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VIPS Parents Honored with Beacon Awards

Kate and Kyle McDaniel – Served by VIPS Indiana

Kate and Kyle McDaniel's daughter, Annie, has cortical visual impairment (CVI) in addition to other challenges, including seizures. To control seizures, Annie was put on a particular medication which can cause visual field constriction as a side effect. Annie's vision began to decline; was it the medication, or the seizures, or both? The only way to truly find out was through an electroretinography (ERG) test, which measures the electrical responses of various cell types in the retina. Annie's pediatric ophthalmologist and parents were devastated to learn that Riley Children's Hospital in Indianapolis could not perform the test because the ERG machine was not budgeted. Kate, along with VIPS Indiana Regional Director, Meredith Howell, began advocating for Riley to find a way to purchase the machine which could help save the sight of many children. The teamwork paid off. Riley bought the ERG machine and Annie was tested. Finding that the medication was causing the limited vision, Kate immediately began to wean her off of it, and put her on another seizure medication; Annie's vision began to improve.

In addition, the McDaniel's welcomed officials of the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust during a home visit, so they could see VIPS services in action and learn more about VIPS families and their challenges. This home visit led to an invitation for VIPS to apply for a \$75,000 grant and to a possible capital gift to the VIPS Indiana Family Resource Center.



Katie, and daughter Mallory, accept the Beacon Award from Executive Director Diane Nelson.

Karin and Leonardo Geraci—served by VIPS Central KY



Karin and Leonardo Geraci

Karin and Leonardo are the parents of five-year-old Josie, who has three visual diagnoses, and is served in her local preschool by VIPS Central KY. The Geracis have a history of hosting a unique Korean Dinner because of Leonardo's heritage. This year, after hearing about our cuts from United Way, they made it a mission to use this special event to raise funds for VIPS. This is quite an undertaking for young parents who work full time, one of whom attends school full time (Karin is working on her TVI certification at UK). The Geraci's set a goal to raise \$5,000 from their friends and family who attended the dinner and enlisted a local jeweler to make braille jewelry to be auctioned. The Geracis agreed to



Mission Statement

VIPS empowers families by providing educational excellence to young children with visual impairments in order to build a strong foundation for reaching their highest potential.

match the donations from the event. This amazing effort brought in a mind blowing \$18,070 and raised awareness for our limited support in Northern Kentucky.

Jamie and Fahr Juneja – served by VIPS Louisville

The Junejas were blessed with a sweet little girl, Eva, who was diagnosed very early with Warburg Muscular Dystrophy - a syndrome that would result in a multi-system early atrophy. Despite her diagnosis, she was a very vibrant, happy child and a blessing to everyone around her. The Junejas made it their mission to enrich her life by developing a bucket list of things that they wanted her to experience. One of those bucket list items was a First Day of School at Kids Town Preschool. Working with VIPS, Eva's early interventionist and the Kids Town Preschool staff, everyone rallied around Eva to create the best First Day of School experience possible; she made friends, laughed and even had her own cubby. It was so impactful to all involved. These truly amazing parents made sure that Eva's life was very full and that her impact on all of our lives would be felt in perpetuity, which was their greatest gift to VIPS and our team. We all treasure that day. Despite the pain of losing Eva, the Junejas have honored her by generously donating in her name so that other children with vision loss can receive critically needed VIPS services.



Jamie & Fahr Juneja

An Article by the winner of the VIPS Ambassador Beacon Award, Mr. Tom Briggs, appears on pg. 15.

Parent Stories of Challenge and Hope

Editor's Note: Each year we solicit stories for Blindness and Visual Impairment Awareness Month from all families served by VIPS throughout IN and KY. These heartfelt and inspirational stories are the result!

Anthony by Cierra

Anthony graduated from VIPS in 2017. He started at VIPS as a two-year old in 2013 after he lost his eyesight from an optic pathway glioma. Anthony has been through countless surgeries (including brain surgery to remove most of the tumor), a stroke, chemo, radiation, endless hours of physical, occupational and speech therapy, but at the end of



the day he's the happiest eight-year old around. He's in second grade at the Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) where he's known as the Mayor. His favorite subject is math; his best subject is spelling. He wakes up every morning with a smile on his face ready to face the day. Anthony is proof that children are resilient, that they can and will overcome. If you don't know Anthony personally, I invite you to visit him. He's guaranteed to bring a smile to your face.

Etta by Courtney

Our daughter, Etta, has Optic Nerve Hypoplasia and Cortical Visual Impairment. After finding out she has two different impairments, we started looking for help. When we found VIPS, we just knew it was the right fit. We made the move to Louisville, three hours away from Eastern KY and our support system, to better our daughter's opportunities. A month in, we can tell so many changes in her. The teachers at VIPS "get" her, and know how to help her succeed. She is happy to get to school in the mornings and happy when we get her in the evenings. We are hearing positive feedback about class participation we have never seen before. She is nonverbal and they are working on helping her communicate with a device. We couldn't be more pleased with our VIPS experience so far and can't wait to see what this year brings.



Harper by Sarah

My daughter, Harper, a graduate of VIPS, was diagnosed with Joubert Syndrome at two months of age. Joubert Syndrome is considered rare with 1,000 cases diagnosed worldwide. Harper is visually impaired, has kidney disease and has global developmental delays that impair her mobility among other things. Harper is also a laughing, giggling, dancing, splashing in the pool, ice cream eating, sassy kid like so many others.



Harper began working with Dixie Marz, a VIPS Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI), at 6 months of age. Harper was also one of the first attendees of the VIPS Little

Learners Enrichment Program in Lexington. VIPS was instrumental in educating us about the resources available to Harper as well as providing the tools necessary to monitor Harper's visual development. Although Harper no longer receives VIPS services, our family still attends the annual Christmas parties and knows that VIPS will always be on the sidelines cheering her on.

Harper is now a six-year-old first-grader. She has uncanny determination and drive and works very hard to overcome her disabilities. Harper is non-verbal -- she's learning sign language

and can communicate through some signs and a communication device. Harper is working on walking independently and using a cane. She walks all over our home and her school building with hand held assistance. Harper has physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy in school as well as at home. She also has vision, music and orientation and mobility services through Fayette County Schools. Harper participates in therapeutic horse riding at Central Kentucky Riding for Hope.

Scholastically speaking, Harper does quite well in school. She knows 100 sight words, continues to practice number recognition and is working on systematic scanning. Harper enjoys her teachers and her fellow classmates.

Harper traveled to Orange Beach this summer and we attended our fourth biennial Joubert Syndrome and Related Disorders conference in Baltimore, MD. At the conference, Harper was able to reconnect with other children like her and be evaluated by medical doctors and researchers from around the world. Over the years, Harper has had a window seat on an airplane, sat poolside on a cruise ship, been in the passenger seat of the family mini-van through eleven states and has many more adventures in store.

Josie by Karin

Josie is five years old and lives in Northern Kentucky. She is in a preschool program at a local private school and is thriving. While she has been learning print at school, what she has been the most enthusiastic about is learning her braille. Josie loves learning new letters and how to braille them. Recently, she brailled a quiz for Ms. Dixie, her VIPS TVI, to test her on her braille skills. We are so proud of Josie for how hard she works and how far she has come with learning braille in just a few months.



Monroe by Michal

Monroe, lovingly known by family and friends as "Roe Roe," was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis type 1 when he was 16 months old. Soon after he received his first MRI. The results indicated he had an optic glioma on his right optic nerve. It was not the news we were prepared to hear, but we buckled down and asked, "What now?" At the time we didn't know that his vision was impacted and just stayed on the course for frequent MRI's and eye appointments. After receiving services through First Steps we were referred to VIPS because Roe seemed to have difficulty traveling in



new areas and on stairs, and we had concerns about his depth perception. Until Ms. Paige and VIPS entered our lives, we didn't realize that Roe was struggling visually and just how much it was impacting several facets of his daily life. We found out that he has peripheral vision loss and received support and advocacy to get glasses for his near-sightedness.

We receive in-home services through VIPS that have helped him grow, be more aware of his surroundings and navigate new spaces more effectively, while helping us as parents to better understand just how his loss of vision affects his daily life. We are so indebted to Ms. Paige and all the support at VIPS for what they continue to do for our family!

Owen by Tiffany

We learned Owen has albinism when he was six months old. We had noticed his nystagmus so his pediatrician sent us to a pediatric ophthalmologist (P.O.). One of the first things our P.O. told us after the diagnosis was to get in touch with VIPS. Since then VIPS has been an enormous help and support in our journey. They helped us get him enrolled in First Steps for early intervention, introduced us to other kids with albinism, and they hold events where we can do fun activities and get involved with the VIPS community.



Owen is now 2-1/2 years old and attends the Little Learner's program at the Central Kentucky office. Every week he looks forward to going to "school" and seeing his friends and teachers. He learns new things every week and his social skills and confidence have blossomed since starting the program. I look forward to the future as VIPS continues to enrich my family's life going forward.

Myles by Jen

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, he had lost a significant amount of weight and presented with various symptoms that landed us at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. At just five weeks old, Myles was diagnosed with Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency, a genetic condition that affects his liver (and so much more as we are coming to find out!). 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 that 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. However, after a year, Myles' vision was still presenting as atypical. Recently, we have begun to explore a new diagnosis. Myles has been working with Ms. Paige for the past two years and looks forward to her visits! Ms. Paige and VIPS have been such a blessing to our family, especially now as we start the diagnosis process all over again! We don't know what the future holds for him but with all of the love and support he has, we are confident his future will be bright! We love you so much, Myles! Thank you for always being our light in the dark and for showing us what true strength is!

William by Rebecca



This is William, and we are a VIPS family. The story I am telling is his, but the journey is ours.

The day William was born was a delight for me, my husband Harry, and our two older boys, Jackson and Patrick. We loved our 10 pound and 6-ounce large bundle of joy more than words could ever express.

As William's life progressed, we began noticing things about him were not the way they should be. Compared to typical babies, he was quite delayed in his milestones. We found ourselves asking questions, such as: Why didn't he respond to people when they spoke to him? Why wasn't he making eye contact with anyone or anything? Why wouldn't he interact with the world around him? Why did his eyes dart around with seemingly no purpose? That is when the feelings of uncertainty, fear, denial, anger, sadness, and helplessness overwhelmed all of us. We knew something was very wrong.

Through William's pediatrician, we were sent to Cincinnati Children's Ophthalmology department. I remember thinking, "William will look so cute in glasses, this won't be so bad." Him needing glasses didn't come as a surprise to us because all the members of our family wear them. We thought we would just get a glasses prescription and be done. Easy peasy? Not so much. You see, William was diagnosed with legal blindness due to a very rare genetic disorder known as Leber's Congenital Amaurosis. This is a condition that is known to gradually kill his eyesight over time, beginning with his central vision. This diagnosis changed our lives forever because it was only the beginning. Very quickly, it seemed as if our lives revolved around trips all over Cincinnati to see doctors of various specialties, who would help diagnose our little puzzle. You see, none of his

symptoms across the board fit in any mold. During this time, we felt a lot of confusion and at times, despair. Were we ever going to find a cure or treatment for our sweet boy? With living in a rural community, what would school look like for him?

VIPS came to our aid. William's support and care team was growing faster and bigger than I could have ever imagined. We no longer felt alone in this journey. When we joined VIPS, William was given a teacher of his very own who came to our home to work with him. She taught him new ways of handling basic skills that most people take for granted. She gave William braille books that really helped jumpstart a big love of reading in him. She taught me how to show him ways to overcome his fears of toys and environmental situations around him such as walking through grass. Not only was she a teacher, she became a friend. She was there to listen to our concerns and frustrations and celebrate our joys and successes.

Fast-forward to William turning two years old; we enrolled him in VIPS Little Learners program at VIPS Central KY. When he began the program, one of his obstacles was being around other children. They always scared William because they were too rowdy, and too loud for him. The program introduced him to children who played at his speed and he quickly became comfortable with them. He has even taken some of the children under his wing and taught them how to interact and play with others. Seeing him be a positive leader among his friends has made this Momma's heart smile.

During our time at VIPS, William has grown a lot and gained many things. He has gained friendships that he cherishes, as well as invaluable knowledge and courage that he has carried on to preschool. He has also gained another family who loves him. I never thought I would say this, but William is ready for the next chapter in his life. He is doing so well in public preschool now. His teachers tell me daily how amazed they are at how well he gets around and his classmates all want to be his helper. I must thank VIPS for their help getting to this point. VIPS has been and will continue to be an invaluable asset to William and other children like him who have visual impairments. One thing I have learned from being William's mother is that "disability" is such a harsh and inappropriate words for children who aren't typical. A more appropriate term I think is "differently abled." These kids may never do things the typical way, but they do things in a way that works for them, and I find myself amazed every day at all the new ways William thinks to make life work for him.

Zander by Madison

Hello all! My name is Madison and I am the lucky mother of my handsome baby boy, Zander Eli. Zander is nearing six months old and finally doing so well. Zander was diagnosed with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia before he was even three months old. This was

just another thing added onto all the health concerns we had the first four or so months of his life. When Zander was diagnosed we were told he didn't respond to light and until he is bigger we won't know where he falls on the spectrum of sight as to how much he can and cannot see. This was heartbreaking for a parent to hear as most of you know and understand. I will say, although he isn't quite six months old he has impressed us so much already! He CAN see light as he responds to it now. When he was diagnosed, the doctors were correct: when Zander was in a dark room and the light came on, he would not be fazed, but now! Oh man! Turn a light on and if there's a ceiling fan, what an added bonus! Zander lights up like it's Christmas morning! How exciting that is for us to see! He is also tracking objects which we are super excited about as well!



When I became pregnant with Zander I had no doubt that I was growing a perfect child. We didn't find out gender so that in itself kept our curiosity at an all time high. My pregnancy, in my opinion, was beautiful! Yes, at times I struggled, but overall I was extremely happy with my experience. It came as a total shock when it came time to deliver and so many health issues and concerns arose. It was a waiting game full of lots of doctors, appointments, and the unknown. I'm thankful to say at this point we have a good grasp of all things that are going on health wise (Optic Nerve Hypoplasia -- ONH -- and Panhypopituitarism -- pituitary problems), but patiently waiting to see exactly what Zander's vision will be. Zander most definitely has brought so much joy into our lives! The hardships have been exactly what they sound like... hard, but I know I would do it all over again in an instant to have my perfect baby boy. We are super thankful for our community, as well as family who helped us financially during our difficult time. A GoFundMe was created that helped us with bills and especially gas money as Zach (dad) was driving back and forth from home to the hospital to help care for everyone's needs (myself after an emergency C-section, Zander being in the NICU, and big brother Zayne back home). Our family helped us stay afloat by helping make sure we had a roof over our heads to come home to and utilities kept up. Our church, Bachelor Creek, helped us financially as well with rent and also had us set up for a meal train that helped tremendously. We had so much support for which I can't thank everyone enough!

To this day, when people ask how Zander is doing, I love that I'm finally able to say that he is thriving! I still cringe when people ask if he is "better now" with my knowledge that he will never be "better" so to speak. My son will always be visually impaired, he will always have panhypopituitarism, and he will always be on medication. What I do know though, is that he will always be loved, he will always have support in all of his endeavors, and he will always

have a village to help him in any and every way possible. We are thankful, grateful, and blessed to have Zander in our lives. His six year-old big brother loves "his" baby and his dad and I are over the moon in love with him. He is perfect in our eyes!

Bill of Rights for Students Who are Visually Impaired

The leaders of the Council of the Schools and Services for the Blind (COSB) and the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) have teamed up to develop a clear, concise 'Bill of Rights' as a resource to inform parents, professionals and legislators on the basic educational rights of all children who are blind or visually impaired. The authors hope that this resource will be widely distributed and endorsed (formally or informally) by interested individuals and organizations. It is not fully inclusive of all rights; it is a starting point for teams when planning individualized programs for children with visual impairments.

Preamble

In addition to numerous educational principles that have been proven to be beneficial for children with visual impairment, all the provisions of what constitutes a "Free and Appropriate Public Education" under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) shall be assumed along with this bill of rights.

Bill of Rights

1. Children with all levels of visual impairment (including those with multiple disabilities and those who are DeafBlind) have a right to early intervention/instruction provided by highly trained and qualified teachers of students with visual impairment and certified orientation and mobility specialists, that is timely, ambitious, and results in the highest possible achievement for each child.
2. Children with visual impairment have the right to a functional vision evaluation and a learning media assessment by highly trained and qualified teachers of students with visual impairment to determine appropriate services following the initial clinical eye exam.
3. Parents/guardians of children with visual impairment have the right to assistance in interpreting the educational implications of the diagnosed visual impairment that is provided by highly trained and qualified teachers of students with visual impairment and certified mobility specialists and the right to seek assistance from regional/national agencies (including consumer advocacy organizations) that can help them make informed decisions on behalf of their child.

4. As required in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act “in the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team must provide for instruction in braille and the use of braille unless the IEP Team determines, after an evaluation of the child’s reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child’s future needs for instruction in braille or the use of braille), that instruction in braille or the use of braille is not appropriate for the child.” Appropriate reading and writing media are determined by conducting a learning media assessment.

5. Children and families have the right to be fully informed about the “Expanded Core Curriculum” of skills unique to students with visual impairment, which includes: compensatory skills, orientation and mobility, social interaction skills, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, assistive technology, sensory efficiency skills, and self-determination.

6. Children have the right to assessment and instruction, in school and in their communities, in every area of the Expanded Core Curriculum that is deemed appropriate by the educational team and includes the parents/guardians as the primary decision makers and includes the student when appropriate. The Expanded Core Curriculum is equal in importance to the standard academic curriculum and will not be overlooked in the educational plan.

7. Children have the right to receive school materials that are accessible, in the preferred format and at the same time as their sighted peers. Children have an absolute right to testing procedures and instruments that are fair and accessible, that take into consideration the results of the functional vision evaluation, and include all accommodations identified in the IEP.

8. It is the right of children and families for a full range of educational placement settings to be discussed at IEP meetings, including the variety of unique programs and options offered in specialized schools/services for children who are visually impaired. A specialized school may offer the best opportunity for achievement and be the “least restrictive environment” for some children.

9. All children with a visual impairment have the right to teams that enthusiastically assist them in preparing for transition to independence and adulthood.

10. Children with visual impairment, including those with multiple disabilities and DeafBlindness, have the right to be perceived and treated as equal, active, and contributing members of their communities, classrooms, and schools. As with all children, their engagement through belonging increases the collective value of each setting within which they participate.

May, 2019

We’re Seeing Stars!!!



We have wonderful news! VIPS Kids Town Preschool has again received a 5 STAR rating from the Kentucky Early Care Rating System! This highest possible rating comes from the fantastic work of our preschool teachers and classroom assistants under Kristin Horlander’s amazing leadership.

While we take time to salute the preschool team, we further recognize that this accomplishment is not possible without the behind the scenes support that comes from ALL team members – regardless of location. When one of us shines, we all shine! The good name of VIPS is earned by all of us.



Director of Education, Kathy Mullen and Kristin Horlander, Kids Town Preschool Assistant Director and Family Services Coordinator.

October Means Spooktacular Fun at VIPS!

On October 26, 2019, **VIPS Indiana** held our annual **Spooktacular PEP!** VIPS families, past and present, were invited to bring their kiddos dressed up in costumes to trick-or-treat for sensory goodies and candy, while parents trick-or-treated for resources from various organizations. Also, families took home handmade Halloween books created by the **Indiana State University CHILL**



A volunteer reads to Spiderman (aka Jeremiah).



(Colleagues Helping Implement Lifelong Learning) students.

We cannot thank the CHILL students enough for making these very creative and well-crafted books for our families.

Felix loves sharing a book with a friend.

We also would like to thank all the wonderful organizations that participated and our volunteers that helped with families as well! However we cannot forget to thank *Krispy Kreme* for donating dozens and dozens of donuts for our families and volunteers to snack on and thank *Starbucks* for fueling us all with coffee. This PEP was such an impactful experience, we hope to see even more families at our Winter PEP! (Stay tuned for details).

VIPS Central Kentucky held our annual **SPOOKTACULAR Halloween party** and had another great turnout with families, volunteers from the *Delta Gamma Fraternity* and special guests from the *Lions Club* and *Members Heritage Credit Union*. Families had fun in the selfie station, exploring different sensory experiences, making spooky crafts and seeing all of the VIPS children and their siblings dressed up in their costumes.



Ember and family getting in on the fun.



MacKenzie enjoyed a craft.



Superheroes save the day -- Spiderman Amerius and Superwoman Jocelyn!



VIPS Louisville's annual Trunk 'N Treat, was held on a rainy Saturday that forced the open trunks and decorated tables inside. Over 40 Trick or Treaters enjoyed making Frankenstein suncatchers. They loved opening up their treat bags at the 15 tables that awaited their approach! Buddy the Bat and Batman, from the Louisville Bats, also put in an appearance, thrilling the youngsters.

Tell Your Story: The VIPS 2019 Family Retreat

The theme of the 2019 VIPS Family Retreat was "Tell Your Story" and tell the parents did! Twenty-one families scattered across Kentucky and Indiana gathered at the Sullivan University residence hall to share experiences, learn from speakers with uniquely invaluable expertise and meet even more people who can provide support.



At left: Kennedy loved playing with the dolls in Respite Care.



At Right: Ashlyn checked out a magnifier in Kids Town.

The keynote speaker was Chris Sweigart, a consultant from the Ohio Valley Education Cooperative and former teacher of children with emotional and/or behavioral challenges. He spoke about Why Children Act as They Do, suggesting ways to identify normal behavior and making himself readily available for individual questions following his session. Licensed Clinical Social Worker JoAnn Kalb of Jewish Family and Career Services reminded parents of ways to take care of themselves as caretakers of a child with unique needs.



Parents worked industriously making book crates for their kids.

Tracy Thomas, Youth Programs Coordinator at the Louisville Free Public Library, stressed the value of parents reading to their children to encourage literacy skills. Paige Maynard, VIPS Teacher of the Visually Impaired/

Pauletta Feldman and Maury Weedman, both VIPS employees, discussed how they teamed with various education professionals as their son, Jamie, one of the original group of VIPS kids, moved through the school years, preparing the parents in specific ways to plan for their child's future.



These moms found that teamwork made the job much easier.

Developmental Interventionist, showed parents how to adapt books for their large print- or braille-using child. Once the parents knew how to adapt their child's books, they built wooden book boxes in which to store the books.

VIPS Assistant Preschool Director Kristin Horlander led a group meditation to guide parents in telling their story. After a delicious supper prepared by Sullivan's culinary students, the parents did just that! When they were adjourned and picked up their children to return to their homes, they excitedly introduced their children to their new friends. The palpable excitement of time well spent listening, learning and sharing was obvious to all as they agreed that this retreat was the best ever!

Virtual Home Visits: Creating Opportunities for Service Expansion!

By Paige Maynard, VIPS Louisville TVI/Developmental Interventionist

One of my favorite parts of teaching at VIPS is that our leadership encourages and supports us in learning about and implementing best practices in our field just as soon as they are hot off the press! One new practice that I have found helpful in serving VIPS families is the use of virtual home visits. A virtual home visit is essentially a home visit completed with me present at the VIPS office (or sometimes my home office!) and the family in their home, communicating via video chat. VIPS's first virtual home visit took place in August of 2017, and I've personally seen excellent benefits from using this practice in conjunction with traditional face-to-face visits.

From a research standpoint, there is still much for us to learn about virtual home visits. The current research was done mostly with families of children who are deaf/hard of hearing but it is still very promising! Families who met with their providers via virtual home visit were more engaged with their children and with their interventionists than families who met with their providers face to face. Also, providers who met with families via virtual home visits were more responsive to family priorities than providers who met face-to-face with families. The child's progress was similar between virtual home visits and face-to-face visits. (Behl, et al., 2017)

So, what exactly is a virtual home visit like? It is actually very similar to a face-to-face visit, except that I'm present in a family's home on their phone, computer or tablet screen instead of their living room! We use the video chat app that the family is most comfortable with, such as FaceTime, Google Hangouts, Zoom, or Duo for Android. As the family and I prepare to begin meeting virtually, we usually agree face-to-face to set aside a time to make sure our devices are in sync. This enables technology

to run smoothly when we actually do meet virtually. Honestly, we sometimes still deal with some technical issues, such as buffering, but the benefits of virtual home visits much outweigh the inconveniences.

When the date of our virtual home visit comes, both the family and I log onto our devices and just like when I'm physically present in the home, I often start out with a hello song to the child. I sing this song to help the child identify me and to establish a predictable routine. Exactly as in face-to-face visits, my role during a virtual home visit is to come alongside a family as a mentor and coach who is there to help and empower them with whatever they need as it pertains to their child's participation in family life. I then give the family the prerogative to set the agenda for the home visit -- do they want to tweak strategies that we developed at our last visit, or do they have a new topic they'd like to focus on? It's my job to listen to the family and empower them with whatever they need to help their child succeed.

Then, with my coaching, the family can identify a strategy that they'd like to try out. Sometimes they may need my help with thinking of a strategy or analyzing how their child's needs are affecting what we're focusing on. I may spend time explaining why their child's visual impairment may be affecting the child's participation, the same way that I would if we were meeting face-to-face. I'm also able to share my screen to show them pictures and resources that may help them understand. I have a doll and some props that I may use to model strategies as well. Then, just as we would in a face-to-face visit, the family gets the chance to try the strategy with their child. Afterward, we reflect on how the strategy went, and together, we make adjustments as needed until the family feels confident in using the strategy on their own.

So, what is the child doing in all of this? In most cases, the child is engaging with family members within the strategies the family and I develop together. Research shows that parent-child interactions that include responsive parenting (positive back and forth interactions between parent and child) are the most important factors for successful interventions and are the best



Paige engaging with child during a virtual home visit. (If you look closely you can see the baby on the computer screen.)

predictor of child development (Mahoney, Boyce, Fewell, Spiker, & Wheeden, 1998). I've personally seen the benefits of VIPS children developing their skills through interactions with their family more effectively than they develop within interactions with me. What better way to build a child's success than to let the child engage with their family?!

My most recent virtual home visit can serve as an example of the way that my interactions with a family look in action. During our virtual home visit, the family of a child who has low vision wanted to learn how to replicate a video magnifier they had seen during a tour of Kids Town Preschool. They wished to use items they had in their home or could purchase. As we began the visit, this little one's mom and I reflected at the wonderful skills he demonstrated with the video magnifier at Kids Town, and we identified together that whatever setup was used would need to enable him to build upon the amazing skill that he was already good at -- placing toys and objects beneath the camera to magnify them. After some more reflecting together, I modeled the use of my own tablet with a magnifying app and a tablet stand, and then Mom and I reflected about how she felt her son would respond to a setup like this at home. At the end of the visit, this sweet Mom had come up with her plan to use an old tablet in her home and an inexpensive stand to explore magnifying this little guy's toy cars!

I'm excited to know how this video magnifier setup will help this little one and I know that his success will be because of his amazing Mom who made decisions about the best strategies for him during our virtual home visit!

Below are the situations in which virtual home visits may be helpful for your family:

1. if the distance you live from your VIPS teacher is too far for him/her to travel to your home with the frequency you need;
2. if your IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan) doesn't allow for the frequency of service you need from your VIPS teacher;
3. if having your VIPS teacher in your home puts your child at risk for getting sick or being hospitalized, especially during cold and flu season.
4. if the weather prevents your VIPS teacher from being able to travel to your home.

If you are interested in learning more about virtual home visits, please speak with your VIPS teacher.

Resources:

Behl, D. D., Blaiser, K., Cook, G., Barrett, T., Callow-Heusser, C., Brooks, B. M., Dawson, P., Quigley, S., White, K. R. (2017). A Multisite Study Evaluating the Benefits of Early Intervention via Telepractice. *Infants & Young Children, 30*(2), 147-161.

Mahoney, G., Boyce G., Fewell, R., Spiker, D., & Wheeden, C.A. (1998). The relationship of parent-child interaction to the effectiveness of early intervention services for at-risk children and children with disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 18*(1), 5-17.

Update: Recently, I encountered the need to do a virtual home visit. I had a sore throat when scheduled to meet in person with Avron and his mom Charlene and we didn't want to risk any illness!. The Campbell County public library let me reserve a study room to meet with them while in Fort Thomas during a gap in my visit schedule. So I safely was able to see Avron via Google meet.



Top: My Virtual Home Visit Toolbox;
Below: Avron ready to learn!

I Am Only One

By Kathy Mullen, VIPS Director of Education

On a recent Thursday morning, I gathered with a crowd of others engaged in the vision industry to celebrate the arrival of the Helen Keller archives at the American Printing House for the Blind (APH). The sun was powerful as it worked its way through the magnificent trees welcoming folks of various titles to the front lawn of APH. The energy throughout the crowd was electric and quite contagious.

At the end of the ceremony, I felt myself drawn to the young woman who opened the festivities with her warm welcome and powerful message. I was in awe of her words, confidence, and obvious passion about her work at APH in general and about Helen Keller in particular. I asked Jessica Minneci if I could share her words with our VIPS family and was delighted to receive her permission to do so.

But first, a little about Jessica. Originally from Chicago, Jessica's family found their way to Louisville in 2017 by way of Pennsylvania. While visiting her family in Louisville during a break from college at Seton Hill University, where she majored in English Creative Writing and minored in Communication, Jessica learned that APH called Louisville home as well. This was of interest to Jessica as she had been using APH materials her whole life. Jessica is legally blind.

Jessica visited APH for the first time in January of 2018. She was hooked. Hoping to obtain a summer internship, Jessica turned in her resume before returning to school. She was hired as a summer communications intern at the end of her junior year. When she returned to Seton Hill for her senior year, she continued as a blogger for APH, writing posts pertaining to college, career and professional development as a blind individual. In June 2019, Jessica was hired full-time as a marketing associate, editing the company newsletter, *APH News*, drafting product brochures and blog content and assisting with writing social media posts.

And now for the words that touched me so:

“Good morning, my name is Jessica Minneci.

Helen Keller once said, ‘I am only one, but still I am one.’ Although she was just one person, Helen’s tenacity and determination to help others impacted the lives of so many.

If you are blind, deafblind, a woman, have a disability, or are a minority, Helen stood up for you. As a visually impaired young woman, I am part of two of the groups that Helen advocated for. Here are just a few of the things Helen did to fight for others:

- *She helped create the American Civil Liberties Union.*
- *She began Helen Keller International, which addresses the causes of blindness and fights against malnutrition.*
- *She traveled to 39 countries, campaigning for the establishment of schools for the blind and deaf.*
- *She created rehabilitation centers.*

In 1933, Helen Keller wrote a scathing letter to Nazi students. In it, she warned, ‘History has taught you nothing if you think you can kill ideas.’ Helen was right. Even though the Nazis burned her books and tried to stifle her ideas, today, we stand here to celebrate the very principles of Helen that could not be blotted out.

I am grateful for all that Helen did for me and for all of us. The example she set pushes me in my work at APH. I create materials that make learning easier for students all over the world. I make workplaces more accessible for people everywhere. This brings me joy. Like Helen, I am only one, but with hard work and determination, I am making a difference in the world, and so can you. Thank you.”

Editors Note: *The American Printing House for the Blind is located in Louisville at 1839 Frankfort Ave. It is a wonderful place to visit and to take family and friends to see how braille and other media and resources for the visually impaired are produced. There is a beautiful, inspiring museum as well. It is listed in the top 15 things to do in Louisville on Trip Advisor! Free tours are offered M-Th, 10 a.m. & 2 p.m..*

Parent Recommendations

The *Baby Musical Piano Lullaby Playmat®* was recommended by a VIPS parent who has been able to use this toy through different stages of her child’s development, including looking and reaching for overhead toys and strengthening the child’s legs as he pushes his feet on the piano. The piano can be adjusted to help support the child while sitting. The child can also lean on the piano allowing him to visually focus on the dangling objects and activating the toy. This playmat is available on eBay and other online distributors for \$30-35. (Submitted by Tammy Maynard, DI, VIPS Central KY.)



Dani Savick, VIPS Kids Town Preschool Instructional Assistant and VIPS mom, recommends *Lumipets Cute Animal Silicone Baby Night Light w/Touch Sensor®*. It lights up, changes colors



with a gentle tap and can be purchased with Bluetooth connection allowing music to play through it! Several similar versions are offered online under different names; one comes with a remote (\$15-20), while the Bluetooth version runs around \$21. Other brands and prices are available from eBay, Bed Bath and Beyond and Amazon.

Dani’s daughter, Jaycee, enjoying her Lumipet.

Marvelous Milestones

Corbin demonstrates progress in focusing and tracking objects with lights and reflective material. His family places him on his favorite pillow to engage in activities. His diagnosis makes it difficult to reach and grasp objects. During a home visit, Corbin was very motivated by the lights and beads. He kicked the beads and attempted to swat at them. We are so proud of Corbin as he demonstrates recent progress in his development.



Abigail has learned to discriminate sounds, determine where sounds originate, and locate their source. In the photos, Abigail is using her sense of touch and sound to explore differences in the sound, feel, and location of various zippers on a zipper board. Not only is she using her fingertips to find the zippers, she is also

demonstrating the ability to discriminate differences between the cloth, zipper, and pull toggle. Just as important, Abigail is also learning to follow horizontal paths with her hands to locate the toggle--all foundational tactile and fine motor skills needed for Pre-Braille learning! Great job to Abigail and her family!



Since his Mom, Sara, began some new vision strategies, **John Malachi** is now reaching with much more accuracy and looking at objects while he is reaching more. He's pictured here with his light box (on loan from VIPS) and a bead curtain.

Hunter attended a baby shower over the weekend, and found interest in this balloon. He's so proud of himself and having a great time grasping it! Hunter was able to look at this balloon when it floated up, and he was able to hold onto it in his lap.



Meet **Evelyn!** Evelyn and her Mom (Kristina) and Dad (Glen) moved all the way from Alabama to receive VIPS Services. When Evelyn was born she was diagnosed with Microphthalmia in her right eye. Microphthalmia is a condition in which the eye is small and underdeveloped. This condition results in low vision, or in Evelyn's case, non-functional vision. She does not let that diagnosis stop her. She is meeting milestone after milestone. At 8 months, she is talking, crawling, and pulling herself up to stand. Way to go Evelyn!



PEP At UPike

VIPS Central KY partnered with the *Kentucky College of Optometry (KYCO) at University of Pikeville* to offer a Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) on their lovely campus. Held in the beautiful meeting space at KYCO, this event was open to all families who receive First Steps early intervention services in Pike, Martin, Floyd, Magoffin and Johnson counties. Dr. Josephine Owocye was on hand to give families a tour of The Dr. Jerald F. Combs Eye Clinic and share information about the comprehensive eye care services they offer in addition to pediatric optometry.

Central Kentucky Regional Director, Kelly Easton, and Developmental Interventionist, Tammy Maynard, planned a variety

of hands-on activities for families, including a make & take tactile book on concepts such as left, right, above, below and between. We look forward to future collaborations in that area.



Above: Tactile Book Make & Take activity just waiting for parents to show up!
Right: Kelly and Tammy pose Seymour the Bear (notice his eye chart!).

The Cupcake Classic

VIPS Central Kentucky held our 3rd annual 5K for the 5 Senses, with a sweet added twist -- the 5K was rebranded this year as The Cupcake Classic -- a 5K for the 5 Senses. All participants received cupcakes and ice cream at the finish line!

BabyCakes was our cupcake sponsor and offered a variety of gluten free and vegan cupcakes along with their regular offerings. **Forcht Bank** brought their ice cream truck to join the fun, and, as expected, it was a big hit!

Elements of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch were again incorporated into the overall course experience, and kids and adults of all ages had a great time exploring the hands on activities in the SENSEsational Spot. Our cupcake mascot CC was on hand to run the Little Cakes 1K with our youngest runners, and everyone had a wonderful time raising money for a terrific cause!

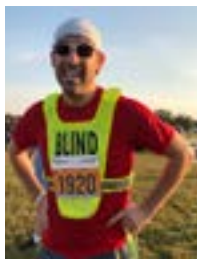


The team from Stratton Eyes, one of our sponsors.

Stampede for VIPS

The 17th Annual Dr. Mark Lynn & Associates Stampede for VIPS was held on September 28 at Bowman Field, the very first time for this venue. Local runners and walkers, along with VIPS families and friends, came out to support this great event. VIPS is so grateful to the following sponsors who helped us

raise \$65,000: *American Printing House for the Blind, Councilman Pat Mulvihill, Ford Motor Company Fund, Kentucky School For the Blind Charitable Foundation, Louisville Downtown Lions Club, Papa Johns, Print Tex, Visionworks/Dr. Mark Lynn & Associates and Texas Roadhouse.*



First Place winner in Men's Visually Impaired Division, Joe Burkett.



Above: The Hannah's Flight Crew team. At Right: Back of the Team Addy t-shirt quoting Helen Keller..



VIPS Central Kentucky Regional Director, Kelly Easton, and Assistant Director, Mary Smyth, had a great time volunteering at the Heart of Kentucky United Way's 2nd Annual .5K at Centre College in Danville. The Heart of Kentucky United Way works to promote the common good by focusing on Education, Income and Health in Boyle, Garrard, Lincoln and Mercer counties, providing funding to VIPS that allows us to provide early intervention services to children in those four counties. They also help us to spread awareness of the critical role vision plays in a child's overall development. We are so thankful for their support and we loved being a part of this fun event (and .5K really is farther than you think!)

VIPS Indiana held a cookout for the Crusade for Children in October. Staff and volunteers grilled burgers and hot dogs for our community and hosted an afternoon of fun and appreciation. The people of the office building where VIPS Indiana is located look forward to this cookout every year, and we are always excited to fill the crisp fall day with delicious aromas! The Cookout was in honor of WHAS Crusade for Children as a way to express our gratitude for their generous grant funding. The Crusade is helping change the lives of Indiana's youngest children with blindness/low vision by funding VIPS teachers/interventionists who provide the children with vision-specific early intervention services and comprehensive support to their families. We are proud to present them with \$412.00 as a result of this fundraiser!

On Friday, November 8, a *Trivia Night to support the VIPS Indiana Family Resource Center was hosted by the Indianapolis Alumnae of the Delta Gamma.* All proceeds went to the Capital Campaign to build our Family Resource Center! We are so grateful for the Delta Gammas' generosity and for putting on a lively evening of



food, trivia, and laughter! They also hosted a silent auction at the event, which raised over \$10,000! We look forward to this night every year, and once again, it was a success!

Many thanks to those who worked the Corn Stand for the Washington Township Lions Club at the Indiana State Fair in August. VIPS Indiana received a check for \$490.88 as a result of this collaboration!



Other Happenings Around VIPS

VIPS Central KY was selected as the charity of the month in the Dine Out For Charity at Sedona Taphouse. Every Monday in October diners could choose a specially priced entree and \$1 was donated to VIPS. This was a great opportunity to share our mission with the community, and we are so thankful to our Advisory Board member Jack Brown for helping us secure one of these highly coveted spots.

The Delta Beta chapter of the Delta Gamma Fraternity at the University of Kentucky held their second annual Night for Sight Gala with VIPS Central KY child, William, as the special guest. William and his parents, Rebecca and Harry Chinn, along with VIPS volunteer, Madison Johnston,* and Regional Director, Kelly Easton, attended the gala that celebrated the academic successes of their members and the work that the fraternity does to help organizations such as VIPS and the Lions Club. Rebecca shared her story of how William's diagnosis of Leber's Congenital Amaurosis has impacted their family, and how beneficial it has been for William to receive VIPS in-home intervention and to participate in the Little Learners program and various family events. We are so thankful for the relationship we have with the Delta Gammas!



William all dressed up for his speaking engagement, shown with volunteer Madison Johnson.

*Madison is a 2019 Beacon Award Winner for her volunteer work with VIPS Central KY.



New Arrivals

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

Aiden -- 1 year, Plainfield, IN
 Amelia -- 7 months, Fort Wayne, IN
 Apollonia -- 3 years, Louisville, KY
 Asher -- 2 years, Warsaw, KY
 Atticus -- 4 years, Louisville, KY
 Boone -- 2 years, Paint Lick, KY
 Brian "Trip" -- 8 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Briley -- 2 years, Richmond, IN
 Carson -- 2 years, Lancaster, KY
 Castleman -- 10 months, Floyd Knobs, IN
 Christian -- 2 years, Indianapolis, IN
 Christopher -- 2 years, Milton, KY
 Da'mya -- 10 months, Fort Wayne, IN
 Deniro -- 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
 Denver -- 1 year, Russell Springs, KY
 Dylan -- 3 years, Indianapolis, IN
 Easton -- 2 years, Jeffersonville, IN
 Elizabeth -- 4 years, Lawrenceburg, KY
 Greyson -- 1 year, Avon, IN
 Greyson -- 1 year, French Lick, IN
 Hazelee -- 2 years, Berea, KY
 Henry -- 3 years, Fort Wayne, IN
 Hunter -- 1 year, Albany, KY
 Hunter -- 1 year, Columbus, IN
 Hunter -- 11 months, Latonia, KY
 Isaac -- 11 months, Dry Ridge, KY
 Isaiah -- 11 months, Mt. Washington, KY
 Jack -- 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
 Jordan -- 1 year, Louisville, KY
 Josiah -- 11 months, Wallingford, KY
 Josue -- 2 years, Lexington, KY
 Juniper -- 10 months, Lexington, KY
 Kentrell -- 10 months, Jeffersonville, IN
 Kingston -- 11 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Landon -- 3 years, Kokomo, IN
 Laylah -- 10 months, Princeton, IN
 Mckenzie -- 1 year, Valparaiso, IN
 Paige -- 1 year, Churubusco, IN
 Patrick -- 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Persephone -- 8 months, Lexington, KY
 Raina -- 1 year, Avon, IN
 Sally -- 10 months, Osgood, IN
 Samantha -- 4 years, Louisville, KY
 Shawn -- 1 year, Greenfield, IN
 Thielen -- 9 months, Corbin, KY
 Uvon -- 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Vera -- 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Weston -- 2 years, Frankfort, KY
 Wyatt -- 1 year, Shelbyville, IN
 Zander -- 7 months, Wabash, IN
 ZyhMir -- 1 year, Louisville, KY

Welcome New Staff

VIPS Indiana

Hello, my name is *Mindy Koehne*. A passion for teaching children with special needs led me down the path of Blind/Low Vision and I am now a full-time Teacher of the Blind/Low Vision for VIPS IN. I have worked for the local public schools as a resource teacher for four years, and eight years as a Blind/Low Vision teacher. My husband and I were high school sweethearts and have now been married for 17 years. We have four children, Henry (age 12), Adelyne (age 9), Elsie (age 8) and Cora (age 5). During my free time, I enjoy spending time with my children, participating in 1/2 marathons, scrapbooking and sewing.



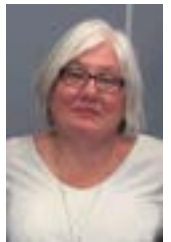
VIPS Louisville



Kristan Decker is a new Preschool

Instructional Assistant working in the orange classroom. Kristan had previously volunteered at VIPS summer camp and was motivated to leave her desk job at a clothing distribution center to accept the assistant's position. She has her own embroidery business, Company 12 Designs. A busy lady always on the go, she has two children, a 15-year-old boy at DeSales and a ten-year-old girl at Notre Dame Academy. Her husband, Jerry, rounds out the family group, complemented by a new puppy.

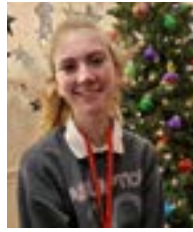
Pam Holladay was a Developmental Interventionist for VIPS in the mid-1980s. After two years, she left to teach preschool and kindergarten in the Bullitt County Schools. Now, 33 years later, Pam is back with VIPS, this time as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired! Her children, now grown, are scattered from Louisville to Cleveland, OH to Springfield, MO. Her son, Nathan, is a VIPS board member and has two children (twins!) and Pam and her husband are raising another grandchild. They live in Old Louisville and enjoy events around the St. James Court area, Netflix and Dalmatians. We are so happy to have her back!



Wrae Sanders (pronounced Ray) comes to VIPS from a mental health/psychiatric worker background working with children with special needs at Our Lady of Peace. She is a graduate of Jeffersontown High and Spalding University. She has three children, a 14-year-old at Jeffersontown High and a 13- and an 11-year old, both at Ramsey Middle School. When not working as an Instructional Assistant in Kids Town Preschool's green room, Wrae enjoys listening to true crime podcasts and reading.



Mary Alice Fike is a Senior at Assumption High who is working in after school care. She has previously worked with special needs students at Jewish Community Center. She is active in high school theatre, especially costume designing, and enjoys painting with acrylics.



Gifts of Time, Talent and Treasure

VIPS Louisville

For sharing their skills with VIPS kids in the classrooms, thanks to *Fran Woodward, Sharon Bohannon and Deanna Scoggins*.

For assisting with administrative tasks and in the preschool, thanks to *Leli Grimes and Emma Strange, both interns from Holy Cross High School*.

For volunteering at Ford Motor Company's 50th Anniversary open house benefitting VIPS, thanks to *Isabel Billings, Greg Billings, Will Mullen, Chris Neighbors, Maggie Spath and Alyssa Wines representing VIPS; Julie Kennedy from the Veterans Administration; Mike McNatt, a Ford retiree; and Pam Minton and Jenny Tyree from the Office of the Blind*.

For refreshing our landscaping, thanks to *volunteers from the Kentucky Science Center: Janet Brown, Jon Dixon, Lindsey Harris, Mike Herps and Virginia Hoyt*.

For helping with the Give for Good Cookout, thanks to *GE Employees Rob Byron, Ilona Hugdeorn, Jennifer Johnson, Nick Okruck, Walt Pozgay, Stephan Roeslen and Dave Schofield*.



For working at the Stampede for VIPS, thanks to: *Annaliese Billings, Catherine Brands, Michelle Brown, Phoebe Brown, Julia Ceresa, Lauren Ceresa, Sara Ceresa, Brandon Conrad, Tinley Daniel, LaRhonda Daniels, Jon Daniels, Michael Daniels, Anne Decker, Jerry Decker, Will Decker, Ashley Erwin, Pauletta Feldman, Rey Gomez, Bonnie Helm, Beth Krebs, Courtney Krekel, Mary Lesousky, Makenzie Lovett, Max Lovett, Stephanie Maloney, Chris Monahan, Kelly Monahan, Brandon Osborn, Rachel Osborn, Georgia Punwani, Rachel Puscya, Brittany Rebalsky and daughter, Brian Rhodes, Tammy Rhodes, Shelia Roden, Missy Schmidt, Noah Schmidt, Ron Spaulding, Jason Wallin, Dave Webb, Derek Webb, Joe Wegner and Brandon Woodward*.

For helping with administrative and cleaning tasks, thanks to *Emily McCurry and Sonia Nagpal, both from DuPont Manual High School*.

For their wonderful helping hands and loving hearts doing childcare during the Family Retreat, thanks to *Tracy Crean-Marchegian, Will Decker, Francisco Elbl, Pauletta Feldman, Meela Holladay, Carol Melikian, Karen Spath, Maggie Spath, Claire Stemmer, Marilyn Strong, Steve Vied, Joy Wall and Sarah Welch*.



Respite workers, Carol Melikian (left), who is a retired OT, and Joy Wall (right), a retired special ed teacher. Joy has worked respite for the VIPS Family Retreat for over 25 years.

VIPS Central KY

For helping hands at the VIPS CK Halloween Party, thanks to the following members of *Delta Gamma Fraternity at UK: Gracie Bernhard, Makenna Briggs, Samantha Briggs, Madison Butler, Kelly Custer, Emily Hayes, Sammy Howard, Sara Ignoffo, Taylor McBride, Ashleigh Miller, Savannah Miller, Maddie Owens, Sylvia Scheuer and Carly Snyder*.

For all of their help with the Cupcake Classic, thanks so much to members of *UK Delta Gammas, including Macie Agnich, Page Askins, Victoria Casenhiser, Maggie Ellis, Sedona Fleck, Bailey Gilliam, Laura Gobbo, Ary Gomez, Amber Keene, Elise Kowalski, Jessie Logeman, Ally McNulty, Macaira Mullen, Piper Pearson, Gabrielle Rondina, Nina Sanchez, Sierra Shirley, Elli Spanier and Nicole Weinzimmer*.

We give a BIG shout out to *our mascot, Maxwell Morton!* He not only wore the mascot suit all day, but he RAN the 1K with the kids while wearing it!



VIPS Indiana

For help with October PEP, thanks to *participating organizations including A Kid Again, About Special Kids (ASK), Delta Gamma Fraternity, Easterseals Crossroads, Epilepsy Foundation, Family Voices Indiana, Feeding Friends, Joseph Maley Foundation and Morning Dove Therapeutic Riding, Inc.*

For all of those anonymous donors who have answered needs from our Amazon Wish List, thank you! The outpouring of gifts of office supplies, toys and other items these past few months helps us save on many extra costs so we have more to spend on programming.

For organizing over 50 student volunteers to make us hundreds of shaker tubes and texture blocks, **thanks to Kiwanis International.**

VIPS Ambassador Award

Editor's Note: Tom Briggs began the VIPS Corporate Cup Golf Tournament in 1989, when he was Vice President for Loss Prevention at KFC. Since that time, the tournament has raised many hundreds of thousands of dollars to support VIPS services. Tom is now retired from KFC, but comes to the VIPS Louisville Office weekly to record for Radio Eye, a radio reading service for the blind and visually impaired. He always brings donuts or cookies for the staff to enjoy!

Tom Briggs, former VIPS Board member and longtime supporter, received the VIPS Ambassador Award at the Beacon Awards dinner in October. He was moved to later write what he wished he'd said when he accepted this prestigious award.

"In retrospect, I SHOULDDA said that my 33 year relationship with VIPS has been, without a doubt, some of the most meaningful and transformative years of my life.

I SHOULDDA said that VIPS is a remarkable team and that VIPS provides an amazing, meaningful and impactful array of services to young children with visual impairments.

I SHOULDDA said that your team serves as a needed support for parents when they face the fact that their child will have certain on-going limitations and how to cope with that ... how to recover from that fact ... and how to direct their love and energies.

I SHOULDDA said that I get misty every time I see the school buses arrive.

I SHOULDDA said that working with KFC to initiate the VIPS Corporate Cup Golf Tournament years ago, and the fact that it has become a major source of funds for VIPS, means more to me than you can imagine.

I SHOULDDA also said that my golf team in the annual VIPS tournament has lost 32 years in a row.

I SHOULDDA said that being a member of a team is what it's all about and I have been blessed to have been a part of teams throughout high school, college, the military and at senior corporate levels and am keenly aware that there is 'no I in team'... nor is there an I in success.

I SHOULDDA then said that, beginning with Sharon [Bensinger] and then grown and developed by you [Diane Nelson]**, VIPS has assembled a fantastic team. People like yourself, Kathy, Angela (even though she's got an Air Force background), Dani, Carol, Maury, Kirsten and all of the other staff constitute one of the best and most complete teams that I've ever seen and I like to consider myself a member of that team, if only peripherally.*

I SHOULDDA said that I am very honored to be recognized with the Ambassador Award and hasten to add that it won't affect the flow of cookies and occasional donuts, just so long as I get an occasional hug.

In short, I should have said so many things and sang the praises of what the VIPS team accomplishes on a daily basis ... that what VIPS does has a life-changing role for so many people, children and parents alike ... but because I didn't have a script in front of me, I'm sorry to say I didn't ... until now."

*Sharon Bensinger was the Founding Director of VIPS. **Diane Nelson is the current Executive Director of VIPS.



Thanks to Our Donors

Thanks to the many wonderful organizations that make VIPS services possible through their generous donations! Recent grants have been received from the following:

VIPS Indiana

- \$47,760 -- AWS Foundation
- \$20,000 -- The Glick Fund
- \$7,500 -- Smithville Charitable Foundation
- \$6,600 -- Caesars Foundation of Floyd County
- \$6,200 -- Ninestar Connect
- \$6,000 -- The Huffer Foundation
- \$5,000 -- Old National Bank Foundation
- \$5,000 -- Costco Wholesale
- \$3,000 -- Well Foundation

VIPS Kentucky

- \$60,000 -- Irvin F. & Alice S. Etscorn Charitable Foundation
- \$50,000 -- Karston A. & Ethelyn O. Osmondson Charitable Fund, Inc.
- \$30,000 -- iHeartMedia Louisville
- \$25,000 -- The Gheens Foundation
- \$20,000 -- The Allergan Foundation
- \$20,000 -- Lift A Life Novak Family Foundation
- \$12,500 -- Lexington Lions Club
- \$3,987 -- The King's Daughters & Sons Foundation of Kentucky, Inc.
- \$3,000 -- Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky, Inc.

VIPS is Looking for Auction Donations

You can help us raise important funds by making a donation towards the VIPS Tennis Ball Dinner & Auction. We're accepting local artisan goods, gift cards, bottles of bourbon, event tickets and more!
Contact Dani Harper - dharper@vips.org / (502) 498-2926.

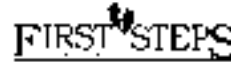


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Upcoming Events

All VIPS Family Events, regardless of office sponsoring them, are open to all VIPS families

Friday, January 10

LENA Sessions begin. Details at right.

Saturday, January 11

VIPS Indiana will hold a Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis. You must register in advance. Contact rdevore@vips.org to RSVP.

Wednesday, January 15

VIPS Louisville will tour Breckenridge-Franklin Elementary, 9:30 a.m., for children entering kindergarten. Contact kmullen@vips.org.

Saturday, January 18

Yoga for a Cause will be held at the VIPS Louisville Office, 10-11 a.m. Contact khorlander@vips.org for details.

Tuesday, January 28

VIPS Louisville will tour the Kentucky School for the Blind, 9:30 a.m., for children entering kindergarten. Contact kmullen@vips.org.

Friday, February 28

Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) will be held at the VIPS Louisville Office, 10a a.m. Contact khorlander@vips.org for details.

Friday, March 13

VIPS Indiana will hold Opening Night for Revision. Watch for more details!

Saturday, March 28

There will be the Annual Egg Hunt at VIPS Louisville, 10:30 a.m. Contact khorlander@vips.org.

Announcing LENA A New Friday Program at VIPS Louisville

Words unlock success and language builds babies' brains. Language is so important for child development!

Language Environment Analysis (LENA) Playgroup is a new, three-month program that will begin at VIPS in Louisville, starting January 11 and running through March 13. The group will meet each Friday for 10 weeks, 10 – 11 a.m. This FREE program is for children two months to 32 months of age. **At each weekly session, there will be free snacks and a free book, toy and gift card.** All families are welcome to attend; language and transportation support will be available.

VIPS is the only organization serving children who have special needs invited to participate in the LENA playgroup study sponsored by the National Center for Family Literacy. The study is taking place across five US cities: Louisville, Detroit, Atlanta, Birmingham, and Hartford, CT. The reason for including VIPS is to measure the success of the LENA intervention on children who have special needs to see if it matches the gains enjoyed by children who are developing typically. The playgroup is opened to ALL children – those with or without a visual impairment, as well as children of parents who are visually impaired.

To become involved, contact Kristin (khorlander@vips.org) or Juanita (jmiles@vips.org) or call the VIPS Office at 502-636-3207.

VIPS-Louisville

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Kathy Mullen, Director of Education
Angela Billings, Development Director
Christina Frasher, Controller
Carol Dahmke, Office Manager & HR Director
Christina Allen, TVI in Training/Preschool Teacher
Suzanne Bigbee, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Shelby Birchler, Instructional Assistant/After School Care
Bob Boyd, IT
Kristan Decker, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Ashley Emmons, TV/COMS/Preschool Teacher
Pauletta Feldman, Special Projects
Mary Alice Fike, After School Care
Julie Hampton, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Marchelle Hampton, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Debbie Hardesty, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Dani Harper, Development Coordinator
Pam Holladay, TVI/Developmental Interventionist
Kristen Horlander, Preschool Assistant Director/Family Support
Paige Maynard, TVI/Developmental Interventionist
Staci Maynard, TV/Preschool Teacher
Juanita Miles, Twos Preschool Teacher
Jan Moseley, Visual Impairment Specialist
Shai Mullins, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Beth Owens, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Brenda Pharris, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Wrae Sanders, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Dani Savick, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Kirsten Schmidt, Guest Relations/Volunteer Coordinator
Carla Vied, Developmental Interventionist
Tracy Webb, Developmental Interventionist
Maury Weedman, O&M Specialist/Facilities Manager
Brittany Williamson, TV/Preschool Teacher

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Melissa Matthews, Blind/Low Vision Specialist
Amy Nichols, Teacher of Blind/Low Vision
Ashley Ross, Development Coordinator
David Sterne, Lead Blind/Low Vision Specialist