational teams and most recently pediatric neurologists and ophthalmologists at Nicklaus Children’s Hospital to optimize outcomes for these students inside and outside of the classroom.

According to the Pediatric Cortical Visual Impairment Society, “The number of children with CVI is increasing, elevating it to a public health concern of high significance. Approximately 30-40% of children with visual impairments have CVI.” The National Eye Institute recommends, “If your child has CVI make sure that they get early intervention therapy, educational support, and other special services to help them develop and learn.”

Awareness and recognition of CVI are the first steps toward its proper diagnosis, medical intervention and appropriate educational response. Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) is a brain-based visual impairment. It often goes undiagnosed, is misdiagnosed and does not receive appropriate follow-up care and education plans. It is different than conditions causing ocular visual impairment because functional vision in children with CVI can be expected to improve when early screening, early diagnosis, appropriate assessment and CVI-specific instructional intervention are put in place.

Advances in visual neuroplasticity research have shown that with early diagnosis, appropriate functional vision assessment, and specifically designed individualized intervention children with CVI can make progress in how they access their visual world in addition to enhancing their literacy, math, and all other areas of learning.

At Miami Lighthouse under the leadership of Francesca Crozier-Fitzgerald, a Teacher of the Visually Impaired and Perkins-Roman CVI Range© Endorsee, we are committed to implementing best practices, appropriate assessment and educational intervention for our population of children diagnosed with CVI. With few Florida professionals trained in administering the CVI Range© Assessment, she is addressing the unique needs of these students through her mentorship and leadership in the development of Miami Lighthouse’s new CVI Center.

Francesca is a Board Member of the Pediatric Cortical Visual Impairment Society. She has worked with children of all ages and across all three Phases of CVI to assess their functional vision and to design instructional strategies specific to their visual needs. Her interest in and motivation pertaining to CVI are fueled by her students as they build their paths toward literacy, emerging math skills, and growth in all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum.

You can ensure that our new CVI Center will be able to provide crucial educational intervention for students with CVI.

Join the $1 Million Matching Challenge, and your gift will be doubled. You can make your donation by using the enclosed business return envelope or by visiting our website at www.miamilighthouse.org.
rtical Visual Impairment Center

At Miami Lighthouse Academy we have trained professionals to work with children who have CVI and other vision disorders:

- Teachers of the visually impaired who have received specialized training to teach students with visual impairments how to use their vision or adapt their environment to maximize learning.
- Orientation and Mobility specialists to train visually impaired students in critical skills to safely and effectively navigate their environment.
- Occupational/Physical and Speech Therapists to improve outcomes in fine and gross motor skills, activities of daily living, and receptive/expressive language.

With this expertise and through our collaboration with medical professionals, infants and school-aged students at Miami Lighthouse will receive proactive early screening and early diagnosis by a medical professional, post-diagnosis CVI Range© Assessment/Functional Vision Assessment, and early education-based intervention to maximize their opportunity to fulfill their educational potential.

To promote our professional team’s understanding of CVI, the Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC and its Blind Babies Program was honored to host Dr. Christine Roman-Lantzy for a staff-wide training in September. Dr. Roman-Lantzy’s groundbreaking research led to foundational literature on CVI and the design of The CVI Range© Assessment.

Miami Lighthouse is proud to serve as a community resource for parents of children with CVI and all other visual impairments and to offer specialized programs tailored to our students’ educational needs.

Testimonials from Parents Whose Children Have CVI

“I’m so grateful to the Miami Lighthouse Academy because my son Lorenzo has been able to make such big improvements with his vision. With the help of his TVI, Mrs. Francesca Crozier-Fitzgerald, he has greatly improved his literacy skills. His Occupational Therapist, Mrs. Maria Peirano, has helped him improve his fine motor skills and his hand writing skills. I have seen Lorenzo make great strides with his learning and abilities and best of all, he loves going to school every day at the Miami Lighthouse Academy.”

“Aimee has CVI and has made tremendous progress working with all the amazing staff at Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, especially Francesca Crozier-Fitzgerald. She has provided us with numerous techniques that we are able to incorporate at home to assist Aimee with identifying objects, letters, puzzles and more — focusing on reducing clutter, being specific and consistent, and most of all having much grace, patience and love! This program has been a life changing experience for not only my daughter, Aimee, but for me as well! We are continuously learning new ways to help Aimee with her visual impairment. We are forever grateful for the thoroughness of this program to focus on exactly what Aimee needs to help her succeed!”
Early Childhood Research Demonstration Project

We are proud to report that the fourth- and final-year results of the longitudinal study of our Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC inclusion model are immensely encouraging and indicate strong progress.

Teams from the University of Miami research faculty and Miami Lighthouse for the Blind conducted this study collaboratively through funding from The Children’s Trust. The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the effects of implementing the Miami Lighthouse Academy inclusion model (50% with visual impairment and 50% without visual impairment) on participating toddlers and preschool children and their parents and teachers.

The evaluation had four primary research questions focused on change in (1) fidelity of implementation of high-quality classroom practices and the inclusion model, (2) teacher professional development, (3) child developmental outcomes, and (4) parent outcomes.

**Year Four Summary Results**

- Overall, the Miami Lighthouse Academy displayed high quality teacher-child interactions and instructional practices in their early childhood inclusion model, with instructional practices meeting and/or exceeding national averages.

- Despite the challenges of covid, teachers were able to develop techniques to meet the needs of all children, and preschool children made gains across academic, social-emotional, and behavioral domains.

- Parents felt their children acquired many new skills including language, literacy, and communication skills, and they reported a positive change in children’s patience, empathetic behaviors, and independence.

- Parents also highly valued parent-teacher communication and recognized that this relationship was critical for their child’s development.

**Marlins Women Empowerment Day**

President and CEO Virginia Jacko met Kim Ng, the General Manager of the Miami Marlins, during Women Empowerment Day at a Marlins game. Kim has broken many barriers being the highest ranking female baseball executive and the first woman to serve as general manager of a major sports team. CEO Jacko said that she is a role model and a hero for all women.
Thank You to Our Supporters

Miami Women’s Club Makes Another Generous Donation to Miami Lighthouse

Our warmest thanks go to the Miami Women’s Club for once again making a very generous donation to Miami Lighthouse. This gift will go a long way toward enabling our seniors to continue engaging their creative abilities. Their donation will be used to purchase much-needed art supplies such as large- and medium-size canvases, paint and paint brushes, macramé cord, beads and gem stones, and colorful markers.

Program Support

We count on foundation support for our programs, and gratefully acknowledge recent grants from the following:

Early Learning:

- **The Family Foundation**: $50,000 generous matching challenge to sustain our Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC. Caring donors quickly met the challenge, and the funds were used to hire a full-time nurse and to support our early learners’ art and music instructors.
- **Albert H. and Jane D. Nahmad Foundation, Inc.**: $30,000 for classroom materials.

Florida Heiken Children’s Vision Program for eye exams and prescription glasses for low-income children:

- **AD Henderson Foundation**: $50,000 allocated for Broward County.
- **Quantum Foundation**: $25,000 awarded for Palm Beach County.
- **Miami Foundation**: $25,000 earmarked for Miami-Dade County.

Seniors:

- **Peacock Foundation**: $60,000 for our Low Vision Initiative for Seniors.
Thank You to Our Supporters

Wildflower Foundation Matching Challenge for Art and Music

The Wildflower Foundation challenge supports year-round music and tactile arts programs at Miami Lighthouse that enables us to offer sound engineering and music instruction to our adult learners and schoolchildren and to provide art instruction and supplies for our talented program participants. You can join our Wildflower Challenge by making a donation on our website: www.miamilighthouse.org.

We reported in our last newsletter that artistic works by several of our talented students and adults were entered into the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) annual InSights competition, an international art contest open to artists of all ages who are blind or visually impaired. We are pleased to let you know that several of our submissions won prizes and two received honorable mention. The director told us that Miami Lighthouse had the highest number of winning entries of any organization and that the quality of our art was amazing. The prize-winning artworks are shown below.

Miami Lighthouse Now Accepts Cryptocurrency Donations

Miami Lighthouse has announced that it is now accepting philanthropic donations of cryptocurrency, recognizing the growing popularity of this form of investment and its tax advantages to contributors. Miami Lighthouse made the announcement on the heels of Bitcoin 2021, the largest Bitcoin event in history, which took place June 4-5 for the first time in Miami. Miami Lighthouse has established a relationship with Coinbase, a publicly traded crypto exchange, to process crypto philanthropic gifts, making donations of established digital currencies easy to transact. Each cryptocurrency contribution is converted by Coinbase into its cash value at the time of donation. To make a cryptocurrency donation to Miami Lighthouse visit our donate now page at www.miamilighthouse.org.
SAVE THE DATE!
MIAMI LIGHTHOUSE EVENTS

Music Under the Stars
Thursday, November 18, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.
Miami Lighthouse

Andrea Bocelli VIP Experience
Winter Concert
Saturday, December 18, 2021 at 7:30 p.m.
FTX Arena

EASY WAYS TO DONATE!
We would like to thank friends of Miami Lighthouse who support our mission when making online purchases through AmazonSmile and eBay giving works.

If you are shopping at Amazon, simply shop through the AmazonSmile website and choose Miami Lighthouse as your charity. Amazon will then donate 0.5% of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to Miami Lighthouse.

If you are shopping on eBay, make Miami Lighthouse your “Favorite Non-Profit” and choose to give a donation at checkout.

YOU ARE INVITED
ANDREA BOCELLI
FTX ARENA
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2021
7:30 PM

This VIP experience includes:
• Viewing of the sound check rehearsal
• Followed by an Italian Bocelli Wines dinner at the FTX Arena before the show
• Seating within the first 10 rows for the concert
• Complimentary parking

A limited number of tickets are available at $1,500 per guest (includes charitable donation benefiting Miami Lighthouse).

For more details, contact Cameron Sisser at csisser@miamilighthouse.org or 786-362-7515.