



**LIGHTHOUSE**  
FOR BLINDNESS & VISION LOSS  
OF COLLIER COUNTY

## *May 2026 Newsletter*

**Let's give it up for Jeffrey!**



Congratulations are in order for our Assistive Technology Assistant Jeffrey Zacarias! He will be joining Citibank as a summer HR analyst in Tampa. He wrote the following regarding the big news:

"I am extremely proud of this achievement. However, I could not have done it alone.

Lighthouse of Collier has played a huge part in developing my personal and professional skills. Being able to develop my communication, teamwork, and time management skills in an environment where the people around me understand my challenges has been a privilege. Now I get to challenge myself in a new environment where my coworkers may not know what individuals like me can accomplish in the professional world.

Nonprofits like LOC are extremely important because personal growth starts at a young age. I lived with a lack of guidance in my younger years because I had never met anyone else who was blind or visually impaired. Attending summer camp with other LOC students changed that for me. Being able to share those common struggles in a safe space while being taught how to develop personal skills is extremely important for children who live with vision loss."

Jeffrey starts his internship June 1. The entire LOC team is so proud of you! You can learn more about employment stats for people who are blind and visually impaired by clicking on this [link](#).

## ***Blind Inspirations* podcast**

LOC staff member Rick Hart encourages everyone to watch *Blind Inspirations* on YouTube. It's about a man named Bobby Carr who shares his personal story on living with vision loss. His third episode addresses his five positive takeaways since losing his vision.

They include having an enhanced sensory perception, developing deeper connections, adapting to different situations, living in the moment, and discovering new passions. Carr picked up on the way certain people walk, began asking for help, challenged himself to learn new skills, and discovered new interests. He wants everyone to see a silver lining in every situation. Carr understands life can be challenging. He doesn't want others who have a visual impairment to give up on themselves or their passions. You can watch his third episode by clicking on this [link](#).

## **ILS classes this month**



Portable independent living skills kits were distributed to clients. They included bump dots, a signature guide, a liquid level indicator, a 20/20 pen, and a QR code that lists class resources and tools.



LOC Program Director Kerry Birchall gave an Orientation and Mobility lesson to LOC client Mary Ellen Brady at our facility. She practiced using different cane tips.

## ***Tuesday Talks***

Tuesday Talks serves as an opportunity for clients to listen and learn from different speakers who have experience in the vision loss industry. LOC Technology Assistant Sead Bekric was this month's Tuesday Talks speaker. He showed clients how to use the Hable Easy. It's a small, easy-to-use device that helps people who have difficulty using touchscreens. It can be

used to make and answer phone calls, listen to audiobooks, check the weather, etc.

TVI Dani Gonzalez also spoke briefly about a new app she came across.



Close to 30 clients came to this month's session! Those who couldn't make it tuned in remotely.



Here's a close-up shot of the Hable Easy.



Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) Dani Gonzalez spoke about the SpeechLabel app. It allows people who are blind and visually impaired to label and identify objects using audio messages, barcodes, and NFC tags.

## Overview of this month's Transition Program activities

Transition students had an eventful day on Saturday, May 9. They learned about different types of work attire. For example, an electrician will dress differently than an investment banker. They also learned about how to dress well for a job interview. The group visited Miromar Outlets in Estero to put their skills to the test!

They were given a budget and tasked with putting together an appropriate outfit for a job interview. They explored different stores, used technology to

read prices, and worked through ways to problem solve challenges they may experience while shopping.

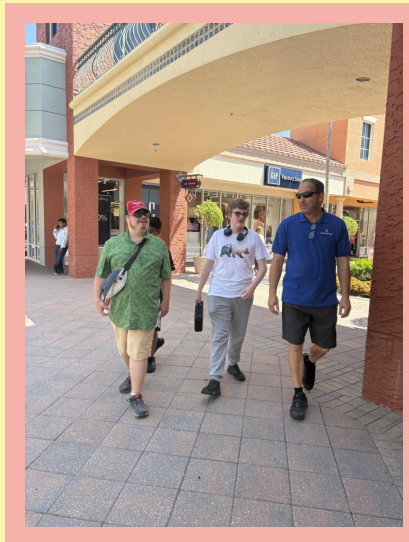
They also used their orientation and mobility skills to head to the bowling alley. Activities like these incorporate vocational rehabilitation skills. You never get a second chance to make a first impression!



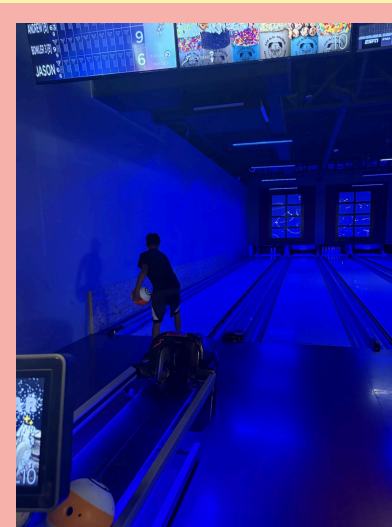
Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) Jason Shaffer is showing transition program students the appropriate pants to wear to a formal job interview.



Transition program students Andrew and Hamilton compare price tags on a clothing rack.



The group practiced their orientation and mobility skills while walking to different stores.



They wrapped up their busy day at the bowling alley! Hamilton is about to roll his ball.

## Client success story this month

## Meet Patricia



*LOC staff members are assigned a specific month to highlight a client in our newsletter. Kerry was assigned the month of May. She wrote a brief write up on her client Trish Bennett.*

"Since becoming a client of Lighthouse of Collier in 2022, Patricia Bennett—known to her friends and family as “Trish” — has demonstrated determination, resilience, and a strong commitment to maintaining her independence while adjusting to changes in her vision. Trish is a retired teacher and was diagnosed with Age-Related Macular Degeneration and Dry Eye Syndrome. Her diagnosis didn't stop her from finding alternate ways to stay active and independent.

Trish is an engaged participant in many Lighthouse programs. She attended our Independent Living Skills (ILS) classes and participated in assistive technology instruction focused on improving her use of her iPhone and iPad. She also attends the Adjustment to Blindness support group each week, where she has built meaningful relationships with peers while continuing to strengthen her confidence and self-advocacy skills.

Trish's determination is seen wherever she goes. She practices her skills in our advanced Orientation and Mobility training in her neighborhood and along 5th Avenue in downtown Naples. These lessons focus on improving her ability to travel safely and independently in increasingly complex environments. Examples include street crossing analysis, environmental awareness, and navigational techniques.

Trish recently applied to Dogs Inc to explore the possibility of working with a guide dog in the future. Her willingness to embrace new skills, technology, and experiences continues to inspire both staff and fellow participants every day."

Way to go, Trish!

## Outreach events this month



LOC Fund Development & Public Relations Manager Victoria Scott visited Lely Palms on May 7 to give a presentation on our history, mission, and services. She also gave presentations at Terracina Grand and American House Bonita Springs III.

## Cue the Wedding Bells!

Victoria went from Miss to Mrs. this month! She and her husband Joseph Saphia got married at The Ritz-Carlton, Naples, on May 9. Congrats to the newly-weds!



Victoria and Joe pose for a photo at their wedding.

## Upcoming Lighthouse Events/Announcements

Summer Camp runs from June 17 to July 22. It'll be M-F from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

No Summer Camp July 3 in observance of the July 4 holiday.

We are ALWAYS looking for new volunteers! Please email [cynthia@lighthouseofcollier.org](mailto:cynthia@lighthouseofcollier.org) or

**stephany@lighthouseofcollier.org if you're interested in  
volunteering at LOC.**

***Check our website for additional details as they become  
available.***

**Here's to a great June!**

**Visit our Website**



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