

Spotlight on Excellence

Special Advertorial Section



Miami Lighthouse's CEO Virginia Jacko works with youngsters at the Miami Lighthouse Academy.

You can enroll your child today in Miami Lighthouse Academy

Are you seeking an educational institution that fosters inclusivity, promotes academic excellence, and instills a sense of belonging for all children and families? Look no further than the Miami Lighthouse Academy. In collaboration with Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Early Steps, and the Early Learning Coalition, we are proud to offer a remarkable learning environment for blind and visually impaired students in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first grade, and second grade.

As a certified Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) Provider, our Miami Lighthouse Academy welcomes students with and

without vision impairment. Our early learning program ages 1-4 years old ensures that all children thrive together, forming lasting connections and friendships.

We take pride in being a national Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment (APPLE center). Our commitment to excellence is reflected in our pioneering approach to education.

We have adopted the internationally renowned HighScope Curriculum, making Miami Lighthouse one of the first vision rehabilitation educational institutions in the United States to utilize this proven methodol-

ogy for blind learners in a fully inclusive model.

At Miami Lighthouse Academy, your child's educational journey will be guided by Florida-certified early childhood teachers, Florida-certified teachers of the visually impaired, and dedicated teaching assistants. These experienced professionals are committed to providing a nurturing and stimulating environment that supports the unique needs of each child.

We take our commitment to research and development seriously. Currently, our institution is engaged in a groundbreaking longitudinal study conducted by



Miami Lighthouse Academy serves those with and without vision.

research faculty from The University of Miami. By participating in this study, we are shaping the future of education for blind and visually impaired students, preparing them for successful integration into our school system, higher education and eventually the workforce.

Discover how we can empower your child to reach their full potential and embrace a future

filled with endless possibilities. Enroll your child today in our Miami Lighthouse Academy and join us on this transformative educational journey.

To learn more about the early learning opportunities available at our Miami Lighthouse Academy, we invite you to contact our dedicated Program Coordinator at (786) 362-7483 or visit MiamiLighthouseAcademy.org.

Miami assistant city manager cites string of successes

Since being appointed in January 2021 as Miami assistant city manager, Natasha Colebrook-Williams has seen through successes and continues to work to better the quality of life for all city residents, businesses and the workforce.

Ms. Colebrook-Williams serves as chief of operations for six multidisciplinary departments, which are solid waste, human services, code compliance, general services administration, innovation and technology, and parks and recreation. Under those departments, there are a number of initiatives that she has accomplished.

"The City of Miami continues to evolve, and what we realized was that it was really important that we established a roadmap on how to improve our parks and recreation system," she said. "A master plan for our parks and recreation had not been done since 2007, so we've been spending a lot of time taking a look at our infrastructure, the community needs and putting together a plan that basically will map out how we move forward

over the next decade and beyond."

The plan encompasses all aspects of the system, including physical parks, amenities, buildings, programming funding and staffing.

"What has been really good about this, and why I see it as an accomplishment, is because the master plan is a process that's driven by data analysis and community input," Ms. Colebrook-Williams said, "and it really provides an implementation strategy."

The parks and recreation master plan is slated to be present today (7/13) during the Miami city commission meeting with the idea that the commission endorses and approves it, which is the goal, she added. "As we saw during the pandemic, the use of the parks became more important nationally and we just want to make sure that we're moving forward in a way that meets the needs of the community."

Another offering Ms. Colebrook-Williams believes doesn't receive a lot of conversation, in terms of what the city offers to



Natasha Colebrook-Williams.

the community from an operations standpoint, is within the Human Services Department.

"This department has an opportunity center in which we provide a free platform for recruitment," she explained. "We're serving two communities, both the jobseekers and local businesses, with a platform through Salesforce to basically advertise employment opportunities for individuals that are pre-screened by the city, and in the last year we've placed approximately 300

individuals in jobs."

Under Ms. Colebrook-Williams' leadership, the city has been working on the improvement of solid waste operations and the mitigation of illegal dumping.

This continues to be a major undertaking and priority for the city, she said, "Everyone deserves to live in an environment that's clean, inviting and that contributes to the quality of life. This is an ongoing issue, and every time we hit a new milestone there's always an opportunity to go even further and to make sure that we're providing the very best service."

In February, the solid waste department launched Rubicon, which is a smart city technology that powers the entire solid waste and recycling fleet.

"This technology is being used to make sure that we're balancing our routes with the goal to reduce missed pickups," she said.

In the last year, the RID campaign, which stands for reporting illegal dumping, was also launched. About 90 cameras were installed throughout the city's

hotspots that have been identified as frequent illegal dumping sites.

"We're just continuously brainstorming and looking for innovative ways to not only make sure that our collection of solid waste and recycling is done in the most efficient manner," Ms. Colebrook-Williams said, "but also ways to mitigate illegal dumping within the city."

Taking it a step further, the city also realized that it needed to step up street-sweeping efforts. The city has gone from sweeping 70 miles of streets per week to 258 miles.

"Miami is definitely a city where we are driven by professionals who are truly committed to improving the quality of life and the way we function," Ms. Colebrook-Williams added. "These directors work tirelessly to ensure that they are thinking outside the box, listening to constituent concerns and needs while keeping up with the trends, because we realize that at the end of the day, we're here to serve our residents."