



President and CEO'S Report to Stakeholders January 1 through October 31, 2024

As we celebrate 95 years of continuous service to people of all ages affected by uncorrectable vision loss, we applaud our donors, board leadership, professional team, and our program participants and their families. This Stakeholders' Report highlights our new strategic initiatives, and our continuing achievements made possible by contracts, grants and most importantly the generosity of our donors.

Blind Soccer Initiative

As a recipient of the highly competitive Children's Trust Innovation Award, this October we launched our first-of-its-kind comprehensive Blind Soccer Program in collaboration with the U.S. Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) and with support from Thomas Abraham of the Anthony R. Abraham Foundation. Eighty-five children, from toddlers through high school, will learn this team sport relying on participants' echo localization to find the rattling soccer ball.

Our Senior Technology Specialist, Oseas, has been playing soccer since he was blinded at age three, is collaborating with our teachers to develop the first early learning and early elementary school blind soccer curriculum for children attending our Academy and Saturday and summer camp students. Ten of our professional staff have become USABA certified Blind Soccer Coaches as a crucial part of this project.

Cerebral/Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) Two-Year, \$2 Million Gift

This September we launched our CVI Collaborative Research project "Cortical Visual Impairment Diagnostic Indicators and Educational Best Practices for Affected Children." This project is led by Miami Lighthouse with collaborators from the University of Miami's Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, Nova Southeastern University Colleges of Medicine and Management, and Nicklaus Children's Hospital. Our goal is to develop a standard universal medical diagnosis protocol and validated assessment tools for children ranging from preemies through elementary-aged schoolchildren. This research promises to have local, national, and international impact.

Adding Third Grade to our Miami Lighthouse Academy

Third grade is a pivotal year in a child's academic journey, particularly for blind and visually impaired children, to prepare for standardized tests beginning in the fourth grade. Parent and teacher feedback demonstrates that visually impaired students need to be taught how to access and successfully complete standardized testing. Our goal in adding third grade in the fall of 2025 is to solidify students' academic foundation and reading proficiency in literary Braille as well as Nemeth Code Braille for mathematics, and to familiarize them with accessible testing materials or alternative formats. To date, we have obtained partial funding from the Miami-Dade Impact Collaborative to add credentialed teachers of the visually impaired, classroom teachers, reading specialists and other professional staff for this third-grade expansion.

Art and Music

Our artistic children and adults, despite their vision loss, continued in 2024 to receive state, national, and international recognition. For example, a mixed media painting created by children in our Miami Lighthouse Academy was selected for display in the Florida State Capitol Rotunda in Tallahassee during the annual Children's Week Celebration. Our Senior Group Activities Program artists' works were chosen for the Unity Art Exhibition held in Tampa, Florida; the "Celebrating Resiliency" art exhibition in Ocala, Florida; the "Honoring the Woman" and "La Mano Hispana" art exhibitions at the Milander Center for Arts and Entertainment in Hialeah; the American Printing House for the Blind International 2024 "Insights" Calendar; the 2024 Arts4All Florida Calendar; and the 2024 American Printing House for the Blind juried InSights International Art Competition.

Our Music Program students received recognition in the county-wide Young Talent Big Dreams competition and have performed locally at the Stephen P. Clark Center in celebration of the American's with Disabilities Act, at a *Miami Kids Magazine* Easter Event, and at other community events. We are proud to announce that Miami Lighthouse was approved for a \$30,000 Grant by the highly competitive National Endowment for the Arts to support our Music Education Program, including our Braille Music Distance Learning course, benefiting blind and visually impaired people ages 14 and older.

Expanding Services to Seniors with Uncorrectable Vision Loss

We have proposed to the Alliance for Aging funding to expand our services to seniors with a strong focus on learning digital technology. Additionally, adding a social worker with expertise in gerontology is a critical need for these seniors along with others such as food insecurity, transportation, and social interaction.

Blind Babies Early Intervention

To date this year, our Children's specialists have provided in-home early intervention weekly services to 120 blind babies. In many cases these children have multiple disabilities.

Florida Heiken Children’s Vision Program

Our Florida Heiken Children’s Vision Program continues to prevent blindness by providing an ever-increasing number of dilated eye exams and prescription eyeglasses at no cost to financially disadvantaged students in grades Pre-K through 12 throughout Florida. This past school year 18,020 low-income schoolchildren received a dilated exam, 11,991 received prescription glasses, and 2,762 children who previously failed a vision screening received further attention. This month was our annual Florida Department of Health program audit for which there were no findings; we are in compliance with both the Florida Department of Health and the Florida Optometric Association standards.

New Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

“Bascom Headen Palmer, Jr., MD (1889-1954),” is a history of Dr. Palmer by Eduardo Alfonso, M.D., Professor and Chair of the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute (BPEI); Stephen Schwartz, MD, MBA; and CEO Virginia Jacko that will appear in the December issue of the *American Journal of Ophthalmology*. It documents the founding of BPEI and the major role of Miami Lighthouse in providing land and funding for its establishment (about \$6 million in 2024 dollars) to construct an eye institute named in honor of Dr. Bascom Palmer. The current institute opened in 1973 and was built on a 17th Street site owned and donated to BPEI by Miami Lighthouse.

“Learning to Play, Playing to Learn: Peer Interactions and Executive Functioning in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms Serving Children with Visual Impairment,” by Eraine Leland, Sofia Krausse, Bella Lerner, Elizabeth Campos, Casey Mullins PhD, Virginia Jacko, and Rebecca Bulotsky-Shearer, manuscript is accepted for publication in *Exceptional Children*.

The Growing Need

For 2024, we project serving over 27,000 program participants. To meet the growing need, support from our stakeholders is crucial.

For additional information, contact:

Virginia A. Jacko, President and CEO

E-mail: vjacko@miamilighthouse.org | Phone: 305-856-4176

P.S. Miami Lighthouse has earned 14 consecutive 4-star ratings from Charity Navigator, the nation’s premier independent nonprofit evaluator, and has achieved nearly perfect scores of 100% on their new Encompass Beacons of Finance, Leadership, Impact, and Community Engagement.