

THE VISIONARY



LIGHTHOUSE
OF BROWARD

Amanda Diaz—On Track for College

Amanda Diaz is 16 years old, a junior at Calvary Christian Academy, a private high school, and on a college-bound path. She is the first blind student that they have had, but because of her easy transition from public to private school and her academic success, she will pave the way for others. Here, she has learned to be her own advocate. Her mother, Myriam, believes that Amanda's

success was possible because of the support she received from the Lighthouse and the willingness of her school to see beyond her disabilities to her abilities.

The Assistive Technology Expert at the Lighthouse, Eric Barrette, advised the family which technology devices would help Amanda. She got a braille embosser for the family's

computer and worked diligently with Eric and Samantha Kelly (Sam), a Lighthouse Teacher of the Visually Impaired, to learn "the ropes" in order to guarantee academic success in the private school setting.

Honors Math is Amanda's biggest challenge and the SAT and ACT college admissions tests in March are the place to make the big score. Amanda is calm and confident. Amanda explains, "I handle my other courses with books in braille that we order six months in advance.

Then I do my homework almost entirely with my iPhone and iPad and also my BrailleNote (a portable computer with no screen, just braille and speech output)." However, the Honors Math class in school is graphs and slides and formulas, "and so difficult to understand." With Sam, Amanda actually studies the material ahead of the rest of the class and then listens in class and uses it "for review."

Honors Math is advanced algebra, trigonometry and geometry...heavy duty stuff for any student. For a blind student, typical braille is not enough to do math. In 1946, a special type of braille was developed for the symbols and formulas of math and science, called Nemeth Code, which Sam teaches Amanda. "Without Sam I would never be on the honor track. Graphing for algebra was terrible. Even the book was incomprehensible."

"Without the Lighthouse and Sam there is no way she would have accomplished the math part," Myriam emphasizes.

Amanda also participates in the Lighthouse's TeenLIFE program—Learning Independence From Experience, where she had both a summer job in the Division of Blind



Amanda as Junior Homecoming Princess.

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Message from the Executive Director

We want our children to receive the services that they need at every stage of their lives. In 2000, the Florida legislature, through the hard work of the Florida Association of Agencies Serving the Blind (FAASB), passed the funding for Blind Babies. In 2006, the Division of Blind Services received additional funding for a year-round program for teens 13 – 21. Somehow the primary school children have never gotten their share!

This year FAASB, of which Lighthouse of Broward is a member, will propose legislation to add funding to the Division of Blind Services budget for specialized services for children between the ages of 6 and 13. In this way, programs for the blind and visually impaired children of all ages will receive some funding. This will help organizations like ours improve our programs for children from infancy through age 21.

This issue of the Visionary includes a story about Amanda who is clearly extraordinary. But that also can be said of her whole family. The Lighthouse was an important partner in their success, made possible by funding for our TeenLIFE Learning Independence From Experience program. The Diaz

family also was fortunate that the private school Amanda attends is extraordinarily committed: creating an inclusive environment, and ensuring that Amanda will be competitive in the real world.

Not every private school makes it possible for dedicated families, smart kids and Lighthouse services to be so well integrated. In Florida, private schools are not required to have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which is required by Federal Law for all public schools. Parents can apply for their child to get a consult from the public schools' Teachers of the Visually Impaired, but the private school is not required to follow any recommendations. Do you feel a little confused by this? Imagine if you had a blind child.

Charter schools are another puzzle. As recipients of our tax dollars, charters are under public school rules and have to follow an IEP. They must arrange to provide a Teacher of the Visually Impaired and many do not. TVIs are specialists. Regular classroom teachers rely on their expertise. Their special knowledge can't be found "on the internet." Charters are not meeting their obligations.



LHOB is the one resource all these parents and children of all ages have available, at no charge, simply by asking for it. We come to the home, provide summer camp, and offer age-appropriate services year-round. We are committed to their success.

And don't forget adults with vision loss! As Eleanor can attest, she can go forth and do good in our community with all her energy and caring because we were there the first time she needed us, and when new hurdles arose, we were there again.

As always, thank you for your support.

Elly du Pré, DPA

Executive Director

CHECK IT OUT!

I am excited to inform you that the videos the National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP) filmed with Cesar and Graciela at the Lighthouse of Broward are now available on the National Eye Institute's YouTube channel. You can find them at the following addresses:

Cesar Baena: www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RHEJZ8NKL8

Graciela Castaneda: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BTe5T7lv-k

NEWS YOU CAN USE

New Groups Starting

VETS – Florida BVA now meeting at the Lighthouse

Contact Jim McCoy, District Director
Jmmccoy70@att.net, 954-748-9428

Florida Council of the Blind – Broward Chapter now meeting monthly at the Lighthouse

Call the hotline for more information
954-463-4217 ext. 143



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@BrowardVision

Amanda Diaz—On Track for College *(continued from page 1)*

Services' local office, and a college experience at Florida Atlantic University last summer. "That really got me thinking about going away for college. And I made a little money working, which was great."

"I'm talking about college now," Amanda says, barely containing her excitement. She wants to attend one of the local universities but not live at home. Myriam asks her why she cannot live at home? "I just can't stay home. I don't want to. As a blind person I need to show I can live on my own. Plus, my brother did it."

Amanda has two brothers and her older brother Andrew also is blind. He was a recipient of many of the same Lighthouse services that Amanda receives and was very active in the summer programs, first as a camper and

then as a volunteer. He graduated from Florida State University and now runs his own tutoring business, living on his own on the West Coast of Florida.

Myriam says, "If you ask me about the impact the Lighthouse has on Amanda, I would say I believe the Lighthouse has fueled Amanda's independence and that independence gave her the confidence and courage to pursue other interests and succeed at them."

Her accomplishments are evidence of this. She is on the National Honor Society, swam for the CCA swim team for three years and won Junior Homecoming Princess this past October. Amanda was also awarded the honorable Rick Horsnby Award for courage at her school in her freshmen year and the Love Award



Amanda shows 3 examples of her award-winning pottery at a show.

this past year." Myriam Diaz believes without God first and the amazing support of the Lighthouse staff and her teachers at CCA, Amanda would not be the successfully confident well rounded young lady she is today.

Making a Dream Come True

Lee Dockery wanted to make his wife Barbara's 80th birthday really special. Knowing her lifelong wish to ride on the Goodyear Blimp, he decided this was the year to make that dream come true. So, with his "can do" attitude, he called Goodyear. He

was informed that the only way to get a ticket was to win one from a charity with which Goodyear has partnered. In Florida, that meant the Lighthouse of Broward. At the 3rd Annual Dining in the Dark event the tickets were up for Live Auction.

Lee and his family have a soft spot in their hearts for helping people facing vision loss become successful. While growing up in Arkansas, Lee's uncle lost his eyesight at the age of three. Through the help of the Lighthouse organization there, his uncle graduated from the Arkansas School for the Blind and learned how to live a productive and independent life. So, by participating in the Lighthouse auction, Lee felt that he would have a wonderful surprise for his wife and support an organization close to his heart.

He was not able to attend—it would give away the surprise to his

wife. He called Jose Lopez, Director of Community Relations and Development. Jose, who also has a "can do" attitude said, "No problem, you call me on my cell phone and I'll bid for you." It worked like a charm and a bond was formed.

Lee presented the news of his successful bid at the surprise celebration of Barbara's birthday. With their three children and spouses and eight grandchildren, they rejoiced in the celebration of Barbara's birthday and Lee's thoughtful gift.

This was just the beginning of Lee and Barbara's relationship with the Lighthouse. They have continued their support and are excited to now be a part of the Lighthouse of Broward family! And that will lead to many dreams coming true, just ask Amanda and Eleanor.



Barbara Dockery and her Goodyear Blimp tickets.

Eleanor Kohen – “I thank the Lighthouse for everything.”

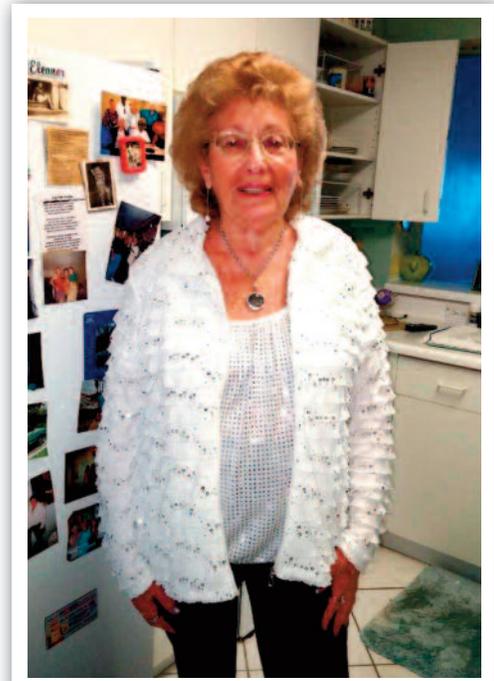
“I have a new life. I am enjoying my life. Don’t ask me my age—I’m 30 years younger than I was 5 years ago. I’m really enjoying my new life.”

The turn-around in Eleanor’s life in the past year has been dramatic. Having lived with Glaucoma for over 20 years, she had first received Lighthouse support and training in 2011 and was doing well. Then about a year and a half ago, she experienced a big loss in her vision. Her daughter noticed that Eleanor was hibernating. She was in a slump. “But that’s not me,” says Eleanor. “I was getting down and I realized I needed to be with people.”

In September 2013, she called the Lighthouse and started to renew her skills. There, she learned how to use the community bus and the paratransit vans to get to the mall and attend senior center programs.

Eleanor learned how to improve her daily living skills and what resources are available to her, such as an aide from Impact Broward. She is also taking keyboarding—she was an expert typist when she worked at the Sun-Sentinel, but needs to be able to apply the skill to the computer with access software to accommodate her vision loss.

With the help of the Lighthouse, Eleanor has overcome the hardships of life and returned to being who she really is. At the senior center, she is taking classes, joining the sing-a-long and discussion groups and, as a widow, benefits from the bereavement group. Eleanor has a talent for drawing others into a conversation, so soon after she joined a Lighthouse social group, she was introducing ideas for “stimulating our minds” not just joking and laughing.



Eleanor poses in her kitchen beside the family photos on the fridge.

At the senior center, the activities director also saw her talent and welcomed her initiative to start a support group for the visually impaired attendees there. She noticed how many people seemed to have no vision problems but couldn’t sign the attendance sheet. Eleanor quickly had 25 people in her group and started inviting the Lighthouse staff to teach the group members the independence skills that they had taught her. She also arranges field trips to the Lighthouse’s main facility which includes the Florida Reading and Vision store and the NSU Low Vision Clinic. “They thank me all the time” for connecting them to the Lighthouse.

Eleanor’s children are proud of their mom for her strength and many contributions to the community. And Eleanor says that she is so thankful to the staff at Lighthouse for helping her turn her life around. “I thank the Lighthouse for everything. I love all the friends I’ve made there—we have such a bond.”



Eleanor, 3rd from right, dancing with friends and staff at the LHOB holiday party, December 2014.