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# Parents Share Stories of Hope for Their Children

## Addy

It's hard to imagine that one moment or one word can completely alter the rest of your life, but it did mine. It took a doctor only a few seconds to utter the word "blind" and change my world forever. I look back at the day that my daughter was diagnosed and I remember how tough and trying that time was. I was fixated on the things she would miss out on, sports, movies, pretty sunsets and everything in between. I was grieving over the life I had imagined for my newly born baby and angry that God would allow such a cruel thing to happen to such an innocent and precious little girl.



I didn't know it then, but time would tell that God had much bigger plans for my little girl than I could have ever imagined. After spending much of our time at VIPS through home visits, family events and PAL classes, we quickly learned that blindness would not limit her abilities. With their help we managed to pull ourselves together and learn to teach our child in a way she could learn without her vision. You can never truly realize how much of learning is visual until you have to teach a blind child to put pop beads together, help them use utensils to eat, or teach them to dress themselves. It is often the simple things that we take for granted that have proved themselves to be most challenging during our journey. It is unbelievably hard to watch your child struggle with something that seems to come naturally to most children, but when they finally get it, it's indescribably amazing and makes it that much sweeter.

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# We Are All Superheroes! Family Retreat 2017

*By Kathy Mullen, Director of Education*

A very special event occurred in our little corner of the world the first weekend of November. This is the weekend set aside for the annual VIPS Family Retreat and Parent Conference. After much planning and preparation, the 2017 event came together with seamless ease. The efforts of the VIPS Team paid off in our ongoing effort to provide our VIPS families with the education and support needed to raise a child with special needs. This year our VIPS families came in record numbers to soar into a Superhero weekend for the whole family.

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*Parents made tactile story books.*

I watched our very timid and dependent baby blossom into a brilliant, funny and kind little girl. The baby I feared would miss out on so much is now a sassy six year old that tap dances, plays piano, rides horses and has impeccable pitch when singing. She has surpassed every expectation and has touched so many hearts along the way.

This journey has been hard. It is hard to explain to a 3 year old that she can't see and others can. It is hard to not smack people in the face when they stare at a little girl trotting independently with her cane at the grocery. It is hard to watch other children do things and experience things in a way that may not ever be attainable for your child. We have definitely had our challenges and I expect many more, but it has been more rewarding than I could have ever imagined. There is nothing in this world that makes my heart happier than watching her succeed and grow. Thank you VIPS for equipping us with the tools and skills to help our daughter develop into the person she is today. We couldn't have done it without you.

~Brittany, Addyson's Mom

## Anthony

A lot of people assume that individuals, especially children, without vision are missing something in life. If these people met Anthony, they would know that is the furthest thing from the truth. Anthony is completely blind due to a tumor on his optic pathway. He underwent chemotherapy and is still on complete hormone replacement due to a pituitary condition. Once we found out that he was going to be permanently blind, we didn't know where to begin, what to do. Luckily, we found VIPS and they put us on the right path to give Anthony everything he needed. Despite losing his vision, having a stroke, a brain tumor, enduring chemotherapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, needing a feeding tube and speech therapy -- through all that for four years now -- Anthony has had a smile on his face. He loves everyone and makes friends with anyone he meets. He has the best laugh and gives the best hugs. And he isn't afraid to tell you that he loves you and ask if you love him in return. As a parent, finding out your child may need more than you can give is a hard diagnosis. However, VIPS gave us the tools and the confidence to give Anthony the best start. He is in kindergarten now and is a successful student thanks to VIPS.



Don't let anyone tell you that a blind child is missing out. If anything, these close minded people are missing out on knowing some of the best kids I have ever met.

~Cierra, Anthony's Mom

## Aria

My beautiful daughter Aria has overcome so many obstacles in her 3 years of life. She was diagnosed at birth with Aicardi Syndrome. She has many accommodative diagnoses, including several eye abnormalities from her syndrome. She has grown so much from all therapies she has received even before attending VIPS, especially from her wonderful vision teacher, Mary. We have been beyond blessed with a great group of therapists, friends and family and would not be where we are today without them.

~Jackie, Aria's Mom



## Addison



In 2012 I was diagnosed with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome PCOS. My husband and I didn't think it was possible for me to have a child. My ob/gyn told me she could help me have a child but would not help me until I was 30 years old. I wanted a child so badly I didn't know what to do; my husband and I tried everything! Finally I did some research online and found a pill I could order called clomid. I got pregnant the first month, we were SOOO happy! However the pregnancy was very difficult, I got hives and gallbladder attacks. It was terrifying!

When I had 6 weeks left, I went into labor. It wasn't painful. I'd never had a child before and didn't know what contractions felt like. It was a throbbing feeling in my lower back. I called the Columbus regional hospital. They told me that I wasn't really in labor because I would be screaming and crying. I was told to take some Tylenol and walk around. Something didn't feel right about that, but I took Tylenol and fell asleep. I slept for about an hour and woke up again feeling the same pain. Once again I called the hospital and this time was told I wasn't in labor because I wouldn't have been able to fall asleep if I really was.

I knew something was wrong. I called the hospital again and they told me "Do not come to the hospital until you see your doctor." When I got there I could only waddle -- it wasn't from pain but pressure. The receptionist told me I had to call and make an appointment to see the doctor. I told her about what the hospital said and that if she didn't get a doctor to see me, I was going to have my baby there. Finally, after I threw a fit, she got a doctor to see me. To everyone's surprise but me, I was in labor. I was 5cm and was told to go right to the hospital. When I got there, the nurses who told me not to show up were shocked. Addison was born 6 weeks early and stayed in the hospital for 3 weeks.

Six months later I knew she was blind. Maybe to be honest, I probably knew a little earlier. Addison has Optic Nerve Hyperplasia. We won't know how much she can see until she is older. She is now 4 years old with a 3 year old sister named Aubree.

Addison is an amazing child! It's quite amazing the things she can do! I got pregnant with Aubree in January 2013 and they were born 1 year and 2 days apart! I feel they are both my little blessings! Addison is blind but she goes to preschool and has friends and is learning to ride a tricycle. I'm not sure what made my little girl blind but I love her more than life itself and she has taught me to look at life in a completely different way.

~Kati, Addison's Mom

## Arianna

When Arianna was born, it was the happiest day of our lives! We didn't even know anything about her condition until she was about 6 months old. We noticed her eyes turning in and swinging back and forth. At first we didn't know what to expect.

We went to the eye doctor and they said they thought that Arianna had Albinism. From there we went to Cincinnati to undergo genetic testing. We had to wait about a month for the labs (they were sent off to Colorado). This felt like the longest month of my life! Finally we got the phone call. Arianna was officially diagnosed with Oculocutaneous albinism type 2 (OCA2) - a very rare condition with fewer than 18,000 diagnoses. This means Arianna was born without the usual pigment (color) in her body. Her body isn't capable of making a normal amount of melanin, the chemical that is responsible for eye, skin, and hair color. As a result, Arianna has very pale skin, hair, and eyes. Since she lacks melanin she is at a much greater risk of sunburn and some forms of skin cancers. She also has severe alternating eye turning along with extreme photophobia, and nystagmus.



During the phone call of her diagnosis, I immediately had many thoughts that ran through my mind. I was afraid and sad for her. I wondered what kind of quality of life she would have. At times, I felt angry that this happened to her. Such an innocent child. I remember feeling a bit helpless and very overwhelmed!

I was contacted by a member of NOAH (National Organization for Albinism and Hyperpigmentation). They connected me to another family in Lexington with a daughter who also has Albinism. I emailed her mom. She was so nice and directed me to VIPS! It took me a week to get up the courage to call them. One particularly hard day, when I really felt lost and very alone, I called VIPS. I broke down crying explaining what was going on. They were so nice and helped to calm me down. They explained how they could relate to my situation and were very familiar with

it. They explained that we were now a part of the VIPS family. I must admit, I didn't really fully believe them back then. However, I found comfort knowing that someone else could relate and was there as a support.

VIPS has held true to their word. They were there then and they are still here today. They helped get Arianna started in First Steps (an early intervention program). They offered in home therapy, fun activities, family events, information, and resources. Arianna was about 9 months old when she started. We first started by going to all the events. Later Arianna attended their Little Learners classes.

In the start, Arianna suffered from extreme separation anxiety and was very dependent on us. They helped transform Arianna into a child that no longer has separation anxiety. She is still working on some social aspects but has come a very long way! I often think back to those beginning days. I have watched my daughter grow from a baby to a toddler.

I expected to be the one teaching her but she has taught me so much about life. She is full of life and has an abundant amount of determination. She doesn't let her disability stop her. Instead she just finds new ways to overcome and reinvent herself. She is constantly trying to make others laugh and she is a very happy child. She tells me all the time, "Mommy it's okay, I can do this." So I step back and watch her and she always comes up with a way to overcome whatever is in her way. She amazes me every single day. I know now that she will be able to handle all life's many challenges in the future. She has so many people supporting and lifting her up! Albinism didn't bring us down and her vision didn't bring us down. If anything it led us home to our extended family. Thanks to our VIPS family for all that you do! Each and every one of you truly makes a difference!

~Angella, Arianna's Mom

## Hadley Jo

Hadley Jo, now four, had her first seizure at 16 months old on my lap at McAlister's Deli, and little did we know our lives would soon change forever. After transferring care to Cincinnati Children's Hospital, we were finally able to find answers and an accurate diagnosis, cryptogenic localization related epilepsy. As Hadley Jo's seizures continued, we noticed her left eye was "wandering", which led us to a pediatric ophthalmologist where we learned Hadley Jo's seizures were most likely affecting her vision. She was then diagnosed with amblyopia and her left eye was significantly worse than her right. As our world of epilepsy evolved, we found that after our follow-up appointments, we were constantly required to change her prescription lenses. We also learned that fine motor skills were triggering Hadley Jo's seizures; I began to quickly wonder...





how is my child going to learn to read and write when “learning” is triggering her seizures?

I began my research and soon found myself meeting with a case worker at Seven Counties who suggested we tour VIPS. I had never heard of VIPS before and was overwhelmed with the welcoming “family” atmosphere and education VIPS provided to special children like Hadley Jo. To this day we are blessed beyond words for many reasons, one of the most important being our Hadley Jo has “a home” at VIPS. VIPS is her other “family” she absolutely adores and we are forever grateful VIPS is willing and able to meet Hadley Jo’s unique needs. Hadley Jo and her service dog, Ariel, wake up every morning and ride the bus to VIPS where they are both ACCEPTED and LOVED. As a parent of a child with special needs, I can honestly say this experience makes my heart happy.

~Heather, Hadley Jo’s Mom

## Molly

We’d been visiting the eye doctor every 6 months to monitor Molly’s vision. We had her hearing checked multiple times as well. We knew something wasn’t clicking in her learning process but had no idea the barrier. It wasn’t until we were referred to our doctor’s mentor that we received a diagnosis of CVI, or Cortical Vision Impairment. Never heard of it? Neither had we and the explanation about what it was and what to do about it was fuzzy and confusing.

We were referred to an Occupational Therapist (OT) who specializes in CVI and she opened our world to vision challenges and gave us the tools to begin the journey of helping Molly focus on a single object in a simply decorated, quiet room with a light box for background. After months of preschool therapists asking me endless questions about what she could see and do at home and frustrating team meetings to help therapists try and teach Molly basic preschool themes, this OT demonstrated for me how to teach Molly and hope was restored.



In the course of an hour, I watched Molly after many minutes, reach for an object and interact with it. I began to cry. So many conversations about her not reaching for objects in school only to discover that she COULD learn, she just needed a quiet environment and time to explore and build pathways from cortex to eyes before actually touching the object. She is a latent learner. I must use black poster boards and black gloves and single objects at a time to help her learn the characteristics of objects. I must describe the unique features of an object to help

her identify it. It takes time for me to demonstrate what an object can do and then, let her think about it, look close, look away, process this information. Repetition. Repetition.

She can learn. She just needs time.

We teach each other. I am exposing her to this world of wonder. She teaches me to slow down, really look at an object, examine things, and wait. To curl up and snuggle more than be on my own. To enjoy each other rather than things. Patience. Endurance. Perseverance. I experience pure joy when I watch it click in her sweet brain and she reaches for a foreign object and engages with it. We are both discovering new rhythms of learning and the celebration of doing it together.

~William & Susan, Molly’s Parents

## Myles

Myles was born on March 12, 2017, weighing in at 7 pounds 4 ounces and a seemingly perfectly healthy little boy. The first month of his life seemed to fly by and we were so in love with our sweet boy! At Myles’ one month well-check, Myles had lost a significant amount of weight and presented with various symptoms that landed us at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. At just 5 weeks old, Myles was diagnosed with Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency, a genetic condition that affects his liver. During our weekly doctor’s appointments, Myles’ doctors began to express concerns about his vision so he was referred to the ophthalmology department and the diagnosis process began.



At this time, we reached out to VIPS and began working with Ms. Paige. She has been so wonderful and supportive as we went through various tests and procedures to finally arrive at a diagnosis of delayed visual maturation. In his short 6 months that he has been with us, Myles has been a trouper! Between multiple hospital stays, weekly doctor’s visits, trial and error to find the right medication, and numerous tests and procedures, Myles is always a happy-go-lucky baby full of non-stop smiles! We are so blessed to have this sweet boy in our lives and we hope his strength and happiness continue to shine through even on his darkest of days. We love you, Myles!

~Nathan & Jen, Myles’ parents

## Nicholas

Nicholas was diagnosed with bilateral ONH (Optic Nerve Hypoplasia) at 5 months old on May 11th. I will never forget this day as I was lost, confused and so scared. As a first time mother, it was a lot to take in. I had so many doubts, I was scared he would miss out on so many things in life; little did I know I was

completely wrong. If anyone met Nicholas they would know this is the furthest thing from the truth.

Nicholas is now 9 months old and is in Physical Therapy once a week to work on his milestones, and sees Mary from VIPS once a month. He is so observant, so determined to reach whatever goal is set for him, and he is an absolute joy to be around. Nicholas loves meeting new people, he is always so happy and smiley. Nicholas is in love with the sound of music and other people. VIPS has given us the help, encouragement and confidence that we needed. Nicholas inspires and amazes me each and every day that goes by. We learn from each other daily and he is a very special little boy and has an amazing journey ahead of him.

~Ashley, Nicholas' Mom

## Theo

We'll never forget the birth of our second son, Theo. We know most parents feel that way, and it's true, but we'll remember every detail of it for the rest of our lives. Not only did he decide to make his appearance in quite a dramatic way, when we first laid eyes on him, his hair was as white as snow. To say we were shocked was an understatement. He was the talk of the hospital. No one could get enough of the baby with the white hair. He was beautiful in every way, but we had a gut feeling that there was something more going on than just his white hair.

We were right. Our little Theo was diagnosed with Albinism when he was three weeks old. The diagnosis was hard. We had learned that not only does having Albinism effect the hair and skin, but it also has a significant impact on the eyes and vision. It was all so much and not something we were prepared for. As parents, we want our children to have no struggles and to know that Theo could struggle with something we had genetically given him was tough. Theo was visually impaired and more than likely would be legally blind. We were scared for our son and the infinite amount of unknown when it came to his vision.

We reached out to VIPS right away and were quickly in touch with a teacher for the visually impaired (TVI). To say our relationship with our TVI and VIPS is a blessing is an understatement. Our monthly meetings bring such joy to us to learn that our boy is growing and perfectly adapting to the vision he has.

To watch Theo play, you would never know he was visually impaired. He chases his brother, looks through books, throws balls, pushes trucks and plays like any other 15-month-old little boy. We wish we would have known all that we know now when



we first received Theo's diagnosis. We would not have worried a bit because he's going to be all right. He's going to do everything he wants to do and will never be held back because of his visual impairment. We are excited to see what Theo accomplishes as he grows up. We're so proud of our son. We're thankful to be his parents, and for VIPS and how much they care about him.

~Adam and Megan, Theo's parents

## Trystan

He came into our lives with God's Perfect Timing. But we soon learned our little boy had visual problems and was getting behind in developing. Despite therapy the gap was getting larger. We moved to Indiana just before he turned two and struggled with getting therapy started again. But once started, things began to progress with First Steps.

We were set up with Pediatric Development at Riley Children's Hospital and put in touch with VIPS. Annie came out to visit and we were immediately impressed with her vibrant personality. She explained what she observed in our son, and for the first time we had an idea of what was going on with our little boy and had a direction for helping him.

With the new information, we made a few adjustments in how we worked with our son and changes started to happen. He went from cruising and to walking in a few weeks! There were lots of little improvements as well that we were able to report to his VIPS therapist, Amy, when she came for her first visit. Amy quickly became involved in our lives and has gone above and beyond in helping our son's other therapists to have a better understanding of how he sees and ways to tailor his therapy. Changes began to happen rapidly, with Trystan developing new skills almost daily. (He is still behind, but the gap has lessened.)

Then Nick, the Orientation and Mobility specialist (O&M) from VIPS, came for a visit and we were surprised to learn that our son would probably need assistance walking in unfamiliar areas for the rest of his life. But we also learned from Nick how we could help our son and what to do to help him better negotiate his environment. This information turned out to be a blessing as now we are more acutely aware of potential situations that can be a problem for our son and how we can help him learn to negotiate his surroundings.



I know that because of all the wonderful people at VIPS and their desire to help, our son's life has been greatly improved, not only for the present, but also for his future. I cannot say THANK YOU enough to those who have helped make our son's life better.

Thyrealyynn & Jerry, Trystan's Parents



# We Are All Superheroes

Continued from front page

*The 2017 Retreat was attended by superhero families from across Kentucky and Indiana. Many families reported they had not stayed in a hotel since the last retreat or when their VIPS child was last hospitalized.*

Families began their adventures into the world of superheroes at our Super Sundae Ice Cream Social on Friday night, November 3. The delicious fun began in Kids Town on our VIPS Louisville campus. Families from all three offices joined us for exploration of the preschool, playtime in Kids Town, and sweet treats for the whole family. Sleepy children and tired parents found their way back home or to their

hotel room at Holiday Inn Express across the street to fall into bed in order to rest up for the day full of fun and learning waiting for them on Saturday.

After a good night of sleep, the children were ready for Camp VIPS, offering a great variety of activities and experiences organized just for them. They enjoyed playing in the classrooms, in Kids Town, in the Sensory Room and outside on the playground. There was a room of Superhero games to delight in and science experiments to experience. A special visitor from the Louisville Ballet came to lead the children through movement exercises.

Meanwhile, VIPS parents were across the street at the Holiday Inn Express enjoying some Superhero time of their own. A presentation on intentional self-care of the parents and caregivers of children with special needs kicked off our day together. This was followed with sessions on transitioning into public school preschool and kindergarten as well as the services offered by Kentucky School for Blind and Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. At lunch, the parents were joined by a panel of adults with visual impairments,

hearing from a staff member of the Office for the Blind, one of our own Kids Town Preschool teachers, a travel agent and a young man and his mother on ways to become more engaged in the lives of busy family members. Our families had the chance to create books and sensory-friendly learning materials. The day was

capped off with a presentation on sleep challenges of children with visual impairments and stories told by several team members on their paths to VIPS and what keeps them coming back.

At the end of the day, as superhero capes and crowns were being hung across our two states, it was a toss-up who was the most exhausted – parents, VIPS children and their siblings, or the 35+ volunteers and VIPS Team members who worked to make this event happen. VIPS is grateful to be able to provide this experience for our families and so thankful to our donors who recognize the importance of an event like the VIPS Family Retreat and provide the financial means to ensure it will continue to take place each year.

VIPS is hopeful our efforts helped to refill the hearts of the Superheroes performing Superhero tasks for our Superhero children every day.



*Little Nyielle, of Richmond, KY, has a snuggle with Alli, one of our wonderful volunteers.*



*Gage, of Jeffersonville, KY, came dressed as the superhero he is!*



*Make and take activities were very popular with the parents.*



*Parents listened to Psycho-therapist Fred Hampton talk about self-care for caregivers.*



*Kids Town Preschool teacher, Staci Maynard, made fast friends with Theo, of Greenville, IN.*



*Left: Busy children and volunteers filled one of the classrooms. Right: Sibling Olivia, of Ft. Mitchell, KY, enjoyed the playground.*



# Winter Sensory Ideas

By Annie Hughes, Director, VIPS IN/TVI

*(Editor's Note: We are so sorry that you are not getting this newsletter in time to implement some of Annie's Holiday ideas. But with your creativity, you can adapt these ideas for other times and keep them in mind for next Christmas season.)*

These ideas are for parents of young children with visual impairments. They are fun and appropriate for sighted children as well, and can easily be used for children of all ages with multiple disabilities. As you look through this list of ideas, pick and choose things that are appropriate for your child's age and developmental level. Change, simplify, expand, or adapt ideas that you might want to try.

If your child is using a pressure switch, a "Big Button," or Lilli Nielsen's "Little Room," incorporate seasonal winter sounds, smells, textures, movement, or objects into the experience. Use these ideas as a jumping off point, a way to start thinking in a way that pays less attention to what things "look like," and more attention to providing experiences that might have meaning. You'll think of many ideas on your own.

Winter/seasonal activities can still include all the visually pleasing aspects that are such a pleasure to typically sighted children, but start to also think in terms of sounds, smells, textures, touches, movements, and experiences that will have meaning and provide more learning opportunities for a child with a sensory loss.

Use your judgment about how often and how quickly you introduce new objects and experiences, as sometimes too many things too quickly can be overwhelming for a child with a visual impairment. They sometimes need several exposures before the experiences start to become familiar and comfortable, and they need a little more time to "look" in other ways.

- ~ Feed the winter birds. Scoop, then scatter birdseed on the ground or fill up a bird feeder. Once you start feeding winter birds, don't stop until spring because they are counting on you for their food.
- ~ Play in a bucket of birdseed. Hide little toys/objects for your child to find tactually. If your child is ready to learn to "match," hide two of each item so he/she can find the "pairs" (Example: two shells, two hot wheels cars, two texture balls, etc.) Of course, you can also use rice, dry beans, dry macaroni, or sand, but since you are feeding the winter birds, birdseed will have extra meaning!
- ~ Put toys and every day objects into a large red holiday stocking and help your child to name them. The items can be from different rooms in the house. It's fun to figure out where they came from.

- ~ Make an easy pinecone bird feeder. First, tie string or yarn around the top of the pinecone. Then open a jar of peanut butter and take a sniff. MMMmmmmm. Help your child spread peanut butter on the pinecone, and then roll it in birdseed. Hang the pinecone birdfeeders on a little tree outside your home. After a week has gone by, help your child to check to see if the birds have eaten all of the seeds.
- ~ Take a winter walk to find evergreen trees. Find a tree with soft, long needles. Find a tree with short, sharp needles. Feel them and smell them, then help your child to notice the difference between real branches and artificial branches.
- ~ Listen to winter sounds such as the wind blowing, the crunch of snow under your shoes/boots, the crack of ice in little frozen puddles, the calls of winter birds.
- ~ Take your child outside with a little bucket and shovel. Help him to fill the bucket full of snow. Then, go back inside and put the bucket where it won't be knocked over. Check the bucket in an hour to see what is happening. Talk about what happens to snow when it is in a warm place like inside the house. If the snow hasn't melted all the way, check the bucket again in the morning.
- ~ Fill a large basin with snow, bring it inside, and teach your child how to make a snowball. Make several and build a little snowman in the basin in the warmth of the inside environment. When your child is ready, try to build a little snowman outside.
- ~ Make a collection of mittens and gloves of different sizes and fabrics. Talk about the difference between mittens and gloves. Talk about which fit your child and which fit you. Notice which are fuzzy, slippery, feel like leather, or are soft. Take two very different pairs, put them in a paper grocery sack and "shake 'em!" (Your child will love the sound.) Now help them find the ones that match.
- ~ For children who are unable to grasp and hold objects, cut fabric of a variety of textures into rectangles large enough to fold over and completely cover a child's hand. Sew the fabric together with the texture on the inside, leaving one end open so a child's hand can fit inside. Try two or three different "sensory mittens." Add bells in a sewn-in pocket to add an auditory appeal.
- ~ Make a collection of winter hats and scarves. Play "dress-up" to try on hats and pick favorites. Use lots of vocabulary as you narrate, and give your child with low vision plenty of time to look in a mirror wearing different hats. Use items with bright colors to draw visual attention where appropriate.



- ~ Make sensory bottles using pharmacy pill bottles. Fill your “sound jars” with a variety of sounds. (Jingle bells, sand, rice, beans, etc.) Fill your “smelly jars” with winter/holiday smells. (Nutmeg, potpourri, vanilla, peppermint, cinnamon, pine, etc.) Poke holes in the lids of the “smelly jars” to allow the aroma to escape the jar without opening it. (Using extracts works well if you put a cotton ball in the bottom of the jar.) Take it slowly, adding one new jar each day, and allow your child to help fill the jars when it is safe to do so. Make a second set for each child who is ready to “match” the sounds or smells. Start with just three jars...two that are alike, and one that doesn’t belong.
  - ~ Make a collection of different sized bells strung on ribbon. Let the children experiment with the different sizes to see if all the little bells have a higher pitch. Make wrist or ankle “bell jinglers.” Listen to “Jingle Bells” or other holiday songs and chime in!
  - ~ Using Christmas rope lights, (for children with light perception or more), turn off room lights and enjoy the visual stimulation of colored lights. Use them to teach color names.
  - ~ Use a simple wind-up music box to provide auditory stimulation. Make sure the music box is not an heirloom so you can let the child open and close the lid to start and stop the music.
  - ~ Help your child fill a tube sock with potpourri and tie the open end closed with a knot. Hang it on your child’s play frame or put it on his/her toy shelf so he/she can find it and sniff it. (Note: Be very careful with scent. Some children with respiratory problems should not use scent. Remember, you can walk away if you don’t like a scent, but a child who isn’t mobile can’t.)
  - ~ Listen to a variety of holiday music. (Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa) Keep time with bells or rhythm sticks. Select an object to represent favorite songs so your child with no speech can “choose” a song. (Example: bells for Jingle Bells, a top for the Dreidel Song, a toy drum for The Drummer Boy, etc.) There are also many commercially made children’s CDs with “winter” songs available at the public library, at stores, or downloaded onto your phone.
  - ~ Include your child in holiday baking. Let them play in cookie dough or icing, shake a jar with instant pudding, and help with stirring and tasting. Smelling and tasting holiday recipes in which the child has been allowed to participate in simple ways uses many sensory channels.
  - ~ Decorate a little tree with large pompom balls. Either leave it decorated, or make it an independent activity.
  - ~ Read simple winter and holiday stories to your child. Provide a tactual object that has meaning in the story. Remember to record on your smartphone while you’re reading. Listening again later will be fun, and your child will especially enjoy any interruptions, voices, or sounds that were caught during the recording.
  - ~ Bring out the crinkling holiday wrapping paper, mylar tissue, and ribbons. Allow your child to explore items on a tray, wheelchair tray or suspended on a play frame.
  - ~ The holidays provide an abundance of scented candles. Let your child handle and smell unlit scented candles. They feel waxy, and come in a wide variety of sizes. Use the opportunity to work on concepts like; long/short, wide/narrow, thick/thin, big/little. Your child will have favorites!
  - ~ Allow your child to help decorate a Christmas tree with unbreakable ornaments. (There is a wide variety available commercially, or make your own with sound, scent, or a tactual component.) Use a small tree so they can tactually explore how wide the tree is at the bottom compared to the pointy top or allow your child to work on a lower branch of a large tree. Don’t worry if all the ornaments are on one branch! Remember to play some holiday music during this activity.
  - ~ Provide your child with bendable snowmen, Santas, or other flexible toys to strengthen little fingers.
  - ~ Hang a holiday item down low where your child with visual impairment/blindness can encounter it daily. Sighted children have constant visual reminders of holidays and seasons.
  - ~ If you visit Santa, allow your child to sit on Santa’s lap and feel his beard and soft red coat and hat.
  - ~ Bring in a wreath for your child to examine tactually, view, and even smell. Wreaths are usually up too high for a young child to explore tactually, or view “up close.”
  - ~ Sing “I’m a Little Snowman” to the tune of “I’m a Little Teapot” and teach the children how to “act it out” as they sing. Here are the words:  
*I’m a little snowman, short and fat.  
 Here is my broomstick, here is my hat.  
 When the sun comes out I melt away.  
 Down, down, down, down, oops! I’m a puddle!*
  - ~ Provide a sheet of bubble wrap for your child to roll on and make indoor “fireworks.”
  - ~ Make an “inside fort” out of a table and blankets and chairs on a cold winter day. See how it feels and sounds in there, and use vocabulary such as; floor, ceiling, and walls. Stay in the “fort” for a snack, a tube feeding, or to read a story.
- There are many more activities and sensory experiences possible but the important thing is to use simple tools and household items to build interest, motivate and even teach your child! And of course, your presence is the best present of all!



# White Cane Awareness

On October 16th, the VIPS Central KY team participated in the White Cane Awareness Walk hosted by the Blind Services Coalition of Kentucky (BSCK), the VA Medical Center, and the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government's Division of Aging and Disability Services.

The event began with Jennifer Roark, of the Office for the Blind, talking briefly about the history of White Cane Safety Day and the importance of continuing awareness today and into the future. She quoted Kentucky's White Cane Law (Title XVI. Motor Vehicles. KRS 189.575) which states "The operator of a vehicle shall yield the right-of-way to any blind pedestrian carrying a clearly visible white cane or accompanied by an assistance dog." Walkers carried "White Cane Awareness" signs, and wore shirts expressing the same sentiment. They trekked approximately one mile around several blocks in downtown Lexington, ending at the beautiful Phoenix Park.



VIPS CK Staff spreading awareness about white cane safety.

## VIPS Central KY Program News

### Little Learners

Central Kentucky's Little Learners classroom has continued to grow! They are now offering two sessions per day to reach more children. The sessions are on Monday and Tuesdays from 9:30 - 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 - 2:30 p.m.

The children have loved the hands-on experiences such as washing pumpkins, painting pumpkins, collecting leaves, making fall sun catchers, painting with fall colors, and going on nature walks! They have also enjoyed



Gage and Truitt enjoyed a wagon ride together.



Zara worked on balance.

circle times where they had the opportunity to explore fall clothing and a variety of scents. And, as always, they love the sensory room!

The Little Learners went on a field trip to the White Cane Walk on Oct. 16. They ended the walk at the Lexington Public Library for an exciting story time!

### Early Preschool Program

A few children have recently graduated from Little Learners and transitioned to a full-time preschool program, including one child, Hannah, who has started at VIPS Central KY's Early Preschool Program in collaboration with Lexington Hearing and Speech Center (LHSC). This collaboration allows our VIPS students to attend a high quality, low student to teacher ratio preschool with a language and literacy enriched curriculum.

Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) Dixie Miller provided the classroom teachers with the professional development training needed to be able to seamlessly welcome Hannah into the classroom, and having Hannah continue her education in the same building as the VIPS offices allows Dixie to work with her on a regular basis.

This partnership between VIPS and LHSC is a perfect example of two non-profit agencies working together to meet the needs of children and families. We can't wait to see Hannah flourish this year, and look forward to more Little Learners graduates joining her in the future!

## In-Home Intervention: The Bright Beginning for VIPS Children

Since its beginning in 1985, VIPS has provided in-home early intervention. Outreach to areas beyond Louisville began in 1989. Since that time, VIPS teachers have traveled hundreds of thousands of miles visiting children and their families in their homes where they are most comfortable and ready to learn. VIPS is so grateful to have been able maintain this



Serenity practices looking while clapping.

service model for well over 30 years. It is a great honor to be welcomed into the homes of VIPS children and families. Thank you for allowing us to be a part of your family during our visits.



Bailey and her mommy play with a tug-'n-pull as mommy makes it.



Emma uses a magnifier with her book.



Reyansh is deciding which tactile book to explore. Will it be *That's Not My Duck* or *Little Feet Love*?



Little Savannah is enjoying the sights, sounds, touches, and smells of the sensory exploration area made especially for her by her early interventionist in Visual Impairment, Melissa Barrick!



Dakota easily angled poker chips into the slot which was the skill for which Director/TVI Annie Hughes was watching. Then, he proceeded to load up the metal can with rhythm instruments and hot wheel cars!

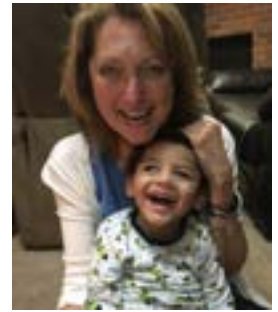


Hunter and Kayla having a snack. Mom is learning to place food on the lightbox so Hunter can learn to look at it. Hunter is learning to eat, one part of that being looking at his food and spoon.



Jason works on tactual exploration.

Did you know VIPS contractors play an integral role in the lives of children and families we serve? We tap the expertise of Teachers of Blind/Low Vision, early interventionists with backgrounds in working with children who are visually impaired, and Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialists. This enables us to provide high-quality intervention services to more children in different areas of Kentucky and Indiana, but we are able to minimize the travel of our full-time employees and save money, too.



Contractor Cindy and Jeremiah certainly enjoy each other.

## Adventures in Learning

By Staci Maynard, Provisional TVI, Kids Town Preschool Teacher

**Editor's Note:** In the article below, activities that take place in Kids Town Preschool and their benefits are described. However, these activities and benefits **can be achieved in any preschool setting as well as implemented in the home** to help VIPS children grow and develop.

For students to be successful in preschool, it is vital for them to first develop an understanding of the school environment, to know what is expected of them and to learn how the school day is structured. The children in Kids Town Preschool work hard to become the best students they can be. They learn how to manage time by using timers, schedules, and prompts to determine what is coming next and to know when their current activity will end. They familiarize themselves with the classroom and school environment and learn how to play appropriately in each area. They practice how to be responsible and organized by putting away their own belongings in the same place each day as well as by putting their toys and supplies where they belong when finished with them. They also work on social skills as they find ways to identify and manage their emotions, to be a good friend and to be a good listener.

As we work on all of these skills that are vital to success, the students also have a lot of fun. For instance, children enjoy practicing turn-taking and cooperation as they create a painting with a partner. They also like locating items around the school that



Lucas and Kendall are good friends.



match the brailled picture cards held by their team. A favorite activity is acting! For instance, they learned the nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty" and got to take turns acting the part of Humpty Dumpty, the horses, and the king's men. Another fun learning opportunity is creating art from the first initials in their names.

October was Blindness and Visual Impairment Awareness month, so it offered an ideal time to help our children learn about eyes, how they differ, how to take care of their eyes, and how to advocate for their needs. As such, classrooms put a special emphasis on activities that we also will work on through the remainder of the year. Students explored low vision tools, including different kinds of magnifiers for near viewing and monoculars for distance viewing. They learned about how braille can be produced with a braillewriter or slate and stylus and got to explore how braille is read with a light touch. Children also worked on developing their tactual skills with activities like tracking tactual lines from left to right and assembling simple shape puzzles without the use of vision. It is an important step toward independence for students to be able to express that they are visually impaired and to let others know about what tools, positioning, etc. that they may need in order to be able to learn, so we practiced how to address this as well.



*Levi uses binoculars to magnify what he wants to see across the room.*

Our first field trip of the school year was to the Bill Roby Track and Field Games at the Kentucky School for the Blind in October. Students enjoyed having a picnic, running a short distance race, seeing how far they could jump into the sand pit, and receiving medals for their efforts. Children learned strategies to calm their bodies and to go on a scavenger hunt around Kids Town using monoculars to find objects. They used dome magnifiers for reading books, especially the book *Princess Peepers*, who had to learn the hard way the importance of wearing her glasses to help her see her best.

As the year progresses, children are learning characteristics of the seasons. They study the weather, how trees change with seasonal change, how foods grow, and from where our food comes.

Even children as young as the twos need to learn routine. For these little ones, leaving the comfort of home and stepping



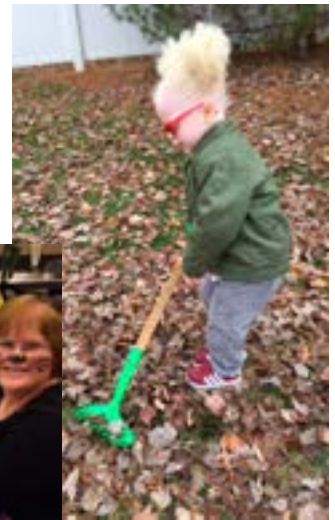
*Eli & Tyler work cooperatively on a puzzle.*

into a classroom can be a tearful experience. Routine provides lots of security for them as they come to know what to expect at school each day.



*Above: Gabriel loved raking leaves.*

*At left: The twos celebrated Halloween with a party where they got to eat the pumpkin muffins they had made.*



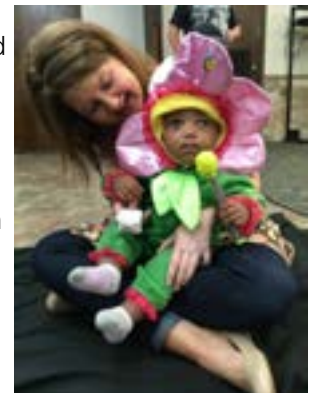
The twos engaged in typical fall activities involving leaves (raking and playing in a leaf pile) and pumpkins (scooping them out and making and eating pumpkin muffins.) They also spent time learning about themselves and who is a boy and who is a girl.

Each day holds an adventure for the students of Kids Town Preschool, as both planned and spontaneous learning opportunities lead to the growth and development of our wonderful students.

## VIPS Family Events

### Indiana Hosts "Spook-Tacular" Play & Learn

On Saturday, October 21, VIPS Indiana hosted a Halloween-inspired Play and Learn (PAL). The families were invited to put their kiddos in Halloween costumes for the event and they sure were cute! We had them adapt Halloween buckets with tactile and auditory components for their VIPS child during the Make & Take. The families then took those



*Megan held a beautiful flower named Marjani.*



adapted buckets and Trick-or-Treated for resources from agencies who serve individuals with special needs while their children Trick-or-Treated for sensory-friendly goodies and treats.

We'd like to thank *Access Behavior Analysis, Easterseals Crossroads, IN\*SOURCE, Jackson Center for Conductive Education, and the Indianapolis Alumnae of Delta Gamma* for hosting a sensory table and donating their valuable time. The families were able to enjoy delicious pastries courtesy of *Starbucks*, along with fruit and other refreshments. In addition, we want to thank all of our volunteers, our board members, our amazing staff and especially our families for making the event SPOOK-TACULAR!



*Clay and his sister threw balls to play "Feed the Monster" game.*



*Top: David enjoyed some time with little Jeremiah. Left: The Carter family (Brian, Kelly, Beth & Maggie) arrived ready to party. Right: Courtney snuggled with Annalise.*



*Kinley was a powerful Supergirl!*



*Brayden enjoyed playing a game.*

## VIPS Central Kentucky Halloween Party



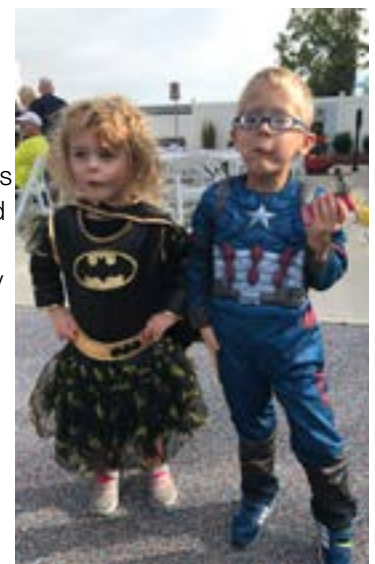
*Grace (above) was a beautiful fairy. Gage (right) was a pretty sweet looking vampire.*



## VIPS Louisville Halloween Party

The VIPS annual Halloween party, Trunk-or-Treat, has migrated from decorated automobile trunks in the parking lot to more than a dozen decorated treating stations on the playground and in the Sensory Garden. Over 50 VIPS children and siblings, participated in crafting candy corn out of pompoms and ghosts painted by using spatulas dipped in paint then "stamped" onto paper. Everyone enjoyed healthy snacks before the all- important trick-or-treating! Our thanks to the volunteers from St. Martha Catholic School as well as those VIPS staff members who joined the fun.

*Twins Aubrey and Carter were superheroes.*





*Athena was ready to trick-or-treat.*

*Lucas wasn't a scary scarecrow.*

*Hannah was a beautiful mermaid.*

## A Valued Partnership

*By Kathy Mullen, Director of Education*

The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) on Frankfort Avenue in Louisville, Kentucky is truly the ONLY printing house for the blind in America. It is a hidden treasure in our own backyard dating back to 1858. As a matter of fact, it not only provides educational and occupational materials to afford individuals independence in their respective schools and work places across the United States, it does the same across the WORLD.

Visually Impaired Preschool Services has long enjoyed a wonderful working relationship with APH. APH has honored VIPS by distributing the VIPS "Can Do!" video series and by revamping the VIPS@Home Parent University materials to become part of the APH catalog of offerings. Both APH and VIPS share a climate of commitment to provide the very best of everything for those served.

Visitors can feel the APH commitment when they enter the large building bursting at the seams with character and stories from the past. The museum and its content share the history of not only APH, but of the blind population in general. What a resilient group! The warehouse and production centers inside APH tell their own story. Those individuals who have spent their days working at the Printing House offer a wealth of knowledge from their many years of service, adding personal insights to the treasure trove of information found inside the walls of the stately building. Each friendly team member appears eager to share the story of APH.

Under our own roof, VIPS has championed APH efforts such as Braille Tales, a partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library,

to deliver brailled children's books into the homes of young Americans who are blind or visually impaired or are the children of parents who read braille. VIPS has provided expertise for field-testing new products for APH. Our teachers have participated in the planning and designing of the materials that will find their way into the hands of teachers of the visually impaired throughout the country. Our students have given their seal of approval by playing and learning, sometimes even devising new ways of using the materials offered to us. VIPS is honored by the trust of the designers at APH.

In October, the level of commitment continued and deepened when VIPS was included in the APH Annual Meeting. Every year, the trustees from the schools for the blind and agencies and organizations serving public and private school students and adults who are blind or visually impaired gather to share ideas and dreams and to plan for the future. VIPS has been represented in this meeting in the past to view new APH materials being introduced, during the general meeting, and to attend the Hall of Fame dinner. This year VIPS was included in the planning and dreaming portions as well.

One day of the annual meeting was filled with a variety of presentations on the theme of Transitioning. Typically in the world of education, "transition" begins when a student with special needs is moving out of the classroom and into the workforce. On a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP), the planning for transitioning officially begins at age 14. Those of us at VIPS know much better.

Transitioning begins when a family first learns that their baby has a visual impairment and/or additional needs. It continues as the family works to fully include the child into the daily activities bonding the family members. When a family welcomes service providers into the home, they are introduced to more transition. From there, a child transitions to preschool, then to kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school. While the greatest transition for anyone with or without a visual impairment may be living independently and working at a meaningful job, the transitions preceding these rites of passage provide many occasions to practice the skills needed to succeed at each occasion.

VIPS is grateful to APH for allowing us the opportunity to share how VIPS families are being prepared for transitions. At the onset of VIPS involvement, VIPS staff first affirms and stresses the job parents are doing as their child's first teacher. We then build on the successes at home to lay the foundation for many more shining moments in the future. VIPS continues to look for many ways to strengthen its partnership with APH in hopes of becoming part of their story for years to come.



# Shortage of Teachers of the Visually Impaired

By Jan Moseley, Vision Impairment Specialist, VIPS Louisville

The Chicago Tribune reported recently that the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) -- the international professional organization for teachers and others working in the field of blindness -- had 1,000 fewer members than ten years ago. This is due to a chronic, historic shortage of teachers certified to teach individuals of any age with blindness/visual impairments.

In Illinois, the student-teacher ratio is 79 students for each Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI), where state class size limits are generally smaller than the one to 20 ratio allowed for students with visual impairments served primarily in a mainstream setting. In Kentucky's largest school district, Jefferson County Public Schools, there was never more than one applicant for any TVI position from 1979 until 2004 but at least there was one. Smaller districts were not as lucky.

The article, "Programs for Visually Impaired Students Face Teacher Shortage," by Vikki Ortiz Healy, pointed out that of the two Illinois colleges that offer specialized degrees in teaching students with visual impairments and blindness, Illinois State University has graduated fewer than 20 TVIs the last five years. (The University of Kentucky houses the only TVI teacher training program in Kentucky with the next closest located at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.)

Lack of awareness appears to be the main reason for the teacher shortage. Students interested in becoming teachers simply do not realize the possibilities of teaching blind/visually students due to a lack of exposure to the students themselves (typically one in 1,000 students is considered visually impaired) and to the teachers that support the learning of those students.

Most states consider TVI training as leading to an endorsement, rather than a certification, to teach blind/visually impaired school age students. This means that TVI endorsement must be added to additional teacher certification although many teaching certifications are simultaneously earned along with TVI endorsement. Orientation and mobility licensure, however, can be added on top of most college degrees.

Because of this international shortage of TVI endorsed teachers, perhaps you, or someone you know, might consider becoming a Teacher of the Visually Impaired!

# VIPS Staff and Board News

## VIPS Louisville

### Familiar Face/New Office

**Dani Harper**, our former receptionist, has been moved to a new position -- Development Coordinator in charge of events and marketing. Dani has been the engaging first face you see and first voice you hear when you enter VIPS and is now excited to carry her people skills to a brand new arena.

### New Face in the Lobby

We welcome **Brittany Clarkson** to her new role as new Receptionist and Family Services Coordinator. Brittany is the mother of VIPS graduate, Addy. She writes:

*"While I am certainly not new to VIPS, it feels good to be a part of the VIPS community in a new way. I was first introduced to VIPS in 2011 when my oldest daughter, Addy, was diagnosed with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia. Although she graduated VIPS preschool in 2016 we never could quite say good-bye to this place. I continued to serve on the board of directors after her graduation and I am thrilled to now be taking over the lovely "Miss Dani's" position. I am well aware I have big shoes to fill but I am honored and beyond excited to officially join the team.*



*I am a Bellarmine graduate of 2012. Since then, I have spent the majority of my career in a law office as a legal assistant before being promoted to paralegal. Three years later, and after having my second daughter Kennedy, I decided it was time to venture out onto something new and I pursued my real estate license. I have enjoyed working in the real estate business and I plan to still work in real estate as my schedule allows but could not pass up the thought of working at a place that is changing lives daily and meant so much to my family. So here I am.*

*My family is my world. My husband, Nathan and I have two little girls -- Addy, local celebrity and VIPS grad, is six and Kennedy is one. When I can find the time I enjoy running and working out with my husband, a good movie (as long as there is popcorn), and sleeping in -- none of these happen very often, but hey, a girl can dream!*

*I look forward to greeting all of the kiddos each morning and learning more about the families VIPS serves. See you around!"*

### New Faces in Kids Town Preschool

We have had to say good-bye to music therapist, Greta Gilmeister, who left to due to demands of her caseload and to



spend more time with family in West Virginia. We are happy to announce that **Bailey Carter**, with the University of Louisville's Department of Music Therapy, and her amazing intern, **Jessica Hethcox**, are providing music therapy now for Kids Town Preschool. In addition, Bailey and Jessica are joined each Tuesday and Thursday by **Ashley Reynolds Linson**, one of our first graduates of VIPS. Welcome, Bailey, Jessica, and Ashley!

### **New Director of Finance Position**

It is with heavy hearts and not a few tears that we said "so long" to controller, **Kim Shippey**, who has left to pursue new options. We wish her the very best in all of her future endeavors.

We are delighted to welcome **Janie Martin** as a new member of the VIPS family in the new role of Director of Finance. Janie graduated from the University of Louisville where she received a B.S.B.A. with a major in accounting. She is also a Certified Public Accountant (CPA).



Janie has been a self-employed finance and accounting consultant since 2008 after returning from five years of living in Hong Kong. Janie's husband moved the family to the orient to work in Brown Forman's Asia-Pacific operations. Janie also lived in California for six years where she continued to consult and volunteer at her church. Her focus and passion have been in the nonprofit sector and she is excited to begin working at VIPS.

Janie has one son, Garrett, and two daughters, Logan and Taylor; only Taylor still lives at home with Duke the dog and Kitty the cat. Janie has already joined the VIPS work-out group and also enjoys refurbishing old furniture, quilting and volunteering.

## **VIPS Central Kentucky**

### **New Assistant Teacher**

Our Little Learners program is excited to welcome new assistant teacher, **Jamee Adkins**. Jamee is working on completing her master's degree and teaches local art classes in Lexington KY. We are thrilled that she has decided to join our team!

## **VIPS Indiana**

### **New Website Gains Recognition**

Kudos (and gratitude!!) to **Rob & Meredith Howell**, parents of VIPS graduate, Lola. Our wonderful new website which they created, just received special recognition. Check out:

<https://www.neoncrm.com/nonprofit-spotlight-impaired-preschool-services-vips/>.

Rob and Meredith worked countless donated hours creating a compelling and user friendly website for VIPS.

## **VIPS Staff Honored with Awards & Opportunities**

### **Woman of Mercy Award**

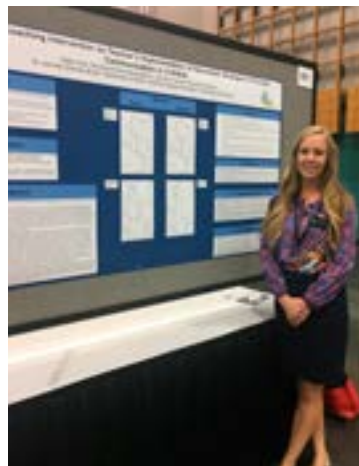
We are proud to announce that VIPS Executive Director, **Diane Nelson**, was recently presented with the Community Leadership Award from Mercy Academy, her alma mater. Diane attended a luncheon where she received this wonderful award which is given to a female leader who is willing to serve for the benefit of the community, a **Woman of Mercy**. She was joined at the luncheon by family and friends, including former VIPS director Sharon Bensinger, and board member, Terri Connolly.



Diane also was the featured guest on the **Social Good Instigators podcast** online at [bullockconsulting.net/sgi53](http://bullockconsulting.net/sgi53) where she discussed her transition to the non-profit world from the business world as part of a "Midlife Purpose" change. Visit [SocialGoodInstigators.com](http://SocialGoodInstigators.com) to learn about additional podcasts.

### **Thesis Presentation**

**Katie Dick**, VIPS Central Kentucky developmental interventionist, presented her thesis research at the Division of Early Childhood's annual international conference on in Portland, Oregon. Katie's research was titled, "Effects of a Coaching Intervention on Teacher's Implementation of Naturalistic Strategies to Promote Communication in Children." This conference was



also an opportunity for Katie to network with early childhood professionals and spread the good news about what VIPS is doing for young children in Kentucky and Indiana. Katie has recently graduated from the University of Kentucky with her Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education (IECE), but plans to return in the future to gain her orientation and mobility licensure.

### **Makers of Change Award**

**Maury Weedman and Pauletta Feldman** recently received a Makers of Change Award from Community Action of Southern Indiana, in recognition of their work with children who are visually impaired and with neighborhood activism. Maury is O&M Specialist/Facilities Manager for VIPS Louisville and Pauletta works in Special Projects. They have been married for 42 years and are the parents of one of VIPS first students.

## Staff Share About VIPS Before Joint Committee

VIPS had quite an exciting morning in Frankfort with the Interim Joint Committees on Health & Family Services. **Diane Nelson, VIPS Executive Director** and **Kathy Mullen, Director of Education**, shared with the committees about the services that VIPS provides for blind and visually impaired children in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Our very own VIPS graduate **Addy** even got to sing the National Anthem for all in attendance!



## Notes of Interest



A 2015 article on the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) website, *“Employment Outcomes for Blind and Visually Impaired Adults,”* by Edward C. Bell, Ph.D. and Natalia M. Mino, reported the employment rate among the adult blind and visually impaired population was only 37%, making the unemployment rate 63%! There was a direct correlation between employment and education/training. The higher the level of education and rehabilitation training (technology, orientation and mobility and braille), the greater the outcome for employment. Individuals who read Braille on a weekly basis and use a white cane experienced greater opportunities for employment and received higher earnings than those who did not use these tools.

A terrific resource for parents and teachers of children with blindness and visual impairments is Paths to Literacy ([pathstoliteracy.org](http://pathstoliteracy.org)), sponsored by the Perkins School for the Blind. *“What to Include in an IEP for a Student Who Has CVI”* is a blog written by Brenda Biernat with the assistance of Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) Matt Tietjen. It lists considerations for the child with CVI. The basic information used in this blog is Dr. Christine Roman-Lantzy’s *“Cortical Visual Impairment: An Approach to Assessment and Intervention”* (2007, American Foundation for the Blind Press). Matt Tietjen is also the author of *“What’s the Complexity,”* a framework for designing an accessible school day for students who have cortical visual impairment (CVI).



## New Arrivals

**VIPS is pleased to welcome these new children and their families to the VIPS:**

Adelina – 2 years, Anderson, IN  
 Airelyn – 21 months, Muncie, IN  
 Ally – 4 years, Louisville, KY  
 Angeline – 2 years, Independence, KY  
 Audrey – 2 years, Louisville, KY  
 Bella – 10 months, Columbia, KY  
 Brantley – 22 months, Kings Mountain, KY  
 Broxton – 2 years, Corydon, IN  
 Callopie – 3 years, Fort Wayne  
 Calon – 16 months, Louisville, KY  
 Carson – 6 months, Madison, IN  
 Chloe – 2 years, Lexington, KY  
 Colton – 2 years, Bowling Green, KY  
 Daniela – 13 months, Russell Springs, KY  
 Devinne – 6 months, Burlington, KY  
 Eden – 2 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Edgar – 17 months, Anderson, IN  
 Elliott – 22 months, Columbia City, IN  
 Elliot – 20 months, Princeton, KY  
 Emma – 2 years, Prospect, KY  
 Emmanuel – 10 months, Indianapolis, IN  
 Eugene – 16 months, Fort Wayne, IN  
 Evelyn – 16 months, Charlestown, IN  
 Gabriel – 2 years, Lexington, KY  
 Gunnar – 2 years, Calvin, KY  
 Harrison – 2 years, Fort Wayne, IN  
 Ignacio – 3 years, Louisville, KY  
 Jalen – 2 years, Louisville, KY  
 Jason – 3 years, Louisville, KY  
 Jensen – 14 months, Freedom, IN  
 Kai – 8 months, Erlanger, KY  
 Kaleb – 3 years, Louisville, KY  
 Kamauri – 2 years, Elkhart, IN  
 Keelan – 7 months, Paint Lick, KY  
 Kenzie – 2 years, Bowling Green, KY  
 Kinsley – 2 years, Brownsville, KY  
 Liam – 17 months, Lexington, KY  
 Liam – 22 months, Mt. Washington, KY  
 Lucas – 12 months, West Liberty, KY  
 Maggie – 12 months, Madisonville, KY  
 Noah – 12 months, Union, KY  
 Philip – 11 months, Lebanon, IN  
 Renly – 9 months, Frankfort, KY  
 Reyansh – 19 months, Indianapolis, IN  
 Ruby – 2 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Ruby – 22 months, Columbia City, IN  
 Samuel – 11 months, Valparaiso, IN  
 Sebastian – 14 months, Independence, KY  
 Shaela – 13 months, Noblesville, IN  
 Thea – 16 months, Tell City, IN  
 Zoe – 3 years, Granger, IN

# Gifts of Time

## VIPS Louisville

For regular assistance in Kids Town Preschool we are grateful to *Fran Woodward, Deanna Scoggins and VIPS grad Ashley Reynolds Linson*.

For all the helping hands to make the Dr. Mark Lynn Stampede for VIPS on September 30 such a great success we thank: *Rory Atkins, Dawn Bauccho, Ryleigh Bishop, Catherine Borders, John Paul Buddeke, Asha Buford, Justin Buford, Katherine Cermack, Jennifer Coffey, Carly Crawford, Brant Dieruf, Ellie Dunham, Ashley Erwin, Jacob Erwin, Robbie Erwin, Whitney Fante, Jemima Fields, Tara Haden, Sarah Hasson, Highland Middle School Beta Club, Abby Hitzelberger, Alex Hitzelberger, Brandi Hitzelberger, Shari House, Margaret Kaiser, Hailey Kampschaefer, Kohl's - Preston Highway employees, Pete Laguens, Ethan Lally, Audrey Lentz, Keeley Lesch, Jessica Piatt, Sophie Ritzenhaler, Kaley Seldon, Ron Spaulding, Gretchen Thomas, Joe Thompson, Chelsea Tippel, Brett Weber, Clay Weber, Ashley Widmer and Kylie Wulf. Thanks also to VIPS staff and family members who assisted, including: Jon Daniels, LaRhonda Daniels, Michael Daniels, Kelly Easton, Ashley Emmons, Pauletta Feldman, Mary Lesousky, Leah Mullen, Allison Owens, Beth Owens, Karen Weber and Tracy Webb.*

Thank you to Katie Meany, Nicole Sarver and Melissa Robinson, of First Steps, who helped out at the Halloween party on October 21. Other wonderful volunteers included staff and students from *St. Martha Catholic School: Elizabeth Burke, Cullen Coyle, Claire Degener, David Horsman, Kaylee Lentz-Zierer, C.J. Manalo, Holly Price-Degener, Carter Schadt, Kathy Schadt, Carolyn Zierer and Kevin Zierer.*

A debt of gratitude is owed to all of our fabulous volunteers who provided fun times and wonderful care for the children attending the Family Retreat Weekend on November 4, including *Lizy, Lilly & Lucy Dangler, Kelly Easton, Ashley Emmons, Stacy Hall, Marchelle Hampton, Dani Harper, Gina Haynes, Audrey Lentz, Mary Lesousky, Ashley Linson, Lesley Lusher, Jamie Martin, Paige Maynard, Staci Maynard, Phebe McGaha, Tracy Marchegion,*

*Juanita Miles, Dixie Miller, Will Mullen, Caden Rich, Karen Spath, Maggie Spath, Anna Tabler, Elizabeth Underwood, Carla Vied, Joyce Wall, Karen Weber and Allie Weining.*

For beautifully decorating the Christmas trees at VIPS Louisville, thanks to *Chris Gilbert and her friend Paula Miller.*



## VIPS Indiana

Thank you to the women of the *Indianapolis Alumnae of Delta Gamma* for making "texture bottles" which will go into our Welcome Bags.

Our many thanks to the kind folks from the *Association of College Unions International (ACUI)* in Bloomington for the "shaker tubes" they made which will also go in our Welcome Bags.

Thank you, *Global Gifts*, for donating the bags that we use as our Welcome Bags for newly referred children.

Thank you, *Thyrealynn and Trystan Pettit*, for taking time out of your day to participate in the filming of a video produced by Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCD).

For helping make the Crusade Cookout on October 10 a success, thanks to *board member, Eric Bruun*, who purchased food and supplies, and *Ann Perrin of Klosterman Baking Company* for donating hamburger and hot dog buns. A final thanks goes to our grill master, *Steve DeVore*.

We have received wonderful community support from *Costco Wholesale, CVS, Kroger, and Meijer* with donations of gift cards which will be used for family events. Thank you!

## VIPS Central Kentucky

For the wonderful help with the 5K for the 5 Senses, thanks to *Kayla Bates, Morgan Goodman, Madison Johnson, Maddie McKenzie, Megan Penrod, Aly Rominger, Megan Sabatke, Lucy Slusher. Thanks also to volunteers we had from Amazon, UK Masters of Health Administration Program, UK Physical Therapy Program, Delta Zeta, VIPS Staff and Advisory Board members, and community members with a heart for kids.*

Thanks to *UK Delta Gammas and Morehead nursing students* for help with our Halloween Party. They included *Maureen Andersen, Sami Diener, Sara Edgett, Isabelle Goens, Shannon Holt, Ireland Irving, Anna Johnson, Kara Kelleher, Caroline McLaurin, Nancy O'Neill (Delta Gamma Alum and VIPS board member), Caelan Pavlak, Lindsay Rothenstine, Claire Saylor, Nicole Slain, Grace Steenson, Jillian Ulrich. Thanks also to Shelby & Tinley Easton (family of VIPS staff).*





# Grant & Fundraising News

## VIPS Louisville

### Grants

The Allergan Foundation has awarded VIPS \$8,000 to fund the provision of direct services.

We are thankful to Lowe's for the provision of two benches that convert to picnic tables for placement on our playground.

### Fundraisers

VIPS was able to raise more than \$21,000 during Give for Good Louisville, thanks to a \$10,000 matching grant from the *Louisville Downtown Lions*. Thanks to all who helped us reach this level!!

### Stampede for VIPS

The 15<sup>th</sup> annual Stampede for VIPS was a roaring success! For the first time ever, the 5K event was held at the Louisville Zoo. Runners and walkers zigzagged through the zoo on the morning of September 30, even passing by three visually impaired animals (a Bongo, a Tiger and the Snow Leopard)! It was the largest turnout we've had in years, and our supporters helped us raise more than \$76,000!

Thanks to our generous sponsors: Title Sponsor -- *Dr. Mark Lynn & Associates*; 15 Year Sponsors -- *Texas Roadhouse*, *Louisville Downtown Lions Club*, *Kentucky School for the Blind Charitable Foundation (KSBCF)*, *American Printing House for the Blind (APH)* and *Print Tex*; and additional sponsors -- *Ford*, *Papa John's*, *Boxcar PR* & *The Stiebling Group*.

Group t-shirts for the race represented themes selected by VIPS families, whether a variation of a child's name or a diagnosis.



Shelby Birchler (center) was a sighted guide for Dawn Wilkenson, of APH, along with Pyper and Maddie of Kids Town Preschool.

## VIPS CK

### Grants

The *WHAS Crusade for Children* has donated \$30,000 for VIPS Central Kentucky programming.

*The United Way of the Bluegrass* has awarded the Regional Grant for \$20,000 per year for the next three years to provide direct services in Central KY.

*The Blue Grass Community Foundation* has given VIPS a \$10,000 grant for direct services and the Early Preschool program.

We offer sincere thanks to the *Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels* for \$3,614.88 for new flooring in the Little Learners Enrichment program's classroom.

We thank *Cumberland Trails United Way* for a grant of \$1,000 for direct services in Bell, Knox, and Whitley counties.

### 5 K for the 5 Senses

VIPS Central KY held the inaugural 5k for the 5 Senses on Saturday, October 7. It was a beautiful day to run or walk through a course that engaged the senses of sight, smell, sound, taste and touch. Held on the lovely grounds of the Club at UK's Spindletop Hall and the Legacy Trail, runners of all ages came out to support a great cause while experiencing this one of a kind race. From quotes by Helen Keller and Stevie Wonder and posters of our VIPS children with facts about visual impairment posted along the route, to tables with vision simulators and volunteers using a slate and stylus to braille cards for participants, runners and walkers were treated to a hands on experience while learning about blindness and visual impairments. Several children took part in an active Sensory Scavenger Hunt.



We owe a HUGE thanks to our sponsors: Gold Sponsors -- *Amazon*, *Bluegrass Dentistry*, *Duncan Investments-Hilliard Lyons*; Silver Sponsors -- *John Groft*, *Realtor with RE/MAX Creative Realty*, *UK Healthcare Advanced Eye Care* and *Ward Hocker Thornton*; Sensory Scavenger Hunt Sponsor -- *Stratton Eyes*; Family Sponsor -- *Messer Construction*; In Kind Sponsors -- *Dicks Sporting Goods*, *Instant Signs*, *Kremer Wholesale*, *Lexington Legends*, *Lucky's Market*, *Wilson Pediatric Therapy Center* and *White Greer Maggard Orthodontics*.

## VIPS Indiana

### Grants

We are thrilled to announce that VIPS Indiana will be the recipient the *Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust* grant in the amount of \$75,000 each year for two years to hire a new Teacher of the Blind/Low Vision.

The 2017 *WHAS Crusade for Children* awarded \$30,000 to VIPS Indiana to provide salaries of VIPS service providers.

VIPS Indiana was chosen as the beneficiary of \$20,000 from the *Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority's 14th Annual Charity Golf Outing*.

A Good Neighbor grant of \$10,000 was awarded to VIPS Indiana by the *Community Foundation of Elkhart County* to fund direct services for Elkhart County.

### Fundraisers

For the sixth year, *Operation: Chili for Children* and VIPS Indiana would like to thank the *Kiwanis Club of Bloomington* for allowing VIPS Indiana to be the recipient of a portion of the fundraising from this special event. A special thank you to *Jenny Kelly, Shannon West and Julia Slaymaker* for donating your time to VIPS!

VIPS Indiana's *Annual "Cookout for the Crusade"* was a hit! It is just a small way we say thanks to the WHAS Crusade for Children for all they do for us!

## 2017 Beacon Awards

The annual Beacon Awards for 2017 were presented Thursday, September 14 in Kids Town. Awards were presented as follows:

- Individual Benefactor: *The Anders Family*
- Individual Volunteer: *Mrs. Ellen Prizant*
- Parent Ambassador: *Mr. Virren Malhotra*
- Social Service Award: *Indiana Delta Gammas*
- Award in Collaboration: *American Printing House for the Blind and Lexington Hearing & Speech Center*
- VIPS Ambassador Award: *Metro United Way and United Way of the Bluegrass*
- Corporate Volunteer: *Lowe's*
- Corporate Benefactor: *Louis T. Roth*

We thank all of the Beacon Award winners for their service to VIPS and appreciate the many hours and effort they have expended on behalf of the blind and visually impaired children of Kentucky and Indiana.

*Marcey Ansley, Executive Director of Lexington Hearing & Speech, exuded enthusiasm as she spoke of the collaboration with VIPS Central Kentucky.*



## Jordy

VIPS Louisville staff was excited to learn about one of the latest high tech devices available for the low-vision population. VIPS graduates Ashley & Aaron Linson stopped by to show off the Jordy low-vision device.

Ashley & Aaron both have a diagnosis of ROP which brought them to VIPS as children. With the help of the Kentucky Office for the Blind, Aaron got his Jordy to help him increase productivity in his work environment. He calls Jordy a "magnifier on steroids!" We are grateful that our super volunteer Ashley brought her husband Aaron over to let us explore & learn more about this device.



## IN MEMORIAM

This issue of VISability is dedicated to the memories of:

### *Stella Padgett-Berger*

daughter of Kyle Berger and Kyleigh Padgett-Berger of Hometown, IN who passed away August 24, 2017 at the age of two years

~ and ~

### *Crew Long*

son of Scott and Mandy Long of Carmel, IN who passed away September 18, 2017 at the age of three years.

*Our hearts go out to all those who loved Stella and Crew.*

## VIPS Wish List

### **Wish List Indiana**

Computer paper  
Adult scissors  
Craft glue

### **Wish list Kentucky**

Baby wipes  
Gallon jugs of bleach  
Paper Towels



Visually Impaired  
Preschool Services

1906 Goldsmith Lane  
Louisville, KY 40218

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

#### Sunday, Feb. 18

*Pediatric Ophthalmologist and VIPS board member, Dr. Ashima Gupta*, will compete in Dancing with the Prospect Stars to benefit VIPS. For ticket info go to [www.DancingWithProspectStars.org](http://www.DancingWithProspectStars.org).

#### Thursday, Feb. 22

*VIPS Grad Addy Clarkson* will sing the National Anthem to open the U of L Women's basketball game at the YUM! Center, 7 p.m.

#### Thursday, March 1

*VIPS Family Night at Kentucky Science Center* (formerly Louisville Science Center). Details to come. Contact [bclarkson@vips.org](mailto:bclarkson@vips.org).

### VIPS Indiana

#### Saturday, January 27

*Winter Play and Learn*, 10 a.m. – noon, at the ILC. Contact [mhowell@vips.org](mailto:mhowell@vips.org).

#### Friday, March 9

*Opening night festivities for reVISION* will be held at the ILC Art Gallery, 6 – 8 p.m. There will be wine, hor d'oeuvres, and exceptional art. Contact [mhowell@vips.org](mailto:mhowell@vips.org).

### VIPS Central KY

#### All week, Feb. 4 – 11

*For the Love of Children 2018*, a weeklong celebration of the WHAS Crusade for Children, will feature a daily business that will donate a percentage of sales to the Crusade. Check out the lineup at <https://www.facebook.com/FortheLoveofChildrenFayetteCounty/>.

#### Tuesday, Apr. 24

*Kentucky Gives Day*, <https://www.kygives.org/>, a 24-hour online giving event, will raise funds for KY nonprofits, including VIPS.

## Tell Us Where to Go!!

We would like to hear from YOU newsletter readers!! We are going to be making some changes for 2018 and want to know what you like the most about the newsletter and what you could do without. You can email your ideas to [jmoseley@vips.org](mailto:jmoseley@vips.org). Please take a moment to voice your opinion -- yes, we really DO want YOU to tell us where to go (with the newsletter)!

## Turning on the Light: Adapting your preschool classroom for students with visual impairments

This training is coming to a KY location near you! Provided by VIPS, with support from KY School for the Blind consultants, it will cover topics such as successful inclusion, adapting classroom schedule and environment, diagnosis-specific strategies, and make & take opportunities. Contact [kmullen@vips.org](mailto:kmullen@vips.org) for info. Register at [www.vips.org](http://www.vips.org).

- 1/26 – GRREC, Bowling Green
- 2/16 – KY Education Development Corporation, Ashland
- 2/23 – Carroll Co. Public Library, Carrollton
- 3/23 – Floyd Central HS, Langley
- 5/11 – SESC Training Center, London

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

#### VIPS-Louisville

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