

KIDS *can't*
WAIT



Vanessa
Behan



Kids Can't Wait

"My life would have been a lot different without Vanessa Behan. I didn't have a mother and I probably would have had to go to a lot of different houses which would have put a lot of burden on my dad's shoulders."

-Zeke, Former Vanessa Behan Kiddo

School is out, and for most of us there is excitement about our summer plans. Yet, for parents on stretched incomes, limited resources and living in stressful situations, summer can become overwhelming. In a year that brought on so many additional stressors, those already close to the edge of isolation and poverty are at risk of being sent over their breaking point this summer.

Vanessa Behan is here for these parents in the moments just before this breaking point, not after the damage has been done. A gift today will help us care for more than 1,000 kids visiting Vanessa Behan this summer. Your gift will give these children unforgettable summer experiences, build self-confidence and resiliency, and provide the immediate support their parents need before it is too late.

Right now, you can keep over 1,000 children safe throughout the summer months and provide support to their parents. Here's how:

- Make a gift using the enclosed envelope or at vanessabehan.org/newsletter.
- Join the Vanessa Promise Society for as little as \$30 a month.
(Contact our Grants & Stewardship Coordinator, Jenifer, at 509.340.0486)
- Become a volunteer by submitting an online application.

Please make a gift using the enclosed envelope
or at vanessabehan.org/newsletter.

Make your gift go even further!

Did you know that many companies will match your gift?
Check with your employer about their matching gift program.

"Vanessa Behan has been more than just childcare for us; they are part of our family"

We first met Tristain a couple years ago when her son, Christian, was six-months old. Tristain suffered an injury while working as a carpenter, and after three surgeries and joint replacements, was disabled. "Everything was difficult, walking our dogs with a newborn, my husband relapsing and taking off leaving me with no help and returning with an excuse, I was at my breaking point before even getting out of bed on most days." Tristain shared.

She heard about Vanessa Behan from a friend who was familiar with our services. Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, Tristain was interested in asking us for help, but hesitated at the thought of leaving her son with people she did not know. As a self-proclaimed "helicopter mom", she voiced her concerns with her friends and husband, who eventually talked her in to giving us a call. "I think more out of self-preservation than anything... the opportunity of getting a break was pretty enticing and with a bit of persuasion, I agreed."

When Tristain brought Christian to Vanessa Behan for the first time, she was welcomed with open arms and assured that her baby would be well cared for and loved while she attended physical therapy and rested. Our Family Support Specialist also invited Tristain to call for any updates on Christian while she was away. When she returned a few hours later, she was relieved to find her son happy, fed, and comfortable with our staff.

Over the next year, Tristain continued to call Vanessa Behan whenever she was in a lot of pain, needed a break, or needed to attend medical appointments. When her marriage started to deteriorate, she recognized when an argument was close to erupting into a full fight with her husband, and frequently brought Christian in to stay at Vanessa Behan so he would not witness it. "I didn't ever want our son to see his father's behavior or hear our yelling at one another," said Tristain.

In the fall of 2020, Tristain became a single parent and had an order of protection against her husband. She said, "Never did I think I'd be a single mom, unable to work at 40 years old, but there I was... I threw myself into being a mom." She continued to bring Christian in for care when her pain made it too difficult to care for him.



Tristain shared her story at our Vanessa Promise Benefit Luncheon in June. *Photo courtesy of Emily Regno Photo*

Last year, Tristain had a life altering moment: she got an infection in her artificial joint and could lose her leg if she did not have emergency surgery. The surgery needed to clean the infection also required that Tristain could not walk for six weeks! Thankfully, a friend was able to move in to help Tristain with her recovery and care for her son. Tristain shared, "the surgery was harder than I ever imagined but it was successful; Vanessa Behan was right there beside us, offering their services as we needed it."

Tristain has recovered and occasionally brings Christian to Vanessa Behan so she can go to her doctor's appointments and rest. Her son loves to play with building blocks in the Rainbow Room and being able to run off energy outside with other kids. Through tears, Tristain explained, "Vanessa Behan has been more than just childcare for us; they are part of our family and I don't know what we would ever do without them."

Tristain is one of hundreds of parents who turn to Vanessa Behan for help each year. We are honored to be a part of her journey. Without your investment in Vanessa Behan, Tristain's path to recovery and Christian's future could look much different. Thank you for helping us provide such a valuable resource to our community and ensuring that families like Tristain's have the support they need to thrive.

Creating Cycle Breakers



A Letter From
Amy Knapton Vega,
Executive Director

Almost everyone has heard the story about Vanessa Kay Behan and her tragic death from abuse. What we rarely discuss is what Vanessa's life might have looked like had she survived. While we would like to think she would have grown up happy, graduated from high school, gone off to college, found her career, married and had children of her own, the truth is, she could have very likely gone on to repeat the patterns happening in her home.

In fact, research shows that children growing up in difficult homes are at higher risk of doing poorly in school and struggle to form healthy peer relationships. These challenges follow children into adulthood and increase the odds of living in poverty, developing mental health issues or experiencing substance misuse by 3 to 4 times.

This is why the work happening at Vanessa Behan is so critical. We strive in every day experiences to help our parents and children become Cycle Breakers – a term that refers to the difficult work of changing harmful family patterns. It is our belief, based also on significant research, that the earlier in life we can provide children with a different experience, the easier it is for generational cycles to be broken.

Our goal is to expose children to (or reinforce) an environment full of rich activities with kind, supportive adults. You might be surprised to know that these moments do not need to be extravagant. It is often in the simple and ordinary moments that lives are changed. Through countless stories from former children, we know it is in moments like being rocked back to sleep after a nightmare, or having permission to dunk a sandwich in milk until it all falls apart that children build a belief system that the world can be a safe and supportive place. This realization is the foundation for becoming a Cycle Breaker.

The sooner we can expose a child to these experiences, the easier it is to grow up with healthy beliefs and behaviors. Thank you for helping us provide these experiences every single day!

Kindly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy".



Inside the Behan : Mini-Picassos

Along with our staff and volunteers, kiddos in our care have been becoming budding artists. We hope you enjoy their artwork as much as we do!



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• HEART to HEART •

Summer 2023 | Volume 29 | Number 2

Heart to Heart is published quarterly for the supporters of Vanessa Behan. In some cases the identity and circumstances of parents and children represented in this newsletter have been altered for the purpose of honoring their confidentiality. In keeping with our confidentiality policy, children pictured in this newsletter are not visitors of Vanessa Behan.

Vanessa Behan keeps kids safe, strengthens families and creates a healthier community in an environment of unconditional love, inclusion, authenticity, and adaptability. Named in memory of Vanessa Kay Behan, a Spokane girl who died of child abuse related injuries at the age of two, we're committed to preventing her story from happening again.

• Contact Us •



Vanessa
Behan

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Spokane, WA 99202

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www.vanessabehan.org

Keeping Kids Safe: Stories of our Vanessa Behan Families

Summer is here and hundreds of little ones have been exerting their energy playing games with new friends and amazing staff and volunteers, creating art projects, reading stories, and discovering a world of wonder in our outdoor play space. For their parents, this has been the crucial time needed to get support and resources. Here are the stories of just a few children who enjoyed the love and safety of Vanessa Behan this past spring thanks to your support.

👶 **Sabrina, 2:** Sabrina played with baby dolls, dressed up like Elsa in the Dramatic Playroom, and nodded off to sleep while watching *Frozen 2* while her parents took their older son for chemotherapy.

👶 **Damien, 9; Darla, 3:** The kiddos spent several hours playing board games with and staff, putting together puzzles, and playing outside while their dad attended an AA meeting to stay on top of his sobriety.

👶 **Riley, 8 months:** Riley was cuddled, fed, and soothed by a childcare volunteer while her mom enjoyed some much-needed sleep. Her mom said that she has been driving Riley around in the car nonstop, because that's the only time she can get her to go to sleep.

👶 **Mike, 2; Dayna, 4:** The kiddos drew with sidewalk chalk outside, enjoyed grilled cheese sandwiches, and drifted off to sleep to light music while their dad spent the night in a shelter after the family lost their housing.

👶 **Jenson, 4 months:** Jenson worked on tummy-time and then drifted off to sleep while being rocked by a House Parent so his mom could sleep. Jenson had a new sleeping schedule and she was exhausted.



👶 **Jemma, 5; June, 7:** The sisters enjoyed a bubble bath and fell asleep under warm quilts while their parents moved all their stuff to storage after eviction.

👶 **Samuel, 2:** Samuel played in the sandbox and enjoyed a slice of homemade pizza for lunch while his dad finished mandatory work training for his new job.

👶 **Derek, 3:** Derek built a block tower, had a second helping of goulash at lunch, and dressed up like Spiderman while his mom went to an important doctor's appointment.

👶 **Bella, 5:** Bella made shapes out of playdough with a cookie cutter, played Candy Land with a House Parent, and played "red light, green light" with the other kids while her mom took her final exam.

👶 **Zelda, 5:** Zelda spent the afternoon at Vanessa Behan playing basketball, painting butterflies, and running through the water outside while her dad packed up their apartment so they could move closer to family.

Vanessa Behan Immediate Needs List

- Canned Fruit & Vegetables –(50oz or smaller)
- Applesauce
- Otter Pops
- Laundry Soap & Dryer Sheets (Free & Clear)
- Diapers (Sizes 2-6; Huggies, Kirkland, & Pampers preferred)
- Pull-Ups (Sizes 2T-5T)
- Children's Sunscreen (not Coppertone)
- "Black Girl" brand sunscreen
- Snack Crackers (unopened & unexpired)
- Flour (unopened & unexpired)

For other immediate supply needs please see our Amazon Wish List at vanessabehan.org.

Vanessa Behan gratefully accepts items on our immediate needs list and Amazon Wish List at our home located at 2230 E. Sprague Ave., Mon. - Fri., 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Due to health and safety regulations, we are unable to accept donations of child car seats.

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While being
rocked by a
volunteer,
Eli (2) looked up
at her and said,
"You are old and
warm."



Mouths of Babes

Add Volunteering to Your Summer Plans

Looking to add a little something to your summer schedule and give back to your community? You're in luck! Volunteers are the heart of Vanessa Behan and every hour you contribute helps keep kids safe and strengthen families in our community.

Vanessa Behan is looking for energetic, enthusiastic, and passionate individuals to commit to weekly shifts and join our in-house volunteer team. We have different volunteer opportunities:

Childcare: Childcare volunteers assist House Parents by participating in childcare and routine activities under the direction of the staff. Volunteers interact with children during playtime, assist staff in daily activities such as serving meals, cleaning up and soothing/nurturing children at nap and bedtimes.

Kitchen Volunteer: Kitchen Volunteers prepare one snack and one meal and an optional dessert for up to 24 children and adults. Kitchen Volunteers follow the menu and will be able to provide input for their future shifts once they feel comfortable doing so.

Receptionist: Receptionists are often our families' first point of contact with the facility – what a privilege to experience! Receptionists see the generosity of our community through visiting donors and in-kind donations. Duties include answering the phone and greeting/assisting visitors, clients and donors.

Please consider joining our team today! Visit our website and click on the Volunteer tab to read more about the position and licensing requirements. Still have questions? Call our Administrative Coordinator, Jenny, at 509-598-7490 or email Jenny@vanessabehan.org.



Our "rock star" childcare volunteers get lots of snuggles!

A Glance Into Our Past

We are excited to share that our organization timeline is complete and on display in our main entrance!



Thanks to local artist, Jesse Pierpoint (above) for lending his design work!

Vanessa Promise Benefit Luncheon raises \$225,000

We had another successful luncheon event on June 7, 2023 at the Davenport Grand Hotel. Guests in attendance gathered to learn about the important work Vanessa Behan is doing right now to help the children and families of our community. In addition, supporters had the privilege of hearing from 13-year-old Zeke, a former Vanessa Behan kiddo, and Tristain, a mom who utilizes our services (For Tristain's story, please see page 3). Amy Knapton Vega, Vanessa Behan Executive Director, shared a message about our "Kids Can't Wait" initiative:

"The need now is to increase our operating budget to pay for the additional staff needed to care for our parents and their children. Right now, our gap is 3,000 kiddos or roughly \$2 Million dollars. While both numbers are large, if you remember last year, it is significantly less than the cost of not investing early and spending our money on substance misuse treatment, homelessness, violence intervention and the list goes on. \$2 Million broken down is: 2,000 people at \$1,000 per year. I believe we can do this! What if we became the city that invested first in our children?"

And, with a room full of over 1,000 guests, this message was heard, as this year's luncheon raised \$225,000 for Vanessa Behan! That is the chance for hundreds of amazing little ones to receive 24-hour safe care and unconditional love, while parents receive the support, hope, and time they need to become the best parents they can be to their kiddos. Thank you to the generous event sponsors listed who made this year's luncheon possible. In addition, we would like to thank our awesome table captains, every guest who attended the luncheon, our event emcee, Stephanie Vigil, our champion speaker Curt Holmes, our video producers Hamilton Studios, our photographer Emily Regno, and the volunteer counters and credit card processors from AgWest Farm Credit, BDO, and Horizon Credit Union.



Photos clockwise from upper left: Former Vanessa Behan kiddo Zeke with his dad, Mark.; We said goodbye to longtime emcee Stephanie Vigil and introduced KHQ's Hayley Guenther as our new emcee; Executive Director Amy Knapton Vega addresses the room. Photos courtesy of Emily Regno Photo

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KREM Cares Diaper Drive ends with 151,500 diapers donated

The KREM Cares Diaper Drive returned in May collecting an astonishing number of diapers for Vanessa Behan. For so many families already struggling to make ends meet, and with continued inflation in retail prices, the need for diapers has increased. Sadly, 1 in 3 families struggle to afford diapers for their little ones. Thanks to partners KREM2, Rosauers, and Washington Trust Bank, Vanessa Behan will be able to distribute 151,584 additional diapers in the coming year to our community's families. That is enough diapers to fill 3,031 bags of 50 diapers (and wipes)!

Amy Knapton Vega, Vanessa Behan Executive Director, shared a personal thank you to our community, "For the past 15 years, the KREM Cares Diaper Drive has helped us provide over 2.5 million diapers for families in our community. We are so grateful for KREM2, Rosauers, Washington Trust Bank, and the entire Spokane community for believing in our mission and ensuring that no child should go without a sufficient supply of diapers."

Thank you to our partners KREM2, Rosauers, and Washington Trust Bank who made this event a success, including our in-store volunteers, as well as all those in the community who supported this event!

We would also like to extend a special thanks to Stoneway Electric Supply for storing our diapers, and McKinstry Inc. for delivering them to our facility on a near-weekly basis.



Sponsored by:

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Washington Trust Bank presents a donation that allows Vanessa Behan to provide 1,000 bags of diapers and wipes to area families.

Thank You Cheers for Kids Sponsors

We can't thank you enough for your support for this important event!



Benefiting Vanessa Behan

Presenting



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Invest For the Future: Many Ways to Give

Vanessa Behan tries to be on the forefront about communicating how you can support our work. We know that everyone's financial situation is different, and are grateful for you, our supporters, who invest in keeping kids safe and strengthening families. We have been asked, with more frequency, about the types of gifts we accept. There are many ways to give to Vanessa Behan. Aside from cash, Vanessa Behan accepts the following:

- Stock, or other securities
- Distributions from IRA accounts
- Grants from Donor Advised Funds
- Life insurance policies
- Real Estate
- Gifts under your will
- Other Assets



Giving to Vanessa Behan, in some of these ways, may have income tax benefits. We encourage you to work with tax professionals and financial advisors about the specific benefits of these options. Feel free to reach out to our Development Director, Lacey Renner at (509) 340-0482, with any questions you have about the types of gifts we accept.

Vanessa Behan Award Winner Spotlights

Heart of Gold Award Walgreens Store #1993



Thank you Walgreens Store #1993!
Obtaining a yearly flu shot is a licensing requirement we try to offer to our staff at no cost. Last Fall, they came to the rescue when our regular shot clinic providers couldn't get the flu shots in time. Walgreens not only provided the shots, but also sent pharmacists to our building to administer the shots to nearly 75 people.

Heart of Gold Award Chris Courtney & Bailey May



This grandfather/granddaughter duo shop together and purchase large quantities of play clothes for our kiddos. It's important to Chris that Bailey May understands that our community is stronger and more cohesive when we give back, when we support organizations who are doing the hard work to lift up marginalized populations. What admirable efforts of shaping the next generation.

There's No Place Like Vanessa Behan



For families struggling with poverty, frequent moves can be a fact of life. Those moves not only change the child's home, but their school too. Recently, one child talked with staff about their struggles with the challenges of having to make new friends due to frequent school changes. The child shared that their landlord had come to the door recently with a piece of paper, and now they had to move again. The child also noted that, "Vanessa Behan is kinda like home."

While many things are uncertain for this child and their family, Vanessa Behan is a constant they can count on.

Emotional Coaching Bags are Now Available for Families

Vanessa Behan has a new parenting resource available – our Emotional Coaching Bags are now ready for parents to check out for use at home.

Each bag is filled with activities and books related to a specific emotional topic:

- Anger
- Sadness
- Worry
- Scared
- Biting
- Sleep Time
- Missing Someone
- Sharing
- Resiliency (*pictured right*)
- "All About Me" (for ages 8 and up)



Teaching children how to regulate their emotions is an important skill they will use over their lifetime. Regulating emotions is a foundational skill to having healthy relationships as well as being successful in school or later on in work.

These bags offer parents an opportunity to increase their bond with their child when they go through the bag together. They also teach parents positive parenting skills, which help break unhealthy generational cycles that run in many families.

Each bag contains a book chosen specifically for that bag. For example, *The Invisible String*, which is in the Missing Someone Bag. For families experiencing divorce, death or some other reason why someone is absent, the book creates a beautiful image of an invisible string between the heart of the child and the heart of the person who is absent. This bag also contains a blank box the child can keep and decorate in order to create a memory box of the person they are missing.

Sometimes life is tough to explain to children. Sometimes a parent's only experience with managing an emotion has been punitive. With the help of an Emotional Coaching Bag, parents now have a tool that can guide them in helping their child navigate the emotions with which they struggle.

Emotional Coaching Bags can be checked out at the front desk of Vanessa Behan Monday – Friday, between 8:30 AM and 4:30 PM. We ask that the bags be returned once the child has mastered the skill – although some of the bags have items the child can keep. Anyone can check out a bag – parents don't need to use other Vanessa Behan services in order to use them.

Breaking generational cycles while prepping children for healthy emotional futures – it's a tough job, but with help from Vanessa Behan's Emotional Coaching Bags, parents can do it!



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