

May 2023



Lighthouse Guild

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



Dear Friends,

Make Eye Health A Priority

May is Healthy Vision Month, but taking care of your eyes should be a health priority year-round, like eating a balanced diet and being physically active. It starts with a comprehensive dilated eye exam to check for common vision problems and eye disease. Lighthouse Guild urges people of all ages to schedule regular eye exams, but especially older adults who are at increased risk for eye disease.



Photo: A father standing behind his daughter while she receives an examination by an eye care professional.

20 million Americans have some form of vision loss caused by eye diseases. An examination can detect potential vision-threatening eye conditions, such as: cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and age-related macular degeneration. When you need an eye exam, our Lighthouse Guild optometrists are experts. You can request an **appointment** with one of our vision specialists for you and your family.

Many common eye problems can be corrected with glasses, contact lenses, or laser surgery. Millions of Americans would see better if they used corrective lenses or had corrective eye surgery, if appropriate. For people who have low vision — vision loss that cannot be corrected with glasses, medication, or surgery — vision rehabilitation and technology can help with everyday tasks.

Tips and Techniques to Protect your Vision

In addition to regular eye exams, other simple practices can help maintain healthy vision, including:

- **Wearing protective eyewear** when playing sports or doing activities such as painting, yardwork, and home repairs.
- **Wearing sunglasses** that block 99-100 percent of ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) radiation.
- **Quitting smoking.**
- **Knowing your family's eye health history**

For more eye health tips, visit our **website**.

In Support of Independent Living

We are pleased to announce that a major gift on behalf of **Marilyn and Francine Gruder** was made in support of Lighthouse Guild's **Independent Living Skills Program**. This generous gift will enable our clients, especially our older clients, to attain the skills necessary to remain in their homes and be independent.

Marilyn Gruder was nine years old when her sister, Francine, was born. Soon after her birth, Francine was diagnosed as blind. Marilyn was the consummate big sister and took care of Francine for her lifetime in the most loving manner. She never considered Francine to be a burden. For her part, Francine was an intent listener with a sharp analytical mind and tremendous memory. In fact, Marilyn would say that Francine was her personal “computer” if she ever needed to recall any financial transaction and always consulted with Francine in making any important decision.

Marilyn and Francine lived together for many years. Both Marilyn and Francine had great, cheerful dispositions and they were a loving team. While many people think of blindness as a disability, Francine was always a positive person. They also had a profound connection towards their Jewish roots and Judaism.

“We are truly grateful to Marilyn and Francine Gruder, and will carry their legacy forward with our work to support clients by helping them learn essential skills. This gift will have a lasting impact.”

—Judith Katzen, Director of Rehabilitation




Photo: A quote “We are truly grateful to Marilyn and Francine Gruder, and will carry their legacy forward with our work to support clients by helping them learn essential skills. This gift will have a lasting impact.” – Judith Katzen, Director of Rehabilitation,” next to a photo of Marilyn and Francine Gruder seated together.

When Francine predeceased Marilyn, the loss of her sister was overwhelming for Marilyn. Marilyn made sure that upon her own death, her estate would be dedicated towards improving the lives of people who were blind, by supporting organizations serving the visually impaired and blind community.

Lighthouse Guild is honored to have our Independent Living Skills Program named in tribute of the memories and generosity of Marilyn and Francine Gruder. “We are truly grateful to Marilyn and Francine Gruder and will carry their legacy forward with our work to support clients by helping them learn essential skills. This gift will have a lasting impact,” said Judith Katzen, Director of Rehabilitation.

Mental Health and Your Patients Who Are Visually Impaired

May is also Mental Health Awareness Month. Did you know that one-third of older adults who are visually impaired experience clinically significant symptoms of depression and anxiety? Vision loss can be detrimental to an individual’s mental health, while mental stress can exacerbate vision loss.



Photo: Man with glasses listening to a mental health professional who is facing him.

Our **free** webinar, **Psychiatric Care of Persons with Vision Loss and Blindness**, provides physicians, psychologists, and other mental health professionals with an understanding of the bidirectional relationship between vision loss and mental health.

Lighthouse Guild’s Chief Psychiatrist, **César Alfonso, MD**, with expertise in the clinical care of the medically ill, psychopharmacology, and multimodal psychotherapy, discusses the leading causes of vision loss and psychiatric comorbidities and reviews the ocular side effects of psychotropic medications. His insights can help you formulate the treatment of your patients.

And visit our [website](#) to learn why mental health awareness is important in supporting people with vision loss.

A Sporting Good Time

Accessible sports and activities provide people who are blind or visually impaired with physical, social, and emotional benefits, fostering inclusivity, independence, and personal growth. Recently, Lighthouse Guild staff and clients have participated in some amazing accessible sporting events, from golf to baseball and even a major bike tour with 32,000 riders!

Great Shots

It may have rained on Saturday, April 29, but all was bright at **The Blind Can Drive** golf event hosted by Brodie Enoch, Founder & Executive Director of the. 145th Street Alliance and Lighthouse Guild Advisory Board member. Participants from our **Teen Transition Program** (ages 13 – 21) learned how to hold a club and how to swing resulting in some major hits at the Chelsea Piers Golf Club driving range in Manhattan. Each teen received a special Lighthouse golf glove thanks to Advisory Board Member, Christine Miller and swag from **KPMG** thanks to another Advisory Board Member, Scott Leiberan.



Photos: From left to right, a teen learns how to hit a golf ball from an instructor; Brodie Enoch and Development Intern Kiana Glanton.

Batter Up!

On Saturday, May 5, students gathered for a morning of fun and excitement in Central Park, playing the adaptive sport of blind baseball. The participants ranged from ages six to thirteen and are students from Lighthouse Guild’s **Youth Skills Program**, which provides social and recreational services to legally blind children to help them build self-confidence. Ed Plumacher, Adaptive Technology Specialist at Lighthouse Guild, and the president of the **United States Blind Baseball Association**, along with his fellow USBBA blind baseball players, coaches and volunteers were on hand to offer expert coaching and to provide safety tips to help prevent eye injuries during Healthy Vision Month. “Sports give young people a sense of belonging, a space to learn and to challenge themselves, and an outlet to have fun. That’s not to mention the numerous benefits on physical and mental health,” says Jaydan Mitchell, Coordinator of Youth Programs at Lighthouse Guild. Visit our [website](#) to read more about this fun filled event and check out this [video](#) of the children learning how to run the bases. We thank **The Blavatnik Family Foundation** for its transformative support of our Youth Programs and **Peperino West Side** for providing pizza to cap off the day.



Photos: From left to right, Group photo of Team Lighthouse Guild getting ready to ride; Team members Chris Babcock and Matt Sherwood riding a tandem bike through Brooklyn.

Tour De Force

On Sunday, May 7, **Team Lighthouse Guild** participated in the 2023 TD Five Boro Bike Tour cycling through New York City with the goal of helping make a difference in the lives of people with vision loss. We are so proud of the 33 riders who raised awareness of and funds for our programs and services while crisscrossing all five boroughs with over 32,000 other cyclists. To date, with your help, the team has raised over \$23,000! The good news is that it's not too late to add to the growing total by visiting the **Team Lighthouse Guild fundraising page**. The funds go directly toward helping Lighthouse Guild provide exceptional services that inspire people who are visually impaired to attain their goals.



Photos: From left to right, Group photo of Team Lighthouse Guild getting ready to ride; Team members Chris Babcock and Matt Sherwood riding a tandem bike through Brooklyn

Emil Lavian, DPM

Foot and Ankle Specialist

Photo: “Emil Lavian, DPM, Foot and Ankle Specialist” next to a portrait of Dr. Lavian.

We are pleased to announce that Foot and Ankle Specialist Dr. Emil Lavian has joined the Lighthouse Guild family. Dr. Lavian is board certified by The American Board of Podiatric Medicine and has over 10 years of experience delivering quality personalized foot care. He earned his Doctorate in Podiatric Medicine at the New York College of Podiatric Medicine.

Dr. Lavian provides podiatric care for people of all ages, including sports medicine, pediatrics, trauma, elective surgery, and wound care. His goal is to help patients with podiatric issues become pain-free and function better.

To request an appointment with **Dr. Lavian** or any of our highly trained and experienced healthcare professionals, visit our **website**.

Andy Pays it Forward

Andy is 32 years old and lives in Queens, New York. He was born with an eye condition called optic nerve hypoplasia (ONH), in which the optic nerve is underdeveloped or incomplete in development. Some individuals with ONH may have mild visual impairment or no vision problems, while others may experience significant vision loss or blindness.

Andy first came to Lighthouse Guild when he was about eight years old and participated in a weekend program in a former Queens location. He says, “At that time, I was not good at making new friends, and that program gave me a community to meet other kids who had a similar situation as I was in. It enabled me to be in a safe space with people I could talk to and relate with, and it helped me to navigate my life.”

Over the years, Andy has spent time living in Texas and in New York. When he was in New York, he went to Lighthouse Guild every two years for low vision exams. During those visits, he would see different doctors. Andy shares, “I have always made my appointments with the expert who was available. I felt comfortable knowing that I would get the best care no matter which [Lighthouse Guild] expert I had my appointment with.”

When Andy was a teenager, he participated in Columbia University and Lighthouse Guild’s collaborative Summer Youth Transition program, which enabled students to use the independent living skills they have learned and experience life as a young, independent adult. Participants stayed in a Columbia University dorm room for about a week — spending half of their time at Columbia and the other half at Lighthouse Guild, taking classes in math, typing, improv, cooking, and cleaning. There were also field trips to concerts, shows, and parks.

Recently Andy has participated in other Lighthouse Guild services including Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training, assistive technology, and independent living skills. He works with O&M instructor Wojciech Jacobi learning about street crossings and how to take the train and the bus. He says the training makes him feel more comfortable in navigating his neighborhood.

“I felt comfortable knowing that I would get the best care no matter which [Lighthouse Guild] expert I had my appointment with.”

—Andy


A portrait of Andy, a man with dark hair, glasses, and a beard, wearing a dark hoodie. He is looking directly at the camera against a solid orange background.

Photo: A quote, “I felt comfortable knowing that I would get the best care no matter which [Lighthouse Guild] expert I had my appointment with,” next to a portrait of Andy.

Andy sees Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Monica Torres for independent living skills training — learning how to cook with adaptive aids and about helpful apps on his smartphone, such as a money reader called EyeNote and Seeing AI (an App that identifies people and objects and then audibly describes them for the user).

Andy says, “I’ve learned proper cutting techniques when peeling and cutting vegetables, so I won’t cut my hands. I want to learn the skills of cooking so I’m able to prepare more healthy food choices.”

Andy is certified in Information Technology (IT) and can build and repair desktops and laptop computers. He shares, “I’m pretty technology savvy, but I still have a lot to learn in terms of adaptive aids in technology. I know all about computers, how to fix and build them from scratch. I know about laptops, tablets, smartphones — how to use them, set them up, use voice readers, magnifiers, and such.”

Andy has volunteered at the Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library, working in their adaptive technology department, assisting people who are blind and visually impaired with iPhones, iPod Touches, iPads, and Android devices — how to use Apple VoiceOver or Google TalkBack and Zoom for communicating, such as making phone calls, emailing, and text messaging. Andy says, “I’m a very patient and understanding person, which is helpful when teaching others how to use their devices.”

Andy also volunteers at Lighthouse Guild with the Youth Skills and Youth Transition Programs, where he assists Adaptive Technology Specialist Ed Plumacher with assistive technology. He can apply his wealth of tech expertise to help others with vision impairment meet their goals.

When asked what his advice would be to someone recently diagnosed with vision loss, he says, “First, I would recommend that they connect with the New York State Commission for the Blind and speak with their counselor to be advised on their needs, and then I would recommend they reach out to Lighthouse Guild as a great place where they can get assistance and services that can be of great value to them.”

Andy’s hope is to get a job in the IT field or work at an organization like Lighthouse Guild.

Andy says, “My experience at Lighthouse Guild has always been positive. Anytime I have ever gone to Lighthouse Guild, whether it was for a vision exam or typing class, and on up to my recent visits with Monica Torres [for independent living skills training], I always have a positive experience with everyone there, and with all the different services I’ve received.”

Learn more about Andy by visiting our [website](#).

Professional Learning Exchange

We were honored this month to host medical professionals from Mexico and Pakistan. Dr. Ayerim Alejandra Cruz Flores, Optometrist from Conde de Valenciana Institute, and Prof. Dr. Wajid Ali Khan, Professor of Ophthalmology and Chief of Medical Services and Major General Rehmat Khan, President from Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital, toured Lighthouse Guild, learned about our programs and services, including research initiatives, and saw demonstrations of assistive technology available in our Technology Center. Visits like these help further our efforts to help people who are visually impaired world-wide.



Photos: From left to right, Dr. Cruz tries a wearable assistive device with the help of Occupational Therapist Inna Babaeva; Chief Research Officer Dr. William Seiple, Maj. Gen. Rehmat Khan, Dr. Calvin Roberts, Prof. Dr. Wajid Ali Khan and Chief Operating Office Paul Misiti.

Events Focused on Making a Difference

Lighthouse Guild benefitted from a stylish and fun shopping event hosted by long-time advocates **Carolina Herrera** and **Francine Leinhardt** at the Carolina Herrera store on Madison Avenue.

We were honored to have **Jennifer Fischer** host a cocktail party to celebrate the supportive friends of our organization and raise awareness about vision health and vision impairment. The guests had the opportunity to hear Advisory Board Member Lauren Oplinger share her experience with Lighthouse Guild and its impact on her journey after becoming legally blind in her 20s and continuing a career in finance.



Photos: From left to right, Dr. Calvin Roberts, Jennifer Fischer and Marc Rosen; James Duffy and Lauren Oplinger

I was honored to be recognized by **West Side Spirit** as one of their **2023 WESTY Award** recipients. The award shines a spotlight on those working to make New York City's Upper West Side a great place to live and work. I was humbled to be part of the thirteen distinguished recipients, including the Honorable Richard Gottfried, Stephanie Garry of Plaza Jewish Community Chapel, and Leah Johnson of Lincoln Center. Visit our **website** to read more about all the honorees and this inspiring event.



Photo: Group photo at the Westy Awards. Back row left to right: Keith Kelly, Straus Media; Joyce Hammann, Phantom of the Opera; Lucy Wallace Eustace and Monica Zwirner, MZ Wallace; Hon. Richard Gottfried; Ilze Thielman, Team TLC NYC; Leah Johnson, Lincoln Center; Dr. Bendan Carr, Mount Sinai; Stephanie Garry, Plaza Jewish Community Chapel; Carmen Quinones, Frederick Douglass Houses; Neil Zuber, NYPD 20th Precinct. Front row left to right: Assembly member Gail Brewer; Jason Busch, Folk Art Museum; Jeanne Straus, Straus Media; Dr. Calvin Roberts, Lighthouse Guild; Pat Kiernan, NY1 News

At Lighthouse Guild, winning is defined as making a difference in the lives of the people who are visually impaired. And like any winning team, it is all about teamwork. We need you on our team! Whether you **donate, volunteer, refer** people who can benefit from our services, or spread the word on **Twitter** and **Facebook** — you are sure to help the people we serve hit it out of the park!

Be well and stay safe,

Calvin W. Roberts, MD
President and CEO, Lighthouse Guild
Twitter: @EyeDrCal

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