

In This Issue:

ECVIA Comes to VIPS	2
Visitors to VIPS	3
Cuteness from Kids Town	
Preschool	4
VIPS Family Events = Fun	5
VIPS Graduate News	5
VIPS Summer Programs	6
Financial Planning for Families of	
Children with Special Needs	7
Marvelous Milestones	8
Welcome New Children	10
VIPS Parent Recommendation	10
Rowan's Story	11
VIPS Staff News	12
VIPS is Hiring!	13
In Memoriam	13
The Story of Eli	13
Notes of Interest	14
Face It!	15
Thanks to Our Volunteers	15
Recent Grants and Donations	16
Development News	17
Upcoming Fundraisers	19
VIPS Wish List	20

VIPS Achieves Line Item in Indiana State Budget

For the first time in its history, VIPS Indiana is a line item in the biennial budget for the state of Indiana! For the next two years, VIPS is budgeted to receive \$1,200,000 (\$600,000 each year). This has been a burning desire for Meredith Howell, VIPS mom, former VIPS Indiana Regional Director, and new Development Director for VIPS. She shares her journey below.

Making VIPS IN History

by Meredith Howell, Director of Development

I can remember the first time I ever went to the Indiana Statehouse. It was back in early 2014 and I went with the then director of development, Rebecca Davis, and teacher of blind/low vision, Annie Hughes, both from VIPS Indiana. We were advocating for specific pediatric visual impairments to be updated in the Indiana Birth Defects and Problems Registry (don't worry we'll work on updating this name through the state legislature, too!) so that young children with these visual impairments



Meredith Howell at IN Statehouse.

[Continued on page 2](#)

VIPS Named a 2023 Best Place to Work

VIPS has been named a Louisville Business First 2023 Best Places to Work for organizations in the 25-150 employees category. The program measures a number of best practices that lead to employee satisfaction and engagement.

With 28 VIPS Louisville employees responding, VIPS had an overall score of 95.14%, demonstrating a workplace where employees go above and beyond in working to fulfill the organization's mission, advocate for the organization, and plan to stay in their jobs.

VIPS had a 100% engagement score for employees, with 96% being highly engaged. And levels of engagement barely differed by age group of employees; those in the 56-65 age group had a 98% level of engagement, while all other age groups exhibited a 94% level of engagement (36-45, 46-55,

[Continued on page 2](#)

Making VIPS History

Continued from front page

would be counted by the state of Indiana and then, in turn, would get funding to go towards services to help these children with vision loss. I knew very little about the state legislature or the lawmakers, but I was passionate about helping these children—especially since my own daughter was legally blind with one of those very visual diagnoses we were hoping to add to the Registry.

VIPS served our daughter, Lola, from 2012-2014 with vision-specific early intervention and it was such a life-enhancing experience that I wanted to help this organization that had done so much to ensure our daughter would thrive. I wasn't able to become a VIPS teacher or an early interventionist to help kids but I knew I could share my story and the impact VIPS had on our lives so when they asked me to go to the Statehouse, I agreed, but cautiously.

I remember how small I felt as I walked up to the Indiana Statehouse for the first time. I was a bucket of nerves when speaking with the various legislators — they were intimidating to me. And to make matters more interesting, I had my infant son, Sebastian, with me during these meetings. But that didn't stop me from sharing my story about Lola and the impact the VIPS services had had on our lives.

After our meetings that day, I felt energized and eager to do more especially when our efforts would eventually be successful in updating the Registry. I would be hired by VIPS in July of 2014, and while my roles within my job have changed many times over the last nine years, one part of my job has remained the same — I am an advocate for VIPS at the Indiana Statehouse.

During my time with VIPS, we would not only update the Registry but we would also go on to advocate for a line item in the state budget in the amount of \$121,500 specifically for early intervention for young children with vision loss. This was a win for Indiana's youngest children with blindness/low vision. However, there were many hoops VIPS had to jump through in order to secure that grant funding year after year and it was only a small fraction of what it cost VIPS to serve the entire state of Indiana. So this year, we decided to go back to the state and lobby for more funding for these children who have very specialized needs. And after countless meetings with numerous Indiana legislators, we were successful in doing just that — VIPS is now in the Indiana state budget for \$600,000 a year for the next two years!

This was an incredible accomplishment for VIPS and for me personally, both as a VIPS employee and as a mother of a child with vision loss. This funding will allow VIPS to serve more

children with visual impairments and serve them better across the state. It will allow us to build infrastructure in Indiana so that no matter where children with vision loss may live, they will have access to a VIPS teacher who can help them thrive in this life.

I'm so proud of the work that has been done to ensure that these children have services specific to their needs. I'm grateful to former VIPS grandpa, Rob Schlafer, for coming to the Indiana Statehouse with me and sharing the story of Eli, his grandson. Rob and his family played a critical role in our success and I can't express my gratitude enough. We owe a huge thanks to the Indiana legislators who listened to our stories and advocated on behalf of VIPS to finalize this funding. Without them, this happy ending wouldn't exist. And to all who sent a letter, called, or emailed your own Indiana legislator, thank you. Your presence during this legislative session was felt and the impact you've helped make will be profound for these children and their families for many years to come.

I'd finally like to thank Rebecca and Annie for teaching me to advocate for my daughter and other children with vision loss like her. You see, early intervention is not just about the child — it's about the parent, too. I am a product of early intervention. VIPS taught me to be the advocate I am today and without them, I don't know where our lives would be. I will continue to share my story at the Indiana Statehouse so that other families like mine have access to services that could potentially shape their lives as well.

If you have a story to tell too, please connect with me. While we were successful this legislative session, we will always have an uphill battle at keeping the money where it is. We will need additional advocates along the way and while I never thought I'd be the one teaching others about advocacy at the Indiana Statehouse, here I proudly am and this is where I'll happily stay.

VIPS Best Place to Work

Continued from front page

and 66 and over). VIPS had a 100% score on how senior leaders value employees – at VIPS our staff is our most valuable resource.

Among the things VIPS team members said they valued about working at VIPS are the “family first” culture and mission; flexible scheduling; wonderful co-workers; kindness and support from the leadership team and board; opportunities for professional growth; collaboration; and responsiveness to employee input.

VIPS is Hiring!

See details on page 13.

ECVIA Friends Come to Louisville!

by Kathy Mullen, Director of Education

What do you get when you gather a group of friends whose last gathering was canceled due to a global pandemic? What do you get when a group of professionals committed to providing a level of excellence in service unmatched by others joins forces? What do you get when you bring together agency leaders in a very specialized field of education and family services?

These are not trick questions, and yet they can all be answered with the same response: ECVIA! The **Early Childhood Visual Impairment Alliance**, of which VIPS is a member, came together at the VIPS campus in Louisville for the first time in three years in mid-April. The energy was high, the excitement was palpable, and the noise level close to deafening as 35 of our closest friends in the field of early childhood services for children with vision loss gathered at our opening reception on Wednesday night, April 19. We shared stories, a few hugs, and lots of memories as we stepped right back into the groove of working together toward our common cause and supporting each other in the process.

As we gathered for our days of learning, we quieted down to hear from VIPS founder, Sharon Bensinger, and ECVIA leader, Tanni Anthony, on the histories of the two entities, recognizing the gift of history to plan for the future. We learned from experts in the



field on topics such as CVI (Cortical/Cerebral Visual Impairment) Updates on Screening, Diagnosing, and Interventions from Dr. Terry Schwartz and Dr. Karen Harpester from Cincinnati Children's Hospital and Medical Center. We enjoyed a tour of the American Printing House for the Blind before joining a virtual update with the leaders of Babies Count, the national data collection effort for children who are blind/visually impaired. Dr. Linda Lawrence,

a very active member in ECVIA, joined us virtually from Kansas to provide an update on international initiatives and ongoing needs for early interventions.

Dr. Rebecca Sheffield

from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, provided information on fact finding strategies and new regulations passed at the federal level, along with the opportunities that come from these updates.

And don't forget the food and fellowship! Our conversations went late into the evenings as we caught up with each others' families and learned even more about our work and shared victories and challenges. The time we spend out of workshops and presentations is always as valuable as the time we are seated in less than comfortable chairs in front of a PowerPoint and Smartboard.

We ended this year's time together in three workgroups assigned the individual tasks of tackling funding issues, recruitment of new professionals to our field, and the topic of appropriate assessments and evaluations of a young child's visual skills.

Before we bade farewell to our friends from across the country and Canada, we got out our calendars and began planning for our next ECVIA gathering. Speaking for all of us, we cannot wait for that day to come once again! Fingers crossed a global pandemic does not stand in our way the next time!

Welcoming Visitors to VIPS

Community groups often come to visit VIPS to learn about our mission and how they may be able to help. Over the past few months, both Kentucky and Indiana have welcomed groups of visitors to our campuses.

VIPS Indiana

We were so excited to host some **students from Franklin Township Schools** for a field trip to the VIPS Family Resource



EVICA members loved VIPS Mobility City.

Center! These students learned all about our mission, the importance of early intervention, and the impact of vision loss. Ms. Rita showed them how to braille and Ms. Amy taught them about being a Teacher of the Visually Impaired and the experiences of our VIPS families. The students even ate their lunch blindfolded to learn about using their other senses! They were so engaged and we hope they took away knowledge and appreciation for the visually impaired community.



We were honored to host **Project VIISA (Vision Impaired In-Service of America)** at our Family Resource Center in Indianapolis! Project VIISA is a training that focuses on working with infants and toddlers in early intervention home-

based programs. Attendees leave the two-day training equipped with knowledge on how to best serve families of young children with visual impairments. Participants attended sessions where they wore sleep shades, experienced the feel of different visual impairments using vision simulation goggles, and created materials for children with visual impairments.

Finally, VIPS Indiana was able to host the **Key Club, a service club of students, from Perry Meridian High School**. Students toured the Family Resource Center and participated in activities to learn more about our mission and the families we serve. They learned how to braille, found words on the braille wallpaper, and used the sleep shades for activities such as making a house with legos! Ms. Michelle then explained to them the items she uses for her



VIPS visits and what an in-home visit might look like. Thank you to the Perry Meridian Key Club for checking out our space and hearing about our mission!

VIPS Louisville

VIPS recently welcomed students from Indiana University's early childhood program to our Louisville campus. The university students participated in a presentation on the abilities and needs of young students who are visually impaired and how VIPS goes about addressing both in our VIPS Kids Town Preschool. A tour of our preschool was followed by lunch before the students boarded their bus once again for the trip back to Bloomington. It was a wonderful visit. Our future's looking bright in the world of early childhood educators!



A Bit of Cuteness from Kids Town Preschool

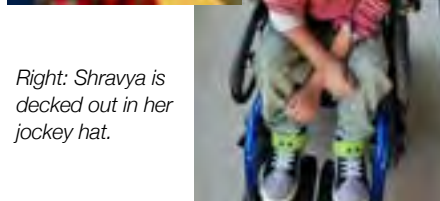
In celebration of Derby, VIPS Kids Town Preschool students tried their hand at racing horses on the playground.



Left: Christian is off!

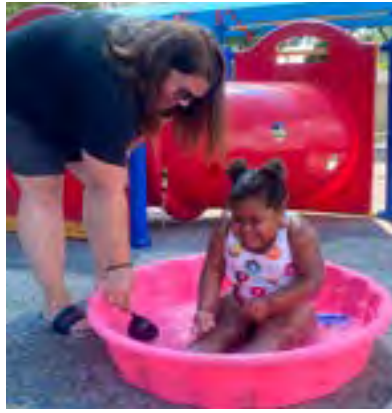


Above: Wells is raring to go!



Right: Shravya is decked out in her jockey hat.

Mrs. Ashley's class celebrated the last day of the 2023 KidsTown Preschool school year with a fun Water Play Day! The kids enjoyed exploring the sprinkler and cooled off sitting in little pools. The teachers set up a soap and water play table that provided fun for all. What a perfect way to kick off Summer Break!



Top right: Saniyah giggles as the cool water hits her shoulders.

Above left: Wells likes dangling his legs from the edge of the pool. Above right: Jayden (front) plays in the spray as Christian (rear) gets ready to scrub a toy.



Family Fun Events in Louisville

Sensory Egg Hunt

We had a great turnout at the Sensory Egg Hunt at our Louisville campus! The children hunted eggs that were filled with various items such as playdough, stuffed bunnies, pop-its, jingle bells, and candy! We also had beeping eggs, light-up eggs, and eggs with balloons tied to them. The kids made a musical shaker out of an egg while also visiting with the Easter Bunny! Almost thirty children and families attended. We thank the students from the **U of L Ophthalmology Interest Group** for volunteering and helping make this family event a success!



Elise chats with Easter Bunny, as her sister Sophia waits her turn.



Left: Maelynn gets a snuggle from Easter bunny. Right: Gabriel prepares to make a musical shaker.



Donuts with Grownups

Thank you to our VIPS Kids Town Preschool parents and grandparents who joined our preschoolers for Donuts with Grownups before the end of this school year! The children not only loved the special morning treat in Kids Town, they loved showing their loved ones around their school. Everyone agrees - it was a very SWEET way to start our day!



London (left) and Maelynn (right) loved having their parents at school.

VIPS Graduate News

Kids Town Preschool graduation was held the evening of June 1, 2023. The six graduates will attend kindergarten at these schools: Bowen Elementary, Farmer Elementary, Kentucky School for the Blind, Medora Elementary, and Norton Elementary.

The **Daughters of the American Revolution** presented each student with a braille flag, which they have done for many years. In addition, **Andrew Chapman with University of Louisville Music Therapy Clinic** led the students in a song. The program ended with a video presentation showcasing each graduate who was acknowledged for achieving specific milestones. The evening ended enjoying lemonade and cupcakes with the graduates

and their families. The graduates were each given a copy of the book **Be You** by Peter H. Reynolds, which was brailled by VIPS staff with both print and braille words and the original illustrations.



Some of the graduates for 2023!
Top left: Hayes
Top right: Saniyah
Left: Sophia

Congratulations, Alex and Cory!

Alex and Cory, shown below, just graduated from the Kentucky School for the Blind. These two students were in the first class of Kids Town Preschool in Louisville. We are so proud of all they have accomplished since their time at VIPS and wish them the best! Read more: <https://www.kentuckyteacher.org/.../kentucky-school.../>



Summer Promises Learning & Fun for VIPS Kids & Families

VIPS Indiana

VIPS Five Senses Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Camp

July 12-15 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. each day

Location: VIPS Family Resource Center Indianapolis

Age group birth to 18 months old

Wednesday & Friday, July 12 & 14

Age group 18 months to 3 years old

Thursday & Saturday, July 13 & 15

Register at <https://forms.gle/DEhwQHTwv1y6spdq7>

Your child will work with all his/her senses learning O&M skills and having play time/games at the end of the session. Activities will include seeking out items to put in sensory bin, making a tactile book to keep utilizing all the senses, snack time, game time and much more!

This camp is free and available to current VIPS families only. You may sign up for one or two days of the camp that correspond with your child's age. Siblings are welcome to attend while parents/caregivers and VIPS children participate in the program designed for them. Parents/caregivers must stay for the duration of each camp session. This camp is limited to 10 VIPS children and their siblings each camp session.

VIPS Kentucky

O&M Camp at VIPS CK Campus in Lexington

Friday, July 14

Birth to 18 months

9 – 10:30 a.m.

18 months to 3 years

11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Join us for the VIPS Central Kentucky Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Camp at the VIPS Lexington campus. During the camp, your child will participate in a variety of activities to promote O&M -related skills such as body awareness, environmental awareness, directional/positional concepts, mobility skills (i.e. crawling, standing, walking, jumping, kicking, etc.) and more! The camp is free and available to current VIPS families only. Parents/caregivers must stay for the duration of the session. Contact keaston@vips.org.

O&M Camp at VIPS Louisville Campus Thursday and Friday, August 3 & 4

Birth to two years

9 – 10:30 a.m.

3 to 5 years

11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Register at: <https://forms.gle/PqscoxXKyXamTJ929>

Join us for the VIPS Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Camp at the VIPS Louisville campus. During the camp, your child will participate in a variety of activities to promote O&M-related skills such as body awareness, environmental awareness, directional/positional concepts, mobility skills (i.e. crawling, standing, walking, jumping, kicking, etc.) and more! The camp is free and available to current VIPS families only.

Prents/caregivers must stay for the duration of the session. Contact aemmons@vips.org.

Financial Planning for Your Child's Future

VIPS regularly presents programs on financial planning for special needs families with Gordon Homes, a financial advisor and special care planner. The next one is scheduled for September 14, 2023 at 10 a.m. It will be held in person at the VIPS Family Resource Center in Indianapolis and shared virtually. Information on registering will be available as the event nears.

Gordon F Homes, Jr., (CFP, CLU, ChFC, CASL, WestPoint Financial Group |Financial Advisor|Special Care Planner) is a Certified Financial Planner whose practice focuses on Financial and Estate Planning for families who have a family member with special needs. He has a unique perspective through his experience both as a financial professional and parent.

Gordon explains the why and how of financial planning for the future of a child with special needs below.

"Having a child with special needs makes for some very full days. Finding time for Special Needs Planning is a challenge, but the rewards are great.

Special Needs Planning includes the Legal, Financial and Government Benefit issues that accompany our special needs journey.

The process starts with an initial consultation. There is no charge for this meeting. No matter one's financial circumstances, taking time for an initial meeting is a great start.

It's never too early to plan and with lengthy waits for Medicaid Waiver services, the case for starting early is strong."

Meredith Howell, a former VIPS Mom and VIPS Development Director, describes her experience with special needs financial planning:

"When you have a child with special needs, it is incredibly hard to think about their future without you in it. I often say I need to live forever because nobody can care for my daughter, Lola, who has significant disabilities, like I am able to, but obviously, that is not the reality. Someday Lola's life will go on without me but what can I do now to ensure that she is set up in the future?

I had heard the term "special needs trust" in various online support groups and while it sounded like something I needed to do, I was often overwhelmed with the thought of the task. How could we afford to set up a trust? How could Lola have a trust when we don't have that much money to begin with, to put into it? But over time I began to hear tidbits of information from friends and at various events for parents of kids with disabilities so I decided to reach out to a special needs estate planner and I'm so thankful I did.

I quickly realized that taking the first step was the hardest part—the rest was smooth sailing. Sure there was a ton of paperwork, a lot of hard discussions to have, and multiple parts moving forward all at once but in the end, once everything was signed, I was able to take a deep breath knowing that Lola is taken care of if something were to happen to my husband and me. I can sleep a little bit easier at night knowing her trust is set up and I'm grateful that this is one worry I can finally check off my list."

Jenny Castenir, a former VIPS Mom and VIPS Family Services Coordinator, says of the planning process:

"Prior to working at VIPS I was a VIPS parent. I remember the Gordon Homes seminars being offered, but I never attended. My thinking was that you had to be very wealthy to obtain services or even need the services. After I joined VIPS and sat in on the first seminar, I knew it was something we needed. I signed my husband up for the following seminar and after that we started meeting with a financial planner on a regular basis. He helped us set up a will and directives for future care givers. He offered us an affordable option to establish a trust that would allow our daughter to be taken care of in the future. While I don't know what the future holds, I have peace of mind knowing that our daughter will be taken care of."

Pauletta Feldman, VIPS Special Projects and Mom of a VIPS grad, reflects on her experience with setting up a trust:

"We used a local attorney who specializes in special needs planning to set up a trust for our son, Jamie. Our attorney is the father of an adult with developmental disabilities and very knowledgeable and compassionate. Even though our son Jamie lives independently and is capable of caring for himself when we are gone, setting up the trust makes it possible for him to maintain the government benefits he receives, but still have access to additional funds in trust as he needs. It was really a beneficial exercise for my husband and me to take a look forward for our whole family, as we created Jamie's trust, our wills, our living wills, and plans that also address our other children."

For further reading, checkout the resources below.

- Financial Planning for Kids with Disabilities <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/needs-planning.html>
- Financial Planning for Parents of Children with Disabilities <https://www.moneygeek.com/financial-planning/resources-for-parents-of-children-with-special-needs/>
- Special Needs Financial Planning: Smart Advice for Families Coping with Disabilities <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sergeiklebnikov/2023/04/30/special-needs-financial-planning-smart-advice-for-families-coping-with-disabilities/?sh=129f9bf06e51>

Those Marvelous Milestones

Because of the variety of visual impairments and other disabilities that VIPS children experience, their milestones may look a bit different. The milestones below, which are the result of much hard work on the part of the children and their families and caregivers, are truly cause for celebration.

Barrett was struggling with accepting his glasses, so the family and his VIPS teacher visited an optical shop to find new frames that would work better for him. They picked out the Tomato Frame brand pictured here. He likes these so much better! It's so important for children to be comfortable in their glasses to ensure they wear them as needed. Doesn't Barrett look great in his new glasses!?



Barrett's family also shared that he reached out for the first time ever to explore an unfamiliar thing in his environment! His mom snapped this picture of him after he looked at the ornamental grass, and then used his hand to explore it. We are SO proud of Barrett's progress with reaching and exploring!

Felicity has recently been working on container play, learning to reach into a container to get an object. A perfect use of this skill occurs during snack time! In the video linked below, she is reaching into the snack bag to get a puff! Here she shows a functional use of her understanding of containers. Way to go, Felicity!



<https://www.facebook.com/VisuallyImpairedPreschoolServices/videos/1225249461455715>



Recently **Ford**, his mother and his brother were able to come to our Little Learners Parent and Me playgroup for the first time. Ford enjoyed the sensory play and loved to feel and look at the Mylar curtain. He also didn't mind painting and was moving his hand around on the paper. Even his big brother, Beau, loved it and didn't want to leave!

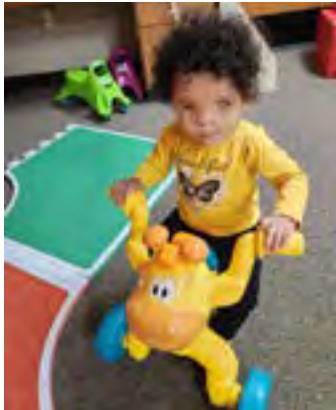
Jaiden recently aged out of our program! He and Ms. Paige took a selfie to celebrate and remember one another. We are so proud of Jaiden and his family's growth over the last few years during their time at VIPS. Thanks to early intervention, he is ready to take on preschool! Good luck, Jaiden!



James is wearing his eye patch more regularly! James was diagnosed with Bilateral Retinoblastoma last April. His left eye was affected by the tumor which caused some misalignment and loss of depth perception. Wearing the patch on his right eye allows James' left eye to strengthen, but patching can be very difficult for young children to tolerate.

When VIPS first started seeing James, he was wearing his patch for 5-10 minutes at a time. Now James is wearing his patch for 45-50 minutes! Great work, James!

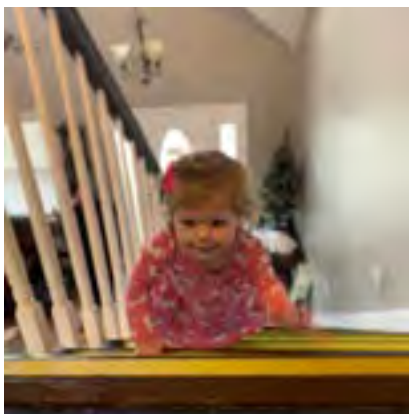
Lazuli has been working on standing and walking for a while now, and over the last month she has been on the move! She's pulling to stand, cruising furniture, and walking behind a push toy. Soon she will get a white cane for more independence. Lazuli is making super progress!



Osuke has a diagnosis of Soto's Syndrome and CVI and recently received his glasses. Osuke has been adjusting so well to them. He has been very excited to play with his toys—especially the lighted ones! His mom is very creative with his playtime which encourages his progress.

<https://www.facebook.com/VisuallyImpairedPreschoolServices/videos/787178199791147>

Remington has been working on looking at and reaching things in front of him. During a recent visit, Ms. Michelle worked along with his Occupational Therapist to get his visual attention and to activate his muscles to interact with toys. These photos show Remington reaching for the bells and making the car move! What great progress!

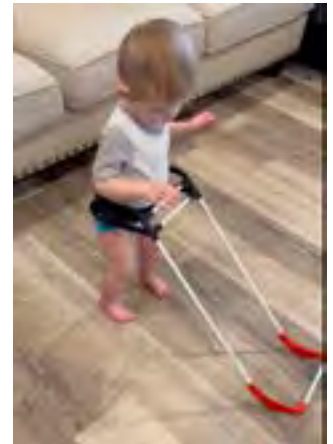


VIPS kiddo, Roiree, has become confident in traveling up a flight of stairs independently! Recently, Ms. Julia worked with Roiree on safety when traveling in her environment. A strategy they came up with to help with surface awareness when traveling is to use a high contrasting

color, like yellow tape, to act as a visual marker for Roiree to feel confident in finding her next step up/down. Great job, Roiree!

Sawyer recently received his pediatric belt cane which will be a step towards him becoming more independent as he navigates his environment. This is his first time wearing the cane and he starts turning from side to side as he realizes the couch is in front of him! Look at Sawyer go!

<https://www.facebook.com/VisuallyImpairedPreschoolServices/videos/877353836651765>



Silas has recently been using his vision to look at and focus on more objects. Putting an illuminated object in a metal bowl has facilitated his focus. In the photo, Silas holds the toy close to his face to better see the water movements. These adaptations allow Silas to learn how to best use his vision to meet his needs. That's great looking, Silas!

Stevie has had a lot of milestones in the last few weeks— He is patting pictures in books and exploring pages, he took his first bite of purees, he found his feet, he is beginning to roll to both sides, and he is starting to pull his legs under him when on his belly! We are so proud of all the strides Stevie is making.



Tanner has been embracing her sunglasses, and recently on a drive to school, the sun had barely begun to rise when she told her mom, "Oh, no, the sun! I need my glasses!" We are so proud of Tanner for understanding the importance of protecting her eyes (and the importance of accessorizing her outfit!)



Welcome New Children

VIPS is pleased to welcome the following new children and their families to the VIPS program.

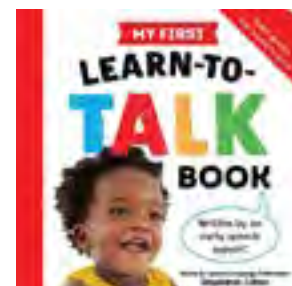
Adalynn – 1 year, Owensboro, KY
 Aieslynn – 2 years, New Albany, IN
 Alaska – 1 year, Terre Haute, IN
 Alexander – 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Amelia – 1 year, Earlington, KY
 Aria – 2 years, Indianapolis, IN
 Atlas – 9 months, Seymour, IN
 Ayden – 1 year, Hobart, IN
 Bentli - 6 months, Washington, IN
 Blaire – 1 year, New Albany, IN
 Brynn - 8 months, Greenwood, IN
 Bryson – 1 year, London, KY
 Caden – 1 year, Plainfield, IN
 Carla – 1 year, Fort Wayne, IN
 Carter – 11 months, Nicholasville, KY
 Charles – 8 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Cooper – 1 year, Hometown, IN
 Cooper – 1 year, London, KY
 Dakota – 10 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Daniella – 1 year, Monterey, IN
 Dariel – 2 years, Kentland, IN
 Darnel – 10 months, Oak Grove, KY
 Decker – 7 months, Georgetown, IN
 Demi – 2 years, Louisville, KY
 Demi – 1 year, Hardinsburg, KY
 Diostinmender – 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
 Eliana – 10 months, Fort Wayne, IN
 Eliza – 1 year, Elizabethtown, KY
 Elora – 9 months, Dawson Springs, KY

Elsie – 9 months, Cicero, IN
 Ember – 3 months, Fort Wayne, IN
 Evan – 9 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Freya – 2 years, Independence, KY
 Gatlin – 1 year, Lafayette, IN
 Gavin – 1 year, Lafayette, IN
 Grace – 5 months, Franklin, IN
 Grayson – 1 year, Waco, KY
 Gurkirat – 2 years, Fishers, IN
 Hadley – 1 year, Florence, KY
 Haley – 1 year, Fort Wayne, IN
 Harrison – 1 year, Stanton, KY
 Henry – 1 year, Frankfort, KY
 Hudson – 9 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Hugh – 8 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Hunter – 11 months, Lakeville, IN
 Imani – 1 year, Louisville, KY
 Isla – 1 year, Jeffersonville, IN
 Isla – 2 years, Madisonville, KY
 Jana – 2 years, Evansville, IN
 Jaxon – 6 months, Lawrenceburg, KY
 Josey – 1 year, Louisville, KY
 Justin – 1 year, Carrollton, KY
 Ka'Cee – 2 years, Indianapolis, IN
 Karambar – 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
 Kash – 3 years, Indianapolis, IN
 Khyson – 6 months, Louisville, KY
 Leiland – 1 year, Lowell, IN

Lennox – 8 months, Owensboro, KY
 Logan – 3 years, Radcliff, KY
 Lucas – 1 year, Pekin, IN
 Lucy – 5 years, Louisville, KY
 Lucy – 1 year, Jasper, IN
 Mason – 7 months, Highland Heights, KY
 Maxxon – 2 years, Evansville, IN
 Merrin – 2 years, Zionsville, IN
 Mia – 9 months, Indianapolis, IN
 Oaklynn – 10 months, Louisville, KY
 Oliver – 2 years, Berne, IN
 O'Lonzo – 2 years, Kokomo, IN
 Ophelia – 1 year, Greenwood, IN
 Owen – 1 year, Fort Wayne, IN
 Owliyah – 2 months, Louisville, KY
 Rahma – 1 year, Louisville, KY
 Raven – 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
 Rayelle – 1 year, Louisville, KY
 Rowan – 1 year, Lawrenceburg, KY
 Seraphina – 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
 Taylor – 1 year, Bedford, IN
 Tommy "Nathaniel" – 1 year, Greenfield, IN
 Waylon – 1 year, Elkton, KY
 William – 2 years, Nicholasville, KY
 Willow - 2 years, Columbia City, IN
 Winter – 2 years, New Haven, IN
 Yuliana – 2 years, North Judson, IN
 Yusef – 10 months, Shelbyville, IN
 Zander – 1 year, Kokomo, IN

Parent Recommendations

Stephanie, Mom of VIPS child Felicity, recommends the dollar spot at Target because it has a lot of great lighted toys! Felicity especially likes the fiber optic handheld light! She also recommends My First Learn to Talk Book written by a speech-language pathologist. Stephanie likes this book because of the simple photograph pictures and the short and simple phrases. Each page has a one syllable sound that is easy for a child to imitate, promoting vocal imitation and overall communication development. Rhythm and rhyme encourage repetition and help keep babies engaged. The book uses real photographs that model correct mouth positions and support social emotional learning. Reading the book aloud helps caregivers easily model important aspects of communication for little ones, not only through sounds and words, but also with gestures, facial expressions and more! Board book \$9.99 at Amazon <https://www.amazon.com/My-First-Learn-Talk-Book/dp/1728248108>.



Rowan's Story

by his mom, Katie

Rowan is our incredibly loved two-year-old whose easy going personality fits right into our chaotic and fun household. Rowan has a big sister (4), twin sister (2), and baby brother (8 months), and my husband, Reece, and I are lucky to be their parents. We were a family that only planned on having 2 kids, but found out at our first ultrasound during my second pregnancy that we were pregnant with twins. That was our first dose of the reality that plans are overrated and that God always seems to have a better one.

My twin pregnancy was a difficult journey for my whole family, with lots of ups and downs, but we proudly made it to my 38-week induction date and had an easy delivery of two beautiful babies. So much anxiety over the last year had finally come to an end as we held our twins, Ellie and Rowan, in our arms. We had worried about Rowan for a number of reasons throughout the pregnancy, and although we were told he was healthy at birth, we just had a feeling that something wasn't quite right. He had a rash all over his face and was very shaky. He ultimately failed the newborn hearing screen, and we were told that this was a common occurrence and he would have a follow-up test in a month. Fortunately, the hospital we delivered at did targeted screening for congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV), so when he failed his hearing



screen, he was tested. We had one week with our twins before we got the terrible call that our little boy had CMV. CMV acts like the common cold in most people, but can be detrimental if acquired while pregnant, and unfortunately, prevention education is not often provided to moms.

Those initial months were filled with so much fear and anxiety, tons of testing and appointments, and just heartache. Since that time, Rowan has been diagnosed with numerous complications as a result of CMV: profound bilateral deafness (received cochlear implants at 10 months old), triplegic cerebral palsy, focal epilepsy, feeding difficulties, and cortical vision impairment, all of which have led to gross motor delays.

I am happy to say that a lot of healing and acceptance has occurred during that time. But as all families with special needs kids understand, it is an incredibly difficult journey. Without the support and assistance from friends, families, and his amazing therapists, we would never be where we are today as a family.

Rowan was enrolled in First Steps at just 3 months old, and we engaged with physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech

therapy, etc. It wasn't until he got older that his PT suggested having his vision assessed and getting VIPS involved. He was diagnosed with cortical vision impairment (CVI) and a VIPS teacher (the amazing Dixie) started coming to our house two times a month.

It is so wonderful having her come to our home so that she can show us and Rowan's nanny how to improve his CVI with the items that we have at home. Admittedly, due to all of Rowan's other issues, his CVI was lower on the list of our priorities at the time. As Rowan has gotten older though, his need (and our need) for communication with him has increased and Dixie has helped us so much with understanding the importance of communicating with him in anyway possible. We've already noticed a lot of improvement in his ability to play and interact with the world around him. We are also incredibly grateful for Dixie providing us with the resources we need to start pursuing an AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) device. We are still hopeful that he will be verbal with the help of the cochlear implants, but are excited to help Rowan access an alternative way to more effectively communicate with us at this time.

VIPS, along with our other therapists, have helped us to recognize Rowan's ability to progress and be successful even if it looks different from his siblings. Our 8-month-old learned to sit two months ago, a feat that Rowan is still working towards, but this fact no longer devastates me because our family recognizes that every path is different and important and the best thing we can do is support one another through that.

Rowan is joyful in such amazing ways and is a tremendous blessing to our family. His laugh and smile are contagious! His favorite things to do are watch Super Simple Songs, grab his sisters' hair, be tickled and thrown in the air, and lately, dance with mommy and his sisters in the kitchen. We still have our daily struggles and fears, but we are grateful for the community that now surrounds us.



My advice to other parents who have a child recently diagnosed with a visual impairment, or any disability, is to contact as many resources as possible like VIPS, to obtain the help that your child needs. It used to be very hard for us to reach out for help, but I realize now, that not only does your child need the help in order to progress, but often the family needs the additional support as well. There are many days where I can get lost in Rowan's uncertain future or the goals he may be unable to reach, but I rest assured each day knowing that he has the people and the resources that he needs in his life, and that we need in ours as well.

VIPS Staff News

Meredith Howell has been promoted as VIPS Director of Development. Meredith was previously the Regional Director for the Indiana office. Her promotion is unique as she was once a recipient of VIPS services as her own daughter is legally blind and a VIPS graduate. After years of filling several roles at VIPS, from volunteer to board member to employee, Meredith now finds herself in a position to use her own story to help other families like her own.

She has blossomed as a public speaker and obtained her certificate in Non-Profit Executive Leadership from the Lily School of Philanthropy at IU. She is responsible for the recent completion of a successful capital campaign of \$2.3 million. She has had great success as a legislative lobbyist in support of her passion for VIPS, a mission-based non-profit, resulting in a \$600,000 line item in the Indiana state budget. We are so excited to welcome Meredith to her new role! (You can read about Meredith's advocacy efforts on the front page.)

We also welcome **Justine Aycock** to VIPS in the brand new position of Lead Donor Engagement Officer. She writes:

"I am excited to have recently joined VIPS as the newest member of the development team. Originally from New Albany, Indiana, I spent most of my adult life in Indianapolis before relocating back to my hometown. My career has always been rooted in fundraising, and I am passionate about making a difference through philanthropy."

I am eager to help "shake things up" from a development standpoint at VIPS and work closely with donors to enrich the lives of the children we serve. Prior to joining VIPS, I had the pleasure of working with some fantastic organizations like Indiana University, New Hope of Indiana, and the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, IN but most recently served as a Director of Development for the University of Louisville. I am grateful for the valuable knowledge and experience I gained through these experiences."

In my personal life, I enjoy spending time with my husband, Collin, who is currently in law school at the University of Louisville, and our two beloved Australian Shepherds, Java and Jameson. We like to take on home renovation projects and explore new destinations whenever we can."



Trisha Conklin is our latest addition to the VIPS family. She will be serving our families in Western Kentucky. Trisha says:

"I am thrilled to join the VIPS family as a TVI/ COMS serving the Western Kentucky and Southern Indiana regions. What a privilege to be able to serve and work alongside families and their children!"

I was born and raised in a small town northwest of Columbus, Ohio but have called Murray, KY my home for the past ten years. I hold a bachelor's degree in business administration and public relations from Heidelberg University in Tiffin, Ohio and a master's degree in special education with an emphasis in Visual Impairment and Orientation & Mobility from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois. For the past 20 years, I have served as an itinerant TVI/ COMS in the public school system, working with students from preschool to high school ages, with a wide range of visual diagnoses and academic abilities."



My husband and I have been married for 19 years and have two beautiful daughters, ages 15 and 6, who keep us very busy. When I'm not working as their Uber driver, I enjoy reading, spending time with family and friends, learning sign language (ASL) and watching Ohio State University football (Go Bucks!)."

It's an absolute blessing to meet with families, listen to their beautiful stories, and become a small part of their journeys. Thank you for welcoming me aboard!"

We are saddened to report that **Marchelle Hampton** recently resigned as a classroom assistant. She hopes to rejoin us as a volunteer next school year. We look forward to seeing her perky smile and loving ways again soon.

Congratulations to the VIPS **Neonatal Assessment Visual European Grid (NAVEG) team**, made up of **Paige Maynard**, TVI/DI, **Dixie Marz**, TVI/DI and **Amy Nichols**, Teacher of Blind/Low Vision. The Riley Hospital Neonatal Intensive Care Unit team spoke so highly of the training they received from our staff and they hope to expand the NAVEG across the Midwest someday! We are very grateful Riley is embracing the need to identify children with CVI as soon as possible. This could impact so many children's lives along with those of their families.

Earlier this year, VIPS joined early childhood teachers in Ashland for Kentucky's Early Childhood Regional Training Center's Spring Day of Training. VIPS presented on the importance of offering active learning opportunities to students

who are visually impaired and/or have complex needs. Before the training ended, the attendees were given the opportunity to prepare active learning materials for their own classrooms, including Play Frames, baskets, wire racks, etc. It was definitely a time for active learning!



Kathy Mullen, Director of Education, kicked off the summer supporting our partners at Jefferson County Public Schools by participating in their Summer Professional Development Day at Moore High School. Attendees received hands-on experience in developing active learning strategies and materials so all children in classrooms can participate in the educational process. It was our pleasure to support our friends at JCPS!



In Memoriam

This issue of VISability is dedicated to the memories of:

Eli Riley

son of Tom and Debbie Riley of Batesville, IN who passed away November 17, 2022 at the age of eight.

~ and ~

Grace Catherine Fowles

daughter of Dani and Justin Fowles of Louisville, KY who passed away Friday March 31, 2023 at the age of four.

~ and ~

Bruce Prizant

husband of long-time VIPS Board member and volunteer, Ellen Prizant, and father of current board member, Loren Prizant, who passed away on June 16, at the age of 75.

~ and ~

Mitzi Thomas

mother of long-time VIPS board member and former VIPS interventionist, Terri Connolly, who passed away on June 18, at the age of 90.

*Our hearts go out to all of those who loved
Eli, Grace, Bruce and Mitzi.*

VIPS is HIRING!

If you or someone you know is interested in joining our amazing team, please let us know! We are currently looking for new team members to fill the roles of:

Assistant to the Director of Education (based in the VIPS Family Resource Center in Indianapolis)

Teachers of the Blind/Low Vision and Developmental Therapists (Indiana)

Teachers of the Visually Impaired and Developmental Interventionists (Kentucky)

VIPS Kids Town Preschool Classroom Assistants (Louisville)

If you are interested in applying for one of these positions or would like more information, please reach out to Kathy Mullen, VIPS Director of Education (kmullen@vips.org or (502)498-2927). Thank you!!

The Story of Eli

By Eli's Mom, Debbie

Eli Riley, a former VIPS kiddo, may have been born with a cataract, visual impairments and other eye conditions, however he was able to see the world in the most amazing way- his way. He saw the best in every person, including himself.



Eli cared so hard for others. He wanted for others, felt both joy and heartache for others and always, always helped others. Meeting Eli, even if for only one minute, would change your life for the better! That is how impactful he was.

Eli was a dedicated friend, in fact he was the best friend anyone could wish for. He even started his own club on recess- The Big Brain Club, which included his all-time best friend, Bella. Eli had many cousins, with his best friend (and cousin) also named Bella.

Eli loved to dance, sing, build, draw, tell jokes, play hide and seek and laser tag, learn about the presidents, practice his ninja moves and care for all of his stuffed animals- mostly dogs. He loved pugs the most and even started his own dog club, where he was the president. Eli was an advocate for animals.



Eli was loving, kind, creative, imaginative, smart, funny, had a great memory, was a quick learner and was wise beyond his years. But most importantly, Eli was happy. He fought until the very last second, as hard as he possibly could.

Eli had the bluest eyes, adorable strawberry curls and loved the color red.

We lost our Eli in November and we will be forever searching for him in life. He is everywhere, as he left us so many memories and such a positive outlook on everything.

Notes of Interest

- If you are looking for a little inspiration, you can find a great deal of it in the story of a **Canadian mountain climber who is visually impaired** and who has climbed six of the 14 tallest peaks in the world. <https://globalnews.ca/video/9482331/visually-impaired-canadian-woman-sets-records-on-the-worlds-tallest-mountains/>
- For another inspiring story, check out this one about a **D.C. woman with a visual impairment, who worked in politics** and who wound up trying to make Congress more accessible to dog guide, white cane and wheelchair users: <https://19thnews.org/2023/03/moira-shea-guide-dog-senate-floor-blindness-accessibility/>
- Recently, **a runner who is visually impaired accomplished something amazing** – he completed six World Marathon Majors! Anthony Butler is thought to be the first such American runner to do so and perhaps the only one in the world! Butler met his wife, who serves as his guide, through Achilles International, an organization which helps runners with disabilities train for and compete in races and other endurance events. <https://www.runnersworld.com/runners-stories/a43690578/visually-impaired-athlete-completes-6-world-marathon-majors/>
- With warmer weather and sunnier days, **reminding children to wear their sunglasses** is critical. While not prescription lenses, a few VIPS families have used these

successfully with their children who were also averse to glasses. They can be ordered at <https://realshades.com/>. The glasses are sturdy, protective and comfortable. They offer 100% UVA and UVB protection.

- YouTube can be a great learning tool. However, for children with delayed processing issues, a slower playback speed will enable them to gain more information. The link shows you how **you can adjust the playback speed of videos**. <https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/changing-the-speed-of-a-youtube-video/>
- A long-standing problem for teachers who read braille by sight but are trying to teach learners who will read braille by touch is discussed in this article, which examines **the differences in visual and tactual learning**. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/braille-and-language-development-what-teachers-should-know/2023/03>
- In 1914, **Clovernook Center's Braille Printing House in Cincinnati** was the first braille producer to be primarily operated by individuals who were blind and visually impaired, comprising over 50% of the staff. Clovernook Center has become one of the largest global producers of braille—over 30 million pages are shipped out to individuals, libraries, and global consumers annually. For more information, visit <https://clovernook.org/braille-printing-house/>.
- For individuals with visual impairments, **eye pressing** can be a serious detriment, socially and sometimes physically. To read about a study involving mostly school-age students using a small device to decrease eye pressing and other repetitive habits, visit <https://familyconnect.org/blog/familyconnect-a-parents-voice/wearable-technology-that-may-help-reduce-eye-pressing/>
- Two Cornell University students teamed up to create a **smart glove with a camera mounted next to the index finger that tracks the finger's movement as it traces the Braille letters**. Computer vision technology translates by reading aloud the Braille that was just traced. <https://cornellsun.com/2023/04/26/student-developed-smart-glove-boosts-braille-accessibility-and-literacy/>
- A Danish start-up company, **Be My Eyes**, has developed **Virtual Volunteer**, a tool that uses **Artificial Intelligence to describe images** and answer questions about those images for those who are visually impaired. <https://thenextweb.com/news/be-my-eyes-app-uses-openai-gpt-4-help-visually-impaired>

- Designed to remove the accessibility and training barriers that have historically held back individuals who are blind, **Clusiv is the world's first e-learning platform built specifically for the blind community.** With Clusiv, blind individuals can access the same high-quality training and education opportunities as their sighted counterparts with content tailored to the unique needs and challenges faced by the blind community. And it's created by and for people who are blind. Go to <https://clusiv.io> for more information.
- For tips on **making Google documents more easily accessible** to individuals with visual impairments, see: <https://www.accessibility.com/blog/how-to-make-your-google-document-or-presentation-more-accessible>
- Check out the **4to24 mobile app created to help youths who are blind or have low vision and their parents focus on the necessary steps to prepare for employment and independent living.** A version for parents of youths with deaf-blindness and additional disabilities is also available. The app features self-paced modules (no deadlines!) so the information can be used at your convenience. Visit <https://www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/consumers/4-24-app>

Face It!

The Face It Movement launched in 2013 as an initiative led by Kosair for Kids in response to the number of child abuse deaths in the Commonwealth. Face It focuses on a three-pronged approach to addressing child abuse and neglect:

- to promote best practices in child abuse prevention and intervention,
- to advocate for effective policies to improve the child welfare system, and
- to build awareness and engage the community.

VIPS is proud to partner with Kosair for Kids and Face It.

Over 100 organizations - including nonprofits, government agencies, medical professionals, and school systems - make up the participants in the Face It Movement. Keeping kids safe is up to all of us, and we can all join together to end it.

Face It offers child abuse prevention training at no cost to staff and volunteers at youth-serving organizations, such as youth sports programs, faith-based organizations, and community centers. Face It also engages with agencies to develop and host events and workshops to connect with children, families, and professionals.

If you are interested in hosting a training for your staff and/or volunteers, visit FaceltMovement.org and visit Trainings under Take Action.

The Face It Policy Team works to identify and advocate for needed state and local policy changes around prevention, recognition, and intervention.

Face It is focused on normalizing parenting hardships, sharing tools and resources, and encouraging the community to support families to keep kids safe.

Gifts of Time, Talent and Treasure

VIPS Kentucky

We greatly appreciate **Fran Woodward** for her continued volunteering in the Kids Town Preschool 2s classroom.

We thank our **Holy Cross intern, Kristen Barr**, for volunteering with administrative duties along with her work in the preschool classroom at the VIPS Louisville Campus.

We are most appreciative of the members of the **Ophthalmology Interest Group at U of L** who helped with crafts and handed out prizes at the Easter party in Louisville.

For the second year in a row, **the consulting engineering firm of Biagi, Chance, Cummins, London, Titzer, Inc. (BCCLT)** has spruced up the Sensory Garden at VIPS Louisville campus. Their volunteer work included weeding, mulching, planting flowers, vegetables, and herbs in the sensory garden; power washing the playground equipment and classroom chairs; and purchasing birdhouses, chimes, and shepherd hooks to add to the sound and feel of our beautiful garden. Their crew of 14 men and women worked together to create a beautifully sensual space



for our preschoolers. When the tomatoes and peppers begin to grow the children will be able to go out and pull them off the vines! As the herbs start to grow they will be able to smell the mint, basil, thyme, and lavender. They even dug up a dead bush, root and all! They are a wonderful group of kind and generous individuals we are so glad to know. One of their employees is the father of two of our VIPS children and said he is now going to build a sensory garden for his children at home. Thanks BCCLT!



Thank you, **MrBeast!** Jimmy Donaldson, better known as MrBeast, is an American YouTuber and philanthropist who has pioneered a genre of YouTube videos with over 150 million subscribers. Mr. Beast released a video at the end of January in which he details that he paid for 1000 people to receive cataract surgery to help cure their blindness. He saw that the **ONLY** barrier to these people “seeing” was the money required for this surgery that changed their lives and he eliminated that barrier.

We are so grateful to MrBeast for supporting the visually impaired community. We at VIPS can’t help but dream of a time when our community understands this same truth— that if a child is given the opportunity and resources, they can have an independent, successful life despite their visual impairment. See the video of Kids Town Preschoolers thanking MrBeast. The video then goes on to narrate what MrBeast has done and how VIPS hopes more people will invest in the VI community. While the narration plays, there are video clips of VIPS children who are in the preschool and out in their community/homes exploring their environments. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrlvuM1G1qk>

VIPS Indiana

We are so grateful to the **Hoosier Chapter of the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels** for coming out to the VIPS



Family Resource Center for a volunteer day! After a tour of the facility, they installed two exterior doorbells, repaired some areas in toddler town and the sensory room, washed windows, made cards, donated supplies, and more! We are so moved by their generosity. They capped off the amazing day by inducting Meredith Howell and Rita DeVore into the chapter, giving them flowers and certificates.



We offer a huge thank you to the **Theta Chapter of Delta Gamma** for volunteering at the VIPS Parent Empowerment Program (PEP). The ladies played with the VIPS kiddos and their siblings while the parents attended a support group. The volunteers also made “Thank you” cards to send to our VIPS supporters. Thanks again, IU DGs!

Recent Grants and Donations

Thank you to our generous funders who have supported the VIPS programs over the past several months. We could not do what we do without YOU!!

VIPS Kentucky

\$1,000 - **Alexander G. Campbell, Jr. Foundation** for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Central Kentucky

\$2,500 - **Norton Healthcare Community Initiatives** for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Jefferson County

\$5,000 - **Jacob C. Koch Charitable Trust** for the Louisville IT budget

\$7,500 - **The Copia Foundation** for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Jessamine, Fayette, Garrard, Madison & Woodford counties, Kentucky

\$15,000 – **The Gibney Family Foundation** to support VIPS Kidstown Preschool best practice curriculum resources

\$40,000 - **Louisville Downtown Lions Club** (\$25,000 for Dr.

Stengel scholarship, \$5,000 for Lynn Family 5K sponsorship, and \$10,000 for Give for Good matching donor)

\$90,000 - **Kentucky School for the Blind Charitable Foundation** for their continuous support of our mission, specifically for our Early Childhood Intervention Program

We are very grateful for the donation of six office chairs from **Triage Staffing of Loveland, Ohio** and owners Ken and Libby Tracy. We especially appreciate the delivery service provided by **Beth Rogers and Belinda Rogers!**

Thanks for the Music!

Thank you **Kosair for Kids, Louisville Fund for the Arts** and the **University of Louisville Music Therapy Clinic** for bringing music to our VIPS Kids Town Preschool! Through this collaboration, our students are exposed to music all throughout the school year. Music stimulates brain development and research shows exposure to singing, musical instruments, and movement activities strengthen future math skills. Not to mention



music is a basic (and fun!) form of literacy, helps our children with movement skills, and provides great opportunities for socialization. And all of this brings music to our ears!

VIPS Indiana

\$5,000 - **Junior League of Indianapolis** to support the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Central Indiana

\$7,500 - **Costco** to support the Early Childhood Intervention Program

\$12,000 - **Community Foundation of Elkhart County** for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Elkhart County

\$15,000 - **Nicholas H. Noyes, Jr., Memorial Foundation** for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Marion County.

\$75,000 - **AWS Foundation** to provide services to VIPS families in Northeast Indiana for two years.

We are so grateful to **The Garden Community Church** as they recently presented VIPS Director of Development, Meredith Howell, with a check from a grant when she accepted their invitation to



share information about VIPS. Not only was Meredith welcomed with open arms at The Garden, but the church members collected supplies from our wish list, donated gift cards and money, and made tactile birthday cards for the children we serve. We are incredibly appreciative of the support from The Garden and hope to partner with the members again in the future!

VIPS Indiana would like to say thank you to the incredible students from the **Lebanon High School Key Club** as they raised \$800 for VIPS through various fundraisers throughout the year! Director of Development, Meredith Howell, spent part of the morning sharing with the students about the services VIPS provides to Indiana's babies and toddlers who are blind or visually impaired. After time was spent asking questions, the club presented Meredith with the gift. We are so grateful to the Lebanon High School Key Club for raising awareness and critical funds for our mission! We are inspired by your generosity!



Development News

VIPS Kentucky

Give for Good KY

VIPS participated in KYGives23, Kentucky's 11th annual day of online giving that brings charities and Kentuckians together for a powerful day of action and philanthropy. We raised \$3,300, achieving our goal for the day.

The VIPS Gala

Our 11th Annual Gala at the Louisville Boat Club raised \$125,000 to support our mission focused services. Our sincere thanks to **Caldwell Preload**, our very generous Visionary Sponsor who enabled the event to be so successful.

A huge thank you to all the Board Members and other supporters who donated bottles of bourbon in support of our Bourbon Pull event.



Left: Miranda Smith spoke about the impacts that VIPS had on her twins, Carter and Aubrey. Right: VIPS Board President Nathan Holladay and his wife, Holly.



Fundraising for the Crusade

VIPS Central Kentucky raised over \$400 at a lemonade stand at the **Baptist Health Lexington - Child Development Center** annual playground Derby. Families came out to watch their child run for the roses and stayed to enjoy some lemonade, supporting children with special needs.



VIPS hosted a cookout at the Louisville campus to support the 70th Anniversary of the WHAS Crusade for Children! **UPS Brokerage employees** volunteered. They helped set up the tents; grilled burgers, veggie burgers, and hot dogs; served food; and even helped clean up. These employees help us with our cookouts year after year and we can't do it without them!



We served over 90 meals and brought in \$1,100 which we donated to the Crusade. Some VIPS team members went to Paristown Point on June 3rd with **VIPS mom, DeErica, and son, Zyh'mir**, to deliver the Cookout check to the Crusade folks which ended up being highlighted on WHAS 11 TV!



DeErica and Zyh'mir (center) help VIPS Executive Director Diane Nelson (right)

VIPS will hold a cookout for the Crusade at the Indiana campus on Friday, July 21st from 11:30am-1pm. For \$7 you will get your choice of a burger/veggie burger or hot dog, chips, drink, and dessert! The cookout will take place outside the VIPS Family Resource Center (1212 Southeastern Ave, Indianapolis IN).

VIPS Indiana

Indiana Brewery Running Series

On Saturday, April 22, runners from the Indiana Brewery Running Series gathered at Ash & Elm Cider Co. to benefit VIPS and the children and families we serve! People enjoyed the run and also learned about our mission and how to braille their names. A portion of the proceeds from the run will help

VIPS continue to provide early intervention to Indiana's babies and toddlers who are blind or visually impaired. Thank you to the Indiana Brewery Running Series, the folks from Ash & Elm, and everyone who came out to run! We are humbled and honored to receive such amazing support!



Walking for Dreams

What a beautiful day we had at Walking for Dreams on May 22! We had an amazing turnout of VIPS families, volunteers, and supporters. We raised nearly \$20,000 to support children who are blind or visually impaired across Indiana. There were giveaways, t-shirts, and more! Over 70 participants walked in the glorious sunny weather. Thank you to everyone who supported Walking for Dreams this year and we look forward to seeing you again in May 2024!



We want to give a special thank you to our sponsors: The **Salentine family, Broad Ripple Sertoma Club, EYE Can See Inc., The Delta Gammas at Butler University, Bose**

McKinney & Evans LLP, Citizens Energy Group, Bosma Enterprises for the Blind, The Spectacle Shoppe, Vivirito Realty, LLC, Gordon Homes with WestPoint Financial Group, and Steele Pediatric Dentistry.



Upcoming Fundraisers

VIPS Pickleball Classic

Friday, Saturday and Sunday, August 18 - 20

Springhurst MultiSport Center, Louisville

** Open Play Friday night for registrants **

** Doubles and Mixed Doubles Divisions **

<https://vips.org/event-calendar/vips-pickleball-tournament/>

Contact aford@vips.org

VIPS Cupcake Classic

Friday, August 25, 7:30 p.m.

Wellington Park in South Lexington

3K Run/Walk, Kids' Dash (1/4 Mile) & Virtual option

** Overall and Age Group and Top 3 (M/F) Awards **

** BabyCakes cupcakes and ice cream **

** Prizes for largest teams **

** Referral rewards **

<https://runsignup.com/Race/KY/Lexington/>



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



Upcoming Events

Wednesday - Saturday, July 12 - 15

VIPS Five Senses O&M Camp for children currently enrolled in the VIPS program will be held at the Family Resource Center in Indianapolis. Birth to 18 months will meet Wednesday & Friday; 18 months to 3 years will meet Thursday and Saturday. See details on page 6.

Friday, July 14

VIPS will hold O&M Camp at the Lexington campus for children birth to 3 years old currently enrolled in the VIPS program. See details on page 6.

Friday, July 21

VIPS will have a cookout for the WHAS Crusade for Children at the Family Resource Center in Indianapolis.

Thursday and Friday, August 3 & 4

VIPS O&M Camp will be held at the Louisville campus for children currently enrolled in the VIPS program. There will be sessions for birth to two-year-olds and for 3-5 year-olds. See details on pg. 7.

Saturday & Sunday, Aug. 18 & 19

The VIPS Pickleball Classic will be held at Springhurst MultiSport Center in Louisville. Contact aford@vips.org for more information. You can register here: <https://pickleballbrackets.com/ptd.aspx?eid=007560ac-3fa4-492d-8c4a-94f862a0f493>. Details page 19.

Friday, Aug. 25

The 6th Annual VIPS Cupcake Classic 3K will be held at 7:30pm at Wellington Park in South Lexington. For more info contact keaston@vips.org. You can register here: <https://runsignup.com/Race/KY/Lexington/VIPS5KForThe5Senses>.

Looking Ahead

Monday, September 18, 10 - 11:30 a.m.

Financial Planning for VIPS families, at the VIPS Family Resource Center in Indianapolis or on Zoom.

Saturday, September 30

Lynn Family 5K will be held in Louisville.

Monday, October 2

The YUM Corporate Cup Golf Tournament will be held at Wildwood Country Club in Louisville.

VIPS Wish List

Amazon Wish List:

https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/39L72QUX5ECYX?ref_=abls_nvfly_y
| <http://a.co/aeRar2N>

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.

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