

# It Takes a Community; Together We Can Make a Difference



It takes a community to raise a child and for a nonprofit to be a success. It is because of the generous people and organizations in our community that make a difference to small nonprofits like Lighthouse of Collier and to our clients.

The Lighthouse of Collier children's summer camp program has grown over the years and has made a significant difference in the lives of the campers who are blind and visually impaired, their families and their caretakers. Program continuation and expansion is vital in order to grow at a rate to keep up with the ever so growing need for services in Collier County. Our goal is to help these children learn socialization, educational and skill development while providing unique opportunities for them to have fun. Children who are blind and visually impaired need to experience as many real life events as possible through art, sports, field trips, and through contact with their environment. These types of activities encourage creativity, independence and enhance awareness of sports and other physical activities, aiding in their self-esteem, body coordination and sensory training. Getting involved in summer camp helps them to realize that they, too, can participate and enjoy the same activities as their sighted friends. Lighthouse of Collier ensures that our Clients have access to all the things that others who are not visually impaired have access to, despite their disability.

Almost all social skills used by sighted children have been learned by visually observing the environment/other persons and behaving in socially appropriate ways. Social interaction skills are not learned casually and incidentally by children who are blind and visually impaired as they are by sighted children. Social skills must be carefully, consciously and sequentially taught. Fundamentally, it can often mean the difference between social isolation and a satisfying and fulfilling life as an adult.

Lighthouse of Collier enrolled 25 children, in their 7th annual 4 week summer camp. During the camp, children experienced interacting with other children who are blind and visually impaired, enjoyed community activities and field trips, learned about public safety, visit local attractions and participated in activities at such places as: Naples Botanical Garden, Arthur L. Allen Tennis Center, Naples Art Association, Home Depot, CREW Nature Walk, and The Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens, all of whom have collaborated with Lighthouse of Collier to provide these services free of charge to our summer camp participants. In addition, activities that took place at the Girl Scout House location during summer camp include picnics at the neighboring park, board games, crafts, talking computer classes, beep baseball, audible soccer and meeting and playing with new friends.

Andrew Muller is one of the 25 campers at the Lighthouse of Collier Summer Camp. Marcia and Todd Muller's

son was born more than 14 weeks prematurely, and before he was 6 months old Andrew, their son, had already undergone several complex surgeries to mitigate serious vision issues. With his mom and dad's encouragement, Lighthouse of Collier is helping this lively child 'spread his wings'.

"At first we were hesitant to have Andrew attend Lighthouse's summer camp since he was so young and had never been away from his family. We were surprised when on the 2nd day of camp Andrew was waiting at the front door of our house at 6:45am with his backpack on asking if it was time to go yet? So much for separation anxiety. He experienced positive interaction with other children with activities that were specially geared to Andrew's abilities and gave him a feel for being away from mom and dad. It's comforting for us to know Lighthouse of Collier will be there as we prepare Andrew to enter the school system. The staff with their resources and expertise will be able to guide us and his school with any special equipment and guidance Andrew might need, and also help him realize there are many children with impairments just like him."

Lighthouse of Collier has been providing services to the blind and visually impaired community for 7 years and we have serviced over 1200 clients in Collier County. Their main focus is empowering their clients of all ages, and teaching them to be as independent as possible by teaching clients tips tools and techniques in order to live more independently. If you or anyone you know is blind or visually impaired, call the center for a tour and learn what the Lighthouse may be able to do for you or your loved one. If you are interested in enrolling in a program at Lighthouse of Collier Summer or making a donation to Lighthouse of Collier, please contact us at 239-430-3934.

### **Lighthouse of Collier**

Phone: 239-430-3934

Website: [lighthouseofcollier.org](http://lighthouseofcollier.org)

Email: [info@lighthouseofcollier.org](mailto:info@lighthouseofcollier.org)

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