

## Miami Lighthouse Strategic Plan 2023-2025

The Miami Lighthouse Planning and Program Development Committee is charged with designing and coordinating the Board's participation in Lighthouse strategic and operational planning and recommending to the Board of Directors the initiatives that the Lighthouse's strategic planning should focus on.

In developing this Strategic Plan, the Planning and Program Development Committee reviewed the Miami Lighthouse 2017-2021 Strategic Plan that included the strategic goals of ensuring that Miami Lighthouse has the financial capacity to sustainably meet the increasing demand for services and to increase Miami Lighthouse's presence and reputation for quality and innovation at the local, state, and national levels. The Committee's discussion of the proposed 2023-2025 Strategic Plan resulted in the decision to continue to pursue these fundamental goals.

### 2023-2025 Strategic Goal 1

To ensure that Miami Lighthouse has the financial capacity to sustainably meet the increasing demand for services, in 2023 we launched our 95<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Fund to sustain programs for the blind and visually impaired. We must plan for sustainability and address increasing demand challenges while balancing both short- and long-term results taking into consideration not only current costs but also future costs in order to support continued growth and innovation in service coverage. It is important to consider not only what funding is available today, but also what will be needed to ensure sustainability in the future.

The goal of our 95<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Campaign is to raise \$9.5 million with \$4.75 million initially solicited from philanthropists followed by a one-for-one matching challenge to raise an additional \$4.75 million over two years. The total funds raised will be held in a new Restricted Reserve Fund designated for sustainability and growth. These assets will be invested at one of Miami's leading financial institutions and will be available as resources for Miami Lighthouse to meet current and future program requirements.

### 2023-2025 Strategic Goal 2

Continue to increase Miami Lighthouse's presence and reputation for quality and innovation at the local, state, and national levels. In furtherance of this goal, we are pursuing the following initiatives:

#### **Miami Lighthouse for the Blind (MLB) Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) Collaborative Center Project Proposal**

In collaboration with medical experts, research is needed to address CVI. In particular, research should focus on developing reliable screening tools and diagnostic criteria to

identify CVI in infants and young children as early as possible. It is also crucial to compare assessment tools and outcomes. Additionally, much research is needed to develop habilitation and rehabilitation (thereafter “(re)habilitation”) programs, early interventions and therapies that can harness neuroplasticity to enhance visual processing and improve functional vision in individuals with CVI.

Interventions and therapies will include unique teaching methodologies and classroom accommodations for children with CVI introduced at MLB IN 2023 as well as the use of technology. Such ambitious and important research requires an interdisciplinary approach that has been purposefully implemented within the MLB CVI Collaborative Center.

The project, led by MLB in collaboration with subcontracts to engage the University of Miami’s Bascom Palmer Eye Institute (BPEI), Nova Southeastern University (NSU), and Nicklaus Children’s Hospital has two specific aims:

1. Develop an evidence-based, age-appropriate test battery and CVI classification system.
2. Identify CVI biomarkers for more accurate diagnosis, risk prediction, and evaluation of assessment and treatment efficacy.

This is a two-year project starting in September 2024 and concluding in August 2026 for a total of \$2 Million with Miami Lighthouse serving as the major awardee and CEO Virginia Jacko serving as overall PI. The project will significantly contribute to addressing a global critical problem and will lead to a better understanding of CVI's genetic and neural basis and explore neuroplasticity-based therapies as well as more effective (re)habilitation and early intervention strategies. The results will be shared with the research and educational communities, including our colleagues in Israel at our sister school, Eliya.

As a result of this project, MLB Collaborative members will then seek federal funding. The Miami Lighthouse goal of the subsequent project will be to fully evaluate the impact of the (re)habilitation/early intervention protocol implemented at MLB. This will consist of a double-blinded, mask, prospective study of two cohorts of CVI patients (cases and controls) that underwent (re)habilitation/early intervention at MLB. The MLB CVI Collaborative Center will conduct comprehensive assessments of the subjects, including clinical assessment conducted by BPEI.

## **BLIND SOCCER**

In 2023 Miami Lighthouse began a significant collaboration with the U.S. Association of Blind Athletes including planning a community launch of blind soccer in early 2024, which included a demonstration by the USABA National Blind Soccer Team. A comprehensive blind soccer initiative for children ranging from age one to twenty-two was proposed, and a funding request was submitted to The Children’s Trust as an innovation project. On July 16, 2024, The Children’s Trust of Miami-Dade County Board

of Directors approved our proposal as part of their approximate \$2 million innovation fund grant awards to support our comprehensive blind soccer initiative effective October 1, 2024, at \$90,000 for twelve months. Our proposal is intended to enable 85 children and teens ages one to twenty-two to learn the concepts required to play the game of blind soccer.

Blind soccer is governed by the International Football Sports Federation and teams play with modified rules (e.g., the field of play is smaller than a soccer field/pitch, is surrounded by sound echoing large boards, and the ball is equipped with noise-rattling sound, which is vital for echo localization by the blind soccer players to have ear/foot coordination. Currently, learning and playing soccer are not possible for our blind and visually impaired children and teens. In collaboration with the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA), our pilot project represents the first time that a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning blind soccer will be developed for children starting at age one. This project aims to overcome challenges faced by blind and visually impaired children and teens who could benefit from participating in a team sport. Our campus green space needs modification for practicing the concepts of blind soccer, and a funding proposal for purchasing the required portable walls is being pursued.

Our pilot project builds on The Children's Trust's commitment to building soccer as a team sport that's available and accessible to all in our community. Miami Lighthouse's pilot project presents a unique opportunity for blind or visually impaired children and teens, empowering them to overcome barriers, realize their full potential, and thrive as active community members.

### **Collaboration with Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) to Add Third Grade**

Collaboration with M-DCPS continues to be very strong. Discussions are underway with M-DCPS leadership for Exceptional Student Learning to add third grade to our Miami Lighthouse Academy starting fall semester of 2025.

Miami Lighthouse has an outstanding track record of empowering blind and visually impaired children. Our students are highly competitive in the Regional Braille Challenge as finalists and winners because of our emphasis on Pre-Braille and Braille literacy. Planning is underway for this year's South Florida Braille Challenge to be held on Saturday, March 8, 2025.

For 95 years, Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired has been a national vision rehabilitation leader and has dramatically increased the number of children it serves. In order to address education inequities and unique challenges that blind and visually impaired children face, in 2017 Miami Lighthouse launched our school for visually impaired early learners. This program was featured in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness* in a 2021 article entitled, "Innovative Inclusion Program for Early Learners with Visual Impairments Offered by Miami

Lighthouse Learning Center,” and our Early Intervention Program was named Miami’s number one children’s program of the year by The Children’s Trust.

Our Miami Lighthouse Academy is an Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment (APPLE), a national early learning program accreditation that recognizes early learning centers for operating high-quality programs. We are also recognized as a Florida Department of Children and Families Gold Seal Quality Care program, a designation conferred upon a childcare program that meets the accreditation standards of one of the approved accrediting agencies. We will maintain these accreditations for our early learning classes for one- to four-year olds.

Our early elementary school, kindergarten, first and second grade classes address the need to provide proficiency in Braille and in life and study skills to growing numbers of blind children and to enable more blind and low vision children to attain the success they are capable of achieving.

We are now collaborating with Miami-Dade County Public Schools to open third grade for students with a vision disability beginning in academic year 2025. The curriculum design includes meeting the individual needs of students in a print/braille-rich environment supported by advanced technology. All of our classroom settings support and accommodate assistive technology to enhance and promote students’ academic performance.

Third grade is a pivotal year in a child's academic journey, particularly for blind and visually impaired children because students begin taking standardized tests 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.

The goal of this expansion is to prepare visually impaired students for standardized testing beginning in fourth grade by solidifying students' academic foundation and reading proficiency and familiarizing them with accessible testing materials or alternative formats. Our objective is to empower most children with a vision disability on their individual educational plan to enter fourth grade on an equal footing with their sighted peers.

### **Management Team Development**

Annual goals for our management team are set at the end of each year as part of employee performance reviews and are reviewed midyear. We will continue to use Kompass Advisors as our management consultants. Their “Personalysis” assessment provides strategies to create productive professional relationships by identifying behavioral strengths, effective approaches to communications and team building, and other key insights. Kompass also provides screening for predictive personality traits of potential hires.

Going forward, Miami Lighthouse will continue to cultivate relationships with funders and other key supporters and expand key collaborative partnerships while striving for continuous quality improvement for all Miami Lighthouse program and services.