BLIND EARLY SERVICES TN

Taking matters into our own hands:

The evolution of vision-specific EI services in TN

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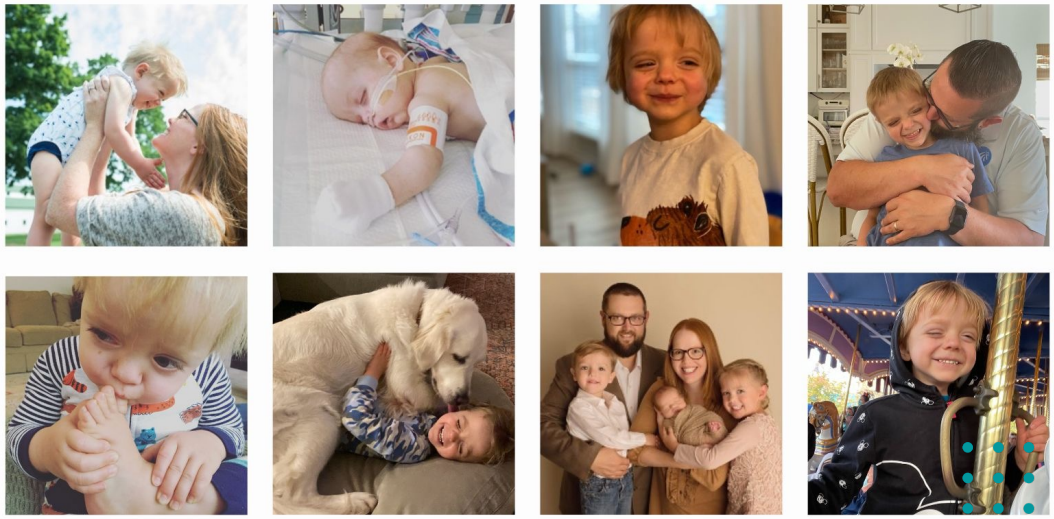
Agenda

- Our Story
- Stocking the pantry
- Taste-Testing
- Soups on!
- May I have your recipe?
- The Secret Sauce

Stacy's son Nathaniel

- Born a healthy newborn – so we thought!
- Diagnosed with Malignant Infantile OstePETrosis at 5 months old
- Nathaniel successfully fought through a bone marrow transplant, but lasting optic nerve damage
- My defining moment as a mom and when I found my voice
- How this led me to speak up and speak out
- Now 6 years old and despite multiple challenges continues to amaze us and teach us



Our Federal IDEA Part C

34 CFR 303.13(b)(17) - Qualified personnel:

Qualified personnel means personnel who have met State approved or recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the areas in which the individuals are conducting evaluations or assessments or providing early intervention services.

34 CFR 303.13(b)(17) - Types of Services: Vision Services

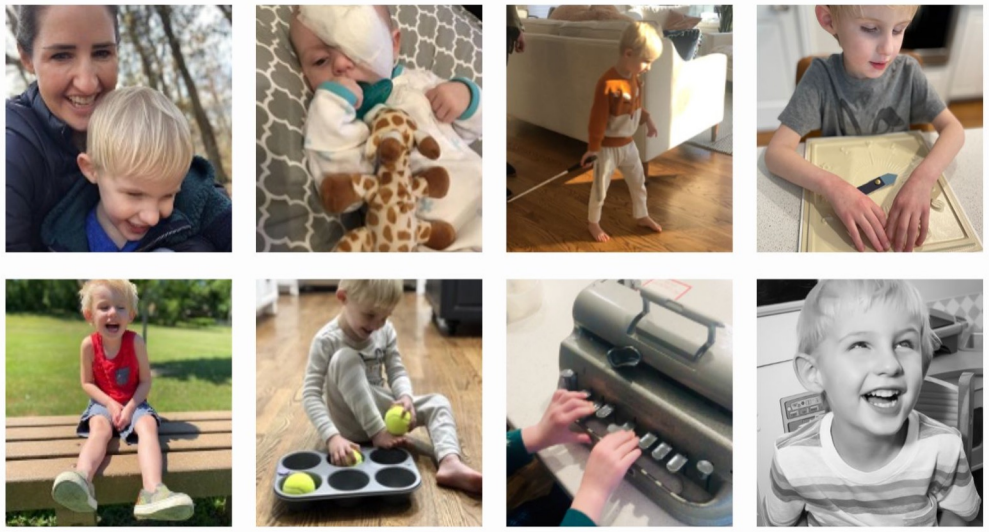
(i) Evaluation and assessment of visual functioning, including the diagnosis and appraisal of specific visual disorders, delays, and abilities that affect early childhood development;

(ii) Referral for medical or other professional services necessary for the habilitation or rehabilitation of visual functioning disorders, or both; and

(iii) Communication skills training, orientation and mobility training for all environments, visual training, and additional training necessary to activate visual motor abilities.

Alison's son Finn

- Born with bilateral retinal detachments
- Low incidence within a low incidence population
- 6 months advocating for a TVI for a completely blind child, successfully achieved in that timeframe due to the precedent set by Stacy and Nathaniel
- Taking braille classes during the pandemic turned into a full TVI degree and eventually, a partnership with Stacy to do more for families like ours across the state
- Now 5 years old and learning braille/cane skills



Our Misson

Blind Early Services TN ensures that families are empowered and equipped through specialized programs of support to provide young children who are blind or low vision their absolute BEST start.

Our ~~Problems~~ "Opportunities"

- We were told that blindness is a low-incidence disability
- We were told there were no providers within the early intervention program who specialize in vision
- We were told that Tennessee School for the Blind does not serve birth-to-three and hasn't for decades
- We were told that services would be available when our children entered the school system at age 3 and to simply "wait it out"
- The developmental therapists and specialists we received had not worked with a child with blindness
- Specialized vision services under IDEA Part C that once existed in Tennessee (the program was called TIPS) were dissolved years ago due to administrative changes

Stocking the Pantry

Ingredients we had on hand:

- Personal experience
- A TVI in-training
- An accounting and business background
- An understanding of the Part C system in our state
- Connections with the ladies at VIPS which led to forming connections with other model agencies (Anchor Center, A Shared Vision)

Stocking the Pantry

Ingredients we needed:

- A legal business entity
- A Board of Directors
- Starting capital
- Insurance
- Approval for TN Part C to provide EI services
- Fundraising
- The right service providers
- A history of services in our state

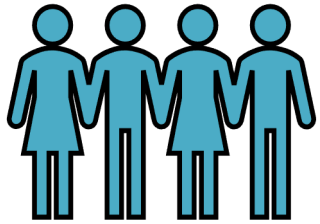
NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK!

Our State's Part C

Early Intervention Resource Agencies (EIRAs) are established through Part C funds to provide **generalized** early intervention support through Developmental Therapy

- IDEA Part C dollars are dispersed through a grant application process by which current and potential agencies are reviewed, ranked and approved
- Funding is calculated and awarded based on assigned FTEs per week and funds are deposited monthly to EIRAs
- Grants include 10% for indirect costs
- Funds our EIVI Services, Director salaries and some of our overhead costs

Our State's Part C (cont.)



Specialists (PT, OT, Speech, TVIs, COMS) are outsourced/contracted as vendors with TEIS to provide **specialized** support

- Funding may or may not originate from IDEA Part C – the child's insurance is billed and TEIS pays what insurance does not cover
- Both individuals and agencies can contract with TEIS and both must meet minimum requirements
- Reimbursement is set at a fixed dollar amount that may or may not equal the fair market value of services rendered
- Funds CTVIs, COMS, FVAs and assistive technology

Taste-Testing

- What was going to be the right mix of ingredients?
- We looked to other "recipes" as inspiration for building our own
- ***Given the same mission and ingredients...***
  - ***What services would you provide?***
  - ***How would you fund these services?***
    - ***Public funds v private funds***

Our Timeline

October 2020
Formed legal entity

January 2021
Submitted application to be an EIRA with the state's Part C agency

April 2021
Received notification that we had been awarded 50 FTEs/week, enough to hire two full-time and one part-time DTs

July 2021
Our EIRA contract begins!

March 2022
Awarded a vendor contract to fund TVIs/COMS

Soup's On!

We arrived at a public/private partnership whereby we have one grant and one contract with TEIS to provide:

1) Home/community-based Developmental Therapy

2) Direct services by CTVI/COMS

Our state grant covers four full-time Developmental Therapists, one full-time and one part-time Executive Director, and some related overhead such as interpretation services and software subscriptions

Our state contract pays by service delivered and covers about 75% of our cost to salary two TVIs

We now salary or contract with providers in Middle and West TN and offer virtual services across the state!

Our Programs

BEST Start

- Home and community-based early intervention services from **VIISA-trained Developmental Therapists, CTVIs and COMS**

BEST Together

- Podcast featuring providers, parents, and those with lived experience with VI/blindness, monthly newsletter, in-person events

BEST Advocate

- Quarterly parent training for transition planning, IEP support, and attendance at meetings

BEST Screening

- TEIS screening partnership and NAVEG Screening (seeking hospital partnerships)

Our Next Steps

- Adding other related service providers to our programs (OT)
- Expanding to other parts of the state through in-person services (Memphis, Chattanooga, Knoxville and beyond
- Brick-and-mortar location for staff and resource center
- Inclusive preschool!

May I have your recipe?

See the opportunities!

Know your strengths and strengthen your weaknesses

- Includes learning about your state's Part C program

Get creative with what you have!

Don't wait! You will learn the most from getting in the kitchen yourself!

An ounce of action is worth a ton of theory.
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

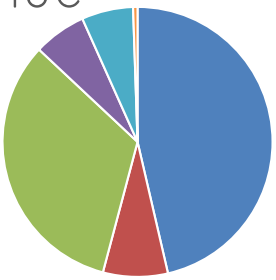
The Secret Sauce

Passion, purpose, and profitability

- You can't have a mission without money $$$
- Calculating the margin is a must!
  - The difference between the price you will be paid/reimbursed for services and the cost of those services
- There is more to cost than meets the eye
  - **Direct costs:** costs directly related to delivering a service, such as salary, payroll taxes, benefits, mileage, and interpretation (i.e. your ingredients when cooking)
  - **Indirect costs:** costs related to running a business and may be spread across multiple services/programs, such as management salaries, accounting, insurance, and software subscriptions (i.e. your stove, oven, pots and pans)

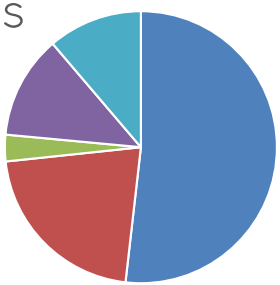
Our Financials

Revenue



- EIRA Grant (46%)
- Vendor Contract (8%)
- Donations (33%)
- Special Event (6%)
- Private Grants (6%)
- Program Service (1%)

Expenses



- EIRA Grant (52%)
- Vendor Contract (22%)
- Programs - Other (3%)
- Management and General (12%)
- Fundraising (11%)

Our Reach

Currently serving 155 families across Tennessee

- 62 EIRA only
- 57 Vendor/Vision services only
- 36 both EIRA and Vendor/Vision services
- 25 different counties through in-person and telehealth options

Additional Resources

OSEP US DEPT OF EDUCATION
https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/
- Read IDEA law word for word

ECTA CENTER WEBSITE
https://ectacenter.org/
- Technical information and data

BABIES COUNT
https://www.babiescount.org/
- National registry of VI infant/toddler counts by state

VISIONSERVE ALLIANCE
https://visionservealliance.org/
- Leadership collective of organizations/individuals