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Visually Impaired Preschool Services (VIPS)

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# Annual Report

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July 2021–June 2022

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[www.vips.org](http://www.vips.org)  
Kentucky • Indiana

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"We are never  
really happy until  
we try to brighten  
the lives of others."

—HELEN KELLER



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# Letter from the Director



**Diane Nelson**  
VIPS Executive Director

Another year is in the books at VIPS and we look forward to highlighting what we proudly and successfully faced despite the many challenges we were presented with last fiscal year relating to a tough economy and the continued fallout from COVID's omicron variant. With your generous support, we continue to be what we call #VIPStrong and because of that, have so very many things to celebrate!

We ended 2021/2022 serving 672 children and families. Although our numbers still have not returned to pre-COVID levels, more and more referrals are once again being made.

One of the biggest highlights of the year was our April 2022 Grand Opening of our new home – the Simon & Estelle Knoble VIPS Family Resource Center located at 1212 Southeastern Avenue in Indianapolis. This beautiful 6,300-square-foot facility is a place of welcome and comfort for families learning of their child's vision loss diagnosis.

Another huge milestone was the launch of our "Feeling This Life" podcast as part of a collaboration with Dr. Cathy Smyth and The Anchor Center for Blind Children in Colorado. This podcast has allowed us to share our knowledge and reach families across the United States and 17 other countries.

We continue to be blessed by the Irvin F. and Alice S. Etscorn Foundation who generously added two more fleet vehicles (now up to seven) for our travels across the entire Commonwealth of Kentucky and the State of Indiana.

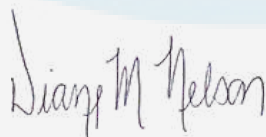
Since it has been almost 20 years since we first moved to 1906 Goldsmith Lane in Louisville it was necessary to update our security cameras & monitoring system, the HVAC units, our technology wiring, and all our appliances (thanks to the generosity of GE), and make much needed updates to our Kosair Charities Kids Town Preschool playground. We feel refreshed!

We continue to expand our VIPS family with the hiring this year of more teachers, teacher assistants, and direct interventionists. This year we also added our very first full-time database coordinator, a full-time volunteer coordinator in Indiana, and are planning on adding a Development Manager in 2022/2023. If you know someone wanting to join the VIPS family, please send them our way!

We were very proud to receive the Better Business Bureau Torch Award for Marketplace Ethics as a Finalist in the Non-Profit category. As they said, VIPS "set a high mark for excellence...also recognizing the company's leaders who demonstrate a high level of personal character and ensure the organization's practices meet the highest standards of ethics and consequently generate trust."

So you can see that your investment in the future of children with visual impairment is changing lives. We are so very grateful for your support and look forward to continuing to be #VIPStrong in 2023.

With love and appreciation,



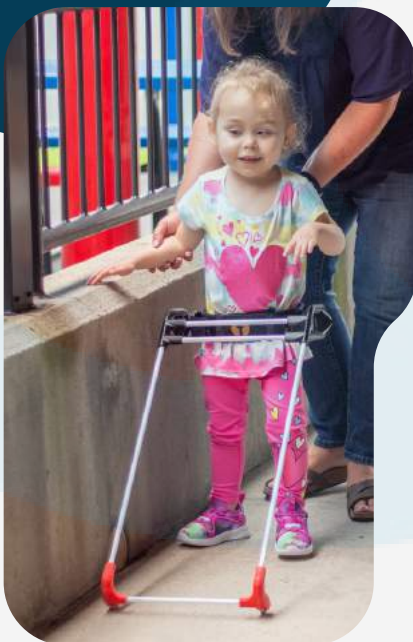
# About

## Our Team



### MISSION

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



Before 1985, early intervention and educational programming were not available in Kentucky for infants, toddlers, or preschoolers who were blind or visually impaired until they entered kindergarten. VIPS became the pioneer in Kentucky in educating children when it opened its first office in Louisville. We then opened a second office in Lexington (VIPS Central KY) in 1990. VIPS further expanded services in 2011 to include the whole state of Indiana (VIPS Indiana). We are the only agency in Kentucky and Indiana providing regular and ongoing early intervention services to young children, birth to 5, who are blind and visually impaired.

In VIPS' continued expansion, in April of 2022 we had the grand opening of our new home in Indianapolis, The Simon & Estelle Knoble VIPS Family Resource Center, located at 1212 Southeastern Avenue. This state-of-the-art facility will help us better serve children with blindness and low vision across Indiana.



# Mission in Action

Story by Melisa, mother to Jacob

Jacob joined our family via domestic adoption in September 2020, at 10 months of age. At the height of the global pandemic, we had the delight and honor of welcoming our son, Jacob, home forever! What a joy!

Before Jacob's adoption, we were aware that he had experienced global developmental delays and had been diagnosed with cerebral palsy and failure to thrive. However, after transferring all of his medical care to our closest children's hospital following his adoption, Jacob was comprehensively assessed and received a diagnosis of Spinocerebellar Ataxia, Type 4, as well as other accompanying medical diagnoses, of which one was CVI and several brain anomalies, including a retinocerebellar cyst, white matter volume loss, and thinning of his corpus callosum.

After several hospitalizations, team assessments, and medical appointments, Jacob now is medically stable, thriving, and developing. He is dependent on a G-tube for all feedings, meds, and hydration, has severe epilepsy and is dependent for all mobility and activities of daily living. Jacob, now almost three years old, resides in eastern Kentucky with his family, which includes his parents and three older siblings. He is the joy of our lives and spending our days with him is the highlight of this season of family life.

Jacob loves his daily routines, which include morning playtime, therapy sessions at home, traveling in the car and out in our community, and spending time with family and friends. He is funny, mischievous, and playful. He smiles and laughs hysterically, and loves going for long walks with his family in his wheelchair near our home. His dog, Pippen, brings him lots of joy and fun. After Jacob came home, I (Melisa) left the full-time workforce as an occupational therapist to become Jacob's full-time caregiver, playmate, and mama. Although I had primarily worked with the elderly population throughout the last 24 years of my career, I did have just enough experience in pediatric therapy services to know the value of early intervention and know the right questions to ask to initiate services for Jacob.

I began aggressively researching options for assessment and treatment for him, knowing that traveling the four hours each way to our local children's hospital was not feasible or reasonable for long-term services. After initiating First Steps Early Intervention Services, I reached out to VIPS in Louisville via email to determine if there were any options for virtual services, and to my surprise, they indicated that they had a service provider that lived in my county! Who knew?

We worked with VIPS and First Steps to coordinate services with Ms. Bekah Allen, who became our Developmental Interventionist and VIPS service provider. Ms. Bekah has blessed our family tremendously. She has provided innovative services, did research to assist us in locating equipment and services that would benefit us, as well as accompanying us virtually to Jacob's CVI Team Assessment at our children's hospital all while contributing and assisting in implementing strategies at home. She worked to acquire Jacob a lightbox, which has been invaluable for his development and learning. Ms. Bekah has been so playful and interactive with Jacob...he doesn't AT ALL realize he is working on skills! She has assisted with suggestions about home modifications to assist with his vision as well as identifying toys that would allow him to be successful with play and development. Once she taught me, I ran with it and we established a great repertoire of stimulatory toys and an environment that has helped him thrive visually and developmentally.

One particular emphasis that Ms. Bekah had was ensuring that we understood about simplifying Jacob's visual background and environment to allow him to thrive visually. We made a backdrop and changed his play floor mat to more simplistic, dark colors to allow the colors of his toys to pop! He loves it and has come alive with his independent play skills since we made the change.

I strongly advise other parents, physicians, and therapy services providers in the eastern Kentucky area to make referrals to the VIPS program. This service, in my estimation, is grossly underutilized in the eastern Kentucky region. In an area where services can be much more difficult to navigate, identify, and utilize, this service is accessible and so helpful! We are so thankful that we have been connected with VIPS and will always be grateful for the services of our provider, Ms. Bekah Allen.



# Education & Programs



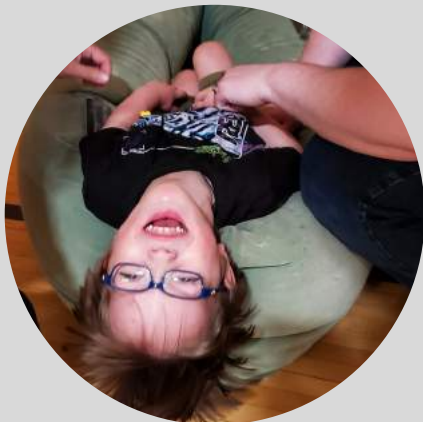
**Home visits** by teachers and interventionists equip parents and caregivers with vision-specific knowledge and resources to teach their children.



**Orientation & Mobility (O&M)** is a program that helps our VIPS children navigate their environment safely with the use of a white cane.



**Kids Town Preschool** is a nationally accredited preschool located at our Louisville campus that prepares visually impaired children for academic success & social integration.



**Little Learners** is a weekly parent-child playgroup held at the Central Kentucky office. It provides hands-on activities in a social setting that lays the foundation for future learning.



**Parent Empowerment Program (PEP)** is a space for VIPS families to socialize with one another.

# Podcast: "Feeling this life"



Presented by **Visually Impaired Preschool Services (VIPS) & Anchor Center for Blind Children**, this podcast dives deep into the triumphs, challenges, and strategies that are part of the lives of those who care for young children with blindness and visual impairment, building an audio community of families, caregivers, and early interventionists

**Co-Hosts:** Dr. Cathy Smyth, Paige Maynard, & Jenny Castenir

**E1** What to expect when taking your child to the eye doctor

**E2** What to expect in your daily life with a child with a visual impairment

**E3** What to expect when you need to speak up for your child

**E4** What to expect when helping your child learn to get from place to place

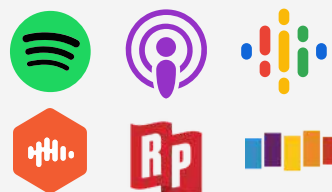
**E5** What to expect when fostering your child's social skills

**1,083**

**TOTAL PLAYS**

**18** **TOTAL COUNTRIES**

Available on





# Financial Data

## REVENUE

Contributions & Grants	\$1,607,931
In-Kind Contributions	\$1,110,345
Program Service Fees	\$886,530
Special Events	\$333,465
Net Investment Return	(\$121,497)
Gain on disposal of property & equipment	\$3,560
Misc Income	\$37,831
Rental Income	\$4,050

<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$3,862,215</b>
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## EXPENSES

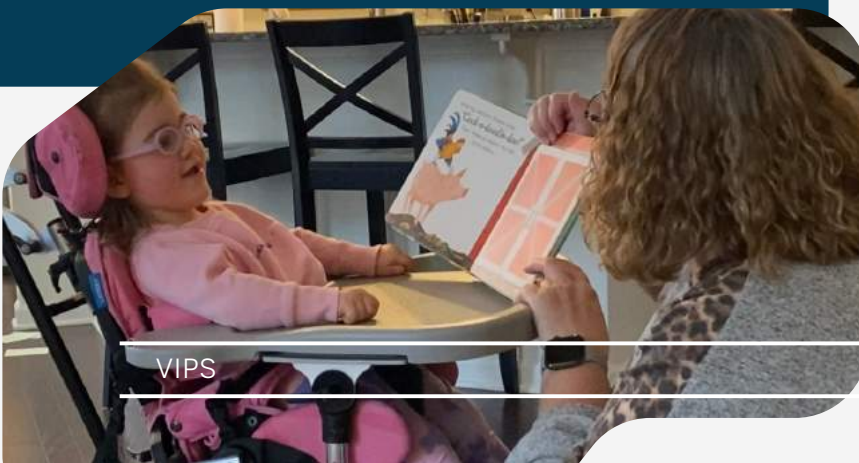
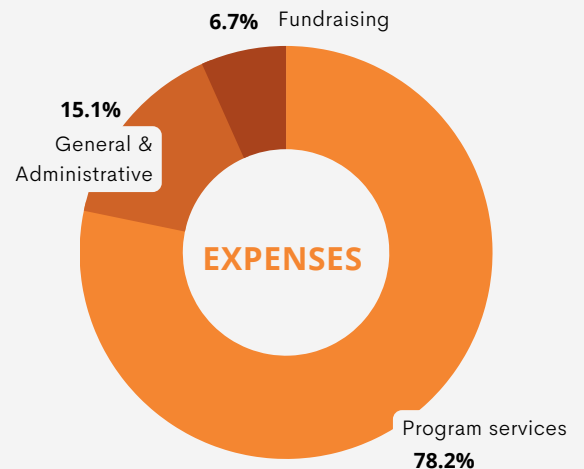
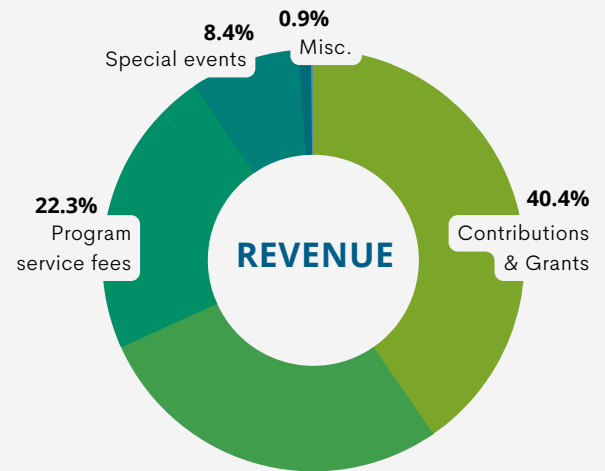
Program Services	\$2,119,239
General & Administrative	\$408,560
Fundraising	\$180,903

<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$2,708,702</b>
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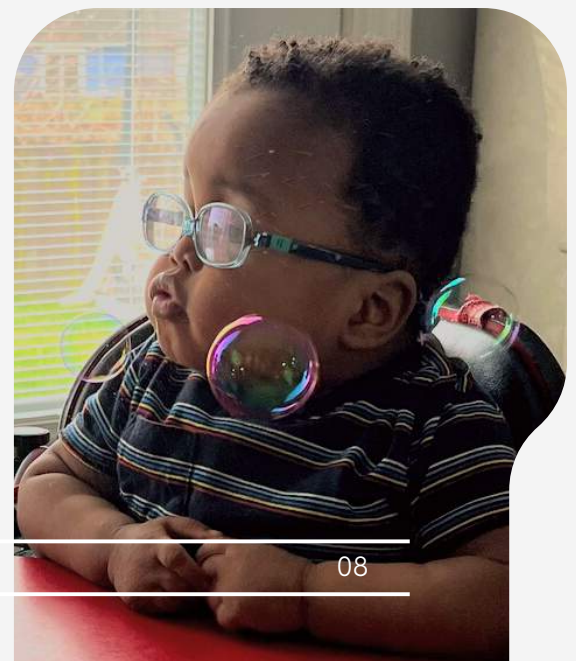
## NET ASSESTS

Unrestricted	\$4,943,496
Temporarily Restricted	\$312,528
Permanently Restricted	\$332,328

<b>Ending Net Assets</b>	<b>\$5,588,352</b>
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VIPS



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# VIPS Team Members

## **Current Board Officers & Directors**

Nathan Holladay, President  
Mike Johnson, Vice President  
John Anders, Treasurer  
Taylor Gehring, Secretary  
Virren Malhotra, Indiana Representative  
on the Executive Committee

## **Board Members**

Jennifer Arington  
Sharon Bensinger, Founder of VIPS  
Aaron Benson  
Jerry Bizer, O.D.  
Jelisa Chatman  
Theresa Connolly  
Jena Fahlbush  
Alejandro Erick Franco  
Paul Frazier  
Ashima Gupta, M.D.  
Paresh Gupta, Pharmacy  
Arvetta Jideonwo  
Emily Krauser  
Donna Brostek Lee, Ph.D.  
Ellen Prizant  
Mark Stiebling

## **Current VIPS Employees**

Diane M. Nelson, Executive Director  
Kathy Mullen, Director of Education  
Kim Berghoff, Blind/Low Vision Specialist  
Suzanne Bigbee, Classroom Assistant  
Jenny Castenir, Family Services Coordinator  
Carol Dahmke, HR & Office Manager  
Kristan Decker, Preschool Assistant  
Rita DeVore, Office & Volunteer Coordinator  
Rebekah Dunda, Classroom Assistant  
Kelly Easton, Intake Coordinator and Central  
Kentucky Regional Director  
Ashley Emmons, Teacher of the Visually  
Impaired & Certified O&M Specialist  
Pauletta Feldman, Special Projects  
Michelle Flora, Blind/Low Vision Specialist

Ashley Ford, Event Coordinator  
Marchelle Hampton, Classroom Assistant  
Debbie Hardesty, Classroom Assistant  
Pamela Holladay, Teacher of the Visually  
Impaired  
Meredith Howell, Indiana Regional Director  
Brian Justice, Building, Grounds, &  
Maintenance  
Lesley Lusher, Developmental Interventionist  
Dixie Marz, Teacher of the Visually Impaired  
Paige Maynard, Teacher of the Visually  
Impaired  
Staci Maynard, Teacher of the Visually Impaired  
Tammy Maynard, Developmental Interventionist  
Juanita Miles, VIPS Kids Town Preschool  
Director  
Jan Moseley, Visual Impairment Specialist  
Amy Nichols, Teacher of Blind/Low Vision  
Brenda Pharris, Classroom Assistant  
Sarah Potter, Classroom Assistant  
Elaine Reed, Developmental Interventionist &  
2's Teacher  
Tommie Roesch, Teacher of Blind/Low Vision &  
Certified O&M Specialist  
Ashley Ross, Development Coordinator  
Joni Santiago, Classroom Assistant  
Kirsten Schmidt, Guest Relations/Volunteer  
Coordinator  
Julia Sleder, Teacher of the Visually Impaired  
Laurie Smiley, Teacher of Blind/Low Vision  
Mary Smyth, Grant Writer  
Emma Strange, Classroom Assistant  
David Sterne, TBLV, Indiana First Steps &  
Cultural Quality Assurance Coordinator  
Emily Thornton, Database Coordinator  
Malinda Vogel, Classroom Assistant  
Tracy Webb, Developmental Interventionist  
Maury Weedman, Maintenance Manager  
Christina Welsh, Controller

# Contact Information



## Louisville



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Louisville, KY 40218



local: (502) 636-3207  
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toll-free: (888) 636-8477



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

## Central Kentucky



350 Henry Clay Blvd.  
Lexington, KY 40502



local: (859) 276-0335  
fax: (859) 276-4379  
toll-free: (888) 254-8477



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

## Indiana



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Indianapolis, IN 46202



local: (317) 961-5001  
toll-free: (888) 824-2197  
fax: (317) 924-5469



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

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"It's so hard in those early days, you are just struggling to keep up and process everything. Before you realize it you find yourself becoming a parent, caregiver, nurse, and therapist. It's daunting and overwhelming at first but when your child reaches their first goal or hits a milestone, no matter how big or small, and then you realize it was all worth it."

— Becci, Mother to Noah

"VIPs has played a vital role in Tala, and our family's journey! VIPs came into our home with a knowledge base for parents, siblings, and Tala as an individual with visual impairments."

— Christine, Mother to Tala

"We got started with VIPs as soon as possible. I will never forget our first home visit. Beau did not look at anything. He gave no indication he could see at all. I was crushed and devastated; but the VIPs teacher was very knowledgeable and convinced me his eyes could get stronger the more we helped them make connections with lights and toys. She also assured me there were resources and help if Beau was blind. I felt much better knowing I had VIPs and its community to lean on."

— Lindsay, Mother to Beau

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