



Light the Way

**2019
—
2020**

**ANNUAL
REPORT**





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Message from the President and Board Chair

Dear friends,

For 65 years the Lighthouse of Pinellas has played a pivotal role in transforming the lives of the blind and visually impaired in our community and this past year was no different. As an organization and as a collective we faced a year of uncertainty and challenges. But one thing was certain – our dedication to meet the needs of the visually impaired in our community remained steadfast.

This past fiscal year, even amidst a global pandemic, we were able to continue providing much-needed services to our clients and their families thanks to our loyal staff, supporters and the help of technology. We were able to create virtual instructional classes for adaptive kitchen skills, coping with vision loss, self-advocacy skills, individualized daily living activities, one-on-one counseling on adjusting to vision loss, iPhone training, computer training, job readiness training and placement and our children's program conducted their entire 2020 summer program over Zoom.

In addition, we partnered with MacDonald Training Center to assist clients in our workforce development program so they could acquire the skills they need to re-enter the job market.

With the generosity of a gift from the Free Family Foundation and Hancock Whitney our newly launched STEM lab and program allowed 15 teens to participate in STEM activities they are often excluded from.

Your support throughout the year helps make everyday miracles happen at The Lighthouse of Pinellas. It also creates opportunities that we look forward to beginning like the opening of our first ever low vision store that will directly support the clients and community we serve, establishing on-site mental health services for individuals struggling with an eye condition diagnosis or the life-altering impact of vision loss. Looking ahead and acknowledging our new reality we foresee continuing to offer hybrid programs held in-person with segments taught virtually. Lessons learned during this challenging time will make our programs more effective and accessible to those impacted by blindness or low vision.

Our community is counting on us and your support is essential to our success. Together, we can shine a light on vision loss.

With Gratitude,

Kimberly Church, CPA, MBA
President and CEO

Michael W. Porter
Lighthouse of Pinellas, Inc. Board Chair

MISSION

To advance the independence and quality of life for individuals in Pinellas County who are blind or visually impaired.

VISION

Every individual who is blind or visually impaired has the opportunity to achieve his or her fullest potential and to pursue his or her aspirations in all aspects of life.





Kim Church,
President and
CEO is pictured
with MacDonald
Training Center
President and CEO,
Karenne Levy

Lighting the Way During Unprecedented Times...

This year, we are proud of all we accomplished in the face of a global pandemic. More importantly, we are honored our clients and families choose us to walk this journey with them and we are above and beyond proud of all they have accomplished. We hope you enjoy reading this year’s annual report and learning how our programs and services are changing the lives of our clients and allowing them to live independently, secure employment and pursue their dreams.

Partnership with MacDonald Training Center

For most people, employment provides a sense of purpose, belonging and a feeling of satisfaction. Yet, most individuals who are blind or visually impaired are not employed. We understand the value of having a job when a person has a disability, well beyond the monetary benefits.

That is why we have partnered with the Florida Division of Blind Services (DBS) to offer our Vocational Rehabilitation Program to Pinellas County residents who meet DBS eligibility requirements. The program helps people with vision loss train for and gain employment. It also assists those who are losing their vision in their adult years to retain their current job.

This past year, we focused on expanding the workforce development portion of our Vocational

Rehabilitation program. We began a pilot partnership with the MacDonald Training Center in Tampa whose mission is to transform lives through innovations in vocational training, employment pathways, residential support and life enrichment opportunities for the disabled.

We are proud to announce all three clients who participated in the pilot partnership program passed their Internet Competency Certification (IC3 certification). Congratulations to **William Marshall, Amanda Shevitsky** and **Nick Crowell**. What an accomplishment! The IC3 Certification is a global benchmark for basic computer literacy, including operating systems, hardware, software and networks.

We look forward to our continued partnership with MacDonald Training Center and to the success of our second group of clients who will begin their certification courses May 2021.



William Marshall



Amanda Shevitsky



Nick Cromwell

15 Teens Participated In The STEM Program

Our Innovative Teen STEM Program

Far too often, blind youth are denied the opportunity to explore science, technology, engineering and math known as (STEM) and have been excluded due to the false assumption that being sighted is required to succeed in these disciplines. Unfortunately, many teachers, parents and students are unaware of the nonvisual solutions -- many of which have been created by blind scientists and engineers, that enable blind people to engage in STEM education and careers. Due to this lack of knowledge and the resulting low expectations, blind students are discouraged exploring employment in STEM careers where the development of ideas and innovations by disabled individuals have been known to change the world.



Isabella Cruz's Story

Isabella has never let anything get in her way when it comes to reaching her goal. She is currently a senior at Tarpon Springs High and will receive her high-school diploma this year. Subsequently, she'll graduate from the early college program at St. Petersburg College this spring with an associate degree. But this is only the beginning of her lifelong dream and journey to attend the University of South Florida and graduate with a master's or PhD in Psychology with a concentration in neuroscience.

Isabella has attended the Lighthouse since she was very young. Her visual impairment is caused by optic atrophy and brain damage to her occipital lobe. She has both acuity and peripheral vision loss, along with nystagmus which causes her eyes to uncontrollably move back and forth. Isabella now participates in the Teen Transition program. She credits this program (which she says is her favorite) for boosting her self-confidence and helping her build skills related to completing college entrance applications and interviewing for jobs. Isabella told us recently that participating in Blind-Sighted Creations has helped her figure out what she wants to do with her life. "Since I want to become a neuropsychologist, I had to decide whether I want to practice privately or with a group after I finish college and get licensed to practice. Blind-Sighted Creations has shown me the amount of extra work that is needed to run something like a private practice, while the job experiences helped me learn what it's like to work under someone else and has helped me consider this further." We know that Isabella will fulfill her dream – whatever her chosen path. We are so proud of you!

"This program would greatly benefit anyone with a visual impairment to truly see what we can do. We are not typically given the opportunity to participate in STEM programs or technical occupations." – Isabella Cruz

Grace Patterson's Story

To say that Grace is ambitious is an understatement. She is currently dual-enrolled at Pinellas Park High School and St. Petersburg College, expecting to receive both her high-school diploma and an associate degree in English, Language and Literature this Spring. But this is only the beginning of her life-long dream to attend Florida Atlantic University's Wilkes Honors College and then Stetson University's College of Law to obtain a Juris Doctorate. Grace has two goals – to travel and become a Public Interest Attorney.

Grace was diagnosed at the age of four with Retinitis Pigmentosa – a genetic disorder that causes progressive vision loss. At the age of seven she was deemed legally blind and was referred to the Lighthouse of Pinellas Children's Program where she learned skills to live independently and received job training and counseling services. After graduating from the Children's Program, Grace enrolled in the Teen Transition Program and Blind-Sighted Creations.

"Learning how to manage and manipulate the technology was extremely enjoyable, it showed me that even with low vision or blindness that I could work in a technical field." – Grace Patterson

"Both the Teen Transition Program and Blind-Sighted Creations have helped me develop research, marketing, and additional workplace skills that I will continue to use well after high school", says Grace. "I am more confident in working with others in a professional setting, collaborating to enhance our business and navigating any issues that arise with respect and precision. I have acknowledged my ambitions to go into law for many years, but the Teen Transition program has helped me hone the skills that I will utilize in college and law school."

It has been our privilege to learn and grow with Grace and we wish her all the best on her future endeavors. We know she will succeed!



Taking Back Control of My Life



“Without the Lighthouse I’m not sure where I would be. Everything and everybody now put a smile on my face. I am going to be 57 years of age and I feel like I have my life back. I am interested in and enthusiastic about anything life can throw me.”

– Charles Berube

Charles Berube's Story

Charles spent a good part of his life working the family business in Baltimore, Maryland. He is a former plumber and pipe fitter and has a strong engineering and business background. One early morning he woke up and could not see. He was diagnosed with Dry Macular Degeneration, which several year later turned to Wet Macular Degeneration.

When Charles Berube first came to Lighthouse of Pinellas, he did not think he could ever work again due to his visual impairment. He planned to receive training to live independently, but he did not know he could return to the workforce. Charles began reclaiming his life by enrolling in several of our Adult Independent Living programs. After learning adaptive kitchen techniques for cooking, orientation and mobility training and receiving a guide dog, Charles decided he was ready for his next big step – going back to work. After trying to find employment at various businesses, Charles realized he needed to learn at least some basic computer skills.

He had never used a computer before and did not think he wanted to or could learn it easily. Charles ended up loving using the computer and being a quick learner. He can now use Word, Excel, email, and surf the internet, and has decided he wants to participate in Department of Blind Services (DBS) Business Enterprise Program to become a vending operator.

“Without the Lighthouse I’m not sure where I would be. Everything and everybody now put a smile on my face. I am going to be 57 years of age and I feel like I have my life back. I am interested in and enthusiastic about anything life can throw me.” Says Charles.

Charles can often be seen walking around town with his beloved guide dog Hercules. “Nothing can stop me now!”

Mike Bender's Story

Mike remembers having bad vision his entire life. As a kid he could not see the blackboard in school and had to sit in the first row. Those who knew him well say he was a wild child. “I raced go-carts as a kid,” he says jokingly – “even though I couldn’t see where I was going”.

As a young man he tried to enlist in the service but was denied because he failed the vision test. But that did not stop Mike.

Mike was diagnosed with Cone Dystrophy in 2002 – well into adulthood. His ophthalmologist told him he was legally blind – three times over the legal limit to drive and was referred to the Lighthouse of Pinellas.

When he came to LHP, he wanted to try to find another part-time position using professional skills and he immediately took advantage of almost every program offered to him. Mike spent 4-5 days a week at our training facility – and became a “fixture” in our classes. He learned to read using low-vision products, mastered computer keyboarding skills, and even assisted our instructors when they needed help.

After learning firsthand about the need for website accessibility for visually impaired individuals, Mike obtained certification as a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Trusted Tester V5. This past winter, with LHP assistance, Mike secured a position as a remote accessibility tester for Portland Community College, Oregon. Mike is really enjoying this position, as it allows him to work from home, use technical skills and help make a part of the internet a more accessible place for people who are blind and visually impaired.

Today, Mike continues his quest for learning and trying new things. He is an avid cyclist and enjoys open water swimming. He works out at a local gym and walks every day trying to stay in the best shape possible. So, what is next for Mike as he begins his new career? “Singing lessons!” beams Mike.



A Lifetime Love of Learning

“I raced go-carts as a kid even though I couldn’t see where I was going”.

– Mike Bender

Lighthouse of Pinellas Programs

Established in 1956, the Lighthouse of Pinellas (LHP) provides comprehensive vision rehabilitation training and services for individuals of all ages in Pinellas County who are visually impaired or blind. Our highly trained, certified and licensed staff provides individual and group instruction designed to help clients succeed in school, the workplace, travel independently in the community and live a safe and healthy lifestyle despite vision impairments.



Youth



We believe every child should be able to fully participate in school, recreational activities and career exploration and feel no limits to what they can become. The Lighthouse has three programs that help children meet developmental goals and prepare for life as an independent adult:

Early Intervention Program: Birth – 5 years

Early Intervention Program instructors focus on teaching parents how to interact and communicate with their child who is visually impaired to compensate for learning that is not taking place through sight. Teachers also provide additional training in auditory, tactile, pre-braille and independent travel skills so children are prepared to enter pre-school or Kindergarten along with their sighted peers.

Children's Program: 6 – 13 years

School-age children receive instruction from specially trained Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) designed to help them become self-confident and function independently at school, with friends and in the community. Curriculum includes building skills in independent living, social and communication, assistive technology, career exploration and recreation.

Teen Transition Program: 14 – High School Graduation

The Teen Transition Program empowers students age 14 and up to 22 years, to transition from high school to college, technical school, or employment by providing extensive year-round training in personal and home management, assistive technology, job readiness, self-advocacy and independent travel skills. In addition, the teens participate in a summer programs that includes college and work experiences, career planning and volunteer opportunities to prepare them for success in competitive employment and living on their own after graduation.



Adults



Independent Living Skills

Certified instructors teach adults new ways to perform familiar tasks and manage their daily lives. Clients learn adaptations for cooking, cleaning, money management, home organization and personal care, as well as valuable resources in the community available to people with vision loss.

Orientation & Mobility

Certified Orientation & Mobility specialists help clients discover new techniques for traveling safely and independently in their homes, their workplaces and in the community. Skills taught include learning to use a white cane, cross streets safely and independently, access public transportation when driving a car is no longer an option, and for some, developing the prerequisite skills to obtain a guide dog.

Coping with Vision Loss Classes

Counseling services are available to LHP clients and their family members and they are intended to help in the transition, recovery and adjustment to living with vision impairment. Lighthouse instructors who are also visually impaired themselves, provide stress management, problem-solving and self-advocacy techniques, and address anger, depression and other common concerns associated with low vision or blindness.

Alumni Program

Once clients have successfully completed classes, they are invited to participate in the Alumni Program. With the intent to help adults and seniors avoid physical and social isolation, and stay healthy, active, and connect with others, this vital program allows clients to choose from several social activities such as Pinellas Talking Book Library Book Club, healthy cooking classes, technology assistance, card and other games, musical entertainment and more.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services

LHP offers comprehensive training to empower adults who are blind or visually impaired with the skills and confidence needed to gain employment, maintain employment, or regain employment and function alongside their sighted peers. In addition to Independent Living Skills classes, Orientation & Mobility training and technology instruction, services also include:

Job Readiness Training

Based on an individualized plan to meet the client's employment goals, individuals participate in access technology classes, iPhone and iPad training, instruction in the use of various low vision aids and training in writing a resume, online job-search techniques and interviewing skills.

Job Placement & Supported Employment Services

A specially trained Employment Specialist assists clients in their job search and then works with them at the job site until their training is complete. After the training period, the Employment Specialist follows up periodically with the client to ensure success.

Technology

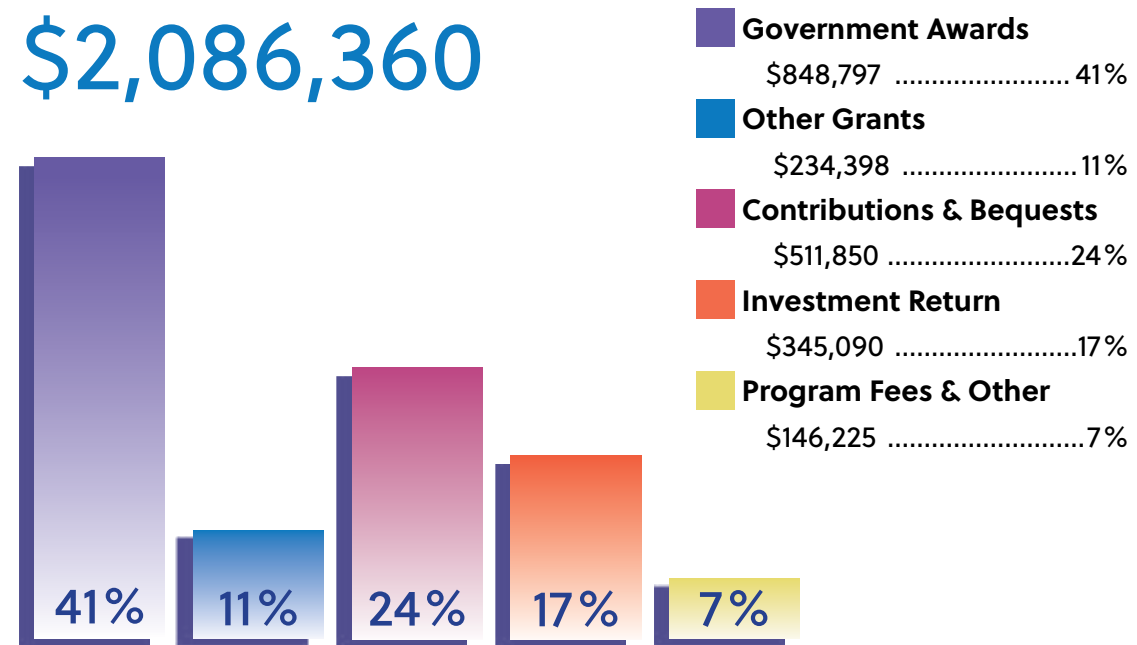
Technology is adding a new level of independence for people with vision loss. Lighthouse staff train adults and children to use magnification and screen-reading software so they can operate a computer for work, school, or leisure just like their sighted peers. Clients can also take classes to learn how to use the access technology in iPhones and iPads.



Our Mission Shines

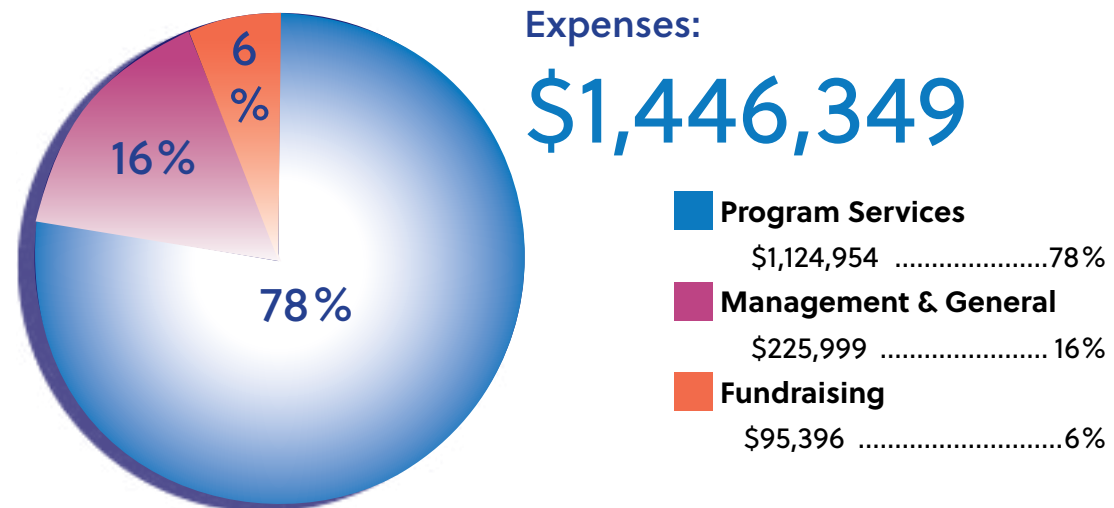
Revenue:

\$2,086,360



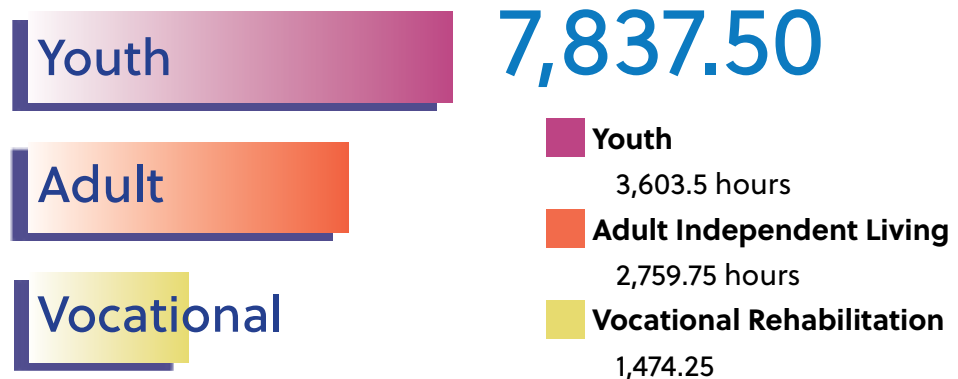
Expenses:

\$1,446,349



Direct Client Service Hours:

7,837.50



7
Programs Offered

234
Supporters

353
Referrals

606
Clients Served
Across All Programs

3,000+
Touched Through
Community Outreach



Monthly Giving Program

The monthly giving program makes supporting the Lighthouse of Pinellas mission easy through monthly, automatic withdraws from a credit card or bank account of your choice. You can get involved for as little as \$5 a month.

Planned Giving

Our planned giving program allows you to leave a legacy gift in support of Lighthouse of Pinellas. Even if you cannot make a sizable gift today, through a planned gift, you can have a profound impact on how people with vision impairment receive services tomorrow.

Memorial and Tribute Gifts

Honor your loved one by designating Lighthouse of Pinellas as the recipient of charitable gifts in lieu of flowers.

Special Events

Attend or volunteer at one of our annual fundraisers held each year including **Night at The Races** and **Point of Light**.

Community Fundraisers

There are many ways you can raise money to support our mission by organizing a community event. Community events can be bake sales, car washes, a neighborhood yard sale, a Facebook birthday campaign, text to give campaign or even a large-scale golf tournament like the highlighted **Swing for Sight** below.

Swing for Sight Success

Thank you, Dr. Jonathan Mines, for organizing 2019's Friends of the Lighthouse Swing for Sight Golf Tournament and choosing us as the beneficiary. The event raised over \$26,000 that we were able to use for programs and services.

We recently presented Dr. Mines with the Glass Lighthouse award in appreciation for his support and dedication. We hope to thank him again in the future when we can all gather.





6925 112th Circle N., Ste. 103

Largo, FL 33773

www.lhpfl.org

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