

News for donors and friends of VisionCorps

*For more information on services for you or someone you know,
please call 717-291-5951.*

A SENSE OF BELONGING

VisionCorps youth activities challenge children who are blind or visually impaired to step out of their comfort zones and try new things.

Seven-year-old Hudson Robinson has already experienced more changes in his young life than most people do in a lifetime. For him, VisionCorps also serves as a comfort zone – a safe space to polish his social skills among people he trusts.

“Hudson is my little super hero,” his mother Rebekah said, as her son ran around in his Batman cape. “He can be very sweet and loving. He’s always coming over and kissing me on the cheek and saying, ‘I love you, Mom.’ The next minute, he’ll be rough and tumble, wrestling or playing Nerf guns with his brothers. Or he’ll make slime with his sisters.” It is a story that does not sound out-of-the-ordinary. And that is the goal.

Hudson has come a long way. He was adopted by Rebekah and her husband Greg from China when he was 3. At the time, he could only see light and shadows. Cataract surgery improved his vision somewhat, but doctors believe his brain didn’t fully develop the ability to interpret visual input.

“He gets occupational, physical, and speech therapy,” Rebekah said. “He’s improving slowly; one step at a time. He’s amazing in so many ways. You can give him a pile of Legos and he’ll

build you a man with a sword. But he struggles with learning letters and numbers. And he’s not comfortable in most social situations. It’s a bit of a mystery.”

VisionCorps is helping him learn to adapt in social situations. Earlier this year, Hudson and his VisionCorp peers took a trip to a restaurant. “He loved learning how to order from a menu by himself,” Rebekah said. He and his friends visited a museum, went on hikes, and even took a boat ride to Annapolis. “He loves playing in water,” she said, “He turned his kayak over on purpose!” Hudson is looking forward to starting art classes with his friends at VisionCorps.

The Robinsons live in Lancaster. Hudson is home-schooled along with his four adopted siblings: twin brothers Jachin and Josiah (13) from Russia; and Havyn (7) and Leilani (4) from Ethiopia.

Once a week, Hudson attends class with peers in the community. But Rebekah notes that many well-intentioned

adults often have no real experience interacting with a child who is blind or visually impaired. “When Hudson attends this class, my mother-in-law shadows him to make sure he’s safe,” Rebekah said. “She adores Hudson, but I wish he didn’t need to be shadowed. I wish people understood more about children with vision deficits.”

Seeing how differently her son interacts socially at VisionCorps has given Rebekah deeper insight into her son’s



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MESSAGE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

Shortly after school buses appeared on the roads in September, we were reminded by retailers everywhere that the holidays were just around the corner! At VisionCorps, that means parties for our clients to celebrate another year gone by with personal goals met, independence achieved, and lives changed! Before we know it, the ball will drop and 2019 will be here.

Without your help, these celebrations wouldn't be possible. Be sure to watch for our Annual Report in the New Year where we will show you all that you've made possible with your generous support of VisionCorps.

In the meantime, when doing your holiday shopping, please consider using Amazon Smile if you plan to shop with Amazon. When you choose VisionCorps Foundation as your selected charity, a portion of your purchase will be donated to VisionCorps! And, it costs you nothing beyond a few seconds to select VisionCorps Foundation when you visit AmazonSmile.com. Once selected, it will default to VisionCorps for future purchases.

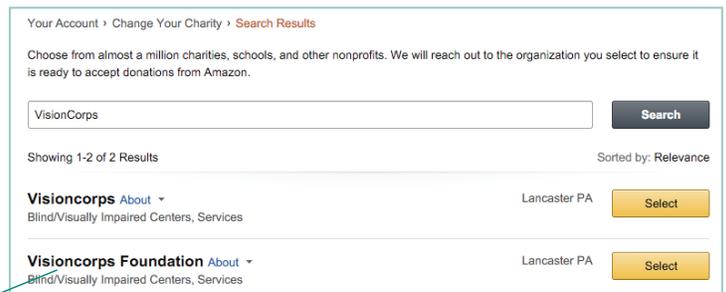
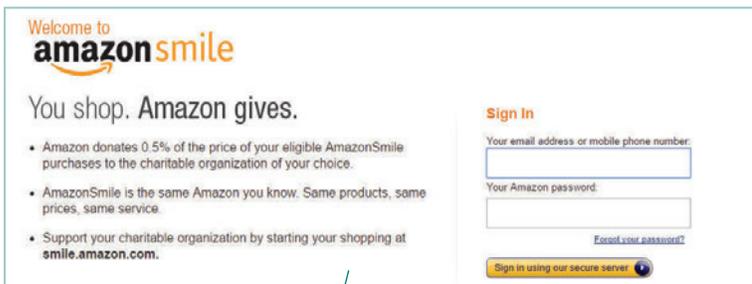
In this season of giving thanks and celebrating the past year, VisionCorps is especially thankful for you, our dedicated donors, for giving VisionCorps the means to provide services to county residents who are blind or vision impaired. Please be sure to reach out if you'll be in the area of your local agency and would like a tour, or a visit during this holiday season! We enjoy meeting our supporters and showing you first hand the difference you make.

Have a wonderful holiday season!

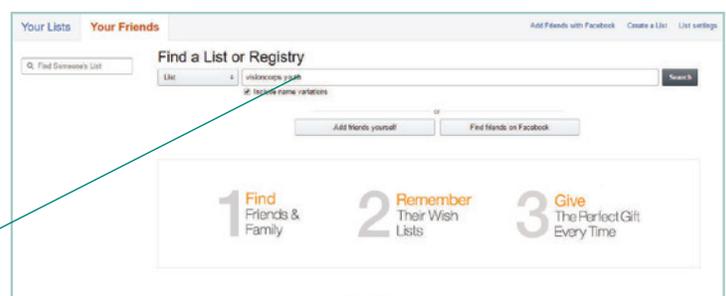
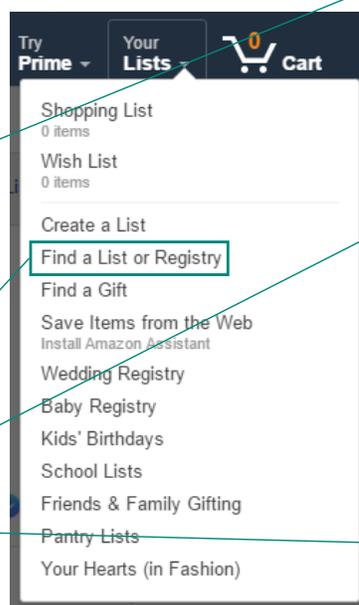
Megan E. Tomscheck
Vice President and Chief Development Officer



And, as you are shopping on Amazon Smile, please take a look at our wish list! These items will be put to use throughout the agency and will be shipped directly to VisionCorps.



- Visit amazonsmile.com and log in to your Amazon account
- Select VisionCorps Foundation as the charitable organization you'd like to support
- Go to "Your Lists" Menu and click on "Find a List or Registry"
- Type in VisionCorps Youth in the search box and select the products you wish to purchase



Q&A WITH TONY HEATH, ACCESS TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST AT VISIONCORPS

Vision impaired himself with Optic Atrophy, Tony Heath has worked in the field of blindness for nearly 25 years. He is responsible for the evaluation and training of blind or vision impaired clients in the use of Video Magnifiers, adapted computers and other related technologies. Tony demonstrates, installs, provides training and support for the equipment both at the agency, and in the customers' homes.

Tony's job duties also include facilitating four low vision support groups at various locations throughout York County. Vision impaired clients can learn and benefit from his life-long experiences.

The part of the job that Tony enjoys most is educating the community about blindness and the agency. He has spoken to school children, senior groups, and other organizations in an attempt to promote the capabilities and dispel the myths about people who are blind or vision impaired.

Recently we had a chat with Tony about what's new in AT:



For the unfamiliar, what is Assistive Technology in relation to those who are blind or visually impaired?

Well, I like to call it Access Technology. And it is anything that gives a blind person access to the same information that their sighted peers have.

How has Assistive Technology changed in recent years and what advancements are you aware of for the near future?

In recent years it has begun to appear in mainstream products such as appliances and smart phones. The fact that we are now able to speak to some devices has made it much easier for those who are blind or vision impaired because we don't have to be able to see buttons or touch screens. Nor do we have to memorize the sequences of key strokes or button pushes. There has also been an introduction of numerous products with OCR (Optical Character Recognition) or text to speech capability. This is great for us because we are now able to take a picture of a document and have it read in speech. I expect the aforementioned technologies to continue to improve in the future.

What are daily tasks/situations in which Assistive Technology positively impacts children and adults who are blind or visually impaired?

There are devices that identify color to help with selecting our wardrobe each day and one that beeps to let us know our cup is full when we pour our morning coffee. My microwave and meat thermometer talk to me as I prepare

my meals. Computers display fonts up to 50X and read screen content to help with e-mail and searching the web. There are GPS systems that work in pedestrian mode to help us get from place to place.

How does one gain access to Assistive Technology and is it available for everyone?

For the most part, these devices need to be purchased and are usually expensive, which makes them available to those who can afford them. There are grants and low interest loans set up specifically for assistive technology. However, at least for the grants, they can be difficult to get; often requiring an arduous application process and a limit on how much money is available. Pennsylvania has a state Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services that will provide such devices to qualifying individuals. Again, the problem is limited funding and long wait times. Blind and vision Impaired persons who are employed and need the assistive technology for their job are more likely to receive it from the state agency than those who are unemployed.

For those wishing to use Assistive Technology, what type of training/support is available?

Many companies that produce assistive technology devices have sales representatives, who also provide training and support. They usually offer free lifetime telephone support as well. Local agencies serving the blind and vision impaired, such as VisionCorps, often have a person on staff who will provide training and support.

WHY I GIVE TO VISIONCORPS: LISA SHIRK



I first became aware of VisionCorps through the services they offered to my grandson more than ten years ago. VisionCorps has continued to help him throughout his life.

Out of gratitude, my late husband and I decided we wanted to give back to VisionCorps. We worked with our local baseball team, the Lancaster Barnstormers, to come up with a way to raise awareness for VisionCorps and at the same time, promote my husband's

insurance agency. Every time the announcers called out that the team had scored a home run hit, they would also say that VisionCorps had scored another donation from our company. It was a fun and exciting way to give.

When I was asked to serve on the VisionCorps Foundation Board of Directors, I realized it was something I wanted to invest my time in. I've been on the board for quite a few years now. I love being part of this wonderful organization!

After my husband died, I decided to establish a golf tournament in his memory, as golf was his favorite sport. Initially, I thought that all the proceeds would go to Johns Hopkins, where he had received treatment. But through my work on the board, I learned VisionCorps was considering eliminating their golf fundraiser, and I saw another opportunity to give back.

Today, the proceeds from Ray Shirk's Big Swing for Sight, Science, and Research

help support the VisionCorps Foundation, Johns Hopkins, and the Children's Science Factory in Lancaster. This is our legacy -- our way of showing gratitude and support to organizations that have been near and dear to our hearts.

I think of VisionCorps as light in the darkness for people with limited, impaired, or no sight. It lights the way to live on a daily basis. It helps people improve their independence and self-worth. And VisionCorps not only offers services to clients, they also offer employment. I have a dear friend who is one of their employees with impaired vision, and he feels it is a blessing.

Unfortunately, until a personal need arises, people don't pay attention to what's available. Yet, most people have someone in their lives with a vision impairment or disability issue. I want to help get the word out so more people will be aware of VisionCorps' services, and many more will become supporters, donors, and volunteers.

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needs. "At VisionCorps, the adults 'get' him – they understand what he's dealing with. They know how to help him learn the skills he needs to navigate through life," Rebekah said. "He just feels so comfortable with the other kids at VisionCorps. He feels safe there – like he belongs. He can trust them. And the other kids have the same disability, so they have something in common. From a mom's perspective, he seems like he fits in there. It's really nice that way."

VisionCorps is Hudson's comfort zone. It is also a place where he can try new things as he grows and his needs change. It is a unique learning resource that he and his family can depend on today, and in the future.



The Robinson Family

insights

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Dennis Steiner, President

Questions, please contact Megan Tomsheck, VP & Chief Development Officer
717-393-5894 ext. 4115 or email megan@visioncorp.net

Please notify us if your contact information has changed.
717-393-5894 or email linda@visioncorp.net