



***Strategic Vision for Expansion  
of Programs in our  
Center of Excellence Initiative 2013-2016***

***Presented at Board of Director's Retreat  
February 19, 2013***

***Progress Report February, 2015***

The Strategic Vision presented here comprises a focus on the following six initiatives over a four-year period from 2013-2016:

1. Meeting the Needs of Visually Impaired Children
2. Providing Career Guidance and Job Placement
3. Meeting the Needs of Visually Impaired Adults, Especially Seniors
4. Innovating through Advanced Technology
5. Collaborating with Academe
6. Positioning Miami Lighthouse for Health Care Reform

Miami Lighthouse, with the unanimous approval of its Board of Directors, expanded its mission to state:

To provide vision rehabilitation and eye health services that promote independence, to educate professionals, and to conduct research in related fields.

The foresight of the Board in adopting the new mission was crucial to today's success and to the future of vision rehabilitation in our community and beyond. Miami Lighthouse, as a Center of Excellence, serves more than twenty times as many people of all ages as it did in 2004 offering a continuum of service for blind babies, children, young adults and seniors with low vision along with eye health services for financially disadvantaged schoolchildren throughout the state of Florida.

The Strategic Vision presented in this document identifies those areas of service where Miami Lighthouse must continue to expand and to evolve to meet the vision rehabilitation needs of its clients. These areas include:

### **Meeting the Needs of Schoolchildren**

We need to collaborate with our public schools so that teachers of the visually impaired are current on the latest technology and so that visually impaired students can supplement their in-school learning with year-round programs at Miami Lighthouse.

### **Update on Initiative 1:**

Our Sash A. Spencer Educational Empowerment Center—a \$2.5 million project to enable more blind teenagers and young adults to transition successfully from high school to higher education or mainstream employment was dedicated on October 7, 2014.

In a highly competitive grant process, Miami-Dade County Public School's "Million Dollar Literacy Challenge Family Empowerment Initiative," we were delighted to be selected as a collaborator on two new empowerment initiatives: empowering adults to earn their GED and empowering parents of our visually impaired children to be engaged in the literacy of their children. We are committed to having a minimum of 20 of our adults (despite their blindness) participate in our program so that they can earn their GED and position themselves for future employment. On two Saturdays per month a minimum of 50 parents/caregivers of our students will take part in workshops enabling them to be more involved in the literacy of their visually impaired child.

A challenge grant from the Wildflower Foundation of \$400,000 with \$400,000 to be secured from donors (total \$800,000) was completed ahead of schedule in 2014. These funds will most significantly support our initiatives to provide year-round instruction in Braille and technology to visually-impaired and totally blind children and youth, to take advantage of collaborative opportunities to enhance Miami-Dade County Public Schools teachers' work with these children, to teach visually-impaired children how to access technology, use iPads and other digital technology, develop career/life skills and utilize distance learning and help the children in our Better Chance Music Production Program™ learn music production skills using computer technology. As a result of the music training they received at Miami Lighthouse two more students have been admitted to the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston.

Training students and teachers on the latest access technology devices, including iPad applications and computer software also supports initiative 2, Job Placement, because blind and visually impaired students are more likely to obtain employment if they are technologically literate. Technology literacy is

crucial for most occupations including broadcast journalism and music production skills.

During 2014 Miami Lighthouse hosted two programs for Miami-Dade County Teachers of the Visually Impaired. Topics covered in one program included Nemeth Code, creating tactile graphics and quick adaptations, iPad use and applications, understanding eye conditions and implications for instruction and overview of Miami Lighthouse Transition and Braille/Technology Literacy Programs and TVI/regular education teachers planning sessions for mutual visually impaired students. The purpose of the second meeting was to discuss Quality Programs for the Visually Impaired (QPVI) which looks at caseload equity, ways to improve delivery of services and to discuss issues pertinent to working with children who are blind and visually impaired. Miami Lighthouse continues to host periodic TVI in-service training sessions for which the teachers earn master points. Grants from the Batchelor Foundation and other donors have been received and matched by the Wildflower Foundation to support this initiative.

Miami Lighthouse also hosted a workshop for 30 people representing 12 Community Based Organizations (CBOs). The workshop was entitled, “You, your child’s first teacher” and at which a curriculum designed to cover many aspects of parenting from birth through adulthood was presented. The curriculum is a component of the Family Empowerment Project, and the Community Based Organizations represented at the workshop are partners with Miami-Dade County Public Schools enlisted to help cultivate greater family involvement through meaningful interaction with community partners and other families.

### **Career Guidance and Job Placement**

Unemployment among blind people, currently estimated at 75%, is as high as ever—we need to do more.

Miami Lighthouse must provide more extensive career guidance for our teens and young adults as they complete their formal education, as well as expanded job placement services for blind clients. We have found that, as our young clients age out of our Transition Program, they still need career mentoring to know “what to do next,” such as identify opportunities and successfully join the workforce. Community outreach to local businesses and more funding for vocational guidance positions is required.

### **Update on Initiative 2:**

A new High School High Tech Grant from The Able Trust provides our transition youth (ages 13-22) opportunities to prepare for careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century job market. A Business Advisory Council representing prominent

South Florida leaders will help provide internship and mentoring opportunities for 30 participants.

During our 2014 summer camp, 31 transition teenagers had job experience such as working with nurses and patients at Jackson North Medical Center, as a teacher's aide during the Frost Science Museum summer camp and doing inventory accounting at Bennett Auto Supply, and stocking shelves at our local Walgreens.

A grant from The Able Trust was the catalyst to reinvigorate our Job Placement Program. We were able to increase the number of clients who obtained mainstream employment this year. Fourteen clients in 2014 were placed by our Job Readiness team as a result of our employment collaborations with Florida Division of Blind Services, Switchboard Miami, Baptist Health, Perez Art Museum Miami, Micro Data, Hyatt Hotels, Marriott Worldwide Call Center, and others.

The Sash A. Spencer Educational Empowerment Center, on our newly opened 4th floor is already impacting adults from the age of 22 to 72. Designed to help teenagers and adults achieve gainful employment, our innovative GED program, in collaboration with Miami-Dade County Public Schools, currently has 46 visually impaired adults working hard on their studies to both learn English in ESL classes and attain their GED. Often in the past, visually impaired students were forced to drop out of school because of their inability to access information. Several of the current students will soon begin coursework to study for the GED Test.

### **Meeting the Needs of Seniors**

Senior citizens with low vision are a rapidly growing population. Support for our existing Senior Group Health and Activities (SGA) at Miami Lighthouse will enhance our ability to successfully and sustainably serve this population and, like the Low Vision Center, will help us learn more in general about seniors with uncorrectable vision loss so we can better meet their vision needs.

### **Update on Initiative 3:**

Thanks to the generosity of individuals, foundations, companies, and other organizations, Miami Lighthouse is positioned to expand our efforts during 2015 to empower people of all ages with affected by vision loss, especially seniors with low vision and blind babies.

At our 2014 See the Light Luncheon a generous donor announced the "Expansion of the Center of Excellence in Vision Rehabilitation Grant Challenge." Under the terms of the Challenge, the donor will match gifts dollar for dollar up to a total of \$5 million supporting facility expansion of our Center

of Excellence in Vision Rehabilitation, estimated to cost \$10 million. When completed, the expansion will enable Miami Lighthouse to increase—and provide access to—critically needed services for the growing numbers of blind babies, young children and seniors with age-related eye disease as a means of empowering them to lead independent and productive lives.

Grants from The James Deering Trust and the Peacock Foundation, Inc., provided partial support for 600 low vision exams for seniors during 2014. Of those examined, 200 seniors had follow-up consultations with our certified Low Vision Occupational therapist. In our 2014 survey of Low Vision clients, 99% said they would recommend our low vision services to others.

Public funding for our Senior Group Health and Activities Program (SGA) was received as a result of a proposal we submitted to the Division of Blind Services. This additional funding will enable participants in the SGA program to receive nutritional services which will include a healthy breakfast, snack and lunch, with menus reviewed by a licensed dietician, access to daily exercise classes, daily monitoring of blood pressure, blood glucose, medicine management and weekly weight checks. Daily monitoring of SGA program participants will enable us to more readily identify medical needs or the need for additional rehabilitation services.

### **Innovating through Advanced Technology**

It is sometimes said, “If you have to be blind, now is the time!” This is because technology advances provide access to information that previously the blind and visually impaired could not access. Technology literacy is important for people with low vision, visually impaired and totally blind persons. Whether using a note taker on a standard keyboard or a Braille keyboard, specialized instruction is required. Screen reading software like JAWS enables the blind to know what is on the monitor. New Apple products like the iPad and iPhone have voice over features. These are a few examples of advanced technology that help the blind if they get the required training.

A recent example of Miami Lighthouse as a “Living Laboratory” to test technology to serve the blind and visually impaired was working with an innovator as the test site for “Menus that Talk.”

More involvement with technology developers will benefit the blind. In the long term through collaboration with business and academe new ventures could be created, such as beta testing initiatives and acquiring the rights for sole distributorships in South Florida. Furthermore, being an advocate for digital learning is crucial so that the blind are not shut out (“Let's Give the Blind Better Access to Online Learning” by Virginia A. Jacko, Chronicle of Higher Education, May 8, 2011).

### **Update on Initiative 4:**

We are collaborating with Comcast by incorporating in our curriculum instruction on their TV “Talking Guide,” which reads aloud channel names, show titles and DVR commands giving the visually impaired auditory access to programming.

Technology is helping us offer our comprehensive Braille music course to a wider audience not limited by geography. We recently debuted our distance learning Braille music curriculum. This first-of-its-kind online instruction for Braille music, developed over a two-year period by Miami Lighthouse instructor Jin Choi, makes Braille music learning available to students worldwide. Students who complete the course are delighted to have access to the same information their sighted music peers have on sheet music. “A New Synthesis of Sound and Tactile Music Code Instruction in a Pilot Online Braille Music Curriculum” is slated to appear in the Practice Report section March/April 2015 issue of the *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*.

During 2014 a grant from a generous donor enabled Miami Lighthouse to purchase hardware such as a Pro Tools HD Digital workstation, Apple Mac Pro computer and scanner as well as to upgrade software and site licenses. Up-to-date computers and current software enable our students and instructors to learn on versions that are compatible with those used in schools and the workplace.

### **Collaboration with Academe**

Through our continued collaborations with the academic community, Miami Lighthouse has gained a reputation as an innovator in vision rehabilitation and has, in keeping with our mission, contributed to expanding the vision rehabilitation professions. We have on average six interns each year. Our Internship Program has been a fruitful experience both for our interns and for us, and we need to continue developing the work force of vision rehabilitation professionals, specifically Orientation and Mobility (O&M), Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT) and Occupational Therapy (OT). In addition, our growing client base affords many opportunities for researchers in academe to learn more about vision rehabilitation, and we seek to maximize these opportunities in a real world setting.

### **Update on Initiative 5:**

With a grant from the Anthony R. Abraham Foundation during 2014 Miami Lighthouse provided eight-week practicum internships for twelve occupational therapists from Florida International University (a 25% increase over 2013) and supervised five orientation and mobility interns (a 40% increase over 2013) from Florida International University, Florida State University and the University of Massachusetts. This funding also enables our highly credentialed professional staff to maintain their certifications and obtain additional credentials. For example, an certified orientation and mobility specialist staff

member is currently enrolled in coursework to become a certified vision rehabilitation therapist.

As part of an ongoing collaboration with the Florida International University Occupational Therapy Department, we offered our fourth CEU workshop on February 7, 2015 “Engaging the Low Vision Community through Education, Research, and Service,” a seminar for Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists and Nurses. On a survey administered at the end of the session the 44 participants rated the workshop as follows: objectives of the workshop 4.9, Organization of the workshop 4.9, Instructor’s mastery of the subject matter 5.0, usefulness of the materials to your job 4.8, with an overall workshop rating of 4.9 out of a possible 5.

Each year the Miami Dade Optometric Physicians Association holds a meeting at Miami Lighthouse, and the optometrists in attendance earn continuing education units. The 2014 meeting CEU program was entitled “Optical Conditions in Children.” These yearly meeting are a way to increase collaboration of the local optometric community on our children’s eye health initiative.

Miami Lighthouse is collaborating with Second Sight Medical Products and Bascom Palmer Eye Institute on the Argus II retinal implant, and in 2014 we began to provide our first rehabilitation and assessments of a patient benefitting from this new technological innovation

### **Update on Initiative 6:**

We are positioning Miami Lighthouse for Health Care Reform through participation in local seminars, workshops and webinars on the Affordable Care Act and collaborations with the health care community. We are also implementing an electronic medical records system to help us prepare for potential insurance billing.

With the support of foundations and generous donors and thanks to the leadership and dedication of our Board of Directors, Miami Lighthouse has made great strides since 2007 to meet the challenges these examples underscore.

As a Center of Excellence, Miami Lighthouse has the responsibility to continue to look ahead, and to find ways to serve this growing need.