

December 2021



# Lighthouse Guild

## Lighthouse Guild In Brief

From Dr. Cal Roberts, President and CEO



Dear Friends,

The winter holiday season is upon us! It can mean gatherings with family and friends, work parties, abundant food, and presents for some. For others, it sparks overwhelming feelings of sadness and loss. This period can be challenging at times for everyone, especially with the added impact the pandemic has had on our lives, but even more so for people with vision loss.



**Photo: a mother and her three children laughing and holding sparklers in front of a decorated tree.**

The dimmed lighting of holiday parties can make it more difficult to recognize faces. Social contacts increase with people who may not understand the needs of those with vision impairment. More people are on the street and in the stores. Cooking, shopping, and traveling require more effort.

Following are some tips that may help make the holidays more enjoyable and less stressful.

- Plan travel details and alternate routes with care;
- Bring necessary devices for reading;
- Consider buying food and gifts online;
- Limit celebrations to a few select ones;
- Try to be patient and ask for help if you need it.

It's not unusual to feel sadness, anger, and grief during the holiday season. However, if someone feels persistently sad or anxious despite best efforts, is plagued by physical complaints, is unable to sleep, is irritable, hopeless, or faces routine chores, they should seek help from a doctor or mental health professional.

Visit our [website](#) for more tips to help people with vision loss avoid holiday blues from Lighthouse Guild expert Lisa Beth Miller, LCSW-R, BCD. If you, or someone you know, are having difficulty coping, **Lighthouse Guild Behavioral Health** professionals are here for you now and throughout the year. We can help you deal with your anxiety, depression, or difficulty adjusting to vision loss and other health conditions.

### First of Many Tech Demos

As you know, for much of this year, we've been working on our Technology Center, a dedicated space that showcases assistive technology. On December 8, we held the first Demonstration Event, which provided an opportunity for people with low vision to try assistive tech devices in one-on-one demonstrations. Forty-five people attended, receiving tech consultations and a tour of the Smart Home that showcases some of the newest technology controls for the home environment. It was their first exposure to Lighthouse Guild for some attendees, and we were so thrilled to welcome them!



**Photo: Lighthouse Technology Center sign with attendees in line to the entrance.**

For me, the highlight was meeting with the attendees and hearing about how they use technology and their ideas for future useful devices. They provided some great ideas that will shape future events.

Our demo day is one of many events meant to connect users to advanced tech, making their world easier to negotiate. Stay tuned for announcements about upcoming demonstrations and educational seminars! If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about assistive technology, email [techcenter@lighthouseguild.org](mailto:techcenter@lighthouseguild.org).

## Nisha’s View of Tech

As I mentioned, it’s helpful to talk with clients who already have benefited from assistive technology. One such person is Nisha, who is a lawyer who practiced criminal law, worked for a judge, and used her expertise at a legal research database company. She accomplished these things despite having been born with cone-rod dystrophy, which worsened over the years, eventually leaving her legally blind.

“Everything about [this] organization tells me they understand what I’m going through and can help me adapt to this new world.”



A photo of a Nisha smiling.

An empty-nester, she moved back to New York City after living in suburban Connecticut for almost 30 years. Her vision loss made it impossible for her to drive, and life in New York City does not require a car. A Lighthouse Guild optometrist and assistive technology specialist changed her life. The doctor “introduced me to some technologies that I was not aware of, such as binoculars that I can place over my glasses to assist me with reading,” as well as other magnification tools. The technology specialist taught her how to use the computer and a screen reader. “I was continuing to try to use the laptop as if I were a fully sighted person, and I was caught between these two strange worlds. It was not working for me at all.” She looks forward to being trained to use other apps in the future.

For more about Nisha’s journey with tech and the training she receives, visit our [website](#).

## The Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) invests in Lighthouse Guild’s Technology Center!

Lighthouse Guild is pleased to announce a grant of \$125,000 from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) in support of our Technology Center. The grant helps make possible Lighthouse Guild’s initiative to create the foremost Technology Center in the U.S., providing access to assistive technology and driving future advances for people who are visually impaired.

Based at Lighthouse Guild’s NYC headquarters, the Technology Center has a vast array of assistive technology, personalized training focused on individuals’ skills and objectives, and a “smart home” where people can try the latest tech in settings such as an office or kitchen. The Center not only provides services to people who are blind or visually impaired to help them achieve their goals, it is also a hub for entrepreneurs and developers to test and create new innovations.



Photo: a senior woman wearing a virtual technology headset.

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation is a world leader in philanthropy with a focus on health and sports, arts and culture, education, and social welfare. We are truly excited to partner with the Foundation in the year ahead!

As never before, technological advances are poised to benefit people who are visually impaired. For more information or to support our bold new initiative, please contact [techcenter@lighthouseguild.org](mailto:techcenter@lighthouseguild.org).

## Visionary Kick-Off

On December 14, Jennifer and The Honorable David Fischer graciously hosted our Lighthouse Guild Holiday Tea at their home in Palm Beach. The Fischers will be honored at our upcoming Annual Visionary Evening Dinner on February 20, 2021, for all their good work and support that helps make Lighthouse Guild’s mission possible. I had the pleasure of demonstrating one of the state-of-the-art devices featured at our Technology Center and fielding questions from the enthusiastic guests. Mrs. Fischer said the device “could change the world for people who are blind or have low vision.”

For more information or to join us in Palm Beach for our Visionary Evening Dinner, contact Mona de Sayve at **561-635-5342** or [mona\\_desayve@hotmail.com](mailto:mona_desayve@hotmail.com)



Photo from left to right: Dr. Calvin Roberts, Jennifer and the Honorable David Fischer

## Technologies for Autonomous Human Navigation

Can the technology that makes self-driving cars possible help people who are blind or visually impaired? On the latest episode of **On Tech & Vision with Dr. Cal Roberts** podcast, I talk with Jason Eichenholz, the Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer of Luminar Technologies, and Manufacturing Engineer Nico Gentry. Luminar’s LiDAR technology — a remote sensing method that uses light to measure ranges — is instrumental to developing self-driving cars. This same tech could be useful for people who are blind or visually impaired as they need to know the same information to navigate: “What is in front of me?” What is behind me? To the Left? To the right? You’ll also hear from Thomas Panek, the President, and CEO of Guiding Eyes for the Blind, an avid runner who dreamed of running without assistance. He took this unmet need to a Google Hackathon. Ryan Burke, the Creative Producer at Google Creative Lab, put together a team to develop a solution that turned into Project Guideline. Kevin Yoo, Co-Founder of WearWorks Technology, is using inclusive design to develop Wayband, a navigation wristband that communicates directions with users via haptics.



An abstract illustration of a person running down a path.

## Still Looking for That Special Gift? Lighthouse Guild Experts have Suggestions


We asked Lighthouse Guild experts to provide gift ideas for people who are blind or have low vision. Judith Katzen, Director of Rehabilitation, recommends the **Say When Liquid Level Indicator**. A small device placed in a mug or cup alerts the user before the liquid they are pouring reaches the rim. “A **Talking Watch** is a great idea — many of our clients ask for them,” says Kwun Kau Lee, Optician. Dr. Andrea Zimmerman, Low Vision Specialist, suggests a **gooseneck lamp**. Her patients find it very helpful because it enables them to direct the light for reading or tasks. Another great option is the **Amazon Echo Dot Smart Speaker** with Alexa. This voice-activated tool can help someone with vision impairment text, make phone calls and lists, check their calendar, and turn devices in their home on and off. Check out our [website](#) for a complete list of some of the latest assistive technology, along with other tried and true solutions!

## End the Year with an Inspirational Gift

As I shared, the holidays can be a difficult time for people with vision impairment. Our services are a lifeline for those coping with depression and vision-related challenges. And our state-of-the-art Technology Center connects people with vision impairment to the assistive tools that will inspire them to achieve their goals. However, our patients and clients could not benefit from services such as those provided by our Dorothea Strelsin Behavioral Health Clinic and our Technology Center without your support. Please take a moment before the end of 2021 to make that **gift of inspiration** to Lighthouse Guild.

I hope you will also consider volunteering, referring people who can benefit from our services, and spreading the word on Twitter and Facebook!

On behalf of all of us at Lighthouse Guild, we wish you and your family all good things this holiday season and in the coming year!

  
**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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