

Offering a  
helping hand  
now and for  
generations  
to come.



*Envision the Future Endowment Campaign*  
Summer 2022



The Chicago  
Lighthouse

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# Dear Friends,

**In July 2020, The Chicago Lighthouse Board of Directors launched an initiative to raise \$7 million over three years for our endowment.** As a raging pandemic cast uncertainty on our daily lives, we keenly understood the importance of securing The Lighthouse's long-term viability.

This year marks the third and final leg of our *Envision the Future* Endowment campaign. We have been blessed with generous contributions from our closest friends and most loyal supporters. As we enter the home stretch of this effort, we are requesting your support to raise the final \$1.4 million required to reach our goal and help secure The Lighthouse's long-term viability.

In this issue of *Legacy*, we highlight just a few of the many remarkable people who are members of The Chicago Lighthouse family. These stories represent just a small fraction of the tens of thousands of people we assist each year. We are dedicated to helping our clients build confidence and live as independently as possible through programs that range from Birth-to-Three Early Intervention services to job training and employment to groundbreaking scientific research.

For 116 years, The Chicago Lighthouse has provided our assistance to anyone who needs it, which is why we offer most of our programs at no cost, and we never turn anyone away due to an inability to pay. A successful closing out of

our *Envision the Future* Endowment Campaign will help safeguard that our programs will be available to help people who are blind, visually impaired, disabled and Veterans for generations to come.

We, along with the other members of The Chicago Lighthouse Board, are committed to reaching the \$7 million goal we set in July 2020. In addition to our annual financial commitment to The Chicago Lighthouse, the entire Board has made a personal, multi-year pledge to our endowment. We would like to invite you to join us in this effort by contributing to the *Envision the Future* Endowment Campaign. You can donate now or even make arrangements to include The Lighthouse in your estate plan. No gift is too small, and every donation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Robert Clarke  
Board Chair



Caroline Grossinger  
Chair, *Envision the Future*  
Endowment Campaign



# Providing Hope Through **COMPREHENSIVE VISION CARE**

**Losing the ability to see can be a devastating prospect, as it can affect nearly every aspect of daily life, from dependence on others for transportation to limiting the ability to continue lifelong hobbies and have meaningful social interactions.** That is why The Chicago Lighthouse takes a comprehensive approach to vision care, providing practical education and solutions so that our clients can continue to live their lives to the fullest. Glenn's story illustrates how all of our different elements of care come together.

**Glenn came to The Chicago Lighthouse in 2021 after losing much of his vision due to Leber hereditary optic neuropathy.** Glenn's vision loss hindered his ability to work, read, cook and, perhaps worst of all, see his 9-year-old grandson's face. As a result, Glenn had become depressed about his future.

Glenn was seen by several of our Low Vision Services experts. At an appointment with Dr. Kelly Scherer in our Low Vision Clinic, Glenn learned about his diagnosis, disease progression and treatment options. Our in-house clinical psychologist Dr. Michael Smith, helped Glenn cope with his frustrations and fears related to his



*The Lighthouse helped Glenn find assistive technology that once again could help him see his grandson's face.*

“ Their support and resources brought back all the little things in life that mean so much.

—Glenn

declining vision, and our Occupational Therapist Laura Hayes provided tips and advice that enabled Glenn to continue his love of cooking.

Glenn had several consultations with our Assistive Technology Team. They showed him devices that could help maintain his independence, including IrisVision. This device combines an individual's remaining vision with artificial intelligence to help users read, watch television, and recognize faces. For Glenn, the device provided what he wanted, and after nearly a year, he was once again able to see his grandson's facial expressions. **“Coming to The Lighthouse was the best thing that happened to me,”** Glenn says.

**Last year, The Chicago Lighthouse helped more than 3,500 patients understand their vision loss, make the most of their remaining vision, and find tools to help them continue the activities they love.**



# FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY,

The Lighthouse has been providing resources to help people who are blind or visually impaired live life to the fullest.

Now serving more than 50,000 people annually, The Lighthouse is providing those same resources to include Veterans and those with other types of disabilities. By supporting the *Envision the Future* Endowment Campaign, we are ensuring The Chicago Lighthouse's financial security so that the Isaacs of the future will have the same access to cutting-edge programs and resources that my son does today.

**LEFT TOP:** Isaac and Flyer relaxing at their home.

**LEFT BOTTOM:** Chicago Lighthouse Board Member John Raske and his son, Isaac, await Flyer's arrival in 2021.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Isaac learns the proper way to give Flyer a treat.





**Of the many roles I play, “father” is probably the most important.** In fact, it was fatherhood that brought me to The Chicago Lighthouse eight years ago, and it is as a father that my family and I have pledged our support to The Lighthouse’s *Envision the Future* Endowment Campaign. We want to ensure every person experiencing vision loss has the same opportunities for advancement and achievement as our family.

I knew my son Isaac would have vision troubles when we adopted him at age two. Doctors in China (where Isaac was born) informed us he was born with microphthalmia, a condition in which one or both eyes do not develop fully, and that he would only have limited sight in one eye. For many years, we deployed a defensive strategy, scheduling multiple medical procedures to protect Isaac’s limited sight. Despite our efforts, a detached retina in seventh grade took Isaac’s remaining vision.

Fortunately, The Chicago Lighthouse was there. It was at The Lighthouse that Isaac first participated in the National Federation for the Blind’s BELL® Academy, which teaches young students Braille. The BELL program continued to be a highlight of his summers for many years as it helped him continue to grow in his blindness skills, interact with blind mentors and have fun with blind peers.

**In 2021, The Lighthouse helped provide Isaac with his beloved and near-constant companion, Flyer, a yellow Labrador, as part of Operation Cuddle Up. The initiative was a joint project between The Chicago Lighthouse and Guiding Eyes for the Blind that found loving homes for dogs who decided the guide dog life was not for them.**

I believe all parents have the same fundamental goals for their children: health, happiness and success on their own terms. For those of us whose



children have vision impairments, we often must turn to skilled professionals to provide the resources that ensure our children can realize their potential. **For our family and hundreds of others, The Chicago Lighthouse is that place.**

Our world is built for the sighted, and Isaac must adapt to it. As a sighted person, I do not have the tools, knowledge or experience to help him learn these skills. The Chicago Lighthouse does. Its Youth Transition Program can help him learn to use public transportation to navigate around a bustling metropolis. Its Low Vision Services can provide opportunities to participate in groundbreaking and necessary research studies. Its Assistive Technology team can help him determine the best devices to suit his needs. Or better yet, serve as an outlet for the devices that Isaac may invent; he is a whiz at technology! **For Isaac and countless others, these resources will be critical to not just accessing the world but being included in it.**

# OUR YOUTH TRANSITION PROGRAM BUILDS CONFIDENCE FOR **THE NEXT GENERATION**

**The Chicago Lighthouse's Youth Transition Program prepares young adults, ages 15-24 who are blind or visually impaired, for adulthood through life-skills instruction, peer interaction and confidence-building.** While some of our participants have been blind since birth, others, like Marcheale, are still adjusting to living with a visual impairment.

Marchele lost her vision in 2020 due to cancer. As she adjusted to her new life, the 16-year-old from suburban Chicago was relieved about one thing: all of her schooling was being conducted via Zoom. In the virtual world, where she would not have to navigate crowded hallways or classrooms, her disability could go unnoticed.

However, Marcheale knew things would change soon. The 2021 school year was likely going to resume with in-person classes, which meant she would have to move from classroom to classroom along with her peers. Marcheale would tell her mother everything was fine, that she could see well enough to return to school without needing to learn how to use a white cane. Her mother knew Marcheale was in denial and turned to The Lighthouse for help.

Soon, the teenager was enrolled in our *Summer in the City* Program. Over the course of the five-day session, she bonded with several other adolescents who shared her disability, some of whom had been blind since birth. As they shared their stories and talked



*Marchele (second from left) and her fellow Summer in the City participants embark on an afternoon outing.*

about how they navigated their schools and interacted with others, Marcheale began to gain confidence. By the end of the session, Marcheale's mother noticed significant improvement in her daughter's self-esteem. They both look forward to Marcheale's participation in our Program for years to come.

The Chicago Lighthouse's Youth Transition Program is the **only program in Illinois** that provides adolescents with vision impairments the instruction and tools they need to grow into confident, independent adults.



**"Summer in the City helped me accept my visual impairment, I learned not to be embarrassed to use a white cane, and I made a new group of friends who can understand exactly what I am going through."**

—Marchele



## ENSURING THEIR DAUGHTER'S LEGACY, The Ross Family Endows Low Vision Research



“

What an incredible legacy for Lauren to have her name attached to a process that might help blind people see again!

—Ruth Ross

**When Lauren Ross passed away at the young age of 39, her family wanted to make sure the young woman's memory lived on.** Knowing that The Lighthouse had been an important part of Lauren's life after being diagnosed with aniridia, an eye disorder characterized by the absence of an iris, Lauren's parents, Steven and Ruth, met with Lighthouse President and CEO Dr. Janet Szlyk to ask if there was anything they could do to help the organization that had done so much for their daughter.

Dr. Szlyk updated the Rosses on many of The Lighthouse's projects, including a clinical trial of a groundbreaking technology. The Intracortical Visual Prosthesis (ICVP) is a small device that is implanted directly into the brain's visual cortex, bypassing the retina and optic nerve and may restore some light perception for people who are totally blind.

**“This is such an amazing project that we had to get on board.”** Ruth recalls.

So was born The Lauren M. Ross Chair in Low Vision Research. The endowed position will enable The Lighthouse to continue participating

in groundbreaking research projects designed to help those who are blind or visually impaired. Dr. Patricia Grant, who is The Lighthouse's Vice President of Research, is the first professional to hold the newly-endowed chair.

The Rosses are proud to have their daughter's name associated with The Lighthouse's work on behalf of people who are blind or visually impaired. They speak of the organization with pride and encourage friends and associates to get involved or donate however and whenever possible. (They are also pleased that Lauren's fiancée, Michael, has found a place within The Lighthouse's I.T. department after having supported Lauren through her disease and decline for nearly nine years.)

**“When an organization does such amazing things and provides hope where it didn't exist before, they deserve all of our wholehearted support,”** Ruth says. **“We want to ensure The Lighthouse will continue its life-changing work for years to come, so that others can find the same hope Lauren did.”**

**Note:** As this article was being prepared, Steven Ross passed away after a long illness. The Chicago Lighthouse extends our deepest condolences to the Ross family.

Please join our incredible community of donors who are investing in the future for people who are blind, visually impaired, disabled or Veterans!



A campaign to **ensure** The Chicago Lighthouse will continue to provide our essential **services** to people who are blind, visually impaired, disabled and Veterans **for generations to come.**

**For more information or to make a gift to the Endowment Campaign, please call or write us at:**

Janet P. Szlyk, Ph.D. | President and CEO

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