

VI Sability, The VIPS Parent Newsletter

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Accessible Edition

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VIPS Receives Unprecedented AER Accreditation

VIPS has received accreditation from the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), the world's largest professional organization dedicated exclusively to professionals who provide services to persons with vision loss. This marks the first time AER has accredited an agency serving only young children who are blind or visually impaired. This accreditation applies to all three VIPS sites and across all services VIPS provides, including early childhood intervention, home visitation and tele-intervention, preschool programming, itinerant services, orientation and mobility programs, and identification and referral.

The purpose of AER is to promote and support evidence-based practices, high quality standards, value-added resources and giving voice to issues of critical importance. Along with the accrediting process, AER also provides networking, mentoring, connectivity, awards and scholarships for professionals to advance excellence within the field, ensuring the successes of individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Our thanks goes to the incredible Kathy Mullen, VIPS Director of Education, who led the intensive process required for this honor, including a self-assessment of the program by VIPS team members, interviews with stakeholder groups, and an external review by AER to determine the agency's strengths and areas of improvement.

In the award letter, Mark Richert, AER Accreditation Council Chair, said: "This is an extraordinary accomplishment! Thank you for your commitment to excellence in service delivery!"

Have You Heard the Big News?

VIPS Indiana is building a wonderful Family Resource Center. And we could use YOUR help with our Capital Campaign!! Please consider making a financial gift to this exciting effort that will benefit so many children! Through June 1, your gift will be matched by the Malhotra family of Zionsville, IN, whose son Krishna received VIPS services.

The Malhotras learned firsthand how critical VIPS services were in 2011 when Krishna was born blind. During that scary and uncertain time in their lives, VIPS provided the Malhotras with critical services that allowed them to understand Krishna's unique needs, how best to meet them, and, more importantly, have hope for his future. Today, Krishna is a thriving 3rd grader at his local public school. In gratitude, the Malhotra family is leading the Capital Campaign fundraising effort.

The Family Resource Center, which will be located at 1142 E. Washington St. in Indianapolis, will provide a wealth of opportunity for Indiana families of young children with visual impairments. It will include a sensory room, outdoor sensory garden, adaptive playground, accessible Toddler Town, therapy rooms, parent lending library, teletherapy room, working space for teachers and staff, and more. We anticipate opening doors in November 2021!

Overall, the new facility will ensure that our mission is spread across Indiana through innovative ways to reach more children in need of our services. There are almost 1,400 children under the age of five in Indiana who have visual impairments that cannot be corrected. VIPS is serving only a portion of these children. Our goal is to serve every child, birth to three, who has vision loss with best-practice, vision-specific intervention so they can reach their highest potential.

The Family Resource Center is located within one of the most unique mixed spaces in Indianapolis -- Line Lofts, an apartment community completely designed for adults with blindness/low vision as well as low-income seniors. For the first time in Indiana, there will be an entire development designed for and able to accommodate individuals with blindness.

You can take a tour the Family Resource Center here:

Read on for a story by Rebecca Davis, a determined Mom, whose love for her baby diagnosed with a visual impairment, led to the creation VIPS Indiana, and ultimately the dream of the Family Resource Center.



Virren and son Krishna. An architect's rendering shows a 4 story building ins shades of grey and white.

Eliza's Story

By Rebecca Davis

Meet Eliza. Eliza is a happy, mischievous girl with an iron will, a VIPS baby, not unlike your baby. In 2006 she was born legally blind due to multiple diagnoses.

As her sighted parent, I did not understand her. When I gazed at her perfect face, her eyes stared off in another direction. She startled at every noise. Things I did to comfort and entertain my older daughter did not work with Eliza. I remember sitting next to her on our living room floor and feeling helpless. I could touch her, but I did not know how to reach her.

I was desperate to learn.

Our children learn differently than children who have functional vision. Eliza and I both needed the services of a Teacher of Blind/Low Vision. I needed a professional to teach me how to encourage Eliza to use all of her senses to

explore the world around her. I needed someone to show me how to comfort and care for her.

When I searched for these services in Indiana, I learned no ongoing specialized early intervention for young children with visual impairments was available. There was no one to help me.

I felt completely hopeless.

When the services our children need are not available, we can feel as though our children don't matter. No parent should ever feel this way. I could not accept that Indiana did not offer the services we needed to give Eliza the best start in life.

Determined in my pursuit to get Eliza and our family the help we needed, I found Visually Impaired Preschool Services (VIPS) in Louisville, Kentucky. I remember pulling into the parking lot with my family and seeing the letters V-I-P-S in print and in braille on the outside wall. I caught myself feeling hopeful. As the sliding glass doors parted, we walked into VIPS for the first time. The kind woman at the reception desk said, "Hello, Eliza!" This welcome, a simple act of kindness to an overwhelmed mother, touched me more than I can express.

They understood. VIPS understood that Eliza matters.

I drove Eliza from Bloomington, Indiana to VIPS in Louisville, Kentucky every week for the next two years. She was taught by teachers who understood her unique needs and how to meet them. She learned alongside classmates who were both sighted and blind. She played inside in the sensory room and outside on the inclusive playground. She practiced making food in an adapted kitchen. She smelled the plants in the sensory garden. She had tap dancing lessons! There was a learning library filled with resources for curious parents and teachers. There was a calendar of events and upcoming holiday parties for the whole family. This wonderful center that VIPS had built for children like ours was more than I could have dreamed of. It was incredible!

Our time there was a gift. It was a vision of a future in which Eliza is educated in the unique way she can learn. A future in which she is included the way every child should be and a world in which she is welcome. For this vision, this gift, I am eternally grateful.

I wanted to pay forward what VIPS gave to my family – the best possible start for young children with blindness in a place where we felt welcome. In 2011, with the blessing of VIPS' Executive Director, Diane Nelson, and the board, a nationally recognized Teacher of Blind/Low Vision from Indiana named Annie Hughes and I started VIPS-Bloomington. We began with 8 families and a passion for serving young children with visual impairments and their families.

With support from communities all over Indiana, VIPS has grown exponentially. In 2014, VIPS-Bloomington became VIPS Indiana and moved to an office in Indianapolis. To date, 863 families have been served in 76 of the 92 counties in IN.

When we opened a VIPS office in Indiana, we knew the time would come to build a state-of-the-art center here for children with visual impairments and other disabilities. The demand for the services VIPS provides grows every year. We have to grow to meet the needs of the families we serve.

I say "we" because, even though Eliza turned 14 this past June, we will always be a VIPS family. As Eliza's mom, I want the youngest children with vision loss in Indiana to receive the educational services they need. As a parent who once struggled to find inclusion, I want their families to feel supported and welcomed the way I was except they won't have to leave the state like I did. Indiana's children deserve no less.

The time is now. Join me in making a gift to help VIPS build our very own Family Resource Center here in Indiana. This wonderful space will be filled with the resources and staff to give our youngest children who are blind the best possible start in life. A gift, of any amount, will make a difference in the lives of our families for years to come. Now through June 1st, your gift will be matched by another generous VIPS family so your donation can have double the impact. Don't miss the opportunity to pay it forward to another family like yours.

Thank you for being a part of our journey, our story.

With gratitude,
Rebecca Davis, Eliza's mom



Two pictures show Eliza as a smiling baby in a high chair and as a smiling 14-year-old today.

Welcome Back

By Kathy Mullen, VIPS Education Director

It was with great joy and gusto that the doors of VIPS Kids Town Preschool were flung open on Monday, March 22, after being shut tight for over a year! School buses, cars, SUVs, and trucks lined the parking lot on our VIPS Louisville campus as children were dropped off for their 18-day school year. That's right, 18 days! That's not much time. We better get to work!

The children were greeted by shining faces and shiny classrooms - eager teachers and classroom assistants who had spent many hours scrubbing and sanitizing Kids Town Preschool following the very strict protocols set forth by the Department of Public Health and Wellness and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. VIPS team members were determined to keep COVID-19 out of reach! Along with our teachers, the physical, occupational, and speech therapists from Jefferson County Public Schools had worked ahead of time to make accommodations for serving students during a pandemic. Together as a unified team, everyone jumped in to build on the amazing work done by our VIPS teachers, school therapists, and children's families during the past twelve months of remote learning during non-traditional instruction (NTI).

Observers would be surprised to learn that our students had not begun their school year last August. The children jumped right into the routine of the school day without a hitch. Planning for the transition back to in-person education, the Kids Town teachers filled their classrooms with the same materials that had been used during virtual learning. Some of our students

gravitated to the familiar objects initially before moving to the new and exciting learning materials in the classrooms. Our classes are smaller in number of students than usual as some parents have opted to continue with remote learning until next August when the 2021-22 school year begins. That was a mixed blessing for VIPS - the students have enjoyed and benefited from the extra attention, but teachers have missed their special little friends whom they are still serving remotely.

Some of the "routines" were the same as they are every school year: we had some tears as children realized their parents were not coming to school, too; we had some boo boos earned on the playground; we needed to take advantage of the extra clothes sent in after particularly messy art activities; and we will celebrate one very special graduation at the end of May!

On a personal note, I read somewhere that things will never return to normal again, but that we should take to referring to our post-pandemic life as the "new normal." New or old, I am sure we all are glad for the comfort routines, such as school and home-visits, can provide. To our routines we say, "Welcome back!"



Above: Kaily gets her temp taken. Right: Judah gets off the bus wearing his mask. Far right: Ms. Paige works with Savannah on the deck of her house.

VIPS In-Home Services Resume, Too

Not to be outdone, our home and community-based teachers across Kentucky and Indiana have transitioned back to in-person early intervention services with much success. Families were so ready - as were the VIPS

teachers! Lots of precautions continue to be taken to ensure the safety of the VIPS providers as well as the families served by VIPS. Teachers have been equipped with additional masks, gloves, aprons, and plastic sheets to sit on during home visits. Families are so grateful to celebrate the partnerships with their child's early intervention teams.

We have added so many children into the VIPS family over this year, so for many of them, this is their first time meeting their teacher/interventionist in person! Here is a photo of Ms. Paige at her first in-person visit with one of her families. She said, "It was great to finally meet Savannah and her mom, Hailee, after interacting with them on screen for a year. We all enjoyed the nice weather on the patio while we worked together."

I'm Not a Vision Therapist

I'm Not a Vision Therapist

By Paige Maynard, TVI/Developmental Interventionist

Families of children with special needs are often no strangers to therapy. Does your child receive services from a physical therapist? An occupational therapist? A speech therapist? Oftentimes, VIPS teachers may be mistakenly referred to as vision therapists. At VIPS, your child's services do not come from a vision therapist. Rather, VIPS providers are all certified as teachers.

What does a vision therapist do?

Vision therapy is usually provided by a certified optometric vision therapist (COVT). According to the American Association of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, "Optometrists define vision therapy as an attempt to develop or improve visual skills and abilities; improve visual comfort, ease, and efficiency; and change visual processing or interpretation of visual information." A vision therapist uses specialized equipment to guide an individual through specific visual exercises in an office setting. Specific visual exercises may also be assigned to be completed at home between therapy sessions.

Some examples of exercises that may be used in vision therapy include:

- Practicing visually following an object (such as a pencil) as it is viewed at arm's length and moved closer in toward the nose;
- Practicing visually focusing at various distances using a Brock string (a specialized string with beads); and

- Practicing using both eyes together by viewing a special type of picture called a Vectogram, with a specialized set of glasses.

For more information about vision therapy, visit <https://aapos.org/glossary/vision-therapy>.

What does a VIPS teacher do?

A VIPS teacher's services are educational, and occur at your home or other places where your child naturally spends time. Your teacher is trained to help you address areas within family life where your child's visual impairment impacts his/her developmental skills and his/her engagement in daily routines. Your teacher coaches you in developing and using strategies that provide opportunities for your child to meaningfully participate within the rhythms of life. For some VIPS children, some of the strategies that you implement may focus on helping your child's functional vision to get better. However, for all VIPS children, the strategies your teacher helps you design and implement focus on helping your child reach his or her highest potential - however that looks for your child.

Some examples of things you focus on in home visits with your VIPS teacher may include, but are not limited to*:

- Helping you help your child explore and interact with the world around him/her. Depending on your child's needs, this may look like helping you to learn to verbally describe the environment to your child, helping you to understand which developmental skills your child is mostly likely to acquire next, supporting you in creating and adapting educational materials and the environment, etc.
- Helping you help your child to increase participation at mealtimes. Depending on your child's needs, this may look like helping you to help your child be aware of what is happening during a gtube feed, helping your child find foods on his/her highchair tray/plate, helping you to interact with your child to increase social skills during meals, etc.
- Helping you and your child in developing self-advocacy skills. Depending on your child's needs, this may look like helping you help your child learn to make choices, helping you help your child communicate about his/her vision needs, helping you understand and exercise your child's rights within federal special education law (IDEA), etc.
- Helping you help your child to use the vision he/she has to the best advantage. Depending on your child's needs, this may look like helping

you help your child learn to use a low vision device (such as a magnifier, monocular, or tablet app), helping you set up the environment so that your child can see items better, helping you help your child learn visual efficiency skills like shifting gaze or visually scanning, etc.

Depending on where you live and your VIPS teacher's education background, his or her official title may be developmental therapist (DT), developmental interventionist (DI), teacher of blind and low vision (TBLV), or teacher of the visually impaired (TVI). However, we are all teachers! For more information about how vision therapists and teachers of the visually impaired are different, visit https://aerbvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Low-Vision_AERBVI-Position-Paper-on-Vision-Therapy-5.4.17.docx.

The Expanded Core Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments

In their work with VIPS children and families, VIPS teachers use the Expanded Core Curriculum for students with visual impairments. This curriculum addresses nine critical learning areas that are impacted by vision loss. They are:

- Compensatory Academic Skills -- skills needed to be successful in school, including concept development, organizational skills, communication skills, and learning media (braille, large print, etc.),
- Orientation & Mobility Skills -- skills needed to know where you are, where you want to go, and how to get there safely and can include identifying and using environmental cues, asking for assistance, and using the long white cane.
- Social Interaction Skills -- skills needed to interact effectively with others in a variety of social settings which can include good manners, conversational skills, requesting/declining assistance, and acceptable expression of emotions.
- Independent Living Skills -- skills needed to function as independently as possible, including personal grooming, managing belongings, and cleaning and cooking.
- Recreation & Leisure Skills -- skills needed to enjoy free time, including playing games, enjoying sports, or developing hobbies.

- Sensory Efficiency Skills -- skills needed to use all senses, including vision, to best advantage in all environments, and use of devices that assist in this (such as communication devices or low vision devices).
- Technology Skills -- skills needed to learn types of technology to enhance school, work and home life, and how to use that technology.
- Career Education Skills -- skills needed to function in a work environment, including learning about jobs, occupations and professions and participating in work opportunities.
- Self-Determination Skills -- skills needed for self-advocacy, including knowing what you want and how to achieve your goals.

Those Marvelous Milestones!

Never to be taken for granted, each child's milestones uniquely reflect his or her own progress through determination. We celebrate the following VIPS children and their families.

Recently, Hawke laughed for the very first time! His mother, Brynne, bought him a space blanket -- because of Hawke's visual impairment, he is drawn to shiny objects and also loves to play with crinkly textures. Once Hawke got hold of that space blanket, he could not contain his giggles. We are so happy for Hawke and his family for reaching this exciting milestone. To enjoy a video of Hawke enjoying the space blanket, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/VisuallyImpairedPreschoolServices/videos/267870287804739>.

When Jamaal (AKA JJ) got his new glasses, it was an adjustment for him. His mom, Akeisha, worked with him, having him wear the new glasses multiple times a day for longer and longer periods of time. Congratulations to Akeisha and JJ for their perseverance!

Liam recently received a low vision evaluation and was prescribed a Jupiter portable magnifier. His TVI delivered it to him and walked through its exploration with Liam and Heather, his mom. Heather pointed out that there was a bird nest at the neighbor's house between the drain pipe and the brick. Liam could see it there, but could not see the detail of the chicks opening their beaks while the mother bird fed them. Then, once he and Heather pointed the Jupiter at the nest, Liam could see the chicks and the mother bird for the first time. He was so happy! Wonderful job, Liam! To watch a video of Liam watching the baby bird in the nest, go to: <https://youtu.be/9QrCw55g66Y>

Savannah has been sleeping in her own bed throughout the night! For some children with visual impairments, independent sleep can be difficult because skills used for calming and self-regulation are not always learned incidentally (children with visual impairments miss out on incidental learning). Specific self-regulation strategies may need to be put in place through a stair-step approach to gain independence. As Savannah's parents, Hailee and Brennan, have worked on strategies to help Savannah sleep in her own crib through the night, she has bloomed into a sleeping beauty!

Micah practices his emergent writing skills in his preschool classroom. He has so much determination and focus as he uses his finger to make vertical and horizontal lines on the iPad! Great job, Micah!

Maylin has been working with her VIPS interventionist for over a year and a half and will soon age out of in-home/virtual services! She has made so much progress during her time with VIPS and is doing some pretty amazing things. Her favorite color is red and she is visually tracking all kinds of red objects. Keep up the great work, Maylin, we are so proud of your many milestones!

Leo is pulling apart pop beads and putting them back together, using both his hands together in a coordinated way -- an important skill for young children to master. This task also requires good depth perception as well in order to get the small nub end to fit in the hole. Keep up the good work, Leo!

Look out world!! Hunter has progressed so much with his gross motor skills that he can independently get in/out of his little truck and is learning how to drive it! Happy and safe driving, Hunter. We are so proud of you!



Hunter is show driving his truck.

From VIPS Kid to VIPS Board Member Meet Paul Frazier!

VIPS board member, Paul Frazier, brings a lot to the table. He is the father of a preschooler, a former educator, a businessman, and a natural advocate, with a charismatic personality and a heart of gold. But one of the strongest qualities Paul brings to his board responsibility is the critical perspective he has as a legally blind individual. He knows visual impairment inside-out on a very personal and practical level.

You see, Paul is a VIPS alumnus. He was referred to VIPS when he was just seven weeks old, following his diagnosis of albinism, a condition impacting pigment in the hair, skin and eyes that causes impaired vision.

"My mission for serving on the VIPS board is to be a name and face of what VIPS does."

"I want to make sure everyone knows the significance of this work," Paul notes. "VIPS served 752 children and their families last fiscal year. Numbers and reach are important, but what's more important is that each one of those is a REAL person who has been helped; VIPS services to REAL children and REAL families = REAL impact."

Paul and his wife, Chelsea, have a son, Lincoln, who turns four in May, the same month Paul turns 30. Being a parent now, Paul realizes how important VIPS services were to his Mom and Dad in terms of offering comfort and showing them the possibilities. "VIPS helped me and my parents to be able to adapt."

"We were a sports family," Paul's mom, Robin, says. "My husband Roy and I both played high school sports and were avid sports fans. Our friends joked that we should get married on the pitcher's mound. When our first son was born, he was destined to be an athlete. Roy coached and I was team mom."

While awaiting Paul's birth, Robin and Roy anticipated the same would be true for Paul. "But little did we know that once Paul was diagnosed, we would wonder if he would even be able to play at all," Robin recalls. "I was holding that seven-week old jumping 16 years ahead in my mind."

Once referred to VIPS, Robin and Roy were able to develop a new “game plan.” Robin says, “Our bi-weekly visits with our interventionist kept us on track. Once we had hope, it helped us not project into a future we did not know, but to take things one day at a time. I had joy everyday in witnessing what Paul was able to do instead of grieving what he might not be able to do someday.”

“VIPS gave my Mom and Dad the knowledge and skills to help me find the things I could do and find ways to overcome whatever obstacles there were to me doing them successfully.” Paul said.

“My brother was a very good athlete. So I wanted to be a very good athlete, too. I know my mom thought she would lose her mind when I said I wanted to play football, but she knew if I’d made my mind up, I was going to do it.”

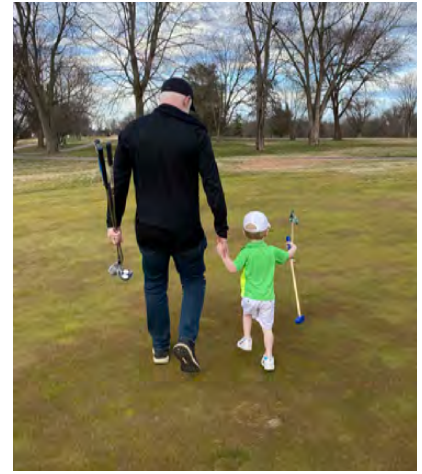
“When you are growing up, you feel some insecurities,” Paul recalls. “That’s compounded if you have a disability. When you are 13, all that matters is feeling included. I decided sports would be my thing, and that I would immerse myself into that and become successful.”

Paul is still very athletic, playing golf whenever he gets the chance and running in the Stampede for VIPS each year.

After graduating from college, Paul taught PE and Health. He served as Athletic Director at the private school where he taught for five years. Currently, Paul is Head of Sales at Cliff Cherry Machine Co., which is an FAA repair station in Louisville, repairing aircraft wheel and brake components, primarily for UPS.

Paul has come full circle from that 7-week old referred for VIPS services 30 years ago. Today, this successful young man gives back in service to VIPS through his donation of time, insight, and passion for young children with visual impairments and their families.

“The work doesn’t stop when the child leaves VIPS,” Paul says, “but thanks to VIPS, parents know what to do to help their child and the child learns to adapt to pursue their dreams.”



Paul at 7 weeks old; with wife Chelsea and son Lincoln; on the golf course with Lincoln.

A Creative Approach for a Child with CVI

By Elaine Cleaves, Arianna's Mom

Editor's note: The following is a Facebook post from the parent of a child with CVI. This creative parent has given us permission to reprint it.

Arianna, like most of our children with CVI, has issues with recall memory. Ari and I have created a digital recall memory -- we create videos with Ari as the subject -- brushing her teeth, combing her hair, getting dressed, making her bed, doing laundry, cooking, flipping on the trampoline, etc. This gives her independence -- when she wants to do a task, she opens a memory and follows the steps.

The idea for this came from her favorite movie "Inside Out" and Julia Child. Prior to WWII, we learned to cook from our Mom and Grandmom -- then came TV dinners, packaged mixes, etc., and suddenly there was a generation of Moms who did not know how to cook. Then came Julia -- she taught us how to cook again. "Inside Out" describes how the different parts of the brain communicate on a child's level.

"Inside Out" opened a door for communication, and Ari asked to watch it again and again; even at a young age she knew somehow that her brain did not work like everyone else's. One day when watching a video, she asked if I could see memories without a video, because she can't.

My reaction, "WOW! Such insight from my five year old!" She had just been diagnosed and I didn't have a clue about CVI. She asked if we could use her

Kindle Fire to make memories so she could watch them on her own. I found it interesting that when she watched them it triggered memories for her.

One day while taping with my phone I accidentally hit slo-mo -- I was taping my daycare kids playing. Ari watched it over and over. I thought she was fascinated with slo-mo; however, later she asked me to tape her climbing the slide ladder -- something she had been unable to do -- then she did it. I was surprised when she said, "See, I learned how from slo-mo."

I now know that videos are electronic memories and slo-mo makes them easier for her to process. Another benefit is that Ari can stop and replay as she is learning. My goal is to get the schools to use videos as teaching aids - math, science, etc. Our kids are not "quick learners" and there are very few textbooks for them to refer back to for review.

The benefits are amazing!!!!!! I find hope in our children being part of the digital age.

Elaine has asked if anyone has information on any CVI programs for elementary and middle school students. Please share any info with VIPS Education Director, Kathy Mullen, who will forward to Elaine. You can send info to kmullen@vips.org.

Dear VIPS Alumni and Alumni Families

We have created a VIPS Alumni Facebook page and are thrilled that many of you have joined! If you have not yet joined, please do!! Go to: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/350260048440168>. The purpose of this page is: "to build a network of families where you can share your experiences and find support and encouragement from one another."

We hope this will be an active online community for sharing information, experiences, and insights, as well as keeping us all up-to-date on what you (if you are an alumni) or your child (if you are a parent/caregiver) are up to these days!

This is a private Facebook group, so when you request to join you will be asked a few questions to verify your former involvement with VIPS. In addition to VIPS families, current and former VIPS staff may join.

Easter Bunny Visits VIPS Indiana Drive-Thru Party

On March 27, 2021 the Indianapolis Alumnae of Delta Gamma hosted an Easter Bunny Drive-Thru at our Indianapolis office. The DGs passed out candy and set up an area for families to safely take pictures with the Easter Bunny! We are so grateful for the Delta Gammas and their passion for our VIPS families. They are amazing community partners that truly believe in our mission. Thanks to our wonderful Easter Bunny, VIPS Indiana board member and Delta Gamma, Laurie Roselle

Notes of Interest

Critically Loved is a Louisville-based nonprofit organization dedicated to providing guidance and hope for families of chronically or critically ill children by assisting them in navigating hospital stays, bill payment, and schooling issues as well as providing educational, recreational, and spiritual support. They will meet, at no charge, with parents to answer questions, provide spiritual and emotional support, point them to financial resources and help them organize to manage their child's healthcare.

The Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education has published the first substantial evidence that retinal detachment in Stickler Syndrome eyes can finally be prevented using a laser-based, non-invasive technique called ora secunda cerclage/Stickler Syndrome (OSC/SS). It thus now becomes especially important that at risk need to be identified as soon as possible so they can receive this preventive treatment.

Welcome New Children

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

Adeline – 8 months, Corydon, KY
Alaina - 7 months, Indianapolis, IN
Amelia - 2 years, Westfield, IN
Anna - 3 months, Horse Cave, KY
Autumn - 2 years, Fort Wayne, IN
Chance - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
Claire - 6 months, LaGrange, KY

Dallas - 2 years, Winimac, IN
Easton - 3 years, Fort Wayne, IN
Ian - 2 years, Elizabethtown, KY
Isaiah - 9 months, Henderson, KY
Itzyana - 2 years, Indianapolis, IN
John – 1 year, Danville, KY
Jolene - 2 years, Fortville, IN
Joshua – 2 years, Lewisport, KY
Kade - 1 year, Shepherdsville, KY
Kagan - 10 months, Indianapolis, IN
Kason - 1 year, Plainfield, IN
Kelby - 9 months, Noblesville, IN
Killian - 1 year, Evansville, IN
Leo - 1 year, Fort Wayne, IN
London - 2 years, Louisville, KY
Matthew – 1 year, Louisville, KY
Milan - 8 months, Louisville, KY
Odin - 1 year, South Bend, IN
Osuke - 11 months, Lexington, KY
Otto - 5 months, Louisville, KY
Reece - 8 months, Louisville, KY
Sanvi - 3 years, Greenwood, IN

Eye Pressing Study

The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) is studying the physical, psychological, and psychosocial impact of eye pressing on those who are blind or visually impaired and their families, to determine the need for technology solutions to help intervene and modify the habit. Consistent eye rubbing and/or eye pressing has been proven to cause physical damage to the eyes, including retinal detachment, scratching of the cornea, and globe movement. If you or your child are affected by this, please respond to a brief survey by Monday, May 31, 2021 by clicking [here](#). All responses are confidential, and are for internal APH purposes only.

Making a lighted spoon

Supplies:

McDonald's McFlurry spoon

Finger light (Can be either a plain finger light or a laser fiber finger light)

Clear packing tape (3M Heavy Duty is best for making and taking apart)

Instructions:

Insert the end of the finger light into the end of the McFlurry spoon.

Cut a piece of packing tape $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 " long.

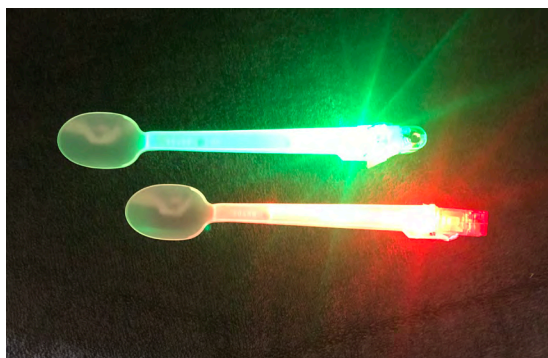
Starting at the side of the on/off switch, place the tape on the finger light and the spoon and wrap around to the other side.

Cautions:

Do not leave the child alone with the spoon.

The plain finger light is small and both lights contain button batteries.

Remove the finger light before washing the spoon.



VIPS Staff News

"See you later" (but never "Goodbye"!) was repeated multiple times to Kristin Horlander, beloved Assistant Director of Kids Town Preschool, who has resigned to join a family business. Kristin became a member of the VIPS staff when her daughter, Maddie, began attending the Preschool. Her job expanded to include Family Services along with troubleshooting pre-school concerns. We wish her well but will miss her dedication (and did we mention her pranks?)!!

We are thrilled to announce that Kids Town Preschool Teacher, Juanita Miles, has accepted the position of Assistant Director of Kids Town Preschool. Juanita brings a wealth of experience in teaching and program management to this position!

David Sterne, VIPS First Steps Coordinator and Provisional Teacher of the Blind/Low Vision, has accepted the new agency-wide position of Cultural

Quality Assurance Coordinator. In that capacity, David will support and enhance the work of all of our service providers and administrative staffs in all three offices. He will assess and provide ongoing services for all Spanish-speaking families through Indiana First Steps and offer interpreter services for VIPS Spanish-speaking families in Kentucky. He will work with interpreter services to secure assistance for serving families who speak other languages and will support minority families in their attendance at our Parent Empowerment Program sessions and the VIPS Annual Family Retreat. He will actively engage in child find activities within minority communities as well.

Melisa Mathews, VIPS Indiana TBLV, has been awarded a scholarship from VisionServe Alliance in the amount of \$1,500 to help pay for the cost of her master's work at Indiana State University as she pursues her TBLV. Congratulations, Melisa!

Kentucky childcare licensing personnel made their annual surprise spot visit to Kids Town Preschool at VIPS to begin the process of reviewing and re-issuing our permit. We are very proud that we continue to meet the highest, 5-Star standards of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. This day-long magnifying-glass examination can be stressful, but Education Director Kathy Mullen and the Kids Town Preschool education team handled the day brilliantly, considering that it was only the second day after our return to in-person school on March 22! Congratulations to the entire VIPS team!

Carol Dahmke, VIPS Louisville Office Manager and system-wide Human Resources Manager, just completed a year-long course in HR and passed her certification test. She is now a Society of Human Resources Management Certified Professional. We are so proud of Carol's hard work and success, overcoming the shift to virtual classes, recovering from a non-COVID hospitalization of 15 days, serving as the matriarch of her family and keeping her VIPS family paid!

Congratulations are due to Meredith Howell, VIPS Indiana Regional Director, and the entire VIPS IN team who recently learned that United Way of Central Indiana, in a rare change in policy, accredited VIPS IN as a new UWCI partner, one of only three new agencies approved! In the words of the UWCI official, accredited organizations are well-managed, fiscally responsible, and provide programs/services that provide high-quality impact to the Central Indiana community. They show commitment to quality human ser-

vice delivery and sound governance and management.

Congratulations to VIPS Family Services Coordinator, Jenny Castenir, author of a mini-grant recently funded by the Kentucky Association of Blind and Visually Impaired (KAER). Jenny's idea was for VIPS parents to visit the Office of the Blind, a state government rehabilitation agency that offers assistance to persons who are blind or visually impaired, typically providing assistance and support to high school students transitioning to further schooling/training along with assisting adults with jobs, training and/or adaptive equipment. Jenny's mini-grant includes a tour of the McDowell Center in Louisville. Congratulations, Jenny for such a clever idea!

Congratulations are due Paige Maynard, VIPS Louisville TVI/Developmental Interventionist, who played a role in the American Printing House for the Blind's recent webinar series on using Lego Braille Bricks.

Kudos to VIPS staff who have completed multi-session trainings over the past several months:

The following completed Virtual VIISA (Visually Impaired In-Service of America) taught by Kathy Mullen, VIPS Education Director, and David Sterne, VIPS IN First Steps & Cultural Quality Assurance Coordinator:

Kim Berghoff, Contractor - VIPS IN

Pam Holladay, TVI/DI - VIPS Louisville

Tammy Maynard, DI - VIPS Central KY

Juanita Miles, Assistant Preschool Director - VIPS Louisville

Tracy Webb, DI - VIPS Louisville

The following completed a 6-session class on Cortical Visual Impairment with Dr. Christine Roman:

Kim Berghoff, Contractor - VIPS IN

Mindy Koehne, TBLV - VIPS IN

Tracy Webb, DI - VIPS Louisville

Melisa Matthews, BLVS - VIPS IN

Our deepest gratitude goes to the indefatigable Bob Boyd, IT Specialist, who has worked through the myriad difficulties and challenges to take VIPS into the 21st century, technology wise! He has installed, trouble shot, shared, trouble shot, faxed, trouble shot, emailed, trouble shot---you get the picture! We so appreciate his patience, perseverance and skills! Thanks, Bob, for a job well done.

In Memoriam

This issue of the VISability is dedicated to the memories of

Finley Devlin, daughter of Katelyn Devlin of Greenwood IN, who passed away on February 11, 2021 at the age of 31 months, and Emersun Cardwell, daughter of Kayla Hunt and Kevin Cardwell of Hopkinsville, KY, who passed away February 23, 2021 at the age of 13 months.

Our hearts go out to all of those who loved Finley and Emersun.

BEST Learns from the Best

Blind Early Services of Tennessee (BEST) in Nashville, TN is an initiative started by two determined parents of young blind children who had to search for appropriate services for their children (not unlike Rebecca Davis – see Eliza’s Story on pg. 2). Finding only limited services in the Nashville area, they virtually enrolled their children in VIPS Kids Town Preschool from Tennessee. Ashley Emmons, Preschool Teacher/TVI/COMS, worked online with both the parents and the children.

With information and coaching from Diane Nelson, VIPS Executive Director, and Kathy Mullen, VIPS Education Director, BEST has now been incorporated, obtained its 501C3 and just announced an award from the State of Tennessee to begin early childhood intervention modeled on VIPS Louisville.

The nonprofit provides support services for families of children who are blind or visually impaired along with programming for the children. Founded to eliminate gaps in state services for these families, BEST aims to be a comprehensive resource for children with visual impairments, working with families to ensure they receive needed support.

Through its first phase of programming, the BEST Together Parent Support Program, families and caregivers will have access to support groups, at-home resources, seminars featuring professionals in the vision impairment and early intervention fields, and hands-on educational training on how to raise a child with a diagnosis of blindness or visual impairment. The organization has plans to unveil in-home early intervention, vision-specific educational training for professionals, and family advocacy services later this

year. All services are funded by public-private partnerships and grants and private donations, making them no-cost to the families they serve.

BEST hopes to serve families across the state with the BEST Together program. Direct, in-person services will be specific to middle Tennessee until the organization grows and can expand its reach. For more information about BEST, go to blindearlyservices.org.

Gifts of Time, Talent and Treasure

VIPS Louisville

Every day for two weeks, VIPS Louisville received box after box after box from Amazon and UPS. Some incredibly generous donors searched our Amazon wish list to shower VIPS with gifts! We are so very thankful to:

John and Amy Anders
Heather and Aaron Benson
Bob and Terri Connolly
Karin and Leonardo Geraci
Mark and Susan Krebs
Mark J. and Leigh Ann Lynn
William Osborne
Penny Osborne

Donated items included sanitizing supplies, batteries, craft supplies, paper supplies, food storage supplies, games, bibs, cups and hook and loop Velcro. Thanks so much for helping prepare for our students to return to the building!

Thanks to Emma Strange and other Holy Cross volunteers who donated craft supplies to the Preschool.

For the donation of wonderful books to the VIPS Parent Library at the VIPS Louisville Office, thanks to: students from Presentation Academy; VIPS parent Lesley Lester, who gave a large number of wonderful tactual books; VIPS parent Karen Geraci, who blessed with with a large selection of print/braille books; VIPS Parent Erika Weilage, who donated braille books and a large braille alphabet display; and VIPS teacher Pam Holladay, who donated

her collection of favorite books she had used in her classroom when teaching for Bullitt County.

Anna Alphin, a sophomore from Assumption High School, wanted to volunteer at VIPS, but due to concerns about COVID, she could not physically come to VIPS. So she made sensory welcome back to preschool cards! Thank you, Anna!

Our excitement was exceeded only by the enthusiasm and willingness that volunteers from UPS Brokerage had for working on the VIPS landscape and windows. They had a beautiful day to weed, lay mulch and wash windows at VIPS on April 9. They were excited to get out of their home offices and help us with a project that saved VIPS money - now able to be spent on helping children! We are most grateful to VIPS Board member Mike Richardson, Jim Jury and the hard workers they brought with them!



A group of nine UPS volunteers smile after a long day of work.

VIPS Indiana

Thank You, DayStar!

We are honored to have been chosen to receive a generous donation from DayStar Childcare & Infant Learning Center in Indianapolis! Each February they choose a non-profit to donate to, providing an opportunity to teach

young children the importance of caring for others. They sent home a coffee cup and lid, along with a flyer about VIPS, so DayStar families and staff could collect change to donate.

Our VIPS IN Family Resource Center is right down the street from DayStar! Their Family Engagement Specialist, Jen May, said:

"We definitely invited families to 'love their neighbor' and welcome you to the neighborhood with a show of support from DayStar! Our classrooms were encouraged to participate in activities throughout the month to talk about visual impairment, experience play using our different senses, and being exposed to braille books. Many children enjoyed decorating their cups and bringing in their change!"

Apparently, quite a few children brought in their change because DayStar donated \$695! Thank you, DayStar, for being such awesome neighbors. We can't wait to join the community!

Walking for Dreams

Join us in Indianapolis for our annual Walking for Dreams Family & Pet Walk on May 23, 2021! The walk will kick off at 2 PM in downtown Indianapolis at the canal (337 West 11th Street between Meridian and Dr. Martin Luther King Drive).

This is VIPS Indiana's largest fundraiser of the year, and we need your help to make it a success! There will be an option to join virtually from ANYWHERE as well, so if you cannot be with us on the canal, you can walk from your neighborhood, local park, or anywhere you choose.

Here's how you can participate! You may do ALL of the following by going to www.walkingfordreams.org whether participating in-person or virtually.

Sign up to walk! By signing up, you are committing to walk on behalf of VIPS and/or raise funds to support our critical programming. So what's next? Set a goal amount and start asking family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors to donate on your behalf!

Start a team! When you sign up, you have the option to start a team and build your own profile. If you select this option, you can start your very own

fundraising team that your family and friends can register to walk on and/or make donations to. This is a great way to get your family and friends excited about raising money to support our VIPS families!

Make a general donation. We get it. Not everyone will want to attend this fundraiser or participate virtually but making a donation will make an impact. Every dollar counts!

Need more info? Contact Meredith at mhowell@vips.org.

Recent Grants and Development News

VIPS Kentucky

We are so blessed to have generous donors like Mike and Chris Gilbert who have continued to bless us every year since 1999 with a generous donation. Thank you so much for your continuing support -- it makes so much possible!

VIPS is a semi-finalist for a grant from The Artemis Fund which is a group of high school students who research and support impact work. Ashley Emmons, Preschool Teacher/TVI/ COMS, will present on the physical education curriculum she created and request support for equipment needed to implement the curriculum in our preschool. Good luck, Ashley, and congratulations for making it this far!

The Pappy Raffle

We are thrilled to report that the Pappy Raffle, held during January and February, netted \$65,300! Thanks to Dr. Mark and Cindy Lynn for covering the cost of the coveted bottles of Pappy Van Winkle. This was a wonderful fundraiser, held at virtually no cost to VIPS and not requiring the staff time needed for most fundraisers. Thanks to Kids Town Preschool student, Millie Deason, who drew the lucky winner! We are so grateful to all who purchased raffle tickets to make this such a success.

Recent Grants

Thank you to the following organizations for their generous grants over the past several months!

\$30,000 -- from Dr. Mark and Cindy Lynn for Stampede for VIPS sponsorship.

\$8,000 -- from the E. O. Robinson Fund for the Early Childhood Intervention program in Eastern KY counties.

\$7,500 -- from The Copia Foundation for the Early Childhood Intervention program in Central KY

\$5,000 – from Children’s Charity of the Bluegrass for the Early Childhood Intervention program in Central KY

\$2,500 -- from Norton Healthcare Community Initiatives for programming

\$1,000 -- from Alex G. Campbell, Jr. Foundation for the Early Childhood Intervention program in Central KY.

VIPS Indiana

25+ Kiwanians Who Care

VIPS Indiana is excited to announce that we were the recipient of 25+ Kiwanians Who Care first-ever Night of Giving! VIPS was nominated by long-time Kiwanian, Vanessa McClary, and joined two other amazing youth-serving organizations presenting to Kiwanians about their services. While it was close, the Kiwanians chose to support VIPS and we are ever so grateful! Through each of the Kiwanian’s awesome individual gift of \$100, VIPS received \$5,200 that will go towards our VIPS Family Resource Center, currently under construction (see article on front page!) Thank you 25+ Kiwanians Who Care for believing in our mission and the education of the children we serve.

Xtina Louise Fundraiser

VIPS Indiana is excited to have partnered with talented pop artist, Xtina Louise, for the release of her brand new “The View” music video. Xtina generously donated all proceeds from the song and video directly to VIPS to help with our Family Resource Center. With a generous matching donation from Bose McKinney & Evans LLP, Xtina Louise was able to raise over \$13,000 for VIPS. We are so grateful for her support! Check out her song “The View” at <https://youtu.be/CzU7Me6ih7k>.

The AWS Foundation

The AWS Foundation has donated to support VIPS services in northwest Indiana. Moira receives VIPS services, thanks to this grant. Moira's mother, Megan, recently wrote:

"My daughter Moira started VIPS in the fall of 2020. She was almost 1 year old at the time. She has Septo-Optic Dysplasia among other neurological disorders and health issues. When we first started with VIPS, I surely didn't realize the impact these services were going to have. We had a lot going on at the time and I almost didn't follow through adding another therapy to our schedule. So glad we did! The education I got about a child's eye development and how it is different with Moira has been invaluable. During therapy sessions, we would discuss issues she was having and her VIPS Interventionist would have suggestions on how her vision might be impacting those issues. She would suggest things to try or adjustments to make. And they ended up helping so much! I'm so grateful we have these services available in Allen County."



Moira bats at her toys that are suspended from the ceiling of her little play "room."

Recent Grants

We are so thankful for the following donations to VIPS Indiana.

\$47,000 -- from The AWS Foundation for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Northeast Indiana.

\$10,000 -- from The Hoover Family Foundation for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in the Indianapolis area.

\$7,250 -- from NineStar Community Trust for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in the Hancock county IN area.

\$2,000 -- from The Kiwanis Foundation of Indianapolis to purchase play frame materials for early intervention.

Need Assistance?

Our friends at Kosair Charities have reached out with a reminder that they are here for our VIPS families! Kosair Charities offers financial aid for medical bills; support for the purchase of wheelchairs, medical equipment and devices; and funding for physical, occupational, and speech therapies. If your family can benefit from such assistance, please contact [Kosair.org/financial-assistance-program](https://www.kosair.org/financial-assistance-program). A big thank you to Kosair Charities!!

Grant Opportunity for Families Impacted by Walker-Warburg Syndrome

We wanted to share some awesome news from the Eva Juneja Foundation -- a foundation started by former VIPS parents Jamie and Fahr Juneja in honor of their daughter Eva who was diagnosed with Walker-Warburg Syndrome (WWS). WWS is a rare genetic disease, characterized by abnormalities of the muscles, brain, and eyes. Children with this diagnosis are given a challenging prognosis and a short life expectancy.

In the Fall of 2020, the Foundation started "Eva's Butterfly Wishes!" They partnered with the National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD) to set-up a patient assistance program for WWS families so they could enjoy a fun experience together as they were able to with Eva.

VIPS is honored to have had a role in Eva's life. And we are so grateful for the support the Eva Junega Foundation has shown to VIPS. We know this foundation will impact the lives of so many families!

You can learn more about the program at <https://evajunefoundation.org/>.

VIPS Wish Lists

VIPS Indiana

Metal whisks

Shiny red pom poms

Office supply gift card

Black bath towels

Disinfectant wipes

Amazon Wish List: <http://a.co/aeRar2N>

VIPS Louisville

Wild Animal primary colored counters (<https://www.kaplanco.com/product/31165/wild-animal-counters?c=8%7CNU1020>)

Pet Animal primary colored counters (<https://www.kaplanco.com/product/51146/pet-counters-set-of-72?c=8%7CNU1005>)

Ocean Animal primary colored counters (<https://www.lakeshorelearning.com/products/math/math-manipulatives/sea-animal-counters/p/LC1667>)

Positional Words Resource box (<https://www.lakeshorelearning.com/products/language/vocabulary/positional-words-resource-box/p/PP949>)

Gallon size Ziploc bags

XL Size Ziploc bags

Glue Gun with glue sticks

Laminating sheets 8.9 x 11.4 in/ 3MIL

White cardstock

Clear Contact paper

Paper Clips

Staplers and staples

Tape dispenser for scotch tape

Large Step Pedal Trash Can
Jumbo black dry erase markers
Plastic Pocket folders (12 each of Blue, Red, Purple, Orange, Green)
Hula Hoops (8)
Bubbles or bubbles refills
Water beads (Orbeez, Marvel or similar)
Mesh Playground ball bag
Kinetic Sand
Glow in the dark star stickers
Multi-colored pom-poms -- jumbo size only
VIPS Central KY
Clorox Wipes
Spray cleaner (for wiping down hard surfaces)
Large Ziploc bags

I'm Just So Proud!

By Kathy Mullen, VIPS Education Director

- I'm just so proud of the work we do at VIPS.
- I am so proud to work in the company of the experts I call coworkers.
- I am so proud that together we change the lives of children and families in our communities and beyond.
- I am so proud that like-agencies across the country look to us for support with program planning.
- I am so proud that other states look to VIPS for the recipe of our success.
- I am so proud that we continue to grow and look for ways to continue to improve.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, May 11

Mark your calendar and be a part of Kentucky Gives Day! Spread the word about your favorite nonprofit--VIPS! On this day of annual giving, we are reminded of how much we can accomplish when we come together as a Kentuckiana community. Visit <https://www.kygives.org/organizations/visually-impaired-preschool-services-vips>.

Monday, Tuesdays June 7 -July 20

Fun-filled VIPS Louisville Preschool Summer Session will be held 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Open to current VIPS preschool students and VIPS graduates who completed Kindergarten in Spring 2021. Tuition assistance is available in exchange for volunteering one day (4 hours) in the VIPS Administrative office. Contact Kathy Mullen kmullen@vips.org for registration/questions.

June 10-June 20

The Annual Bluegrass Fair will take place at Masterson Station Park, Lexington, KY, sponsored by the Lexington Lions Club. This wonderful family-friendly event raises funds for so many Central Kentucky non-profits, including VIPS. Find more information at www.thebluegrassfair.com.

Saturday, June 26

The VIPS Gala will be held. The format will be virtual but also include small in-person parties; VIPS will support individuals in hosting their own parties. If you would like more information on how to host a remote party or would like to donate bourbon, silent auction gifts, live auction packages and other donations, please contact Alexis Asamoah (aasamoah@vips.org).

Saturday & Sunday, Aug 21 & 22

Mark your calendars for the VIPS Pickleball Tournament!

Friday, August 27

The VIPS Cupcake Classic will take place, Wellington Park, Lexington, KY. This in-person race will be a 3k twilight race. All participants will receive a cupcake at the finish line courtesy of our sponsor, BabyCakes. Visit www.vips.org or www.racerise.com for more information. Want to make your summer really sweet? Complete the Treats Trifecta by also signing up for the North Lime Donut Dash on June 5 and the Crank & Boom Craft Ice Cream Sprint for Scoops on July 16 at www.racerise.com. Contact Kelly Easton at keaston@vips.org if you would like to participate as a player or a sponsor.

Monday October 4

The annual YUM Corporate Cup golf outing will be held at Wildwood Country Club. Contact keaston@vips.org for more information.

VIPS Non-Discrimination Statement

VIPS does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law in policies or practices related to: children and/or families served; employment, contractors, or volunteers; and membership on the VIPS Board of Directors or advisory boards.

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Jan Moseley, Editor.

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Staci Maynard, TVI/Preschool Teacher

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Jan Moseley, Visual Impairment Specialist

Brenda Pharris, Preschool Classroom Assistant

Kirsten Schmidt, Guest Relations & Support

Carla Vied, Developmental Interventionist

Tracy Webb, Developmental Interventionist

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