Recognizing these fears can help you understand how Nyla Morrow felt when, in 2008, she was in the doctor’s office with her 1½-year-old baby, Trinity, who had retinal blastoma in both of her eyes. Nyla did not know where to turn for help. She started a conversation with another mother whose daughter was getting chemotherapy. That’s how she found out about the Lighthouse of Broward. She called, and Lighthouse Early Intervention Specialist Cindy Wolke was at her home the very next day!

Trinity didn’t speak until she was 2½ and didn’t like it when people stared at her. “I was hoping to help Trinity, who was very shy. She knew she was different.” Working with Cindy brought Trinity out of her shyness.

When she started pre-school, even the teachers would go into a panic. One day when Trinity’s artificial eye turned out of alignment, they put little Trinity in a room by herself. Cindy was there the next morning at 7:30 a.m. to show the teachers how easy it was to reposition the eye gently and not to panic.

“It made me really happy and gave me a lot of relief to get such a quick response,” says Nyla. “It’s a relief I’m not alone.”

Today, Trinity is a “chatty Cathy” and is helpful and sociable at school. Most amazing, she has learned how to explain her eye problem to curious classmates with a simple, “I was sick. They had to take my eye out. Now I’m okay.” Pretty good for a 6-year-old, right?

Trinity loves nature, flowers, and being in the Sensory Garden. She loves learning and school. She planted the seeds from the Lighthouse Halloween party pumpkins in her front lawn and she just discovered the vines are growing and making flowers! She already has told her mother she wants to volunteer at the Lighthouse when she is a teenager and then she wants to be a dentist. Since the doctors were able to save her left eye, Nyla says, “OK, no problem. I’m very grateful to the Lighthouse for being there. We want to give back because you gave so much to us.”

Through the Lighthouse, Nyla has met other parents who themselves have the same eye condition as Trinity. The fact that they are successful adults gives Nyla the confidence to say, “Trinity is going to be okay.”

Think of how frightened you would be sitting with your child in a doctor’s waiting room and knowing that something is wrong. Now imagine that you are in an oncologist’s office and you are there with your child because she has a cancer that has affected both of her eyes.

“IT’S A RELIEF I’M NOT ALONE.”

Trinity and her mother, Nyla Morrow.
Message from the Executive Director

Since 1973, the Lighthouse of Broward’s success has been enhanced through collaborations with other community resources. The Fort Lauderdale Garden Club has been a partner with the Lighthouse for over 20 years and the Club has impacted hundreds of children and adults by creating and enhancing the Sensory Garden.

The stories in this issue of The Visionary show how blind individuals and their families enjoying the Garden developed emotional and practical skills that are essential to regaining a full and satisfying life. In addition, the garden has been the venue for many successful fundraising and public awareness activities that help neighbors, friends and businesses support the Lighthouse and learn how to involve visually impaired people in the daily life of our community.

The Lighthouse continues to use the Garden to bring experiences of the natural world to blind people and to involve the community in appreciating what people with visual impairments can offer.

Thank you for your interest and support. The stories you are reading are made possible because someone cared and refer to the Lighthouse of Broward a person whose vision was failing, but whose desire to live independently remained strong.

Elly du Pré, DPA
Executive Director

NEWS YOU CAN USE: A recorded message of the monthly newsletter including calendar of activities and other announcements is now available at EXT 143. Call the Lighthouse and when you hear the greeting, enter 143.
The Sensory Garden at the Lighthouse, that began in 1993 in the fertile mind of an 83 year old blind woman, Mary Secrist, is an enhancement to our services. Blending her lifetime love of flowers and native plants with her new appreciation for the Lighthouse of Broward inspired her to spearhead the creation of a beautiful retreat that would enhance the experience of the senses for people with visual impairments. Having just completed some safe travel training at the Lighthouse to help her with her own macular degeneration, she envisioned a beautiful garden with textures, aromas, herbs for cooking classes and play areas for children.

Now lovingly tended under the leadership of Mary’s long-time sidekick at the Fort Lauderdale Garden club, Rose Butman, Mary’s original concept has been expanded. The garden has become a sensory delight, a restorative retreat and a place for “learning by playing” for all ages.

Making friends, being fair, showing leadership, the importance of following rules and boundaries—all the skills that underlie success as an adult in our society are learned at an early age. Blind children need to learn even more—how to use the information provided by hearing, touch, smell, the feel of the wind, the textures of grass and sidewalks, the taste of herbs and fruits, the sounds of water. Even blind babies in the Lighthouse’s Bright Beginnings program learn from play—to be safe and to be courageous, to reach out and explore.

Teens and adults at the Lighthouse also benefit. Herbs are grown for cooking classes. Braille and high-contrast lettering on signage completes the sensory garden’s all-inclusive design so everyone can enjoy its many features.

Clients, staff and the general public have enjoyed picnics, solitary walks to calm the mind, group yoga classes, parties and numerous concerts which also have raised funds for Lighthouse services.

Important group and individual counseling sessions for parents of blind babies and children are held in the garden under the leadership of Children’s Case Manager and Play Therapist Olga Idrissi—the quiet, lush space contributes to relaxing and engaging these stressed out caregivers.
The way Jose Alvarez sees it, success always is achieved because of “the component of luck that is in life.” So he really believes in giving back. For the past three years, Jose’s company, Doral Digital Reprographics, has done all the event posters, annual reports, program journals and just about any other thing that comes up: always on time, with a real flair for dramatic presentation, and with an attention to detail that is without equal.

The non-profit customers keep coming because of that fine reputation, and he also helps with special pricing, “but the Lighthouse of Broward gets even more special pricing,” he says with a little smile.

Former board member John DeSouza introduced Jose to the Lighthouse when our Jazz series was getting off the ground. That led to another good friendship, with LHOB’s Director of Community Relations and Development, Jose Lopez.

So what made the connection to the Lighthouse so special to Jose Alvarez? “The fantastic job you all do is just unbelievable to me. After a while I got used to seeing a blind person like Jose Lopez do everything, but every now and then I stop and think—How did he do that? All those emails and documents from his computer. It is just amazing.”

Jose Alvarez is quick to add that when he comes to the Lighthouse, “it’s like a family. Everyone is treated like family here.”

The Lighthouse is fortunate to have Jose Alvarez in our lives. He is special because he truly believes, “when you have the opportunity to help, it is not an obligation, it is a blessing to do it.”

“I looked forward to the O&M classes in the garden.”

Sensory Garden eased her transition into life as a person who is blind. She expresses the dilemma facing a newly blind person very well when she says, “I didn’t want to learn any of that stuff.” When she came to the Lighthouse in the spring of 1995, she wanted only the minimum instruction in safe travel skills, also known as orientation and mobility or just O&M. Her O&M Specialist Pam Ralfs recognized her nervousness and suggested working in the Sensory Garden. “It was stressful to learn O&M, but being in a nice environment changed my attitude. And after all, it was really important to my life. I looked forward to O&M classes in the garden instead of dreading them.”

Eventually, Judy attended the other Lighthouse classes. She became a volunteer and has come to the Lighthouse faithfully every week since 1998. She is currently the chair of the Alumni Association, which has planted several trees in memory of outstanding volunteers who have passed away. The Alumni have planned their own fundraising events in the garden and attended the evening Jazz concerts. Judy also raves that “The Yoga sessions in the garden really worked wonderfully. It is so quiet on Saturday mornings; you can hear the bird songs.”