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## An Opportunity for Innovation

*By Diane Nelson, VIPS Executive Director*

In eight short years, VIPS has grown from serving 280 children to 751 throughout all of Kentucky and Indiana.

Fiscal Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total Children Served	280	343	373	386	454	526	605	705	751

I am bursting with pride in what VIPS accomplished during the 2019-20 FY (7/1/19 – 6/30/20) and this Pandemic. It has been a time in which we have been challenged to be creative and innovative in how we provide services. We have so many outside agencies reaching out to us to hear how we have accomplished our services, our fundraising and our positive attitudes through it all. The numbers tell the true story of our collective impact for children served by VIPS across Kentucky and Indiana!

- Just during the period of COVID 19, March 16 - May 31, 2020, VIPS Team Members provided:
- 1,183 virtual home visits from March 13 to July 31.
- 85+ Zoom meetings with VIPS Kids Town Preschool Classes
- 330+ virtual lessons on Class Dojo
- 120+ learning packets to Kids Town Preschoolers
- 18 Kids Town Preschool graduation celebrations!

I am energized by the new future we are creating in order to emerge as an even better, broader and brighter provider of critical early intervention for children with vision loss.

## Turning Lemons into Lemonade

*by Kathy Mullens, VIPS Director of Education*

My grandmother was right. Too much of a good thing is not a good thing. She was usually referring to her world famous “panny cakes” or Thanksgiving pumpkin pie.

For teachers, sometimes the good thing is a day at school without students. During a typical school year on non-student days, you might hear teachers and school administrators say, “Wow, you can get so much done at school when there aren’t students around to distract you.” COVID-19 has made us eat our words. We miss our Kids Town Preschool Students! Our halls and classrooms are empty. The playground and sensory room are too quiet. Kosair Kids Town and the Kids Town kitchen are staying too clean and organized. We feel lost.



**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.**

While the majority of our families served through First Steps and private grants have made a seamless switch to virtual home visit through tele-intervention, some have opted to take a break from services for a bit. WE MISS OUR VIPS FAMILIES AND BABIES! Some of us have actually missed driving across the states of Kentucky and Indiana. Some of us are bragging about our clean cars. Some of us can't believe we are on time for every appointment. This is strange for all!

Unplanned changes in our schedules notwithstanding, our work has continued. VIPS Indiana has experienced an EXPLOSION of referrals for services by our wonderful Teachers of the Blind and Low Vision and early interventionists/VI specialists. Remarkably, they have stayed on top of the growing pile of referrals with the relentless work of an amazing support team in the VIPS Indiana office. Even teachers out of the VIPS Louisville office have taken on more children from Indiana to lessen the load.

Our VIPS Louisville team welcomed student teachers for the summer; that's right – student teaching remotely! That has filled the workload of two of our seasoned VIPS teachers.

The rest of the VIPS Kentucky Education Team was not left out of the summer workload. With time out of the classroom, it was time to put these expertly creative individuals to work with dreaming and scheming for our future. Check out the list of jobs they have taken on and are well on the way to wrapping up:

- Designing a preschool curriculum that will expand the whole school year and in to the summer, combining the Kentucky Early Learning Standards and the Expanded Core Curriculum for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired. The curriculum allows the appropriate amount of student choice to make it a developmentally appropriate resource for all. The designers of the curriculum made sure to provide a well-rounded option of learning activities that will meet the needs of all students and even include the adaptations that may be needed for home instruction during Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) as a result of COVID-19. A representative from the American Printing House is consulting with the curriculum writers, adding appropriate learning materials from the vast APH catalog.
- Designing a physical education curriculum for preschoolers who are blind or visually impaired. The authors of this curriculum have taken the developmental lists included in early childhood assessments and screenings, as well as assessments designed specifically for young children who are blind or visually impaired, and combined them with sporting events that all young children enjoy. The children will learn rules of the games while improving motor skills and planting the seeds for a lifetime of activity and living a healthy lifestyle. A representative from Blind Athletes of America is already asking when he can come see the curriculum in action.

- Developing environmental checklists assessing the readiness of an infant-toddler classroom and a classroom for older preschoolers to welcome a young child who is blind or visually impaired. Our team even prepared checklists for the home environment and for preparing for a virtual home visit. (Thank you, COVID-19!)
- Increasing our Child Find efforts across the commonwealth of Kentucky by first identifying all of the medical offices housing ophthalmologists and optometrists and then visiting them personally to update the medical teams on the services provided by VIPS.
- Cleaning, scrubbing, disinfecting, wiping down, mopping up, clearing out classrooms, files, kitchens, and storage rooms. Think spring cleaning ALL summer long.
- Collaborating with the American Printing House and Cincinnati Children's Hospital and Medical Center to design trainings (online, of course!) for educators and the medical community.

And much, much more! Perhaps I could have saved you the time it took to read this article with a simple summary of what Team VIPS has been doing this summer:

***Team VIPS has spent Summer 2020 GROWING and IMPROVING the services we provide to children and families across Kentucky and Indiana!***

I think my grandma would be proud of our work. She might even correct her way of thinking: When it comes to growing and improving, there is no such thing as too much of a good thing.

## AER Accreditation

*By Kathy Mullen, VIPS Director of Education*

Visually Impaired Preschool Services (VIPS) has launched its next great administrative adventure as the accreditation process begins with the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER). Previously, VIPS Kids Town Preschool was accredited by Cognia (formerly AdvancED) and in doing so was nationally recognized.

However, with the realization that visitors from around the world do not come to VIPS because VIPS Kids Town Preschool is a wonderful preschool, but rather because Kids Town Preschool is a wonderful preschool specifically designed to teach children who are blind or visually impaired, AER seemed like a better fit. With a bit of education and advocacy, the Kentucky Division of Child Care and Kentucky Board of Education agreed that accreditation through AER was an appropriate path to travel. And so we pursue this new goal.

The documentation required for accreditation is mountainous. The self-study workbook alone is 116 pages! (Any volunteers?) There are approximately 50 artifacts that need to be collected and included in the self-study. Groups of stakeholders will be identified for interviewing by the visiting review team. VIPS will be responsible for identifying its greatest gifts and the areas that are in the greatest need of improvement.

Perhaps the most exciting part of being accredited through AER is the wide breadth of services the review team will recognize and evaluate. Our former accreditation was for our amazing VIPS Kids Town Preschool alone. This time around, the preschool will be joined by our home visitation program and virtual home visits in being accredited. Thus, the recognition will be shared agency-wide, between our two states and three offices. As it should be!

The accreditation process will be long and thorough and at the end of the road, VIPS will be a better agency. Our hearts are already swelling with pride!

## Play Frame Warning!!!

It has come to our attention that the PVC pipe with which our play frames are constructed is a carcinogenic. Yes, this is the same material that most plastic toys for children of all ages is made of, as well as the water pipes in any home built or updated in the past 25 years. Think ice makers, too. Due to the fact that these products are still on the market and the research on PVC takes a bit of investigating, the risk is recognized as very low. Nonetheless, we need to be proactive in keeping our VIPS babies and families safe. Therefore we are providing the following Play Frame Supervision statement:

***Play frames are provided for presenting objects in a manner to increase child engagement and exploration. They are to be used under the supervision of an adult at all times.***

Wrapping the play frame with duct tape can provide a safe “coating” for the PVC pipe. Duct tape is made of safe materials that only become toxic when they burn.

## A VIPS Mom’s Blog

If you are looking for honest, sometimes raw, and healing insights from another parent, checkout the blog ***Encouraging Ellis*** at <https://www.facebook.com/encouragingellis>, by VIPS mom, Ashley. In a recent post, Ashley writes:

*This week I scrolled through social media and saw a friend complaining about their toddler’s tantrum, a friend*

*whose child is being monitored by a specialist, a friend whose child will need a small risk surgery, and a friend whose baby was discharged from the NICU after two days.*

•••

*I saw all of these posts and my mind selfishly went, “It’s not that bad, not that big of a deal. It could be worse, we’ve lived worse. Your kid will be fine.” And then I caught myself. Thoughts like those are less frequent for me than they used to be, but they still creep their ugly way in sometimes.*

••••

*Pain is pain. Trauma is trauma. It’s all relative to the lives they affect. Any doctors appointment for your child that isn’t a routine milestone wellness check is scary. Any surgery for your child is terrifying. One day spent in the NICU is one day too many. Pain is pain. Trauma is trauma. There’s not one bigger or any worse than the other.*

••••

*Just because you think you have had it worse than someone else doesn’t mean they can’t be hurting. And just because you see someone who might be suffering more than you doesn’t make your experience any less.*

••••

*I think that when you, or your child, has experienced the worst thing that you can imagine, sometimes other people’s pain can pale in comparison. But that’s the thing: there is no comparison. We’re all just parents trying to do what’s best for our kids.”*



*Ashley with husband, Steven, and daughter, Ellis.*

## New and Improved CVI Resources

The **Perkins School for the Blind** in Massachusetts has just launched [www.perkins.org/cvi-now](http://www.perkins.org/cvi-now), a new website and Facebook group dedicated to supporting families of children with Cortical Visual Impairment/Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI), the fastest growing cause of blindness in children in the U.S.

Supporting families and students is always the number one priority. Unfortunately, there are not nearly enough resources available for families of kids with CVI; Perkins is committed to

creating a CVI Center of Excellence, with the goal of ensuring every family has the resources they need for their child to flourish. Perkins is proud to unveil CVI Now as their first major step toward that goal.

With current, vetted and accurate information and resources, stories from other families about their own CVI journey, must-have parenting advice and a Facebook group devoted to building connections between families, CVI Now is a safe space for families of kids with CVI to connect, share and find answers they can trust.

The **American Printing House for the Blind** also offers a broad CVI section of their website at <https://cvi.aphtech.org/>, filled with information about the diagnosis and needs of students with CVI. It covers educational materials available for CVI, assessments, teaching strategies, literacy and communication, orientation and mobility, and the Expanded Core Curriculum.



## The Blind Services Coalition of KY 5th Annual Eye Opening Symposium

Sponsored by Retina Associates of Kentucky

### Offering in-person or virtual attendance options!

Thursday, Oct. 29, 8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Fayette County Extension Office

1140 Harry Sykes Way  
Lexington, KY 40504

### Session Descriptions:

#### *The State of Genetic Diagnosis and Therapy in 2020*

Ramiro S. Maldonado, MD, Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology, University of Kentucky

#### *What You Need to Know About Orientation & Mobility*

Justin Kaiser, Ph.D., Clinical Assistant Professor of Vision Impairment Program, College of Education, Department of Early Childhood, Special Education, and Counselor Education, University of Kentucky

#### *Guide Techniques*

Jennifer Roark, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist and  
Kenny Williams, Community Volunteer

#### *Updates in Assistive Technology for Visual Impairment*

Kristen Piery, O.D., Director of Optometry, University of Kentucky

#### *Vision Loss: The Journey from Grief to Acceptance*

Susan Ament, Ph.D, Bluegrass Council of the Blind and Jeffrey N. Jackson, Psy.D, Licensed Psychologist, Lexington VA

CEU's pending for CRC, ACVREP, JCAHPO, and Social Work

**Register today for this free event!** Go to: <http://fayette.ca.uky.edu/eos> to register. A limited number of in-person seats are available. Masks will be required for everyone attending in-person. Masks will be provided if needed.

Agenda in Braille available upon request.

# Tell Your Story!!



**October is Blindness & Visual Impairment Awareness Month** and we would like to share your child's story during the month on Facebook and in our newsletter.

This is a great opportunity to celebrate your child, inspire other parents, receive encouragement from other parents as they respond to your story, and bring awareness to the community of what it's like to raise a child who is blind or visually impaired. Stories from current, as well as former, VIPS parents are welcome! Some suggestions to get the creative juices flowing are:

- A sweet or special moment with your child;
- Your child's successes, or challenges;
- Your personal thoughts about your child/family;
- Things people may have said or done that have encouraged or discouraged you;
- Any assistance or obstacle that you may have encountered in your community;
- People that have impacted you/your child's life;
- A day-in-the-life-of your child and family; or
- Your child's progress since birth.

The length of your story is up to you. It can be a few sentences to a few paragraphs. Please include pictures of your child along with your story. We will be encouraging people to share and forward all of the stories to their family and friends with the hope they will become viral. Send your stories and pictures to [msmyth@vips.org](mailto:msmyth@vips.org).

# Onward and Upward!

The teachers and instructional assistants of Kids Town Preschool at VIPs were not about to let a pandemic stop them from celebrating the 18 children graduating and moving on to kindergarten in 2020! Special deliveries were made to each child's home to give them diplomas and little year-end gifts of love. Most of these children have spent several years with VIPs, beginning with early intervention and finishing with a couple of very special and impactful years in Kids Town Preschool. Throughout their time with VIPs, these children have grown and progressed so much! It's hard to let them and their wonderful families go!

## Congratulations, Class of 2020 Graduates

- Aubrey Bennett
- Mikaela Caban
- Hannah Casterin
- Gabriel Forrest
- Kya Gilbert-Brooks
- Camilo Gomez-van Wouwe
- Anthony Griffith
- Caden Menkhaus
- Eli Menkhaus
- Athena Neagle
- Connor Pierce
- Vivaan Poorjay
- Evan Tennill
- Atticus Townley
- Samantha Vardeman
- Bradley Wines
- Conner Wright
- Maddie Yocum



Anthony



Maddie

We will miss you and your families! Please stay in touch! Or better yet, come back to let us see how you are growing in mind, body and spirit!!



Evan (left) and Connor W. (right) with their instructional teams.



Left to right:

- Top row -- Camilo, Connor & Bradley
- 2nd row -- Gabriel, Atticus & Athena
- 3rd Row -- Maddie, Eli, Caden & Hannah



Mikaela (left) and Kya (right)

### Aubrey's Graduation Story

by Christina Allen, Aubrey's teacher and TVI/DI, VIPs Louisville

Aubrey began receiving VIPs early intervention services at the age of two. She then continued her education at VIPs Kids Town Preschool for three years. Aubrey is a very smart child and can identify letters, shapes, numbers, and colors. She knows her first and last name, age, and birthday. She can also read familiar words and books. She is challenged by social interactions with

peers and unfamiliar individuals. Given her social challenges, we were surprised by how thrilled she was with our visit.

Maryann, Aubrey's "Nana," and a very proud supporter of the VIPS Community wrote:

*"Aubrey had the biggest smile on her face and jumped for excitement as she saw all the VIPS staff come out of their cars and run into the garage (to get out of the rain). The rain soon stopped and we moved outside. Aubrey was proud to get her picture with her teachers and support staff. She loved the special presents selected just for her and loved all the special attention."*

Aubrey recognized all the teachers and staff despite their masks. She felt comfortable wearing her graduation robe to have her picture taken. She also enjoyed coloring and writing letters with her new crayons as well as looking through her new books. She was so happy. Aubrey and her family will be dearly missed as she transitions from VIPS. This graduation visit was definitely one for the books for many reasons but especially because of how meaningful it was for Aubrey.

Nana was thrilled!

*"For Aubrey's mother, Opal, and me, it was a joyful and sad experience. It marked the ending of a very important part of our lives. It was at VIPS that Aubrey took her (participated in) First Steps while in the Twos Program with Ms. Juanita. VIPS is where Aubrey learned how to participate in activities with other children and learned to trust other adults. I will miss the almost daily contact with very caring, experienced staff that were always willing to share their knowledge and experience with Aubrey's mother and me as we struggled to find the resources to meet Aubrey's needs. She has been greatly influenced by her experiences with her caring teachers. It is comforting to know that the doors of VIPS are always open for help and support as we take the big step forward."*



*Aubrey, in purple gown, surrounded by her instructional team, with her Mom, Opal, on the far left and her Nana, Mary Ann, on the far right.*

## Class Dojo Explained

*by Christina Allen, TV/DI, VIPS Kids Town Preschool, VIPS Louisville*

**Editor's Note:** A silver-lining to COVID-19! Class Dojo makes it possible for VIPS Kids Town Preschool and Little Learners Class in Central KY to expand services to students who cannot physically attend these locations due to distance. These services will be offered on a tuition-basis or through school contract reimbursement. Two students from Tennessee have recently joined in the learning!

Dojo is an online platform to connect with students, teachers, and families through email. Dojo can be used on a desktop computer, tablet, and/or smart phone. Class Dojo is very much like a social media site for your school and/or classroom, either of which can have an account. On the school account, parents can view everything staff and teachers post such as pictures, news and updates, as well as instructional videos. In the classroom account, students have their own avatar to represent themselves.

Teachers can send quick positive comments to families about the child's progress such as "helping others," "on task," "participating," etc. They can also send quick notes to families on specific skills they need assistance with under the Needs Work tab. Teachers can also send private messages to parents in the classroom account.

Each student also has a Portfolio tab on their avatar/account where their work can be shared privately with their teacher. Also on the Portfolio tab, teachers can post personal or adapted assignments to meet the individual needs of the child.

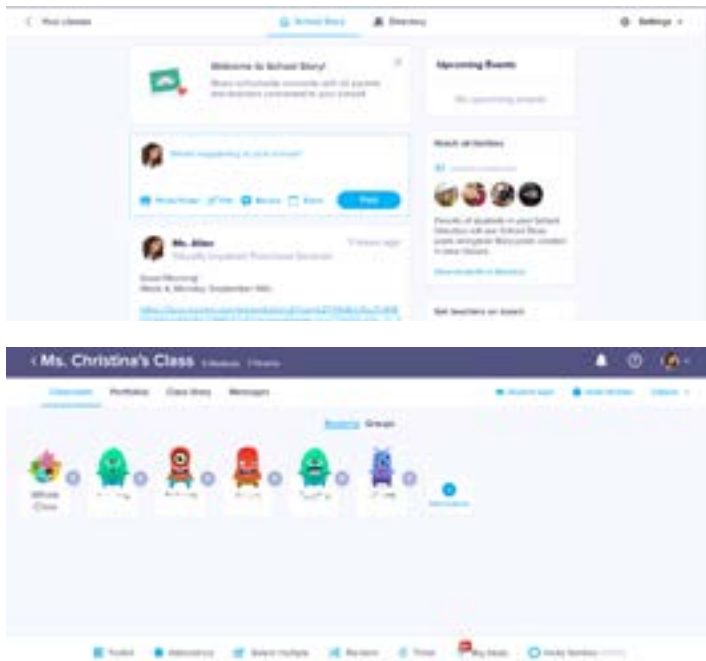
VIPS started using Dojo last school year. All of our families from Louisville Kids Town Preschool received an invitation to use Dojo before school started in August of 2019. In the Spring, 98% (48/49) of our families were connected to Class Dojo. Now all of our students are connected and use Class Dojo for non-traditional instruction (NTI). Due to COVID-19, Dojo has become our main communication and instructional platform.

VIPS Louisville, Lexington, and Indiana staffs are now connected to our school Dojo account. Teachers and staff post a link to a Google Slide to receive their daily instruction. These include instructional videos, pictures, and various resources, consistently including adaptations for the blind and visually impaired, to ensure learning continues at home. Teachers are collaborating to ensure Dojo lessons focus on basic subject areas such as math, literacy, science, as well as physical and social-emotional health. Students also receive daily skills and activities from the Expanded Core Curriculum. Parent involvement is necessary when using this type of instruction and especially when making adaptations for their child's visual and/or developmental

*"One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child."*

*María Montessori*

needs. Virtual instruction via Class Dojo has continued and will continue for VIPS families until COVID regulations have been lifted or modified.



Sample Class Dojo windows

## Please Help Us Build Our Multicultural Library!

Our teachers have been busy this summer researching books for young children with multicultural themes. They have come up with quite a wish list of wonderful books appropriate for our preschool and lending library.

A great number of books are available through Amazon. Our Amazon book wish list can be found at <https://a.co/d2d6zAh>.

Books that are available from other sources, as well as local retailers, include:

### From Barnes & Noble

- We're Different, We're the Same by Bobbi Jane Kates - \$4.99
- The Colors of Us by Karen Katz - 2 copies, \$7.99 each
- Little Heroes of Color by David Heredia - 2 copies, \$10.99 each
- The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family by Ibtihaj Muhammed and S.K. Ali - \$9.99

### From ABC Books

- We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga by Traci Sorell - \$13.52
- All Kinds of People by Shelley Rotner and Shelia M. Kelly - 2 copies, \$7.50

### From Ebay

- Say Hello! By Rachel Isadora - 2 copies, \$4.90 each
- The Story of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Johnny Ray Moore - \$8.09
- Families, Clothes, Schools, Homes Series by Pebble Fun - \$49.99
- Let's Go Play- A Children's Book About Adaptive Equipment and Inclusion by Shelby McCarthy - 2 copies, \$14.95 each

### From Target

- Why Johnny Doesn't Flap: NT Is OK! By Clay Morton and Gail Morton - \$10.99
- A is for Awesome by Eva Chen - 2 copies, \$6.22 each

### From Walmart

- Shades of People by Shelley Rotner and Shelia M. Kelly - 2 copies, \$8.42 each

### From Books A Million

- I Am Jackie Robinson by Brad Meltzer - \$5.97

### From National Braille Press

- Amazing Grace (Braille) by Mary Hoffman and Caroline Binch - \$17.99

### From Facebook

- The Blind Princess (Braille) by Michael Shipman - \$10.00  
<https://www.facebook.com/commerce/products/>

If you are able to help purchase any of these books, it would be greatly appreciated!

## Maximizing Learning at Home

By Tracy Webb, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS Louisville

It seems like overnight all of our lives changed. We are home now more than ever, allowing many opportunities for us to set the stage and enhance our child's learning. Learning doesn't have to be a planned, set-aside time. It can happen naturally during our daily routines and activities. My goal in this article is to give you practical

ways to make everyday activities a learning experience. I have tried to include ideas for all children birth to five regardless of ability. If you like these ideas but are struggling with how to adapt for your child, please contact me [twebb@vips.org](mailto:twebb@vips.org) or your VIPS teacher.

First and foremost, it will help your child if your family has predictable routines in the home. It is not vital you stick to a set time but, more importantly, a predictable sequence. Routines give your child a sense of security and control. In the midst of these predictable routines, remember to use language, language, and more language. For a child with a visual impairment, you are his/her window to the world. Talk about activities you are engaged in and verbally prepare your child for transitions throughout the day. As you engage in daily activities, verbally describe the sounds, sights, and touch your child is experiencing.

### ***In the Kitchen:***

- Provide a space in your kitchen for your child to explore safe items: plastic bowls, measuring cups, wooden spoons, etc. Play with various sized bowls and measuring cups provides natural opportunities for nesting and are great ways for your child to build an understanding of size.
- Allow opportunities for your child to safely touch and explore various sized utensils including smaller eating utensil and larger serving utensils. As your child explores, verbally describe the size, shape, and components (plastic, silver, etc.) of each utensil. First model, then let your child practice sorting utensils in a cutlery tray. If you have various sized and styles of utensils, model and then let your child sort by size (big/little), color, shape, or function.
- Your young child can explore sound by tapping spoons together or tapping a spoon on a metal bowl.
- Older children can help set the table as you count and identify the utensils and dishes you are placing on the table. Practice counting with your child (e.g., How many plates do we need?).
- Involve your child in the cooking process. Let him/her scoop, transfer, or add ingredients to dishes. Talk about the temperature of foods in the kitchen (e.g. ice is cold, boiling water on the stove is hot). Explain to your child why some foods are kept in the refrigerator while others are kept in the pantry.
- If your child has multiple disabilities, bring him/her into the kitchen with you. Talk to your child about what you are cooking and the smells he/she might be smelling. If appropriate, let your child touch some of the ingredients and assist in stirring. Touching various objects in the kitchen provides opportunities to explore new and different textures.

### ***In the Bath:***

- Bath time is an ideal time to help build body awareness. As you give your child a bath, teach body parts by saying, "I'm washing your arms," (legs, knees, etc.).
- Make bath time fun by giving your child time to play in the tub. Provide containers of various sizes and shapes so that your child can pour and transfer water.
- Engage your child in mirror exploration. Let your child look and touch the mirror as you describe to your child what he/she is seeing. Talk about your facial expressions and encourage your child to imitate.
- Encourage your child to take off/put on their clothing before and after his/her bath. If your child is not yet ready for undressing, encourage your child to help in this process by stating, "Hold your right arm up," (left leg up, etc.).

### ***Doing Laundry:***

- Let your child touch clothes right out of the dryer as you talk about their textures and the temperature (warm/hot).
- Let your child help sort and fold laundry. Pairing socks is a great way for your child to strengthen matching skills.

### ***When Diapering:***

- Diapering is a time to talk and/or sing to your child. Create games to build body awareness such as "Where are your toes?".
- Help your child understand the concept of "wet" or "dry" by using language to tell your child if his/her diaper is wet or dry.

Learning doesn't stop once the online lessons do! Be creative with activities shared with your child. And don't forget to talk, talk, talk about all we are seeing and doing! While we are spending more time at home, capitalize on the many learning possibilities offered by everyday items and activities available there!

## **Those Marvelous Milestones!**

Our children work very hard to accomplish the goals we set for them. For a VIPS child, achieving a typical milestone may take a bit longer and a bit more work. Sometimes a lot more! In this issue, we are celebrating several children for their recent developmental achievements!

**Ava** -- Alyssa wrote about her wonderful daughter, Ava. "VIPS and the amazing Ms. Mindy entered our lives shortly before our



daughter Ava's first birthday. Ms. Mindy always fills our home with kindness, encouragement, and amazing tools of the trade. In March, 2020, Mindy came with a large, self-constructed vision room in tow. I was amazed at the craftsmanship and effort. Ava became so interactive in her vision room: reaching for things, feeling the textures, gazing at the shiny objects. She even rolled over for the very first time in her vision room.



*Ava rolling over for the first time!*

Each session, Ms. Mindy would bring us new objects to hang in the room to keep Ava working. She didn't even let the pandemic stop her. She now mails us a large box of visual goodies every month. The progress Ava has made with her vision room spills over into absolutely every other aspect of her life and into our lives. Thank you VIPS and Ms. Mindy!"

**Brooks** -- Brooks' mom, Shelia, was so excited when she was able to brush Brook's teeth WITH a toothbrush for the first time EVER! "He didn't cry and even grinned and let me brush his tongue a little while he was taking his bath!"



**Callaway** -- Callaway has started walking! Mom shared that there are a few spots in the house that are more challenging for him. His teacher, Ms. Melisa, says, "We will address this at a later day. It is important for me to give only a few things to work on between so as to not overwhelm families during this already overwhelming time." Melisa and mom have recruited Callaway's sister to help -- she will be working on hiding things under some buckets to encourage him to look under the buckets to find them. Asking siblings to help allows them to feel important and involved as well as helping the parents to support their child.



**Brendyn**-- Brendyn's teacher, Ms. Tracy, explains that his diagnosis of CVI or Cortical Visual Impairment is different than ocular-based visual impairments -- the problem is not within the eye itself but in the visual processing center or visual pathways of the brain. A characteristic often seen in children with CVI is the difficulty to visually process pictures or 2D objects. Brendyn's current goals include increasing visual alertness to his books as his mom reads to him. His love for watching Elmo videos and his preferred color red were the basis for introducing Elmo books. Brendyn's visual attention to his Elmo book has increased with

opportunities to view the book. During a recent virtual visit, Brendyn moved closer to the book to not only "look" at Elmo but also touched Elmo! This is a huge accomplishment for a child with CVI and we commend both Brendyn's mom and his nurse, Karen, for implementing CVI strategies to strengthen his ability to process 2D images. Yay, Brendyn!!



*Brendyn looks at a picture of Elmo while his nurse, Karen, holds the book in front of him at eye level.*

## VIPS Parents Recommend...

Ashley's grandmother came up with a fantastic way to encourage Ashley to use her vision and look down in her lower field while working on sensory play and exploring with her hands.



She purchased Monilon water beads that come with a blow-up pool and sea creatures (around \$20 on Amazon). The blow-up pool fits nicely on Ashley's wheelchair tray. Her grandmother put under-the-cabinet lights underneath the pool to encourage Ashley to look down in her lower field while playing. Here is a picture of Ashley playing with her water beads. What a fun activity to do on a rainy or hot day, or when you can't go out!

One of the families Ms. Dixie works with recently told her about black silicone baking mats. These can be purchased on Amazon for around \$15. Mom said they were great to use under toys to help reduce visual clutter and that items stick to the mats well. They are also very durable and easily wiped off. These would be great to use for some fun sensory play as well.

An interesting find from one of Mr. David's families is an LED mood light that they use with their child with CVI characteristics. The family changes colors of the light with a remote. They have learned her color preference and are able to provide strong motivation for her to focus her vision on the light! Some of the

lights are dimmable and waterproof along with being reasonably priced. Check online for LED mood light with remote.

Shelia Carwile, Mom of VIPS child, Brooks, recommends the Bright Starts Light and Learn Drum with Melodies. It's great for children in CVI phase 2 - or any child who is learning to reach out for what they see and who are able or ready to look at their mirror image. The colored lights help draw visual attention and the sounds and numbers options offer multi-sensory experiences. It is available from Walmart, Amazon and other retailers for around \$15.



## Goings on Around VIPS

### VIPS Indiana

#### Beer Run, Sept. 26

The Indy Brewery Running Series hosts a 5k-ish course to benefit VIPS Indiana that starts and ends at the awesome Sun King Brewery, 1021 Broad Ripple Ave., Indianapolis 46220, 11 A.M. Choose the pace you like; no matter what, there's a beer waiting for you at the finish line! Participants receive a FREE craft brew from the brewery and a seasonal swag item from the Brewery Running Series...plus more swag, goodies and giveaways, the chance to win door prizes and more free beer! Live music, food offerings, local vendors, and fun with the sponsors for registrants. Limited registration by visiting VIPS Facebook under the event tab.

#### VIPS Indiana Family Resource Center Taking Shape!!

The dream is becoming a reality!! We have had a virtual walk through of the construction of our new Indiana Family Resource Center, which had all the wall studs installed. You can actually begin to visualize the grand space we will soon be blessed to inhabit. Thanks to all who are making this dream come true!!! More next issue!!!



#### Walking for Dreams: A Success!!

VIPS Indiana held our annual event, Walking for Dreams Family

& Pet Walk on August 16, 2020...and it was a great success because of each of YOU! We raised over \$20,000 through many donations (still coming in!) and our amazing sponsors. None of this would have been possible without your online support! We are so grateful for those that walked in-person or virtually, made a donation, started fundraisers, and more. All funds raised will go towards providing vision-specific early intervention to Indiana's youngest children with blindness/low vision.



VIPS staff (l-r, Meredith Howell, Rita DeVore and David Sterne) masked up to work work the VIPS table at Walking for Dreams.

#### We greatly appreciate our Walking for Dreams 2020 Sponsors:

- Bosma Enterprises**
- EYE Can See, Inc.**
- Indianapolis Washington Township Lions Club**
- Shawna's Home Team 317.886.8228**
- The Spectacle Shoppe**
- Steele Pediatric Dentistry**
- Visionworks -- Dr. Mark Lynn & Associates PLLC;**
- Mark Lynn, OD & Associates PC**
- Vivirito Realty, LLC**
- WestPoint Financial Group**

*We will see you all in May for Walking for Dreams 2021!*

### VIPS Kentucky

#### Stampede for VIPS Goes Virtual -- All through September!

Our Stampede for VIPS 5K is now virtual! Sign up to run or walk anytime during the month of September at any place of your choosing. Just track your distance on an app, such as Nike Running, MapMyRun or Strava and upload the file onto the registration website. Every participant will receive a t-shirt and medal; winners in the age and Blind/Visually Impaired divisions will receive a prize. Guide runners will still be available to those who need one. Register here: <https://runsignup.com/Race/KY/Louisville/StampedeforVIPS5K>.

#### Virtual Bourbon Tasting Event, Oct. 16

With the annual VIPS Golf Tournament postponed until 2021, VIPS is substituting a Virtual Bourbon Tasting Event. Virtual bourbon tasting, you may ask? All participants will receive a special bottle of the barrel pick chosen by Tim Knittel from Distilled Living, who will lead you through an interactive tasting. For more information, contact Kelly Easton, Regional Director for VIPS Central KY, [keaston@vips.org](mailto:keaston@vips.org).

### Cupcake Classic Joins a Sweets Challenge

The VIPS-CK Cupcake Classic will become a 3k this year, as we join with two other local races - the North Lime Donut Dash 3k and the Crank and Boom Sprint for Scoops 3k - in a virtual race trio. Don't worry! We will still have individually-wrapped Baby Cakes cupcakes at packet pick-up! We hope this sweet challenge will be even more fun for kids and families to enjoy! This event will be held in November and details will be available soon at [www.vips.org](http://www.vips.org).

### Virtual VIPS Gala a Success!

This year, VIPS made the decision to make our annual Gala a virtual experience, due to COVID-19. The silent auction took place over the course of a week, leading up to the virtual Gala on Zoom on Saturday, May 30. Our auctioneer, Murray, kept things lively, as he interacted with participants with humor and an easygoing attitude. The event ended up being successful, raising over \$130,000 as our largest fundraiser of the year. VIPS is thankful for everyone who participated and donated in our event — we could not have done it without our faithful supporters!



## New Arrivals

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

Abel - 2 years, Fremont, IN  
 Adaline - 10 months, Hazard, KY  
 Aiden - 7 months, Beaver Dam, KY  
 Aiden - 1 year, Plainfield, IN  
 Alijah - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
 Allen - 3 years, Oakland City, IN  
 Ana - 3 years, Winona Lake, IN  
 Anari - 1 year, Kokomo, IN  
 Anzley - 4 years, Henderson, KY  
 Apollo - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
 Apollo - 1 year, New Palestine, IN  
 Archer - 1 year, Granger, IN  
 Ashlynn - 1 year, Depauw, IN  
 Arlo - 1 year, Peru, IN  
 Audrey - 2 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Aylin - 10 months, Indianapolis, IN  
 Bailey - 1 year, Clayton, IN  
 Benjamin - 1 year, Avon, IN  
 Brandon - 2 years, Gary, IN  
 Brayden - 2 years, Evansville, IN  
 Braylen - 3 years, Grabill, IN  
 Bridget - 8 months, Brownsburg  
 Brynlee - 1 year, Greenwood, IN  
 Catherine - 1 year, Centerville, IN  
 Cathleen - 6 months, Noblesville, IN  
 Cecily - 1 year, Bowling Green, KY  
 Charlie - 1 year, Plainfield, IN  
 Christian - 1 year, Louisville, KY  
 Christine - 7 months, Washington, IN  
 Cole - 1 year, Warsaw, IN  
 Connor - 1 year, Clarksville, IN  
 Cowen - 2 years, Tell City, IN  
 Dallin - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
 Damian - 1 year, Louisville, KY  
 Deanna - 1 year, Noblesville, IN  
 Declan - 1 year, Sellersburg, IN  
 Delainee - 8 months, Indianapolis, IN  
 Dominic - 2 years, Bloomington, IN  
 Eileena - 3 years, Louisville, KY

Eleanor - 2 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Elena - 1 year, Louisville, KY  
 Elyjah - 1 year, New Albany, IN  
 Elyse - 1 year, Owensville, IN  
 Emily - 3 years, Geneva, IN  
 Emma - 2 years, Greenwood, IN  
 Estephe - 2 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Finley - 10 months, Indianapolis, IN  
 Forever - 1 year, Ossian, IN  
 Fynleigh - 2 years, Pittsboro, IN  
 Grace - 1 year, Carmel, IN  
 Grant - 1 year, West Lafayette, IN  
 Grayson - 3 years, Auburn, IN  
 Greyson - 2 years, French Lick, IN  
 Gunner - 9 months, Ashland, KY  
 Harlow - 1 year, Lebanon, IN  
 Harper - 3 years, Kendallville, IN  
 Hawke - 2 years, Osceola, IN  
 Henry - 1 year, Roanoke, IN  
 Israel - 3 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Jack - 1 year, New Albany, IN  
 Jack - 2 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Jackson - 3 years, Fort Wayne, IN  
 Jackson - 1 year, Hometown, IN  
 Jadyn - 1 year, Peru, IN  
 James - 1 year, Beech Grove, IN  
 Jameson - 2 years, Lafayette, IN  
 Jaxson - 2 years, Muncie, IN  
 Jemimah - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
 Kayden - 2 years, Milford, IN  
 Kh'Lyia - 1 year, Fishers, IN  
 Kenneth - 1 year, Cambridge City, IN  
 Julian - 1 year, Louisville, KY  
 Legend - 8 months, Amboy, IN  
 Leiandra - 6 months, Valparaiso, IN  
 Lena - 1 year, Petersburg, IN  
 Liam - 2 years, Plainfield, IN  
 Madison - 2 years, Crown Point, IN  
 Malaya - 1 year, Kokomo, IN  
 Marlowe - 8 months, Greenwood, IN  
 Marshal - 1 year, Leitchfield, KY

Miriam - 1 year, Brownsburg, IN  
 Mitchara - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
 Makayla - 10 months, Indianapolis, IN  
 Nasya - 1 year, Kokomo, IN  
 Noah - 1 year, Decatur, IN  
 Noelle - 1 year, Westville, IN  
 Nora - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
 Onyx - 3 years, Cicero, IN  
 Parker - 2 years, Noblesville, IN  
 Rachel - 3 years, Warsaw, IN  
 Randall (RJ) - 2 years, Greencastle, IN  
 Reese - 1 year, Crawfordsville, IN  
 Remi - 2 years, Carmel, IN  
 Riley - 2 years, Independence, IN  
 Riverlyn - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
 Robert - 1 year, Erlanger, KY  
 Ruthann - 3 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Ryder - 2 years, Sellersburg, IN  
 Ryker - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
 Samuel - 1 year, Huntington, IN  
 Sa'Myah - 1 year, Crown Point, IN  
 Savannah - 11 months, Louisville, KY  
 Sebastian - 10 months, Auburn, IN  
 Shepard - 1 year, Bowling Green, KY  
 Silas - 2 years, Crown Point, IN  
 Silas - 1 year, Westfield, IN  
 Silas - 1 year, Knightstown, IN  
 Skyler - 3 years, Avon, IN  
 Sofia - 2 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Tauren - 2 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Tate - 3 years, Shelbyville, IN  
 Timothy - 2 years, Indianapolis, IN  
 Uvon - 3 years, Louisville, KY  
 Victoria - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
 Violet - 8 months Carmel, IN  
 Vivian - 2 years, Bristol, IN  
 Wesley - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
 Weston - 1 year, English, IN  
 Yelitza - 2 years, Goshen, IN  
 Zahra - 2 years, Fort Wayne, IN  
 Zion - 3 years, Connersville, IN

# VIPS Staff, Student and Board News

## VIPS Indiana

Congratulations also to **David P. Sterne**, lead Blind/Low Vision Specialist for VIPS Indiana, for being awarded the Indiana First Steps Excellence in Service Award! David is a very special individual whose contributions are amazing! We appreciate all that he does for Indiana's youngest children who are blind or visually impaired and are thrilled to see that Indiana First Steps agrees with us!

*David working with Preston during a home visit.*



## VIPS Kentucky

**Angela Billings**, has resigned as VIPS Development Director to pursue other opportunities. We wish her all the best.

We welcome **Alexis Asamoah** as our new Development Coordinator. She writes:

*"I started my role at VIPS the first week of March and worked in person for two weeks before having to work from home due to COVID-19. I am a recent graduate from The Ohio State University with a Masters in Public Administration (MPA), but worked as a barista and in banking prior to coming to VIPS. My undergraduate degree is from the University of Kentucky and I still bleed blue. I call Louisville my hometown, but moved around a bit during*



*my childhood. I am excited to work for VIPS because nonprofits play an important role in direct services. My interest in nonprofits and their community work is what brought me to VIPS. VIPS' passion for advocacy and education of children with visual impairment is necessary, but not as well known as it should be. I am excited to be part of the VIPS family and the impact we are making on so many children and their families!"*

We also welcome **Jenny Castenir**, our new VIPS Family Services Coordinator. She writes:

*"Hello VIPS Families! My family has been a part of VIPS for the past three years. My daughter, Hannah, is a recent*

*VIPS graduate, and we have been amazed by her growth and development thanks to the services that VIPS has provided our family. I live in Elizabethtown, KY. I am married to Adam and have two other daughters – Hadley and Harper.*



*I graduated from Western Kentucky University in 2006. I have been working in the corporate world since graduation in Events, Sales and Marketing. I am very excited to start this new chapter with VIPS as Family Services Coordinator. As a parent of a child with a visual impairment, I have seen the wonderful work VIPS does and how essential these services are for so many families and children. I look forward to meeting all the families and especially the kids! Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance to you ([jcastenir@vips.org](mailto:jcastenir@vips.org))!"*

While we are sad to report that **Shelby Birchler**, Instructional Assistant and After School Care support has resigned, we are absolutely thrilled to report that she graduated (virtually) from the University of Louisville with a dual Master's degree in Art and Psychology. Shelby has accepted a position with Transformations as a Community Support Associate as well as a temporary position as residential staff with Childplace. As Shelby said, "Seven years is a long time to repeat preschool!"

An unfortunate outcome of COVID19 is that the difficult circumstances have resulted in the departures of three other Instructional Assistants. **Julie Hampton** has resigned so she can home school her children out of concern for their health. **Suzanne Bigbee** is on furlough and caring for her grandchildren. **Wrae Sanders** has also departed.

We will miss these ladies who added so much stability and experience to our preschool classrooms.

Congratulations are due two Kids Town Preschool Teachers. Both **Christina Allen and Staci Maynard** have completed their certifications as TVIs. We're so happy for you and proud of your hard work. You make us look good!

The Social Venture Partners (Cincinnati) Fast Pitch event has transitioned into a virtual event on September 29th. **Kelly Easton**, Regional Director of the VIPS Central KY Office, will be sharing her 3 minute verbal pitch to a small live audience on September 24th, where a 5 person panel will choose the overall

winners (Grand Prize \$15,000, Second Place \$10,000, Third Place \$5,000). Ticket holders can then vote for the Audience Choice Award (worth \$2500) from 9/29 to 10/2. Tickets can still be purchased at <http://svpcincinnati-fastpitch2020.eventbrite.com>, and the pitches will be shared on the SVP Cincinnati website <https://www.socialventurepartners.org/cincinnati/>. Good luck, Kelly! You've got this!



The VIPS Louisville Staff joined in sending love to VIPS kids and their families.

LEGO Braille Bricks (LEGO bricks with the studs on top forming letters of the braille alphabet along with the print letters) were recently field tested in the VIPS Louisville office. We were thrilled to read promotional materials announcing the launch of the LEGO Braille Brick Toolkits that prominently features a quote

from **Paige Maynard**, VIPS Louisville Teacher of the Visually Impaired/Developmental Interventionist. Paige describes how the blocks will encourage interactive, collaborative play as well as tactile learning. Paige has also participated in a podcast about LEGO Braille Bricks for the American Printing House for the Blind <https://www.aph.org/change-makers-podcast/>. Way to go, Paige!

## VIPS Board

**Scott Duncan**, President of the Central Kentucky Advisory Board, is retiring from Baird and has decided to leave his Board position as well. Scott has been a leader in Central Kentucky for more years than we can count and been instrumental in our relationship with the Lexington Lions Club. He created the Lexington Golf event and has been a relationship builder and an amazing leader! We are going to miss him greatly. Thank you, Scott, for your work to change the lives of children in Central Kentucky and best wishes in your retirement.

## VIPS Graduates

We were overjoyed to learn that VIPS graduate, **Braeden Robinson**, a current student at the Kentucky School for the Blind, placed second in his age group in the national Braille Challenge finals. The Challenge tests students' ability to read and write braille and is the only academic competition of its type in the U.S. We are so proud of you and thrilled for you, Braeden!



## Ashley and Fuller: A Guide Dog Story

By **Ashley Alvey**, VIPS Grad

Written for National Guide Dog Month, which is September. Published by the National Federation of the Blind and reprinted with permission of the author.

High school was when I knew that I wanted to have a guide dog someday.

I had seen a presentation about them and had a chance to walk with one. I loved walking down the sidewalk maneuvering around obstacles, breezing my way through an intersection. Having the harness in my hand and walking with a dog felt amazing to me.

In June 2014, I went to Guiding Eyes for the Blind. I counted down the days until June 28, when I would be flying up to New York and eagerly awaiting the day that all students wait for: Dog

Day. This is where, after finding out the gender and name of the dog, students go to their rooms on campus, and the trainer brings in the dog that has been selected for them. A dog is chosen for a person based on their lifestyle, such as being a city traveler or country traveler. And they also match based on pace. Three days later, on July 1, I was matched with a handsome yellow Labrador named Fuller. That day just also happens to be his birthday.



Ashley and Fuller

When receiving your dog, you have to put a lot of hard work and devotion into building a bond, but it is so worth it. Patience and consistency are key when starting out building the team. The more consistent you are in the beginning, the better off things will be down the road. Patience is important because, after all, it is a dog, not a robot.

When I first got Fuller, he put the brakes on really quickly at curbs; and any new place we would go, he would almost run with excitement. My trainer and I had to work on slowing him down and showing him what pace I needed him to be at. About a week into our training, he started to understand what I wanted from him. It takes six months to a year to build a bond.

Fast forward to a year later, we finally had a rhythm, and Fuller loved his job. Any new place we would go, he knew what pace he needed to be at for me, and he did not pull my arm off like he did in the beginning. He would love it when I would teach him to target things such as a specific door. As I would say, "Fuller, to the door." or whatever I wanted him to find, he would head toward it with enthusiasm, wagging his tail in the process as if to say, "I got this!"

I trusted him with my life. If we were crossing a street and a car came out of nowhere, I knew that he would pull me out of harm's way. Quite a few traffic checks did happen over our years of partnership.

For me, having a guide dog is truly rewarding! Fuller was so much more than my eyes. He was my best friend, and I loved having him by my side, his eyes guiding me all over this world: from France, to Spain, to Portugal, and back. We wandered as one.

Shortly after we celebrated our five years together and his birthday, Fuller let me know that he was ready to retire and hang up his uniform. His way of showing me was by not wanting to work in unfamiliar areas and not wanting to cross streets, even though I knew we had the right of way.

Retiring a dog is never easy. He is my first. It comes with a lot of emotions for many reasons. One is that I simply miss working with him. I also wondered whether I could possibly love and work with another dog? The answer to that is yes. My heart does have room to love and build a bond to work with another one.

For five years Fuller gave his all and loved every second working. Now it is time for me to do something for him in return, and that is to retire him. He deserves it. He deserves to be a dog full time now and not just when the harness is off for the day. So, I have done just that.

At this time I am not able to take care of two dogs when I get my second one. So, soon Fuller will be returning to his puppy raiser. And, while it is the hardest thing that I have had to do, it's important to do what is right for the dog. And, in the meantime, I will use my long white cane to navigate the world.

Fuller is going to where he will be loved and taken care of just like I want him to be. That is what gives me peace and joy through my time of sadness. My heart is full. Happy National Guide Dog Month to those who have one. A bond between a handler and dog is like no other!

## Notes of Interest

⇒ **Hello!** is the form of Highlights Magazine for children ages birth to two that can even survive little hands (and mouths!). Besides being durable, it is bright and colorful, following a theme such as Sounds, Food or Farm Animals, that helps young children make sense of their world. Every issue is filled with colorful images and photos, whimsical read-aloud stories, poems



and simple activities that make babies giggle, laugh and learn. There are also word plays, games and lots of silly fun. Hello helps baby make positive connections between reading and fun. For extra safety, Hello is mailed in an envelope that keeps it germ-free while it's on its way to your home. Go to: <https://www.highlights.com/>.

⇒ **Timely and terrific tips for families dealing with the Coronavirus** and toddlers are available online at [zerotothree.com](http://zerotothree.com). See [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org).

⇒ **Storyonline** is a website where celebrities, artists and famous people read quality children's literature and share the full illustrations. The books are read with passion and inflection and humor. You can sort by themes and favorites. Check out [www.storyonline.net](http://www.storyonline.net).

⇒ **To read a fascinating story about a blind adult** dealing with unsolicited help during the time of COVID19, go to <https://apple.news/AmOyo0raAQiiUJNlgr952kg>. One of primary goals for our students with visual impairments/blindness is to teach them to ask for help and this article explains some of the concerns involved in doing just that in today's world.

⇒ **A 6-Part Beginning Braille Instruction Webinar** is available to watch at your own time and pace. Watch the full series at: <https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/resources/beginning-braille-webinar-series>.

⇒ **An online early literacy series** shares books being read aloud and also performed in sign language. There are accompanying vocabulary videos and slides. You can find it at <https://www.cmich.edu/colleges/class/Centers/DBCentral/Pages/Literacy.aspx>.

⇒ **Braille trails: Helping the visually impaired experience nature** -- At age 11, Evan Barnard came across a vandalized Braille nature trail, one of the few places in his home state of Georgia where the visually impaired could comfortably explore the outdoors. As he began fixing up the trail and working with the Georgia Council of the Blind, Barnard promised to do whatever he could to help his new friends. A few years later, he created his own Braille trail. As he searched for other Braille trails around the world, he founded Nature for All, an online community for the visually impaired to find nature experiences near them. The website now includes over 200 Braille trails and sensory gardens from 35 countries [www.naturefortheblind.com](http://www.naturefortheblind.com). Source: Great Big Story <https://www.cnn.com/videos/great-big-story/2020/07/24/great-big-story-braille-nature-trails-gbs.great-big-story>.

## Gifts of Time, Talent and Treasure

### VIPS Indiana

We thank our generous VIPS Indiana Advisory Board Member, **Laurie Roselle**, who has been visiting the stores early in the morning to collect supplies for our VIPS teachers. We are so grateful for her support!!



A big shout out goes to VIPS Indiana supporter **Mary Little** for her generosity! Amazon boxes full of things Mary purchased from our wish list have been delivered to the Indiana office! When Regional Director Meredith Howell reached out to Mary to thank

her for all of the goodies, Mary said, "It is nice to help someone when they have a fundraiser, but even so much more so when you can do it when they are not expecting it. I know you and your staff will make good use of all of it. Utilizing the Amazon wish list is fun. Will try to remember to keep an eye on it throughout the year. Best wishes to you and everyone at VIPS." Mary purchased folders, toys, books, a shelving unit, carts, and so much more! It has been such a surprise and a blessing to our office as every dollar that we don't have to spend on "things" is another dollar that can be spent on serving a child. Thank you, Mary, and thank you to those who send us items from our lists all year long!

We greatly appreciate the **Kiwanis International** for hosting a "Pop-Up Service Project" on behalf of VIPS. They set aside

a short period of their work day and made VIPS in Indianapolis over 170 spoon rattles! These handmade noisemakers are great to put in our "Welcome Bags" that we give to each new VIPS family to show that simple household items can be made to capture the attention of their little ones. Thank you, Kiwanis International!



### VIPS Kentucky

**Quilters' Day Out – Louisville**, held the end of February, designated VIPS as the recipient of their event's collection. Those attending were asked to bring an item for VIPS from our wish list as part of their admission. In addition to \$400 cash, quilters blessed VIPS with an incredible amount of office supplies and art supplies for the children.



*This is just a portion of the donations received at QDO.*



Thanks to the **Girl Scouts of Kentucky's Wilderness Road Council** for the donation of 11 cases of Girl Scout cookies (120 boxes!) for our VIPS children's families.

*Little Dmitri was happy with his box of cookies!*

Thank you to our Kids Town Preschool Teacher, **Juanita Miles**, for finding and purchasing sanitizing wipes for the Louisville Office!

We were happily surprised to receive 26 backpacks for Kids Town Preschool from the **Newburg Branch Library**.

# VIPS Receives 4-Star Rating from Charity Navigator



by Diane Nelson, VIPS Executive Director

I proudly share with you this message from Charity Navigator:

*"We are proud to announce Visually Impaired Preschool Services (VIPS) has earned our third consecutive 4-star rating. This is our highest possible rating and indicates that your organization adheres to sector best practices and executes its mission in a financially efficient way. Attaining a 4-star rating verifies that Visually Impaired Preschool Services (VIPS) exceeds industry standards and outperforms most charities in your area of work. Only 25% of the charities we evaluate have received at least 3 consecutive 4-star evaluations, indicating that Visually Impaired Preschool Services (VIPS) outperforms most other charities in America. This exceptional designation from Charity Navigator sets Visually Impaired Preschool Services (VIPS) apart from its peers and demonstrates to the public its trustworthiness."*

VIPS is often recognized for the outstanding work we do on behalf of the children and families we serve. It is just as important that we are the best stewards of our donors dollars as possible. This is an amazing stamp of approval!

## Recent Grants and Donations

### VIPS Central Kentucky

- WHAS Crusade for Children** - \$42,000 for the Early Childhood Intervention Program
- Lexington Fayette County Urban Government** - \$38,000 for the Early Childhood Intervention Program
- United Way of the Bluegrass** - \$16,200 for the Early Childhood Intervention program
- Blue Grass Community Foundation** - \$10,000 funding for general operating expenses.
- Children's Charity of the Bluegrass** - \$8,000 for the Early Childhood Intervention program.

- Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation** - \$5,000 for the Early Childhood Intervention program for children in Boone, Campbell and Kenton counties.
- Heart of Kentucky United Way** - \$5,000 for the Early Childhood Intervention program.
- E. O. Robinson Mountain Fund** - \$5,000 for the Early Childhood Intervention program.
- Orphan Society of Lexington** - \$2,300 for the Early Childhood Intervention program.

### VIPS Louisville

- Kosair Charities** - \$225,000 for Kids Town Preschool.
- Kentucky Department of Education** - \$125,000 for program expenses.
- WHAS Crusade for Children** - \$80,000 for program expenses.
- The Louisville Downtown Lions Club** - \$75,000 to create an education endowment fund specifically designated for VIPS staff's continuing education, growing our pool of TVIs and COMS and providing scholarships for VIPS families.
- The Gheens Foundation** - \$20,000 for Early Childhood Intervention and Kids Town Preschool.
- Community Foundation of Oldham County** - \$6,520 for Early Childhood Early Intervention.
- In Memory of Sarah Krebs Osborne** - \$4,500. Sarah was the mother of a Kids Town Preschool student who passed away suddenly after giving premature birth to her second child. We ask that you keep Sarah's family in your prayers!
- Papa John's** - \$3,000 sponsorship of VIPS Stampede 2020.
- CHI St. Joseph Hospital Community Fund** - \$1,000 gift for program expenses.
- Seedlings Braille Books for Children** - \$500 gift certificate for braille books they have printed to round out our libraries and to get braille books into the hands and homes of our youngest children as early as possible.

### VIPS Indiana

- Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust** - \$75,000 for operational support. The Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust is a generous pillar of the Indianapolis community and we at VIPS are so grateful for their continued support.
- WHAS Crusade for Children** - \$42,000 to support VIPS Early Childhood Intervention Program.
- Community Foundation of Elkhart County** - \$23,480 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic so that VIPS children in Elkhart County will continue to receive virtual home visits.
- Matthew Tully Memorial Fund, a subsidiary of the Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF)** - \$15,000 for the VIPS Early Childhood Intervention Program for infants and toddlers with visual impairments in Central Indiana.
- The Hoover Family Foundation** - \$9,975 to support the VIPS Early Childhood Intervention Program.



**BarnRaisers of Indiana** - \$7,500 for Family Resource Center.  
**Sertoma Club of Broad Ripple** - \$4,000 for the Orientation & Mobility Program.

## In Memoriam

This issue of *VISability* is dedicated to the memories of:

### **Amaya Moore**

daughter of Arletha McPherson and John Moore  
 of Indianapolis, IN  
 who passed away at the age of 2 years on March 7, 2020.

### **Hunter Hayes**

son of Kayla and Justin Hayes of Fairdale, KY  
 who passed away at the age of 3 years on March 27, 2020.

### **Harrison Jones**

son of Dawn and Adam Jones of Fort Wayne, IN  
 who passed away at the age of 4 years on May 12, 2020.

### **Sarah Krebs Osbourne**

wife of Will and mother of Vera and Cora of Louisville, KY  
 who passed away at the age of 30 on August 21, 2020.

*Our hearts go out to all of those who loved  
 Amaya, Hunter, Harrison and Sarah.*

## VIPS Louisville

- Blue Tooth dual pairing Speaker set
- Cricut Maker Machine & Cricut mats
- Crayola Silly Scents Twistables Crayons
- 24 Classic Crayola Colors Non-Toxic Art Tools for Kids 3 up
- Scented Self-Sharpening No Mess Twist-Up Crayons
- Dry Erase Markers (black) thick and thin
- Scented markers
- Large paint brushes (large handles)
- Acrylic paint (all colors)
- Play doh (small containers)
- Card stock - all colors, astrobrights, and white and black
- White construction paper
- Self-Adhesive Laminating Sheets, 9" x 12"
- Elmer's Jumbo Glue Sticks
- Washable Glue
- Colored duct tape
- Adhesive Hook and Loop Velcro, Black, 1-Inch x 10-Foot Industrial Grade, Wear and Tear Resistant
- Wet Ones Antibacterial Hands and Face Wipes Fresh Scent
- Natural Care Unscented Baby Wipes, Sensitive, Hypoallergenic, Water-Based
- Waterproof Bibs
- Sealable plastic sandwich, quart and gallon storage bags
- 10 Oz. Take & Toss Spill Proof Cups
- Facial tissue
- Clorox wipes
- Lysol spray
- Disposable gloves and masks
- Items that can be used for math manipulatives (craft pom poms, small blocks, 3-D shapes, unifix cubes, large beads/buttons, etc.)
- Amazon Wish List: <https://a.co/dNzBF5h>

## VIPS Wish Lists

### **VIPS Indiana**

- Lots of PVC pipe and connectors for play frames!
- Metal whisks
- Spools of elastic
- Disinfectant wipes
- Hand sanitizer
- Amazon Wish List: <http://a.co/aeRar2N>

### **VIPS Central Kentucky**

- Child size table with two chairs
- Powdered tempera paint
- Disinfectant wipes
- Baby wipes
- Black and white card stock
- Slinky toys (preferably red, yellow or metallic)
- Sturdy metal open shelving units
- Glue sticks
- 3-oz. paper cups
- Paper towels

## Louisville Gives For Good

Drumroll please!! VIPS was extremely blessed to have been gifted **\$59,735 by 109 donors** over a period of just 24 short hours during the Louisville Community Foundation's Sept. 17 Give for Good Louisville Campaign, boosted by the wonderful gifts of **\$25,000 from Dr. Mark and Cindy Lynn, a \$10,000 matching grant from the Louisville Downtown Lions, \$5000 matching grant from the Bonnie Bizer Foundation, and \$1,200 matching grant from Steve & Jeannie Deeley.** Even during COVID, economic challenges and community unrest, people of all walks of life and financial status pulled together to raise \$7,636,476 in support of over 500 Louisville area charities meeting critical needs. We are blessed to be part of such a generous community.



1906 Goldsmith Lane  
Louisville, KY 40218

Visually Impaired  
Preschool Service

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

### Month of September

*The Stampede for VIPS goes virtual all month!* (See details on pg. 10)

### Saturday, September 26

*Indy Brewery Running Series 5k-ish event to benefit VIPS Indiana.* (See details on pg. 10)

### Saturday, October 10

*VIPS Louisville hosts a Drive-Thru Trunk-or-Treat in the parking lot, 10 a.m.* Everything will be drive-thru so the kids will not get out of the car. To register go to: <http://bit.ly/3i14ao2tot>.

### Friday, October 16

*VIPS Kentucky is sponsoring a Virtual Bourbon Tasting fundraiser!* (See details on pg. 10)

### Saturday, October 17

*VIPS CK will be having a Drive-Thru Trunk-or-Treat, 10:30 a.m., at Lexington Hearing & Speech.* Register at: <https://forms.gle/9SwYoxsZyoZvwnMz8>.

### Saturday, October 24, 2020

*VIPS Indiana hosts our annual Spooktacular Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) at Indiana Interchurch Center, 1100 W. 42nd St., Indianapolis.* We will be extra creative because of COVID but Halloween must go on! Families are invited to dress in costumes as the kiddos trick or treat for goodies and parents trick or treat for resources! More details closer to the date.

### Thursday, October 29

*The 5th Annual Eye Opening Symposium takes place.* (See details on pg. 4)

### November

*The VIPS Central KY Cupcake Classic goes virtual with two other local races.*  
(See updates at: [www.vips.org](http://www.vips.org).)

### Saturday, November 7

*Virtual VIPS Family Retreat will be held.*



Our 2020 VIPS Family Retreat & Conference will look different than it has in previous years because we are going virtual due to the unknowns associated with COVID-19. We want to ensure you and your children are kept safe, as well as our VIPS staff and volunteers. But don't worry -- we have a lot in store for the day! We will have guest speaker, Joe Bargione, former lead psychologist with Jefferson County Public Schools, who will talk about self-care. There will be lots of other fun, such as a make-and-take activity, as well. Plus, participants will get some cool swag! Stay tuned for more details. Please register by Oct. 1 at <https://vips.org/vips-2020-family-retreat-conference/>.

### VIPS Non-Discrimination Policy

VIPS does not discriminate in any of its policies or practices with respect to employment or to services for children and/or families on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.

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

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