



Fragile Babies. Family Support.

2020 Annual Report



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Our Mission

Hand to Hold® helps families before, during, and after NICU stays and infant loss by providing powerful resources for the whole family, and most importantly, one-on-one mentoring from someone who has been there.

Our Four Cornerstones

Hand to Hold's programs, support and resources are focused on four central strengths*:



Peer Support
from trained,
supervised NICU
graduate parents



Psychological & Emotional Support
crucial for improved
successful outcomes



Whole Family Care
including siblings
and grandparents



NICU & Beyond
from antepartum
through early
childhood years

**Essential components in the delivery of Family-Centered and Trauma-Informed Care, as recognized by The Joint Commission and the National Perinatal Association (NPA).*

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Supporting Families *Through the COVID-19 Crisis*

While the threat of COVID-19 created challenges for us all in 2020, imagine adding a fragile baby fighting for their life in the NICU. Imagine the fear of quarantine that could keep you from being with your child. Imagine the anxiety of bringing home a medically fragile baby during this time of fear and uncertainty.

From visitation restrictions to fear and anxiety about contracting the virus itself, Hand to Hold has seen a 241% increase in requests for support from NICU parents since the onset of this pandemic. We pivoted quickly to support families through our free virtual support services: online virtual support groups, podcasts, peer mentors, and private Facebook communities. Our trained Family Support Specialists also continue to provide additional direct support by phone and email.



Welcome Letter

Hand to Hold celebrated our 10th Anniversary this year - a huge accomplishment given that almost a third of nonprofits never reach this major milestone. According to *Forbes*, more than half of all nonprofits chartered are destined to fail or stall within a few years due to leadership issues and the lack of a strategic plan.

Hand to Hold is the exception because of our bold vision and the dedication and steadfast support of my co-founders, Dave and Allie Alter, our board, staff, donors, volunteers, and Hope 100 members, who have been with us every step of the way.

When I started Hand to Hold, I was struggling to manage two small kids. I wrote the original "business plan" in my well-worn mom's devotional planner while sitting in the carpool pick-up line at preschool. But what I lacked in an MBA I made up for in passion and persistence and a bold vision for changing a system I felt was broken - a system that largely ignored the impact of a traumatic birth on the mental health of NICU parents and the ultimate long-term impact on the baby and family.

Throughout the last decade, we have had the honor to watch Hand to Hold connect tens of thousands of NICU parents

annually to life-changing support to help them heal from trauma, to help them bond with and care for their medically fragile babies, and to connect with one another in a true, supportive community. We've witnessed families return after healing from their own journeys, now ready to give back and help others.



Thank you for an amazing 10 years! It has been an incredible and most fulfilling journey.

In deepest appreciation,
Kelli Kelley, Founder & CEO

Kelli Kelley



"Hand to Hold was my compass during our 8-week NICU stay. They let me know from day one that I was not alone and that there were resources and other families that could help me get through it. The other NICU families in the Hand to Hold community knew exactly what we felt and thought. Hand to Hold is the reason we did not feel alone in a hard and challenging marathon of growing a preemie baby. We are forever grateful!"

-Rachel K.
received support from a peer mentor

Learning to be Fighters

The Allen Family Story

Tiffany and Darren Allen's daughter, Kinslee, was born in August of 2020 at just 24 weeks - a terrifying ordeal in any situation, but even more so during a global pandemic.



With a terrible headache one day, Tiffany called her doctor, and an exam showed that she was suffering from severe preeclampsia. Her doctor sent her straight to labor and delivery. The couple thought they'd be monitored for a few days, but Tiffany's blood pressure spiked, she developed pulmonary edema, and her liver began spilling toxins into her body. An ambulance transferred her to St. David's Medical Center, and within 30 minutes she was on the operating table, about to deliver her baby girl.

Darren and Tiffany were allowed to visit the NICU together in the first 24 hours after Kinslee's birth, but after that, they had to visit in shifts, each of them experiencing special NICU milestones without the other.

Enduring the rollercoaster of events and emotions in the NICU was even more difficult without a partner to help shoulder the burden. The couple connected with their Hand to Hold Family Support Specialist, Christine, a NICU and bereaved mom, not long after Kinslee was born. They are active in Hand to Hold's private Facebook groups and participate in virtual support groups, launched when COVID-19 restrictions temporarily cancelled in-person support groups.

"Hand to Hold has been there with us so we've been able to find support through almost every avenue, whether we're at the hospital or at home, even in the middle of the night," said Tiffany. "They are always there if we need it."

Now that Kinslee is home, the Allens are thrilled to be together as a family. But they also know that their journey is not over. They're ready to take any future hurdles as they come.

"It does get easier," said Darren. "We're all learning to be fighters."



"We're all learning to be fighters."

"[Virtual support] group has really helped me to understand and process my emotions that I have held onto for so long. I have had so much guilt for both of my NICU boys and now I feel like my heart can start to mend together again."

-Christina C., Little Elm, TX

Impact Numbers

January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020

NICU Bedside Visits: **5,458**

210 Family members attended a support group

Individual families served by our hospital ambassadors: **2,052**

Volunteer Highlight

January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020

Volunteer hours completed during 2020: **2,818**

Which Included:

23 in-office days, totaling 299 hours

588 support group lunches provided at three Austin-area hospitals

We love making scent cloths for Hand to Hold! Thank you so much for all that you do to support NICU families. We are happy to help!"

-Amy Wagner,
National Charity League



Peer Support:
General Support Requests: **415**

Active mentors: **229**

Matches made: **256**



"It is so helpful to have someone who truly understands. I have been so stressed and have not had time to think about my own self care. [Hand to Hold] reminds me how important it is that I take care of myself. They provide so much support and reassurance."

- Taylor Pessina, Austin, TX

Podcast Numbers

Podcast listeners increased in 2020 by 160%.

NICU Dad Discussions: **1,776**

NICU Heroes: **9,817**

NICU Love & Loss: **621**

NICU Now: **13,869**

Beyond the NICU: **1,796**



"Having the support of a mentor means that there are others with similar experiences and that I am not alone. Having someone who can relate to my NICU experience and who can understand my feelings is reassuring and meaningful. The most interesting part to this was that my mentor was in a different country (and I still felt supported)! It goes to show that parents of NICU babies are all over the world and experiencing the same feelings, hardships, going through the same types of emotional rollercoasters and are experiencing feelings of being alone in one way or another."

-Bryanna B.,
Canada

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The Power of Peer Support

NICU mom Tatiana W. of Atlanta, GA, didn't seek out support until after her child was home from the NICU for a few months, when she realized she was still processing the emotions from a traumatic birth and NICU stay.



"My only wish is that I had known about Hand to Hold sooner," says Tatiana. "I joined a support group, which provided the emotional support I was looking for." Tatiana noticed that Hand to Hold offered to match her with a volunteer peer mentor, and after some hesitation, she reached out for one. She was matched with Laura K., a NICU-graduate parent from Texas, but currently living in Jakarta. Laura has been a Hand to Hold peer mentor since 2013, after enduring two separate NICU stays with her 24-weeker and her 36-weeker. Laura has mentored several families through their NICU journeys.

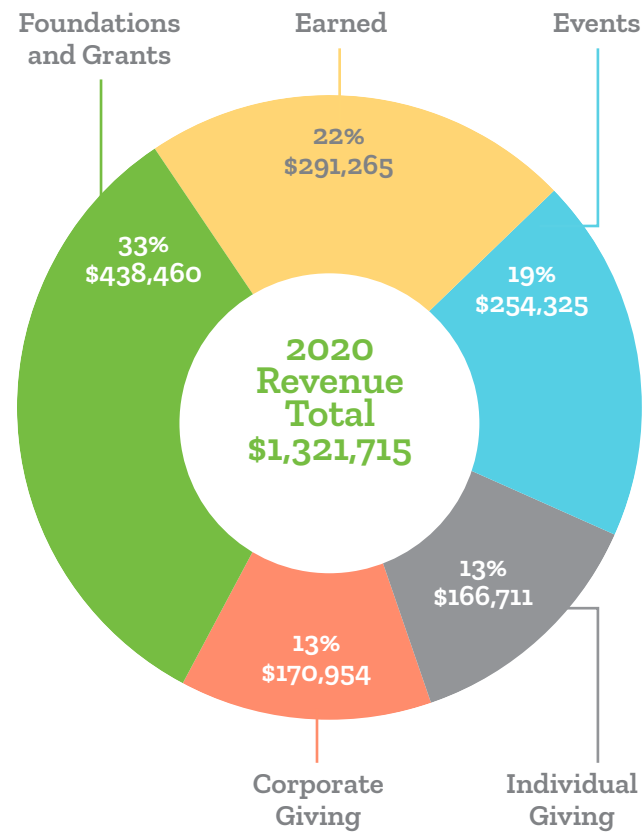
"My peer mentor turned out to be a lifesaver," says Tatiana. "It was so refreshing to talk to someone who truly knew exactly what I was feeling and going through."

"I would recommend Hand to Hold to anyone dealing with birth trauma and having a child staying and/or just home from the NICU. My peer mentor was just able to provide a level of support like no other."

Opposing page: Tatiana W., Atlanta, GA

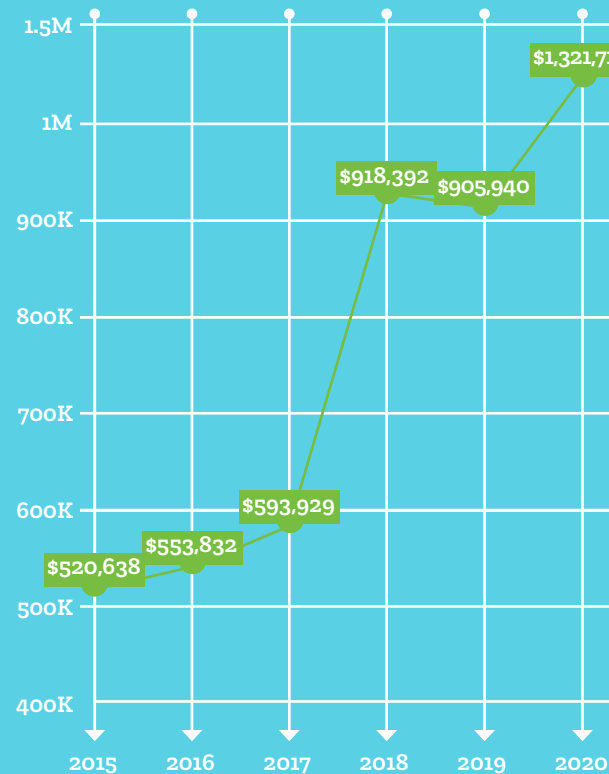
This page: Laura K. and family, Jakarta, Indonesia

Financials



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Year-Over-Year Growth



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"The biggest hardship that COVID caused was the absence of the parent/family connection group that our NICU typically has. They had to temporarily stop the support group meeting and unfortunately, they hadn't set up online groups. This was the hardest part for me because I truly needed to connect with others who were on or had been through this journey. Although our NICU didn't offer any substitute program, it led me to Hand to Hold, which has truly been a blessing. I've found so much support through Hand to Hold and it was thanks to COVID."

-Drina Spain
Whittier, CA.



HAND to HOLD

Toll Free: 855-H2H-NICU
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