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Keep the Blind in Mind all year around.



October is Blindness Awareness Month (BAM) in New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Louisiana (so far). The initiative to declare October as an awareness month began when Rocco Fiorentino, 13, petitioned the Assembly of New Jersey to make the declaration. He was only 12 years old at the time! Fiorentino is blind and an acclaimed musician.

"It is my goal to take this campaign across the country," says Rocco, who is a good friend of mine. I've written other stories about [Rocco](#) and also about [Helen Keller](#). Having a blindness awareness month and stories about blindness helps the sighted realize what the blind must face every day. This year's slogan for Blindness Awareness Month was Keep The Blind in Mind. I like to do that all year.

Recently, the Little Rock Foundation, which Rocco and his family started, held a fundraising walk dedicated to assisting and improving the lives of blind and visually impaired people. The walk took place in the woods at the YMCA Camp Matollionequay in Medford, New Jersey.

The location allowed both the sighted and unsighted a sensual experience. Walkers could feel the warmth of the sun peaking through the trees and hear birds singing and a gentle waterfall cascading. They clomped over wooden bridges and could smell the earth and grass throughout the trek.

"My whole family came out to participate in the walk for Blindness Awareness Month," said 11-year-old Julia

Elisen. "We had such a great time!"

Some sighted walkers wore blindfolds as a challenge. They were guided by friends or used canes to experience what it's like to be visually impaired. They gained even more appreciation for the challenges visually impaired people have to face every day.

"I have to say it was scary," said participant Amy Darlington. "I was afraid to take a step."

Even four-footed friends got involved, including seeing-eye dogs from Seeing Eye Puppies Raisings. Families were encouraged to bring along their pets and even provided bandanas for the dogs, which read "Leading the Way to Blindness Awareness Month one PAW at a time."

I asked Rocco how people can help promote the cause of blindness awareness. You can volunteer your time for one of the organizations events or programs, he said. You can also donate an item for auction or pledge money to directly impact Camp Little Rock, an amazing camp for blind and visually impaired kids.

For more information on upcoming events or programs, visit www.tlrf.org or www.blindnessawarenessmonth.org.

Keep The Blind in Mind all year around!

—Danielle Azzolina

PHOTO: Rocco Fiorentino on a walk to promote Blindness Awareness in New Jersey, October 2010. (Photo Courtesy The Little Rock Foundation)

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