



Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired CEO Virginia Jacko Receives Children’s Week Florida Impact Advocate Award

The award recognizes groundbreaking advocacy in inclusive education and healthcare.

MIAMI, FL – Feb. 24, 2026 – [The Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#) is proud to announce that its President and CEO, Virginia Jacko, has been named the recipient of the 2026 Impact Advocate Award by Children’s Week Florida. The prestigious honor was presented Monday night during the Advocacy Dinner & Awards Ceremony in Tallahassee.

The Impact Advocate 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. Virginia Jacko, a blind CEO and former financial executive at Purdue University, has spent two decades transforming Miami Lighthouse into a national model for inclusive education and accessible healthcare.

Under Jacko’s leadership, Miami Lighthouse established the Miami Lighthouse Academy, which includes Florida’s first fully inclusive pre-kindergarten. The model for the Academy challenges the traditional, often isolating, educational pathways for children with disabilities, creating a more inclusive society from the ground up and now serving students from pre-kindergarten through third grade. 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.

Additionally, Miami Lighthouse is the home of the Florida Heiken Children’s Vision Program, which provides dilated eye exams and glasses at no cost to students in schools statewide through their fleet of five mobile eyecare units along with a network of optometrists. Many vision problems in children go undiagnosed, leading to academic struggles and developmental delays. This program directly addresses one of Florida’s health disparities, boosts confidence, and ensures that vision issues don’t become a lifelong barrier. The Heiken Program is experiencing a 36% surge in demand over last year’s all-time high, with the total number of children benefiting from this program to date being over 225,000.

“Advocacy is at the heart of everything we do at Miami Lighthouse,” said Jacko. “Whether we are creating inclusive classrooms where visually impaired and sighted children learn side-by-side or

deploying mobile clinics to provide essential eyecare to underserved students, our goal is to ensure that no child's potential is limited by their vision."

"Eye health care is too often overlooked or simply out of reach for many families. That is why continued funding by the Florida Legislature for essential programs like the Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program is so important. These programs deliver tangible results in the form of improved academic achievement," Jacko added.

For more information about Miami Lighthouse, please visit <https://www.miamilighthouse.org/>.

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About Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired

For nearly a century, Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired has been working to build a more inclusive society for the blind and visually impaired. Through education, training, research and vision enhancement, Miami Lighthouse for the Blind provides hope, confidence, and independence to people of all ages. Miami Lighthouse serves over 28,000 program participants from blind babies to seniors, each year. For more information, please visit www.miamilighthouse.org.