

February 22, 2019

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind partners with Israeli institution

by Sergio Carmona
Contact Reporter, Florida Jewish Journal

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind has formed an international partnership with Eliya Association for Blind and Visually Handicapped Children in Petah Tikvah, Israel.

Both Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, a local rehabilitation organization founded in 1931 that provides rehabilitation services and training for blind and visually impaired children and adults, and Eliya, a pre-kindergarten school, share information and practices through this partnership. One area of particular interest in this partnership is Miami Lighthouse's rapidly growing pre-kindergarten program, which integrates blind and visually impaired children with normally sighted youngsters in the same classrooms.

Dr. Kenneth Koslowe, an optometrist and professional director of Eliya, recently visited Miami Lighthouse in efforts of sharing ideas between both organizations. Koslowe was impressed with the facility.

"It's a fascinating facility. It's much more extensive than I had imagined with its unique service for both children and adults. It's a really impressive facility, both in its design and the people working there."

Virginia Jacko, chief executive officer of Miami Lighthouse, was impressed with the way that Koslowe immediately interacted with the children there. "He was down on the floor with them and he was reading with them. You would've thought he was one of the teachers. He was immediately engaged and it was so natural for him."

Last year, Jacko, her daughter Dr. Julie Jacko and Isabel Chica, Miami Lighthouse's director of children's programs, visited Israel in efforts to develop the organization's intentional partnerships there. Among the facilities they visited was Eliya, where Virginia Jacko and Chica were engaged with the professional staff due to the recent opening of Miami Lighthouse's pre-kindergarten school. They observed children at various classrooms and enjoyed a demonstration from a young boy on how he uses a tablet. They also learned that both Eliya and Miami Lighthouse use the same screening tool, The Oregon Trail for Visually Impaired Children, as a way to identify student goals and monitor students' progress. A mutual concept of being sister schools was immediately launched.

Virginia Jacko said there is a direct parallel to what Miami Lighthouse is doing with its pre-kindergarten school to what Eliyah is doing, except the Israeli organization has all blind children. "We have 50 percent sighted and 50 percent blind," she said.

Since the establishment of this partnership, the organizations have had monthly Skype conference calls to share ideas and advance the work they do. As Koslowe recently visited his mother in Miami Beach, he thought it was more valuable to spend a few days at Miami Lighthouse in person.

Koslowe discussed the next steps in this partnership. "We've talked about continuing education projects over the internet for teacher training and also have increased occasional visits back and forth. Both our facility and Miami Lighthouse are relatively unique in the work that we're doing, and it's very valuable to touch base and see what each one is doing. We're also looking to continue our monthly Skype conferences."

Visit miamilighthouse.org or eliya.org.il for more on the institutions.



Dr. Kenneth Koslowe interacts with children at Miami Lighthouse for the Blind during his recent visit there. (Miami Lighthouse for the Blind/Courtesy)