Salah Foundation Challenge Grant Edition  
Donations matched up to $50,000 for babies and adult program

“MR. HANK”: A NORMAL CHILDHOOD

Lindsey Hasson and Sean Chesal’s children, Hank (9 Months,) and his sister June (age 3,) enjoy an active life going to the pool, parks and the beach. Their son, known to all as “Mr. Hank,” is crawling all over the house and starting to pull himself up to stand. Mr. Hank has Leber’s Congenital Atrophy, (LCA,) a rare condition which causes blindness. Hank’s cousins, who also have LCA, Paul and Ryan Sullivan, both attended Lighthouse of Broward and are amazing young adults. “I talk to parents who are dealing with a blind child and I feel we are coming from a better place. I want Hank to have a good mix of people in his life, including visually impaired people, and he gets that with the programs at the Lighthouse,” says Lindsey.

The connection to the Lighthouse of Broward came easy, and it has been very important. Sean adds that the Lighthouse’s Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Cindy Wolke “makes sure Hank stays on top of his developmental milestones.” He is a happy boy and I feel like it is going to be a normal childhood for him.”

PEREZ FAMILY JOURNEY  by Gabby Perez

“no one really tells you what it is like to raise a blind baby”

My husband Alejandro and I began to notice that our son, Emilio’s right eye was becoming bigger and bulging out. At three months of age Emilio was diagnosed with a brain tumor called Optic Pathway Glioma and was blind. This added a whole new set of challenges for us. At the time of diagnosis, Emilio’s prognosis was grim. Emilio completed two, year-long, chemotherapy protocols. We had to accept that this was part of our new life. We are committed to doing what is best for Emilio and giving him a normal life. We are lucky to have the support of family and friends.

Emilio’s doctors are all good in explaining Emilio's condition and treatment, but no one really tells you what it is like to raise a blind child.  (See Emilo pg. 3.)
The Salah Foundation presented the Lighthouse with a very generous gift this summer for the Bright Beginnings program for babies born with severe vision loss and for aging adults who became blind or visually impaired much later in life. It is a Challenge Match Grant of up to $50,000. The Salah Foundation will match contributions dollar for dollar essentially “doubling” your donation dollars.

This confidence in the Lighthouse is an enormous compliment to the staff and volunteers who do such amazing work every day so these programs can thrive and grow.

Here, in The Visionary newsletter we share the success stories of our clients as testimony that your decision to support the Lighthouse was a good one. Read the stories of James, George and Eton who strive daily to find new ways of doing everything in order to create meaning in their lives.

We have until December 31, to match the full amount. We are well on our way and hope you can help put us over the top. Blind babies and seniors both deserve your support.

The parents of Hank and of Emilio share their own stories of finding the courage to face blindness in a new born baby. The world is growing ever more complex and the challenge of preparing any child for the almost unimaginable trials and opportunities coming 20 or 80 years from now is daunting.

Each of the stories in this newsletter gives the message that faith, family and friends, and finding the right resources are the means to reaching these life changing goals. All of us at the Lighthouse of Broward are grateful to The Salah Foundation and to you, for making sure that our doors are wide open to help the blind and visually impaired.

Elly du Pré, DPA

Executive Director
Perez Family Journey
(continued from page 1)

It was my mother who suggested I contact the Lighthouse. I am so glad I did because it is with the help of Cindy Wolke, a Teacher of the Visually Impaired, we began to understand the best way to help Emilio. Cindy began working with Emilio at the age of one. Cindy answers any questions we have as a family and shares what other resources are available to assist with Emilio's needs.

Cindy assesses Emilio’s developmental age and works to give him the skills to succeed. These skills range from basic play and motor skills, communication, feeding and sensory acceptance. Emilio transitioned into preschool this past April.

Emilio’s biggest accomplishment was learning to walk independently in familiar environments. We look forward to working with Lighthouse Orientation & Mobility Specialists and training Emilio to use a cane. We feel it is important for Emilio to know that there are other children who "see" with all of their senses. The Lighthouse of Broward provides sensory opportunities through the various social and holiday gatherings throughout the year.

Our favorite is the Fall Festival where kids dress up in their costumes, decorate pumpkins and participate in sensory activities. It is great to talk and share with other parents. We are very thankful for the support and guidance provided by the Lighthouse of Broward County.

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Eton Gordon – “The Lighthouse is a dream come true.”

Years ago, Eton Gordon often drove his car past the Lighthouse. He can remember seeing a blonde woman walking her guide-dog and a man walking with a cane. “I would have this sadness in my heart. I could not imagine what it would be like. And then it happened to me.”

Eton owned a successful cargo shipping company and homes in New York and Florida. He could not cope with becoming blind overnight due to an accident. “When I lost my sight, I think I was the worst person who ever came to the Lighthouse. My knees were shaking. I was so nervous, in fear of the darkness.” says Eton. “I was a man of desperation. I felt defenseless.” Before the van left his driveway to take him to the Lighthouse for the first time, he asked to be let out. “I couldn’t breathe. I had to compose myself.” Eton now wonders what might have happened if he had not stayed in that van. His world might still be filled with hopelessness.

Eton started Lighthouse classes and now works out and walks to stay in shape. He is in the choir, raises his 18 year old son and stays involved with his friends at the Lighthouse. He is proud of his accomplishments. “This is a place that can heal you, physically, mentally, spiritually. The Lighthouse is a dream come true.”
George Gal – “you guys give us life back.”

George saw an ad in the paper for a machinist for a motion picture camera house, to service the equipment. “It was like I was born into it.” He started a successful business renting cameras, sound and lighting equipment to major studios in New York City. George’s two sons now run the business.

Two years ago, George had a stroke. Everything went black in an instant. Hannah, his wife of 52 years, immediately rushed him to Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. The doctors referred him to the Lighthouse of Broward and he started classes. Pat Schneider’s Daily Living Skills class “was a very life changing experience. I couldn’t even speak two words without crying,” states George. In class, George met Orlando McLean and Eton Gordon. “We bonded instantly.” Soon the group of new friends included Eleanor Kohen and James Nurse. They still get together regularly.

His class with Richard Nieves on the latest technology was “fantastic. I had an iPhone before most other people.” George can use special features on the iPhone and reads on an electronic magnification device. It hasn’t been easy for George, but his lifelong ability to meet the right people at the right time is still working for him. “Every minute at the Lighthouse, you guys give us life back.”

James Nurse—“I could still thread a needle”

Talking about his life and how it changed after severe vision loss due to glaucoma, James Nurse says “Time changes and so do men.”

James moved to Florida in 2013 to live with his daughter, a nurse. James met Dr. Nicole Patterson at the NSU Low Vision Clinic and Lighthouse Case Manager Eunice Jackman.

“To be honest, it was amazing to see what a difference the Lighthouse made,” says James. He learned that his life experiences had prepared him to do things without vision. “I found out I could still thread a needle and sew by hand.”

James, a tailor, owned a clothing boutique in Trinidad, “I know a lot of hand stitches so I don’t use the machine for little things,” he adds. With the assistance of the Lighthouse, James keeps up with his many interests including music, sewing and cooking.

“My mother taught me to cook. I learned at the Lighthouse to do things differently due to my vision loss.” James prepares meals for his daughter. As he says, “My hands know what to do, how to measure half a cup, a quarter, how the texture of the dough has to feel.” James now encourages others to check out the Lighthouse, saying “This is an organization that really helped me.”

NEW PROGRAM
Whole Family Network
Visually impaired seniors risk being placed in care centers when they could live independently in their homes.

The Lighthouse can help you and your family maintain independence and quality of life – in your home!

Call Karen at 954-463-4217, x130 or kparparian@lhob.org