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The Hidden Lessons of VIPS

by Kathy Mullen, VIPS Director of Education

Research in the world of early childhood education continues to show that inclusive education enhances the learning of all children, regardless of their strengths or needs. Inclusive preschool programs enroll children with special needs to learn alongside typically developing peers. If there is any doubt to this claim, the person questioning needs to spend some time in Kids Town Preschool at VIPS. It will not take long; the children will provide the proof in a very short time.

Our sighted peer program is made up of children who are developing typically. In the case of VIPS, these children do NOT have visual impairments. We welcome two sighted peers into each of our preschool classrooms and these slots are very popular. Because of the low student: teacher ratio enjoyed in Kids Town, our sighted peers are getting individualized instruction preparing them for a successful kindergarten experience and beyond. Our program adheres to the same learning requirements as the public school systems and our kindergarten-readiness test results prove it.



But academics are only one part of the picture of what is learned in a preschool. Ask any preschool teacher and they will tell you the most important thing a child learns in preschool is how to get along with others, how to follow directions, how to show empathy toward others. These are lessons many adults need to continue learning as well. Adult lessons are taught in Kids Town Preschool daily. Let me share a few with you.

Henley welcomes Braden to play with him.

One morning I stopped in the Red Room for a kid-fix. I became engaged in some very important conversations with the students -- important topics such as how some friends can draw lines from the top of the paper all the way to the bottom. Some friends could do it without picking up their marker from the paper -- even once! Another child had to use a crayon because markers were too "squeaky." When I asked the whereabouts of one of the classmates, I was told, "in the bathroom. He takes a long time sometimes, but it's okay. We can wait for circle time till he's finished."



Lena hugs her friend Aria.



On another recent morning, I saw one of our sighted peers serving as a human guide for a friend who is completely blind. Please take a moment to picture this – a five-year-old girl leading a five-year-old boy from the front door of the building, across Kids Town, into the preschool hallway, to the Red Room. And she did it successfully! The really neat part is, the child who was

blind asked for her assistance. Forget Mom. In one moment of time, I witnessed self-advocacy at its best and empathy in action. I'm not sure who had the bigger lump in their throat – me or the grandfather of the little girl who stood watching from behind.

A quick stop in the Orange Room provided a lesson in patience, followed by a lesson in accommodation. One of our sighted peers had collected all of the Fisher Price little people and had them all engaged in a great game of make believe. A friend wanted to “borrow” a few of the people, but was told they were “too busy” by the mastermind of the game of pretend. Time passed and the question was posed again. The same response was given. More time passed. Without being asked a third time, the leader of the play event offered some of the little people to his friend saying, “You can play here and I'll tell you what you can do.” That seemed to do the trick. It was very clear that the second friend, who is visually impaired, just wanted to be a part of the action.

I have one more example. One of our friends was seated on the floor of the classroom. He has a special seat with lots of straps used to keep him upright so he can use his arms and hands to activate the toys and switches on the tray placed before him. I sat down to visit and asked him to show me what he was doing. In less than 30 seconds, a sighted peer came up to us and asked if he could play, too. I had been replaced. The smile on the first child's face told me so. Three-year-old peers are so much more exciting than any Director of Education. They teach better lessons, too.

Preston's Story

by Kara Booth, VIPS Indiana Mom

We knew something wasn't right with Preston's eyesight from the beginning, so at about 5 months old he was referred to an ophthalmologist. Soon after our visit, we were referred to Visually Impaired Preschool Services (VIPS) of Indiana.

I still remember the day I called the office. Meredith Howell answered the phone. I started to talk, breaking down in tears, as I had no idea what my baby's future would be or how to cope. She was reassuring, kind, compassionate and very helpful. From that moment forward I knew that VIPS would change our lives.

Annie Hughes, the Director, came to our house to do an assessment. I learned a lot that day -- some good and some hard to hear. Preston had cortical visual impairment (CVI) which affects the processing of visual information. Annie came with lots of goodies for Preston, information for us and the support that I so desperately needed. When she left I thought, “You know what? This will be hard, but we will get through it.”

As we started our sessions with our therapist David, I soon realized that CVI affects so much in a child's world. The light outside was irritating, loud noises could be overwhelming and even certain colors could affect processing of information. With a lot of practice and guidance, we have made it through. (Well, at least through a few doors).



In addition to the in-home visits, VIPS provides networking, resources and Play and Learn (PAL). At PAL in Indianapolis, parents and their children learn more about visual impairment. While the kids play, parents always have a craft to do that will benefit their kids at home and information on different aspects of learning with visual impairments. Kids who have visual impairments need other sensory input such as touch, sound, and smell.

One of the assessments they do after starting services measures visual processing. Preston had a score of 3 when we started VIPS services a little over a year ago. Now, about 8 months later he was assessed at a 6. This is great progress!

Special kiddos are not just called special because they are different... they are called special because they bring more joy to the world than we as “typicals” could ever bring. Thank you for supporting such a wonderful cause that has helped my special guy so much and will continue to help so many more after him!

Using the Outdoor Environment to Teach Your Child

by Annie Hughes, TVI, Director, VIPS Indiana

The outdoor environment is sensory-rich! Wind blowing across your skin and through your hair, warm sun on your skin, sounds made by wind blowing the trees and bushes, sounds of birds, traffic, church bells, dogs barking, sounds of swings and other playground equipment, the feel of grass on your feet and legs, the rough texture of bark on trees, the tickle of leaves when you walk under branches, cold squishy mud, dry sand, and fragrant soil that is ready for planting are all experiences that provide wonderful sensory input. All of these help your child to 1) use his or her tactile, olfactory, auditory and visual channels, 2) develop tactile and visual discrimination, 3) progress in concept and language development, and 4) develop gross and fine motor skills. In addition, it's just plain fun to spend quality time with your child in the great outdoors.

Ideas for a baby/toddler or young child with multiple impairments (non-mobile):

- Use a stroller, wheelchair or wagon to take a walk or have a destination like a shady tree or bench. Remember to talk about what you are feeling, hearing and smelling. Give cues about what you are rolling on...a smooth sidewalk, a bumpy road, through the grass, or across a gravel driveway. Your child's receptive language is much more advanced than you may think.
- Unhappy or colicky babies frequently calm if you take them outside. The change in air pressure and sensory input sometimes interrupts a crying jag.
- Depending upon your circumstances, either leave your child in the stroller/wheelchair, or spread out a blanket or large towel so there is a home-base. Take whatever you need with you to position your child comfortably on the blanket or towel. Sing songs, talk about the things you hear and what is all around you.
- Give me some skin! Your child will learn more if they have more skin exposed for feeling things. Take off those shoes and socks. Take off long pants so those legs encounter grass, sand, and little feet can kick at the branches of that bush.
- Position your child so some of his/her body is touching the grass. Sometimes, this change of texture can be overwhelming, so start with just a foot off the blanket. Use the things in your yard or neighborhood park to help your child begin to experience and understand the natural world. Position your child under a little bush so when she

kicks or reaches up, she encounters leaves.

- Hold your child and walk under a branch with leaves. Don't bump the branch, but walk through the tiny branches with soft leaves that will tickle. Talk about what you are doing. Then talk about it and do it again. This can become a fun game and may elicit giggles.
- Take a walk in gentle rain without an umbrella. (No lightning, please!) Talk about, listen to, and smell the rain. Most children with vision learn about rain by watching it through a window, but your child will need to experience it.
- Don't be afraid to allow your very young child to get a little dirty as she feels/experiences nature with skin surfaces. Cleaning up muddy feet that get to feel squishy mud involves remembering to take a few wet washcloths in a zip-lock bag or a package of wipes.

Ideas for a child who is mobile (crawling or walking):

- Select a little tree in your yard or neighborhood that is young enough that your child can reach the branches. Take a tactile marker with you on a string or shoestring to "mark the tree." (Beads on a shoelace, a little plastic toy, a squishy ball on a keychain, etc.) Tie the item onto a branch of the tree that your child can touch. Now, this is "Katie's or Zayden's tree." Check this tree frequently with your child as the seasons change to see what is happening. Are the leaves starting to get dry and falling down? Are almost all the leaves gone? It's fall/autumn. Check the tree in the winter. Verify that it's the same tree by locating the "tactile marker." If it's cold outside, there is sometimes snow under the tree, and if there are no leaves on the tree, it's winter. Find the little buds on the tree that tell you that spring is coming! Are the buds getting bigger? Are baby leaves starting to grow on the tree? Are they getting bigger? It's spring! You get the idea. Later, find a pine tree and discover that coniferous trees shed some needles, but keep their needles, which are their leaves all year long.
- Take your child on a tour of the yard so she will know what is there. (You can do this with babies too.) If you have your own yard, fix any dangerous aspects, (holes, drop-offs), and if possible, enclose the area with a fence so that later, your child can go outside independently.
- When your child is outside, teach her how to find the back door using tactile and auditory cues.



VIPS Indiana O&M Instructor Debby Eades takes November for a sensory walk.

(Follow the side walk; listen for the wind chimes above the door or the radio/iPhone playing music in the kitchen window, etc.) Note: You and your child can even make the wind chimes yourselves!

- When swallowing small items is no longer a hazard, allow your child to play with rocks, dirt, mulch, shells, etc. Compare and contrast things in nature. (big rock/little rock, big leaf/little leaf, smooth bark/bumpy bark, wet/dry rocks, cold/warm sidewalks, steps, and rocks, etc.)
- Tie bells to swing set equipment so your child will hear if another child is swinging and can avoid a collision. Sometimes families use bricks or wood to define a perimeter around the swings, and these act as tactile alerts for a child entering the “swing zone.”
- If you find a bird nest, spray it thoroughly with a germ killing spray and seal it in a plastic bag for a couple days or put it in a zip-lock bag in the freezer overnight. Later, your child can safely explore it. Use artificial birds from craft stores to give children an idea of the size and shape of real birds since they rarely hold still and allow exploration. In late winter/early spring, let your child hang short pieces of yarn and string on a low bush so the birds can use them for nest-building.
- Get a bird feeder that can be taken down from the tree and let your child refill it and notice how empty/full it is. “Do we need to fill the bird feeder?”
- Do not allow your child to play in the water of a bird bath. Birds can carry a disease called Histoplasmosis that can be very dangerous.
- Provide safe opportunities for water play. A small pool, a basin of water, a spray bottle, a paint brush and a bucket of water are all ways to play in water without actually going swimming.
- In warm weather, let your child swim in a little pool or large storage bin, or play under the sprinkler. ALWAYS stay with your child when any water is present. A child can drown in an inch of water.
- Start to make a list of outdoor destinations with landmarks that your child can learn to love...a neighbor's yard, a neighborhood playground/park, a blanket outside the fire station so you can listen to see if the fire fighters need to hurry to help someone, a nearby creek or a farm.
- Teach your child how to use outdoor equipment that is age-appropriate. Teach him/her how to climb a ladder on a small slide, sit down, and slide down a slide. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Children sometimes need many exposures before they can master a piece of equipment. Once you master one piece of equipment, move on to another piece of equipment.
- Take an extra zip-lock bag with you when you venture outside so that as you and your child experience the natural world, you can take back souvenirs. (A favorite

rock, a little branch, a sprig from a lilac bush) Start a nature box that can hold your child's treasures. The items you bring home can also be turned into an experience story with one tactile item on each page. Your teacher of the visually impaired or early interventionist in visual impairment can help you turn those treasures into an experience story.

- Think about the things you used to enjoy as a child and try to share those with your son or daughter. Put your phone away and stay in the moment with your child.



Carter takes in the scent of an iris in the VIPS Louisville Sensory Garden.

Remember that children with visual impairments sometimes initially struggle with changes in the routine or new things, but if the natural world becomes a consistent part of your child's life, he or she will learn to love Mother Nature's sensory world.

How Does Your Garden Grow?

(Reprinted from the VIPS Parents Newsletter, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2001)

It can be easy for children who are visually impaired to have misconceptions about things. They need lots of hands-on experiences to make up for what their vision can not provide. Here are some ideas for using the summer season as a teaching opportunity for your child!

Growing a small vegetable garden is a wonderful experience. But if you can't do this, there are “U-Pick” farms where your child could learn many of the same principles. For instance, the green beans or carrots that he eats for supper don't just magically appear out of nowhere. First, they grow from seed. Then they are harvested from the plants. Then they have to be prepared. Then they can be cooked. They can be sent fresh to the grocery store. Or they can go to factories where they are canned. Visit a fresh produce stand; touch, smell, and taste the different fruits and vegetables.

There are some wonderful sensory plants that your child can enjoy. Mint has a yummy smell and flavor -- you can use it to flavor tea. Lemon verbena, like mint, has an incredible aroma when the leaves are rubbed between your fingers. Lambs ear has the softest, fuzziest leaves you can imagine. These plants grow

heartily, and can easily overtake a garden, so you could probably find a friend who wants to get rid of some! The VIPS-Louisville Office would be happy to give you a start.

Herbs grow easily in indoor pots. You could plant a small herb garden with your child, help her tend the herbs as they grow, then pick some for smelling and tasting and using in cooking.

Growing plants can provide all types of other teaching opportunities. You can talk to your child about how sunshine and water are needed for the plants to grow, "What do you need to grow?" (air to breathe, food, loving care, etc.) Help your child check to see if soil is dry and then water the plants -- letting your child help something grow with loving care. You can discuss the seasons, and how where we live, plants grow best in summer. For older children, you can even talk about how in different parts of the country, climates and growing seasons are different.

Learning about the world doesn't come easily for a child with little or no vision. But you can plant the seeds of curiosity by making the most of each and every teaching opportunity. You can bring the world to life for your child and her interest in and understanding of it will grow and flourish.

Even YOU Can Make Braille Duplo® Blocks

If you are the parents of a toddler, you have likely heard of Lego's Duplo® blocks, larger versions of the famed Lego interlocking blocks. The VIPS Education staff recently was blown away when one of our VIPS moms, Cierra Brettnacher, brought in Duplo Legos with letters of the braille alphabet configured on them. The blocks snap together, just like Legos and Duplo blocks, but rather than the standard style of six connector pegs on top of the blocks, this set of 26 blocks has pegs representing the letters of the braille alphabet! (Each braille cell is made up of six dots.) The braille blocks can interlocked with typical



Jacob Lichtefeld of St. Xavier High School worked on the design.

Duplo blocks. These blocks can be used to increase learning opportunities with the preschool set working on braille literacy as well as fine motor skills. As a child builds with the Legos, he is also working on braille letter recognition and identification.

Cierra provided information about these very special blocks as well as a link to the website containing the directions to make the blocks using a 3-D printer! Cierra came up with the idea for the blocks while watching her son Anthony feel a set of Duplos as he prepared to snap them together.

Doug Seelbach is a Louisville resident who not only created a program to 3-D print the braille Duplo Legos, but also developed a program to build a modified spoon handle for Anthony. (See related article in VISability July-August-September 2015). Doug's creation of the program to print the blocks on a 3-D printer is certainly wonderful but his willingness to share the information at no cost to anyone interested is incredibly gracious!

Cierra also reached out to the students of St. Xavier High School, where Anthony's Uncle Henry (Gates, Class of '17) was a student, who then went to work producing the blocks using a 3-D printer. The students were happy (and hopefully proud) to present the new blocks to Anthony.

VIPS is grateful to students of St. Xavier for their assistance with this project. If you or your organization has a passion to serve our population of students with visual impairments, please share your idea! We are always open to new partnerships.

The end result of this mysterious journey is that you, too, can print braille Duplo Legos. Doug even sent the directions to enable other parents to access his program with just the "cheapest, simplest" 3-D printer ever. This is what he wrote:

To print the Legos:

1. Acquire a 3-D printer (can be very inexpensive -- makes no difference).
2. Hook up 3-D printer to your computer.
3. Load plastic filament in printer according to printer's directions. *
4. Go to Thingiverse, <https://www.thingiverse.com/thing:2151813> and create a free account.
5. Download the files. (Each letter is one file, or you can download one zip file containing all the letters.)
6. Open the software for your 3-D printer.
7. Load the file(s) into the printer software and print.

* Plastic filament is typically used to create in 3-D and there are many different types. Use whatever is recommended for your 3-D printer or whatever type suits your needs.

The UPS store at 743 East Broadway printed Anthony's spoon. (Debbie Adams, the owner, has now become a friend of the

Brettnachers!) The UPS store prints in ABS plastic (semi hard, easily manipulated, harder to print, made from oil).

Very basic 3-D printer kits print best in PLA plastic (very hard, melts at lower temperatures, made from corn).

Exotic filaments are available on Amazon and almost any printer will print with them. Examples include flexible (rubber-like), ceramic, wood, conductive metallic, glow-in-the-dark, glass and many more.

Fun & Educational Events Support VIPS Families

VIPS Louisville

Trip to APH

So few Louisville residents actually know what a fabulous resource they have in the American Printing House for the Blind (APH), next to the Kentucky School for the Blind on Frankfort Avenue. Yet people involved with the field of blindness know full well what wonderful things APH researches and produces. On March 11, VIPS families recently saw first-hand proof of this as they participated in an all-day event at APH, filling their minds with valued information and their children with excitement and imaginative events.

APH staff and volunteers provided short tours of the APH Museum, a treasure trove of the history of blindness in America, and of the area where braille books are printed. A live reading of *The Gruffalo*, a favorite children's book, was acted out by Pam Cox accompanied by Barbara Henning's skilled portrayal of each character's voice using her violin. A make and take followed with the production of puppets on popsicle sticks. After all of this, APH even provided lunch for the families! APH staffers Dawn Wilkerson and Joe Hodge told life stories and answered questions about their visual challenges. Tactile Town, an APH-produced 3-dimensional orientation and mobility kit that uses



Dawn Wilkerson & Joe Hodge talked about growing up blind.



Anthony tries out Tactile Town

manipulatives to teach navigation skills in a model town, was introduced to the families and children to great success, capping off a perfectly wonderful and productive day for the VIPS families and children who attended. Very sincere thanks are owed to APH staff members Bob Belknap,

Deidre Hemm, Heather Kennedy-MacKenzie, Ken Parry, Karen Pope, Hannah Ozmun and Dorinda Rife who spent the day with VIPS families and also to Janie Blome, Michael Hudson, Gary Mudd and Rebecca Snider who provided behind the scenes help. We especially appreciate the hard work of Pam Cox and Barbara Martin along with Joe Hodge and Dawn Wilkerson.

Night At the Museum

VIPS Louisville families starred in their own Night at the Museum at the Kentucky Science Center on March 30th. That night, the Science Center was open ONLY for VIPS families to enjoy! Having the museum to themselves, made it much easier for VIPS kids to experience the many exciting things they could do there.



Zach loved playing at the giant water wheel.

Easter Party

VIPS Louisville's Easter Party was held on Saturday, April 15th. The children colored Easter eggs made of salt dough. The usual Easter Egg hunt on the playground was followed by an extraordinary Sensory Egg hunt using beeper

Friends Pyper and Sarah found LOTS of eggs!!



eggs made by the Beta Club from Highland Middle School. The eggs were turned in for a basket of treats that included candy and gift certificates donated by Hometown Pizza and Texas Roadhouse. Besides thanking both of these companies, we also appreciate Doug Finnissand, the owner of the Waffle House that provided breakfast for all to enjoy.

Donuts with Dad

We celebrated Donuts with Dad on April 19th. We had a great morning with many dads, grandpas, moms, grandmas, Mimis and aunts joining the classroom staff. Thank you to Krispy Kreme for donating the donuts.



Above: Calvin joined son Caleb for a donut before school. Left: Lee breakfasts with twins Carter and Aubrey.



Above: Bradley likes having mom Alyssa come to school!

Muffins with Mom

VIPS moms, grandmothers and grandfathers were provided breakfast during Muffins with Mom. The children made a special treat for their teachers as they bought in flowers to make beautiful flower arrangements for each of their teachers.



Above: Trenton and mom Amber share a muffin.



Left: Cierra and Anthony enjoy time together.

VIPS Central Kentucky

Music and Meatballs

by Kelly Easton, VIPS Central Kentucky Regional Director

On March 10th, VIPS Central Kentucky families came out to enjoy a delicious pasta dinner and have fun with crafts and a presentation by Wellness Music Therapy Center. Parents and children feasted on salad and pasta with homemade meat sauce (donated by VIPS grandparent Charlotte Burton), and yummy cookies (donated by Nancy Miller).

After eating and socializing, families joined a lively musical therapy session led by Music Therapist Pam Withrow and sang songs, shook maracas, and clapped along to songs played on the guitar. Music Therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. It can help improve communication skills, increase movement, and provide motivation to reach individualized goals.

VIPS Indiana

VIPS Indiana Partners with Indianapolis Museum of Art

by Meredith Howell, VIPS Indiana Assistant Director

At the 2016 Fall and Winter Play and Learn (PAL) events, information was shared with families in attendance regarding a very special opportunity offered to VIPS by the Indianapolis Museum of Art called the Toddler Art Group (TAG) Program. Over six sessions, parents and their children were offered exclusive access to a specific exhibit within the art museum followed by a sensory Make & Take activity that was tied to the experience of that exhibit. Led by IMA Art Instructor, Robin McBride Scott, these experiences were tailored to engaging our VIPS children's senses. We applaud Robin for all of the effort she



Participants make rain sticks during an art session at the IMA.

put into making these sessions accessible to the children we serve. We are thrilled to have been invited to partner with the IMA once again next year so if any families are interested, please contact Meredith Howell at the Indiana office.



Above: Ryan loves when IMA Art Instructor, Robin, makes her bird sounds.



Left: Beth enjoys exploring the lentils which added the sound for the rainstick parents and children made during the Make & Take segment.

Spring Play and Learn

On Saturday, May 6th, VIPS Indiana held a Play and Learn (PAL) for the children and families served by our agency. We changed things up a bit and found a generously donated location at pediatric therapy clinic, **SPOT Services Indy**. There was a quiet room for children needing a break with VIPS equipment including LightAides and Lightboxes. There was also a room with a ball pit and a large indoor playground for kids wanting to get some extra energy out. It was a perfect set up! After



Above: Jacob enjoys the opportunity to jump on the mini-trampoline.

Below: Parents make textured art to take home.



circle time, parents/caregivers let their little ones play with our VIPS staff and wonderful volunteers from the *Indianapolis Alumnae of Delta Gamma* while they participated in a nature-inspired Make & Take led by *Indianapolis Museum of Art's teaching artist, Robin McBride Scott*. Afterward we indulged in delicious pizza donated by *Jockamo Upper Crust Pizza*! It was such a fun day and we are so grateful for the families, our staff, the volunteers and our community partners for making it so special!

Pre-Braille Experiences for Infants and Toddlers, Pt. 1*

by Terri Connolly, VIPS Board Member and former Early Interventionist, VIPS Louisville

(Reprinted from VIPS Parents Newsletter, Vol. 17, No 2, 2001)

Babies learn through movement and their senses. Play is the best way for babies to learn. Good pre-braille experiences for infants and toddlers include:

- Discovery through play;
- Associating concepts and meaningful language;
- Developing good fine motor skills; and
- Developing tactual awareness and discrimination skills.

Be patient! Infants and toddlers need to explore on their own for quite a while before we jump in and guide these discoveries. Caring adults can provide materials and language to support their play. Gradually guide their play by expanding it to include the skills and concepts below. Encourage little ones to use any vision they have as well as tactual clues.

Understanding Spatial Relationships

These are spatial concepts: on/off, in/out, front/back, left/right, up/down, above/below, top/bottom, in front of/behind, over/under, forward/backward, together/apart. Others are: next to, beside, through, middle, center, between, here, there.

Begin with experiences with objects relating to the child's body, i.e. "Find the teddy bear behind you (next to you, under you)."

Gradually expand experiences to include toys and objects relating to each other. For example, talk about the block on top of the cup next to the plate. Later talk about and play with objects around a room in relationship to furniture, for example, "The ball rolled under the couch."

Mark spots on paper or surfaces with crayons, stickers, or magnets (top, under, in the raised line box, etc.).

Other Important Cognitive Concepts

Discrimination skills begin with just touching and playing with an object. Let babies hold, drop, bang, and mouth toys in safe ways to discover concepts. When a baby begins to recognize familiar objects and explore new ones, they are ready to build on cognitive concepts. Provide toys that help them develop these concepts: big/little, open/closed, thick/thin, wide/narrow, long/short, and same/different.

Introduce basic shapes to your child. Include shapes such as: ball, circle, round, square, box, cube, rectangle, triangle, cylinder, oval, diamond, heart, cross, dotted line, curvy line. When the toddler is ready to play sorting and matching games, begin with two, and then increase to three or four objects at a time.

Tactile Discrimination

Introduce a variety of textures in a playful, systematic way with words to describe as the baby plays. Tactile concepts include smooth, rough, hard, soft, sticky, furry, bumpy, fuzzy, and slick.

Encourage two-handed play and exploration of details. Give the baby names for things until he or she can recognize familiar objects by touch and name them, too. Name for the baby what the object is made of: paper, cloth, wood, plastic, metal, leather, vinyl. Talk about the edges, corners, and pieces of toys, books, and objects.

Try presenting several pieces of the same tactile objects and one that is different. Have your child find the one that is "different" and the ones that are the "same." Again with sorting or matching games, start out presenting two objects, and then increase to three or four.

Tactile awareness and strength can be refined by playing with whipping cream and play dough, opening jar lids, and by playing keyboards and the many musical toys with buttons and knobs.

** To be continued in future newsletters.*

Former VIPS Child Wins National Braille Challenge

Carmynn Blakeley, age 8, is a rising third grade student at Breckenridge-Franklin Elementary in Louisville. She was a VIPS kid through our Outreach Program a number of years ago. Carmynn, who is blind due to Septo Optic Dysplasia, represented Kentucky in the National Braille Challenge Competition in Los Angeles, CA. She was one of 50 contestants from throughout the US. Congratulations to Carmynn who won first place in the Apprentice Division. You make KY proud and set a great example for other VIPS kids!! Checkout the story at <http://www.whas11.com/news/education/jcps-student-wins-national-braille-challenge/450098742>

Educational Programming News

VIPS Teachers on the Road Making Home Visits

VIPS Developmental Interventionists travel throughout Kentucky and Indiana visiting children under the age of three doing in-home early intervention. This is how MOST of the children in VIPS are seen.

Home is a natural learning environment for young children – the place they are the most comfortable and ready to learn. Likewise, it is a comfortable learning environment for their parents and caregivers as well. And an added benefit is it is easier for siblings, extended family and friends to be involved in the VIPS child's progress.



Left: Aubrianna, of Noblesville, IN, has some favorites, and the big metal bowl and bells are at the top of her list. She can even find specific items upon request!



Right: Eleanor, of Middlebury, IN, shows her love of jewelry as she explored a variety of sizes of beads during a VIPS Indiana Home Visit.



Above left: Jackson, of Fishers, IN, is visually attracted to the movement of a solid color Slinky during an initial home visit.



Above right: Tanner, of Alexandria, IN, began grasping and playing with play frame toys all by himself during an initial visit, to the thrill of his parents.



At right: Dixie Miller of VIPS Central KY works with Miriam, of Richmond, KY, during a recent home visit.



Left: Delaney of Mt. Washington, KY, practices using fine motor skills.



Right: Oakley, of Louisville, is all smiles to welcome his DI.



Left: Gabriel, who lives in Louisville, enjoys putting straws into small holes in a canister. Middle: Ainsley, of Sheherdsville, KY, is using a balloon to work on exploring cause and effect and developing a visually guided reach. Right: Anthony feels snug in a box for reading during a Louisville home visit.



VIPS Central Kentucky

Little Learners Open House

Every Monday and Tuesday, 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., the VIPS Central Kentucky office welcomes some amazing two- and three-year-old children for a morning of sensory play, songs, movement activities, outdoor play and social skills development. We want every VIPS family in the surrounding counties to know all about how this drop-off enrichment program can help their child in reaching individualized goals, so we hosted a Little Learners Open House on April 17 for parents whose children would soon be turning two years old, and those with children not yet three.



Molly received a bright mylar balloon.



In addition to showing off the Sensory Room, classroom routine, and meeting the staff, children were able to

Ms. Lesley engages in some typical classrooms routines with Asher (left) and Arianna (right).

participate in a fun egg obstacle course and scavenger hunt. TVI, Dixie Miller, and DI, Lesley Lusher, planned an obstacle course that allowed children to exercise different mobility skills while using their color recognition skills to find the correct colored eggs assigned to them. Children climbed ladders, slid down slides, crawled through a tunnel and navigated steps on their hunt for eggs, while those using wheelchairs or strollers could find the eggs that were attached to shiny mylar helium balloons. After the scavenger hunt, children and parents were invited to share a yummy snack and learn more about how the Little Learners program can benefit each child, preparing for a successful preschool transition.

Crawling through a tunnel was a fun obstacle to try.



Ms. Dixie helped Arianna over a bridge.



VIPS Louisville

2 Day Twos

by Juanita Miles, Twos Teacher, Kids Town Preschool

During the month of January, the Twos learned about the winter season. The children visually and tactually explored evergreen branches. The sensory table contained ice along with arctic animals (polar bears and penguins). We sang songs and learned finger plays about mittens and arctic animals.



Bradley and Henley explore the sensory table.



Braden enjoys the playground on a warm spring day.

The shape for February was the heart shape and the color of the month was red. The children made a texture rubbing of various textures of hearts (sandpaper, needlepoint canvas, felt and craft foam.) The older Twos sequenced three heart shapes by size (smallest to largest) and then glued the hearts on paper. Our science activity was to mix water with the contents of a red Jello packet. The children touched the Jello powder and watched as the powder turned into a liquid. Everyone enjoyed eating it at snack time.

Our shape and color for March was green and the shape was the triangle. The older Twos made a green counting book by matching the correct number of green stickers to the written number.

We added some new activities to our room in the Spring. Tracey Webb, one of our Developmental Interventionists (DI) made an activity bar for one of our students. It is made from PVC piping and has some items (red metallic pompom and red battery operated lights) attached to it. At the suggestion of one of our volunteers, Deanna Scoggins, we also added a small cardboard box, but large enough to hold a child. We had observed that one of our students repeatedly climbed into the child sized grocery cart or would climb into the sensory table. The box has met the needs of several children who seek a more defined space for activities. Many thanks to Ms. Tracey and Ms. Deanna for their clever ideas!



Kendall brought donuts to share with her friends to celebrate her birthday!

Finally, we added some new students to our classroom and have enjoyed getting to know them and their families.

Kids Town Preschool Adventures

by Elizabeth Underwood, Developmental Interventionist (DI), VIPS Kids Town Preschool

The last several months have been quite busy for our friends who call Kids Town Preschool their home away from home. In February, the Orange and Red Rooms focused on working with our emotions. We used real photos to help identify facial expressions of different feelings. We also used role play to help recognize and manage emotions. The Red Room went on a scavenger hunt using distance searching methods to find people being caring. They also used different textures associated with each emotion to help with texture match. To celebrate Dr.



The children greatly enjoyed the visit from Officer Douglas of the LMPD mounted police division.

Seuss's birthday, the friends in the red room created Seussian creatures. They read Dr. Seuss stories to learn rhymes and opposite words. The Orange and Red rooms also enjoyed going on a field trip to the American Printing House for the Blind (APH). We listened to a storyteller and created a puppet craft. We explored different products and books which APH has available.

March was a time of learning about our community and community helpers. The Red and Orange Rooms both focused on firefighters, police and construction workers. The Red Room also discussed doctors while the Orange Room focused on dentists instead. On our field trip to the McMahan firehouse, we were able to learn about fire safety, sit in a fire truck, explore a fire fighter's tools, and spray a water hose. The mounted police even stopped by for a visit to teach us the importance of the police in our community.



Hadley Jo sprayed the fire hose.

The classrooms explored jobs in the community through a variety of activities. The Red Room practiced safety skills through learning how to call 911 in an emergency, practicing how to stop, drop and roll, and working on crawling under smoke in case of a fire. The children also used magnifiers to match tiny pictures of vehicles to large pictures of vehicles. The Orange Room focused on materials the community helpers used and how they look when they are at work. We worked on identifying sounds in the community, such as a fire truck and police siren, and graphed what items police officers wear when they are on patrol. We even picked out pictures we wanted to use to create our own dentist office and made a dentist book.

The saying April showers bring May flowers is very true in Kids Town Preschool. We have been learning all about fruit, vegetables, and flower gardens for the month of April. In the Orange Room, we have enjoyed observing the process of growing flowers. We planted morning glory flower seeds, made sure they were watered regularly, and were quite excited to come in one day and see that they had started sprouting.



Carter gave his friend Maddie a beautiful flower from the Sensory Garden.

Mr. Clayton, a chef, came to visit and talked about healthy eating habits and how he uses food from the garden in recipes. The children were able to practice their cutting skills, with child safe scissors, of course, and cut grapes to toss into a fruit salad mix they created and devoured.



Children prepare to sample the fruit salad they made with Chef Clayton.

Red Room and Orange Room students enjoyed being able to watch a marionette show of “The Three Little Pigs” that girls from the American Heritage Girls from the Highlands Latin School put on for them. Ginger Hales, mother of VIPS grad Judah, organized the group and we were very appreciative.

The Red Room learned about flowers through sorting seeds by different types and diagramming parts of the flower using a tactile flower diagram. They also put bean seeds in a bag to watch them grow. One of the best parts of April came in the red room when creating a chemical reaction. Water and Alka Seltzer tablets were placed inside an Easter egg making the top pop up in the air. Another classroom favorite was the marbled shaving cream and painted Easter eggs.

A trip to Garden Gate helped us to see where we can purchase produce and flowers. The owner gave each child a mandarin orange, and a very nice customer who was shopping bought all the children cookies just because he thought they were awesome (something we in Kids Town know to be an absolute fact!).

Every other Monday we are able to take part in ballet class. Ms. Elena Diehl has taught both the teachers and children about sensory input, bilateral coordination, crossing our midlines and strengthening our core and gross motor muscles. Mondays have been a fun event with Ms. Elena!



Olive pushes her friend Ian around the bike path in Kids Town.



Kids Town Preschoolers have been hard at work learning about ourselves and the world around us. We have been very busy and have enjoyed every moment.

Aubrey and Leo practice daily living skills by bathing a baby doll.

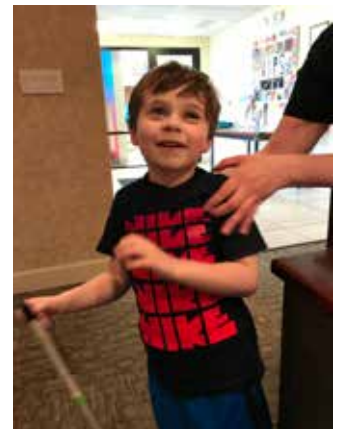
Pre-K in the Spotlight

by Ashley Emmons, Pre-K Teacher, Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI), Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)

In Pre-K, we have continued field testing the new Building on Patterns Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum. Each lesson of the curriculum includes a print and braille copy of the book, tactile storybooks related to the book, braille reading and writing lessons and much more! Each Monday, Ms. Deanna Scoggins joins us as a guest braille reader to read each book. Listed below are some of the students’ favorite books and activities from this term:

In the story, *Whistle for Willie* by Ezra Jack Keats, a little boy named Peter hides from his dog Willie in an empty carton. The students learned that an empty carton meant a cardboard box large enough for Peter to fit inside. After reading the story, the students had a blast playing in a large cardboard box in the classroom. In the story, Peter also learns how to whistle. Each student had the opportunity to practice whistling using just their lips, as well as with a variety of different types of whistles/ noisemakers.

After reading *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson the students explored a variety of different textures, and used these textures to create their very own Gruffalo with knobbly knees, poisonous wart on nose, tusks, claws, purple prickles on back, etc. We also played a game called, “Are you like a Gruffalo?” Students lined up, and after naming features of the Gruffalo, they would take one step forward if they had the same feature. Some of the features included: two feet, tusks, teeth, claws, ears, wart on nose, etc.



Vance loves Pre-K at VIPS.

My Friend the Doctor by Joanna Cole was a book that the students really enjoyed. This is a great book to read when learning about jobs and community helpers. It is also a great book to read to your child before making a trip to the doctor, so that she knows what to expect. After reading the story, we discussed what a waiting room is. What kind of things might there be in a waiting room? What is a scale? Have you ever stood on a scale to check your weight? The students had the opportunity to stand on a scale, and then identified who weighed the most, and who weighed the least. We also explored items from a pretend play doctor kit and discussed their purpose (stethoscope, thermometer, shot, etc).

During the week of May 15 - 19, four of our Kids Town preschoolers had the opportunity to spend the school week at the Kentucky School for the Blind's short term program. They participated in many different activities such as circle time, math, music, adaptive physical education, and much more! Thanks again to KSB for allowing our students to participate in this wonderful program!



Field trips using public transportation offer great opportunities to practice and hone O&M skills.

Notes of Interest



~ In our last VISability we mentioned the two new *VIPS Tips on YouTube* (type Visually Impaired Preschool Services into the search bar) and now there is a third VIPS Tip. This new tip is learning how to make slime with your children.

~ *Computer Coding Basics for Students with Visual Impairments*: Allison Linn is a senior writer at Microsoft who describes a unique project that Microsoft has pioneered to teach children with visual impairments and other disabilities basic computer coding through physically connecting pods together to build programs. Project Torino began in the United Kingdom (U.K.) with ten students and now has increased to 100 students with visual impairments, autism, dyslexia and other disabilities along with their main-stream classmates. While inclusion is one aspect of the project, it is not the only desired outcome. Because of the huge opportunity in professional computing jobs which remain unfilled due to a shortage of engineers and coders to meet the needs of technology companies, and with one in four blind or partially sighted working age adults in the UK doing paid work, it seemed to be a natural match. Reliance on pictures, graphs and conceptual coding methods involved in computer science can be simplified by introducing mathematical and strategic thinking concepts through physical tools which introduce vocabulary, computational tools and other programming concepts.

Project Torino is geared toward seven to eleven year old children in the UK although the project's goal is to expand to other countries. A curriculum is available for teachers who are assumed to have no coding skills. The physical programming language will be followed by an app that allows students to transfer the coding they have done with the physical system into text-based code and then use other assistive technologies to continue coding, gradually moving into skills a professional software engineer could use. To read more about this project, go to Microsoft visually impaired computer programming.

~ *Ablenet now has deep pressure vests*, Squeeze Pressure Vests, available for children with sensory overload difficulties or who have trouble processing sensory information, like those with autism, ADHD, or who have sleeping or anxiety disorders. The vests are lightweight and inflatable yet have a discreet profile. They retail for around \$300.

~ *The 2017 Boston Marathon was a huge deal for all runners, especially the thirteen runners who were visually impaired (out of 30,000 registered runners)*. One of those thirteen athletes is Stephanie Zundel, a senior at Vanderbilt University. Stephanie began long distance running two years ago after giving up her high school track team when running with her tethered guides proved unsuccessful. She now runs marathons with Achilles International after learning about this marvelous organization at a National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Convention. She now runs with guides Harvey Freeman and Amy Harris and has run the New York Marathon in addition to the Boston Marathon. To read the entire article about Stephanie, go online to Liza Graves' article, "Stephanie Zundel: Faces of the South" in the StyleBlueprint Nashville of 4/17/17.

~ *To learn more about Achilles International* whose mission is to "to enable people with all types of disabilities to participate in mainstream running events in order to promote personal achievement" go online to achillesinternational.org. There are chapters in Louisville and Nashville but a complete listing is available on this website. (VIPS and Kentucky School for the Blind graduate, Jamie Weedman, ran in the New York and Boston Marathons through the auspices of Achilles International.)

~ *Bookshare, through the use of Spotlight Gateway, is providing students with visual impairments or print disabilities the opportunity to access a library of over 500,000 titles*. The service is provided by Lighthouse Guild and Bookshare, in collaboration with American Academy of Ophthalmology, LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and VisionServe Alliance. Go to: lighthouseguild.org/spotlightgateway.



New Arrivals

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

Abraham -- 4 months, Clarksville, IN
 Addalyn -- 15 months, Central City, KY
 Ainsley -- 5 months, Shepherdsville, KY
 Alexander -- 18 months, Bardstown, KY
 Amarion -- 13 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Amelia -- 9 months, Newport, KY
 Ashlynn -- 5 months, Louisville, KY
 Ashton -- 2 years, Lexington, KY
 Audrey -- 15 months, Bloomington, IN
 Austin -- 3 years, Cave City, KY
 Bailey -- 4 months, Louisville, KY
 Braden -- 2 years, Sellersburg, IN
 Brayden -- 11 months, Westfield, IN
 Brayden -- 16 months, Cannon, KY
 Breanna -- 2 years, Blue River, KY
 Caden -- 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Caeleb -- 2 years, Lawrenceburg, KY
 Callie -- 9 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Chisum -- 8 months, Somerset, KY
 Christian -- 1 year, Independence, KY
 Clara -- 21 months, Lawrenceburg, KY
 Dale -- 11 months, New Haven, IN
 Daphne -- 2 years, New Palestine, IN
 David -- 1 year, Clarkson, KY
 Demi -- 8 months, Henderson, KY
 Destiny -- 21 months, Glasgow, KY
 Elijah -- 2 years, Somerset, KY
 Ember -- 7 months, Versailles, KY
 Emmalynn -- 2 years, Lexington, KY
 Ethan -- 10 months, Cumberland, IN
 Fox -- 7 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Hannah -- 9 months, Zionsville, IN
 Iker -- 7 months, Scottsville, KY
 Izabella -- 23 months, Russell Springs, KY
 Jackson -- 2 years, Bluffton, IN
 Jaelyn -- 10 months, Indianapolis, IN



This vibrating toy was a big hit with Joylin during a home visit. "And now, we're going to wiggle-jiggle your belly." Learning body parts can be fun!

Jaylin -- 10 months, Jasper, IN
 Jalen -- 14 months, Louisville, KY
 Jalen -- 17 months, Louisville, KY
 Jeremiah -- 20 months, Noblesville, IN
 Josephine -- 16 months, Greenfield, IN
 Jonah -- 10 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Joylin -- 13 months, Greenwood, IN
 Karly -- 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Kennedy -- 7 months, Crown Point, IN
 Kevin -- 5 months, Prestonsburg, KY
 Landyn -- 15 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Liam -- 10 months, Jeffersonville, IN
 Liam -- 2 years, Richmond, KY
 Lily -- 2 years, Nashville, IN
 Logan -- 9 months, Lexington, KY
 MarJani -- 6 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Mercedes -- 17 months, Bowling Green, KY
 Myles -- 3 months, Ft. Thomas, KY
 Nolan -- 18 months, Louisville, KY
 Oliver -- 8 months, Flatwoods, KY
 Oliver -- 5 months, Lexington, KY
 Joseph -- 23 months, Louisville, KY
 Rayvah -- 18 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Robert -- 10 months, Louisville, KY
 Ruby -- 16 months, Greensburg, IN
 Ryder -- 5 months, Ashland, KY
 Ryuu -- 13 months, Lafayette, IN
 Shaye -- 3 years, Brownsburg, IN
 Talon -- 22 months, Paris, KY
 Tanner -- 3 years, Alexandria, IN
 Tayshawn -- 16 months, Fort Wayne, IN
 Trystan -- 2 years, Plainfield, IN
 Victor -- 14 months, Fort Branch, IN
 Yaheli -- 18 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Zoe -- 2 years, North Vernon, IN

VIPS Staff News

Three Welcomes and One Farewell

by Kathy Mullen, VIPS Director of Education

Team VIPS in Louisville has been busy! We are happy to warmly welcome some new grandbabies to the VIPS team. Mary Lesousky, long time VIPS TVI, welcomed her newest bundle of joy on Easter Sunday, April 16. Graven Allen Lesousky was welcomed into Mary and Joe Lesousky's posse of "grands," joining cousins, Rhodes and Harper.

Not to be outdone, Beth Krebs, Kids Town Preschool Assistant Preschool Director, assumed the wonderful role of grandmother by welcoming her first grandchild, Avery Noelle Krebs, on Friday, April 21. Avery has been received into the waiting and open arms of Grandpa Jack as well. Team VIPS welcomes these newest additions to our VIPS family!



Beth with Avery

It is time to interrupt our welcoming celebration to bid farewell as Beth now plans to shirk her natural ability of working with children to the child who means the most to her. Beth will be leaving Kids Town Preschool at VIPS in July 2017 as she begins providing care in her home for Avery. Words cannot express the gratitude we have for Beth and her commitment to the VIPS community. She has served as our first Assistant Preschool Director and has set the bar high for her successor.

And now it is time to welcome Beth's successor. Kristin Horlander found VIPS in March 2016 when her daughter, Maddie, joined Kids Town Preschool as a student. By May of the same year, Kristin and her husband, Matt, were hooked! They jumped into the world of volunteering feet first and have not



Kristin and Maddie

looked back. By early fall 2016, Kristin began asking us to keep her in mind if any positions became available at VIPS. Kristin was one of several applicants seeking the assistant preschool position; it was quite the impressive group. We are confident that families being served in Kids Town Preschool will be just as impressed with her commitment, energy and vision as we have been. Welcome, Kristin!

Special Gifts of Time and Treasure from Special People

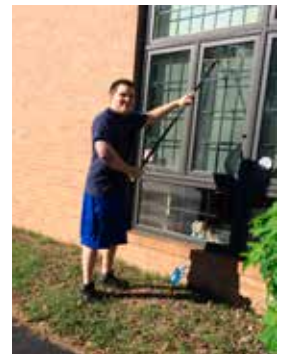
VIPS Louisville

We are so very grateful to the *Fairdale Christian Church* who held a Bunco Night fundraiser for VIPS which raised \$560 dollars!!

In case you see the Wish List column every issue and wonder if we ever receive any donations of the requested items, the answer is a resounding yes! *Margaret Kaiser*, grandmother of VIPS child Evan, donated items from the wish list as did *Corine Liebert and VIPS Mom Cierra Brettnacher*. Thanks so much for taking our needs to heart!

A big thank you goes to the *fourth graders from Sacred Heart Model School* who visited VIPS, bringing many of our wish list items.

Thanks to *Chris Wines*, VIPS student Bradley's dad, for helping wash windows in the Kids Town Preschool.



VIPS Dad Chris Wines

Long-time volunteers, *Jon Daniels*, Barret Middle School, and *Michael Daniels*, Male High School, sons of preschool instructional assistant, LaRhonda Daniels, are much appreciated for their help in the preschool classrooms and during Afterschool care.

Donna Dangler and daughters Lilly, Lizy and Lucy are once again owed our thanks for their help in the Parent Library as well as with general office assistance.

Thanks to *The American Heritage Girls group* (through VIPS grad Judah Hales' family) for donating braille valentines to the preschoolers. This group also presented a marionette show of the Three Little Pigs to the utter delight of the preschoolers.

Volunteers with the Jack Levine Parent Conference included *Elijah Crawford, James Kirchdorfer III and Christian Olsen*, all from St. Xavier High School; *Lauren Garrett* of Sacred Heart; *Katelyn Stumph* from North Oldham High School; *Riley Bender* of St. Margaret Mary; *Jon Daniels* of Barret Middle, *Michael Daniels* from Male High; *Maddie Armstrong, Melissa Armstrong, Robbie Bender, Hope Nolan and Savannah Norris*. Thank you so much for your assistance!

We can never thank our classroom volunteers enough for what they bring to our children. **Deanna Scoggins and Fran Woodward** both contribute much more than simply their time to the Twos, our youngest group. Thanks so much, ladies, we very much value the professionalism you add.

When we speak of folks sharing time and talent with our little ones, we must take notice of **Doug Seelbach**, who has been so extremely helpful with 3-D printing for Anthony, a VIPS kid, and his family. (Please see story on page 4.)

The **Greater Louisville Association of Realtors** came to plant and update the sensory garden as part of their Realtors Care Week of Service (<http://www.weekofservice.com/>). Thanks to **Paula Barmore, Robin Frazier, Kathie Hill, Patti Jo Nolan, Jaime Roth and Rebecca Smith** for sharing their time and energy.



We are very thankful for the parent volunteers who helped us move heavy furniture around during spring break so our floors could be re-done! We're thankful for **Jacob and Robert Erwin, Charles and Justin Ray and Lee Smith**. We also thank VIPS Office Manager **Carol Dahmke's husband Mitch and son Chris**. And we owe a huge shout out to **Mr. Maury** for coordinating it all!



We are grateful to the following **Highland Middle School's Beta Club** members who helped prepare for the Easter party. They cleaned and decorated plastic eggs, filling them with candy. Thanks to **adult sponsors Tua Gravatte, Margaret Kaiser and Gina Mercer and students Jessica Amos, Zoe Foster, Kayli Frazee, Sadara Helton,**

Lily Hotkewicz, Keyona Hughes, Jaiden Jennings, Sarah Kim, Natalie Phillips-Payne, Rachael Plank, Alexis Reyes, Elise Saint, Eve Sexton and Olivia Shain.

Volunteers who helped with the family event at APH include **Lauren Garrett** of Sacred Heart; Delta Gamma alumnae **Chris Huninghake** and **Bruce Huninghake**; and **Tessa Young**.

VIPS Indiana

Many thanks to the **Delta Gamma – Theta Chapter at Indiana University** for hosting the Black Towel Initiative which brought in black towels, card stock, various household items used for playframes given to children and more. They also made 40 “shaker tubes” for the Welcome Bags given to newly referred children. We are so grateful for their support!

We owe our gratitude to **Laurie Roselle of the Indianapolis Alumnae Chapter of Delta Gamma** for donating printers and other much needed items for our office and for the children we serve.

Thank you to **College Internship Program in Bloomington** for hosting “Shake It Up Shaker Bottles” on Monday, January 16, 2017. This project followed the requirements of the MLK Day of Service because it addressed a community need for children with blindness or vision loss through the creation of homemade auditory toys.

Thank you to **Lauren McGraw, mother of Petra**, for suggesting VIPS as the chosen nonprofit for the Salesforce dinner.

We are thrilled that our **Advisory Board in Indiana** is growing. A special thank you to these individuals who donate their time, treasure and talent to help our Indiana program grow.

Thank you to **Nick Ohler** for donating a small desk for our newest employee, Rita DeVore, to use!

Thank you to **Gary and Nancy Bingham of Diversified Mail Services** for donating postage for most of our outgoing mail.

Thank you to **IUPUI students, Tayler Poore and Maddison Kraner**, for working at the VIPS Office on tactile concept books.



Thank you to the **Junior League of Indianapolis** for not only awarding VIPS Indiana with a Trust Fund grant of \$5,000 to support the Orientation & Mobility Program, but for also making 50 texture blocks during their 95 hours of continuous community service! These texture blocks will go into Welcome Bags for newly referred children and will help foster the child's exploration with their hands. We are so grateful to JLI!



VIPS Central Kentucky

We greatly appreciate the **Alpha Delta Kappa Kentucky Theta Chapter** for their very generous wish list donations.

VIPS Indiana: Raising Funds for Programs!

by Meredith Howell, VIPS IN Assistant Director

Trivia Night

On Friday, February 3rd, the Indianapolis Alumnae of Delta Gamma hosted their very first Trivia Night to benefit VIPS Indiana. A large crowd of Delta Gammas, VIPS board members and friends and neighbors turned out for this very special night. Tables were sold, mulligans were available for purchase, there was a silent auction and buckets for "VIPS Tips" along with photos of VIPS children were on every table to let everyone know that there were two purposes to the night: fun and fundraising for VIPS. The spacious room was graciously donated by Marquette Manor. Trivia Night brought in over \$7,000 for VIPS! We are so grateful for the support and are extremely honored to be associated with the ladies of Delta Gamma!



VIPS mom, Lauren, VIPS Teacher of Blind/Low Vision Tracy, VIPS dad Oliver and little Petra enjoyed the inaugural Trivia Night. Lauren even called a round!

Concerts for a Cause

Concerts For A Cause Indianapolis to benefit VIPS Indiana was an amazing evening at the Indianapolis Art Center with delicious food courtesy of Chef Suzanne Catering, beer and wine, and incredible music thanks to Peter Bradley Adams and Kara Cole! One of the co-founders of the event, Bruce Kidd, presented VIPS with a check for \$6,000! These funds along with the donations from the evening will be used for vision-specific early intervention for Indiana's babies and toddlers with blindness or low vision. We were honored to be chosen as a beneficiary of Concerts

for a Cause and are extremely grateful for the support. Check out their Facebook page for information on the next concert coming up in July!

Peter Bradley Adams with VIPS Indiana Director Annie Hughes and Assistant Director Meredith Howell.



reVISION Presented by VIPS Indiana

On Thursday, March 9th VIPS Indiana opened its tactile art exhibition, reVISION, which is specifically designed for visitors with blindness or low vision (and of course their sighted peers). The gallery was filled with art patrons, both blind and sighted alike, touching art that was submitted by truly talented and thoughtful artists. These individuals took their craft and not only made it accessible, but they let lots of hands explore their work. The delicious food was catered by Love Handle and wine was donated by Oliver Winery. Kroger was generous enough to donate the flowers for this year's occasion. We'd like to thank all of the artists including the student artists from the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired for making this year's exhibition such an unbelievable success. The show ran until April 28, and a number of pieces of art were sold. A portion of the adult artwork sold benefitted VIPS Indiana and the children we serve!



Above: Visually impaired guests to the exhibit read braille descriptions of the art. Left: VIPS Mom Kelly and daughter Beth admire the textured cat picture. All artwork at reVISION is touchable.



The Transition/Outreach Crew from the nonprofit agency BLIND, Inc. out of Minneapolis stopped by for a tour reVISION!

Jack Levine Comes to VIPS

In February VIPS was honored to bring to Louisville renowned children's advocate Jack Levine from the 4 Generations Institute in Tallahassee, Florida. Jack shared his expertise amongst VIPS families, board members and staff, in addition to other community partners. In a series of seminars, Mr. Levine spoke about community volunteerism, communication and story telling. The culminating event was held on February 16th in Kosair Kids Town, where local families of children with special needs shared an intimate evening of learning to tell their child's story. Thank you to the brave parents who spoke very personally that evening, some for the first time in front of a crowd! And thank you to Mr. Levine for making the trip to Louisville to share your wisdom!



Jack Levine, left, VIPS Staff & Board Members and Pam Platt on far right.

Grants and Donations

Thanks to all who have so generously donated to VIPS over the last several months!

VIPS Louisville

Recent Grants

Louisville Downtown Lions Club: \$25,000 for the Dr. Ralph Stengel Memorial Scholarship for Kids Town Preschool.

Ronald McDonald House Charities of Kentuckiana: \$1,970 for technology for Kids Town Preschool.

The Paul Ogle Foundation: \$28,000 for school bus turnaround.

William E. Barth Foundation: \$3,000 for VIPS Family Retreat.

VIPS Indiana

Indy Santa-Fred Gives Back

Christmas may be over, but the spirit of giving was still alive and strong recently when Indy Santa-Fred and Mrs. Claus came to the VIPS Indiana office bearing many gifts for the children we serve! They coordinated an effort where a group of children



received a gift from Santa, but they gave gifts in return. They gave tactile items such as wire whisks, measuring spoons and sponges which will be used with play frames, and much more. We are so grateful for the items and all of the hard work Mr. & Mrs. Claus put into this wondrous effort!

Recent Grants

Junior League of Indianapolis: Trust Fund grant of \$5,000 to support the Orientation & Mobility Program.

Kiwanis Club of Indianapolis: \$2,500 will go towards the Orientation & Mobility Program benefitting children living in Indianapolis.

Utilities District of Western Indiana REMC: \$2,000 will go towards serving children in the UDWI REMC region.

MLK Commission: \$500 for materials for Shaker Bottles and Welcome Bags.

VIPS Central Kentucky

Kentucky Gives Day

VIPS Central KY received nearly \$400 through KY Gives Day.

Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.

Helen Keller

Simple Ways You Can Help VIPS

When Shopping at Kroger

Just by shopping for groceries, you can give back to VIPS! All you have to do is go online to connect your Kroger Plus Card to the VIPS account #10771 (Louisville), #74094 (Indiana) or # 30423 (Central KY) and a percentage of your grocery bill will be donated back. Visit Kroger.com and select Community/Kroger Community Rewards to get started. To date, VIPS has received more than \$19,400 in donations from this program!

Log onto Amazon Smile

Another easy way to support VIPS is connecting your Amazon account to VIPS. The online shopping giant gives back to charity through Amazon Smile. Just log into your account at smile.amazon.com and search for Visually Impaired Preschool Services. Once you connect to us, shop away!

When Purchasing Flowers from Nanz & Kraft

VIPS Louisville has been selected as one of the supported charities in the Nanz & Kraft Helping Hands program. The floral company created Helping Hands as a way to continuously give back to the community all year long. If you select VIPS when ordering flowers, Nanz & Kraft will make a \$2.00 donation to the agency. For more information, visit nanzandkraft.com.

Planning Ahead!

Give for Good Louisville & VIPS Beacon Awards Scheduled for Sept. 14

The 4th annual Give For Good Louisville (formerly Give Local Louisville) is coming up on Thursday, September 14th. This 24-hour online giving campaign raised more than \$4 million for Louisville-area nonprofit organizations last year. Your gift to VIPS will be DOUBLED this year, thanks to the Louisville Downtown Lions Club, which will match the first \$10,000 in donations made to VIPS! The VIPS Beacon Awards will be presented on the same date! All you need to do is mark your calendar on 9/14/17 and donate to VIPS on that day!

Wish List

VIPS Central Kentucky

It's Summer camp time! Help us provide an amazing experience by donating the following:

- Paint (powdered tempera, liquid washable tempera)
- Glue sticks
- Bubbles
- A small child sized table and two chairs

VIPS Indiana

- Disinfectant wipes
- Manila folders
- White-out
- Grocery store gift cards

VIPS Louisville

- Paper towels
- Baby wipes
- Hand sanitizer
- Large hand soap refill bottles
- Batteries (all sizes)
- Disinfectant spray/Lysol
- Tongue Depressors (not popsicle sticks, they are not wide enough)
- White Crayola® Model Magic modeling compound
- White and pink washable finger paints
- Finger paint paper and easel paper (12x18)
- White meat packing/butcher paper (on a roll in paper products section of grocery)
- Plastic needlepoint canvas (any color, to teach texture rubbings)
- Laundry Detergent (preferably "free & clear" option)
- Plastic/nylon food bibs with pockets

"Educators working with students who have autism and other special needs should focus on students' unique strengths rather than their challenges. In my case, I was really good at art, but doing algebra made no sense. It is important to work on areas where a child is weak, but an emphasis on deficits should not get to the point where building the area of strength gets neglected."

Temple Grandin, a scientist and livestock equipment designer who has autism.



1906 Goldsmith Lane
Louisville, KY 40218

Visually Impaired
Preschool Services

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

Monday – Thursday, June 12 – July 20

Visions of Summer will be held at the VIPS Louisville Campus, 1906 Goldsmith Lane. There will be different themes each week. Children may attend any or all weekly sessions. Cost is \$150 per week/\$50 per day. Contact Kathy Mullen to register your child.

Fridays, June 30, July 7, 14 and 21

VIPS Louisville will host *Friday Friends* for community children, birth – 6 years, 10 – 11:30 a.m. A parent or adult caregiver must accompany the child. The program is free for VIPS children. A \$5 donation per child is requested for community children (\$10 per family). Contact VIPS with questions.

Monday – Friday, July 24 – 28

Please join NFB of Kentucky for our second annual *BELL (Braille Enrichment Through Literacy and Learning) Academy* (<https://nfb.org/bell-academy-faqs-affiliate/ky>). This one week program offers instruction in Braille skills and non-visual techniques in a fun filled learning environment. The program is designed for blind and low vision children ages 4-12. Through building confidence and independence our children can truly live the lives they want. Once again we have been given the unique opportunity to meet at The American Printing House For The Blind, affording our students on sight, hands on, access to programs as well as a look at Blind History. You will be amazed at how much children will grow as they explore their world side by side with blind adult mentors.

It is an excellent chance for children and families to ask questions and gain the knowledge to move into the next school year more independent and confident than ever before. Jayne Seif at (502)500-7675 or [jayneseif@att.net](mailto:jayneifeif@att.net).

VIPS Central KY

Friday, June 30

Summer Sensations Camp will be held at the VIPS CK Office, 350 Henry Clay Blvd., in Lexington. Theme will be Water World. Special guests include Wellness Music Therapy Center and the Living Arts & Science Center's Aquatic Habitat Adventure. Children birth - 3 years runs 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.; Children 3 ½ - 8 years runs 1:30 – 4:30 p.m. Please register your child(ren) at: <https://vips.z2systems.com/np/clients/vips/event.jsp?event=65&>

Friday, Aug. 11

Summer Sensations Camp will be held at the VIPS CK Office, 350 Henry Clay Blvd., in Lexington. The theme is Music & The Arts; guests to be announced. Children birth - 3 years: 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Children 3 ½ - 8 years: 1:30 – 4:30 p.m. Please register your child(ren) at: <https://vips.z2systems.com/np/clients/vips/event.jsp?event=65&>

VIPS Indiana

Wednesday, August 16

VIPS Indiana will host a summer-themed Play and Learn (PAL) event for families and their VIPS children. As always we will have a sing-a-long, a chance to share stories, a speaker, and refreshments. Stay tuned for more details! Contact Meredith for more information: mhowell@vips.org

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

VIPS-Louisville

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