

# MIAMI TODAY

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SERVING SOUTH FLORIDA'S MOST IMPORTANT AUDIENCE

## Miami Lighthouse provides well-trained job candidates

Companies looking for experienced, well-trained job candidates can realize a number of advantages if they set their sights on the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind & Visually Impaired, where special programs prepare visually impaired people to navigate the world of the sighted with ease, a goal nicely captured in the its tagline, "It's possible to see without sight."

Miami Lighthouse President & CEO Virginia A. Jacko says the Job Readiness Program at Miami Lighthouse provides computer training for both Apple and Microsoft hardware and software using state-of-the-art assistive technology, auditory screen reading and large-print magnification, as well as teaching telephone techniques and skills useful in customer service, interviewing, working as a team member and office procedures.

Many of the participants bring with them previous experience in diverse fields, from administration and management, medical services and accounting to retail, social services, call centers and the culinary arts.

"Our job readiness training," Ms. Jacko says, "prepares them to use these existing skills in a different way to meet their new job responsibilities."

Miami-Dade County's Special Transportation Services division provides transportation anywhere within the county.

"Research confirms," Ms. Jacko says, "that employees with disabilities consistently meet or exceed performance expectations. These employees bring loyalty, experience and a lower-than-average turnover rate."



Photo by Maxine Usdan

**Job Readiness Program offers new skills, says Virginia Jacko, shown in a Miami Lighthouse expansion.**

That and certain tax advantages, she adds. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit provides firms that hire the disabled with a credit of up to 40% of the first \$6,000 of first-year wages for a new employee. The tax credit is available once the employee has worked at least 120 hours or 90 days.

In addition, the Disabled Access Credit provides a non-refundable credit for eligible small businesses that incur expenses providing access to persons with disabilities. An eligible small business is defined as one that earns \$1 million or less annually and had no more than 30 full-time employees in the previous year.

If a new employee is going to use a computer, Ms. Jacko says, he or she may require screen-reading software, which may be purchased for the employee by the Florida Division of Blind

Services.

Area employers that have hired Miami Lighthouse Job Readiness Program participants include the Marriott Global Reservation and Sales Customer Care Center Miami, Baptist Health, Miami International Airport's Telecommunication Division, Miami Dade College, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Switchboard Miami and the Perez Art Museum Miami.

"Visually impaired individuals," Ms. Jacko says, "add diversity and social responsibility to the corporate culture of a company by offering an inclusive perspective and innovative ideas on how to accomplish tasks and implement strategies."

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired Inc. is at 601 SW Eighth Ave. Details: (305) 856-2288 or [www.miamilighthouse.org](http://www.miamilighthouse.org).

