MIAMI LIGHTHOUSE ANNOUNCES THE OPENING OF FLORIDA’S FIRST CORTICAL VISUAL IMPAIRMENT COLLABORATIVE CENTER AT ANNUAL “SEE THE LIGHT LUNCHEON”

Miami Lighthouse announced a $1 million dollar challenge grant from a generous anonymous donor to encourage matching support for our CVI Collaborative Center. The CVI Collaborative is the first in the State of Florida between educators, medical professionals, researchers and service providers responding exclusively to Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI), the number one cause of pediatric visual impairment in the developed world. Our partners in this new initiative are pediatric ophthalmologists at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, the nation’s number one hospital in ophthalmology, neurologists at The Brain Institute at Nicklaus Children’s Hospital, Nova Southeastern University School of Optometry and Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

The collaboration was unveiled at Miami Lighthouse’s “See the Light Luncheon” on October 20, 2021, at The Biltmore Hotel for an audience of benefactors, stakeholders, elected officials and education professionals. Over 200 guests enjoyed a delicious lunch and a fascinating program led by Emcee Jessica Vallejo, CBS4 News reporter. Sponsors for this year’s luncheon included The H. Angela Whitman Foundation, PNC Bank, Raul Leal, NEA Insurance Group and Norma Jean Abraham.

Caterina Sastri, whose son Lorenzo has CVI, provided a parent testimonial. Caterina said, “I was frantic to help my child when a new ophthalmologist told me about Miami Lighthouse, and I enrolled him in the pre-school program at the age of two. Through specialized assessment, it was determined that, with specific learning modalities like brightly colored letters and special movement, he was able to read large print as well as the Braille he already knew to access his curriculum. Thanks to Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, Lorenzo is now reading text at grade level with the appropriate adaptations, support and technology in place.”

(continued on page 2)
See the Light Luncheon (continued)

The highly successful event raised nearly $250,000 that will be matched dollar for dollar. You can help us provide vital early educational intervention for children with cortical visual impairment by using the enclosed business return envelope to join the $1 Million Matching Challenge for our new CVI Center.

We are pleased to report that our new Cortical Visual Impairment Collaborative Center was featured in the Neighbors section of the January 16, 2021, Miami Herald in an article entitled, “How a Miami school helps kids with a visual impairment see better and improve skills” and in Forbes on December 29, 2021, “Miami Lighthouse Opens Florida’s First CVI Center to Address Pediatric Visual Impairment.” Both articles recognized the innovative work of our CVI Collaborative Center and focused on the crucial role that our new specialized classrooms are playing for visually impaired early elementary school students. The articles can be found on our website under the News and Events sections.

Board News

At its December 2021 meeting, the Board of Directors appointed four Directors: Alan P. Levitt, O.D., Scott J. Richey, Steven J. Solomon and Angela Whitman, each of whom has served a previous term on our Board. All board members are volunteers who give generously of their time, talent and treasure. It is because of their dedication and support that we are able to maintain our four-star Charity Navigator rating and continue our tradition of excellence.

Officers of Miami Lighthouse Subsidiaries

**Miami Lighthouse Academy, LLC**  
Virginia A. Jacko, M.S., President  
Karla Richey, M.S., Treasurer  
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**Florida Heiken Children’s Vision Program, LLC**  
Virginia A. Jacko, M.S., President  
Alan P. Levitt, O.D., Treasurer  
Stephen A. Morris, O.D., Secretary
Chairman’s Letter

Dear Friends of Miami Lighthouse,

While 2021 was a very difficult year for everyone, because of our benefactors Miami Lighthouse was able to implement new initiatives and enhance our services for the blind and visually impaired enrolled in our programs.

Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) is the number one cause of bilateral visual impairment in children in the developed world, including the United States and is a public health concern of high significance. CVI is the cause of visual impairment in 30% to 40% of children. Miami Lighthouse has addressed this problem by launching Florida’s first Cortical Visual Impairment Collaborative Center to diagnose, assess and create a unique curriculum for our early learners with CVI. Our early intervention therapy, educational support and other special services will help these children develop and learn.

Last August we celebrated the Grand Opening of our Miami Lighthouse Academy classroom expansion. Our Academy now has space to accommodate kindergarten through second grade for blind students as well as our early learning program for pre-school and pre-kindergarten students ages one through five, half with and half without visual impairment.

Miami Lighthouse has the distinction of having earned 13 consecutive four-star ratings from the independent non-profit evaluator Charity Navigator and has achieved a perfect overall rating of 100. We recently received a score of 100 out of 100 on the new Charity Navigator Leadership and Adaptability Beacon. The categories evaluated were mission, vision, goals, leadership development, mobilizing for mission and adaptability. Per the Charity Navigator website, “This score provides an assessment of the organization’s leadership capacity, strategic thinking and planning, and ability to innovate or respond to changes in constituent demand, need or other relevant social and economic conditions to achieve the organization’s mission.”

I am proud to be Chairman of the Board of this venerable organization and to share with you our accomplishments, which were made possible by your support. There is so much more to do, and with your ongoing help we will continue to provide innovative programs for the blind and visually impaired utilizing best practices. You, our donors, enable us to fulfill our mission.

Sincerely,

Charles J. Nielson
Chairman, Board of Directors

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Programs

Miami Lighthouse Partners with the Florida Division of Blind Services and the Miami-Dade Beacon Council on Jobs

A recent Miami-Dade Beacon Council Newsletter invited its readers to “Meet Jonnathan.” The young man, a native of Venezuela, lost his vision from a brain tumor. The physical, emotional and financial toll was devastating, but he was determined to thrive in his new country. Referred to the Miami Lighthouse by his doctor, he had no idea how he would ever use a computer, a mobile device, or find employment. Miami Lighthouse in collaboration with the Florida Division of Blind Services helped him learn braille, screen-reading software and much more. The result? Jonnathan was recently hired by Florida Blue as a Service Advocate where he works from his home office. Thanks to the training he received at Miami Lighthouse, he is well prepared to succeed in his new job.

With our Florida Division of Blind Services partner and Beacon Council Community Ventures, we are providing wraparound services to ensure the success of our job candidates like Jonnathan. Miami Lighthouse and the Florida Division of Blind Services provide the training and adaptive technology for visually impaired adults to obtain mainstream employment necessary to lead independent and fulfilling lives. This includes training and support for adults entering the workforce and educating employers on the capabilities of the blind and visually impaired.

Job Training Wraparound Services:
• Miami Lighthouse works with the employer to identify and make accommodations at the worksite such as lighting, orientation to the facility and in-depth worksite technology assessment.
• The Florida Division of Blind Services provides rehabilitation engineering services to assess technology requirements at the worksite and set up computers or electronic devices.

Technology Support:
• Following up with client to ensure all needs are being met on the job and providing continuing technology and orientation and mobility training as needed.
• Procuring assistive technology such as handheld magnifiers, closed circuit televisions, and specialized glasses (OrCam) for reading or scanners/readers to enable totally blind individuals to read documents.
• Supplying tools for clients that the employer is unable to provide such as laptops and desktops with screen readers or screen magnification technologies.

Employer Incentives:
• Qualified, prescreened candidates are identified for the position.
• Tax credit for the employer.
• Long-term support from Miami Lighthouse and the Division of Blind Services.
• Entry level wages since individual is being mentored during apprenticeship.
• Liability coverage during work experiences and apprenticeships.
• A poll by the University of Massachusetts Boston Center for Social and Development Education found that 92% of consumers surveyed felt more favorable toward companies that hire individuals with disabilities and 87 percent said they would prefer to give their business to such companies.

Our visually impaired adult clients are ready and willing to work. Employers can help us build a more inclusive workforce of the future by hiring our highly motivated clients who are proficient in the use of on-the-job technology such as all Microsoft Windows applications. For more information contact CEO Virginia Jacko at 305-856-4176 or vjacko@miamilighthouse.org.
Congratulations to our Miami Lighthouse Academy LLC! Our Academy received a score of 100% during APPLE’s (Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment) verification visit. This score signifies the hard work and commitment our team dedicates to ensuring high quality programming for our children. Research shows a direct link between high quality early learning experience and a child’s future success.

Florida Heiken Partners with Lions Clubs International Foundation and Johnson & Johnson Vision on Sight for Kids

We are proud to collaborate with Lions Clubs International Foundation and Johnson & Johnson Vision on the Sight for Kids program. Our Florida Heiken Children’s Vision Program strives to close the gap in access to eye health care for children in low-income and underserved communities. Students across Miami-Dade, Broward, St. Lucie, and Palm Beach Counties will receive quality, comprehensive eye health services at no cost through our Heiken Program utilizing five mobile eye care units and a network of nearly 1,000 optometrists. Our goal is to reach 20,000 children across South Florida in our first year. These exams are being funded by Sight for Kids, a program co-founded by Lions Clubs International Foundation and Johnson & Johnson Vision, and we express our appreciation to them for partnering with our Heiken Program.

The Lewis Prize for Music

Our Miami Lighthouse Music Program is proud to have been chosen as one of 12 semifinalists nationwide in the 2022 Lewis Prize Accelerator Awards competition. In recognition of the impactful work by all creative youth development programs that applied for the 2022 Accelerator Awards, The Lewis Prize Foundation granted $15,000 to this year’s semi-finalists. The awards are for creative youth development organizations across the country to give young people access to music education, strengthen the well-being of their communities and put music at the center of efforts to establish equity. The Lewis Prize for Music is committed to recognizing and investing in leaders who are advancing positive change for young people through music so that they have access to learning and creative experiences that reflect their culture and identity and who create a future where every young person—regardless of who they are or where they live—has access to high quality and diverse music education from an early age.
Music Program Performs at Miami Heat Game

Miami Lighthouse Music Program students were invited to perform at the Miami Heat’s Family Night at FTX Arena on Tuesday, December 21, 2021. Our Music Program put on a spectacular holiday performance before the start of the Miami Heat game on the AT&T East Plaza. Holiday hits were performed such as “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree,” “Underneath the Tree,” and “All I Want for Christmas.”

Art for All Ages

We congratulate members of our Senior Group Health and Activities Program who were awarded third place in the juried “Umbrellas of Little Havana” Art Festival. Our talented Miami Lighthouse artists created a colorful design with pastel art deco colors in three-dimensional geometric patterns. The umbrella is painted in mixed media with large “eyes” adorned with whimsical sunglasses and has a small lighthouse on top. The overall effect is a true show stopper and definitely deserved the winning recognition it received.

Thanks to the excellent instruction provided by professional staff in our tactile arts program, participants in our Senior Group Health and Activities Program have won recognition and awards in local, regional and national art competitions.

We are proud of the artwork created by children in our Miami Lighthouse Academy, which was displayed at the Florida Capitol in Tallahassee during the annual Children’s Week “Celebration of the Hands” art display. Year after year, our teachers and students create unique pieces of art with the reminder that the future of our children rests in their hands. The amazing art pieces are made with the students’ handprints in a variety of artistic representations.

The Wildflower Foundation Matching Challenge supports year-round music and tactile arts programs at Miami Lighthouse that enable our talented children and adults to excel. You can join our Wildflower Challenge by making a donation using the enclosed business return envelope.
Program News, Partnerships and Recognitions

Holiday Smiles
We wish to express our thanks to the many groups and organizations that brought smiles to our children’s faces by providing holiday gifts including Miami Kids Magazine, Rotary Club of Miami, The Saul and Theresa Esman Foundation, several Miami Lions Clubs, Florida International Bankers Association, the H. Angela Whitman Foundation and Scott and Belinda Sime for their annual toy drive. The gifts were especially important since 90% of our program participants reside in a zip code that HUD defines as a poverty zone.

COVID-19 Testing at Miami Lighthouse
Miami Lighthouse is providing free weekly COVID-19 testing for our blind and visually impaired community. We extend thanks to Accessible Home Healthcare of Aventura for responding to the difficulties our blind population have been experiencing with at-home rapid tests and accessibility to public testing sites. With the assistance of our generous Board Director Ali Mandsaurwala and his team, both COVID-19 rapid antigen and PCR tests are administered to our visually impaired clients as well as our staff. Thanks to this regular testing we have been able to make our campus as safe as possible in order to continue daily services for our program participants.
**Events**

**White Cane Day**

This year’s White Cane Day Walk was a winner with more than 100 blind and visually impaired Miami residents in attendance for the annual walk on the streets of Miami. Emceed by El Zol 106.7’s on-air talent Jammin Johnny Caride, elected officials and community leaders joined the special festivities. White Cane Day is a national observance established by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964. The day celebrates the many achievements of the blind and visually impaired and their important symbol of independence the white cane. Escort by City of Miami Police and Fire Departments, the walk was led by Grand Marshals including Miami-Dade County Commissioners Eileen Higgins and Sally Heyman, City of Miami Commissioner Joe Carollo, Miami-Dade County Public School Board Member Lucia Baez-Geller, representatives from the Florida Division of Blind Services Miami District Office, Lions for the Blind, and Billy the Marlin. Presenting sponsors were Florida Blue, High Standard Home Care and Uber. Additional sponsors included McDonald’s, Starbucks, OrCam, Vispero, Ambutech, Lions for the Blind, TracFone and others.

**Music Under the Stars**


Evening entertainment featured our amazing Miami Lighthouse Inner Vision Band and was emceed by Olga Villaverde, host of The Health Channel's Balancing Act. Guests feasted on edible delights provided by Perricone’s, CrepeMaker, The Big Cheese, Don Paella, Seasons 52, Roasters ‘N Toasters, Sport’s Grill, El Carajo, Vicky Bakery, Starbucks, Islas Canarias, Cafe Bernie, E11even Vodka, Eagle Brands and more. The program honored iCare Health Solutions and Florida State Legislators for their commitment to our Florida Heiken Program.
Music Under the Stars (continued)

Events

Miami Lighthouse was Community Partner for Andrea Bocelli Concert

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind was proud to be the community partner for the Andrea Bocelli Winter Concert at FTX Arena on December 18th, 2021. Our special guest attendees were greeted by Peter Kepes, Vice President at Gelb Productions, the Bocelli Concert promotions company. During the pre-concert dinner, Miami Lighthouse music student Silvio Plata serenaded our attendees with Bocelli-themed opera arias accompanied on piano by Miami Lighthouse music instructor Oman Pedreira.

Is Your Website Compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act?

Technology is supposed to open doors, not close them. In a digitally dependent world, accessible website design has never been more vital. Miami Lighthouse’s blind IT experts, who know what it’s like to live with blindness and low vision, have advised presidential campaigns and companies of all sizes to make sure no one is shut out. Our goal is to ensure everyone has the same access to education, e-commerce and voter information from the keyboard and computer screen. Your business can ensure accessibility by requesting a website audit.

Let us help you make your website ADA compliant. Request your free consultation today. The Miami Lighthouse for the Blind offers website auditing by highly qualified visually impaired assistive technology IT specialists to ensure website accessibility for users with disabilities. We also offer quarterly reviews of websites to ensure website accessibility on a continuous basis. Send us an email at ADACompliance@miamilighthouse.org or call 305-856-4176.
Volunteers, Tours and Disability Awareness

USI Insurance and Paycor

Miami Lighthouse welcomed volunteers from USI Insurance Services and Paycor who enjoyed a tour of our programs. Their team volunteered during our lunch hour to serve program participants their delicious meals. Miami Lighthouse is grateful for volunteers like Carlos Alvarez, Nestor Pereira Aragon, Doug Garcia, Fernanda Caris Dos Santos, and Cynthia Borkoski for taking time out of their busy schedules to bring joy to our blind and visually impaired program participants.

Rotary Club of Miami and The Saul and Theresa Esman Foundation Gifts

We express our appreciation to the Rotary Club of Miami and The Saul and Theresa Esman Foundation for their donations of apparel. Our teachers and students are delighted with their new uniforms and sweaters imprinted with our Miami Lighthouse Academy logo.

Restaurant Brands International: International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Restaurant Brands International (RBI) celebrated International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This year’s theme was “Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities toward an inclusive, accessible, and sustainable post-COVID-19 world.” CEO Virginia Jacko visited RBI headquarters and participated in an international broadcast with their employees in Canada, Switzerland, and Singapore. As the totally blind President and CEO of Miami Lighthouse, she emphasized that with proper training and assistive technology blind and visually impaired people can do any job that their sighted peers can.

As businesses look to improve their diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, it is CEO Jacko’s mission to ensure that the blind and visually impaired are a part of the conversation and able to participate in competitive integrated employment. Our Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired Job Readiness Program participants are outstanding examples of how the blind can thrive in diverse areas of the workforce from teaching to customer service to call center operators.
Thank You to Our Donors

We express appreciation to all of our generous donors who make it possible for us to provide hope, confidence and independence for our program participant. We are especially grateful to those who have contributed to the $1 million matching challenge to support our new Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) Collaborative Center. One such donor’s tribute gift stipulated that our new Center shall be named “The Virginia A. Jacko Cortical Visual Impairment Collaborative Center” in recognition of the outstanding leadership of the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired President and CEO Virginia Jacko, who is also the President and founder of the Miami Lighthouse Academy. Gifts in support of our Center will ensure that our early learners with CVI will receive specifically designed individualized intervention in order to access their visual world and enhance their literacy, math, and all other areas of learning. Your contribution earmarked for our CVI Collaborative Center will be matched dollar-for-dollar, and can be designated as a tribute or memorial gift.

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.

Fewer than one percent of the thousands of charities rated by Charity Navigator have earned perfect scores.

We are among the elite 106 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.
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.

SAVE THE DATE!
MIAMI LIGHTHOUSE EVENTS

Art Walk
Saturday, March 19, 2022
9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Miami Lighthouse

Music Under The Stars
Wednesday, May 25, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.
Miami Lighthouse

It’s Possible to See ART Without Sight

Join us on Saturday, March 19th from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. for our Second Annual Art Walk at Miami Lighthouse. This immersive arts experience with music will feature art created by program participants and local artists. Our Art Walk is made possible with the support of the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners, Citizens Interested in Art, and the Wildflower Foundation. Our event celebrates inclusion, diversity, and equity in the arts.

RSVP via Eventbrite or email us at jaleman@miamilighthouse.org.

For the print impaired, the Lantern is available in an alternative format. For more information, call 786-362-7514 or visit our website at www.miamilighthouse.org