

# VI Sability

the Parent Newsletter of Visually Impaired Preschool Services  
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## In This Issue:

<a href="#">Upcoming Events .....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">VIPS Does It Again.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">A Noble Space for a Noble Cause .....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Meet Some Wonderful VIPS Kids .....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">White Cane Awareness Day .....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">VIPS Grad Named Team KY Allstar .....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">VIPS Family Retreat Recap .....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Transition Planning .....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Online Parent Support Group .....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Welcome New Children .....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">7 Ways to Make the Most of an     Eye Doctor Appointment .....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Who Are Sighted Peers?.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">In Memoriam.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Thanks to Our Volunteers.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Notes of Interest .....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">VIPS Staff News.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Fund-Raising &amp; Event News .....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Recent Grants &amp; Donations.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">VIPS Wish Lists.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">'Tis the Season for Generosity .....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">VIPS Office and Staff Lists.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday, Dec. 17 thru Monday, Jan. 3

VIPS Kids Town Preschool will be closed for the Holidays. Contact Juanita Miles at the email address below.

[jmiles@vips.org](mailto:jmiles@vips.org).

Thursday, Dec. 23 - Friday, Dec. 31  
All VIPS Offices will be closed for the Holidays.

Friday, Jan. 21  
VIPs Louisville families will go on a school tour of Breckenridge-Franklin Elementary and the Kentucky School for the Blind. To register, contact Kathy Mullen at the email link below:

[kmullen@vips.org](mailto:kmullen@vips.org)

Sunday, February 6, 1-3 p.m.  
VIPs Indiana will hold a Topgolf Tournament, in Fishers, IN. Participation will be limited, so sign up now! For more information, contact Meredith Howell at the email link below:

[mhowell@vips.org](mailto:mhowell@vips.org)

Saturday, February 12, 2022  
VIPs Kentucky will host Once Upon an Orchestra, at the Louisville Office. Watch for details to come!! Contact Jenny Castenir, Family Services Coordinator, at the email link below:

[jcastenir@vips.org](mailto:jcastenir@vips.org)

Thursday, Feb. 17  
The KY Regional Braille Challenge will be held at the KY School for the Blind in Louisville. See details below

Thursday, March 3  
There will be a Virtual Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) Workshop on how caregivers can secure the future of their dependents with special needs. Contact Jenny Castenir, at the email link below:

[castenir@vips.org](mailto:castenir@vips.org)

KY Braille Challenge

Calling all Kentucky braille readers!  
The 2022 Kentucky Regional Braille Challenge will take place on February 17 (Snow Date February 24) and it is being planned as an in-person event this year (COVID PERMITTING). This exciting competition is open to all Kentucky students who are braille readers. Students do not have to be reading on grade level to participate. All contests for the 2022 event will be in UEB. [Students participating at grade level will be competing for a trip to the national Braille Challenge® in Los Angeles \(COVID PERMITTING\)!](#)

Children must be registered by January 7, 2022. For info or registration forms, contact Jane Thompson at the email link below:

[jthompson@aph.org](mailto:jthompson@aph.org)

# VIPS Does It Again!!!

We are so proud Visually Impaired Preschool Services (VIPS) has earned our fourth consecutive 4-star rating from [Charity Navigator](#)!

They state, "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 21% of the charities we evaluate have received at least 4 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."

We are so honored to once again receive this rating as a testament to our hard work and commitment to see our mission through! For info on Charity Navigator, see link below.

<https://www.charitynavigator.org/>

[Return to Contents](#)

## A Noble Space for a Noble Cause

By Ashley Ross, Development Coordinator, VIPS Indiana

Greetings from our new Simon and Estelle Knoble Family Resource Center at 1212 Southeastern Avenue near downtown Indianapolis! After years of fundraising and building, our VIPS staff moved into the facility on October 29th!

Construction is underway on our Toddler Town and Sensory Room, and soon our specialized outdoor play space will take shape. Once completed, the VIPS Family Resource Center will be a safe space where kids can be kids, and provide a place of respite for family members and caregivers who are doing their best to get through an especially challenging time. It will provide a sense of community and caring, giving parents hope that their child will be able to successfully navigate the challenges ahead. The new facility will include:

- A parent resource and lending library;
- An adaptive playground;
- A sensory room;
- A "Toddler Town" specifically designed to meet the curiosity and educational needs of children with visual impairments;
- Two classrooms/therapy rooms (child-size furniture, appropriate toys and technology to support children with low vision, and a place where children

can be assessed);

- Child-size bathrooms and changing tables;
- A teletherapy room;
- A sensory garden; and
- Office space for staff and storage for adaptive equipment.

The Family Resource Center is the first and only facility of its kind in the State of Indiana—a place where children will be accepted just as they are. They can just be kids, and their parents can just be parents—not parents of a child with a disability. It's the culmination of years of effort that will allow us not only to serve more kids and their families, but also to serve them better for many years to come.

Now that we are in our new 6,300 square foot space, we will change our focus to feathering our new nest as we prepare for an anticipated grand opening in the Spring of 2022. We can't wait to welcome families, friends, and supporters at future gatherings.

Gene D'Adamo, president and CEO, Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, one of two large donors to the VIPS Indiana Capital Campaign responsible for putting us within 98% of our goal, said, "You cannot overstate the positive impact VIPS Indiana makes on these children and their families. The Family Resource Center will be an incredible asset to the entire community." See more at the link below:

<https://vips.org/donations-fundraising/lilly-endowment-inc-and-nina-mason-pulliam-grants-bring-vips-near-capital-campaign-goal>

## Words of Thanks and Praise

By Diane Nelson, Executive Director

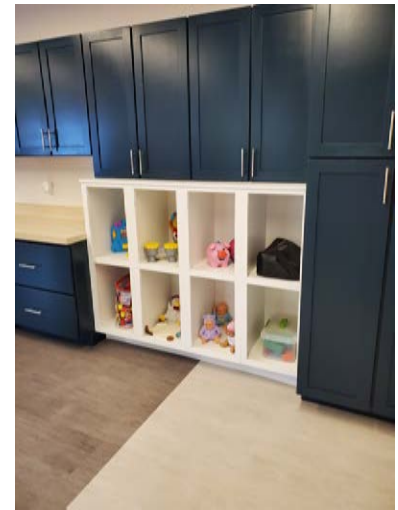
At VIPS, we have so very many things to be thankful for but we began November by celebrating our own official homecoming in Indiana. I say HOME because The Simon and Estelle Knoble Family Resource Center in Indianapolis was officially our own as we moved from our rented spaces in the wonderful and welcoming Indiana Interchurch Center (IIC) where we have grown since April, 2014.

We are so very grateful for the many years of generous support from the IIC, with not only affordable rental offices but also donations of furniture, community gathering spaces, and thoughtful, giving people which allowed us to best focus our limited resources on service to children as we expanded into Indiana. It was a venue that provided the opportunity to launch our popular reVISION tactual art exhibit because of their wonderful rotating art gallery.

VIPS felt a warm and safe collegial welcome there, surrounded by many other nonprofits changing the future for those in need. We count amongst our blessings the IIC team that have become family (Mel, Chris, and Lewis to

name a few) and all the other wonderful staff of the IIC. It was exactly what we needed to get to where we are today, and we are so very grateful.

What I know for sure is our new home will allow us to be even more mission-focused and #VIPsstrong in Indiana. So, as we move into November we want to begin by saying "Thank You" to the many people that have made our dream a reality. It has taken the grand effort of many – our generous development guardian, TWG and their construction partners, the Indianapolis Community Development grant group, our wonderful foundation supporters, generous grantors, extremely supportive individual donors, our passionate advisory board members, the Indianapolis community, our determined team and our grateful client families. As they say, "it takes a team to do anything of lasting value - Together Everyone Accomplishes More." We are blessed to have our TEAM!



Photos are shown of one of the therapy rooms. There is a brightly colored, striped teepee and a book display. Another photo shows dark blue cabinetry and three riding toys. The third picture shows more cabinets and white cubbies filled with enticing toys.

[Return to Contents](#)

## Meet Some Wonderful VIPs Kids

October was Blindness and Visual Impairment Awareness Month. To call attention to this month every year, VIPs solicits letters from parents and teachers about our students. We hope these letters will educate, inspire, and advocate for the blind/visually impaired community. There are more than 300,000 people across Indiana and Kentucky who are blind or visually impaired -- they may be your neighbors, co-workers, friends, or family.



Most people think that every child across the United States has the same access to services because of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and services from the local schools, but we know that is absolutely not a true statement. What VIPS offers to young children and their families in Kentucky and Indiana is actually the exception instead of the rule. The important message is there is much work yet to be done in educational advocacy to ensure that all infants, toddlers and preschoolers with blindness, vision loss, deaf/blindness and low vision receive the professional early intervention they need and deserve. When 90% of what a child learns is through vision – our children cannot wait a single moment to begin their educational journey!

Join us on some of our VIPS' children's journeys!

**Alana** is one of our VIPS Kids Town students and her mother, Kamesha, shared Alana's story:

"Alana was born with a rare unbalanced translocation chromosomal disorder that doesn't have a name; which we have dubbed the "AM Syndrome" after Alana and her younger sister Arael who also has the same condition. They're missing some of the 14th chromosome and have an extra 17th chromosome that is attached to the 14th chromosome. This chromosomal condition has caused some issues that include cataracts and coloboma in both of her eyes; she's missing some of her iris and retina. Her iris is also shaped like a keyhole--which people find pretty amazing. We knew she would have some birth defects when she was born but no one knew what to expect because there was no information about her exact condition.

After her birth, we noticed that one of her eyes was smaller than the other and the NICU ophthalmologist confirmed the contracts and coloboma. With her condition, we know that her right eye which is the smaller eye, has a lot more of the retina missing than her left eye. She relies on her left eye a lot, especially when focusing on objects. We know that she also has trouble seeing things at a distance and out of her peripheral vision so she tends to run into things when crawling and getting around.

When we were signing up for First Steps and discussing our options for services, I mentioned Alana's vision being a major concern of ours because we didn't know how her vision would affect her everyday life and we weren't sure what we could do to assist her. Her coordinator mentioned they offered DI services to assist with vision needs through VIPS; that is when VIPS and Tracy Webb entered our lives.

Tracy was so helpful with new and creative ways so we could make Alana's limited vision work for her. We were pretty hesitant about sending Alana to school at three years old, but VIPS definitely was a major factor in helping us make the decision to move forward. Alana loves going to school and I can tell that her teachers clearly care about her. We still don't know where her vision journey is going to take us but I know that the skills we are learning through VIPs will prepare us for whatever comes our way."

**Cameron** is a recent VIPS graduate who received services in Indiana. His mother, Amy, shared:

“Cameron entered the VIPS program in 2019 through First Steps. We had only heard of the great resources this program had offered but didn’t know much beyond that. After having our evaluation and beginning to work with our teacher, David, our world and eyes were opened to so many opportunities and resources.

Cameron is blind in his left eye and has a diagnosis of Cortical Vision Impairment due to shaken baby syndrome. VIPS, and especially David, provided us with amazing resources and parent trainings. We are especially excited for the new Indianapolis location to open and explore.

Cameron just graduated from VIPS and First Steps in May of 2021, and because of VIPS, Cameron’s vision has grown immensely. He will turn to look at familiar voices, his favorite toys and animals, and has been able to show us that his favorite colors are blue and pink! We are now anxiously awaiting a trial eye gazing device to help further his vision and communication.

We are forever grateful for David and the VIPS organization for giving Cameron back so much that he lost and more and for being a great resource and support system for families like ours”.



Photo captions: Alana is shown sitting in her stroller, with a big blue sunbonnet on and blue sunglasses. Cameron, is shown with Mr. David. They are sitting on the floor and Cameron is leaning against a smiling David.

**Enrique** -- Enrique’s mother, Catelin, writes:

“Enrique was born with an infection called Congenital Cytomegalovirus also known as CMV. Typically, children with this infection see no symptoms or lasting impacts, but for Enrique, it has caused him lots of problems; one of them being Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI).”

Editor’s note: CVI is known to be the leading cause of visual impairment in children in the United States. With CVI, the eye’s connection to and in the

brain doesn't work correctly. With the help of VIPS interventions, Enrique and his family can be provided strategies that will help him compensate for his vision loss.



Photo captions: Enrique is in his stroller, which has a big canopy and even a little fan attached to the front. He is wearing a sunhat and looks quite content. Finn is shown having some french fries and a drink box with a straw. He is a little redhead wearing blue glasses.

**Finn** -- Finn's mother, Megan, shared his story:

"Our sweet Finn was diagnosed with visual impairment and got glasses in June 2020 when he was less than a year old. We added Ms. Paige to our amazing First Steps team last year during the pandemic with tele-visits and have been able to meet with her in person a few times, too. We are so excited that Finn and his twin sister Elliot have started the VIPS playgroup! We are already beyond impressed with VIPS, their facility, teachers, and employees and are so eager to see how they continue to open our eyes (pun intended) to all of the beautiful ways to teach both of our children how to explore and learn from their world."

Gavyn is soon aging out of our program in Indiana and his VIPS teacher, Ms. Amy, is sad to say "See you later!" but is honored to have been part of his life for these past few years. Here's how Amy described him:

"Gavyn, who is almost three (how can that be?!) started with VIPS in the beginning of February 2019, when he was just 12 weeks old -- 66 days old to be exact. At that time, the pediatric ophthalmologists had determined that he had nystagmus and that his retinas were 'very thin.' The prognosis for his future was unknown.

I would describe Gavyn as intelligent, curious, determined, independent, resilient, and motivated to 'figure things out.' He also happens to have low vision and other diagnoses, yet nothing has stopped him. He has conquered Costco with his cane as a mighty superhero; scaled the fence at his brother's tee ball game to get a better view; created sidewalk art; climbed to the top of his backyard gym; learned his colors, shapes, and letters; how to use a



spoon and fork -- the list goes on. He has stolen the hearts of all of his First Steps providers. His mom has advocated for him, taught him new things every day, and allowed us to be a part of their journey with Gavyn. Thank you!! We are excited to see all that Gavyn accomplishes as he grows and continues to learn! Watch out world, here he comes!!"



Photo captions: Gavyn is dressed in a blue shirt, with blue glasses to match. He is laying on his tummy playing with blocks. Hayes is sitting in his special chair wearing a birthday hat and dark blue glasses.

**Hayes** -- mother, Carlie, shared Hayes' story:

"Like every mom, I love to talk about my kids. My son, Hayes, is four and was born with a neurological disorder called FOXP1 syndrome, which affects every area of his development. From a visual standpoint, he is diagnosed with cortical visual impairment (CVI), strabismus, and hyperopia and is very sensitive to bright light. He's extremely cute and when we can manage to keep his glasses on him, it takes that to a whole new level! He's a very silly kid who loves swinging, running people over in his gait trainer, and reading touch and feel books with his brother Layne.

We were introduced to VIPS through First Steps and his wonderful VIPS teacher, Tracy Webb. After aging out of First Steps at three, and at Tracy's recommendation, we were able to send Hayes to VIPS Kids Town Preschool. Both Tracy and Hayes' teacher, Ms. Staci, have taught Hayes and our family so much about how to help him interact with the world around him.

To me, one of the most difficult things you can face as a parent is any feeling of helplessness when it comes to meeting the needs of your child and before VIPS, we had that in spades. Of course, VIPS specifically serves children, but as a by-product of their programs, they have also empowered Hayes' other family members to advocate and better care for him by increasing our understanding of CVI and directing us to resources that can help us further his success. Hayes' potential always existed, but we all struggled to access it. We've worked hard to advance his skills and in the process of helping him get there, he's opened our eyes to everything that he can achieve."

**Itzayana** -- VIPS teacher, Mr. David, has been providing services to Itzayana since the beginning of this year. He wanted to share what she has been up to:

"Itzayana has been making great progress in terms of using her vision since she began services with VIPS about six months ago. She is now walking everywhere in her home, outdoors, and in community environments such as her childcare classroom. She uses her vision to imitate a variety of gestures, complete a variety of fine motor tasks, and follow some one-step instructions. Great job, Itzayana!"



Photo captions: Itzayana, dressed all in pink, with thick black hair, is outside pushing a push toy filled with activity stations. Jack is sitting on the floor, with a wide smile on his face.

**Jack** -- VIPS teacher, Ms. Amy, wanted to write about Jack, another one of her kiddos who has had an impact on her over the past year:

"Jack was born during the COVID-19 pandemic. His neurologist diagnosed him with Cortical Visual Impairment and VIPS met Jack, and his family, when he was just 4 months old.

My first few months of visits with Jack were held virtually, on Monday mornings. Jack's mom embraced these virtual visits, and so did Jack. We shared books, played peek-a-boo, and sang songs. My Monday visits with Jack were always a bright spot for me, as he was full of smiles and joy, and helped give me hope and encouragement during a tough time in our world. On Thanksgiving Day 2020, Jack's mom sent me this photo with the message, "We are grateful for you and your help with our little turkey!"

We don't often think about the impact these amazing children have on our teachers. During the dark times of this pandemic, these families continue to be a bright spot in our lives, just as much as we might be a bright spot in theirs.

**Kaily** -- Kids Town Preschool teacher, Ms. Ashley, wanted to talk about Kaily's progress:

"This year, Kaily has become a great leader in the classroom. She is an active participant during all classroom activities and is a great friend to her peers. At this time, Kaily is a dual media learner, learning both print and braille. She is able to identify the letters in her name in print, as well as write her first name independently.

Her braille writing skills are continuing to grow as she is now able to identify the parts of the braille writer and can write her name in braille with a verbal prompt for the dot numbers for each letter. Kaily benefits from using different magnification tools in the classroom setting and has recently shown interest in exploring the new CCTV in the orange room. The CCTV has a variety of color modes, and she shows a strong preference for black background with green letters/images.

In the area of Orientation and Mobility (O&M), Kaily has recently transitioned to using a long white cane to help her navigate to different locations in the school (i.e., playground, Kids Town, sensory room). I am very proud of everything Kaily has accomplished while at VIPS, and I am very excited to see all the wonderful things she does as she transitions to kindergarten next year!"



Photo captions: Kailey, in a white shirt and black mask, is sitting at a CCTV, which is set so the screen has bright green shapes on a black background. Lucas is sitting in with a furry stuffed toy on his tray, concentrating on what he is feeling as he explores the animals feet.

**Lukas** is a recent VIPS graduate who had been working with VIPS teacher, Ms. Paige. His mother recently sent Paige an update about Lukas.

"He is now reaching out and exploring more items. He is enjoying soft textures. In the photo, you can see him feeling his teddy bear. We are so proud of all the milestones Lukas continues to make.



**Reese** -- VIPS teacher, Ms. Amy, wanted to share about all the things that make Reese pretty special:

"R is for Reese who is Remarkable, Resilient, and has an incredible sense of Rhythm!! Reese is remarkable for all he has learned and accomplished. He has learned how to follow a textured wall down the long hall of his home. He began tapping the keys on the Braille writer the first time he saw it. He has explored many different toys, books, and sensory materials. He has learned how to find his bedroom, as well as his siblings' bedrooms in his home.

Reese's sense of rhythm is remarkable, as well. The first time I met Reese and his family, he tapped out a rhythm with his feet, while we were sitting out on his back porch. Since then, Reese has made rhythms using his drum set, guitar, and just about everything else that will make a sound. I wouldn't be surprised to see him performing on a musical stage one day.

Reese has a visual diagnosis of Leber Congenital Amaurosis (LCA), a rare genetic eye condition. FightingBlindness.org defines LCA as 'a group of inherited retinal diseases characterized by severe impairment in vision or blindness at birth. The condition is caused by degeneration and/or dysfunction of photoreceptors, the cells in the retina that make vision possible.' There is research being done on LCA- Check out the Curing Retinal Blindness Foundation at <https://crb1.org>

One of the best things about getting to know Reese and his family is his smile, the way it can light up the whole room when he is enjoying the moment. Thank you, Reese, for sharing your light with me."



Photo captions: Reese is looking right at the camera, and looks like he is saying a friendly "Hi!" He has very curly, long, dark hair surrounding his face. Savannah is shown in her reclining seat with a light box in front of her that she is looking at intently. She too has thick, dark curls.

**Savannah** has been receiving services for about a year now and her VIPS teacher Ms. Paige writes:

"Savannah is such a sweetheart! She and her family have come so far in the past year and a half of VIPS services. Savannah loves music and lighted toys and is very good at vocalizing back and forth with an adult. One of my

favorite parts of my visits with Savannah is that she always uses her facial expressions and her voice to answer the line in my greeting song to answer 'hello, and how are you?' with a smile and a coo! Savannah is especially good at using her hands to interact with her toys. She uses her switch shaped like a cat, to turn on her light box. I'm so proud of her!"

**Wells** -- VIPS teacher, Ms. Ashley, shares news of his progress:

"Wells is an absolute joy to have in class! He enjoys playing with bouncy balls and will visually track them as they roll across the floor. He is working on rolling the ball back and forth with his friends. Wells has become an absolute pro at activating his switches in the classroom. His favorite switch toy is the textured roller switch that he uses to listen to his favorite books that are pre-recorded on the device. Some of his favorite books include Trashy Town and Llama Llama Red Pajama. Keep up the great work, Wells!"

**Yaheli** received services from VIPS a few years ago. Her former VIPS teacher, Mr. David, writes about her progress during her time with VIPS:

"Yaheli's mom worked very hard on activities and strategies provided during VIPS visits with Yaheli and her other First Steps providers. After initially demonstrating limited functional vision and interest in cause-and-effect activities, Yaheli eventually pushed buttons or levers on a variety of musical and lighted toys or devices. It was such a pleasure working with her and her family!"



Photo captions: Wells is shown at VIPS Kids Town Preschool. He is sitting in his wheelchair pulled up to a table where a toy, mechanical dinosaur is sitting. Wells is using a switch to operate the toy. Yaheli is a pretty little girl, with lots of black hair. She is shown being held by a smiling mom, who she looks just like! Zhy'Mir has his hair in braids surrounding his face. He is standing in the Twos classroom with arms spread and hands open, as if he has been caught in the middle of clapping.



**Zhy'Mir** is a two-year-old VIPS kiddo who is in our Kids Town Twos program! His teachers, Ms. Julie and Ms. Brittany, report:

"Zhy'Mir is a lovable boy who enjoys bouncing and humming. He loves to explore and clap his hands to any tune! He also hums a variety of songs and is working on using his words to sing as well. Zhy'Mir is working on his mobility skills, exploring a variety of push toys and using his pre-cane. He loves to explore his Braille Buzz as well! He has transitioned into the twos program like a pro. Zhy'Mir's family does an amazing job implementing strategies that help him progress.

[Return to Contents](#)

## White Cane Awareness Day

White Cane Awareness Day, celebrated on Oct. 15, was established in 1964 as a day to not only raise awareness about the white canes used by those with visual limitations, but also to celebrate their accomplishments and successes. The name was changed to Blind Americans Equality Day in 2011 with state, local and national celebrations and events to mark this day.

A white cane is not only a mobility tool for those who are blind or visually impaired but also symbolizes their independence. Over time, technological advancements have helped improve the lives of the blind and visually impaired, but the white cane continues to be a basic necessity for leading an independent and productive life. The white cane extends a person's senses allowing them to determine and negotiate stairs, uneven ground/pavement and obstacles. But it also provides a level of safety as a signal to the seeing public.

Here are the main Do's and Don'ts when you meet a person using a white cane.

Do:

- Introduce yourself, especially when entering the room.
- Talk directly to the person and not through a companion.
- Give directions using specific details, including using "left" and "right" and not just pointing or saying "over there" or "that way".

Don't:

- Assume the person needs help. Ask them if they need assistance before helping.
- Grab onto the person and try to steer them. Only help if permission is granted.
- Forget when driving to be aware of pedestrians using a white cane. They may need more time to cross the street. Avoid trying to help from the car.

This year the local celebration of White Cane Day included special recognition of VIPS receptionist, Kirsten Schmidt. Kirsten, a retiree of the Kentucky Office for the Blind, previously served clients there as an Orientation and Mobility Instructor with years of experience teaching the use of the white cane. She was honored on White Cane Day with the Rider-Shaw Award by the TARC Accessibility Council. The award is named after Tommy Rider, a blind consumer who turned his life around, becoming very active with transportation, and for Jim Shaw, a long-time Social Security employee who was totally blind and an incredible community resource. Kirsten's positive experiences as an O & M instructor make this a well-deserved award. We are proud of you, Kirsten!



Photo captions: Two VIPS grads are shown with their canes. Colton, a teenager is in a family portrait holding his cane. Bradley is show using his cane to travel the KY School for the Blind campus, where he is in third grade.

[Return to Contents](#)

## VIPS Grad Is Team Kentucky All-Star

In September, KY Governor, Andy Beshear, recognized 9-year-old Brody Fromholt as a Team Kentucky All-Star. Brody, a VIPS graduate, is an advocate for other kids across the country who have Usher Syndrome like he does.

Usher Syndrome is a rare genetic disorder that impacts three major senses in the body: vision, hearing and balance. At least 25,000 people in the United States are affected. Although there is no cure, we know that early intervention can make a difference.

"We are fortunate to have a supportive community here in Kentucky with leaders like Virginia Moore, and also Brody's mom and her entire team at Heuser Hearing. And of course, First Steps and preschool opportunities also play a major role," said Gov. Beshear. "Brody, you're the man. I know

your parents, Katie and Jordan, are so proud of you and all of us on Team Kentucky are, too.”

The Governor proclaimed Saturday, Sept. 18, as Usher Syndrome Awareness Day in the commonwealth.

[Return to Contents](#)

## **VIPS Family Retreat, 2021**

By Kathy Mullen, VIPS Director of Education

Each year, you will find the halls of VIPS Louisville abuzz on the first Saturday of November as VIPS families from across the states of Indiana and Kentucky gather to receive support from the VIPS team and give support to other VIPS families; to learn new strategies for working with a young family member with vision loss and to teach others what works for them and their family; to have fun and take the opportunity to enjoy some self-care and give some care to others. November 2020 was an exception to this annual tradition due to the pandemic. For this reason, as well as our team’s joy in gathering and giving, the opportunity to come together was even more special than in years past.

Our theme for the 2021 retreat was Disney movies. With Mickey Mouse as our guide, children spent the day on the VIPS campus while caregivers joined together on the nearby Sullivan University campus to recharge and restore. VIPS children and their siblings completed activities related to their classroom’s movie theme, played on the playground and in VIPS Kids Town, and enjoyed a visit from Disney royalty for storytime. Around the block, parents shared their family stories, experienced some firsthand orientation and mobility and emergent literacy lessons from VIPS specialists, and shared information about planning for their child’s transition from VIPS services. The day ended with families reuniting in VIPS Kids Town for a 10th birthday party for our VIPS Indiana program!

VIPS would be remiss not to thank the wonderful people who made this event possible: Jenny Castenir, VIPS Family Services Coordinator, who oversaw the parent conference; Brittany Williamson, VIPS Kids Town Preschool teacher, who kept our children safe, fed, and loved; the VIPS team members who stepped up to share their knowledge and passion for our work and to plan and care for our VIPS children for a long day; our volunteers from outside of VIPS who filled in the gaps in our retreat childcare; and the numerous donors who offered us financial support, donated food and services, and helped us feel the love of the VIPS family!

Mark your calendars for next year’s VIPS Family Retreat and Parent Conference: November 4-5, 2022!

# Family Retreat Energizes, Educates Participants

By Diane Nelson, Executive Director

VIPS is extremely blessed with the support of our grantors and donors that made it possible to provide the families with hotel rooms, lots of wonderful food, learning and literacy materials, activities and entertainment for the children, childcare and nursing care. Specifically we want to thank the Kentucky School for the Blind Charitable Foundation, the Indiana State Department of Health, The Barth Foundation and Sullivan University's Culinary School. We are extremely appreciative of the dozens of team members and volunteers from across Kentucky and Indiana that put in the long days of hard work and commitment, spending many, many hours making the experience the best possible for the children and families in attendance.

There are many pieces to the puzzle of our mission - the donors, teachers, support staff, board members, volunteers, client families, community supporters, etc. We wouldn't be complete without each one's contribution to the whole. So thank you all for what you make possible each and every day! We remain #VIPSstrong.

Just a few of the comments:

One of the families that attended sent their VIPS teacher this message, "We loved the whole day! It was eye opening, educational, and so nice to just be in a room of people that understood! We appreciate everything about VIPS!"

"Warms my heart. It's a joy to be a part of 'Team VIPS'."

"Thank you for all of your help this weekend at the Family Retreat. I believe it was much needed for many of our families."

"I was blown away by our entire team pitching in to set up, tear down, care for kids, talk to parents and make sure everything was perfect for our families. I have never worked somewhere where the Executive Director would show up at 7:00 AM and cut apples!! VIPS is truly a family and I am so thankful to be here."

"A special thanks to Brittany and all her work making this a great experience for the kids. Saturday morning I heard one mom talking about how excited her son was to be there and how amazed she was as typically he does not separate easily."

"We used only parents and VIPS staff as presenters this year. It is amazing to see the depth and talent of our team. I don't think we could have asked for anything better! Thank you, Kathy, Meredith, Ashley, Tommie and Amy!"

[Return to Contents](#)

## Traveling the Seas of Transition

By Kathy Mullen, Director of Education

Each year at the VIPS Family Retreat and Parent Conference, one of the

most popular sessions is the one dealing with transitioning out of VIPS services. Even when the retreat planning team chooses other topics of interest, the conversation always circles back around to what families need to do to be ready to say good-bye to the VIPS family. As we prepare families for the departure, there are two things VIPS wants our families to know before the first step in transitioning is taken:

- First and foremost, once a VIPS family, always a VIPS family. Even after a family has moved on, VIPS can still be tapped for advice and advocacy guidance.
- On the very day a family begins receiving VIPS services, the VIPS team is planning for the child's departure from VIPS.

"Transition" is defined as the process of changing from one state to another. Transitions can be fun, like a special trip or a new marriage. They can also be unwelcomed like a bad haircut or a car in the shop for an extended period of time. What we do know for sure is that a smooth transition takes planning. Lots of planning. Lots of planning with an open mind. That's why there are travel agents and wedding planners.

VIPS family members should think of their VIPS provider as their own travel agent. VIPS teachers have taken this trip many times before and can help parents and caregivers navigate the seas and toss a life preserver when needed. Hopefully, VIPS can help make the journey painless and help the family and child arrive at their destination without too many bumps in the road or swells in the sea.

During the VIPS Retreat 2021, VIPS parents in attendance seemed to enjoy the analogy of sea voyage when discussing transitioning from VIPS services to their child's next educational setting.

Steamboat Willie was Walt Disney's first version of Mickey Mouse. Even Steamboat Willie went through a lot of transitions before he became the Mickey Mouse we know and love.

There are a lot of routes parents can take to reach the right destination for their child. There is no one size fits all and looking at all of them at once can be overwhelming and quite confusing. Looking at routes taken by others can offer guidance, but families will need to determine their child's exact route.

Sometimes a family will need to reduce the clutter of what others are suggesting so they can focus on the direction they want to follow for their child.

All parents want a magnificent cruise ship when it comes to their children's education. By law, school systems are required to offer the basics: more along the lines of a rowboat! As the caregiver, families must work with school systems to find the best fit somewhere in between these two extremes.

Start planning early. Families and First Step teams do not want to be building a ship mid-trip. And parents do not want to end up marooned on dry



land! VIPS parents will always remain the captain of their child's educational ship. VIPS can support families as the first mate!

[Return to Contents](#)

## Online Support Group for Parents of Children Who Are Visually Impaired

APH FamilyConnect and The Chicago Lighthouse are pleased to offer this virtual support group for parents and families of children who are blind or visually impaired. These monthly sessions are for families to connect with and learn from each other about the joys, challenges, and adventures of raising children with visual impairments and blindness. These sessions are open to families. You only need to register once for this ongoing series. No ACVREP or professional development credits will be available.

Jan 5, 2022 07:30 PM  
Feb 2, 2022 07:30 PM  
Mar 2, 2022 07:30 PM  
Apr 6, 2022 07:30 PM  
May 4, 2022 07:30 PM  
Jun 1, 2022 07:30 PM  
Jul 6, 2022 07:30 PM  
Aug 3, 2022 07:30 PM  
Sep 7, 2022 07:30 PM  
Oct 5, 2022 07:30 PM

Register at the link below:

<https://familyconnect.org/after-the-diagnosis/join-our-parentconnect-group/>

## Welcome New Children

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

Addlyn - 9 months, Jeffersonville, KY  
Aisley - 7 months, Burlington, KY  
Alia - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
Anthony - 11 months, Indianapolis, IN  
Antonio - 4 months, Louisville, KY  
Ava - 2 years, Louisville, KY  
Beau - 7 months, Owensboro, KY  
Bella - 3 years, Louisville, KY  
Braxton - 10 months, Indianapolis, IN  
Braxton - 11 months, Lancaster, KY  
Briley - 1 year, Bowling Green, KY

Caleb - 1 year, Huntington, IN  
Charlie - 9 months, Charlestown, IN  
Charlotte - 9 months, Noblesville, IN  
Christopher - 2 years, Sheridan, IN  
Cooper - 7 months, Evansville, IN  
Cooper - 11 months, Lafayette, IN  
Daisy - 2 years, Georgetown, KY  
Daniella - 1 year, Plymouth, IN  
Edward - 1 year, Dyer, IN  
Eleanor - 8 months, Richmond, IN  
Emma - 2 years, Noblesville, IN  
Faiqah - 11 months, Indianapolis, IN  
Gabriel - 9 months, Louisville, KY  
Harper - 1 year, Mt. Sterling, KY  
Hayley - 2 years, Camby, IN  
Hudson - 1 year, Noblesville, IN  
Hunter - 2 years, Albany, KY  
Jonas - 1 year, Geneva, IN  
Jude - 1 year, Martinsville, IN  
Juliana - 2 years, Southport, IN  
Kaylee - 6 months, Elizabethtown, KY  
Kyson - 5 months, Anderson, IN  
Lamichael - 9 months, Louisville, KY  
Leni - 2 years, Kouts, IN  
Levi - 1 year, Henderson, KY  
Lilah - 1 year, Corbin, KY  
Luna - 9 months, Edmonton, KY  
Madilynn - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
Maelie - 2 years, New Albany, IN  
Malachi - 11 months, Anderson, IN  
Marleigh - 2 years, Charlestown, IN  
Marshall - 5 months, Fort Wayne, IN  
Maryam - 1 year, Fishers, IN  
Mia - 9 months, Charlestown, IN  
Ny'Airi - 7 months, Bowling Green, KY  
Ocean - 1 year, Lexington, KY  
Oliver - 1 year, Decatur, IN  
Peyton - 3 years, Anderson, IN  
Posie - 2 years, Columbia City, IN  
Randy - 9 months, Kokomo, IN  
Remington - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
Rena - 1 year, Indianapolis, IN  
Rory - 3 years, Michigan City, IN  
Rylee - 2 years, Greenwood, IN  
Sage - 1 year, Fountaintown, IN  
Samuel - 2 years, Auburn, IN  
Savannah - 1 year, Morehead, KY

Silas - 9 months, Berne, IN  
Serenity - 10 months, Washington, IN  
Skyler - 2 years, Scipio, IN  
Theodore - 1 year, Kokomo, IN  
Trenton - 1 year, Dillsboro, IN  
Quinn - 9 months, Charlestown, IN  
Vivian - 1 year, Louisville, KY  
Walker - 1 year, Monticello, KY  
Warren - 9 months, Owensboro, KY  
Waylon - 10 months, Smithland, KY  
Wrenly - 7 months, Carrollton, KY  
Zaki - 1 year, Muncie, IN  
Zara - 10 months, Bowling Green, KY  
Zayden - 1 year, Noblesville, IN

[Return to Contents](#)

## Seven Ways to Get the Most from Your Child's Eye Doctor Appointment

*By Paige Maynard, TVI/DI, VIPS Louisville*

1. Inform your VIPS teacher that your child's appointment is coming up.

Your VIPS teacher may ask you to have an eye report completed while you are there. This eye report helps your teacher understand more about your child's vision, and can help with eligibility for services and visual impairment specific equipment from federal quota funds.

2. Take time before the appointment to make a list of questions.

It's no fun to get home from a doctor's appointment only to remember a question you forgot to ask while you were there! Taking time to think about your questions before you're at the office can help prevent that blank feeling some families report having at the end of their visit when the doctor says "Do you have any questions?" If you already have them written out for yourself, you can easily refer back to your list at this moment. Your VIPS teacher can assist you in making your list. He or she is happy to spend time in a visit with you helping you think through and put your questions to paper.

3. Be curious during the exam.

Your child's eye doctor may use specialized tools and examination procedures. Feel free to ask questions like "What are you assessing?" and "What are you seeing?" By understanding what the doctor or tech are examining, you'll better understand what the measurements and findings

mean regarding your child's vision and eye health. You can also share what was tested with your VIPS teacher, who can use it to help you disseminate information afterward.

4. Be firm but kind if the doctor seems rushed.

It's your job to let your child's doctor know your needs regarding understanding your child's eye health and care. Likewise, it's your child's doctor's job to spend the time with you it takes to help you feel informed and empowered. You can use your body language to communicate your need to continue the appointment until you receive the knowledge and care you need. Lean in and make eye contact to show your interest. Use words like, "Before we finish, can you help me understand \_\_\_\_\_?", "Can you explain \_\_\_\_\_ to me?", and "Let me be sure I understand \_\_\_\_\_."

5. Share VIPS reports.

Your VIPS teacher's assessment reports and progress reports can provide information about how your child's vision impacts his/her development and participation in daily routines, which may help your doctor make a more accurate diagnosis, and may help with devising a plan of treatment. Consider sharing them before the exam.

6. Take notes.

Many families find it difficult to remember the courses of treatment and numerous details that are shared by their doctor during their appointment. Taking notes during the office visit will allow you to refer back to information so you don't have to try to remember it all. You can also ask your child's doctor for permission to record the visit on your tablet or smartphone so that you can re-watch or listen to it later.

7. Invite your VIPS teacher to come along.

Your VIPS teacher can take notes for you, help you communicate with your child's eye doctor, help you fill out forms, and can help you digest information you receive at your appointment. If your teacher's schedule allows, he or she welcomes the opportunity to join you! Just ask! With COVID restrictions, some offices have even allowed families to have their VIPS teacher join them on video chat! When on video chat, your VIPS teacher may also have the capacity to record the appointment for you if your doctor's office gives permission.

[Return to Contents](#)

## Who Are Sighted Peers?

You might have heard the phrase “sighted peers” to refer to children in our VIPS Kids Town Preschool but not really understood what it meant. Our sighted peers are children with typically developing vision. They help our VIPS preschool teachers keep their eye on the ball for what typical development looks like. From this vantage point, our teachers can design strategies for our VIPS students to keep on the path of typical progress and development.

Our sighted peers are also teaching their classmates about self-advocacy. It is much more appropriate for a child to turn to a peer for assistance with a task than always going to an adult. In our classrooms, we love hearing “Can you please help me find my ...?”, and “I need to move in front of you so I can see better”, and “Would you please walk with me to ...?” Each day we are reminded that our VIPS students are much more like their peers than different. All of the VIPS Kids Town students are kids first!

Research continues to show that children with developmental delays caused by diagnoses of special needs learn more successfully when they attend preschool alongside their peers who are developing typically. For this reason, sighted peers are welcomed in VIPS Kids Town Preschool, and everyone benefits!

Our sighted peers learn a great deal from their VIPS classmates as well. They learn acceptance, understanding, and that there are alternative ways to do things to make up for deficits in vision and other disabilities. They learn that VIPS kids want to play and laugh and have fun with their friends, just as they do. They learn to be tolerant and compassionate individuals, who hopefully as adults, will think outside the box about the value of human productivity and the many forms in which it can be manifested.

[Return to Contents](#)

## In Memoriam

This issue of the VIPS Parents Newsletter is dedicated to the memory of Agnes Diaz Garcia, daughter of Perla Garcia and Adrian Diaz of Clarksville, IN, who passed away on Oct. 7 at 15 months of age.

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

[Return to Contents](#)



# Special Gifts of Time

## *VIPS Kentucky*

We so appreciate the helpfulness of the volunteers from the Middletown Christian Church who recently washed the insides of our windows, organized and scrubbed our large racks of folding chairs and scrubbed the preschool lunchroom chairs, among other tasks. Volunteers included: Teresa Barnes, Cindy Bradley, Brandi Hitzelberger, Dwayne Hunt, Rita Ostwalt-Whitfield, Bruce Reynolds, Robert Yang and Bill Wilson.

Thanks to UK pre-optometry student, Caroline McCullough, for again making herself useful in many areas: cleaning lenses in the VIPS optometrist's office, making bead curtains, cleaning the bikes in the Kids Town garage, and wiping down the handrails and all door knobs and light switches.

We thank Jack Koenig from Holy Cross and VIPS parents Natalie Whitcomb and DeShawn Manning for removing choking hazards from donated handmade tactile library books.

Thanks to VIPS parents, Audrey and Samuel Picota and DeShawn Manning, who weeded around the bricks in the sensory garden.

We're very appreciative of the efforts of Sacred Heart Model School teachers Jan Church, Caroline Elliott, Jessica Hammer, Adele Koch, Amy Malcolm, Leah Mullen, Judy Muth, Holly Sadowski, Julie Satterly, Cara Schaaf, and Katie Spenlau who volunteered their off hours cleaning KidsTown, the Preschool classrooms and the schoolhouse.

We were fortunate to have two interns from Holy Cross, Kayli Hartlage and Mia Maloney, who spent hours working in the Preschool, arranging weights in the exercise room, assisting with Family Retreat preparations and addressing thank-you postcards.

Everyone was delighted to see our perennial volunteer from before Covid changed our world, Fran Woodward, return to the Twos classroom. We so appreciate her expertise and the hours she shares with our youngest children.

Louisville Realtors Alex Diez, Lonnie Garvin, Elizabeth Monarch, Jane Royer, Jaime Smith and Debbie Wilhelmus provided great assistance with administrative tasks, purging files, inventorying the lending library, and addressing envelopes. Thank you so much!

Thanks to members of the Wildwood Country Club Volunteers who helped so much during the VIPS Corporate Cup Golf Tournament.

Thanks to Jena Fahlbush and VIPS Grad Jamie Weedman for help with making the newsletter accessible for our readers who are visually impaired.

## **VIPS Indiana**

We are officially moved into our new Simon and Estelle Knoble Family Resource Center thanks to our amazing volunteers with the Phi Kappa Psi at Purdue University! On Friday, October 29, they helped us move hundreds of boxes and furniture, all without complaint. We are so incredibly grateful for their generosity! We were led to these volunteers by VIPS Indiana contract teacher Kim Bergoff, who along with her husband, Jerry, and their son (and his fraternity brothers!), also used their brains and brawn to help us move. Thanks also to the following VIPS staff members who gave up their jobs for the day to help us settle in: Carol Dahmke, Christina Frasher, Meredith Howell, Kathy Mullen, Diane Nelson, Ashley Ross, David Sterne, and Rita and Steve DeVore.

VIPS Indiana is well-equipped with shaker bottles to give to new VIPS children and their families thanks to the efforts of a great group of volunteers: Stephaine Pellagrino; Jason Rudd, organizer of a virtual summer camp, the Kiwanis Summer Service Program, in which 15 students made shaker bottles at home; and Matthew Ellis, of the Kiwanis Key Club, who organized members to make shaker bottles and cards.

Carol Wetherell (pictured at left) with the ISU/Blumberg Center, delivered books that the group made for VIPS.

[Return to Contents](#)

## **Notes of Interest**

For many years, elves at the National Federation of the Blind have been Santa's helpers in sending out Braille letters to children all around the country. This year, their program has expanded to have a winter themed Braille letter for those who do not celebrate Christmas. They will provide both letters and the activities to go along with them in English and Spanish. The letters and activities provided in the celebration packet are in print as well for sighted family members and friends. Just think how fun it will be undertaking the activities that are included with your child, grandchild, or student. Visit and complete the request form. The program is now open until December 17th. You can visit the link below:

<https://nfb.org/program-services/early-childhood-initiatives/santa-letters>

Amy Nichols, Teacher of the Blind/Low Vision at VIPS Indiana, recommends First Books, a national book bank, as an affordable resource for teachers working with low income children and those with disabilities to obtain low cost children's books. Books are donated from publishers and offered at much lower prices upon verification of eligibility. Currently First Book works directly with eligible educators, service providers and programs serving children and families but parents can make sure their child's school, childcare, early childhood or similar program is registered with First Book. The number of available titles is much larger for older children than for birth to six. For more information, visit the link below:

<https://firstbook.org/>

Need some last minute gift ideas? Our last newsletter offered a ton of options, but if you didn't find what your child needs, check out the link below for some more suggestions.

<http://asharedvision.org>

After touring our new Indianapolis office, we were all fascinated by the braille wallpaper! Lanark Louis is a new wallcovering pattern designed by Lanark stylist, Kathy Wisniski, in partnership with the National Federation of the Blind. Initially inspired by the tactility of Braille letterforms, Louis features 30 embossed words that represent qualities of the human spirit we all possess and strive to implement in our lives. This design brings awareness to the history of Braille, the beautiful simplicity of the code itself and how it can open up worlds for the blind and people with low vision. Check out the link below:

<https://www.facebook.com/DLCouchwallcoveringfabric/videos/louis-by-lanark-vault-wallcovering/1142054205966808/>

Molly Burke is a Youtuber who is legally blind. A passionate proponent of Braille, she has created a video that discusses the basics of braille and its history. For the parents out there, it's encouraging to see Molly's journey and how she advocates for those who use braille. Check it out below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8AEkwtNEiM>.

Do you know the TEN-4 Bruising Rule? Keeping kids safe is an adult responsibility. Sharing information on recognizing child abuse and neglect equips adults with the knowledge and tools needed to understand the warning signs, how to report suspicious bruising, and ways to support families to prevent it from happening in the first place. For more info, visit the link below:

<https://faceitabuse.org/ten4rule/>.

Encouraging young children with disabilities to fully participate in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) learning opportunities and experiences is the goal of the STEMIE project. The project focuses on the supports adults can implement to facilitate STEM learning for children with disabilities and is the result of a cooperative agreement between the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Specific adaptations include changes to the environment, activities, routines, materials, and/or instruction, while minimizing adult assistance. To learn more, go to:

<https://stemie.fpg.unc.edu>

The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant challenges for schools in meeting the needs of all children and students in early childhood, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education. Many children have contracted COVID-19 and are still experiencing its effects, in the form of what has come to be called "long COVID." These challenges will continue as schools and public agencies seek to ensure support and equity for children and students experiencing the long-term adverse health effects of COVID-19.

The US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and its Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSEP) has developed a resource guide to provide information about long COVID as a disability. Long COVID under Section 504 and the IDEA: A Resource to Support Children, Students, Educators, Schools, Service Providers, and Families guides schools' and public agencies' responsibilities for the provision of services and reasonable modifications to children and students dealing with long COVID. For more information, go to:

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/ocr-factsheet-504-20210726.pdf>.

Because it is such a valuable resource, we have previously listed the National Braille Institute ReadBooks! Program as a national children's braille literacy program encouraging families with blind children to read print/braille books together. The National Braille Press distributes FREE bags of beginning braille materials to families with blind and visually impaired children, ages birth to seven, across the U.S. and Canada. To learn more about what is included in the bags and to sign up for your free bag, you can visit

<https://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/programs/readbooks/readbooks.html>.

A free app called "Be My Eyes" connects people who are blind/low-vision with sighted volunteers who provide visual assistance through a live video call. You might get a call to identify the words on a can of vegetables or to identify an object the caller doesn't recognize -- it helps you be more aware of what individuals with blindness have to deal with on a daily basis. Sound interesting? Search the App Store for Be My Eyes and sign up after downloading the app.

[Prevent Blindness](#) was founded in 1908 to protect newborns from preventable blinding eye disease and today continuing the mission of protecting children's vision by promoting evidence-based approaches for ensuring access to the quality eye care that all children deserve. According to statistics compiled by Prevent Blindness, up to 1 in 17 young children, 1 in 5 Head Start children, and an estimated 1 in 4 or 5 school-aged children have a vision disorder that can lead to permanent vision disorders if not found and treated early.

Too often children do not receive an eye examination after a vision screening referral because parents and caregivers do not know their children have a vision disorder. And, many parents and caregivers do not know about

the importance of good vision for their children's development and learning.

The National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health at Prevent Blindness partnered with the National Head Start Association to create an online resource, *Small Steps for Big Vision: An Eye Health Information Tool Kit for Parents and Caregivers*, to provide parents and caregivers with the information, suggested actions, and assistance they need to be empowered partners in their children's vision and eye health, and to care for their own vision and eye health.

This tool kit was designed for use by Head Start and Early Head Start programs, as well as any early childhood education and care program. It was created to provide information about the importance of taking care of your child's vision . . . and for taking care of your own vision.

*Small Steps for Big Vision* includes many resources about vision screening, what will happen at the eye examination, where to find eye doctors, and how to pay for the eye exam and glasses, if needed. Resources also include frequently asked questions about vision and eye health.

The National Center to Prevent Blindness Center also hosted a webinar, *Why Vision Matters for Children with Special Needs*, and posted the recording on their website.

To learn more, visit:

<https://preventblindness.org/>

<https://cvph.preventblindness.org/resource-center/small-steps-for-big-vision-an-eye-health-information-tool-kit-for-parents-and-caregivers/>.

Families are invited to join Louisville Orchestra ensembles for *Once Upon an Orchestra*, a FREE, fun, interactive storytelling through music performance. Participants of all ages will enjoy this free 60-minute program that weaves storytelling adventures together with creative music making. Participants will learn how to use recycled materials to make instruments that go home with them! The program will be offered at each of the Louisville Free Public Library Louisville area branches. (Some programs have already been held.)

Dec. 20, 2021 at 2 PM at Crescent Hill Branch

Dec. 21, 2021 PM at Southwest Branch

Jan. 13, 2022 at 10:15 AM at Shively Branch

Feb. 1, 2022 at 4 PM at Western Branch

Feb. 17, 2022 at 6:30 PM at Fairdale Branch

Feb. 12, 2022, 10 AM at VIPS Louisville

Feb. 22, 2022 at 2 PM at Middletown Branch

Feb. 22, 2022 at 7 PM at Shawnee Branch

Apr. 4, 2022 at 2 PM at Highlands-Shelby Park Branch

Apr. 6, 2022 at 2 PM at Bon Air Branch

Apr. 7, 2022 at 2 PM at South Central Branch



To learn more, visit the link below:

<https://www.lfpl.org/Orchestra/>

Braille Tales books allow children to become interested in braille from a young age, encouraging them to be lifelong braille readers. This program provides six free Print/Braille books a year to blind and visually impaired children until the child's 6th birthday, as well as to blind and visually impaired parents of children under six years old. APH has partnered with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library to provide Braille Tales books. Braille labels are added to each book, bringing the whole family together by allowing you to read braille or print. Check out the link below:

[https://tech.aph.org/dpil/apply?fbclid=IwAR3-lj2dXfZSN8UonRd9Wlj59LrrEyNPc\\_oEDDDvRisS1BDXZB44\\_PIA44](https://tech.aph.org/dpil/apply?fbclid=IwAR3-lj2dXfZSN8UonRd9Wlj59LrrEyNPc_oEDDDvRisS1BDXZB44_PIA44)

You are sure to learn a lot of fascinating things about Helen Keller that you never knew when watching "American Masters: Becoming Helen Keller." This PBS program examined one of the 20th century's human rights pioneers in honor of National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October. You can view it at the link below:

[https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/helen-keller-documentary/18386/.](https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/helen-keller-documentary/18386/)

[Return to Contents](#)

## VIPS Staff News

We are sad to report that our Louisville Development Coordinator, Alexis Asamoah, has left to pursue other options. We wish her well as she begins the next chapter of her life.

We welcome Ashley Ford to the Louisville team as the new Event Coordinator! Ashley is a proud Louisville-area local, graduating from Sullivan University in December 2020, with an Event Management degree and a Tourism Specialist Diploma. She worked at the Louisville Zoo, executing events, until Covid put everything on pause. She then completed her internship with the General George Patton Museum of Leadership in Fort Knox, and spent a year as the Museum's Marketing and Event Director. She enjoys traveling, learning about an array of many cultures, and experiencing different places. We are glad she decided to work a little closer to home and joined our team!

A warm welcome to Michelle Flora who has joined the VIPS Indiana team as actual staff, a change from her previous role as a contract teacher. Michelle was an elementary classroom teacher for the past 32 years, retiring in May from teaching kindergarten. She has been a contract teacher for VIPS since August 2020 and started full time with VIPS in October. She has both

Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Indiana University as well as training in Blind/Low Vision. As she writes, "I have lived my entire life in Huntington, Indiana but we are getting ready to build a new home in Fortville in order to move closer to our two grown daughters. I am excited to be with VIPS full time. I love working with the children and families of VIPS and I love being able to help and be a resource for them. Going into their homes to help them is very exciting for me. I did not have that opportunity while working in classroomthe I look forward to helping many families in Indiana through VIPS!

Julia Sleder has joined the KidsTown Preschool staff as a provisional Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI), meaning she is working toward completing her certification. She will be providing vision services to children in our Twos class as well as early intervention services in the community. We are so happy she joined us. Julia writes: "I am the new TVI/DI at VIPS Louisville, and am enjoying it tremendously! The past five years have been

dedicated to serving the VI population, where my previous experience was at Kentucky School for the Blind. My passion is for anything related to the community of visual impairments, gardening, and spending time with my two cats and boyfriend, KJ. My previous education is actually in the visual arts where I earned a Bachelor in Fine Arts degree in 2D studio at the University of Louisville. I am currently finishing up my Masters degree as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired at the University of Kentucky."

Our own Laney Reed is currently working in her previous role as a Kids Town Preschool classroom assistant while she also works on her Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education (IECE) (provisional) certification. She is in the Two's class co-teaching with Julia. Julia and Laney will also be working on their First Steps enrollment.

Another new staff member is Rebekah (Becky) Dunda, a new VIPS Kids Town Preschool Classroom Assistant, who has already distinguished herself as a real go-getter who works beautifully with VIPS students with complex needs. Becky writes: "I have some background in elementary and special education, but the majority of the past 25 years I've been privileged to spend as a stay-at-home mom. Many of those years included home schooling my four children, who are now ages 16, 19, 22, and 24. My older two kids have "launched," and the younger two live at home with my husband, Fred, and me. They are both full-time students, one at Indiana University Southeast and the other at Whitefield Academy. I love working with the children at VIPS and I am so thankful to be here! " And we are so pleased that you've joined us! Welcome, Becky!

Sisters-in-law Staci and Paige Maynard, of VIPS Louisville, met with some of the project leads at Bernheim Forest to collaborate on making Bernheim's Playcosystem accessible and meaningful for our VIPS population.

We are so thrilled for David Sterne, of VIPS Indiana, who has completed the coursework and passed the praxis (examination), earning his additional certification as a Teacher of the Blind and Low Vision (TBLV). We are proud of him and grateful for the expertise and professionalism he brings to VIPS!

Congratulations to Dixie Miller Marz, of VIPS Central Kentucky, for completing her CVI Endorsement from Perkins! We appreciate your hard work!

Melisa Matthews, a mom of a daughter with visual impairment and a VIPS interventionist in Northeastern Indiana, has started a company called Eye Am Kids. Eye Am Kids is a subscription box that provides educational and sensory experiences for children with visual impairments to begin their love for learning from an early age. Melisa started her company so that she could support families aside from the direct service she provides through VIPS. She states, "The idea that these boxes would provide families with products and activities that would bring them joy and help them learn more about how their child is learning from their environment was motivating. When so many things are uncertain and dark we want the families to know that they are empowered and there are a community of people there to help them along." Check out Eye Am Kids at <https://www.eyeamkids.com/>.

TVI's Ashley Emmons, Paige Maynard and Staci Maynard, and VIPS Director of Education, Kathy Mullen, all of VIPS Louisville, presented to the Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) candidates at the University of Kentucky on the services provided by our VIPS team. Dr. Amanda Lannen from UK praised the scope of the staff's knowledge, further adding that her students were highly motivated by the outstanding presentation.

Two VIPS Louisville staff, Paige Maynard (TVI) and Jenny Castenir (Family Services Coordinator), along with Dr. Cathy Smith, Director of Research at the Anchor Center in Colorado, are ready to launch their collaborative podcast called "Feeling This Life." Their goal for creating this podcast is to share information about education and vision loss with families, to raise awareness, to gather data, to interview experts, to interview children about their experiences and to ultimately share knowledge. They will be welcoming feedback and ideas for future podcasts.

VIPS Executive Director, Diane Nelson, was recently voted onto the Board of Directors of VisionServe Alliance to represent the national voice of early childhood education of children with visual impairment. VisionService Alliance is a leadership collective of organizations and individuals located throughout the U.S. and Canada dedicated to improving the quality of life with and for people with vision loss. Its mission is to build a better world through education, advocacy, products, and services for people with vision loss. This is a feather in the cap for Diane to receive this well-deserved honor, and also enhances the positive reputation for VIPS as an agency, led by someone with such a knowledgeable and professional presence.

VIPS Director of Education, Kathy Mullen, has been recruited to be one of five people on the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired's (AER) Accreditation Council to vet future applicants wishing to undergo the accreditation process. VIPS' reputation within the industry and Kathy's leadership in education have made us an important member of this national voice. Kathy has also been asked to join the Governor's Early Childhood Council for Childcare to be the voice for

children with different abilities. Kathy's reputation for child advocacy has led to this honor for VIPS.

VIPS Indiana Regional Director, Meredith Howell, has been selected to participate in the Leadership United spring cohort program by the United Way of Central Indiana. This opportunity was extended to Meredith, because in the words of UWCI, she has "shown tremendous volunteerism experience, an enthusiasm for servant leadership and learning, and an eagerness to lead change in our community." This is another great honor for VIPS. Meredith and Virren Malhotra, VIPS Indiana Advisory Board Vice President, were the featured speakers at Eli Lilly for their United Way of Central Indiana campaign kickoff. Watch their incredibly powerful video at the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSqIV7W08Go>.

[Return to Contents](#)

## **Fund-Raising & Event News!**

### ***Hitting the green 'fore' the kids!***

We celebrated the 35th annual YUM! Corporate Cup Golf Tournament for VIPS on Monday, October 4th and could not have asked for a better day! Golfers from across the country joined VIPS and YUM! Brands staff at Wildwood Country Club to raise money for our mission. The staff and member volunteers at Wildwood showed our guests amazing hospitality, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the beautiful course and newly renovated clubhouse.

The event would not have been possible without our VIP Sponsors, Proskaur and Lockton, and we are so thankful to all of our generous sponsors/teams: AIG, Alliance Bernstein, Ankura, Arch Insurance, ARG1, AXA XL, CHUBB, Gallagher Bassett Services, Invesco, Marsh Inc., Pepsi, Print-Tex, Sedgwick, Shoes for Crews, Stock Yards Bank, Willis Towers Watson, and Zurich. Thanks to Tito's Vodka for being on the course and Michele Wolff for presenting a wine tasting. We're also grateful for the Wildwood Country Club volunteers!

Save the date for 10/3/22 for the 36th annual tournament!

### ***New Name - Same Great Race!***

The Lynn Family 5k for VIPS, formerly the Stampede for VIPS, was virtual this year in efforts to ensure a safe experience for the children and families we serve. Participants could virtually run/walk from September 11-October 11, and could choose from a 5k or 1 mile option and submit their 5k finish times online to compete for prizes. Many thanks to all of our VIPS families who formed teams and personal fundraisers for the event, especially Team Amazing Grace who raised \$1790 for VIPS! Shout out to Team Josie and Team Hannah as well for getting family and friends involved for our great

cause!

This event would not be possible without the generous support of Mark and Cindy Lynn and the Lynn Family Sports Vision and Training Center as our Title Sponsor. Many thanks also go out to all our sponsors--Presenting Sponsors: Ford Motor Company and Texas Roadhouse; Gold Sponsors: Louisville Downtown Lions Club, Kentucky School for the Blind Charitable Foundation, and Print-Tex USA; Silver Sponsor: American Printing House for the Blind (APH).

### ***VIPS Indiana Plans Topgolf Event***

VIPS is excited to partner with to host a brand new event this winter! For tournament play and an opportunity to help VIPS raise funds for babies and toddlers who are blind or visually impaired, sign up TODAY to make sure you and your friends can snag tickets to this exciting event!

Tickets will be sold individually for \$85 a person which includes:

- \*2 hours of tournament play
- \*All American meal catered by Topgolf
- \*Unlimited soft drinks/tea
- \*Chance to win items in the silent auction
- \*Prizes for individual winners of the tournament

Register at the link below:

<https://vips.org/topgolf-tournament>

Topgolf allows a maximum of 6 people at each bay. Groups of less than 6 people will be paired with others to make a full group of 6 at each bay.

We are only selling a total of 60 individual tickets! Join us for an afternoon of playing, eating and fun, all while supporting VIPS children and families.

[Return to Contents](#)

## **Recent Grants and Donations**

### ***VIPS Indiana***

\$124,000 from the State of Indiana purchase order for our renewed 2021/2022 contract so we can begin billing for services provided.

\$50,000 from the Allen Whitehill Clowes Charitable Foundation, Inc. for the Family Resource Center Sensory Garden.

\$20,000, the first of four payments from United Way of Central Indiana, in support of the education of children with vision loss in their region as part of their 2Gen Initiatives.



\$7,440 generously awarded from the Caesar's Foundation to support our work in Southern Indiana.

\$6,000 from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, a double match donation spurred by a personal \$3,000 gift from their President, Gene D'Adamo, who was wowed by the work being done in Indiana.

\$5,000 from The Louis & Mary Haddad Foundation for the VIPS Indiana Orientation and Mobility Program.

\$3,000 from The James E. Roberts Fund at the Indianapolis Community Foundation for canes for our Indiana children in need.

A community radio media promotional campaign across all the Iheart Media radio stations was awarded to VIPS Indiana. In 2019 Iheart promoted Louisville VIPS, Lexington VIPS in 2020 and now Indy!! We are so grateful they are supportive of our mission.

### ***VIPS Central KY***

\$45,000 from the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government's ESR program for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Fayette County.

\$30,000 Linda Neville Trust to support early intervention in Central Kentucky.

\$12,500 from The Lexington Lions for both intervention and sponsorship of their Cupcake Classic in 2022.

\$5,000 from the Heart of Kentucky United Way in support of our Early Childhood work in the Danville, Kentucky region.

### ***VIPS Louisville***

\$175,000 from Kosair Charities for Kids Town Preschool program.

\$50,000 from the Osmondson Foundation.

\$20,000 from Lift a Life (the Novak Family Foundation) to support our program work.

\$20,000 from The Gheens Foundation for general operating support.

\$10,000 from The Bender Family.

\$5,000 from The Gibney Family Foundation for the development of new curricula for Mobility City, Kids Town Preschool, and physical education.

\$2,000 from the Shelby County Community Foundation for the Early Childhood Intervention program in Shelby County.

\$2,000 from the Dollar General Literacy Foundation for a cold laminator plus supplies.

\$500 from The Louisville Downtown Lions Club in support of our holiday efforts on behalf of VIPS families in Louisville.

Thanks to Meredith and Rob Howell for their design of our holiday card which focuses on "HOPE." Thanks also to Carol Dahmke for her work on creating the mailing lists for our biggest fundraiser of the year.

The GE Kitchen new signage has been installed in Kids Town Preschool at VIPS. GE has contributed \$25,000 plus all new appliances for both Louisville and Indianapolis in a show of support for our critical work. We were excited with the delivery of a brand new refrigerator, washer, dryer, dishwasher, double oven, cooktop and microwave. We are blessed to have board member/VIPS parent Taylor Gehring advocating focus!

### Donor Briefs

- Veronica Mackin, 4<sup>th</sup> Grader at Sacred Heart Model School, has made it a birthday tradition for the past few years to request that her birthday party guests make donations to VIPS instead of bringing her gifts. This year, since a party was not feasible, given the pandemic, her family donated \$5,000 to VIPS in her honor!
- Another recent gift of \$3,500 was received from a couple who heard of our mission from a family member who has volunteered for us for many years. Because of that initial introduction a few years ago -- in just three years they have donated \$11,000.
- VIPS received a gift of \$1,500 from a donor who has been giving \$100 each year since 2004. Executive Director Diane Nelson felt compelled to call her personally to thank her for her extremely generous gift (15 times larger than her normal amount). She shared that she and her husband used to live next door to the old office on Garvin Place and he volunteered to help paint & maintain the building. They grew quite fond of our mission and the population we served. Unfortunately, her husband has since passed and she is now approaching an age where it was necessary to take "minimum retirement distributions" for tax purposes, which has resulted in the opportunity to support causes that mattered to them. VIPS impacted them then and still today.
- VIPS Alum, Samantha Stull, a young mother of two preschoolers, set up a Facebook donation site for her birthday to collect money for VIPS. She said, "I've chosen this nonprofit because their mission means a lot to me."
- Thanks to Mary Lou Wilkinson and VIPS mom Shelly Turpin for the donation of children's braille books.

We all want to feel that what we do matters or has impact. Some of us get that need fulfilled in the work we do. And some of us get that by supporting the work of others. We are blessed to have both types interested in helping us achieve our mission!

[Return to Contents](#)

## VIPS Wish Lists

### ***VIPS Louisville***

VIPS Louisville Amazon Wish List -- linked below:

<https://a.co/0zrxZja>

BlueTooth dual pairing Speaker set

Lakeshore Bright Giant Washable Ink Pads ( would like two of each color)

<https://www.lakeshorelearning.com/products/arts-crafts/stamps-markers/bright-giant-washable-color-ink-pads/p/LA712>

Holiday Green Tempera Paint

White construction paper

Adhesive Hook and Loop Velcro, Black, 1-Inch x 10-Foot Industrial Grade and Wear and Tear Resistant

Bath Towels (Bath size only) in a light gray color (need a dozen)

Primary colored duct tape (red, yellow, blue)

Natural Care Unscented Baby Wipes, Sensitive, Hypoallergenic, Water-Based

Cottonelle Ultra ComfortCare Toilet Paper, Soft Bath Tissue, Septic-Safe

Absorbent Paper Towels

Sealable plastic sandwich bags

Zippered quart and gallon storage food bags

Facial tissue

Clorox wipes

Lysol spray cans

### ***VIPS Central KY***

VIPS CK Amazon Wish List -- linked below:

[https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/17GUTS23K50ME?ref\\_=wl\\_fv\\_le](https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/17GUTS23K50ME?ref_=wl_fv_le)

Items to make sensory boards and tubes

Plastic cutting boards from dollar stores

Plastic toothbrush holders -- the 2 piece tube kind, not the small type that

fit only over the brush

## **VIPS Indiana**

We are in need of many items for our new Family Resource Center. Please see our Amazon Wish List below:

<http://a.co/aeRar2N>

[Return to Contents](#)

## **'Tis the Season for Generosity**

*By Diane Nelson, VIPS Executive Director*

"Instead of buying your children all the things you never had, you should teach them all the things you were never taught. Material wears out but knowledge stays." Bruce Lee

Whatever holiday you celebrate this season (Hanukkah, Christmas or Kwanza), the overlying theme of the season is love, gratitude, joy, kindness and generosity. So, during this season of giving when you are searching for the perfect holiday gift for your loved ones and others on your list, maybe you would consider giving the gift of education to VIPS children and families. It is the gift that will last a lifetime. A child with vision loss must begin their educational journey on day one as 90% of learning is through the vision they don't have. At VIPS, our mission is to make sure that every child with vision loss across the entire states of Kentucky and Indiana have access to critical early intervention to build the educational foundation so crucial to their success.

Our holiday campaign is our largest fundraising effort across both states and we need our donors more than ever during this challenging year. When you receive our holiday "hope" card in the mail, please help us change the future for children with blindness by giving the gift of education. What I know for sure is that we anticipate educating about 800 children this fiscal year and we cannot do it without YOUR support! You can also donate by visiting the link below:

<https://www.vips.org/>

[Return to Contents](#)

## **VIPS Non-Discrimination Policy**

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.

***VI Sability is a quarterly publication of Visually Impaired Preschool Services, Jan Moseley, Editor.***

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Ashley Ross, Development Coordinator  
David Sterne, Teacher of Blind/Low Vision/First Steps Coordinator

