

Virginia Jacko Honored with 2026 Impact Advocate Award

Leader of Miami Lighthouse for the Blind recognized as trailblazer for Florida's visually impaired children through early learning and specialized healthcare

February 18, 2026 – Virginia Jacko, President and CEO of Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, has been announced as the 2026 Impact Advocate Award recipient. The Impact Advocate Award recognizes an individual who is actively making significant contributions to improve the well-being of Florida's children, teens and families through dedicated advocacy and leadership.

Jacko is building a world where all children thrive, especially those with visual impairments. Through her work in the Miami community and beyond, she is expanding children's access to education, healthcare, and professional development.

As founder of Miami Lighthouse Academy, a fully inclusive early learning program for children ages 1 to 4, Jacko works to ensure that blindness is not a barrier to academic achievement. The Academy serves as a national model for innovative early childhood programs. Since its inception the has inspired a shift in how schools approach early learning for all children regardless of ability.

As a President and CEO who is legally blind, Jacko has first-hand experience with understanding the challenges experienced by the visually impaired community, including the critical need for specialized care for children. Through a partnership with Optometric Physicians' Network to provide free dilated eye exams and glasses, she has served over 200,000 children in 67 Florida counties. Her work to establish and fundraise for the Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) Collaborative Center brought critical, multidisciplinary care to children and their families who would otherwise have limited access to these services.

"Virginia embodies what Children's Week is all about: making sure every child is healthy, ready to learn, and able to reach their full potential," said Erin Smeltzer, President and CEO of the Children's Forum. "Her profound impact is proof that one leader's tenacity can change the future for thousands of children."

The 2026 Impact Advocate Award will be presented at the Annual Children's Week Florida Advocacy Dinner and Awards Ceremony on Monday, February 23, where state leaders,

policymakers and child advocates gather to celebrate those shaping the future for Florida's youth. The Advocacy Dinner and Awards Ceremony is sponsored by Walmart for the second year in a row.

For more information about Children's Week Florida, please visit childrensweek.org or call 850-487-6300.

About Children's Week Florida

Children's Week Florida is the largest annual event held in the state that celebrates its commitment to children, youth, and advocates. The event, held each year in Tallahassee during the legislative session, unites young children, teens, legislators, educators, families, advocates, and community leaders to celebrate Florida's children and ensure every child is healthy, ready to learn, and able to reach their full potential.

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