

# OCTOBER IS BLINDNESS AWARENESS MONTH

**44 STATES RECOGNIZE OCTOBER, 2012  
AS  
BLINDNESS AWARENESS MONTH**

**INITIATED BY THE LITTLE ROCK FOUNDATION**

Voorhees, NJ (September 21, 2012) – 44 STATES IN THE USA participate in a campaign aimed to educate and enlighten others about blindness, and it all began with a local teenager named Rocco Fiorentino, who started this only three years ago! OCTOBER IS BLINDNESS AWARENESS MONTH was initiated by Fiorentino and his Little Rock Foundation in 2009 in the State of New Jersey. Not only has it spread with campaigns in 44 states throughout the country, the College of New Jersey has now made it a campus-wide campaign with weekly events.

It is overwhelming to think what the determination of one boy, who began this when he was only 12, can do to make a difference in the world! Fiorentino, who becomes 16 in October, is totally blind due to premature blindness called Retinopathy of Prematurity, and is proud to be a multi-nationally awarded humanitarian. He received the Helen Keller Award from the American Foundation for the Blind in June of this year and was named one of the Top Ten Youth Volunteers in the USA last year. The goal of Blindness Awareness Month is to help people understand what it's like to live without sight. According to Fiorentino, "We want to send the message that being blind shouldn't hold anyone back from being a success. We just have to do things our own way. You have to always believe in yourself and anything can happen." He is also a jazz musician who has appeared on *Sesame Street*, educating Elmo and the children of the world and dispelling myths about blindness.

To kick off Blindness Awareness Month, on September 29, 2012, there's the Walk for BAM at the YMCA Camp Matollionequay in Medford, NJ. Over 200 people have registered for this morning event that will include healthy snacks and musical entertainment. To register for the walk, visit [www.tlrf.org](http://www.tlrf.org).

Throughout the month of October there will be events and special activities that will build awareness about ways to prevent, treat and cure blindness and other serious visual impairments. When former NJ Governor Corzine initially signed this into law, he said it was, “the hope to educate the public about eye disease and eye care and to address the rising trend of blindness and severe visual impairment.”

The College of New Jersey is proud to have a unique collaboration with the Little Rock Foundation this year to help educate the public and the student body about blindness. A series of events is scheduled throughout the campus in October to help gain awareness. The most notable appearance will come on Thursday, October 11, from 6 to 8 p.m., when Rocco Fiorentino will share his experiences with the students and sing and play piano at the Rat Café located in the Brower Center. The next Thursday, October 18, there will be a public viewing of the movie “Blindness” in the Education Building. To view other events at this location, visit [www.blindnessawarenessmonth.org](http://www.blindnessawarenessmonth.org).

From Oregon to New Hampshire, from Montana to Alabama and Florida, according to Debbie Nichols, Little Rock Foundation’s volunteer Community Outreach Coordinator and the mom of a blind boy. She said about building support from states throughout the country, “I’m a collector. I’m determined to collect them all!” Tina Fiorentino, executive director of Little Rock, is overwhelmed by the national support for BAM. “I remember how thrilled we were when both NJ Governor Corzine and PA Governor Ed Rendell first signed on and supported our goal to educate the public about blindness,” she said. “And now, with 44 states – and others still pending, it is so personally gratifying to know how Rocco has made a difference, how everyone involved with The Little Rock Foundation has impacted on the nation.”

Rocco and his parents, Tina and Rocco Fiorentino who created The Little Rock Foundation to help other families with children who are blind or visually impaired, have rallied enormous support from many organizations throughout the State of New Jersey and also in Pennsylvania since BAM was launched. Some of these groups are: NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, National Braille Press, Perkins School for the Blind, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia,

Association for Blind Athletes, Wills Eye Hospital, Overbrook School for the Blind, PA Association for the Blind, Free Library of Philadelphia, Talking Book and Braille Center and much more.

Rocco, who is an accomplished jazz singer and pianist, is an incredible story himself. Born four months premature at only 1 ½ lbs and with less than a 5% chance to survive, he said, “We want to send the message that being blind shouldn’t hold anyone back from being a success. We just have to do things our own way. You have to always believe in yourself and anything happen.”

Rocco was honored to be a special guest on the award-winning television show *Sesame Street* and share this same message with Elmo and all the characters on Sesame Street (and the world of viewers.) The show was first aired in 2010 and it continues to run today.

Collaborations are encouraged throughout October to celebrate Blindness Awareness Month. Those organizations and individuals interested can find more information about The Little Rock Foundation and Blindness Awareness Month can visit [www.blindnessawarenessmonth.org](http://www.blindnessawarenessmonth.org), [www.tlrf.org](http://www.tlrf.org), e-mail [tina@tlrf.org](mailto:tina@tlrf.org) or call 1-877-220-2500.

**BLINDNESS AWARENESS MONTH CELEBRATED IN OCTOBER  
IN 44 STATES IN THE U.S.A.**

1. Alabama
2. Alaska – Deaf/Blind week proclamation
3. Arizona
4. Arkansas
5. Colorado
6. Connecticut
7. Delaware
8. Georgia
9. Idaho
10. Illinois
11. Indiana

12. Iowa
13. Kentucky
14. Kansas
15. Louisiana
16. Maryland
17. Maine
18. Massachusetts
19. Michigan
20. Minnesota
21. Mississippi
22. Missouri
23. Montana
24. Nevada
25. Nebraska
26. New Hampshire
27. New Jersey
28. New Mexico
29. North Carolina
30. North Dakota
31. Ohio
32. Oklahoma
33. Oregon
34. Pennsylvania
35. Rhode Island
36. South Carolina
37. South Dakota

38. Tennessee
39. Texas
40. Utah
41. Vermont
42. Washington State
43. West Virginia
44. Wisconsin