

# Parent to Parent

For Parents and Families of Students in  
Kentucky who are Blind and Visually  
Impaired

Summer 2008

Kentucky School for the Blind

Family Support Center, Member of Parent Resource Centers of KY



## New Addition and Expanded Programming Taking Shape at VIPS

*Reprinted with permission from  
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The fabulous new addition that is being constructed at VIPS in Louisville is almost finished. When completed, it will be a state-of-the-art facility for young children who are visually impaired. VIPS staff and board members have been working diligently to plan features of the new facility and the curriculum components of the expanded programming that will be offered.

The new Kentucky School for the Blind Charitable Foundation (KSBCF) classroom wing



*Kosair Charities Kidstown, located in the new KSBCF classroom wing provides a real-life town square for VIPS children.*



will make it possible for VIPS to offer a full preschool program for VIPS children who are 3-5 years-old, including a special program for those who are deafblind.

The VIPS preschool program will be specifically designed to meet the needs of visually impaired children. It will offer a braille-rich environment and also encourage hands on

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*Located in Louisville, the VIPS addition promises to be a state-of-the-art facility for young children who are blind and visually impaired.*

*New Addition and Expanded Programming Taking Shape, continued from page 1:*

exploration, independence and social development. The Creative Curriculum, approved by the Commonwealth of Kentucky, will be the foundation of programming and will be supplemented by a vision-specific curriculum, based on each child's individual needs.

**Features of the new KSBCF classroom wing include:**

- A main hallway leading to classrooms which will feature a low chair rail for young hands to trail. In addition, there will be tile flooring in front of classrooms to indicate their entrance and carpet elsewhere.
- There will be separate classrooms for three and four-year-olds, maintaining a ratio of no more than four children to one adult. Each will be equipped with Smartboards. There are bathrooms between classrooms equipped with small, child-sized fixtures. Classrooms will have access to a covered porch leading to the playground area. There will be textured walkways outside each classroom (brick, slate, plank) to help children locate their particular classrooms.
- Deafblind classroom with special acoustics to block out noise. There will be sound fields (speakers) to help children attend to their teachers or happenings in the room.
- A Braille Room featuring braille readiness activities, braille alphabet bags, braille books and kid-friendly braille writing equipment will allow students to practice pre-braille skills, individually or in small groups. This room can also be used to help parents learn braille.



- A Technology Room will allow kids to work on computers with a variety of keyboard adaptations, from switches to braille, as well as communication devices.
- The Sensory Room will provide an array of sensory delights, including a ball pit with balls that light up and play music, aroma therapy, special swings and rocking chairs.
- Kosair Charities Kidstown, like a real-life town square, will promote independence, concept development,

*VIPS Development Director Heather Benson checks out the ball pit with the light up ball in the sensory room.*

orientation and mobility skills, and gross motor skills. In Kidstown, there is a library with reading nook and upstairs loft, Grandma's Bakery, Chase Bank, KFC Drive-thru, grocery store with real food, laundromat with front-loading washer and dryer and Eye Doctor's Office, sponsored by Dr. Mark Lynn.

- The Eye Doctor's Office will be where children can go and be examined by a low vision specialist, or pediatric ophthalmology and optometry residents. This will not take the place of regular eye visits.
- Kosair Charities Kidstown will help children build concepts about the world and how it works. They will be able to go to the bank and withdraw some play money, go to the grocery store and buy items to prepare a dish, and then to Grandma's Bakery to make it. In Grandma's Bakery is a child-sized working kitchen with child-sized real appliances donated by General Electric. They will be able to clean up their cooking mess and even launder dish cloths and towels!
- Lighting in Kosair Charities Kidstown will be all natural, coming from rows of windows in a clear story. Therefore, kids will have to learn to make needed adaptations to maneuver around on cloudy days and sunny days. A large stairway to the library loft will be used to teach safe travel skills. Children will be able to begin to learn about safe crossings with their canes and traffic safety rules on their tricycles and in their wheelchairs.
- At the front of Kosair Charities Kidstown is a large stage where children will be able to perform in plays or musical programs. This will also be the perfect place to hold graduation.



*A covered porch and textured walkways outside each classroom help children locate their classrooms.*

The new programs should be up and running by the fall. VIPS is registering for them now. Call VIPS Education Coordinator Melinda Atkins at 502-636-3207 for information or to arrange a tour.

*VIPS Office Manager Carol Dahmke (front left) and Executive Director Sharon Bensinger inspect the new classroom wing.*

## Greenup County Student Graduates with Honors

*By: Verna Howell, Teacher of the Visually Impaired*

Stacy Timberlake was born and raised in rural northeastern Greenup County in a small community known as South Shore. In the fourth grade it was determined that Stacy had a visual impairment. She was diagnosed with nystagmus, strabismus, and albinism.



*Stacy Timberlake overcame many obstacles with her vision and graduated with honors from Greenup County High School in May.*

The challenge for Stacy was that of accessing printed material, which was unique to this community. She used various tools, CCTV, magnifiers, and large print. Being the bright student that she is, she excelled in her academic subjects.

At the end of her eighth grade year, it became obvious to those of us that knew her, that something was wrong. After several doctor visits and several specialists, it was determined that Stacy had hydrocephalus. With the increase of fluid on her brain and the added pressure on her optic nerve, her vision decreased to 20/1000 rapidly.

Today, almost four years later, 20 surgeries and a long hard battle, she is able to attend school again.

Through desire, determination, and many strong people working with her, on May 30, she graduated with honors from Greenup County High School. Stacy is making plans to attend Morehead State University where she will be majoring in elementary education. Yes, she wants to be a teacher.

Stacy has been an active member of 4-H since fourth grade. She has held several officer positions within 4-H and won many awards. She enjoys music and plays the guitar and mandolin. Stacy is always up for a good discussion. Stacy enjoys history and current events but her greatest passion is writing and she has even been published.

*The staff in the Outreach Department at Kentucky School for the Blind wish Stacy the best of luck on her graduation. And, a pat on the back goes to Stacy's mother, Jenny Timberlake, who has supported Stacy from day one.*

***Parent to Parent*** is a quarterly publication containing information relevant to Kentucky parents and families of children who are blind and visually impaired.

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## AT&T Funds Program to Provide Timely Access to Braille Materials via the Web

**Dr. Betsy Flener, KSB Regional Consultant** for the Caveland and River Region Special Educational Cooperative areas, recently received news that her grant request to the AT&T Foundation (NYSE:T), the Corporate philanthropy organization of AT & T Inc., had been partially funded. The organization announced in November that it would give \$20,000 to the Caveland (CESC) and River Region (RRC) Educational Cooperatives to provide timely access to materials in braille for students with visual impairments. Also, the Western Kentucky Special Education Cooperative has been invited to participate.



*The grant from the AT&T Foundation will provide timely access to braille material for students in the Caveland and River Regions.*

The grant will provide for a part-time regional braille transcriber along with equipment and software to ensure that braille students in the two cooperatives receive braille materials in a timely fashion. Teachers will email documents to the transcriber who will format them into braille using braille translation software and then email them back to the teacher who will emboss them. Additionally, the transcriber will become trained to produce tactile graphics (raised line drawings).

AT & T Regional Manager Dave Weller presented the check to Dr. Flener and Caveland Director Pam Coe during the Caveland Director's Meeting in November. Weller stated that the need cited in the grant for a braille transcriber was very compelling and that the grant met the application criteria for providing a web-based program.

## Big East Family Support Group Meets in South Shore

*By: Mitch Dahmke, KSB Family Support Specialist*

One of the highlights in my role as Family Support Specialist is the contact I have with families going through the educational maze and assisting them whenever I can. The highlight of this past year has been a group of families in the Big East Educational Cooperative and assisting Greenup County Teacher of the Visually Impaired Verna Howell and several families in forming a Family Support Group.

On April 12, the family group met for the second time at PJ's Pizza in South Shore. After listening to an informal presentation on mediation, the families decided to hold their meetings every other month on the second Saturday.

The next family support group meeting will be June 14 in South Shore at PJ's Pizza. *Come and join us for free pizza and soda!*

# Benefits of Summer Fun

*Adapted with permission from  
Familyconnect.org*

Spending a week, a month, or the whole summer with other children who have visual impairments gives your child a chance to meet a wide range of kids; to make new friends and to find mentors and role models among the counselors or older campers. Your child may also become a role model for the younger children and benefit from that experience as well.

Camping also gives your child a chance to learn new skills in a setting that focuses on cooperation more than competition, where all kids have similar challenges to overcome. Many camps have specially trained staff to teach young campers how to use adapted techniques to learn athletic skills such as goal ball, rock climbing, and swimming and to use their tactile sense in creative activities such as ceramics and wood carving.

At camp your child can feel that he or she is just one of the gang because all the kids around are also visually impaired. On a level playing field, he or she may be more adventurous and willing to try new games and sports.

Your child's educational team members are probably familiar with camps in your area and can recommend one. If not, check with your state's special school (Kentucky School for the Blind), or Office for the Blind. Many camps around the nation are supported in part by Lions Clubs, so your local chapter is another source of information.

In Kentucky, the only two summer camps exclusively for blind and visually impaired children are the KSB summer programs and Camp Crescendo, a Lions sponsored camp located in southern Bullitt County. The KSB Summer programs deadline has passed, but there is still time to register for Camp Crescendo. If you would like information and/or a registration form on Camp Crescendo, contact Mitch Dahmke at 502-897-1583 ext. 221. If he is unavailable, please leave your name and address and he will mail a registration form to you.



**Check Out this Site**



**[Familyconnect.org](http://Familyconnect.org)** is a new website for families of children who are blind and visually impaired. It was recently launched by the American Foundation for the Blind. Families can get information, advice and talk with other parents of children who are blind and visually impaired. *You need to check it out!!!*

# Knowledge Gained through Parent Professional Conference

*By: Mitch Dahmke, KSB Family Support Specialist*

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Parent Professional Conference was held in Bowling Green on Feb. 29-Mar. 2. Although attendance was down, much knowledge was gained by the attendees who included professionals and parents of children with special needs.

KSB Outreach Consultant Dr. Betsy Flener, serving the Caveland and River Regions, provided information to attendees interested in issues relating to children with visual impairments. Her presentation "Promising Practices for Students with Visual Impairments and Autism Spectrum Disorder" drew the largest crowd of any visually impaired topic presented within the past five parent professional conferences. She shared three case studies showing promising educational practices with autism spectrum disorder.

A very motivational talk by Brad Humphries encouraged family members to be more involved in their child's education. Humphries also taught conference goers how to swing dance. This was a great icebreaker which was held the first evening of the conference and allowed family members a chance to get to know one another.

As usual, Sammie Lambert from the Kentucky Department of Education gave a top-notch presentation on the topic of "Mediation in Kentucky". Lambert told how the mediation process works and the benefits of using the process over alternative methods to settle school and family disputes.

Changes to the Parent Professional Conference are being considered for next year due to budget concerns and low attendance. One possibility that is being considered is to have several one-day regional presentations. Any changes will be passed along to you in future issues of *Parent to Parent*.



*KSB Regional Outreach Consultant for Caveland and River Regions Dr. Betsy Flener presents "Promising Practices for Students with Visual Impairments and Autism Spectrum Disorder" during the Parent Professional Conference.*



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