

August 2023



# Lighthouse Guild

## Lighthouse Guild In Brief

From Dr. Cal Roberts, President and CEO



Dear Friends,

### Visualizing Success: Back-to-School and Eye Health

As the excitement of a new academic year begins, families nationwide prepare for the much-anticipated back-to-school season. Not only is it time to return to the classroom, but it is also a reminder to prioritize our youngsters' visual health as they embark on new educational adventures.

Several eye conditions can affect children, often without showing obvious symptoms. Some common eye problems include:

**Myopia (Nearsightedness)** – This condition makes distant objects appear blurry, while close-up objects remain clear. Myopia is becoming increasingly prevalent among young individuals due to excessive screen time and limited outdoor activities.

**Hyperopia (Farsightedness)** – Children with this condition may have trouble focusing on nearby objects, making tasks like reading challenging.

**Astigmatism** – Can cause blurred or distorted vision due to an irregularly shaped cornea. It may lead to discomfort and headaches.

**Amblyopia** – Occurs when one eye has weaker vision than the other, often due to the brain favoring the stronger eye. Early detection and intervention are crucial to prevent permanent vision loss.

**Strabismus (Crossed or Misaligned Eyes)** – Is characterized by misalignment of the eyes. If left untreated, it can affect depth perception and lead to amblyopia.



Photo: A young girl wearing an optical trial lens frame smiling and giving the thumbs up in an eyecare professional's office.

### The Importance of Regular Vision Screenings

"Vision health is one of the keys to success in school, and the most important thing you can do to protect your child's vision is to make sure they get an eye exam," says Dr. Laura Sperazza, Director of Vision Rehabilitation Services at Lighthouse Guild. "An eye health professional can determine if your child needs eyeglasses or contact lenses or if there is a vision problem that requires further intervention."

For tips to help safeguard your child's eye health during back-to-school season and throughout the year, visit our [website](#). You can also schedule an appointment for an eye exam with one of our [vision experts](#).

### Keys to Accessing Entertainment Media

We were thrilled to host two highly informative tech sessions on accessible entertainment media for people who are blind or visually impaired. The first was a workshop on the Spectrum Access App which provides audio description to movies and TV shows presented by Petr Kucheryavyy,

Senior Manager Accessibility, Charter Communications. That was followed by a panel discussion on “How Media and Entertainment Can Be More Accessible” featuring experts in the fields of music production and communications and a professional DJ. We are grateful to the amazing panelists: Petr Kucheryavyy, Fitz Martin, CEO of Will Power Entertainment, Rebecca Rosenberg, CEO of ReBokeh and Alphonso McFadden, aka DJ Magic, Technology Teacher, VISIONS. Thanks also to Spectrum Charter Communications for their support and collaboration. If you missed either session, not to worry! Check out our website to view the **Workshop** or **Panel Discussion**.



Photo: Left to right, Petr Kucheryavyy, Fitz Martin, Alphonso McFadden, Rebecca Rosenberg and Lighthouse Guild Development Intern and Panel Moderator Kiana Glanton.

### Putting Wayfinding to the Test

Lighthouse Guild is the New York testing site for some of the latest navigational technologies that are striving to provide people with vision loss options they need to travel independently and safely. Recently, Evelyn Tichenor of **GoodMaps** and Walei Sabry of Walmart tested the GoodMaps wayfinding system that has been implemented at our Manhattan facility. If you are working on the next advancement that is poised to benefit people with visual impairment, please reach out to us! Email [techcenter@lighthouseguild.org](mailto:techcenter@lighthouseguild.org).



Photo: Left to right, Evelyn Tichenor, Walei Sabry and Lighthouse Guild Chief Technology Officer Dr. Bryan Wolynski walk down the Technology Center hallway as Walei tests the GoodMaps App.

### Ian’s Keys to Success

Since 2018, Ian has had diabetic retinopathy, and his left retina is detached. He says his vision loss impacted everything in his life, “I can’t see from the left [eye] completely, and the right [eye], I can see, but only shadows.” He cannot see people’s faces and it limits his travel. He says, “I don’t travel much, and I normally have an aid with me because I can’t go to certain places, and I fall a lot.” He also says he has had to learn everything all over again and differently. “Because you can’t see, you have to rely on other things. Feel. Touch. Hearing.”

Ian was referred to Lighthouse Guild by the New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB). He received a **low vision exam** from Low Vision Specialist Dr. Susan Weinstein and explored tools such as a monocular, a compact telescope that helps him see objects at a distance, and a handheld electronic magnifier to help him read letters.

Ian received **Orientation and Mobility (O&M)** training from Wojciech Jacobi, O&M Instructor. He says, “He taught me how to get around my neighborhood. I had to get on the bus. I had to go up and down the



stairs. And I know how to use the long cane. That’s what he taught me how to use. And what to feel, for how to move around.”

He adds, “I got a few home devices to help with the home [and] for hot water that tells you when the water is filled up in the cup, so it’s great. [Also] tags to put on the microwave [and stove] so I can feel [the dials and settings]. I’ve tried everything so far.”

**Key to Independence**

Ian says, “[The mobility] training gives me a little bit of independence and [allows me] to move around by myself because once this first happened to me, I didn’t want to do anything. I didn’t want to move. So, that gave me a little confidence [on] how to move around. And then, I was able to come [to Lighthouse Guild] sometimes. Most of the time with my aid, but sometimes by myself.”

**Persistence is Key**

Another service that has greatly impacted Ian’s life is **Independent Living Skills**, specifically Key Boarding Skills. He says, “When I started, I couldn’t tell you where one letter is, much less words. [It] gives you confidence learning something new and learning how to basically type without your sight. It’s great, I have a good [instructor].” Ian is referring to Dennis Farro, Lighthouse Guild Keyboarding Instructor.

“He always showed me that I can do it. No matter what. He’s a great guy. He’s a great instructor.”

– Ian referring to  
Keyboarding Instructor  
Dennis Farro




Photo: A quote, “He always showed me that I can do it. No matter what. He’s a great guy. He’s a great instructor.” – Ian referring to Keyboarding Instructor Dennis Farro,” next to an image of Lighthouse Guild client Ian typing on a keyboard as Keyboarding Instructor Dennis Farro tracks his progress.

Dennis shares that initially, Ian had a relatively slow start. He says, “When I first tested him, I had to assist him through lesson one. Lesson one is not a hard lesson, but he really struggled with it, and so, progress was slow.” Ian could not always come every week at first, which added to the delayed progress.

Dennis says that over time, “Ian kept coming and kept coming and kept coming, and as the months went by, he began really making progress, and eventually we got to the point where he was almost to the end of the 41 lessons that we do in the Talking, Typing, Teacher program. And now the big thing [would] be getting his speed up because his accuracy was getting better.”

To complete the class, keyboarding students must achieve a speed requirement of 20 words per minute. Unfortunately, Ian kept falling short of that goal. Still, Dennis says, “His attitude was one of continuing to try to do this ... and he was very motivated.” Ian says, “I don’t like to quit. If [I put] my mind to it, I think I [can] do it.”

**Ian Did It!**

Dennis shares, “The day came when — [and] there’s nothing that makes an instructor happier than something like this — he was up to 18, and then 19, and then [he] finally hit 20 words per minute. We celebrated.”

Dennis is happy to report that recently, Ian came to him and said he had not been on the keyboard in quite a while and wanted to try the keyboard test again. Dennis says, “Would you believe he beat his own record? He did 22 words per minute. And so, that confirmed to me that it wasn’t just a fluke, it wasn’t [that] he just had a good day. He got his 20. It was such a nice confirmation that he has learned, is developing, and is really making good progress.”

Ian credits Dennis as one of the keys to his success, “He always showed me that I can do it. No matter what. He always assures you that you can do it. Just if you make a mistake, he tells you where you made the mistake.”

Dennis shares, “What’s really cool about [Ian] to me is just the fact that he came from out of the pack ... And little by little, he makes progress. I’ve had other students that can type much faster and accomplished a lot, but I saw in him a rare determination, and that’s what really struck me as noteworthy.”

**Ian’s Future**

Ian is working on getting a job, and he says that led him to Keyboarding Skills because most jobs he would like to pursue, like customer service, involve using a computer. He says, “[If] I put myself in a position where I can do the job, then I’ll feel much more comfortable applying for [it]. Once you know how to do something, that gives you confidence.”

Dennis says, “[My] hope for Ian is to continue with that good spirit. To progress. To not only master the keyboard but to be a good computer user and to ultimately get a decent job that is suited for him because I think he’d be a wonderful worker just based on his level of enthusiasm and on his desire to not quit.”

**Ian’s Key Advice**

When asked what he would say to a potential supporter of Lighthouse Guild, Ian says, “I would say that what [Lighthouse Guild is] doing is a [value to society] because there are people like me who rely on this type of service. Without this type of service, I’d be lost because the training is important. The people you meet [are] important.” He adds, “I already referred two people here. I also go to dialysis. There’s a person there with the same situation [as] me, and I told him about this place.”

Thanks, Ian! Lighthouse Guild is ready to help anyone you refer to us live the lives they aspire to. To learn more about Ian and his keys to success, visit our [website](#).

**Advocacy and Community**

Lighthouse Guild team members actively participated in various advocacy and outreach events, from joining other advocates to recognize the importance of the Americans with Disabilities Act to striving to make a meaningful impact on the community.



Photos: Left to right, Lighthouse Guild Chief Operating Officer Paul Misiti and Governor Kathy Hochul at the Governor’s Reception Celebrating the 33rd Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act; Lighthouse Guild Outreach and Referral Coordinator Lisa Beth Miller, Outreach and Support Program Coordinator, Vocational Evaluator Carly Feldstein and Marketing Manager Jeremy Morak provide information and resources to the New York City Upper West Side community at National Night Out.

**Expanding Tech Training Through Volunteer Support**

Our most recent **KPMG** corporate volunteer event illustrated how volunteers extend our capacity to help people who are visually impaired reach their goals. After being trained in key assistive tech iPhone Operating System (iOS) functions, volunteers worked one-on-one with Lighthouse Guild clients. Under the guidance of Chief Technology Officer Dr. Bryan Wolynski and Technology Center Assistant Shanell Matos, the volunteers helped clients learn these essential functions, enabling them to maintain their independence.





Photos: Left to right, Dr. Bryan Wolynski teaches the KPMG volunteers about the iOS functions; A client receives tips on how to use his iPhone from a KPMG volunteer.

**Making Stores Accessible to People Who are Visually Impaired**

The design of a store (specifically the storefront) can significantly affect how people who are blind or visually impaired navigate in cities. One of the biggest problems for these individuals is finding store entrances because they need more detailed location information about where the entries are on existing maps. A website called **DoorFront.org** — created by The City University of New York (CUNY) and Lighthouse Guild — aims to collect accessibility data of New York City storefronts using crowdsourcing and artificial intelligence (AI) and, with the help of volunteers, check the accuracy of the accessibility information that AI has tagged on Google Street View via the Internet. The result is accurate and robust location information to help people with vision impairment better navigate and shop in New York City.



Photo: A view of a man from the waist down walking with his white cane along an urban walkway.

**Volunteers Needed!**

DoorFront.org needs volunteers to review and confirm the collected storefront location data. Interested participants can sign up on DoorFront.org for free and immediately begin to note whether a store in their area is accessible for visually impaired people to enter. In return, they'll receive a letter recognizing their effort to help their community. Your efforts will go a long way in helping people who are blind or vision impaired to access their city!

**A New Team to Cheer For!**

We are pleased to announce New York’s newest blind baseball team, the **Lighthouse Guild Lightning!** The announcement was made at the blind baseball clinic and fundraising event we hosted with the U.S. Blind Baseball Association in Central Park. Over 100 people attended the clinic, learning and experiencing this adaptive sport that is a powerful tool for physical and psychological rehabilitation for individuals of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds who are blind or visually impaired.



Photo: Participants, Lighthouse Guild staff, volunteers, Team USA Baseball Team members cheer around a banner showcasing the Lighthouse Guild Lightning Team logo.

The Lighthouse Lightning symbolizes determination, speed, and the power of breaking boundaries. It's not just about playing a sport; it's about challenging perceptions and showing that visual impairment is not a barrier to greatness.

Check out the baseball clinic and announcement on our [website](#).

Events

Don't miss some of our upcoming virtual and in-person events:

**September 13** - Challenged Athletes Foundation, Grant Workshop, New York City

**September 26** - Workshop & Open House on Voting Accessibility: Know Your Rights! New York City

Your support is key to Lighthouse Guild's ability to provide exceptional services and programs that inspire people who are visually impaired to attain their goals. Please [donate](#), [volunteer](#), [refer](#) people who can benefit from our services, or spread the word on [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) and [Facebook](#).

Be well and stay safe,



**Calvin W. Roberts, MD**  
President and CEO, Lighthouse Guild  
X (formerly Twitter): @EyeDrCal

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