

In This Issue:

Why I Support VIPS 2

Moving Day 4

Glasses 101 4

Valentines to VIPS Families 6

Expanded Core Curriculum, Pt. 5 .. 7

VIPS Family Events 8

VIPS-Louisville Class News..... 9

VIPS-IN Kids at Home 12

Notes of Interest 12

Welcome New Children 13

VIPS Staff News 13

Thanks to Our Volunteers 14

New Website 15

Father/Grandfather Team Comes
to the Rescue..... 15

Recent Grants 16

VIPS-Indiana Junior League Grant16

Music on the Lake 17

VIPS-Indiana Events 17

VIPS-Indiana Needs Your Support18

Development News 19

ReVision 19

In Memoriam 19

VIPS Funding..... 19

Wish List 19

VIPS Reaches a Milestone: Thirty Years of Service!

Editor's Note: *Thirty-one years ago I was invited to a meeting at the American Printing House for the Blind that would change the course of my life. It was one of the finest accomplishments in which I ever took part, though my part was*
Cont'd. on pg. 2

In honor of VIPS' 30th birthday, VIPS supporters were invited to a one-hour Launch Lunch, the springboard for a 30th anniversary matching grant challenge. They heard remarks from four speakers: Diane Nelson, VIPS Executive Director; Jay Hatcher, the President of the VIPS Board; Dr. Travis Freeman, a gentleman who demonstrates all that can be achieved with appropriate instruction despite huge challenges; and Jill Talbott, the mother of a delightfully astute VIPS child.

All were so highly motivating that the board members and their guests pledged donations totaling almost \$29,000! And so the 30th birthday celebration year was launched!



These are some of the details of our history:

- VIPS is only one of five centers across the United States that provides early intervention services to young children of blindness.
- VIPS provides educational excellence to young children of blindness, from birth to age 5, across Kentucky and Indiana. Programs include:
 - ~ Statewide Direct Services between a Teacher of the Visually Impaired and a child of blindness in their home, childcare facility or preschool.
 - ~ Center-based programs here in Louisville, including a full time preschool, toddler and infant programs and a summer enrichment program.
 - ~ Soon-to-be preschool program in Lexington beginning in 2015 in a partnership with the University of Kentucky Early Childhood Laboratory School.
 - ~ Parent support services.
- VIPS teachers help blind/visually impaired children piece their world together and to establish a solid foundation on which to grow, learn and develop.

Cont'd. on pg. 2

30th Anniversary Challenge

The Launch Lunch served as the springboard for a 30th Anniversary Matching Grant Challenge. An anonymous donor has pledged \$100,000 to VIPS if we can raise an additional \$200,000. Please won't you consider a donation during this time to help us reach this goal? There is a donation envelope included in this newsletter or you can donate at vips.org.

- VIPS teachers also provide a strong support system for parents, from helping them understand their child's diagnosis to learning to advocate on behalf of them.
- Over time, the service territory grew with children across Kentucky and Southern Indiana receiving direct services from VIPS. Teachers were based out of the Louisville and Lexington offices, and traveled thousands of miles each year to teach children.



VIPS Mom Jill Talbott (left) spoke about how VIPS has helped her child. Travis Freeman (right), inspires with his story of how blindness did not stop him from achieving his goals.



- After beginning in one room loaned from another non-profit, buying and then adding onto an old Louisville building, VIPS moved into this current facility in 2004, just half the size of the current-day building.
- In 2007, VIPS broke ground on the Kids Town Preschool wing, allowing significant expansion of the agency's center-based programs, including the only full-time Kentucky (also several contiguous states) preschool for 3 & 4-year-old children who have a vision issue. The preschool and other center-based programs here are thriving at nearly full capacity.
- The first Kids Town Preschool class graduated in May 2009.
- VIPS-Indiana opened its doors in August 2011 to provide services to children in central Indiana. Prior to this, the state employed one Teacher of the Visually Impaired to provide services to large numbers of preschool children who live in that state.
- Today, VIPS operates three offices in Louisville, Lexington and Indianapolis.
- As a whole, the agency provides services to nearly 400 children each year.
- VIPS-Lexington's move to the campus of UK will enable expanded programming (see related article on page 4).
- VIPS Indiana is deep in discussion with state legislators on being included in the Indiana state budget.

We are so appreciative of the many fine leaders, teachers, staff, parents and others who have made VIPS the success story it is today. This is the start of our next 30 years -- may they be as successful as our first 30!

Editor's Note continued from front page:

tiny! The meeting was called by two colleagues in the local field of blindness professionals and it was followed by many more meetings. Six months later I sat on an interview committee and helped make one of those decisions you know is blessed by the universe, a truly momentous stroke of genius in hiring. I count myself incredibly blessed to have been involved from the start of what became VIPS because I can see just how far we have come and it is truly astounding!

In 1984, Sharon Bensinger worked for the American Printing House for the Blind as a researcher in Early Childhood who routinely traveled to several established early childhood centers for children who were blind/visually impaired as part of her job. Because she felt frustration when she received phone calls from desperate parents asking where they could turn in Kentucky for services for their blind children, she finally thought, why not start our own? She called together a group of motivated community leaders who decided to make a change in our community for these children. The group secured \$20,000 in seed money from Metro United Way and the WHAS Crusade for Children and Sharon was hired as Teacher/Director with a caseload of eight children. And she, and VIPS, have never stopped since that first day.

Why VIPS Deserves Support

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you for taking the time out of the holiday season to visit VIPS. My name is Jill Talbott and I'm the proud mother of 3 children, Hannah, Jack, and Alaina. Alaina is a current student here at VIPS. The early days of her life were filled with anxiety and fear as we learned at two months she had partially detached retinas.

VIPS served our family from the very beginning of Alaina's life, and the people that make up the VIPS team have won a special place in our hearts for all they've done. Today I'd like to share their story with you.

VIPS is a charitable organization that makes a difference from the beginning for all of their families. VIPS is a state-of-the-art preschool – it's not a daycare – but an outstanding preschool – learning takes place here – not babysitting. Because VIPS offers and excels in this teaching mission, Alaina knows many words by sight, has an interest in learning how to read, knows math concepts ... and most amazing to me – she knows over half of her alphabet in braille. Her teacher will send home braille "quizzes" and she gets them right every time.

No other preschool could have provided this positive learning experience. In fact nationwide only 10% of the Legally Blind community is literate in Braille. If you have a blind or visually impaired child in Kentucky and parts of Indiana – VIPS is the only hope for a preschool learning environment with an expertise in educating Blind or VI children. VIPS is beyond exceptional in how they attend to their teaching mission.

VIPS uses state of the art technology. The teachers here have the vision to apply this technology, which ultimately levels

the playing field for children like Alaina. Since our daughter will graduate this year, we've been on a mission to find the right elementary school for her.

Because of the strong preschool education she's received at VIPS, she will be attending a typical elementary school. In touring schools, I was surprised when we visited JCPS' premier elementary school for blind and VI kids that they were not as technologically advanced as VIPS. Because of VIPS' innovative thinkers and focus on applying technology, VIPS is advanced well beyond even the largest of institutions. VIPS has the creativity and drive to apply technology to the needs at hand. The VIPS team does not lack drive.

At VIPS the children can connect their iPad to mirror what is on a smartboard, which is an electronic blackboard. Alaina has used this tool for a year now. This allows VI kids to participate in the classroom just as sighted peers even when they have only a small amount of vision. I've come to learn that unfortunately this is not standard protocol at all schools, not even the much more fully funded JCPS. Again, the VIPS team uses technology to make a difference -- and we are so very grateful for this ingenuity.

There are many VIPS success stories other than just my daughter! Middle schooler Caden Rich and his brother Christian are both VIPS graduates. Last year Caden was named Outstanding Delegate of the KY Youth Assembly. This is a competition that included middle schoolers from all schools statewide -- private and public. Caden won the award for his appeal speech pushing for the use of iPads for all visually impaired students in KY.

Another success story is Ashley Reynolds and her husband Aaron. They are both college students at Indiana University -- moving forward with gusto despite being visually impaired; they began at VIPS -- VIPS makes a difference!

And I'm fortunate to know the parents of another accomplished VIPS graduate, Jamie Weedman. Jamie's Dad Maury is the Orientation and Mobility specialist here at VIPS and his mother provides administrative support and formats the parent newsletter. Jamie, too, is college educated from the University of Louisville, lives independently, and is also a standout runner.

And many of you may recognize another well-known VIPS graduate -- Patrick Henry Hughes. Patrick, also a U of L graduate, was a member of the U of L marching band and was featured in an ESPN special that has run often over the years. In addition to being known for his love of and participation in music, Patrick is a motivational speaker with his father. The last time I spoke with him he was talking of becoming a licensed translator.

These are all very accomplished individuals and it's clear that VIPS made a difference in their lives.

VIPS makes a difference because it kick-starts all of its students into visual therapy and learning braille. ALL VIPS students begin learning braille. VIPS is recognized nationally and is visited by organizations from around the country who wish to mirror their preschool for VI and Blind children after VIPS.

VIPS' mission and reach go well beyond Jefferson County. VIPS team members drive all over the state to serve children who cannot come to the VIPS school. For many of these kids their VIPS therapist is their one and only resource for assisting them in learning how to manage their lives as a blind or VI child. These therapists will say without hesitation that an early childhood foundation is vital to success for the rest of these children's schooling years. Just like their sighted peers, the blind and VI children need a positive first!! The VIPS team sees to that. VIPS makes a difference.

In closing I tell you this -- honestly and humbly; because of VIPS and their guidance, we were able to focus on a path of success -- light out of darkness for our daughter and family.

My guess is that those of you who've taken a tour of VIPS today have seen that this is a group of joyful and committed people.

This joy seems to come naturally. They know they are making an important difference every day. To Diane Nelson and her VIPS team, Alaina and the Talbotts extend a heart-felt THANK YOU.

I hope I've done VIPS justice today; there are so many other success stories that all speak directly to the difference VIPS makes in a child's life. Your support of VIPS is so greatly appreciated. I hope you will consider becoming a sponsor today.



Alaina in her classroom at VIPS.

According to the federal Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, "it is imperative that IEP Teams for blind and visually impaired students provide for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille for those students, unless, based on a thorough and rigorous evaluation, the IEP Team determines that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for a particular student." See: www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/brailledcl-6-19-13.pdf.

Moving Day!

By Kathy Mullen, VIPS Director of Education

Welcome home! In January 2015, VIPS-Central Kentucky moved to their new home in the Early Childhood Laboratory School (ECL) on the campus of the University of Kentucky. In doing so, a partnership was forged to provide better and more comprehensive services to children with visual impairments calling central and eastern Kentucky home.

In the new location, VIPS will enjoy updated office space for service providers and administrative team members. The cheerful surroundings will be the perfect spot for writing grants, researching current practices, catching up on paperwork and assessment writing, and entertaining potential donors. Throwing in a tour of the state of the art early childhood classrooms within the ECL is sure to seal future deals.

But that is only where the magic begins! Outside of the VIPS office space, visitors will be escorted through the hallways, visiting classes where VIPS children will be found fully immersed in inclusive classrooms of two-, three-, and four-year-olds who are developing typically. As a part of the VIPS-UK agreement, slots will be held in classrooms for VIPS children to be enrolled for two to five days per week, depending on the child's educational needs, the family's scheduling needs and the age of the VIPS child. In addition, VIPS will be holding afternoon playgroups for two-year-old children with visual impairments, as well as Play and Learn (PAL) parent-child groups. All programming will be held onsite, in the new, clean, and well-equipped ECL.

The ECL will also be home to a Sensory Room where VIPS and ECL students may enjoy time in the lighted ball pit, on the adaptive swing, or exploring the bubble tube and sensory wall. The indoor multi-purpose room will provide endless hours of fun as the children work on large motor skills and group play activities. Work on the new playground is underway. The outdoor play structure will be moved from the old ECL playground and re-installed on the newly surfaced playground at the ECL's new location. Additional playground structures will be added as resources are secured.

The VIPS-Central Kentucky team has worked very hard to make this move without interrupting the ongoing services VIPS students are currently receiving in their homes and childcare settings. VIPS' commitment to developmentally appropriate services in a child's natural environment will continue as Job #1. Strong, consistent early intervention is the best way to set up a child and his family for future educational success. VIPS earliest services are the very foundation on which the services within the ECL will be built.

Being a part of the UK community will also offer VIPS greater opportunities for hosting family events and educational trainings on campus. VIPS will have access to use other spaces of a variety of size and function to meet multiple needs and purpose. As VIPS continues to partner with the Kentucky School for the Blind and other statewide agencies serving individuals of all ages who are blind or visually impaired through the Blind Services Coalition of Kentucky, this will be most welcomed.

The collaboration between VIPS and the UK Early Childhood Education program is huge! It is a financial commitment for VIPS donors and grantors. More importantly, it is a commitment by both VIPS and UK to continue what is going great in each of our programs and making them even better by partnering in the future. Both see this as the most important of all missions – as it should be! Please stop by the ECL for a tour and to let VIPS-Central Kentucky know how they are doing delivering on our promise to provide the best services in Kentucky to children with visual impairments.

VIPS' 30th anniversary year is an incredible time to begin this long-awaited chapter in the growth of the Central Kentucky office!

Our physical address at UK is 621 S. Limestone St., Room 201, Lexington, KY 40508. To mail us a note, please use:
PO Box 23691, Lexington, KY 40523.

Glasses 101 for Children with Low Vision or Legal Blindness

By: Annie Hughes, TVI, VIPS-Indiana

When a child is blind or has very low vision, sometimes the first thing a parent or a friend or relative says is; "He needs glasses."

But whether or not glasses will improve a child's ability to see is dependent upon the reason for the child's low vision or blindness. For some eye conditions/diagnoses, there IS something that will help improve vision; a surgery, a medication, a visual intervention, or prescription eye glasses. But, for many serious eye conditions, there is NOT an intervention that will improve visual acuity. And in these



Kutter looking handsome in his glasses.

cases, putting glasses on a child simply will not help. That is why, as a teacher of the visually impaired, one of the first things I try to do is make sure a child's parents have an accurate diagnosis from a pediatric ophthalmologist or an optometrist so parents understand whether or not prescription glasses might help their child to use his or her vision.

There are a number of reasons that eye glasses are prescribed. By far, the most common reason is to correct a refractive error. In the case of a refractive error, glasses (or contacts) are prescribed to help the lens bend the light so it comes into focus where it should on the retina. When a child is diagnosed as near-sighted, (myopia), or far-sighted, (hyperopia), glasses can greatly improve visual acuity. Sometimes, each eye has a significantly different refractive error, (anisometropia), and each eye needs a distinctly different correction. And because we all have small imperfections in the shapes of our eyeballs, glasses can also include correction to take our eyeball shape into account. (Astigmatism)

Another reason that an eye doctor might prescribe glasses involves alignment /eye muscle issues or Strabismus. The most common types of Strabismus are esotropia or exotropia. There are a number of things that are usually part of the protocol when an eye doctor is trying to help the child to use both of his/her eyes together. (Binocular vision) After patching the better eye, frequently, one of the steps can be to try to pull the weaker eye into alignment by prescribing specific lenses. As a teacher, I have watched a child put on glasses and eyes miraculously align, followed by taking those same glasses off and watching the eyes immediately slip out of alignment. Sometimes though, glasses are not effective, and eye muscle surgery is necessary, or glasses are used in conjunction with other strategies to foster binocular vision.

There are times when a child is prescribed glasses with clear unbreakable lenses with the only purpose being the protection of the better eye. This is usually done if the child has very little or no vision in his/her other eye and the doctor is doing everything possible to protect the child's one working eye. Because accidents happen, especially with children and in a busy school setting, the doctor decides to put a layer of polycarbonate in front of the better eye to protect it from flying objects, (rocks, dust, balls, elbows), that could blind the child if his/her better eye sustained damage.

Another reason for glasses is when a doctor tries simple magnification in a child with extremely low vision in an effort to increase a child's ability to perceive objects. (Fostering object perception) Along the same lines, sometimes specific prism lenses are dropped into glasses in an effort to pull more light into the eye of a child with CVI who is not responding visually to lighted targets. (Fostering light perception)

Frequently, children with very significant visual loss have more than one diagnosis. They may have a primary diagnosis, and

then several secondary diagnoses that all contribute to the loss of acuity, and the glasses prescribed may only help one of the eye conditions. Also, children with significant vision loss frequently can only be provided with "best correction," which means that in spite of the glasses, he or she does not see with the clarity of a child with normal vision. Sometimes a person sees a child wearing glasses and it can be misleading. They assume that the child can see, when in fact, they see very little. But as any parent of a youngster with visual impairment will tell you, any little bit of visual acuity that you can gain for your child is "golden" and greatly impacts functional skills and mobility.

Deciding which eye professional to use is the subject of a completely different article, but parents should always feel free: 1) to ask questions of their ophthalmologist or optometrist, 2) to get a second opinion, and 3) to talk with their child's teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) to get more information about the implications of their child's diagnosis and ways to make visual accommodations that might allow the child better use of the vision he/she does have.

Once glasses are prescribed, the next challenge can be to keep them on a child's face! As an adult, you may have experienced the sensation of putting on new glasses. If so, you understand that there is an adjustment period as your brain recalibrates to the new correction. The same is true for children. Knowing what the glasses are for and when they will help the most, (viewing at a distance, viewing at near-point, etc.); will



Callie uses both her vision and tactual skills for exploration.

go a long way in making the transition easier. If the child continues to take the glasses off, try "pairing" a favored activity with "glasses time" (meals, snack-time, favorite toys, a favorite CD or video, etc.) If the glasses come off, the favored activity stops until those glasses are replaced. Keeping those little hands busy is a good idea, and sometimes it is necessary to create a barrier of sorts to keep the child from reaching up and pulling off his/her glasses. Put on music, slip

those glasses on, grab the child's right arm, trap the child's left arm under your right arm and dance! The idea is to build up a tolerance to the sensation of glasses on a child's face over time, and to gradually increase "glasses time" so the brain actually has an opportunity to adjust to the new correction. Consistent verbal cues or physical prompts can help to teach the child to leave the glasses on and avoid pulling them off. With very young children, the rule can be, "Only Mommy or Daddy can take your glasses off or put them on." Because prescription glasses are expensive

to replace, it is important that they are put in a specific safe place when taken off. This won't occur if the child takes them off when ever he/she feels like it.

It is important that the doctor prescribes the correct type of glasses for your child's specific needs. If your child does not sit up or stand, but lies down or rolls around to move, glasses with a comfy foam wrap-around strap that adjusts rather than standard temple earpieces are preferable. Some children's glasses frames are unbreakable flexible plastic in a variety of colors, but they usually need a strap to keep them in place. Straps can really help as long as they are not too tight. For some children who have difficulty with glasses, sports goggles can be an answer. Whether or not your child's glasses have nose pads depends on the shape of your child's face. There are also no-slip pads for glasses that are put on the earpieces and can keep the glasses from moving around. Sometimes, using a timer to signal the time when the parent will remove the glasses provides an opportunity to increase the time a child can tolerate glasses in small increments. Praise your child whenever the glasses are in place, and allow your child to become aware of significant people in his life who also wear glasses. Have your child look in the mirror to see how handsome or beautiful he or she is. Teach proper care of glasses, and build "shiny glasses cleaning time" into the day (before putting them on in the morning, after meals, after naptime, etc.).

For children who need a great deal of correction, doctors sometimes do not correct to the full strength with the first pair of glasses, but instead build up to the full strength over a period of time. The important thing is to give the child time to adjust to his/her new glasses. Most often, as the child realizes that the glasses are helping, he/she will WANT to wear



Madison's glasses helps her to take a close look at her toy.

them. If, after trying lots of things and giving it plenty of time, your child is still not wanting to wear his glasses, then it is time to talk with your eye care professional again to figure out what is going on. Are the glasses really helping? Is there an error with the prescription? Sometimes in a youngster with a CVI diagnosis, an optometrist will correct for a refractive error and prescribe glasses, but the CVI is so significant that the refractive error is not even functionally noticeable. Perhaps later, after the child begins to use his/her vision, the correction for the refractive error may be revisited. And some children with significant brain damage or multiple impairments have difficulty with bi-focal and progressive lenses because processing in general is difficult for them. Each child is unique, and if prescription glasses are a part of the visual

solution, a lot of variables will need to be considered as decisions are made about the types of lenses, frames and straps that will be best-suited to your child.

Valentines to VIPS Families from VIPS Staff



Editor's Note: In the spirit of Valentine's Day, VIPS staff members wrote Valentines to our VIPS parents. Some are notes of love, others are thank you notes and others notes of encouragement. We want all of our VIPS families to know how very much we value their efforts as they raise the children we all treasure!

Dear VIPS Family,

One of the reasons I love my job is you. As I began my teaching career, I knew I wanted to serve and support families so that they could teach their children on their own. Out of the Lord's grace, He provided with me with a place to fulfill this calling. Through my work as a Developmental Interventionist and Preschool Teacher at VIPS in Louisville, I love that I get to spend time working with you. I love to hear your stories. I love to listen to the adorable (and even hilarious!) things your child does.

I'm also overcome with emotion when I hear your struggles. I hold in high esteem the courage it takes to allow me into your home. I respect your work helping your child learn when I'm not with you – I know it's not easy. I can see it on your face when you're tired, and when it's all you can do to smile when I knock at your door or when you walk your child into the classroom. I can see the sacrifice you make by taking your child to all of the other therapies she needs.

You're my hero because you learn to navigate all your child's doctor's appointments too – you're her first and best advocate. It's what YOU do that has allowed your child to be able to do all she does. I'm simply honored by you allowing me to be part of the miraculous work you do.

Paige Maynard, TVI, VIPS-Louisville

The Honor of Being a TVI/Early Interventionist for VIPS

We come into the life of a VIPS family during an extremely emotional time. Sometimes, you have just been told about your child's vision loss and other times, your worst fears from your

own observations have been confirmed. Frequently, there are other medical issues or diagnoses. We are invited into your home because your most precious child is not the normally sighted child you were expecting. You are usually moving through the grieving process, and each person in each family does this in his or her own way. To be a part of this...to help your family understand your child's vision issues, to help you learn about using daily activities to provide "hands-on" opportunities for learning, and watch you begin to see that life will go on is such an honor. VIPS families and your children are my heroes. I learn as much from you as you ever learn from me.

Annie Hughes, TVI, VIPS-Indiana

Dear VIPS Parents,

Each family has their own timeline and process of moving forward in this journey. There are no rights or wrongs, no one prescription to follow to achieve success. Remember to learn from each other but give up the need to compare or measure your way against others. We all have our own path to blaze!

Jill Haas, Family Services Coordinator, VIPS-Central Kentucky

Thank You, VIPS Families

I would like to send a special thank you to all my families for putting trust in me to work with your children. Thank you also for allowing me to learn from you as well. You all go above and beyond so that your children can receive services to reach their full potential!

Alysia Rue, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS-Louisville

You Are the Best,

You are doing more than you think you are. Don't feel like you should be doing therapy 24 hours a day. The most important thing you can do is love your child. Remember that you know your child best and that you are their best advocate -- listen to your gut.

Dixie Miller, TVI, VIPS-Central Kentucky

Expanded Core Curriculum, Part 5

By Jan Moseley, Visual Impairment Specialist, VIPS-Louisville

This is the fifth article discussing the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). We recall that all children must learn the core curricular skills (reading, writing, arithmetic and so on). The ECC covers the skills needed by each child who is blind/visually impaired. This article will discuss the ways in which communication skills, a vital part of the ECC, are integrated into the VIPS Kids Town Preschool classrooms.

All children need to learn to use communication skills, being able to use language to express their needs, and learning to listen effectively.

When very young children show up at VIPS for Two Day 2s or even Play and Learn classes, many have few verbal skills. If they talk at all, it may be one word replies or demands, "more," "no," and hopefully, "yes!" And while we care about intelligibility, for we all want to be understood when we say something, our biggest emphasis at this age or functioning level is on language development. Some children new to our (or any!) educational setting, simply cry when their wishes and needs are not understood. So one of the first things our teachers work on is for each child to "use your words." Putting names to common objects (chair, ball, leg, playground) and concepts (big, soft, heavy) is a beginning step leading to what is generally an area of strength for children with limited vision. It also lessens frustration in everyone, but especially for the child who wants to express herself!

As children gain verbal language skills, the emphasis shifts toward putting names to more involved concepts, including opposites (tall-short, big-little) and also putting names to emotions (sad, happy, angry/mad).

As in most classrooms, we emphasize listening skills, an especially important skill for children with limited or no vision.

Not only do we want children to

listen for the content of what is said, but we also want them to narrow down their listening to hear specific sounds that match up, amazingly, to letters they are also learning to recognize visually and/or tactually.

Communicating effectively is one of the most important skills any of us can have, and as such, it plays a huge role in VIPS instruction, regardless of the age or skill level of each child. In a coming article, we will discuss how the VIPS Kids Town Preschool fosters effective communication through reading and writing to gain information and to express our needs and ideas.



Ms. Beth K. and Noah talk about what activity he wants to do to get his day started.

VIPS Family Events

VIPS-Louisville Celebrates the Holidays

The annual VIPS Family Thanksgiving Dinner was held on November 20. Families shared their favorite dish as VIPS provided the traditional turkey and dressing. The evening was filled with great food and vibrant conversation while the children played in Kids Town.

We had a different kind of “Christmas Party” for VIPS-Louisville families this year. We were able to purchase tickets for them to attend Kalightscope at the Galt House in downtown Louisville -- a marvelous setting filled with exciting Holiday events for the whole family! In addition to the delightful animated display windows at the entrance, this year’s version of beautifully lighted, colored silk luminaries told the story of Ebenezer Scrooge and Tiny Tim from The Christmas Carol.

After they walked through the English Village of miniature, well-detailed houses and stores, the children were able to request their heart’s desire from Santa Claus (if their courage prevented sitting on his lap, they could write a letter to Santa and deposit it in his magic bag)! A visit to the lovely Snow Fairy Princess was followed by a ride on the Peppermint Express train. Families also viewed the entries in the gingerbread house contest and enjoyed the show of entertaining elves. The large variety of activities provided something every child and adult could enjoy!

Thanks so much to the Galt House for working with VIPS on obtaining tickets for Kalightscope again this year.

VIPS-Central Kentucky Welcomes Santa

On December 8, VIPS-Central Kentucky held its annual dinner with Santa as a way to celebrate the holidays with all of our wonderful children and families. VIPS arranged dinner, including 10 pizzas donated by **Donato’s**. Cookies were provided by wonderful VIPS mom **Nina Vail** while the cocoa was provided by **Dunkin’ Donuts**. **Gardenside Christian Church** again donated the use of their delightful space for the event. And boy, did we need the space! Seventeen VIPS families, totaling 71 people, were in attendance!

Shortly after dinner, Santa arrived and all the families got to have their photos taken and then received a goodie bag. The children had several craft options to choose from, but most enjoyed playing with new friends in the gym. It was great to see children of all ages and abilities playing together while the parents sat and shared stories with one another.



Ashlyn and Grace Caroline enjoy making a holiday craft before meeting Santa

Thank you so much to all the families that attended. We hope to continue this success into the new year and have record attendance at our next event in March.



Harper and Davis are getting photos with Santa!

VIPS-Indiana Hosts a Play & Learn Class

On Saturday, January 17, VIPS-Indiana hosted our first Play and Learn of the new year! Over 50 people were in attendance! The event included an opportunity for parents to ask adult panelists with blindness or visual impairment about their experiences as children and as adults. The panelists’ time, experiences and ability to share their opinions and advice with

our VIPS families made the event really worthwhile for those attending. The families were enthusiastic about what they learned! Families also participated in a group sing-a-long with Miss Annie. There was also an opportunity to make something for their VIPS child. Families were given the option of making a tactile exploration board or texture matching cards. **The materials for the Make-n-Take were part of a Martin Luther King Day grant from the city of Bloomington. Pizza was generously donated by Marco's Pizza in Broad Ripple. Refreshments were purchased by a generous gift card from Meijer.** Three VIPS contract Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) and two VIISA-trained First Steps providers -- **David Stern and Lisa Percy** -- assisted in making the day a success! Thank you to **Kary Jones, Brian Petraits, Barb Price and Cori Wills** for taking the time to speak to our families.



Families participated with Miss Annie in a sing-a-long.

VIPS-Louisville Class News

PAL (Play and Learn) Louisville

PAL is a free play group for VIPS families that meets at Kids Town Preschool on Fridays from 9:30-11:30 a.m. A parent or other adult stays with the child during the play time, and siblings are welcome as well. Families enjoy time with music, the sensory room, and Kids Town among other fun activities, as well as fellowship with one another. **PAL is also cancelled whenever Jefferson County Public Schools cancel school that day.**

PAL will NOT meet on the following dates during the remainder of the school year:

- February 13
- February 27
- April 3
- April 10
- May 1
- May 8

We hope to see you soon!

Friday Friends

Due to the holiday breaks in our schedule, Friday Friends has nothing new to report! The remaining dates for Friday Friends for the rest of this school year are:

- February 6
- March 6
- April 3
- May 15



Our amazing "Ask the Experts" panelists -- Kary Jones, Brian Petraits, Barb Price and Cori Wills -- answering questions from families about living a normal life when you have a visual impairment.



Left: Families enjoyed a Make-and-Take activity where they made either a tactile exploration board or texture matching cards.

Two Day 2s

By Tracy Webb, Two Day 2s Teacher

The Twos class has been filled with movement and growth over the past few months. We have made many friendships and have been able to successfully separate from parents. The children have grown tremendously and strengthened their ability to transition, follow directions, and use the wall guide as they walk down the hall. During "Circle Time" they are learning to recognize their names, colors, and shapes and love to sing, dance, and participate in storytelling. Many of our children are beginning to achieve the monumental task of toilet training.

In January, we talked about the winter season. We discovered what the weather is like in the winter, what we wear in the winter, animals that like cold weather, and activities we can do in cold weather. We used all of our senses as we built a snowman, danced with snowflakes, drew in the snow (aka cool whip), played with "snow" dough, and retold the story of The Mitten. We also created some art masterpieces as we made puffy snowmen using shaving cream and glue, painted with mittens, painted with colored ice, and crafted snowflakes. We



Above: Pyper (left) and Maycin (right) are best friends!

Right: Brody places a vase of flowers just so on his table setting mat.



explored ice and salt in our sensory table and answered the science question, "Does ice melt faster in our hand or a mitten?" Amidst all of our winter theme activities, we continue to learn through play and exploration as we grow socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually. What looks like play to an adult is work for a two year old!

Expanded Core Experiences in Kids Town Preschool

By Paige Maynard, VIPs-Louisville Kids Town Preschool Teacher, with contributions from Beth Krebs, Preschool Asstant Director & Instructional Assistant, and Tracy Webb, Two Day 2s Teacher

The last few months in Kids Town have been a splendidly happy adventure! Every child has been thriving in gaining developmental skills which will benefit them both now and in transition to life beyond VIPs. As we adhere to Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards, we also follow the Expanded Core Curriculum, which comprises the skills and knowledge that a student who is blind or has low vision needs to know in order to succeed in a sighted world. Each activity that we do at VIPs stems from both of these roots.

The first half of our school year was packed full of learning, exploring and adventure. Our field trips were a big part of all of our adventures.

VIPs preschoolers were able to have their own pumpkin patch to explore, due to the generosity of Jill Beasley and her class of third graders from Collegiate School.

Kids Town Preschool started off November with a trip to the horse barns at the backside of Churchill Downs. We addressed career awareness as we listened to our guide speak to us about his job caring for the horses. The students were



Mason's Dad Chad holds him up to pet a horse while sister Madison waits her turn.



also fortunate enough to watch the horses being groomed and fed by their caregivers. A favorite part of the trip was our lunch on the picnic tables next to the track itself. The children squealed with excitement as another opportunity for career awareness drove by again and again: the tractor that raked the track! How fascinating! Thanks to the kindness of Dale Romans and his staff at Churchill Downs who gave of their time and talent to enable the students to learn!

December was the month where we celebrated the joys of the season at Santa's Workshop located at The Bass Pro Shop in Clarksville, Indiana. We began our trip to this winter wonderland by riding a big yellow bus! The students loved developing their visual efficiency skills while they shouted "bridge!" each time they noticed the daylight get darker on underpasses.

While at Santa's Workshop, each child immersed herself with one of many hands-on activities centered on the outdoor lifestyle and in celebration

At Bass Pro Shop:

Top right: Alaina and Ms. Shelby teamed up for a snowball fight. Below Right: Caden found some groundhogs hibernating in their cave. Below: The children enjoyed their visit with Santa.



of the upcoming holiday. Some children socialized during an indoor snowball fight, while others wrote letters to Santa or drove toy dump trucks and cars. Some waved to their friends as they rode the carousel's bears and reindeer! The children were also given the opportunity to ride the carousel, play with remote control toys and explore aquariums and other wildlife settings, all

under the roof of the Bass Pro Shop. The children had a blast hanging out with friends while visiting Santa and touring the store. The highlight of their day was riding and pretending to drive the Gator 4-wheeler. A big thanks to all parents, chaperones, and volunteers who made the day fun and educational.

As we closed out the calendar year, the preschoolers also explored leisure and recreation skills through singing Christmas carols for the staff on the office side of the building. Caroling provided the students an opportunity to practice navigating the environment and socializing with others.

Even when we're not on the road and are working in the classroom, Kids Town Preschool never passes up an opportunity to learn! Where I teach, the orange classroom, each educational topic is based upon the interests and questions generated by the children themselves, in order to build critical thinking and self-determination skills.

The children recently found the window in Chase Bank in Kids Town and wondered what was behind it. We used this teachable moment to practice following relative directions (left, right, through, beside, etc.) as we traveled to find the answer to the question. Once inside the room where the other side of the window is found, the children discovered the rock climbing wall! Applause was given to each student as he or she put



Canon climbs the rock wall to ring the bell at the top. (Mr. Maury holds the harness as he climbs.)

Of course, braille instruction is a key part of the Expanded Core Curriculum at VIPS Kids Town Preschool. Left: Bronson presses the keys of a Perkins Brailier, while Ahmed (lower left) experiments with one of our new Mountbatten Brailiers. Below: Ms. Paige shows Anthony how to manipulate the rollers on the Perkins Brailier.



on the harness, pulled up each rock, and rang the jingle bells at the top. The children remarked that the texture of the rocks felt “sparkly” as they found them with their hands. When asked how he felt about climbing the wall, sighted peer Noah stated, “I felt brave!” The orange class would like to express thanks to Mr. Maury Weedman for organizing the rock climbing experience.

Dr. Ashima Gupta is also due our thanks for her visit in which she taught us about preventing illness.

Kids Town Preschool will continue on our quest for learning in the months to come! We plan to explore more recreation skills through learning about and playing sports created for people who are blind. We also plan to increase our daily living abilities in a trip to the grocery store. And, of course, we will continue to use each and every moment in the classroom, Kids Town itself, the playground, sensory room, kitchen, and everywhere we spend time to take in one of life’s greatest adventures: growing and learning!



Left: In Ms. Staci’s class, Vivi shows off her Barbie doll, while Canon and Sarah (seated on the right) play together.



Above left: Addy gets an O&M lesson from Mr. Maury. Above right: Evie washes her hands after a messy activity. Left: Madison uses tongs to sort objects, as Vance (right) tactually explores his block, and Grace (rear left) selects an activity from the shelves.



VIPS-Indiana Kids at Home with Miss Annie



Above: During a home visit Denise wears one of Annie’s Santa hats while reading a Seedlings book called *That’s Not My Santa*. She especially liked the page with Santa’s rough bag. Below: Annie loves on darling Sophia.



Notes of Interest



The National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI) is a national membership organization that enables parents to find resources for their children who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities.

NAPVI is dedicated to educating parents, providing emotional support, initiating outreach programs, networking, and advocating for the educational needs and welfare of children who are blind or visually impaired.

NAPVI created an online community that gives parents of visually impaired children a place to support each other, share stories and concerns, and link to local resources. Check out www.FamilyConnect.org to learn more.



NAPVI will be hosting an International Family Conference, July 10-12, at the Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind, 1850 W. Roosevelt Road, Chicago, IL. Lodging is available at the Chicago Marriott, Medical District/UIC.

“When parents join together with common concerns, they have a powerful voice that can make significant changes and improvements in services and education for ALL children with visual impairments.” (<http://www.lighthouseguild.org/napvi>)

To learn more, contact Susan LaVenture, Executive Director of NAPVI, (800)562-6265 or by email, napvi@lighthouseguild.org.



The 2015 American Conference of Pediatric Cortical Visual Impairment will be held June 26-27, sponsored by the Children’s Hospital and Medical Center in Omaha, Nebraska. For more information and to register, call 402-955-6070 or visit www.ChildrensOmaha.org/upcomingconferences.



The Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) will be hosting the Short Term Program Weekend Retreat for grades 6-12, Friday – Sunday, March 27 -29, 2015 on the KSB campus. This year’s theme is “In Tune with Your Creativity” with a focus on music. The KSB Weekend Retreat is funded by the Kentucky School for the Blind Charitable Foundation. The registration deadline is February 26. For additional information, contact KSB Outreach Director Peggy Morris-Sinclair at 502-897-1583, ext. 7714 or peggy.sinclair-morris@ksb.kyschools.us



The Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania has opened a new Center for Advanced Retinal and Ophthalmic Therapeutics (CAROT) whose mission is to research retinal and ocular diseases such as Leber’s Congenital Amauroses. In an initial study of twelve patients, including five children who had been diagnosed with Leber’s, a healthy version of the gene that causes the disorder was introduced, resulting in improvement in vision in all twelve. CAROT will continue to research with the outcome of becoming the premier center for diagnosis and treatment of retinal and ocular disorders with help available to patients, scientists and physicians.



The Future of Braille: NLS Braille Summit Presentations and Outcomes details the proceedings of a conference held by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) in partnership with the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts, June 19–22, 2013. It was attended by more than 100 librarians, instructors, producers, and other experts in the field of braille. <http://www.loc.gov/nls/other/futureofbraille.html>



VIPS is pleased to welcome these new additions to the VIPS family:

VIPS-Louisville

Faith --13 months, Louisville, KY
Ismael -- 11 months, Eminence, KY
Jax -- 11 months, Lewisburg, KY
Lila -- 25 months, Louisville, KY
Matthew -- 15 months, Louisville, KY
Ryder -- 7 months, Eighty Eight, KY

VIPS-Central KY

Bryson -- 10 months, Stanton, KY
Carter -- 13 months, Barbourville, KY
Demaion -- 24 months, Middlesboro, KY
Jolie -- 20 months, Waco, KY

VIPS-Indiana

Caiden -- 36 months, Camby, IN
Levi -- 29 months, Indianapolis, IN
Loralai -- 30 months, Poland, IN
Natalie -- 30 months, Poland, IN
Scarlett -- 25 months, Spencer, IN
Spencer -- 7 months, Anderson, IN

VIPS Staff News

VIPS-Louisville

Tracy Webb is assuming the role of teacher of the Kids Town Preschool’s Two Day 2s Class. **Marchelle Hampton** is now working as an Instructional Assistant with the Kids Town Preschool and the Two Day 2s. Though her role has changed we are very pleased that Marchelle is still at VIPS-Louisville.

While Tracy is new to VIPS, she has years of experience

working in the early childhood field. She has served as both a teacher and administrator in childcare settings and taught in area preschools. Tracy received an undergraduate degree in Child Development from Harding University, a fifth year Certification in Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education from the University of Kentucky, and plans to graduate in 2015 with a Master's in Early Childhood Special Education from the University of Kentucky. She has a passion for working with children birth to five years of age and truly believes these are the most formative years of a child's life. She looks forward to working with the twos and their parents to help lay a solid foundation for future learning and growth.



When Tracy is not at VIPS, she serves as taxi driver for her two teenage children. The majority of her weekends in the spring and summer are spent with her husband David at the baseball field watching her 14-year-old son play ball or at various venues watching her daughter perform with the "Miracle Dancers." If she happens to find a weekend with nothing to do, she enjoys walking with friends and hibernating with a good book. We're glad you've joined us, Tracy!



Becky Owens has joined our team of afterschool care providers on Mondays and Wednesdays as an Instructional Assistant. She will also share her energy and enthusiasm as a substitute assistant in our Friday childcare program. Becky has past experience working in childcare and as an assistant for Jefferson County Public Schools. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and is

currently enrolled in the Speech and Language Program at U of L. A Louisville native and graduate of Eastern High School, Becky has two brothers and enjoys making quilts with her mother, grandmother and aunts. Welcome to our team, Becky!

VIPS-Indiana

We are very sad to announce that Tana Helwig, is leaving her position as Community Outreach Coordinator at VIPS-Indiana. Her bright energy and abundant enthusiasm will be missed!

Gifts of Time, Talent & Treasure

VIPS Louisville

We are appreciative of those folks who helped us with our holiday card fund raiser. Thanks so much to **Chris & Mike Gilbert**; to **UPS volunteers Michele Renbarger and Mark Long**; and to our ever-faithful **Delta Gamma alumnae, including Lisa Bajorinas, Julie Campbell, Corinne Clark, Allie Cowan, Elizabeth Dallenback, Martha Hemminger, Elinore Jeffcoat, June King, Penny Orth, Mary Frances Pack, Holly Richardson and Savannah Richardson**. We couldn't have made it without your gracious help!



Delta Gamma Alumnae

Grateful thanks to **Fran Woodward, Deanna Scoggins and Jamie Weedman** for their faithfulness in volunteering in the Preschool. Fran joins the Two Day 2s weekly to share their fun. Deanna works with the preschoolers on braille skills and music and Jamie brailles books for classroom use. You each are a marvelous addition to our instructional staff!



Above: Deana teaches Addy a bit on the piano. Left: Fran enjoys a carousel ride at Bass Pro Shop with Pyper.

We are thankful that family members of VIPS children and VIPS graduates embrace our needs in a variety of ways:

- ~ VIPS graduate **Megan Weilage and her mother Erika** recently donated toys, mostly games and puzzles, which were eagerly grabbed up by the teachers. Thanks so much for remembering VIPS!
- ~ **Caroline Johnson, mother of VIPS graduate Michael**, recently donated a light box and accompanying "legos". Thanks for thinking of us!
- ~ Thanks to **VIPS grandma Gail Massey** who continues to donate consumables from our list, especially batteries. We can never seem to have enough on hand to power all the assistive devices in the classrooms. She rules!
- ~ **Betty McMahon, grandmother of former VIPS kids**, donated textured wall paper, fabric, yarn and other craft items to the preschool classes. We appreciate your thoughtfulness!

VIPS-Indiana

And it's not just family members of VIPS children who help us out. We want to again thank **Rita DeVore, mother of VIPS-Indiana Family Services Coordinator Meredith Howell and grandmother of VIPS child, Lola**, for her fundraising efforts for VIPS. Rita owns **Casa Bella Rita Bed & Breakfast in Costa Rica**, but even from afar, she still continues to help VIPS.

Rita is a volunteer of long standing in her community but once VIPS came into her life, it became her priority. When a guest wants to leave a tip, she'll have the guest donate to VIPS instead. She also raises awareness about VIPS, sharing newsletters and brochures at her B & B hoping that guests will be inspired to donate in the future. Thank you, Rita, for all you do to help us!

Our ongoing thanks to **Senator Pat Miller, Chairman Tim Brown, Senator Ron Grooms and Senator Mark Stoops** for continuing to champion VIPS in the Indiana legislature. We are so grateful for your help.

Thanks to the generosity of Vision Impaired InService in America (V.I.I.S.A.), participant **David Sterne** and the congregation of his church, VIPS-Indiana again had a booth at the **Northview Church of the Brethren's Alternative Christmas Fair** in Indianapolis. All booths featured organizations that try to do good things in the world. TVI Annie Hughes manned the booth for the day on Saturday, November 15, shared information about VIPS and displayed tactile materials to families who attended.

Annie also sold little fuzzy lamb ornaments made by Bloomington volunteers which netted \$170. The proceeds from

the luncheon and craft sale were split between Peace Learning Center and VIPS bringing the total for the day to \$733! Thanks to David and to everyone in the congregation for helping VIPS serve Indiana's youngest children with blindness.

We would like to say thank you to **Kary Jones, Brian Petraits, Barb Price and Cori Wills** for taking the time to speak to our families at the Play and Learn. Thanks also to **David Stern and Lisa Percy, VIISA-trained First Steps providers for Indiana**, who volunteered their time at the PAL-Indiana event.

New VIPS Website

What did VIPS receive for its 30th birthday? A newly redesigned website! Log onto vips.org to check out the new place to go to receive the latest information about VIPS. Special thanks to **Patrick Murta, Jennifer O'Dea and Kevin Price**, all of whom "logged" hours of their donated time to make this new website possible!

Father/Grandfather Team to the Rescue!

Cliff Ballou (a VIPS grandfather) and Phil Ballou (a VIPS father) are owner/operators of Balcor Architectural Sheet Metal, a specialty roofing company in Shepherdsville, KY. Recently they came to our rescue by offering to modify the canopy that extends from the main entrance to VIPS-Louisville.

The shape of the canopy causes sheets of ice and snow to fall off where there is lots of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Phil noticed this hazard one snowy morning while dropping his child off to school. He immediately offered to fix the problem at no expense to VIPS.

On a cold/raw day Cliff and Phil completed the repairs like the true craftsmen that they are. We at VIPS are very grateful for this assistance that exemplifies the spirit of VIPS parents.



Recent Grants and Donations

VIPS-Louisville

The following have generously donated to VIPS-Louisville over the past few months:

- ~ **Fred B. & Opal S. Woosley Foundation:** \$20,000 for Family Services and Kids Town Preschool at VIPS.
- ~ **Irvin F. & Alice S. Etscorn Charitable Foundation:** \$13,000 for new building signage, buffer and floor repairs and classroom furniture and items.
- ~ **GE Elfuns:** \$10,000 for general operating support.
- ~ **Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County:** \$8,000 for direct services in Southern Indiana.
- ~ **The King's Daughters & Sons Foundation of Kentucky:** \$4,000 for new computers.
- ~ **Dunbar Foundation:** \$2,000 for general operating expenses.

VIPS-Indiana

A huge thanks to the **Junior League of Indianapolis** for a grant of \$25,000. (See story on right.)

Thank you to VIPS-Indiana supporter, **Eric Bruun**, for his recent donation of \$2,000!

Thank you to the **Washington Township Lions Club** for a donation of \$1,000 to help VIPS-Indiana serve the blind children of Marion County.

VIPS-Indiana was awarded \$550 by **Build-A-Bear** to buy 15 fiberglass canes and materials for 10 pre-cane devices to support our Orientation & Mobility program. Our children who will learn to navigate their environment are most appreciative!

Our gratitude goes out to **Gary & Nancy Bingham and Diversified Mail Services** for the generous and ongoing postage donation! It truly helps VIPS-Indiana save money, so thank you!

VIPS-Indiana also thanks **Destiny Live Center for the Performing Arts** for their donation of musical instruments.

We also would like to express our gratitude to **Marco's Pizza** in Broad Ripple for donating pizza as well as **Meijer, Inc.** for providing a gift card for refreshments.

VIPS-Central Kentucky

Thanks to the **Linda Neville Trust** for a grant of \$24,000 to provide direct services to VIPS children and families in Central Kentucky and to partially fund the publication and mailing of this newsletter.

VIPS-Indiana Receives Junior League Grant

On December 11, VIPS-Indiana's Annie Hughes and Meredith Howell presented to the **Junior League of Indianapolis** in the



Annie could not hide her excitement when the announcement was made that VIPS had won!

hopes of receiving a Community Assistance Grant. The JLI is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving the community through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Community Assistance Grants support initiatives which provide families with knowledge and resources to guide their children toward academic success or equip students, families and education providers with age-appropriate educational materials.



Annie and Meredith posed with Mica Wilson, Junior League of Indianapolis President, and Lauren Weintraut, Chair of the Grants Committee.

The ladies of the Junior League chose VIPS out of five finalists for a Community Assistance Grant of \$25,000. The generous grant from the Junior League of Indianapolis will help VIPS serve more children and families in the Indianapolis area. Thank you Junior League of Indianapolis for supporting educational nonprofits and for supporting VIPS' mission to give Indiana's youngest visually impaired children the best possible start!

Music on the Lake

By John Talbott, VIPS-Louisville Father & Vice President of the VIPS Board of Directors

Many thanks are due to **William Florman** of Bowling Green who organized a fundraiser for VIPS, dubbing it the first annual "Music on the Lake," on Saturday, January 24. Mr. Florman hosted the event at his beautiful home on Nolin Lake. The event was a tremendous success, grossing over \$20,000, with some money still coming in! It was a very intimate evening beginning with cocktails and dinner from **Mirza of Verdi** restaurant. The dinner was followed by a few hours of incredible country-style music from four prominent Nashville musicians playing guitars and fiddles to songs in their personal catalogue of favorites.

Nick Hoffman, who hosted, organized and sponsored the event with Mr. Florman, put together the star studded group. Nick had been a regular on tour with Kenny Chesney, performing hundreds of sold out shows for twelve years before pursuing a new beginning with his band **The Farm**. **Tim James** played the only "cover" tunes of the evening, which were actually songs he had written for the likes of George Strait, Toby Keith, Trace Adkins, and others. Five of the songs Tim has written have been No. 1 hits. In 2010 he was also nominated for a Grammy



Front, left - right: Jill Talbott, William Florman, Craig Browning, Natalie Murphy, Tanya Coffey, David Coffey, "Red" Marlow, and John Talbott. Back: Nick Hoffman.

and is a shoo-in for the Country Music Hall of Fame. **"Red" Marlow** tours separately and also has a cut on Garth Brooks' newest record. Finally, the group was completed by the beautiful **Natalie Murphy** who has played for such acts as the Maggie Rose Band, Bill Anderson and Jon Pardi, and also played many times on the Grand Ole Opry.

In addition to thanking William, Nick, and all of the talented musicians who contributed their time and talent, (as well as made donations), special thanks are also due to **US Bank and Craig Browning, TriStar Greenview Hospital** and **Mike Sherrod**, and **Cabelas** for sponsoring the event. Before closing, very big special thanks is also given to **David and Tanya Coffey** who personally donated nearly \$9,000 helping to make the event the great financial success that it was!

VIPS-Indiana Events

Dining to Donate

On December 3, Indiana University-Purdue University: Indianapolis students, **Veronica Bigham and Jesse Covarrubias**, donated their time and effort to host a Dining to Donate fundraiser at Applebee's in Indianapolis. Veronica is the daughter of a wonderful champion for Indiana's youngest blind children, Washington Township Lions Club President, Ron Bigham. It was through her father that she learned about VIPS.

Veronica and Jesse were given an assignment by their Introduction to Communications professor: Help an organization they are passionate about by fundraising or getting the organization's name out into the public. Veronica said she chose to help VIPS because, "I have a passion for preschool children and their education. I believe VIPS has a great mission in which they succeed at every day to help these families. VIPS is a great organization and I wanted to help in any way that I could."

The Dining to Donate fundraiser brought out former VIPS families, other Washington Township Lions members and even some of Miss Annie's previous students from the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. We are thankful to all who helped make it a successful evening for VIPS!

Global Gifts

On December 2, **Global Gifts** hosted a Community Shopping Night at their three Indiana locations to benefit the children served by VIPS-Indiana. It was the third year Global Gifts has offered

their generosity to VIPS and the families VIPS serve. Global Gifts offers unique items from around the world, including jewelry, accessories, home goods, toys, and more, all of which are fair trade products. Purchases support fair pay, gender equality, and life-changing opportunities for disadvantaged artisans. We are grateful to Global Gifts for the support they have shown VIPS over the years!

Dinner in the Dark

Members of the **Lebanon High School Key Club** are champions for young blind children! For the second year in a row they held their own Dinner in the Dark event. With over 90 tickets sold, the guests participated in sensory stations, listened to a presentation given by VIPS mom and Family Services Coordinator, Meredith Howell, and enjoyed a 'blindfold optional' lasagna dinner.

Soft piano melodies played as guests ate their dinners graciously served by the Key Club members. The music was provided by Key Club member and freshman, **Julia Garrard**. Julia's mom, Melissa, shared that her daughter has ocular albinism and was diagnosed at the age of nine months old. "I think her visual challenges have been one of the things that have made her throw herself even more completely into her music, and that is a really beautiful thing," said Melissa.



Key Club member Julia Garrard played keyboard during the event. Julia happens to have ocular albinism.

As the evening concluded and Julia played, "Imagine" by John Lennon, Meredith Howell reflected, "I love the lyric: You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. That's how I feel as a parent of a child with vision loss. We are parents dreaming of hope for the future of our kids. Thankfully with VIPS – we are never alone." VIPS would like to thank everyone in attendance as well as Key Club President, Alex Kraft, and all of the Key Club Members.

VIPS-Indiana Needs Your Help!

VIPS is working to make 2015 a new beginning for families of young blind children in Indiana. Meredith Howell and Annie Hughes were joined by Executive Director, Diane Nelson, at the statehouse in Indianapolis to discuss state funding for VIPS. Stay tuned for ways you can help!

Right now at the Indiana Statehouse legislation is being considered to add VIPS to the next Indiana state budget. **Sen. Mark Stoops** authored **Senate Bill 381** in support of VIPS. SB381 has been assigned to the Health and Provider Services Committee.

If you live in Indiana and VIPS has impacted your family, please take a minute or two to email the following legislators:
Gov. Mike Pence -- <http://.gove.gov/2333.htm> or call (317) 232-4567

Speaker of the House Brian Bosma -- h88@iga.in.gov

Sen. Pat Miller, Chair of the Health and Provider Services Committee -- s32@iga.in.gov

Sen. Luke Kenley, Chair of the Appropriations Committee -- s20@iga.in.gov

Rep. Tim Brown, Chair of the Ways & Means Committee -- h41@iga.in.gov

Tell them you think VIPS belongs in the Indiana state budget. Tell them a personal story. Your help now will enable us to improve the education and care of future blind children and their families in the state of Indiana.

You can also contact the legislators on the committees at the following links:

https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2015/committees/health_and_provider_services_3900

https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2015/committees/appropriations_3700

https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2015/committees/ways_and_means_2200

Help Create a Vision for the Future

You can create a legacy by remembering VIPS in your estate plans. We would love to help you in this journey. Please call Heather Benson at 502-498-2933 if you would like to explore your options in making a lasting effect for young children of blindness.

Amazon Smile

Remember you can now shop 'till you drop at Amazon.com and help VIPS, all in one fell swoop! VIPS has teamed up with Amazon for its charitable program, Amazon Smile. All you have to do is log onto smile.amazon.com, type in Visually Impaired Preschoolers Services of Greater Louisville Inc. and click on the "select" button for the agency's page. Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible purchases to VIPS. This is such a simple way for you to support your favorite organization -- VIPS!

VIPS Funding: You Make a Difference!

Have you ever wondered where VIPS gets its funding? If you have ever taken home our holiday mailings to handwrite a note requesting help, you have helped raise money for VIPS! Being a private non-profit agency requires a lot of hard work: simultaneously raising awareness and raising funds while raising program expectations.

Contributions-actual donations	\$263,050
Grants -- staff write, submit grants to potential donors (WHAS Crusade for Children, Metro United Way, Osmondson Fund, Kosair Charities, etc.)	864,532
State of Kentucky.....	100,000
Contracts-w/school districts	87,270
First Steps Early Intervention	74,900
Fundraisers-Stampede, ReVision, Golf/tennis tournaments.....	364,327
Video sales-produced in 1991, 1996 and 2008	17,500
Restricted Items-donations specified for a named purpose.....	41,000
Center Programs tuition	21,694
Total	\$1,834,220

ReVision

ReVision will take place on Friday, Feb. 27 at the Ice House on Main Street in downtown Louisville. Presented by Brown Forman, ReVision re-examines the traditional gallery presentation of art as a tactile, auditory and spatial experience. Guests will be provided a chance to step into the shoes of a blind individual, experiencing art by touching, smelling and hearing the various media. Guests will enjoy heavy appetizers and live art performances throughout the evening. Over 30 pieces of art will be available for purchase through silent auctions. Tickets can be purchased for \$75 per person by calling VIPS at 502-636-3207. You can also register online at www.vips.org.

In Memorium

This issue of VISability is dedicated to the memories of:

Heaven Lolla

daughter of Desiree Lolla of Indianapolis, Indiana who passed away on November 20th, 2014 at the age of 15 months.

~ And ~

Kaziah Phillips

daughter of Laura & Darren Phillips of Louisville, and sister of Jesalynn and Isaiah who passed away on Dec. 30, 2014 at the age of 3 years.

Our hearts go out to their families and all who were touched by their lives.

Wishlist

VIPS-Louisville

- Boxes of metal binding rings for making Braille books (assorted sizes)
- Baby wipes
- Paper towels

VIPS-Indiana

- Paper cutter
- Grocery store gift cards for new Play and Learn (PAL) class
- Computer paper



smith Lane
KY 40218

Nonprofit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 284
Louisville, KY

Change Service Requested



ViSability is made possible through grants from the Linda Neville Foundation and the Fred B. and Opal S. Woosley Foundation.

Upcoming Events

VIPS-Louisville

Friday, February 27

ReVision, sponsored by Brown Forman will be held at the Ice House on Main Street. (See page 19 for details.)

Saturday, March 28

Celebrate Easter with a traditional Easter Egg Hunt and special activities for the children, including crafts and a visit from Easter Bunny! The event will feature beeping Easter Eggs for VIPS kids. Breakfast will be served.

New Policy for Family Assistance

Each year VIPS has generous donors sponsor VIPS families for Christmas. We are changing the process for becoming a VIPS Christmas family this year to encourage families to be more involved in VIPS throughout the rest of the year. To be considered for sponsorship as a Christmas family, the following requirements must be completed throughout the year:

- Attend at least 6 hours of family events, educational activities, or the VIPS-KSB Family Retreat.
- Volunteer for VIPS at least 2 hours at a fundraiser, at the office, or family event.

VIPS family activities are fun and educational for the whole family. Of course if your family has some special circumstances preventing you from completing these requirements, talk to Martha Hack, Family Services Coordinator.

Monday, May 18

The YUM Brands Corporate Cup Golf Tournament will be held at Persimmon Ridge Golf Club.

Saturday, May 30

The Brown Forman Tennis Ball will be held at the Louisville Boat Club. Enjoy an elegant evening of dinner, auctions and music to benefit VIPS. \$75/person.

Sunday, May 31

The Brown Forman Doubles Tennis Tournament will be held at the Louisville Boat Club. Tennis Package includes lunch, player gifts and cocktail party at \$300 per team. Purchase 1 Tennis Team and 2 Tennis Ball tickets for \$400!

Saturday, June 27th

Summer Picnic / Fourth of July party.

VIPS-Indiana Needs Your Help!!

Are you a current or former VIPS Family who lives in Indiana? If so, you could play a significant role in helping VIPS-Indiana to become included for funding in the Indiana state budget. The story of your child and family and the impact VIPS has had on you could really help Indiana legislators understand the importance of specialized early intervention for young children who are visually impaired. See page 18 for details!

ViSability is a quarterly publication of Visually Impaired Preschool Services, Jan Moseley, Editor.

VIPS-Louisville

1906 Goldsmith Lane, Louisville, KY 40218
(502) 636-3207 FAX (502) 636-0024
Toll free 1-888-636-8477

E-mail: info@vips.org Website: www.vips.org

Diane Nelson, Executive Director
Kathy Mullen, Director of Education
Heather Benson, Development Director
Shelby Birchler, Preschool Instructional Assistant/After School Care
Ashley Buren, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Ti Erika Carney, After School Care
Gretchen Cutrer, JCPS Preschool Instructional Assistant
Carol Dahmke, Office Manager
LaRhonda Daniels, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Ashley Emmons, O&M/TV/Preschool Teacher
Pauletta Feldman, Administrative Support
Greta Gilmeister, Music Therapist
Martha Hack, Development Asst./Family Services Coordinator
Marchelle Hampton, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Dani Harper, Receptionist
Beth Krebs, Preschool Assistant Director/Instructional Asst.
Mary Lesousky, TV/Developmental Interventionist
Paige Maynard, TV (in training)/Preschool Teacher
Staci Maynard, TV (in training)/PAL/Preschool Teacher
Barbara Merrick, TV/Preschool Teacher
Jan Moseley, Visual Impairment Specialist
Kathy Moulden, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Becky Owens, After School Care
Beth Owens, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Amanda Rucker, After School Care
Alysa Rue, Developmental Interventionist
Kim Shippey, Controller
Tracy Webb, Two Day 2s Teacher
Maury Weedman, O&M Specialist/Facilities Manager

VIPS-Central Kentucky

621 S. Limestone St.Rm. 201, Lexington, KY 40508
Mailing address: P.O. Box 23691, Lexington, KY 40523
(859) 276-0335 FAX (859) 276-4379
Toll free 1-888-254-8477
E-mail: vipslex@vips.org

Terry DeLuca, Community Relations/Development Director
Jill Haas, Family Services Coordinator
Amanda Hamm, Developmental Interventionist
Dixie Miller, TV/Developmental Interventionist
Courtenay Schulten Daugherty, O&M
Mary Smyth, Office Manager

VIPS-Indiana

1100 W. 42nd Street, Suite 228, Indianapolis, IN 46208
Toll Free 1-888-824-2197 FAX 1-502-636-0024
E-Mail: vipsindiana@vips.org

Rebecca Davis, Development Director
Debby Eades, O&M
Meredith Howell, Family Services Coordinator
Ann Hughes, TV