



LIGHT LINE™

A MONTHLY BLOG FROM MIAMI LIGHTHOUSE FOR THE BLIND

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In This Issue

- **Miami Lighthouse CEO Virginia Jacko Honored in Tallahassee with 2026 Florida Children's Week Impact Advocate Award**
- **Heiken Program Brings Free Eye Care and Prescription Glasses to Cristo Rey Miami Students**
- **A Shared Mission: Lighthouse Guild Leaders of New York Visit Miami Lighthouse to Experience Programs in Action**
- **Global Collaboration: Miami Lighthouse Welcomes ELIYA Leaders from Israel**
- **Save the Date: Music Under the Stars Returns May 13**

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Miami Lighthouse CEO Virginia Jacko Honored in Tallahassee with 2026 Florida Children's Week Impact Advocate Award

Miami Lighthouse is proud to announce that President & CEO Virginia Jacko has been named recipient of the 2026 Impact Advocate Award by Children's Week Florida. The prestigious honor was presented recently during the Advocacy Dinner & Awards Ceremony in Tallahassee, which was attended by more than 600 people.

This award recognizes individuals who have demonstrated extraordinary leadership in advocating for public policy changes and programs that significantly improve the lives of children, teens and families. President Jacko, who is also blind, has spent two decades transforming Miami Lighthouse into a national model for inclusive education and accessible healthcare. Under her leadership Miami Lighthouse has achieved multiple groundbreaking milestones, including the establishment of the Miami Lighthouse Academy which includes Florida's first fully inclusive pre-kindergarten. She also created and fundraised for the interdisciplinary Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) Collaborative Center, recognizing the profound need for specialized care for children with CVI which is a leading cause of visual impairment in children.



Miami Lighthouse President & CEO Virginia Jacko delivers her remarks after receiving the 2026 Impact Advocate Award at the Children's Week Florida Advocacy Dinner.

Heiken Program Brings Free Eye Care and Prescription Glasses to Cristo Rey Miami Students

Our Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program recently provided free eye exams to students at Miami's Cristo Rey High School. Using our mobile eyecare unit, we delivered comprehensive exams to uninsured students at no cost. Once the custom-made prescription glasses are ready, our Florida-licensed optician will return to the school to dispense them during a follow-up visit.

"We are grateful to Miami Lighthouse for making vision care accessible to our students," said Amelie Ferro, President & CEO of Cristo Rey. "Our partnership reflects our shared commitment to helping families with limited resources while supporting the overall well-being of our students."

The Heiken Program's recent visit further advanced our statewide effort to ensure every child has access to clear vision and academic success. By bringing our mobile clinic directly to schools, the program removes barriers such as cost, transportation and time away from work for parents. At Cristo Rey, 82 percent of the students who received a free exam needed prescription eyeglasses.



Malikah Auguste, a ninth-grade student at Cristo Rey Miami High School and a Miami Lighthouse intern through the school's Corporate Work Study Program,

A Shared Mission: Lighthouse Guild Leaders of New York Visit Miami Lighthouse to Experience Programs in Action

Miami Lighthouse was pleased recently to welcome Thomas Panek, Lighthouse Guild's President & CEO and James Dubin, Chairman of Lighthouse Guild's Board of Directors, who toured our Miami facility and experienced first-hand many of our successful programs for the visually impaired.

Among the highlights was a live show by our music students who performed "Hit The Road Jack". Our visitors also had a chance to watch some of our talented 14- to 22-year-olds learn how to play Blind Soccer on our campus mini-pitch. They also visited an art class to witness how tactile art allows our program participants to "see without sight".

Miami Lighthouse's relationship with Mr. Panek, who is also visually impaired, spans nearly 20 years. He and Miami Lighthouse CEO Virginia Jacko first met at Guiding Eyes for The Blind, the outstanding organization where she has received all of her highly trained guide dogs. During the tour Mr. Panek recalled how his guide dog and President Jacko's current dog were puppies at the same time in the kennel at Guiding Eyes.



James Dubin, Virginia Jacko, and Thomas Panek during their visit to Miami Lighthouse's campus.

Global Collaboration: Miami Lighthouse Welcomes ELIYA Leaders from Israel

On February 16, Miami Lighthouse was delighted to welcome two representatives from ELIYA – Association for Blind and Visually Impaired Children in Israel: Director Zohar Farhi and Physical Therapist Reva Cohen. Their visit continued our international exchange of ideas in accessible education, early childhood development, and innovative practices for children with visual impairments.

To celebrate their arrival, our Bright Beacons students performed a lively music and dance presentation, showcasing the joy and talent within our early childhood programs.

Miami Lighthouse's partnership with ELIYA began in 2018, when President & CEO Virginia Jacko visited their school in Israel as part of a professional exchange with then-Director Dr. Ken Koslowe. While the collaboration paused during the COVID pandemic, we are pleased to reignite this important relationship and look forward to continued shared learning and global cooperation.



Miami Lighthouse Board Members, community partners and Miami Lighthouse team members join together for a breakfast reception for ELIYA.

Save the Date: Music Under the Stars Returns May 13

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind is pleased to announce the nineteenth annual Music Under the Stars: Bon Appétit Miami taking place on May 13 from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

This special evening honors our participating optometrists in our Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program, which provides free comprehensive eye exams in our fully equipped mobile units to schoolchildren who otherwise lack access to essential vision care.

Guests will enjoy live musical performances and culinary delights from outstanding Miami-area restaurants, all under the stars at Miami Lighthouse.

Please mark your calendars and plan to join us on May 13!
For more information, contact jferrara@miamilighthouse.org.



Contributed by Joan Spector


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