

THE VISIONARY



LIGHTHOUSE
OF BROWARD

The Lighthouse Experience Changed My Life

Just a few months after starting to attend classes at the Lighthouse, Guy Manfra already was comfortable with marching solo down Andrews Avenue, cane in hand. His confident manner extends to meeting people and immediately engaging them in animated conversation, always with a beautiful smile on his face.

He's been a hard worker all his life. Construction was the family business so after a three-sport high school career, he went to work in "the perfect

job—I got off at 3 p.m. and could go back to my North Miami High School and coach the Junior Varsity baseball team." At 19, he was already certified by the school board and was invited to start the Junior Varsity program. "Looking back, I should have gone to school so I could be paid to do what I love."

After 12 years in the family business, he started at P&G and for 16 years continued achieving, succeeding, and getting good promotions. He

married, got a house, a pool, had two wonderful boys and 20/20 vision.

When the economy fell, he lost his job, his marriage and his home. Then he started to lose vision in his left eye. By January 2012, he was totally blind in that eye and stopped driving. He had been working at Kohl's, but had to stop because he needed to be able to drive to do the job. A funk set in. Not only his eyes but also his knees were very bad.

He found out that "It's hard to ask for help or accept help. I always could meet the physical, mental challenges. But with the vision loss I went into a deep depression. Then one day I was with my kids and I said to myself '**this funk is not me.**' I knew I needed to get help to get back to being positive, a fighter."

He applied for Social Security Disability and was denied. So he took his case to a law firm. They sent him to a Broward Health Clinic to get medical support for his case and he was ultimately referred to the Lighthouse. He started classes in January 2014.

"The Lighthouse was a fantastic experience for me. It changed my



Guy Manfra working with some of the kids at i9 sports.

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Message from the Executive Director

Employment is a defining characteristic of being an adult. It is 24 years since the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, but finding a job still eludes 70% of working age blind or visually impaired people. That's why the stories in this issue of *The Visionary* are so important. These individuals beat the odds by their persistence, courage and ingenuity.

Their stories also have a common thread—the Working Solutions program at the Lighthouse of Broward. Our staff uses best practices and some very creative approaches, found only at our Lighthouse, to make sure more of the people we serve get a paycheck.

Leticia Vaz and Linda Clark, both Certified Rehabilitation Counselors, provide state of the art job preparation, counseling and vocational evaluation testing. Eric Barrette teaches competitive employment-level skills training in the computer lab.

Dolores Hanley McDiarmid developed the Saturday Interfaith Group and the Autumn Market. These apply principles which show that a natural interaction with the sighted world, in an environment that does not overprotect or segregate, where participation builds self-esteem and real-world skills, is a vital component in vocational success. Faith communities are a particularly fertile ground for developing these interactions. The Saturday Interfaith Group re-energizes adults who had given up finding work and guides younger adults to get the education and skills needed to begin careers. The Autumn Market was developed as a showcase for all the hidden stories and talents of working

folks in Broward who are visually impaired or blind.

The essential basic “blindness” skills of safe travel, braille, computers, and managing finances-nutrition-medications-grooming-household chores are the foundation for all these higher level Working Solutions activities.

“We prepare clients to present themselves positively. Interviewing skills are very important and take a lot of practice,” says Leticia Vaz, the Lighthouse’s Working Solutions case manager. There are many hurdles to finding a job, getting the right training, identifying income benefits, obtaining technology. And not the least of these hurdles is “knowing how and when to disclose the visual disability.”

Linda Clark notes that “it takes a team, and a lot of listening.” She coordinates the many Lighthouse partners, especially the important local office of the Division of Blind Services.

The Lighthouse is so fortunate to have wonderful partners and dedicated staff who see the potential and create the opportunities—and we are equally grateful for your support, dear readers of *The Visionary*.

Elly du Pré, DPA



Executive Director



UPCOMING EVENTS

NOVEMBER

Saturday, November 22, 2014

5 pm – 7:30 pm

Lighthouse of Broward and Saint Anthony Catholic Church invite you to Broward County's Inaugural White Mass, celebrating the lives of people living with various disabilities. All faiths are welcome. A reception will follow mass in the school clubroom. For more information please contact Dolores McDiarmid at 954-463-4217, ext. 135.

Tuesday, November 25, 2014

First Baptist Church of Ft. Lauderdale Christmas Pageant with audio description. Event is FREE this evening ONLY! 7:30 pm – 10:00pm. 20 headsets available. Please RSVP by October 25th. Please call Dolores at 954-463-4217, ext. 135

DECEMBER

Sunday, December 14, 2014

Audio described performance of The Nutcracker at Broward Center for the Performing Arts. For more information please contact Dolores McDiarmid at 954-463-4217, ext. 135.

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.



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LighthouseBroward



Follow us on Twitter:
@BrowardVision

She Found Sweetness

Terry Haile's life has been full of challenges. She was born with retinitis pigmentosa, which affected both her vision and hearing with progressive losses. She was abused by her parents, never attended school and became a ward of the state which sent her to "an old folks home".

As she tells her story, she mentions, "I was never spoiled as a child—I believe you can do whatever you put



Terry Haile making sales at the Autumn Market

your mind to." So she saved her \$50 a month State stipend and ran away. Unable to read, she recognized that the dog logo meant Greyhound—"we'll take you there." So she bought a ticket for Orlando, FL.

Later, Terry was in South Florida State Hospital where she met a Christian Counselor who "showed me there is more to life." This was a turning point for her.

She came to the Lighthouse of Broward to learn independent living skills and now lives alone with her guide dog, attends church and travels to church events in other states.

About ten years ago, a friend from church needed help with a big chocolate project—making an 80th birthday present for her mother. She enlisted Terry's help and taught her the art. She loved it!

In spite of the hardships she has had to endure, Terry radiates a gentle and sweet nature. This personality blends with her career...chocolatier.



Terry Haile showing off one of her chocolate bars made for the Lighthouse's Dining in the Dark gift bags.

And at the Lighthouse, we know how wonderful those chocolates are! Terry made 250 chocolate bars with braille and print "Thank you" messages for the Lighthouse's Dining in the Dark event.

It was Terry's way of thanking both the Lighthouse and the event's attendees. Now we want to say, "Thank you, Terry!"

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life. I told the lawyer I don't want disability, I want to work. He advised me to apply in order to be more stable economically while I put my life back together. Still, I'm not sitting back waiting and hoping I will get disability. I'm actively looking for work."

Actively looking is what it takes, along with Guy's ability to ask for help and leverage the great skills he brings to any employer: 35 years of volunteer coaching, experience with hard work and the school of hard knocks, and most of all, persistence.

He says, "The Lighthouse got me mentally back on track plus they

enrolled me in their Nike Fuel Band program. It got me to lose 55 pounds and get function back. I walked 3.2 miles today." The Lighthouse was there to help when Guy did not know where to turn. He had no family nearby and a mother with Alzheimer's. At the Lighthouse, and with his new mental strength, he had people to talk to. "I would definitely not be where I am today if it wasn't for the Lighthouse. I am the person I used to be again."

Guy trains the referees at i9, a family-oriented youth sports program. He jokes about that: "If anyone gets mad and asks if the ref is blind, I can truly say, yes I am!" He also handles

all customer service as Site Manager at 3 locations. One day, one of the kids asked him for a reference. While giving it for the kid, who did end up with the job, the interviewer mentioned needing a sports counselor and Guy got that job. Now he is doing what he loves: "Just that look on a kid's face—you teach them and they remember – you can't get that feeling anywhere else.

"The Lighthouse is filled with great people. Anything I could ever do for the Lighthouse, I'll always do it—I would take a bullet for you guys."

Technology for the Vision Impaired Helps Zahra

Zahra is the queen of technology. It is completely integrated into her life. That's why she majored in computer science in college. Although she has been visually impaired from retinitis pigmentosa her whole life, she graduated in 2006 without extensive use of typical blindness skills. She could still see well enough to get by. But since then, she has lost more of her peripheral vision and depth perception and has taken Orientation & Mobility training at the Lighthouse for moving on crowded sidewalks, crossing streets and riding buses.

Technology for the vision impaired also helps Zahra. Her tools include a portable magnifier called a Prodigy tablet which is available at the Florida Reading and Vision store inside the Lighthouse, a MAC big screen computer, a PC with big monitor, and Zoomtext software. These tools are used to enlarge small material on the screen and assist her with completing spreadsheets and

updating Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

And technology is Zahra's livelihood. She designs websites, business cards, flyers, brochures, social media pages and other promotional materials for clients along with providing math tutoring for people throughout the community. She also works part-time at Broward College as Administrative Coordinator in the Public Affairs and Marketing Department.

To get the Broward College job, she took O&M travel training, participated in the Lighthouse's Job Prep course and kept applying for jobs. She has been there for 2 years now, recently getting an extra day added to her schedule.

Last week at work, the network went haywire and all her 800+ inputs had to be corrected. "I did freak out for a while and my colleagues

Zahra Jafferjee Computer Expert

Designs websites, flyers, brochures & business cards, updates social media pages and provides technical support for all computer related problems at a reasonable price.

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Zahra Jafferjee designed her own business card.

definitely noticed it! But **the Lighthouse educates people to problem solve.**" Zahra used her own access equipment to create a backup plan so she was able to deal with the glitch, report it to the help desk and resolve the issue.

Zahra still participates in the Lighthouse Saturday Group of young job seekers and other visually impaired people who have started businesses. She also exhibits at the Autumn Market which she says helps with self-advocacy skills. This is her 3rd year at the Autumn Market and she was able to get leads for more tutoring while exhibiting.

Now 33 years old, Zahra is making an impression. She zips up and down busy Las Olas Boulevard near her office. She also goes to the Apple store to keep up on all the new developments in general and also the specific adaptations that make Apple products so user friendly for blind people. "I want to show others, and also myself, that I can do it."

In the last 2 years her vision has really diminished. She continues to work with Lighthouse staff, especially on safe travel techniques and interviewing. "**People should take advantage of Lighthouse's services—the technology training, and the opportunities to get together with other visually impaired people.**"



Zahra in her office at Broward College.