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# IMPACT REPORT 2023-2024



# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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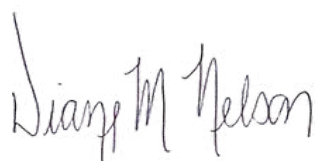
Dear Friends of VIPS,

We are extremely proud to share what you as our donors, partners, collaborators, and supporters have made possible this last fiscal year in this report of highlights from our most recent fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. In our critical mission to serve children with blindness and low vision, we continue to be laser-focused. During fiscal year 2024 VIPS served more children than ever before in our 39-year history. As you will note from the numbers, referrals across Kentucky and Indiana continue to increase, face-to-face visits continue to increase and we continue to add to our VIPS team which is now made up of 44 staff and 35 contracted providers in order to meet this ever-growing demand.

Financially, with a focus on long-term sustainability, we have grown our endowed funds by 154% since 2021 from \$357,350 to \$905,702. Our 5-year goal of having a minimum of 6 months in rainy-day funds has now been met with current assets up 365% from \$633,405 to \$2,945,184. Total Assets have grown during that same period from \$2,767,869 to \$6,634,441. Lastly, 5 years ago only 26% of our \$2,381,287 budget was from contracts, and today, 50% of our \$3,496,570 budget is from contracts thanks to the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the State of Indiana supporting our critical work.

We are honored to report that VIPS was named #2 in "Best Places to Work" (with 25 to 150 employees) by Business First and honored the next month at their Partners in Philanthropy luncheon for Visionary Leadership because of all VIPS has accomplished. VIPS Leadership was blessed to work with a seven-person Encore Group from Leadership Louisville to help shape the future vision for our Board of Directors and define our new 5 year aspirations for continued growth.

VIPS continues to prioritize being great stewards of our donor dollars and does not take our fiscal responsibility lightly. If you want to hear more about any of the work we are doing to elevate programming and our administration, please feel free to contact me at [dnelson@vips.org](mailto:dnelson@vips.org). We remain #VIPStrong because of your generosity of time, talent, and treasure which since 1985, has improved the future for thousands of Kentucky and Indiana's youngest children with blindness and low vision. So, as we share this success with you - we simply say - THANK YOU!!



**DIANE NELSON**

Executive Director





# MISSION

**VIPS empowers families by providing educational excellence to young children with blindness or low vision in order to build a strong foundation for reaching their highest potential.**

"[Ms. Sheila] has guided us in ways to help Brynn focus and teaches us ways to help her vision improve! We have found fun toys that she sees better, and backlighting things in the room to help her, too. We are blown away by her progress already! It was a beautiful moment when I saw Brynn turn her head to look at me and smile. I thought my heart might stop. I was so excited!"

- Brooke, Brynn's Mom  
Johnson County, Indiana



"When my daughter was 5 months old we got her diagnosis and everything just seemed so grim. In our short time with Paige/VIPS my daughter's vision has improved significantly, I've learned about resources and tools and better ways to assist her in her day-to-day life. I learned the braille alphabet with Paige's help and am continuing to learn numbers, symbols, and contractions. Paige has brought us braille books, a light box, a brailier, and other supplies to help me learn but also to assist my daughter. VIPS has been such a good resource to have in our corner for specialist appointments and also for other therapies. I truly just can't say enough good things about our time with VIPS but mostly Paige!"

- Jordan, Annie's Mom  
Nelson County, Kentucky





# ABOUT

Founded in 1985, VIPS is the first and only nonprofit in Kentucky and Indiana providing statewide early intervention and education services to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who have blindness or low vision. Early intervention is critical in addressing the unique needs of a child with blindness; it facilitates sensory exploration, fosters adaptive skills, and lays the groundwork for a child to reach their fullest potential, thriving in future educational settings.

VIPS provides comprehensive services that focus on individualized intervention, family engagement, and empowering children with the skills and confidence to navigate their world independently. VIPS offers wraparound services to care for the child and family's well-being, ranging from early intervention and education to family support and advocacy.

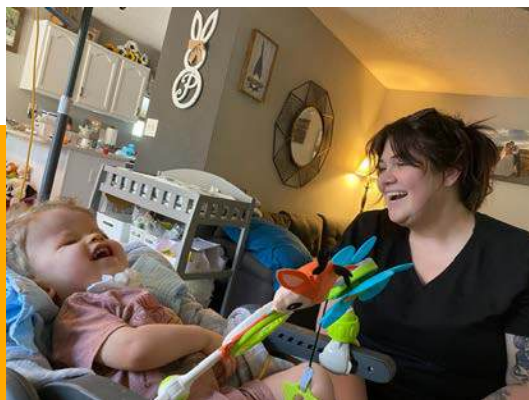


## SERVICES & RESOURCES

Home, Virtual & Community-Based Visits  
Orientation & Mobility Instruction  
Deaf-Blind Instruction  
Kids Town Preschool  
Pre-braille and Braille Instruction  
Child Advocacy  
Transition Planning and Assistance  
Consultation with Child Care Providers and Preschools

Access to Parent Resources

- Annual Family Retreat
- Parent Lending Library (lightboxes, braille books & braille writers)
- Parent Newsletter and Education Events
- Parent Empowerment Program
- VIPS "Can Do" Educational Video Series
- VIPS "Every Child Can" Educational Video



# PROGRAMMING



753

FAMILIES SERVED IN  
KENTUCKY & INDIANA



211

NEW REFERRALS



4,045

EARLY INTERVENTION  
VISITS



21,500

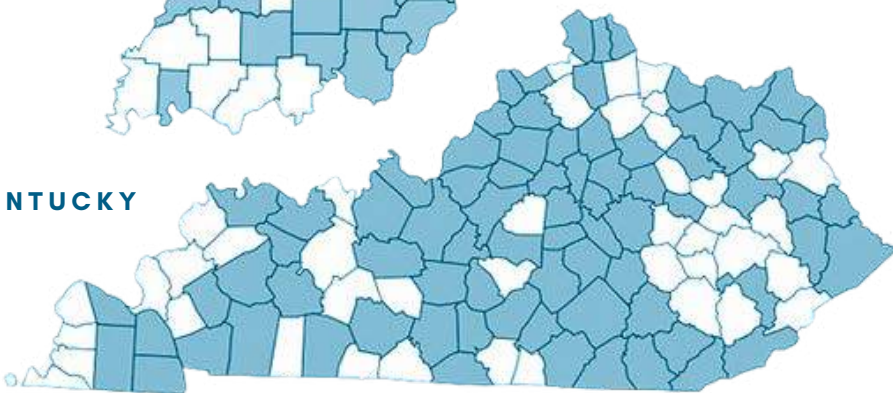
PROVIDER HOURS  
SPENT WITH FAMILIES

## COUNTIES SERVED 2023-2024\*

INDIANA



KENTUCKY



\*includes early intervention and parental support.



# VIPS ON THE ROAD

**IN 2023-2024 WE HAD  
A FLEET OF 8  
VEHICLES**



Our teachers drove  
**183,422 MILES**  
across the Commonwealth  
of Kentucky and the State of  
Indiana to see children in the  
early childhood intervention  
program.

## WHAT IS THE EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION PROGRAM (ECIP)?

Our ECIP supports children birth to three with blindness through in-home services that foster skill development and help them reach their full potential. At VIPS, we know that a child's home is their first classroom, and parents are their most important teachers. For children with blindness or low vision, learning about the world requires a unique approach. That's why our ECIP is so critical. VIPS is the only nonprofit agency in KY and IN that sends highly trained Blind/Low Vision Specialists (BLVS) into the homes of families across Kentucky and Indiana to provide specialized, vision-focused early intervention services. Our goal is to help children develop essential skills needed to succeed in life, both now and in the future.

Research shows that 90% of what a child learns is through their vision, and 85% of the foundation for learning is built during the first five years of life. These early years are crucial for setting children up for success, especially for those with blindness or low vision. ECIP helps narrow the development gap by focusing on cognitive, language, motor, and social-emotional development. Our program empowers children to develop sensory learning, self-help skills, and emergent literacy—critical skills that provide the foundation for future academic achievement and personal independence.

To be exceptional stewards of donor dollars while providing the best possible support for children and families, VIPS employs a hub-and-spoke model for its teachers and contractors. This strategic approach enables our education team to deliver high-quality services across all 120 counties in Kentucky and 92 counties in Indiana, emphasizing both efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

By employing full-time staff and contractors who are strategically located throughout both states—including in the most rural areas—we significantly reduce travel time and associated costs, such as mileage reimbursements, long commutes, and overnight lodging stays. This approach not only minimizes operational expenses but also allows our educators to dedicate more time to the children they serve.

This thoughtful allocation of resources enables VIPS to expand its reach and provide personalized early intervention services with the consistency and frequency each child requires, all while maintaining fiscal responsibility. Every gift matters at VIPS and each donation is maximized to empower children with blindness or low vision to reach their fullest potential.





# A LEGACY OF LOVE:

## LAURIE ROSELLE'S DEDICATION TRANSFORMED VIPS INDIANA

In September 2016, Indiana Director of Community Outreach & Advocacy, Meredith Howell, received an email that said, "I am the Director of Fundraising for the Indianapolis Alumnae of Delta Gamma and we'd like to sponsor a fundraiser for VIPS! We'd love to manage a Trivia Night on Friday, February 3, 2017, with all the proceeds going to VIPS. Would you allow us to do this with you?" As someone responsible for raising money to support Indiana programming for kids and families, Meredith dreamed of emails like this and replied, "Yes!" to this woman she had never met. Little did she know that email would begin an agency-changing journey for VIPS in Indiana as it came from the most incredible woman—the late Laurie Roselle.

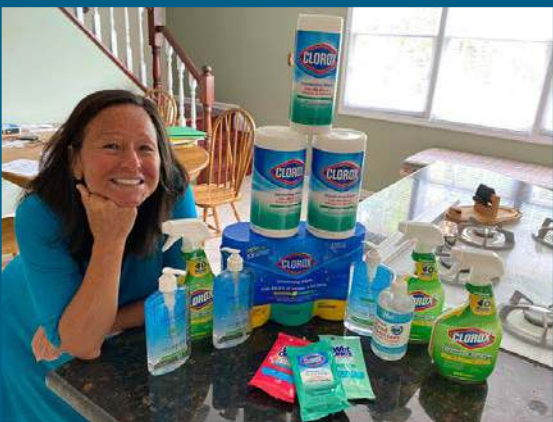


Laurie always had a philanthropic spirit as an alumna of the Delta Gamma Fraternity at Purdue University and the former International President of Delta Gamma. She was committed to the Delta Gamma mission to "Do Good" and because the Delta Gammas have a philanthropic focus on "Service for Sight" to help individuals with blindness or low vision, the pairing of the Delta Gammas and VIPS was a perfect match. VIPS had a long-standing partnership with the Delta Gammas at Indiana University because the chapter had supported the VIPS mission since VIPS services expanded into Bloomington in 2011. Other collegiate and alumnae chapters around the state hadn't been involved with VIPS—but it all changed once Laurie found VIPS.

Laurie, along with her Indianapolis Alumnae of Delta Gamma sisters, Laurie's beloved husband, John, and family would host numerous Trivia Nights—raising thousands of dollars for VIPS. Laurie didn't stop with Trivia Night as she'd organize additional fundraisers such as Tables That Bloom and an Anchor Auction where she auctioned off her personal belongings—all to benefit VIPS. Laurie facilitated a monthly 'Lunch Bunch' group where she and fellow Delta Gammas made sensory exploration items for the VIPS children over lunch. When asked, Laurie eagerly joined the VIPS Indiana Advisory Board and dedicated every ounce of her energy to helping the stories of the kids be told. She began to truly understand the impact of the VIPS mission after volunteering at family events. Laurie was especially good with the VIPS kids who often have complex needs in addition to their vision diagnosis. Laurie didn't see a baby with challenges, she just saw a child. She'd reassure the parents to learn and relax because she would take care of their little one and she did—as if they were her own.

In 2019, when it came time to launch a \$2.5M capital and operations campaign to build a Family Resource Center in Indianapolis—Laurie was all in. She knew the families needed a place to find community, resources, connectivity, and peace, and she became determined to make the dream a reality. Unfortunately, Laurie was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, or ALS in September 2021. While it was devastating news, Laurie continued to raise funds to see this project come to fruition. In April 2022, the Simon & Estelle Knoble VIPS Family Resource Center opened and Laurie was instrumental in helping us accomplish this monumental achievement. Later that year, Laurie was recognized with a VIPS Beacon Award as an outstanding Individual Volunteer because of her dedication, passion, and commitment to VIPS.

Sadly, Laurie lost her battle with ALS in August 2024 and the world lost a truly special human being. Laurie will forever be remembered as an unforgettable VIPS champion and our organization will never be the same because of her.



# THE STORY OF JAXTON

BY WHITLEY BOLIN, VIPS PARENT

Jaxton was born with what is called Septo-Optic Dysplasia, which means, is a rare congenital malformation syndrome that features a combination of the underdevelopment of the optic nerve, pituitary gland dysfunction, and absence of the septum pellucidum. These nerves carry visual information from the eyes to the brain. In children with septo-optic dysplasia, the optic nerves are abnormally small, resulting in vision problems in one or both eyes. This can include limited vision or uncontrolled eye movements, for Jaxton he has no vision (but possibility of light perception) and also has uncontrolled eye movement. Because of this Jaxton faces a few challenges like not being on track of milestones such as eating like he should, he's not walking, he can't dress himself yet, he's not where he should be on talking and a few more things but he is so smart and catches on to things so quick that I have faith he'll be doing all that very soon.

Now let's learn a little more about Jaxton and his family. Jaxton (born December 2022) has a big sister named Gracelynn (born May 2021). Gracelynn and Jaxton are both the sweetest kids you will ever meet, they are always smiling and in a good mood. Gracelynn is just now getting used to the idea of her brother and how playing with him is a little different but she is doing so well. When we ask her to give her "bub bub" something like a toy or his sippy cup she will grab his hand and place it in that hand, she also will now tell her brother things like "I'm behind you bub bub" or "I'm over here" to help him try and find her. She doesn't fully understand what being blind is or that he can't see but she is learning every day and I am so proud of her. Jaxton loves his "sissy" very much and is always happy to have her around (even if it's just for a second).

Jaxton is very much into all things music, whether it is musical instruments or listening to it on my phone or the radio, and let me tell you that boy knows how to keep a beat. Not only does he enjoy listening to it or playing it but it is also a way that calms or soothes him, days he may get overwhelmed or frustrated we can just turn on music and it calms him so much. Jaxton suffers with a few sensory things (due to him being blind) such as his hands and feet are super sensitive to touch and textures as well as the same when he eats but when he play music we can use that as a way to get him to take a bite of something or a way to get him to touch something as well but not only that we also use it when we try to get him so take steps or stand. We implement music in everything we do for him as a way to get motivated and focus and I have to say it works! I am so thankful for his care provider Tammy Manard in VIPS as well as his care providers outside of VIPS Brandy and Katie for listening to me and adapting things in a way for Jaxton to be able to understand or spike interest in. I also am so thankful for his pediatrician Dr. Waddel for listening to me from the start.

What brought us to VIPS? When we first learned about Jaxton's diagnosis he was only 6 months old, I noticed his eyes were moving all around and wouldn't just stay in one place, so I called his pediatrician to have a look and that's when we were referred to Dr. Melanie Bradley at Shriners UK Advanced Eye Care and she noticed she wasn't getting the response she wanted from his eyes and had us get an MRI done which gave us his diagnosis. When we went back to Dr. Bradley that is when she sent in the referral to VIPS, we were lost and didn't know where to start and she knew exactly what to do and where to go, she was a blessing in disguise. VIPS has helped us so much, not only on how to care for Jaxton but also on how to teach him and really understand him and his wants and needs. Tammy, his VIPS provider, has been so helpful to us and making sure we have everything we need for him whether it's a texture book or a braille toy that makes noise, Even any resources we may need or want to consider. She is always there to answer any question day or night and not even bat an eye about it. VIPS has helped us so much on where to even start and we can count on VIPS to guide us where we need to go.

If I could give any advice to a parent who has recently got a diagnosis that their child has a visual impairment it would be to have patience and self-compassion. Have patience in everything you do, whether it's trying to figure out where to even begin or how to teach them. Don't be so hard on yourself, things get hard at times but they will get better and things will get easier. It's not your fault, sometimes things like this just happen, I wish they didn't but they do. God always gives his toughest battles to his strongest Angels, he wouldn't give you anything he knew you couldn't handle. I struggle with self-blame and wondering "why me" or "why us" but then I remember that I can do this, I can be who my kids need me to be for them and what I don't know I can always learn. Just remember that you are strong and that beautiful child of yours is so strong too, you've got this and I am so proud of you.

Everyday is a new journey and I can't wait to see where life takes us, even if it's not how you envisioned your life to be, you just have to look at it from a new perspective. I look forward to learning things from my son's perspective, sure things are going to be challenging at times but I am ready to take on anything that comes my way, and one day I hope to meet other moms and dads that are going to the same things as my family is. I'm so glad I can share my son's story and help any other parent who is going through the same things and I look forward to hearing other parents stories and visually impaired kids stories as well.





# PODCAST

## Feeling this life

presented by



## ABOUT

Feeling This Life dives deep into the triumphs, challenges, and strategies that are part of the lives of those who care for young children with blindness or low vision, building an audio community of families, caregivers, and early interventionists.

## CO-HOSTS

**Jenny Castenir** is the Family Services Coordinator at VIPS. Prior to coming on as staff at VIPS, her youngest daughter received VIPS services for three years. During this time Jenny developed a passion for helping families with children who are blind or have low vision thrive in their daily life by advocating for their children and obtaining services and resources.

**Paige Maynard** has over 10 years of experience working as a developmental interventionist and teacher of the visually impaired at VIPS. Paige's professional passions include empowering families of young children in the areas of advocacy, daily living, and emergent literacy as well as teaching critical thinking skills to infants, toddlers, and their caregivers.

**Cathy Smyth, Ph.D.**, has provided support for families in early intervention in the area of visual impairment for over thirty-five years. Her passions include concept development and tactual assessments for young children with visual impairment, how vision loss affects the mealtime process, and early visual screening for infants. As an independent research consultant, she is committed to engaging practitioners and families in participating in meaningful research to build new evidence-based practices.

## IN 2024 THE PODCAST HAD...

**13%** GROWTH IN LISTENERS

**35%** INCREASE IN STREAMS

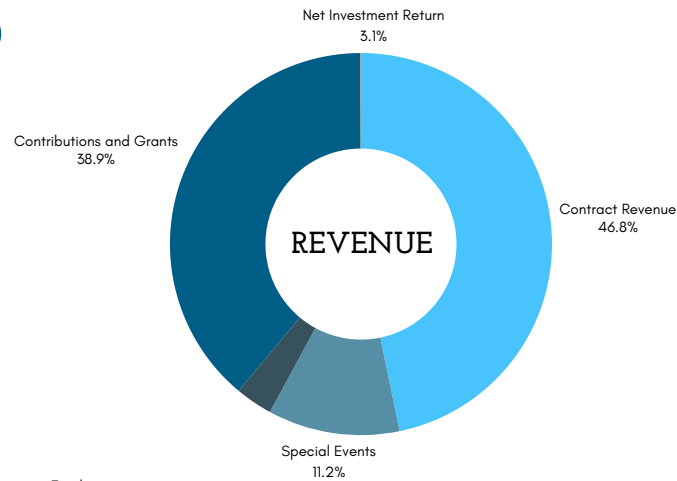
**25%** GROWTH IN FOLLOWERS

In the 2023-2024 Fiscal Year, the podcast released 9 episodes in season 3. The podcast is currently recording season 4 which is available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or wherever you stream your podcasts.

# FINANCIALS

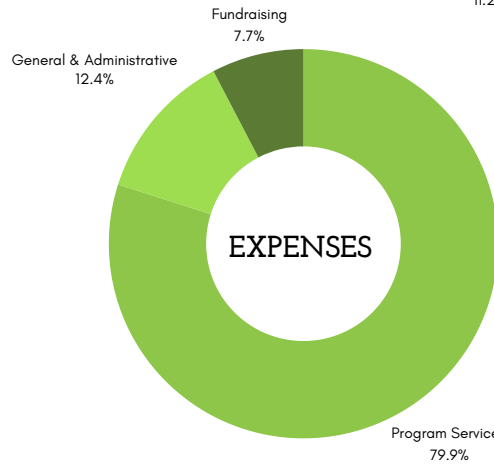
## REVENUE

<b>Contributions and Grants</b>	\$1,440,536.00
<b>Contract Revenue</b>	\$1,732,169.00
<b>Special Events</b>	\$413,318.00
<b>Net Investment Return</b>	\$116,277.00
<b>Miscellaneous Income</b>	\$4,354.00
<b>Rental Income</b>	\$2,400.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,709,054.00</b>



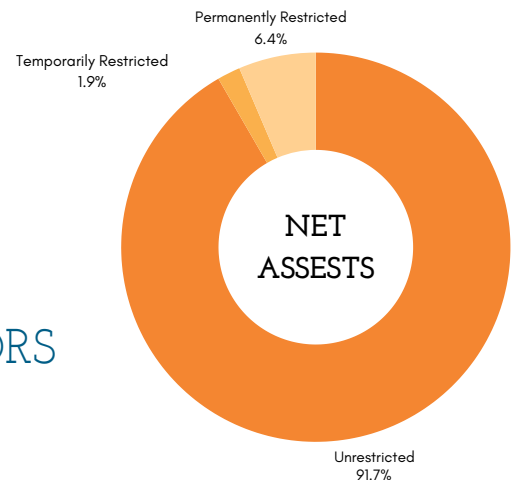
## EXPENSES

<b>Program Services</b>	\$2,458,899.00
<b>General &amp; Administrative</b>	\$382,314.00
<b>Fundraising</b>	\$235,454.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,076,667.00</b>



## NET ASSETS

<b>Unrestricted</b>	\$6,064,728.00
<b>Temporarily Restricted</b>	\$126,911.00
<b>Permanently Restricted</b>	\$425,274.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$6,616,913.00</b>



**VOLUNTEERS**  
957 HOURS BY  
225 VOLUNTEERS



**DONORS**  
974





# VIPS TEAM

## STAFF LEADERSHIP

**Executive Director**  
Diane Nelson

**Director of Education**  
Kathy Mullen

**Director of Development**  
Justine Aycock

**Director of Intake & Community Outreach - Kentucky**  
Kelly Easton

**Director of Community Outreach & Advocacy - Indiana**  
Meredith Howell

**Director of Finance**  
Christina Welsh

## BOARD MEMBERS

**President**  
Nathan Holladay

**Vice President**  
Mike Johnson

**Secretary**  
Taylor Gehring

**Treasurer**  
John Anders

**Directors**  
Jennifer Arington  
Dr. Jerry Bizer  
Jennifer Bratton  
Jelisa Chatman  
Theresa Connolly  
Steve Deeley  
Jena Fahlbush  
Alejandro Erick Franco  
Paul Frazier  
Dr. Ashima Gupta

Paresh Gupta, PharmD  
Shari L. House  
Emily Krauser  
Donna Brostek Lee  
Emily Possidento  
Loren Prizant  
Dr. Melissa Rice  
Andy Steinbach  
Missy Varga  
Sharon G. Bensinger  
Glen Stuckel





# CONTACT US

## FOLLOW US

@vipsorg




## DONATE


[vips.org/donate](https://vips.org/donate)



Support children with blindness or low vision and the parents who walk beside them. Your gift provides the tools and guidance they need to succeed. Scan the QR code to give now.

## KENTUCKY


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