

VISability, the VIPS Parent Newsletter
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July – September, 2023
Accessible Edition
Visually Impaired Preschool Services
www.vips.org

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, Oct. 7, 10 a.m.
Louisville
VIPS will host Safe Toddles, a workshop on the Pediatric Belt Cane with its inventor, Dr. Grace Ambrose-Zaken. Contact Kathy Mullen at link below:
kmullen@vips.org.

Saturday, October 14

Indianapolis Family Resource Center

VIPS will host our annual Halloween Spooktacular for VIPS families on Saturday, October 14, 10am-noon. Organizations and groups will set up booths so that parents can "trick-or-treat" for resources and children can trick-or-treat for goodies! This event is for all VIPS families, past and present! For more information contact Rita De Voreat at:

rdevore@vips.org

Saturday, October 14

Louisville

VIPS will hold a Halloween Night at the Museum at the Louisville Science Center on Saturday, October 14th from 5:30-7:30 PM. Contact Jenny Castenir for more information at

jcastenir@vips.org.

Register at the link below:

<https://bit.ly/ScienceCenterHalloween2023>

Saturday, October 28, 10 a.m.

Lexington

VIPS will have a Trunk or Treat event at the Baptist Health Child Development Center. For more information contact Kelly Easton at:

keaston@vips.org.

Register at the link below:

<https://secure.vips.org/event.jsp?event=1367&>

Thursday & Friday, November 3 & 4

Louisville

The Annual VIPS Family Retreat Weekend will be held. Friday, 7 - 8 p.m., will be meet and greet. On Saturday, the Parent Conference and Kids Camp will take place. Childcare available on first-come, first-served basis. Once childcare is filled, parents will be able to attend conference ONLY. For information, contact Jenny Castenir at:

jcastenir@vips.org.

Wednesday, December 6, 10 a.m.

Indianapolis

VIPS will host a Holiday Story Time with the Indiana Talking Book Library at the Family Resource Center. For information contact Rita DeVore at

rdevore@vips.org.

Saturday, December 9

Louisville Campus

VIPS holiday party will be held at VIPS Kids Town Preschool in Louisville. For information contact Jenny Castenir at

jcastenir@vips.org

VIPS RECEIVES VISIONARY LEADER AWARD

Louisville Business First honored VIPS' Leadership with the Nonprofit Visionary Leader Award, presented to outstanding Executive Directors, Presidents, or CEOs of Louisville metropolitan area nonprofits at their Partners in Philanthropy luncheon on Tuesday, August 22nd. While Diane Nelson was profiled and presented with the award, she said, "I share this with the Leadership Team and Board of Directors that have journeyed alongside me in my 14 years at VIPS because VIPS success is a result of our collaborative passionate work." Accompanying Diane were VIPS Team Members and VIPS Founder, Sharon Bensinger along with the current President of the Board of Directors and many past Presidents who have served with Diane and were able to attend to share the honor. It was quite the reunion and celebration!



VIPS Executive Diane Nelson (center) is shown with her leadership team, (l-r) Justine Aycock (Development), Meredith Howell (Development), Kathy Mullen (Education), Christina Welsh (Finance) and Kirsten Schmidt (Guest Relations).

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KIDS TOWN PRESCHOOL DOES IT AGAIN!

We are thrilled to report that VIPS Kids Town Preschool will remain a Kentucky 5 STAR Program for another year! The 5 STAR rating is the highest possible for participating preschool programs. The rating is based on staff training, family engagement, and instructional practices. We are so proud of the Kids Town Preschool teachers, instructional assistants and support staff!

Kentucky All STARS recognizes and supports quality early care and education programs throughout the Commonwealth. Partnering agencies include the Governor's Office of Early Childhood, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and the Kentucky Department of Education

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THE SUMMER SHORT COURSE DEBUTS AT VIPS!

by Staci Maynard, TVI, Kids Town Preschool Classroom Teacher

This summer, VIPS held its first summer short courses in Louisville. Families from across the state were invited to bring their child with a diagnosed visual impairment to VIPS Kids Town Preschool for a three-day session of activities, assessment, and observations themed around favorite aspects of summer. The first session was held the last week of June with four families, and the second session took place the first week of July with two families attending. Families were also given the opportunity to experience local attractions like the Louisville Zoo while they were in town.

During their time at VIPS, children received an overview of activities that students in our preschool programming might typically participate in such as educational play in Kids Town learning how to engage in a community, regulating their bodies in the sensory room, activating their creative side in music therapy, and moving their bodies in a variety of ways on the playground. They also experienced classroom activities such as making a sandbox volcano for a science observation, using magnifiers to search for objects or pictures up close or at a distance and counting "suns" (bouncy balls) as they transferred them to a different container. Children went on a bear hunt obstacle course to practice gross motor skills and to follow positional directions.

Each child worked with a family member to create an experience book. Most chose to write a book about what they could see, feel, hear, and smell when playing outside. These books were visually simple, had a texture on every page

to correspond with the object it represented, and contained text decided on by students either verbally or using choices given on a voice output device. While the children played and learned in this variety of ways, a Teacher of the Visually Impaired made observations about each child's vision and ability to get around safely in order to offer suggestions and strategies to the families and his/her future teachers. One of the staff's favorite parts of each week was watching families making connections with one another as well as seeing each child quickly growing more comfortable in a new environment. We feel that our goal of each participating family feeling the benefit of sharing time together and of visiting and learning at VIPS was achieved!



Photo captions: Photo on left shows a group of moms and grandmothers who came with children from Western KY to attend Short Course. Photo on right shows three of the children working on a science experiment to create a volcano.

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LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

by Ashley Emmons, TVI/COMS, Kids Town Preschool teacher

Orientation and Mobility skills are a vital part of the skills children with blindness/low vision must learn in order to ultimately lead independent lives. Being able to determine where your body is in space and then moving that body through space are basic components of successful travelers and it is never too early to begin to develop those skills. To that end, all three VIPS offices held camps this summer to start that journey.

On Friday, July 14, a one-day Orientation and Mobility (O&M) camp was held in Lexington, KY with 8 VIPS families in attendance. During the camp families had the opportunity to learn more about Orientation and Mobility by participating in activities that promoted the following O&M skills:

- **SOUND LOCALIZATION** consists of the development of sensory awareness, facilitating anticipation, fostering auditory skills such as identification and discrimination, and of promoting environmental awareness. Families took turns introducing themselves while participating in a sound localization activity using a bell ball.
- **BODY AWARENESS** includes concepts related to purposeful movement, developing body-to-body concepts, and promoting spatial awareness. Families were encouraged to assist their child with identifying body parts by rubbing lotion on body parts, placing stickers on body parts, or by placing bean bags on body parts.
- **TEXTURE EXPLORATION** includes encouraging tactile discrimination, promoting labeling of environmental features, and promoting comparison concepts. Families encouraged their children to go on a sensory walk by stepping in and exploring various sensory bins filled with grass, sand, dirt, gravel, and water.
- **CANE EXPLORATION** gives families the opportunity to explore a variety of push toys, adaptive mobility devices (AMD), pediatric belt canes, long white canes, etc. Interested families had the opportunity to build their very own AMD for their child.
- **OBSTACLE COURSES** promote gross motor development and support motor planning, sequencing, memory, following directions, and self-regulation. Some of the materials used for the obstacle course included stepping-stones, balance beam, toddler slide, tunnel, etc.
- **STORY BOXES** offer a collection of items in a box or bag that corresponds to the items mentioned in a story. It is an interactive learning experience to enhance the learning of concepts. The book we read was *The Adventures of Marshmallow and Peter* by Peter James Heath.

A two-day O&M camp was held in Louisville, KY on Thursday, August 3 and Friday, August 4. We had 8 families in attendance the first day, and 5 families in attendance the second day. The first day activities included the same activities as the Lexington camp (listed above) with the exception of adding the following naming and labeling activity:

- **NAMING & LABELING:** In order to learn specific routes, students must learn specific names for important landmarks, hallways, streets, and so on. A beginning O&M skill is to create tactile door markers to distinguish certain rooms/doors/classrooms.

Our day 2 activities included the following O&M related skills:

- **SOUND LOCALIZATION & AUDITORY DISCRIMINATION SKILLS:** We used a wireless doorbell to work on sound localization skills. Families/children were encouraged to point in the direction of beeping sound and describe the direction (left, right, in front, behind, etc). We also played a "What's That Sound?" game where families/children listened to a variety of

different sounds and attempted to guess the source of the sound.

- **CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT:** We discussed the important of learning the concepts of right and left. Families placed stickers on child's left hand and/or foot. Listened to a left/right song and encouraged children to raise that hand on command.
- **TEXTURE EXPLORATION:** We continued to talk about the importance of exposing children to a variety of textures. We created a texture book by placing a different piece of texture on each page of a small board book. These textures included soft, smooth, rough, bumpy, and rigid. As a group, we also identified an action to represent each texture so that the children can begin relating that action to the texture as a form of "reading." For example, on the "soft" page we knocked on the page and on the "bumpy" page we tickled the page.
- **LANDMARK vs. CLUE:** Families learned the difference between a landmark and clue and were encouraged to identify items in the classroom that represented each. Landmarks are anything within the environment that are permanent and do not change (e.g., the toilet in the bathroom). Clues are not permanent and may not always be there (e.g., the sound of running water). They were then encouraged to think about their home and what items would be considered landmarks and which were clues.
- **GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** We ended the second day on the playground where children were observed performing many different gross motor skills such as crawling, walking, running, climbing, sliding, swinging, etc.



Photo captions: The photo on the left shows a little fellow exploring the contents of sensory bins. The photo on the right show a toddler walking on a textured mat with his bare feet.

VIPS Indiana's 5 Senses Orientation and Mobility Camp was held at the VIPS Family Resource Center in Indianapolis over a period of 4 days with each session broken down by ages: birth to 18 months and 18 months to three years old. Parents remained during each 2-hour session as their children laid the groundwork for successful orientation and mobility skills.

The youngsters were joined by their siblings and parents and searched for items around the building to include in a sensory bin, a task complicated by the enjoyment the children found in the Sensory Room, making it difficult for them to want to stop exploring there! Using items found in the outdoors-worms, flowers, leaves, etc., each child made a tactile book by gluing the items onto each page then reinforcing those skills by eating snacks that simulated the tactile items in their books. Think broken up Oreo cookies for dirt, gummy worms for real worms, and so on.

Former VIPS Indiana Director/TBLV, Annie Hughes, and current VIPS TBLV, Amy Nichols, assisted Tommie Roesch, VIPS TBLV/COMS, who led the camp.

Each of the families who participated in the mobility camp seemed to learn a great deal about how to encourage their child to use sensory information to build skills. And it was a sure thing that everyone enjoyed themselves!



Photo captions: On the left, a little girl with red hair and a big black bow, looks at a texture book with her mom. On the right, O&M teacher, Tommie Roesch, enthusiastically greets a student arriving for camp with a fist bump.

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SUMMER PARENT EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

Indiana VIPS families, past and present, participated in our Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) on August 24 at the Family Resource Center in Indianapolis. VIPS children and their siblings played with volunteers and staff on our newly completely outdoor playscape and in the Resource Center as

their parents attended a presentation from Alissa Hughes, ASHA-certified Speech-Language Pathologist, on "Communication & Vision Impairment". Alissa discussed the extra barriers that vision loss can have on language development, providing strategies/ideas/functional goals to help parents understand how to support language/communication development despite vision impairment/loss. After the presentation, the children rejoined their parents to enjoy refreshments.

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CVI -- A Hidden Epidemic

With Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI), the eyes may function properly. The impairment of vision is the result of an inability of the brain to process visual input from the healthy eye. CVI is a brain-based, rather than a vision-based, visual impairment. Children with CVI can have a wide range of visual functioning. With early intervention, visual functioning can improve.

A recent study by the CVI Center at Perkins School for the blind, using health insurance data, has determined that there is an alarming failure to properly diagnosis CVI, as well as high rate of misdiagnosis. While CVI is the most common cause of childhood visual impairment, it is not being diagnosed as frequently as it is occurring.

The study estimates that as many as 180,000 children or young adults, birth to 22, have CVI in the US, but only 20% are being accurately diagnosed. This means that children who are undiagnosed or misdiagnosed may go without needed medical and educational services. It can also result in failure to train a sufficient number of professionals to work with these patients.

The study also looks at differences in incidence and diagnosis of CVI across the US, by geographical area, by sex and age, by existence of additional physical and visual conditions, among other factors, with implications for policy development.

You can read the whole report at the link below:

https://www.perkins.org/our-work/cvi/by-the-numbers/?j=57158&s-fmc_sub=11090859&l=703_HTML&u=1768647&mid=534002510&-jb=1&utm_source=MarketingCloud&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=091423+CVINow+-+9+-+mobile+version+-+20230915_093738+-+20230915_120315-resend&ut

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VIPS GOES TO WASHINGTON

US Dept. of Education's Office of Special Education Programs Conference

Last month VIPS own Paige Maynard, TVI and co-host of Feeling This Life, joined former VIPS team member, Rebecca Davis, and others at the US Department of Education's 2023 OSEP Leadership and Project Directors' Conference in Washington, D.C. These leaders presented on "Cortical/Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI) and Parent Centers: Two States' Perspectives on Early Intervention and Parent Center Collaboration". It is a distinct honor to be considered a leader in the field of early intervention - and one VIPS does not take lightly. Thank you to Rebecca and Paige for speaking out for young children with CVI everywhere!

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TRIBUTE TO A VIPS PIONEER

by Diane Nelson, VIPS Executive Director

The very first employee Sharon Bensinger (VIPS founding director), hired was Melinda Atkins. It is with an extremely heavy heart that I share the very sad news that our dear friend and first Education Coordinator, Melinda Atkins, left this life shortly before she would have celebrated her 70th birthday. Her pacemaker could no longer control her heart rhythm and after 5 episodes of cardiac arrest, she was put on life support. Those who knew Melinda knew that would not be her wish, so we are grateful she went peacefully surrounded by her family. For those that have been around VIPS a long time, it is a very emotional loss. Melinda was a passionate teacher, with a wonderful laugh and sense of humor. She served VIPS' families with kindness, compassion, and support from 1985 through 2011. Her early commitment to our mission helped us successfully grow across Kentucky and Southern Indiana. We and the hundreds of families she served are grateful for her many, many years of passionate mission focus.

Melinda retired a number of years ago due to congestive heart failure but continued to support VIPS' mission. Miraculously, she fought a long and courageous battle against her heart disease to live life to the fullest despite her illness and was able to fulfill her biggest dream - to be a wonderful Mimi to her two beautiful grandchildren - Maycin and Mattox. Her daughter, Mary Catherine, was her pride and joy and took great care of Melinda over the years. In retirement, Melinda was also able to spend a lot more time with her sister/partner in crime, Cindy, watch a lot of IU sports (her other pas-

sion), and help nurse her mother until her passing just a few years ago. Melinda would occasionally visit and pop up at VIPS events like our annual Crusade Cookout. We loved seeing her and were very proud to share with her the growth that was the result of her early hard work. Melinda was a generous person and worked hard in the mission of others by leading her Howard Park Christian Church as a Choir Director, Board Chairman, Deacon, Elder, and organizer of free community dinners. Melinda had a huge heart and tireless dedication to the people, places and things she loved. VIPS, her co-workers and VIPS families were fortunate to be counted among them.

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FEELING THIS LIFE

Feeling This Life, a podcast series, produced in collaboration between VIPS and the Anchor Center for Blind Children in Denver, has scheduled Season 3 podcasts. Feeling This Life is a family support podcast that addresses the triumphs and challenges that are part of the lives of those who care for young children with visual impairments. Season 3 podcasts are scheduled for release at 7a.m. Eastern Time on October 2 and November 6. Stream them on Instagram, Facebook, etc. or at vips.org/feeling-this-life podcast.

The Introduction to Season 3 was released on August 28 with the first podcast following on September 4, featuring an interview with Meredith Howell, VIPS Director of Development and the mom of Lola, a former VIPS student. Meredith tells Lola's story, sharing how far Lola has come and what she and her family has learned along the way. Paige, Cathy, and Jenny reflect on the ways the Howell family has worked to set Lola up for success even when the unknown was scary. Paige shares her memories of Lola as a toddler.

Meredith discusses creating the NR2F1 Foundation with a group of other mothers. For more information on the NR2F1 Foundation visit their website:

<https://nr2f1.org/>

You can listen to the episode wherever you get your podcasts!

<https://vips.org/feeling-this-life-podcast/>

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WANT TO WORK AT ONE OF THE BEST PLACES TO WORK IN LOUISVILLE?

We have the data to prove it! Just recently, VIPS was named #2 of the top 20 Best Places to Work in the 25 to 150 employee group by Business First. VIPS is currently hoping to add additional members to our team as our referrals continue to grow. We are looking for qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired, Orientation & Mobility Specialists, or Early Interventionists with a passion for working with young children from birth to age three who have vision loss and supporting and encouraging their families until school systems take over. Because we serve the entire Commonwealth of Kentucky and State of Indiana, you can have your choice of where to live and work.

VIPS offers teachers competitive wages, great benefits, flexible scheduling, a “family-first” work environment, as well as a sign-on bonus. If you think you would be a good fit as a part-time or full-time teacher or as an independent contractor, please contact VIPS Education Director, Kathy Mullen, at kmullen@vips.org. We’d love to add you to our team!

We are also looking for Instructional Assistants to work in VIPS Louisville’s Kids TownPreschool. Applicants must be at least 18 years old, have a high School diploma, preferably with some college coursework, and experience with 2 to 5-year-old children. If you are interested, please contact VIPS Preschool Director, Juanita Miles, at jmiles@vips.org.

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In MEMORIAM

This issue of VISability is dedicated to the memories of:

Benjamin Sugarman, son of Brad and Katie Sugarman of Indianapolis, IN, who passed away on April 26, at the age of thirteen.

Jeanne Deeley, wife of VIPS Board member Stephen Deeley of Louisville, KY, who passed away on July 13, at the age of 68.

Clinton Glasscock, former VIPS Board member and volunteer of Louisville, KY, who passed away August 3, at the age of fifty-two.

Melinda Atkins, former VIPS teacher and Director of Education of Clarksville, IN, who passed away on August 25, at the age of 69.

Joy Stuckel, wife of former VIPS Board President, Glen Stuckel, of Louisville, KY, who passed away on September 22, their 66th Wedding Anniversary.

Our hearts go out to all of those who loved Benjamin, Clinton, Jeanne, Joy and Melinda.

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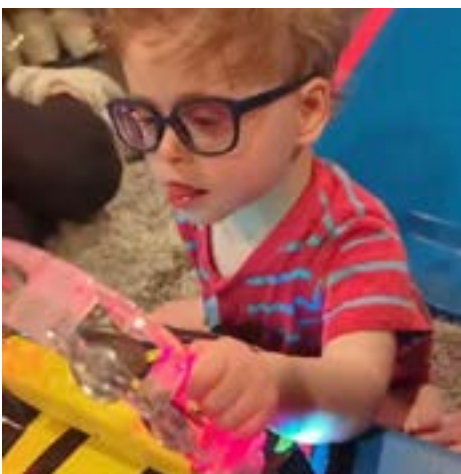
THOSE MARVELOUS MILESTONES

Each child is a unique individual, who grows and develops skills in uniquely individual ways. VIPS children have a variety of visual, and possibly other conditions, that will influence their rates of development. This column celebrates VIPS kids' and families' hard work, knowing that each milestone is hard won and not to be taken for granted.

Gabriel has been practicing looking and reaching up! He's doing great with his adapted tambourine toy!

VIPS graduate, Gavyn, has been knocking it out of the ballpark recently! He used to climb the fence to watch his big brother play t-ball, and now Gavyn is playing on a team himself! He also recently graduated from preschool and will head to Pre-K this year.

VIPS graduate, Hayden, received the trustworthiness award at his new school, plus has been doing so well in class this past school year, according to his mother. We always are so excited to see what VIPS kiddos are up to once they move on. Keep up the great work, Hayden!



Photos show: At left, Gabriel plays with a lights, color and sound tambourine. In the center, Gavin runs to a base during a game. At right, Hayden proudly displays his Trustworthiness Certificate.

Jayce aged out of the VIPS Indiana program and started his FIRST day of preschool at his local public school! We are so proud of all Jayce has accomplished and know that he will do great in his next adventures.

Liam quieted when the slinkies were presented to him in his new active learning center. He then explored them by looking toward them and batting at them with his hand! Keep up the great work, Liam!

MarJani officially graduated from Kindergarten this year! She has grown so much since her time at VIPS— she loves to draw and color; she is great at math and especially good at subtraction; she is reading, and loves to play the recorder. MarJani is strong, smart, caring, and always sees the good in others. We are so proud of MarJani!



Photo captions: At left, Jayce, stands on his front porch wearing his backpack, ready for school. Center: Liam plays in a low light with a lighted slinky. At right: MarJani is dressed in her purple graduation cap and gown with a huge smile on her face.

Remington recently walked down stairs in the butterfly building of the Indianapolis Zoo with his Orientation and Mobility Specialist, Tommie. He showed no hesitation in moving up stairs but avoided going down a few times (which can be very scary for children with visual impairments). But when he was ready to descend the stairs so he could explore more of the zoo, he really took off. Great job, Remington!

Roiree has recently accomplished matching her colors! She has really shown us her skills with 1:1 correspondence placing her bears on top of shapes or into slots of pop blocks. Wonderful progress, Roiree!

Stevie is now able to hold one item in each hand! Vision impairments can affect many areas of development, including motor skills. VIPS works with parents to help children like Stevie make progress toward milestones in all areas of development! Stevie is now banging toys together, an important midline skill! Woohoo! His video is below:



Photo captions: At left Remington walks down steps at the zoo while holding his mom's hand. Center Roi-ree plays with colored bears. At right, Stevie bangs two plastic rings together.

Wyatt's VIPS interventionist and his mother have been working to encourage him to engage and play with toys. In a recent home visit, they used the light box with a yellow filter and Wyatt's turtle car. He was successful at looking at the car and moving it from left to right all the way across the light box! Mom said she had never seen him do this before! Terrific work, Wyatt!

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VIPS PARENT RECOMMENDATION

Kaylee is best able to see at eye level but also wants to use her hands to explore. Her mom, Kelsey, bought fabric pieces to cut down to make into a texture board for Kaylee. However, as they were playing with them, Kelsey realized that Kaylee was most engaged when the fabric could be draped so that Kaylee could both look at eye level and touch it at the level of her hands. This strategy could be very inexpensive by purchasing fabrics at the craft store or could be free by finding long items with interesting textures around the home -- like a towel, pair of jeans, water hose, etc.

Gabriel and Mom Hillary also used a similar strategy with sensory bins.

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NOTES OF INTEREST

The Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) provides services designed to support and improve the academic achievement of students with disabilities. DCMP has thousands of educational videos with high quality captions, audio description and American Sign Language that are aligned to state and Common Core standards. Teachers can create lessons, quizzes, and clips of DCMP videos and assign them to student accounts. K-12 students under age 18 are not able to have their own membership but their teachers or other adult members can create student accounts for them. Student accounts are designed for direct use by the member teacher/parent. Memberships are free. For more information, see the link below: <https://dcmp.org/learn/381>.

A pilot program by Vodafone provided 5G technology-enabled headsets for Wimbledon guests with visual impairments. Not only could the users look around the stadium at whatever they chose but they were also able to connect with what the TV cameras were showing viewers at home! Participants were thrilled to be able to enjoy the same sights as the other viewers! To see more, visit the link below: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGNOcHI-j8w>

The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts in Houston, Texas goes the extra mile to make its musical theater shows more meaningful and enjoyable by giving its patrons who are on the vision spectrum a chance to experience the set, props and costumes prior to the show. See how they do it below: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brIuLsObTSg&t=7s>

Scientists at University College London have developed an AI screening model that can identify which at-risk infants have Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) that could lead to blindness if left untreated. They hope their technique could improve access to screening in areas with limited neonatal services and few trained ophthalmologists. Read more at the link below: <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-04-ai-breakthrough-childhood.html>

A federal judge has ruled that Florida, among many other states, has been unlawfully segregating children with complex medical needs and putting other disabled children at risk of unnecessary institutionalization by failing to provide Medicaid services that would pay for private nursing care and allow children to live in home settings. The judge ruled that Florida was in violation of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). The ruling was prompted by a lawsuit filed by the Justice Department in 2013 and could

have sweeping implications for thousands of people across the country who need these Medicaid services to live in their homes or communities. This group includes adults with disabilities and older people, along with disabled children and their families. Read more at the link below:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2023/07/19/florida-disabled-kids-institutions-judge-ruling/>.

Check out this cool app that VIPS kid, Gabriel, uses when video chatting with his grandparents who live in another state! This is a great way to make things CVI accessible! Checkout the link below:

<https://www.kinzoo.com/kinzoo-together>

Want to know more about the history of Braille? Read about the National Braille Press as well as about current victories and challenges in the area of braille literacy at the link below.

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/92816-how-the-national-braille-press-brings-books-to-blind-readers.html>

Speaking of braille, an exciting new braille “literacy solution” in the form of a learning device has been developed by Thinkerbell Labs in India. “Annie” helps learners read, write and type braille in their own regional languages, offering a “fun and interactive experience for children.” Their U.S. variant, “Polly,” has been launched with plans to expand to Europe and beyond.

Check out Annie at the link below:

<https://www.thebetterindia.com/324715/meet-annie-worlds-first-self-learning-braille-device-that-also-acts-as-a-personal-tutor/>

These sites offer a wealth of information for families of children with visual impairments.

APH Access Academy -- see link below:

<https://www.aph.org/educational-resources/outreach/training/access-academy/>

APH Hive -- see the link below:

<https://aphhive.org/#/category/2>

Perkins School for the Blind -- see link below:

<https://www.perkins.org/perkins-elearning/>

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WELCOME NEW CHILDREN

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

Annalise – 9 months, Taylorsville, KY
Anzal – 7 months, Louisville, KY
Ayani – 2 years, Gary, IN
Caiden – 1 year, Speedway, IN
Carrington – 2 years, Louisville, KY
Carson – 1 year, Louisville KY
Chosen – 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
Christian – 1 year, Columbus, IN
Doris – 2 years, Ft. Wayne, IN
Elora – 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
Emma – 2 years, Avon, IN
Grayson – 6 months, Frankfort, KY
Hendrix – 1 year, Buffalo, IN
Hiraya – 10 months, Indianapolis, IN
Hudson – 2 years, Walton, KY
Itzel – 9 months, Indianapolis, IN
Jameson – 1 year, Indianapolis, IN
Kashton – 2 years, Versailles, KY
Liam – 9 months, Ashland, KY
Liam – 4 months, Lawrenceburg, K
Liam Halim – 1 year, Greenwood, IN
Lincoln – 9 months, Grayson, KY
Lucas - 1 year, Ft. Wayne, IN
Luna – 9 months, Portage, IN
Marigold – 1 year, Leitchfield, KY
Maverick – 1 year, Fairdale, KY
Miles – 1 year, Shelbyville, KY
Milo – 7 months, South Bend, IN
Molly – 2 years, Hobart, IN
Mulanii – 2 years, Indianapolis, IN
Nova – 2 years, Gary, IN
Octavia – 19 months, Corydon, IN
Ray – 1 year, Lexington, KY
Saint – 1 year, Louisville, KY
Savannah – 4 months, Louisville, KY
Sophia – 2 years, South Williamson, KY
Summer – 2 years, Louisville, KY
Tate – 8 months, Noblesville, IN

Titus – 1 year, Williamsburg, KY

Traedan – 1 year, Corbin, KY

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OCTOBER IS BLINDNESS AND VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AWARENESS MONTH

To celebrate BVI Awareness Month, we are sharing two parent stories about their amazing children.

A Mom on a Mission to Advocate for Her Daughter

Avelyn (Avy) lives in Southern Indiana, spending her days outside with her siblings along with her animals—a cat, a dog, and eight chickens. She is a bubbly, playful, animal-loving almost-three-year-old who currently receives services from VIPS due to her Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI), Anisometropia, and hypermetropia. Avy loves wearing her purple glasses as she works on skills to help compensate for the vision loss in her left and lower fields of vision. She works hard to keep up with her fast-paced siblings and her friends when running, swinging, or playing with a ball. While it often leads to bumps and bruises due to her depth perception, she doesn't let it stop her from enjoying playtime!

Avy's mother, Kara, explains how the services they receive through VIPS have helped their family learn to accommodate for Avy to make her more independent as she learns to navigate her environment. Avy and her family work with VIPS teacher, Ms. Pam, to ensure Avy is set up for success. Kara shares that Ms. Pam has shown the family many great resources including how to use an angled board to help with Avy's field of vision, how to use contrasting colors for backgrounds, and how to guide Avelyn in public areas. Kara says, "We have been able to understand how Avelyn sees the world with the help of VIPS. I look for opportunities in daily activities for her to practice using all of her vision and focus on the tough areas through play. We practice in various public places for her to learn her depth perception and how to navigate without contrasting colors available."

The family treasures the vision services they receive and the knowledge they have gained as it can be difficult to find early intervention services especially when living in a rural area. Kara said that it took their family almost a year, several doctors, and specialists to finally get an idea of what Avy's visual challenges were and why she struggled with her vision as an infant. Through this journey, Kara hopes other parents going through something

similar understand that advocacy is one of the most important things you can do for your child. Finding resources, utilizing what is available in your community, and asking for help when it's uncomfortable will make a difference in a child's overall development. Kara explains, "I have learned that the answer will always be "no" unless I ask, regardless of how uncomfortable and guilty I may feel."

Avy has made such an impact on her family with her determination and independence. While she struggles to reciprocate verbal communication, she knows her family—including her VIPS family—is in her corner, fighting for her every step of the way. We are so grateful to have had a small role in Avelyn's journey!

Gloria & Odin Stay Positive No Matter the News

Smiling through adversity, VIPS child Odin, has brought such joy and positivity to his family over his young life. His mother, Gloria wrote to VIPS telling the impact her son has on their family as he navigates life with a visual impairment. The family experienced negativity from doctors and those around him, but it brought them all closer as they leaned on each other for support.

Odin was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and epilepsy, which made walking, crawling, and tummy time difficult. Right away, the family worked to combat his seizures, learning how to administer his medicine via shot. He has now been 2 years seizure free! Gloria was once concerned that he wouldn't be mobile, but he is now running. Odin is unstoppable and his family has so much admiration for his perseverance.

Along with CP and epilepsy, Odin was also diagnosed with cataracts at nine months old and had surgery soon after to remove them. His family has worked hard to provide adaptations to his life to make him as independent as possible— from his glasses to feet braces, to a McKie splint for his thumb. Empowering families to advocate for their children is what makes VIPS services so important to these young children.

Gloria is so grateful for the early intervention services Odin received. She writes, "VIPS helped me and my family and especially Odin by sending us Angela. She was always positive and happy to work with Odin. She would bring lights and toys and he loved sessions with her. Odin has achieved walking, talking more, communicating, playing, and more. I will always be thankful to his therapists from First Steps: Bobbie, Holly Anne, Sarah, Angela, and Cara.

To other parents, always stay positive no matter what the news. Look at your babies and just watch how strong, loveable, and positive they are. Remember their will to keep achieving things at their speed, and know we all learn at different speeds. The point is to achieve them. Keep talking to your babies positively, love them, and kiss them every chance you have. Enjoy the now and know that the future will be 100 times better.”

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VIPS STAFF NEWS

Congratulations to Meredith Howell, Development Director, for being selected by the Indiana Pacers and Fever teams to receive their Anthem Assist Award for “the wonderful community and advocacy work that you have been committed to at VIPS and throughout the Hoosier community.” She received the award at the Indiana Fever game on August 8th. Congratulations, Meredith, on this much deserved honor. We are so proud of you!

Congratulations to Justine Aycock, who has title has been changed from Donor Engagement to Assistant Director of Development.

We are thrilled to share that Ashley Ross and her husband, Logan, have welcomed their first child – Elliott Theodore – to their family. Ashley is Communications Coordinator for VIPS in Indiana.

Changing her VIPS role to allow more family time finds VIPS Louisville Developmental Interventionist, Tracy Webb, shifting from a full-time caseload to monthly Parent-Infant Play (PIP) groups and part-time substituting in the Kids TownPreschool.

Amy Nichols, Teacher of the Blind/Low Vision at VIPS Indiana, is leading the Parent-Infant Play group at VIPS Indiana.

Hearty congratulations are due to Kristan Decker, Kids TownPreschool Instructional Assistant, who recently earned her Associate of Science degree in Early Childhood Education while working full-time at VIPS, balancing a full course load at Jefferson Community and Technical College, and also being a full-time wife and mother. Kristan is currently enrolled at Campbellsville University in order to complete her Bachelor’s degree.

VIPS Kids TownPreschool staff has collaborated with the Kentucky School for the Blind, Jefferson County Public Schools and the Kentucky Office of the Blind to enable a KSB high school student to coop part day in the VIPS pre-

school. It's an opportunity for her to get some work experience and for us to have an extra set of hands in the classroom. Sophia Thompson is a Jefferson County Public School student who attends part-day at the Kentucky School for the Blind and is assisting in our preschool classes after expressing her interest in preschools as a vocation. Welcome, Sophia!

We wish Dixie Marz, TVI/Developmental Interventionist at VIPS Central Kentucky, all the best as she transitions to the UK Healthcare team, transitioning children leaving long term hospital care and re-entering the school systems. Sadly, we will miss her dedicated service to VIPS children but greatly appreciate all she has done for them and us over the last 17 years.

Laney Reed, DI/Kids TownPreschool Teacher, has left VIPS to work at the Carriage House Preschool. Laney began as a preschool classroom assistant at VIPS Louisville, returned to school to earn her Master of Arts in Teaching degree. We will miss her sweet smile and wish her much success in the future.

VIPS Kids TownPreschool Instructional Assistant Emma Strange is also changing her role with us. Emma volunteered at VIPS during her high school years and worked part-time at VIPS while in college but is now returning to school full-time. We wish her well in her studies!

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VIPS Board News

At the June Annual Meeting, a set of new officers were elected for the board, along with new board members. The current Officers of the VIPS Board of Directors are:

Nathan Holladay, President
Old National Investments, Wealth Advisor

Michael Johnson, Vice President
Data Management Solutions, President
Father of former VIPS child

Taylor Gehring, Secretary
GE Appliances, Senior Principal National Account Manager
Mother of a VIPS child

John Anders, Treasurer
Retired

On the final weekend in August, VIPS hosted our Annual Board Retreat for the VIPS Board of Directors. It was an amazing day of dreaming and discovery with new and old voices and perspectives from diverse backgrounds who came together with equal passion for our mission.

We owe an extreme debt of gratitude to the Sensational Seven (our Leadership Louisville Encore Team) made up of our Encore team leader, Harold Butler, and the other members of the team, Michael Aldridge, Matt Bowdy, Al Cornish, Edie Nixon, Mike Shaikun and Robert Waterman. Over eight months, the Encore team spent hundreds of hours completing a free, detailed analysis of VIPS with a focus on Business Structure for continued growth, Strategic Planning for a path forward five to ten years, and Sustainability long into the future. They shared their knowledge and suggestions at the VIPS Board Retreat on a recent Saturday. This was such a tremendous gift of knowledge and skills applied to our non-profit and we feel exceptionally blessed to have been the recipients of their largess and that of Leadership Louisville.

We look forward to future growth and sustainability and thank all those who spent a Saturday working towards the success of VIPS!

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GIFTS OF TIME, TALENT AND TREASURE

Kentucky

We appreciate Addie Lynn for volunteering to lead dance classes for VIPS children attending the summer program. Addie's interest in VIPS is possibly due, at least in part, to her parents, Mark J. and Leigh Ann Lynn, who have been long-time VIPS supporters.

Thanks to JCPS/KSB coop student, Sophia Thompson, for assisting at VIPS each morning.

We are always thankful to Fran Woodward for her continuous dedicated volunteerism in the Twos classroom.

We are extremely grateful to Brandon Krugle at Multitude Productions for his gift of consulting time for the Feeling This Life podcast. He troubleshooted some recent recording issues and we are so thankful for his support and expertise!

Students from the U of L Success Center volunteered this summer making materials for VIPS children's use: they made bead octopi, painted "Little

Rooms” and wrapped PVC pipes for play frames. We are thankful to Heather Bauer, Annie Jones, Toni Robinson, Tony Robinson, Anika Strand, Eric Turner and Greg Vittitow. Our teachers are especially appreciative of their assistance.

Indiana

We are so grateful to the volunteers with Women United at United Way of Central Indiana who joined us on June 23 to #GoAllIN! This is a day each year when thousands of volunteers around Central Indiana work with local nonprofits to aid in their mission. We were so honored to host this amazing group of women through Women United as they made birthday cards for our VIPS children and thank you cards for donors! We can't wait for next year's Go All IN!

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VOLUNTEER NEEDED

If you have a working knowledge of braille, we could use your expertise and your time. Rather than our teachers spending time brailleing books in our library for our children and families, we would be so grateful to have a volunteer who was able to do it. VIPS will provide the materials, including a braille writer, if anyone is able to help us on a voluntary basis.

RECENT GRANTS AND DONATIONS

VIPS is very appreciative for the wonderful gifts of support from generous donors in Kentucky and Indiana. Our recent Grants and Donations include:

Kentucky

\$1,500 - Snowy Owl Foundation for materials and supplies for Kids Town-Preschool

\$2,000 - Orphan Society of Lexington for assistive technology for the VIPS Lexington campus

\$3,000 - The Gilbert Foundation for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Jefferson County,

\$3,000 - V.V. Cooke Foundation for IT/Technology for the VIPS Louisville campus

\$4,445 - The Honorable Order of the Kentucky Colonels for a braille embosser and Duxbury software

\$4,730 - The Wood and Marie Hannah Foundation for laptops for the administrative and education teams

\$5,000 - Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile, Jr. Foundation for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties

\$5,000 -The Elsa Sule grant for Early Childhood Education Program in Northern Kentucky

\$5,000 - Anonymous for Kids Town Preschool

\$10,000 - United Way of the Bluegrass for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Anderson, Bourbon, Clark, Fayette, Franklin, Jessamine, Madison, Montgomery, Scott, and Woodford Counties

\$50,000 - WHAS Crusade for Children for the VIPS Lexington Early Childhood Intervention Program

\$90,000 - WHAS Crusade for Children, for the VIPS Louisville campus, Early Childhood Intervention Program and Kids Town Preschool

\$150,000 - Kosair for Kids for the Early Childhood Intervention Program and Kids TownPreschool

Eva's Butterfly Wishes music bingo fundraiser was recently held to benefit the Juneja Foundation honoring the memory of Eva Juneja. We were blessed to teach Eva in Kids TownPreschool as part of her family's bucket list when they were made aware that her life would be brief. Their foundation supports VIPS and so we support them right back!

NAMING RIGHTS

VIPS graduate Emma was welcomed back to Kids TownPreschool on August 2 as we celebrated the dedication of "Emma Avenue." Emma's parents, Jonathan and Elise, won the re-naming of the Mobility City street sign at the 2023 VIPS Gala. Mobility City is a life-sized re-creation of a street corner, complete with auditory Walk/Wait signs, where our students learn how to navigate a crosswalk safely and independently.

A new sign naming the Sensory Garden after current VIPS child, James Davis, is now in place. James' parents won the naming rights at the 2023 VIPS Gala.

The Kids TownGrocery has recently evolved to become "Grace's Grocery" in memory of Grace Fowles. Grace's family's foundation wanted to permanently memorialize her life here at VIPS. They added new sections to the grocery (freezer section, floral area, a new checkout system) and new bright pink paint along with a new sign announcing Grace's Grocery. Her foundation is also committed to help VIPS continue to raise valuable resources to fund our work.

Indiana

\$1,500 - Louis and Mary Haddad Foundation for the Early Childhood Intervention Program.

\$7,220 - 3 Rivers Credit Union granted VIPS for the Early Childhood Intervention Program in Northeast Indiana.

\$33,330 - The United Way of Central Indiana through their Power to the Parent grant for early intervention in Central Indiana.

\$42,000 - The WHAS Crusade for Children for the Early Intervention Program.

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FUNDRAISING WRAPUPS!

Indiana

In July, we had a great turnout at our first Cookout for the Crusade at the VIPS Family Resource Center in Indianapolis! We raised over \$400 for the WHAS Crusade for Children, selling more than 50 meals. The Crusade has been a long-time supporter of our mission, and we are grateful to find a way to give back for their generosity. Plus, we loved being able to connect with our local community! We owe a huge thank you to our volunteer grill master, Steve DeVore, for cooking up burgers and hotdogs.

Kentucky

Pickle Ball

The third annual VIPS Pickle Ball Classic Tournament was held at Springhurst Tennis Club August 18-20, with 208 amazing mixed doubles players. Friday night featured great fun with open play, pizza and beer. Players were treated to music provided by the talented Allen Haywood and Brandon Halfacre. A special pickleball demonstration featured VIPS graduate Lainie Talbott and her coach Magnus Gustafsson. While Lainie may have a visual impairment, that certainly has never stopped her from excelling at everything she tries and her demonstration proved that! A silent auction was also held. We so appreciate the support and involvement of Lainie, Magnus, Allen and Brandon and also Gravely Brewing Company, whose beer was featured. Thanks also to the 208 participants who made this event so special.

Cupcake Classic 3k

The 6th annual Cupcake Classic 3K was another successful race despite the sweltering temperatures! Around 150 participants came out to Wellington Park in Lexington to support VIPS and enjoy the sweet reward of finishing the 3K and Kids Cupcake Dash 1K. Participants enjoyed music, visiting the cupcake themed selfie station, and learning more about VIPS before enjoying treats from our in-kind sponsors at BabyCakes Cupcakes and Forcht Bank. Our friends at Wilson Pediatric Therapy and Learning Center, Inc. set up a booth with lots of information and giveaways, and Ruby Cline Eaton provided free pre-race and finish line photos. Even the sudden thunderstorm at the end didn't faze the crowd, as everyone huddled under the shelter to cheer as the age division winners collected their prizes.

This event would not be possible without the help of Bob Baney and Race-Rise, as well as our amazing sponsors who helped us raise almost \$9000 to support our early intervention services:

Visionary Sponsor--Lexington Lions Club

Changing Lives Sponsors--Lexington South Lions Club, George Hocker

Hope for the Future Sponsors--UK Healthcare-Advanced Eye Care, Medical Vision Institute

Helping Hands Sponsors--Wilson Pediatric Therapy and Learning Center, Inc. and Vanessa Vale Team

Friend of VIPS--Estill County Lions Club

Give for Good Louisville

VIPS had an amazing level of support for Give For Good Louisville 2023. We received many gifts made as memorials or honorariums, including Melinda Atkins (6), Carson Botner, Levi Boyle, Pyper Buren, Addie Clarkson, Terri Connolly, Richard Cooper, Bret Dahmke, Maud Fliegelman, Grace Fowles, Wells Gehring, Granddaughter VIPS Alumni, Emmett Henry, Lola Howell, Kathy Mullen, Levi Pierce and the Pierce Family, Bruce Prizant (5), Mary Hoeck Seewer, Mitzi Thomas (2) and The VIPS Staff.

We raised an impressive \$62,835, thanks to 105 generous donors and the fabulous matching donations from:

Anonymous \$1,000

Anonymous \$500

Bonnie Bizer Foundation \$5,000

Nancy Cannon \$1,500

Steve Deeley \$1,000

Louisville Downtown Lions Club \$10,000

Stevie Molter \$1,000

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VIPS WISH LISTS

The Kentucky Amazon Wish List is linked below:

https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/39L72QUX5ECYX?ref_=abls_nv-fly_yl

The Indiana Amazon Wish List is linked below:

<http://a.co/aeRar2N>

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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.