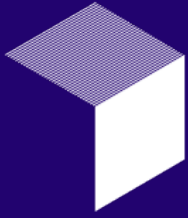


February 2023



Lighthouse Guild

Lighthouse Guild In Brief
From Dr. Cal Roberts, President and CEO



Listen to the Audio

Dear Friends,

Low Vision Awareness Month

More than seven million people in the United States have low vision. Low vision is defined as vision that cannot be corrected by regular eyeglasses, contact lenses, medications, or surgery. It can be difficult for people with low vision to perform everyday activities, such as reading, shopping, cooking, or writing. The good news is that low vision devices and technological advances can help people stay independent and make the most of their sight.



Photo: A woman with glasses helping a second woman hold and use her mobile phone.

“The most important thing you can do to safeguard your vision is to get a complete eye exam,” said Dr. Rebekah Lin, a low vision specialist at Lighthouse Guild. “The three main causes of low vision and blindness in the United States are glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic eye disease. Only a comprehensive eye exam can detect these diseases in their early stages.”

Once a proper diagnosis is given, the next step is to identify the cause and potential treatments or interventions. A low vision evaluation can be helpful in providing people with low vision different tools and techniques to continue doing their daily activities.

Here are some practical tips for people who have low vision to help make life easier and more fulfilling.

- **Embrace technology!** Video magnifiers, audio and electronic books, smartphones, and tablets as well as apps that can help you identify money, colors, and navigate your surroundings. “As the use of personal electronics becomes even more prevalent, there will also be increased accessibility to low vision technology through built-in features and applications that can help people with reduced vision perform visual tasks such as reading and navigating,” said Dr. Lin.
- **Use high contrast to distinguish items**, such as a dark bathmat with rubber backing on a light floor, a light cutting board on a dark countertop, and white sheets with a dark comforter and pillows.
- **Use night lights, a flashlight, or hall or room lighting** if you get up in the night or when it is dark.
- **Use shades on all light sources to reduce glare.**

There are many misconceptions people have about Low Vision. Visit our [website](#) for a video featuring Dr. Lin and Director of Vision Rehabilitation Services Dr. Laura Sperazza dispelling some myths about low vision.

For more information about Low Vision, visit our [website](#). You can also request an [appointment](#) for an eye exam with one of our vision experts.

Tech Pals: Helps Put the Power in Your Hands!

If you are aged 55 or older and would like to feel more confident in using your iPhone or tablet, our **Tech Pals** program is for you! Our exciting intergenerational technology training program, pairs tech-savvy young adults (aged 18-24) who are blind or visually impaired to serve as mentors to older adults (aged 55+) who are also visually impaired and want to become proficient in using their mobile phones and tablets. Tech Pals not only imparts skills and support but provides an opportunity for a meaningful connection between you and someone who is also coping with vision loss. Visit our [website](#) to sign up and put the power in your hands!

**Boost your
Confidence and
Skills with
Tech Pals**



Photo: Text, “Boost your Confidence and Skills with Tech Pals,” next to an image of a female mentor in the Tech Pals program providing mobile phone instruction to an older adult woman.

Billy’s Superpower

64-year-old William (or Billy) has been a Brooklyn resident since 1980. When Billy was 18 months old, his mother noticed something unusual about his vision. One day, a quarter fell on the living room floor, and instead of looking for it with his eyes, Billy began to feel and rub the floor to find the quarter. His mother became concerned and took him to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with Congenital Glaucoma in both eyes.

Once in middle school, Billy was transferred to a learning institution for children with special needs. He learned to read all levels of Braille, including reading sheet music in Braille.

“For anyone who cannot see well, there is no better place you can go that can help preserve what little vision you have. There is nothing that Lighthouse Guild cannot facilitate for you and your vision disability,”

– Billy



Photo: A quote, “For anyone who cannot see well, there is no better place you can go that can help preserve what little vision you have. There is nothing that Lighthouse Guild cannot facilitate for you and your vision disability,” next to a portrait of Billy smiling and wearing a black baseball cap.

Growing up, Billy was a typical carefree little boy who enjoyed singing. His love for music was instilled in him by his mother, who taught him to harmonize at a very young age. At age five, Billy was already singing lead in the church choir. At age seven, his mother allowed him to join an adult gospel choir, and by the time he was eleven, he was on the road with them to perform.

A Musical Career Around the World

In 1978, as members of the newly formed family band The Robinson Connection, Billy and his family left their hometown of Jacksonville, Florida, and moved to Brooklyn, New York. After arriving in New York City, the band would often be surrounded by cheering crowds as they performed their Doo-wop music on the corners of 50th Street and Broadway, 34th Street, or 42nd Street. Shortly after arriving in New York, Billy landed a contract with Columbia Records as the lead singer of the group B. T. Express – whose hit songs include “Do It Til You’re Satisfied,” “Here Comes the Express,” “Shout It Out,” and “Put It in Your Peace Pipe.” It was during these years that Billy found himself performing around the world.

A Life-Changing Introduction

At 16, Billy met the love of his life, Sharon. It was love at first sight, and they were inseparable from that day forward. Billy and Sharon married in 1980 and had 2 children together. They were together until Sharon's sudden death in 2018.

Connecting with Lighthouse Guild

Billy was focused on building his career, connecting with his community, his church and family. However, he felt the need for a stronger foundation and education to bridge the gap between the two worlds he was trying to balance. This is when he discovered Lighthouse Guild.

Billy knew about Lighthouse Guild long before seeking its services. Shortly after moving to Brooklyn, he began hearing about Lighthouse Guild's low vision programs and services through Helen Keller Services in Brooklyn, the New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB), and community members. It would only be a few years later that Billy would reach out to our organization. Being a musician, Billy's initial interest when reaching out to Lighthouse Guild was to register for classes in its former music school, where he soon found himself serving as a representative on its Student Council committee.

Shortly after that, the NYSCB arranged for Billy to take another class at Lighthouse Guild to learn about writing a business proposal. Billy drafted a business proposal that earned him a grant to renovate and upgrade his recording studio. Billy said, "Lighthouse Guild was instrumental in teaching and preparing how to use new technology to design and draw up a business proposal and to demonstrate why it would be beneficial to my business." Since then, for more than 20 years, Billy has benefited from other Lighthouse Guild programs and services.

Orientation and Mobility Training

Another program Billy feels has been helpful to him is the **Orientation and Mobility** (O&M) training program. Billy said, "The training taught me how to correctly use the cane, how to safely travel on the train and maneuver myself safely in the subways when going up and down the stairs, figuring out which end of the train to get on and off, the nearest entrance and exit to access, and most importantly, not to be ashamed to ask for assistance." A concern for Billy is that when someone who is blind or has low vision goes in the wrong direction in the subway – it can be disastrous.

Reading Services

Prior to his wife Sharon's passing, for the 44 years they were together, she was Billy's "eyes." She assisted him with performing certain tasks and drove him everywhere he needed to go. Billy said, "Since my wife's death, the Lighthouse Guild **Reading Services** program has become my eyes." Billy credits the program as a tremendous help, saying, "It's not about them just reading your favorite books to you. Through their Reading Services program, I am provided with a reader who reads my mail to me, organizes my email, teaches me how to set up folders, and appropriately files my email. They clean out the junk email, identify what's most urgent, and create your folders. If something requires me to update a subscription, the reader will go online and assist me with taking care of that, too. It's a vital service that's instrumental to me, and it's absolutely irreplaceable." Billy is grateful to Administrator of Volunteer Services Renita Carter, volunteer Rosie Lopez, and volunteer reader Nimra Sarwar for all their assistance.

Braille

Billy is thankful for all the developments in technology to assist individuals with vision impairment, and he also stresses the importance of being able to read **Braille**. Because of the classes offered at Lighthouse Guild, Billy can now read all forms of Braille – Grade 1, Grade 2, Braille music, Nemeth code, computer Braille, and international Braille.

Tax Preparation Program

Billy says there are so many programs and services provided by Lighthouse Guild that he's grateful for having access to. He also mentions the **Tax Preparation Program** that assists with one's yearly income taxes as well as the hosting of accessible voting demonstrations and workshops to give participants with low vision the experience of using voting ballots and machines at polling sites. Billy said, "For anyone who cannot see well, there is no better place you can go that can help preserve what little vision you have. There is nothing that Lighthouse Guild cannot facilitate for you and your vision disability."

A Place for Billy

Billy describes Lighthouse Guild as "A place where I can be around people like me, and a place where people with a vision impairment can learn and keep up to date on the latest technologies, receive mental health therapy and other low vision services that one cannot get anywhere else." Billy said, "Lighthouse Guild is special to me because it's a safe haven where one can learn and be understood by a community of people who are there for them."

While taking the opportunity over the past 23 years to become vested with Lighthouse Guild, Billy also found himself performing as the longest-standing lead vocalist with the musical group **Total Soul**. When he's not performing on stage, Billy enjoys recording in the music studio that he founded, owns, and operates. When performing on stage, most of the audience has no clue he's legally blind — mostly because he can be seen moonwalking, doing splits, and dancing back and forth across the stage.

The Future

A future goal for Billy includes opening a Braille school and offering classes to people who are sighted as well as people who are blind. Billy stresses the importance of learning Braille to individuals with low vision or who are blind.

Words of Wisdom

Billy's final words for young people who are blind or have low vision are, "Do not let what you think is a handicap stop you. Find your gift and share it with others." Billy shares, "My handicap was my superpower."

To learn more about Billy, including a link to a documentary about his life, visit our [website](#).

The Power of Generative AI

When it comes to emerging technology, there's no hotter topic than artificial intelligence. Our latest **On Tech & Vision** podcast episode features Saqib Shaikh, an engineering manager at Microsoft who leads a team that developed an app called Seeing AI, which utilizes the latest generation of artificial intelligence, known as generative AI. I speak with Saqib about how Generative AI works, his firsthand experience using an app like Seeing AI, and how it helped improve his daily life. We also hear from Alice Massa, an occupational therapist at Lighthouse Guild. Alice described the many benefits of generative AI, and how it helps her clients better engage in their world. Check out **The World in Your Hand: The Power of Generative AI** to hear about this life-changing technology and what it could mean for the future.



Image: A hand holding a translucent globe made of lights.

Level Up Your Tech and Leave a Lasting Impact!

If you're a Technophile who must have the latest computer or tablet or simply someone who is upgrading their everyday tech and has an older laptop or tablet you would like to part with, consider donating it to our Reading Services program. Your donation will help us support people who are blind or visually impaired in accessing written and electronic communications. With your generosity, our clients can receive assistance with electronic applications, email access, and more. And you will receive a letter confirming your impactful donation.

For more information or to donate your device, contact Cheryl A. Pemberton-Graves at gravesc@lighthouseguild.org or call **646-874-8544**.



Photo: A young woman providing instruction on using a digital tablet to an older man with glasses. The man is touching the tablet screen.

Join Team #NoLimits in the 2024 TD Five Boro Bike Tour

On **Sunday, May 5, 2024**, Lighthouse Guild and the **Foreseeable Future Foundation** share the common goal of supporting individuals of all ages who are blind or visually impaired, along with their families. We are teaming up to form **Team #NoLimits** and ride in the **TD Five Boro Bike Tour** – one of New York City’s iconic athletic events.

Riders Needed!
Join team #NoLimits and make a difference in the lives of people with vision impairment.



Photo: Text, “Riders Needed! Join team #NoLimits and make a difference in the lives of people with vision impairment,” next to a photo of Development Intern Kiana Glanton and President of Foreseeable Future Foundation Griffin Pinkow standing in front of a tandem bike with a Lighthouse Guild logo above their heads and Griffin’s guide dog at their feet.

Register now! Join our team for an unforgettable day cycling through New York City and help make a difference in the lives of people with vision loss. Riders will raise awareness and funds that will directly support the services of Lighthouse Guild and Foreseeable Future Foundation while crisscrossing all five boroughs with over 32,000 other cyclists. Visit our **website** for more information on how to join our team or support our riders!

Events

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

March 14 | Tech In-Session: All About Alexa | New York City

March 14 | Ask the TVI: Exploring Summer Camps for Children with Vision Loss | Online

March 18 | Tele-Support Talk: Managing Self Care for Parents of Children with Vision Loss | Online

Through March 31 | Lighthouse Guild Scholarship Program: Applications Open | Online

Through April 4 | 2023 Tax Preparation Program | New York City

You have the power to help people with vision impairment access all the services, programs and resources they need. Please consider **donating, volunteering, referring** people who can benefit from our programs and services, or spreading the word on **X (formerly Twitter)** and **Facebook**.

Be well and stay safe,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Calvin Roberts, MD'.

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

Donate: lighthouseguild.org/donate/

Volunteer: lighthouseguild.org/volunteer/

Share: TwittXer @lighthousegld | Facebook @lighthouseguild



Dedicated to providing exceptional services that inspire people who are visually impaired to attain their goals.
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