

## Achieving ADA Compliance on a National Level

On today's episode, we're joined by Virginia Jacko, the President and Chief Executive Officer at [Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#). Virginia shares her experiences, as someone who is blind, of attempting to view the websites of the candidates running in the 2020 United States presidential election and finding that none of the sites were ADA compliant. She also shares the ADA compliance meter that Miami Lighthouse created and how companies can develop their online presence to be more accessible for all.

### Mentioned Resources:

1. Miami Lighthouse ADA Compliance Meter:

<https://www.miamilighthouse.org/ADAComplianceMeterReport.asp>

2. NY Times article about Whitehouse website updates:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/20/us/politics/biden-white-house-website.html>

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### Transcript of the podcast episode:

**Gabrielle Oates:** Hello everyone and welcome to another episode on the Educating All Learners Alliance podcast! As usual, my name is Gabrielle Oates, and for today I am happy to be joined by Virginia Jacko, who is from the Miami lighthouse for the Blind and Visually impaired. She was a graduate of the lighthouses vocational rehabilitation training program when she was enrolled.

And so Miami lighthouse we are so glad to have you on the episode, the podcast today. But we just wanted to share with everybody that Miami Lighthouse is actually in their 90th year of operation and in normal pre-COVID times they serve 90,000 students. And they have various programs, both in the States and globally but I'll go ahead and turn it over to Virginia to share a bit about that so, welcome Virginia.

**Virginia Jacko:** Thank you so much, yes, the 90,000 program participants ranges from blind babies, to our school, to services to school aged children, to pre employment, training for teenagers to vocational rehabilitation for adults, to services for seniors affected by vision loss. And a statewide program of Ihelp with five mobile I care units in a network of optometrists whereby any child that is

low income needs a dilated eye exam, a medical referral, prescription glasses and globally, providing Braille music distance learning to musicians throughout the world. So when we say 90,000 we also include the parents of these clients.

**Gabrielle Oates:** Yeah you're definitely serving them as well and that's incredible the amount of people globally that you're able to impact with the work. I know that EALA is excited to have Miami Lighthouse as a partner and we've seen a lot of the resources that you've shared the past year, whether that be helping young students learn Braille using muffin tins and tennis balls or anything that we've seen it's just been incredible so we're happy to have you on and we.

**Virginia Jacko:** And I'm privileged, thank you!

**Gabrielle Oates:** Well, we know that this past year has obviously been very interesting and very impactful for many students. But we know that your organization has made a lot of impact regarding ADA compliance. So we know that you made an ADA compliance meter, so could you share a bit about the report and what that included.

**Virginia Jacko:** So our ADA compliance meter is a scorecard that we've copyrighted, which has the 10 most important parameters in making a website or a portal accessible to people with vision impairment or hearing impairment. So it is in compliance with the worldwide consortium on accessibility.

**Gabrielle Oates:** And I know that there was a lot of work around the most recent presidential elections. Could you share a little bit about the work that you did related to that?

**Virginia Jacko:** It was a thrill on the day of inauguration, that the New York Times had a featured article about the importance of the new administration on website accessibility and that whitehouse.gov was accessible based upon the guidelines that we had provided the Biden team during their campaign.

This goes back to when in Miami the first debate I, as a totally blind person, wanted to know about the candidates what were their policies, not a single candidate in that first debate had a website that was accessible. That was shocking. It was so shocking that I said 'Virginia you've got to get busy'.

On our IT team, I have three totally blind experts with degrees either in information technology or computer science. And that is when we took our compliance meter and scored every candidate.

And I was delighted that the first team to get back with us and work with us on a regular back and forth basis were the technology and digital design experts of the Biden team. So, not only was his

campaign website made accessible. But, also, that he used those guidelines, his team used those guidelines in designing the new White House website.

**Gabrielle Oates:** That is incredible and it's just amazing to think that the impact that you had in the initiative that you took to even create the meter, let alone to share it and, obviously, the impact that it's now had on the White House website itself at [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov). So that is great! Congratulations to your team on that hard work, I just have to say.

**Virginia Jacko:** Thank you, let me give you just a couple of easy examples. It's not only about totally blind users, but so many seniors are affected by age related eye disease and a very simple widget installed whereby a senior could change the font size or change the color contrast or that there be an accessibility statement with a phone number for a person to get in touch with. Those were three of the items, of the 10, that are so important in that were installed on [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov). So those are examples of what makes a website accessible.

**Gabrielle Oates:** Yeah no those are great I was actually going to ask us what are some of those biggest changes to the site that Miami Lighthouse sort of inspired and it absolutely makes sense and it just kind of shows people and organizations that it doesn't necessarily have to be this huge lift of effort to be able to actually reach people who want to know more information, like you did.

**Virginia Jacko:** So let me give you some other examples of website accessibility, for example, now under COVID, many of us are doing our grocery shopping through the computer. So we provided our accessibility meter to some of the main grocery chains. I was quite surprised, in comparison to my shock with the candidates in the debate in Miami, the grocery stores websites were quite accessible. And that is so important not to shut out people, especially seniors with vision impairments. We did the same thing for pharmacies, in fact regarding all retail shopping external to pharmacies and groceries we have been consultants to over 40 or 50 retail chains. Helping them so that people during COVID can shop, because that is where commerce has been very successful. People are shopping using their computer!

So website accessibility, distance learning accessibility, portals to be able to get the vaccine. Shocking that people with a vision impairment are going to struggle, because of these portals for getting a reservation for a vaccine, most of them are not in compliance.

When we talk about diversity and inclusion, society did not want to shut out people in wheelchairs from going into brick and mortar businesses. But now most business is not the barrier of those steps with the wheelchair. Furthermore there are ramps, so those barriers are gone. The new barrier with business being done through the computer is the visually impaired, the blind, and especially seniors with low vision are being excluded from the access to information, from commerce because people do not do the very simple things that need to be done for making the website accessible. And so I am proud of the more than 100 establishments that Miami lighthouse has enabled the blind and visually impaired, to conduct business with because those websites are accessible.

**Gabrielle Oates:** Very well, said. And we're thankful that there are some organizations out there that welcome the opportunity to develop and become more accessible, so that way they, you know, it's mutually beneficial that way people have more opportunity of places to go to and information to share, and then of course the organizations and companies benefit from the clients they're growing, So yeah that mutually beneficial act is great, and we know that the digital world, the world of online, whether that be shopping or using the pharmacy like you mentioned, that's only going to continue so these efforts are just increasingly more important.

Great and so, if people wanted to know more about, of course, where to find you and where to find more information about what Miami Lighthouse does, where can they go?

**Virginia Jacko:** [www.Miamilighthouse.org](http://www.Miamilighthouse.org)

**Gabrielle Oates:** Thank you so much, Virginia, for coming on the episode today and sharing with our audience. This is incredible work and we hope to continue spotlighting Miami Lighthouse. For listeners, like Virginia said, go to [miamilighthouse.org](http://miamilighthouse.org) and for more information on the Educating All Learners Alliance, you can go to [educatingalllearners.org](http://educatingalllearners.org). You can subscribe on YouTube at Educating All Learners. And also follow us on Twitter [@educateall\\_org](https://twitter.com/educateall_org). Thank you for tuning in. Until next time, this is the Educating All Learners Alliance podcast!