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A Day at the Museum for VIPS Indiana

By Meredith Howell, Regional Director, VIPS Indiana

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is the largest children's museum in the world and a nationally ranked tourist attraction (Top 10 Coolest Museums in the World according to the New York Times and recipient of many other accolades). On a Saturday morning in January, the museum opened earlier than usual for an exclusive group of children and their families -- our VIPS children. Truthfully, my family lives about 15 minutes away from the museum -- I pass it almost daily on my way to the VIPS office -- however, it is not a place we frequent. Our daughter, Lola, is now nine years old and has a visual impairment among other disabilities. We are a former VIPS family, and now as the Regional Director of VIPS Indiana, I am able to advocate for kids like Lola and families like my own. So as we began to brainstorm ideas for our Parent Empowerment Program (PEP), I started to think about all of the places in the city that I would love to take Lola but often feel overwhelmed in doing so. The first that came to mind was The Children's Museum.



Meredith and daughter, Lola, at the museum.

Let me start by saying The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is pretty amazing. It has exploratory fun for all ages, the exhibits are interactive, the staff is kind, and the museum itself is relatively accessible. I've always been impressed with how hands-on the kids can be with the exhibits. The downfalls? It gets ridiculously busy which is good for the museum but bad for kids who have sensory challenges. (Many of our kiddos with visual impairments also struggle with over-stimulating sensory environments.) It is a roll of the dice every time we go and one where we go into the outing prepared for the unexpected. Will Lola be able to handle it? Where will we be able to seek silence in the museum if it becomes too overwhelming? Will we have to leave? Up until we received the [Access Pass](#) (a program where families of kids who meet certain state requirements can go to other local



Emma and her mom, Sarah, (left) enjoy some water play, while Gavin (right) has fun with stacking shapes.



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.

museums and cultural institutions for just \$2 per family member per visit), we would have had to simply eat the steep cost of our trip to the museum which just added salt to the wound. This is not just our reality; in fact, what I found is many of the families we are serving face similar challenges. So I approached The Children's Museum with the idea to have a PEP there. And while it took a couple of years to make this happen (we were only the second group allowed to hold such an event), on Saturday, January 11, 2020, it finally did!

With almost 100 people in attendance, our PEP began with a fairly empty museum and it was glorious. A few of the museum staff led our families (who traveled from all over Indiana to



Making music with the sounds of Ghana!

attend) up to the Playscape exhibit for a very special "Sounds of Ghana" music session. Afterward, the families had Playscape to themselves for the remainder of the hour before the museum opened to the public. During this time, teachers and education staff from The Children's Museum walked around with clipboards and were armed with questions for the VIPS parents/caregivers so they could learn what they could do to make the museum more inclusive for kids who are visually impaired and for those who have additional disabilities as well. Parents were eager to share their concerns, thoughts and ideas. We are rarely asked how to make a space more accessible for our children; it is usually us who is doing the asking, pleading and advocating and let me tell you--it can be exhausting but the outcome is so worth it. The smile on our kid's face, the sense of belonging, the opportunity for our kid to just be a kid makes us parents continue to ask for more inclusive practices in community settings--we only want to improve our child's quality of life.

The exclusive hour went by fast and we began to see others start to trickle into Playscape when the museum opened to the public. Thankfully, The Children's Museum gave all of our VIPS families and staff free tickets to the museum for the remainder of the day. It was heartwarming to see VIPS families exploring the museum with one another--that opportunity to connect and engage in a community setting is priceless as it can be isolating raising a child with special needs. I know all too well because I am one of them.

Lola had a wonderful time at the museum--she made it a couple of hours which was an accomplishment in our world. We won't know what next time will bring and that's OK. We will keep trying and with the information our VIPS families shared with The Children's Museum--who knows--maybe it will become a place we do seek out. I hope for the sake of children with all abilities, The Children's Museum will continue to examine ways they can do better for kids like ours. And because it is the best in the world, I hope others follow suit. The Children's Museum certainly went above and beyond to make our group feel welcomed and included. We are so grateful to The Children's Museum for offering this very special experience to our VIPS families!

Family Fun Was on the Holiday Menu at All VIPS Offices

VIPS Kentucky

Once again, the VIPS Central KY office is so thankful for the annual **Pancakes with Santa at Forcht Bank** that benefits VIPS each year. This free event was open to the community, and offered lots of crafts, games, and a huge pancake breakfast. A balloon artist was on hand to make wonderful creations for the children, and everyone had their picture taken with the big guy, Santa himself. With a VIPS video of children and vision facts playing in the background, families enjoyed learning more about our mission and getting their names brailled on a Christmas gift tag. We are so thankful to **April Larkin at Forcht Bank Hamburg Banking Center** for putting on this event, and for the **Delta Gammas** for volunteering their time at our craft station.

Families all across Central Kentucky came out for some reindeer fun and games at the **VIPS Central KY Annual Holiday Party**. VIPS children and their siblings enjoyed a holiday



Ember (left) and Jackson (right) shared their holiday wishes with Santa.

photo booth, decorated a Christmas tree that was just their size, ran in reindeer balloon races and made lots of holiday crafts and games. *VIPS parent, Nina Vail*, donated delicious baked treats, and each child received a bag of Christmas goodies (in bags generously made by *our friends at the Federal Medical Center*) after getting their picture taken with Santa. A special thanks to our loving Santa, *Jack Pattie*.

Santa made a visit to our **VIPS Central KY Little Learners** class to read to the children. Thanks to *VIPS parent, Harry Chinn*, for donning the red suit and beard to delight the children.

At right: Do you think William recognized his dad, Harry, under that Santa suit?



We were thrilled to welcome Santa to the **VIPS Louisville Annual Holiday Party** sponsored by our incredible friends at the *Louisville Downtown Lions Club*! Donning pajamas, VIPS families had great fun at the party, which included breakfast, crafts, activities, and of course, a visit from Mr. Claus himself! Kids wrote letters to Santa and Ms. Christina helped to Braille them. There was also a craft activity where families made their own reindeer pine cone ornaments. Our kids loved talking to Santa, and each child even received a special gift from Santa to take home with them.



Left: Little Scarlet with her mom, Raina, shows her gift from Santa. Right: Aubrey and "Nana" Mary Ann, came in matching PJs.



VIPS Indiana

We had so much fun in Indianapolis for our **Sensory-Friendly Santa Experience with Indy Santa-Fred**! Parents were able to snap those adorable holiday photos and Santa passed out gifts donated by the *Indianapolis Alumnae of Delta Gamma*. Families were able to enjoy food and refreshments donated by *Starbucks*. We thank *Indy Santa-Fred* for sharing his time with our families.



Santa told Jeremiah what a good boy he has been!



Lovely little Kennedy obviously delighted Indy Santa Fred.

We were so excited to host our very first **Sensory Santa - Fort Wayne Style**! A huge thank you goes to: *Cindy Bluhm, of Remax Results*, for sponsoring this event; *The Chapel*, for allowing VIPS to use their space; *Hallmark Mortgage and the Fort Wayne Mad Ants* for donating toys; and, last but not most certainly not least, thank you to *Santa Roger* for spreading holiday cheer!



VIPS Mother Tinisha, holds little Tina, while Tinirah sits on Santa's lap during the Sensory Santa event in Fort Wayne, IN.



Santa enjoyed a lapfull of Farris family kids during Sensory Santa - Fort Wayne.!

More VIPS Indiana Family Events

PEP Comes to Fort Wayne!

On February 1, 2020, VIPS held our first ever Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) in Fort Wayne, Indiana! *Cassie Morris*, an OT who specializes in feeding, discussed with parents an overview of all that is involved with feeding, including common misconceptions and the top reasons kids won't eat. She finished the discussion with a few ways parents can involve their child in mealtimes even if they aren't eating.



Little Emery, from South Bend, plays in a texture tub with volunteer, Laurel.

PEP is an opportunity for parents of children with blindness/visual impairments to gather knowledge so they can be the best advocate for their child, while also meeting other families whose lives are similar to their own. Thank you to the *Delta Gamma ladies* and *Homestead High School students* for helping with VIPS kiddos and siblings, so that parents could give their full attention to the presentation! Also, we would like to thank *Possibilities Northeast Pediatric Therapy & Autism Services* for allowing VIPS to use their space!

reVISION Opens March 13

reVISION is a unique and interactive exhibition of works by regional Indiana artists who were challenged to explore the world of art through the eyes of the visually impaired. reVISION transforms the traditional “do not touch” gallery presentation into a tactile, auditory, olfactory and spatial experience that welcomes everyone, blind and sighted alike. Opening night will be March 13. The exhibit will be open Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m., March 16 - April 30.



Kathy's Corner

By Kathy Mullen
VIPS Director of Education

Packing Your Backpack

From the moment a child begins services with Visually Impaired Preschool Services, our team begins planning for their departure. We are working with parents and caregivers to collect the essentials for success in the child's next educational setting long before the child boards the bus to a preschool or a kindergarten program – whether it be in a public, private, or home school, the Kentucky School for the Blind or the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

In my mind, I picture the VIPS team helping parents and caregivers pack their child's school backpack with some essentials:

- Through the time spent in early intervention, provided privately or through Kentucky or Indiana First Steps, VIPS has founded our services on parent advocacy. The importance of parents knowing their rights and responsibilities for working for their child's current and future successes cannot be overstated. In the world of First Steps, this is done by helping

parents recognize they are the ruler of their child's universe. They are empowered by VIPS teachers and other team members asking what is important to them so their child can enjoy a fully inclusive life within their family and community. This sets the foundation for planning an early intervention program supported by VIPS and other service providers.

- Next, a strong supply of self-advocacy needs to be added to the backpack. While the parents and guardians certainly know the needs of the child better than any other adult, the child knows their wants and needs even more so. VIPS is charged with the responsibility of helping the child find their voice, just as the parents find theirs.
- Hand-in-hand with self-advocacy comes the packing of confidence into the backpack. This will serve both the parent and child well. Parents need reminding that their opinions really do matter when a child's next placement is being decided. They need to speak up when a decision is being made about the goals included on their child's IEP (Individualized Education Program).
- Remembering that we are working with other humans in this educational world, a supply of humility would work well in this backpack. Sometimes things are just not going to be the best they can be at no fault of anyone. There will be times when parents and educators will need to step back and rethink a strategy or goal set for the child. A child needs to be empowered with the notion that it is okay to make a mistake when learning a new skill and that there is truth to the idea of practice, practice, practice makes perfect.

Sometimes this backpack is going to feel very heavy. There will be a lot of people around available to help with the burden of carrying the backpack and helping with the educational programming. Open arms are a must to accept the assistance and support that is offered by many.

Finally, it should be no surprise to anyone that there will be times when your child's backpack is going to feel very light. It may even feel empty. This is the time to remember that “Once a VIPS family, always a VIPS family.” Give us a call at VIPS. Come back for a family event. Ask for help. VIPS is always ready to help you fill that backpack once again.

In Memoriam

This issue of VISability is dedicated to the memory of

Michelle Ann Leonard

daughter of Stephanie Leonard, of Versailles, KY,
who passed away on January 21, 2020 at the age of eight.

Our hearts go out to all of those who loved Michelle.

Those Marvelous Milestones!

For VIPS parents and teachers, watching their little ones grow, develop, and make progress is something to always be celebrated. VIPS teachers share below some of the triumphs of the children they serve.

Sophia is learning how to use a magnifier to enlarge objects while looking at books. Sophia's parents and VIPS teacher, Tracy, initially introduced the magnifier in a fun, casual way, just allowing Sophia to tactually and visually explore the magnifier. Sophia was encouraged to place the magnifier on various objects and books while she was told, "The object is big," or "The object is little." At Sophia's age, the magnifier not only helps her see smaller pictures in books but helps build an understanding of size (big and



little), an important concept. Sophia has progressed from playing with the magnifier to purposely placing the magnifier on pictures as she verbalizes "big." Yay, Sophia!!

Jay is not too interested in different textures, but you can see in the picture he is reaching for the falling (fake) snow! It was fun to see him playing with new textures in our recent visit.

Meet **Pip**! Pip began receiving VIPS services after being diagnosed with Joubert Syndrome, Cortical Visual Impairment, and ocular ataxia. Thanks to teamwork and dedication, Pip has gained confidence in himself and has become quite the explorer! During VIPS Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) sessions and home visits, Pip has had the opportunity to learn about fire trucks and firefighters, animals, pre-literacy, and even some early food preparation skills while making homemade holiday sensory dough! Pip loves learning and is on his way to a bright future in pre-k with all the knowledge and confidence he has gained through early intervention. Great job, Pip, family, and team! The photos here show Pip having a blast helping to make Gingerbread Sensory Dough.



At Kidstown Preschool in Louisville, **Evan** has recently achieved many milestones due to his desire for independence. Evan has been receiving VIPS services since he was 6 months old. He has a visual diagnosis of Peters Anomaly which results in a cloudy cornea and makes his vision blurry as well as Phthosis Bulbi in his left eye which is a shrunken, non-functional eye. Evan has become more interested in moving and playing during physical playtime. He has improved in the area of gross motor skills by exploring new equipment such as climbing a slide ladder on the playground or crawling through a tunnel. He has also begun transitioning from drinking out of a bottle to a cup! Keep moving and doing, Evan!



Sometimes a simple adaptation to a toy can open the door to play and activity for a kiddo learning to use their vision. Thanks to



the creativity of Jack's family and team, **Jack** is improving upon his physical, fine motor, and visual discrimination skills. Pictured here Jack is placing large, high-contrast, colored circles into a chunky wooden puzzle with a black background. The dark plain background helps him focus on the individual colors of the puzzle with less distraction by unnecessary visual clutter. Jack's family has also found that he

loves the color red and that placing a red toy on a black blanket encourages Jack to squat, reach, and stand during his physical therapy sessions and everyday playtime. Great job, Jack, family, and team! Keep up the good work!

VIPS teacher Ms. Paige is having fun with **Avron** and his Occupational Therapist (OT) at an aqua therapy session to collaborate on strategies to help his visual attention in the water. As they were working on strategies, the lifeguard offered to turn out the overhead lights at the pool, and Avron totally lit up after this! Turning off the lights helped cut down on the visual complexity of the room, encouraging Avron to focus more on the things close by. Since Avron responds so well to



light, his team and parents realized that he was able to lift his head to look at the light that has a tactual toy placed around it. This great little light is submersible, so it was perfect to use during aqua therapy! We're so proud of Avron for holding up his head to look at it! (If you're interested in your own submersible lights, you can find them at <http://amzn.to/2IAr3xy>.)



John is developing better skills in reaching out! His Mom, Sara, set up this sensory play with icing and Jell-O mix, and you can tell he is definitely using his hands!



If you would like to share your child's milestone(s), please tell your VIPS teacher or contact the Newsletter Editor at 502-636-3207.

Parents Recommend...

Patching isn't an easy task for a child. It's hard work. I wanted to find a way to involve **Ashlyn** in the patching process to make it a little more fun for her. Once she was at an age where she noticed the different designs and colors on patches, I was on a pursuit for how to organize them in an easily accessible way so that she could choose her patch on her own. I came upon an idea online of using an over the door shoe organizer. I ordered one and filled it with patches for her choosing. Ashlyn loves being able to look at her options and choose one that she thinks looks pretty that day or matches whatever she's wearing. It makes it more exciting for her to be involved. She has ownership of the patch and her patch time.

Jessica, Ashlyn's mother



Isaiah's mom, Hannah, shared a strategy that she came up with for helping him keep a hat on (for light sensitivity/photophobia) outside. She put his jacket hood over his hat. He is able to pull the hat off, but not when there are two steps to getting it off.



If you would like to share your helpful hints for other parents, please tell your VIPS teacher or contact the Newsletter Editor at 502-636-3207.



A Special Relationship in the Classroom

By Kathy Mullen, Director of Education

A little background: I started my work in the field of special education in a Developmental First Grade classroom made up of amazing young children whose learning styles challenged their placement in a regular first grade class. I was hooked. However, almost immediately I became aware of the need to initiate services at a much younger age to be the most impactful. That's how I found my way to First Steps. That's also how I found my way to Juanita Miles, our teacher in VIPS Kids Town Preschool's blue classroom.

At the time of our first meeting, Juanita was the director of a nationally accredited early childhood education program that served children who had experienced abuse in their short lives. I was serving a few of these children who also had developmental delays according to early intervention standards. I knew her as "Miss Juanita"; she knew me as "Miss Kathy." Fast forward several years and our paths crossed again. This time, Juanita had just completed training at the Office for Vocational Rehabilitation, formerly the KY Office for the Blind/McDowell Center, for adults who had lost vision. Her classes included braille, orientation and mobility, assistive technology and home management. Juanita had been diagnosed at age ten with uveitis in her right eye but her vision remained stable, requiring no adaptations, until she was a college senior when she underwent surgery and lost all vision in her right eye. Shortly afterwards she lost most of the vision in her left eye due to uveitis, increased pressure, hemorrhages, and retinal detachments. She currently requires the use of magnifiers, closed circuit TV systems, and voice/speech on her computer and phone.

When Juanita called VIPS, I did not know that she was "Miss Juanita"; she did not know I was "Miss Kathy." What a wonderful surprise for us both! Neither of us is sure how we never learned each other's last names. Juanita was looking for additional experience with young children as a newly diagnosed visually impaired adult. VIPS was looking for a volunteer. Together we found an amazing relationship as she morphed from volunteer back into her lifetime role as a preschool teacher/Developmental Interventionist!

Juanita is an expert in many ways. She is the go-to person for assistance with children with challenging behaviors. She is also who you want helping you prepare for difficult conversations with families. But more than that, Juanita is a master in the classroom.

When I walk in the blue classroom, Juanita never speaks to me. She is completely and totally engaged in the events of the

classroom, respecting the children's space – as she should. If she is offering me information, she does it through the children. Juanita will begin a statement with “Sarah, I bet Miss Kathy would like to know....” or “Michael, can you show Miss Kathy” She is always on the floor or sitting at the children's table or in the bathroom with a little one being potty trained. Juanita is a great researcher, learning ways she can do her job even better. She teaches us all.

Juanita willingly accepts assistance offered to her. This comes in the form of her wonderful classroom assistant, Marchelle Hampton. Marchelle is the consummate grandmother



Juanita (left) and Marchelle (right) wrapping up a school day.

who uses her grandmotherly ways to encourage and support the students in the blue classroom. She knows that our students learn best by doing things for themselves and she has mastered the difference between facilitating and doing. She has learned a lot in the blue classroom as have the students.

Marchelle is more than your average classroom assistant, having taught preschool herself for many years and taken college coursework in early childhood education. She has also become Juanita's scribe for the computer work and paperwork required to run a First Steps playgroup. Though Juanita continues to be supported through the Office for the Blind and Vocational Rehabilitation with adaptive equipment for her computer and personal reading, computer work moves much more smoothly with Marchelle's assistance. Likewise, Marchelle was welcomed into the trainings for First Steps providers – a new opportunity for our State Lead Agency. She has mastered computer skills that she herself never dreamed possible. By learning these skills, Marchelle has gained more confidence and now assists others in similar tasks.

Together, Juanita and Marchelle can do so much more than they ever could separately. It's a special relationship both in and out of the classroom. Should they ever go their own ways, I am confident their paths will cross again in the future – and once again, wonderful things will happen.

Board and Staff News

VIPS Central KY Regional Director, Kelly Easton, was selected as a finalist for the Social Venture Partners (SVP) Cincinnati Fast Pitch competition. Fast Pitch is a way to showcase and accelerate nonprofits making a difference in the Greater Cincinnati area (including the Northern KY counties

served by VIPS). After going through in-depth training and individualized coaching, Kelly presented her three-minute pitch to the SVP board and was selected to compete in the Finals. This is a great opportunity to spread awareness of VIPS' mission in Northern Kentucky! It also speaks to Kelly's professionalism and polish in presenting information about VIPS! In the finals on March 31st at the Hard Rock Casino, Kelly will present her pitch to an audience of 500-700 and have the chance to win up to \$15,000 for VIPS services in Northern Kentucky.

Dani Harper, who served as Development Coordinator in the VIPS Louisville Office, has left VIPS to become the new Events Planner for the Ronald McDonald House. Dani's spirited energy and amazing people skills will carry her far. We wish her all the best! Read her farewell letter below.

Congratulations to *long-time VIPS Board of Directors member and former President of the Board, Lester Sanders*. Lester was named the 2019 Realtor of the Year by both the Greater Louisville Association of Realtors and Kentucky Realtors and now he has been elected President of the Kentucky Realtors, the first African American president in the 97-year history of the organization!

Fred Hampton, LCSW, the husband of Kids Town Preschool Classroom Assistant, *Marchelle Hampton*, has just published a book about the loss of their son, Zachariah, titled *Zachariah's Story/ Love Wins*. Marchelle shares, “It was originally going to be a book of memories for our immediate family. It quickly turned into a book that not only shares the humor, heartache and joy of raising a child with a visual impairment as well as other challenges, but also a message for anyone who has experienced trauma/loss. It is very much influenced by my husband's 30 plus years as a psychotherapist.” Marchelle adds, “Three weeks after the loss of our precious youngest son, Zachariah, I asked a friend who worked at VIPS if they could use me as a volunteer; she said they would grab me up!!! VIPS did just that and this is my sixth school year as an instructional assistant. My faith, as well as working with our unique population of little ones has been a significant part of my healing. I believe this book will be both an encouragement and a blessing.” The book is available from Westbowpress, as well as Amazon.

Dear VIPS Family...

Editor's note: *Dani Harper penned this love letter to VIPS families as a so-long (but not good-bye!) to VIPS as she embarks on a new career opportunity at the Ronald McDonald House.*

I'm Dani. You may or may not know me as a member of the VIPS team. Ten years ago when I came to VIPS, I was just a girl of 23 years old. I lacked a sense of direction or drive towards any sort of achievement in my life. I worked for a record store in Louisville as a simple sales clerk, but moving into my mid-20s, I

realized I wanted a job that provided me with more stability and regular hours. A friend of mine heard about a receptionist position opening up at a place called VIPS and suggested I apply. What was VIPS? After a quick Google search, I learned the basics about a place that helped children who are blind or visually impaired and I applied for the job immediately. Despite not having any children of my own, I had previous experience being a nanny and I loved working with kids.

Starting my job at VIPS was exciting and eye-opening. (No pun intended!) I had only interacted with a blind person a handful of times in my life and this was a whole new world for me. Every day, children would come through the doors and I'd get to meet them and watch them grow. My ignorance about children with special needs blossomed into a desire to learn as much as I could from the experts around me. What is albinism? What is CVI? What's the best way for me to offer a visually impaired person my arm to guide them? What's the best way to talk to a child with blindness? The teachers, parents and the rest of the staff at VIPS filled me with knowledge. I learned about braille, I learned about adaptable toys, I learned about g-tubes and seizures and white canes and so much more.



Dani with Vance - 2017.

Although I've always considered myself a compassionate person, I also learned just how deep that compassion could grow. I learned what to do when a parent called me in a panic after having just learned their child might never see their face. I learned about comforting and encouraging. VIPS parents and caregivers have always amazed me with their ability to show strength during a time that can seem very dark. Some parents also blew me away with their ability to remain optimistic, even if their child's future remained a mystery.

Despite what outsiders may think about an organization that serves children with many different abilities, VIPS is an incredibly happy place. VIPS is a place that celebrates every child's achievements, no matter how small. For the past ten years, I have witnessed your children take their first steps, speak their first words, and use the potty for the first time. I've also cheered your children on as I watched them work to hold their head up on their own, visually attend to nearby objects, and place their hands over dots on a page. I've proudly been a part of many Orientation and Mobility (O & M) lessons, and have comforted your children when they were sick, when they were well, on good days and bad. These children, your children, have changed my life for the better and I cannot ever show enough gratitude to you and to VIPS for allowing me to be a very small part of their lives.

The biggest lesson I've learned during my time at VIPS is that a child who is blind or visually impaired is just like any other child. I've been so proud to be able to utilize VIPS' social media platforms to share the stories of VIPS children with the world. Sharing stories like Addy singing at a basketball game or William using his pre-cane device are special moments that show the world just how wonderful your children are. But just as important as those show-stopping moments, are the moments we share about the first time a child looks at an object or the first time they lift their hand to press a switch button. Every accomplishment, big or small, is a moment to be celebrated just like a sighted child would be celebrated.

This whole letter is my big THANK YOU to everyone who makes VIPS the special place that it is. What started out as a simple job answering phones became much more to me in a very small amount of time. The team and Board of Directors here at VIPS saw potential in me that I didn't know I had. And what was "just a job" became my career and, more importantly, my true passion in life - helping others. Your family, your VIPS child, helped me develop that passion. And, in addition to my career goals manifesting themselves, my own family became personally invested in the mission of VIPS because of that passion. A fund started in memory of my uncle and godfather, Steve Molter, has continued to grow and has helped to support the very services VIPS provides to your wonderful children every day.

So, thank you for sharing your incredible children with us at VIPS. You and your children are helping to make the world a better place, just by being in it.

Become a Member of the 1985 Society

VIPS is 35 years old and remains the only agency specifically serving our unique population of young children with visual impairments in Kentucky and Indiana. What was at first only a vision by VIPS founder Sharon Bensinger, helping 8 initial families, has grown to serving thousands across two states throughout our history!

To celebrate our 35th anniversary in 2020, we've reinstated our 1985 Society. Benefits include a special 1985 Society pin, discounts for VIPS fundraising events and recognition at those events, on our website and at our annual Beacon Awards. Some have already generously donated over \$1,985 to VIPS and are official gold members. Anyone can become a member by pledging \$1,985 and donating monthly, in any amount. For the price of a weekly cup of coffee, or the amount of your Netflix subscription, you can impact the education of children who are visually impaired. Contact Angela Billings, Director of Development, at abillings@vips.org or by calling 502-498-2933 for more information.



New Arrivals

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

Adah - 2 years, Bluffton, IN
 Adelaide - 1 year, Fishers, IN
 Adele - 10 months, Washington, IN
 Alexander - 1 year, Camby, IN
 Annaleigh - 1 year, Louisville, KY
 Ariana - 1 year, Zionsville, IN
 Aurora - 2 years, Pendleton, IN
 Austin - 11 months, Ludlow, KY
 Ava - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
 Avyah - 1 year, Noblesville, IN
 Bentley - 2 years, Indianapolis, IN
 Bentley - 1 year, Camby, IN
 Brantley - 2 years, Salem, IN
 Braxton - 11 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Brexton - 2 years, Jasper, IN
 Bryson - 11 months, Louisville, KY
 Camden - 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Charron - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
 Claire - 2 years, Fort Wayne, IN
 Claire - 3 years, Fort Wayne, IN
 Connor - 1 year, Bowling Green, KY
 Coralynn - 1 year, Pierceton, IN
 Cormac - 1 year, Franklin, IN
 Darcy - 10 months, Glasgow, KY
 Davis - 3 years, Newburgh, IN

Delice - 10 months, Louisville, KY
 Easton - 2 years, Fort Wayne, IN
 Elijah - 3 years, Sharpesville, IN
 Evelyn Ann - 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Finley - 1 year, Greenwood, IN
 Greyson - 2 years, French Lick, IN
 Hudson - 11 months, Wabash, IN
 Itzell - 2 years, LaGrange, KY
 Ivy - 1 year, Fort Wayne, IN
 Jacob - 1 year, Fishers, IN
 Jameson - 1 year, Louisville, KY
 Jarman - 1 year, Bluffton, IN
 Jon Jackson - 1 year, Bowling Green, KY
 Jordan - 1 year, Deputy, IN
 Journee - 5 months, Louisville, KY
 Judah - 1 year, Charlestown, IN
 Juliana - 1 year, Auburn, IN
 Kaily - 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Kaiser - 3 years, Pittsboro, IN
 Kayla - 8 months, Redkey, IN
 Kaysan - 1 year, Princeton, IN
 Keegan - 2 years, Wakarusa, IN
 Kehlani - 2 years, Indianapolis, IN
 Kiah'Mony - 1 year, Columbus, IN

Kierra - 5 months, Huntington, IN
 Kyhlar - 9 months, Bowling Green, KY
 Lailani - 2 years, Kokomo, IN
 Lincoln - 1 year, Clarksville, IN
 Lincoln - 2 years, Vine Grove, KY
 Logan - 11 months, Lafayette, IN
 Logan - 2 years, Fort Wayne, IN
 Lorien - 2 years, Bedford, IN
 Mason - 1 year, Louisville, KY
 Mason - 1 year, Rockville, IN
 Maxwell - 1 year, Louisville, KY
 Millicent - 5 years, Louisville, KY
 Quarte - 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Rosemary - 2 years, West Lafayette, IN
 Ruthann - 2 years, Rineyville, KY
 Saniyah - 1 year, Louisville, KY
 Saylor - 5 months, Louisville, KY
 Simone - 1 year, Fort Wayne, IN
 Sheldon - 1 year, Sheridan, IN
 Stella - 1 year, Owensboro, KY
 Theodore - 1 year, Evansville, IN
 Thristan - 8 months, Earlington, KY
 Wallace - 9 months, Georgetown, KY
 Weston - 2 years, Frankfort, KY
 Wyatt - 1 year, Avon, IN

Gifts of Time, Talent and Treasure

VIPS Central KY

We appreciate the following *Delta Gammas from the University of Kentucky's Delta Beta Chapter* who volunteered for our Holiday events: *Kaylyn Brown, Annie Cross, Meg Fennell, Alyssa Gallagher, Carlie Harris, Shannon Kelly, Mallory McCarty, Abby Mills, Katrina Norris, Gabrielle Rodina, Mia Rose, Emily Silvati, Ellen Tenhundfeld, Reagan Thornton, and Chloe Vanhorn.*

Thanks so very much to the *Bluegrass Council for the Blind. Executive Director, Theresa Thomas, and her staff* adopted a VIPS child for Christmas. The family was so appreciative of the clothes, toys and gift cards and thanks them for making Christmas so blessed. Thanks also, to *VIPS Central KY board member Nancy O'Neill* for adopting another VIPS child for Christmas.

VIPS Louisville

For their wonderful work baking cookies with VIPS kids, thanks to *Trinity HS students Trevor Antle, Luke Bratzge, Robby Lindset and Elia Serfrit.*

For making tactile greeting cards, thanks to *Michael Daniels*, and other *Boy Scouts from Louisville Male High School William Cecil, Luke Chmielewski, Jon Daniels, Kyle Davis, Tyler Davis, Nick Pace, and Chase Rhodes. Cord Vinsel* also volunteered. Michael, the son of former VIPS instructional assistant, *LaRhonda Locke-Daniels*, completed his volunteer work for his Eagle Scout project at VIPS.



The boys donned vision simulators for their group picture.

We greatly appreciate the hard work of our volunteers in our office and classrooms, including: our *interns from Holy Cross,*

Leli Grimes and Emma Strange; our dedicated Kids Town volunteers, *Deanna Scoggins, Sharon Bohannon and Fran Woodward*; and our administrative helper, *Emily McCurry*.

For help with our Holiday Giving Campaign, thanks to members of the *Delta Gamma Alumnae in Louisville, including Lisa Bajorinas, Leslie Dorn, Ginny Fuller, Gigi Gibson, Martha Hemminger, Melissa Hofe, Geri Huff, Elinore Jeffcoat, Debra Johnson, Rosa Logan, Samantha Mojab, Christine Okada, Mary Frances Pack, Karin Tyrer, and Krisse White*. Thanks to *UPS volunteers* for helping send out reminder postcards for the Holiday Giving Campaign, including *Jen Arington, Charissa Baker, Mike Duncan, Angie Eckert, Bonnie Helm, Holly Herring, Leigh Ann Messer, Colleen Metzinger, Rachel Osborn, Yolanda Pate, Casey Pereira, Mike Richardson, Dorothy Thacher, and Rob Turner*.

Thanks to the *family of Betsy Montgomery*, who designated VIPS as the recipient of memorial donations in her honor upon her recent passing. Betsy passed away in November, just 12 days before her 100th birthday. The mother of VISability editor, Jan Moseley, Betsy was the recipient of a VIPS Beacon Award in 2011, in recognition of her great generosity to VIPS.

VIPS Indiana

Fred Imhausen donated his time to be our beloved “Indy Santa-Fred” at the Indianapolis Sensory Santa. He also organized a neighborhood donation and in-kind gift drive that resulted in monetary donations, gift cards, and toys for VIPS kiddos.

Every year the *Indiana University School of Education (IU SoE)* hosts a Staff Council Winter Auction to benefit a local charity. Their 2019 charity of choice was VIPS Indiana! VIPS Indiana Advisory Board Member and IU professor, Dr. Rowan Candy, spoke to the crowd about VIPS and the impact the funds will have on the population of children with visual impairments that we serve. The event raised \$2,144.20! We are incredibly grateful! It means so much to us!



VIPS Indiana staff appreciates the *family of VIPS child, Ryan Silverstein*, who asked friends and family to send donations to VIPS in memory of Ryan’s great-grandfather, Melvin Gassman, who recently passed away. We are extremely sorry for their loss and are grateful for their generosity in remembering Mr. Gassman through VIPS.

Thank you to *Gary and Nancy Bingham of Diversified Mail Services* for generously offering to send all of our Holiday Cards for our annual fund campaign at no charge.

Here’s a quick shout out to our friend, *Ally Matthews*, who made a thoughtful donation to VIPS Indiana for her eighth birthday. Ally’s reason? She has ocular albinism. She said, “I wanted to help make a difference in VIPS so I asked my friends to donate money for my birthday. I chose to gather donations for VIPS because I didn’t want the kids to have the same toys.” Ally, the daughter of Melisa Matthews, Blind/Low Vision Specialist with VIPS IN, also noted, “I wanted to make a better selection of toys so the kids can work on their vision with the help from the providers [like her mom] ... sometimes the kids might like newer toys. It helps the families know what to do and how to help their child.”



Notes of Interest

Can I Tell You about Nystagmus?, is a children’s book by Nadine Neckles, that tells the story of a girl named Amber who has nystagmus. It is for children aged seven and up, their parents, teachers and other professionals working with individuals with nystagmus. It includes a list of easy adaptations for school and home and a list of recommended resources for additional support, all to increase awareness about the condition and to build self-esteem and self-confidence for children with the condition. Find it at Amazon.com for \$13.95 www.Amazon.com/Nystagmus.



Reusable braille labels from <https://candoable.co> are plastic half-rings that feature braille on the outside and engraved letters on the inside. They can be used to label canned goods, spices and other food products. with prices from \$3 each. There are many other types of Braille labels available including medicines, beverages, etc. including custom labels. They run \$3 each.

Perkins School for the Blind recently petitioned the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for the establishment of a consistent, clear, recognizable sound for hybrid and electric cars. For people who rely on hearing to recognize that a vehicle is nearby while determining how to proceed on foot in traffic, the silence of hybrid and electric cars can be deadly. Automakers have been lobbying for a new rule allowing consumers to choose a preferred individualistic

sound for their silent vehicles which would only confuse the listener and cause even more difficulty in recognizing just what is approaching. Public comments were requested by November 1st so stay tuned!

Recent Grants and Donations

VIPS is so grateful to the organizations, foundations, and individuals who donate generously to support our mission. Here is a recap of recent funding support.

VIPS Central KY

- **Linda Neville Trust** - \$31,000 to assist in funding the Early Childhood Intervention program and VISability Newsletter.
- **George Weeks Trust** - \$14,340 to assist in funding the Early Childhood Intervention program.
- **Kings Sons & Daughters** - \$3,987 for a sensory wall and tactile tools.

VIPS Louisville

- **iHeartMedia Louisville** - \$30,000 gift in kind in promotional airtime.
- **IPA Foundation** - \$12,490 for IT/Technology.
- **Lift A Life Novak Family Foundation** - \$20,000 for the Early Childhood Intervention Program
- **King's Daughters & Sons Foundation of KY** - \$10,990 for IT

VIPS Indiana

We thank the following for providing funds for the early childhood intervention program:

- **Smithville Charitable Foundation, Inc.** - \$7,500
- **James E. Huffer and Betty J. Huffer Foundation** - \$6,000
- **Costco Wholesale** - \$5,000
- **The Samerian Foundation** - \$3,500

VIPS Indiana is incredibly grateful this holiday season as we were awarded a \$20,000 **Junior League of Indianapolis** Community Assistance Grant that will help fund our Lending Library in our new Family Resource Center! The Lending Library will be open to the families served by VIPS and will include braille and large print books, Lightboxes and other adapted learning tools young children who are blind or visually impaired need to start their journey in early literacy.



From Diane's Desk

by Diane Nelson
Executive Director

I want to share some exciting news about wonderful gifts for two special VIPS projects!

The first is our new cost saving grant. We have been trying to find ways to continue to welcome more and more families on our limited budget. Thanks to the generosity of the **Irvin F. & Alice S. Etscorn Charitable Foundation**, VIPS has been gifted a \$60,000 grant to cover the purchase of two 2020 Nissan Altimas inclusive of a five year bumper to bumper warranty, prepaid maintenance, prepaid insurance coverage, tire replacement and support with fuel costs.

These two cars will allow teachers to safely travel across Kentucky and Indiana greater distances to educate children with visual impairments in their homes at no cost to VIPS. **Neil Huffman Nissan** really contributed to stretching our dollars as well on this project by selling us the cars at a wonderful discount. With an MPG of 38 on the highway, we will be able to save about \$25,000 per year in current travel costs and over a six year period that translates to \$150,000 which will allow us to hire more teachers, our greatest need. We are so grateful for the Etscorn Charitable Foundation and their amazing generosity.

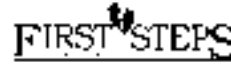
The second project involves the purchase of a property adjacent to the Louisville Office. Last year, VIPS jumped at the chance to buy available vacant land and a house on the rear of our existing property to address our need for expanded parking and access to our Kids Town Preschool. On a leap of faith, we used a line of credit in order to make this critical purchase with the hope of finding partners to help us become debt free once again. VIPS' primary need is teacher's salaries and we gratefully look to our foundation partners to help us maintain that fiscal focus. Two of our long term supporters have stepped up to make the dream a reality. **Kosair Charities** generously awarded us \$125,000 in the form of a matching challenge grant to pay off half the \$250,000 mortgage. That challenge was answered by the equally generous gift from the **Kentucky School for the Blind Charitable Foundation** as part of a new Community Collaboration Grant initiative. We are so very grateful for Kosair Charities and KSBCF for the investment in the future of children with blindness.



1906 Goldsmith Lane
Louisville, KY 40218

Visually Impaired
Preschool Services

Change Service Requested



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

Upcoming Events

VIPS families are welcome to attend any events sponsored by a VIPS Office, regardless of location.

Friday, March 13 – April 30

Opening night for The reVISION Tactile Art Show at the Indiana Interchurch Center, 1100 W. 42nd St., in Indianapolis, 6 – 8 p.m. Bring your family out to a night of food, art, and inclusivity. Show continues at the Indiana Interchurch Center, Monday - Friday, 8 am - 4 pm, March 16- April 30.

Saturday, April 4

VIPS Indiana Spring Parent Empowerment Program (PEP), 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Talking Book and Braille Library at the Indiana State Library, in Indianapolis. Contact Rita to RSVP at rdevore@vips.org.

Saturday, April 11

VIPS Louisville Egg Hunt. For more information, visit www.vips.org or call 502-636-3207.

Kids Town Preschool Dates to Remember

Please note, there will be no school at Kids Town Preschool on these dates:

- Friday, March 20
- Friday, March 27
- Monday, March 30 - Friday, April 3 (Spring Break)
- Friday, April 24
- Monday, April 27
- Friday, May 1
- Monday & Tuesday, May 18 -19

Sunday, May 17

Walking for Dreams Family & Pet Walk, Indianapolis. Help VIPS Indiana boost awareness, create community partnerships, and raise money. Form a team and start raising money today. This is our biggest fundraiser!! We would like to exceed the \$22,000 we raised last year so we need your help! Contact aross@vips.org for information.

Monday, May 18

YUM/BB&T Corporate Cup Golf Tournament, Audubon Country Club, Louisville. For more information, visit www.vips.org or call 502-636-3207.

Monday, May 25

All VIPS Offices closed for Memorial Day.

Thursday, May 28

VIPS Kids Town Preschool Graduation. For more information, visit www.vips.org or call 502-636-3207.

Saturday, May 30

VIPS Gala (formerly Tennis Ball) at the Louisville Boat Club. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., \$100 per person. For more information, visit www.vips.org or call 502-636-3207.

Monday, June 8

First Day of VIPS Kids Town Preschool Summer Program. For more information, visit www.vips.org or call 502-636-3207.

Saturday & Sunday, July 11 & 12

VIPS First Annual Pickleball Tournament at the Springhurst Multi Sport Center, Louisville, KY. For more information, visit www.vips.org or call 502-636-3207.

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

VIPS-Louisville

1906 Goldsmith Lane, Louisville, KY 40218
(502) 636-3207 FAX (502) 636-0024
Toll free 1-888-636-8477 E-mail: info@vips.org
Website: www.vips.org
Diane Nelson, Executive Director
Kathy Mullen, Director of Education
Angela Billings, Development
Christina Frasher, Accountant
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
Julie Hampton, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Marchelle Hampton, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Debbie Hardesty, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Pam Holladay, TVI
Kristen Horlander, Preschool Assistant Director
Paige Maynard, TV/Developmental Interventionist
Staci Maynard, Provisional TVI/Preschool Teacher
Juanita Miles, Twos Preschool Teacher
Jan Moseley, Visual Impairment Specialist
Shai Mullins, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Beth Owens, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Brenda Pharis, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Wrae Sanders, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Dani Savick, Preschool Instructional Assistant
Kirsten Schmidt, Welcome & Family Support
Carla Vied, Developmental Interventionist
Tracy Webb, Developmental Interventionist
Maury Weedman, O&M Specialist/Facilities Manager
Brittany Williamson, TVI/Preschool Teacher

VIPS-Central Kentucky

350 Henry Clay Blvd., Lexington, KY 40502
(859) 276-0335 FAX (859) 276-4379
Toll free 1-888-254-8477 E-mail: vipslex@vips.org
Kelly Easton, Regional Director
Mary Smyth, Assistant Director
Rebecca Chinn, Little Learners Assistant
Tammy Maynard, Developmental Interventionist
Lesley Lusher, Developmental Interventionist
Dixie Miller Marz, TV/DI/Little Learners Teacher

VIPS-Indiana

1100 W. 42nd Street, Suite 228, Indianapolis, IN 46208
Toll Free 1-888-824-2197 FAX 1-502-636-0024
E-Mail: vipsindiana@vips.org
Meredith Howell, Regional Director
Melissa Barrick, Blind/Low Vision Specialist/OTR
Rita DeVore, Administrative Asst./Special Projects Coord.
Melisa Matthews, Blind/Low Vision Specialist
Amy Nichols, Teacher of Blind/Low Vision
Ashley Ross, Development Coordinator
David Sterne, Lead Blind/Low Vision Specialist