



Impact Report 2024



Hand to Hold™
NICU BABIES • PARENT SUPPORT

handtohold.org

Together, We Thrive

In 2024, Hand to Hold delivered 111,402 sessions of support — a 54% increase over 2023! This includes counseling, support groups, and bedside peer support.

We **expanded in-hospital support** to Texas Children's Hospital — the state's largest NICU — and its sister site at The Woodlands, reaching 5,000 more families. We also welcomed 600 attendees to our **annual NICU Mental Health Conference**, introduced **a sliding scale for counseling**, redesigned our **NICU Graduate Handbook**, and released **34 new podcast episodes**. These milestones were made possible by your generosity.

Thank you for helping us provide essential early intervention mental health support for NICU families. Your belief in our mission allows us to grow, innovate, and continue showing up for NICU families every day!

With gratitude,
Kelli Kelley, Founder
Katrina Moline, Executive Director



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“Hand to Hold’s Support Group has given me the strength and freedom to be vulnerable, to find optimism in my life and strength to advocate for my family.”
- NICU Parent

Program Growth YOU Made Possible!

In-Hospital Support | Austin, TX and Houston, TX

We expanded to Houston through a partnership with Texas Children's Hospital (TCH), home to the largest NICU in the state, and its sister hospital at The Woodlands. We also saw high attendance at all hospital events, reflecting strong engagement from NICU families. **In 2025, we plan to enhance bereavement support resources, launch a volunteer program in Houston, and increase our support hours within the NICU at TCH and TCH The Woodlands. We will continue to pursue additional hospital partnerships.**

Virtual Support | Nationwide

We reached families in 37 states and 3 countries, tripling the number of families supported. Our weekly virtual support groups continued to grow, providing free, accessible care across the country. Additionally, we expanded our resources in Spanish to better serve our diverse NICU community. **In 2025, we plan to expand support groups, pilot a 6-month 1:1 virtual support model, increase mobile app engagement with more resources for Spanish-speaking families, grow our Peer Mentor Program, and create additional pre-recorded parent panels.**

Counseling | Texas and Florida

We launched a Sliding-Scale Program for clients graduating from free counseling sessions to help parents overcome financial barriers to long-term mental health support, began our internship program to address the critical gap in available perinatal counseling specialists, and celebrated our counselors earning dual licensure in Texas and Florida. **In 2025, counselors aim to reach more pregnant individuals before their NICU stay, explore ways to serve clients in all 50 states, lead psycho-educational support groups, and will begin developing wellness journals for parents.**

Our 'Secret Sauce'

Our 'secret sauce' is our Family Support Specialists, who are board certified through the state of Texas as mental health peer specialists. Specialists bring personal NICU experience, offering compassionate, relatable support because they've lived it themselves.

*Our peer support model has been proven effective in **reducing anxiety and depression** in maternal health settings¹.*



1. Center for Maternal Mental Health. (2023, April). A Significant Solution for Maternal Mental Health: Certified Peer Specialists [Issue Brief]. <https://policycentermmh.org/certified-peer-support>

Real Families, Real Impact



Pictured: Gemiece & Legend

Finding Joy and Reassurance in the NICU

During her 30-day stay in the NICU with her baby, Legend, Gemiece found comfort, connection, and even moments of joy through Hand to Hold.

“I loved Hand to Hold,” she shared. “They made being a NICU parent feel fun and reassuring.” She looked forward to celebrating her baby’s milestones with the support of Hand to Hold — especially the opportunity to collect meaningful milestone charms, which became a source of hope and encouragement.

“It’s easier to communicate with someone who’s been through the NICU life,” she said.

For the First Time, I Didn’t Feel Forgotten

During a recent Cafecito session, our virtual support group for Spanish-speaking parents, we welcomed a new mom who found Hand to Hold on Facebook. She had been searching for NICU support in Spanish for more than three years. When she clicked on our link and saw the resources available in her language, she was moved to tears.

“For the first time,” she said, “I didn’t feel forgotten.”

Her gratitude was immediate. Before the session even ended, she had already signed up for the next one.

She is now the third mom in our Cafecito group to express how deeply seen and supported she feels. These powerful moments reflect the commitment of everyone at Hand to Hold to create a welcoming, inclusive space for Spanish-speaking families.

**Your generosity helps us create spaces
where no parent feels alone!**

“I never even knew where to buy preemie clothes, and Mrs. Shardá showed me exactly where to go.”

“Having support from someone who had lived the NICU experience made all the difference.”

- Gemiece, NICU mom

Connection, Care & Community

Specialists round during the day and are also in hospitals evenings and weekends — ensuring working parents, as well as those with limited availability, aren't left out.

“Hand to Hold has really **helped me feel like there is someone who cares** and knows what I’m going through.”

- A NICU Mom

“I **feel less alone** and that **I’ve found my people that understand** how I’m feeling and what I’m going through **because they’ve been there before or are right there with me.**”

- A NICU Parent

“We adopted and the milestone beads meant so much to the birth mom and my wife. It **helped us connect over the baby’s achievements** and **build a relationship** that will be the base of a healthy open adoption.”

- Adam, a NICU Dad

“They **gave me a voice.**”

- Rebecca, a NICU Mom



Impact at a Glance

“This group helped me hold space for my feelings and gave me others to talk to. It helped me accept that I’m not alone — that my struggle is seen, recognized, and supported.”

98% of parents reported Hand to Hold’s peer support reduced depression, anxiety, and stress

111,402 sessions of support provided in 2024

100% of our programs experienced year-over-year growth

89% of counseling clients reported decreased depression after just 8 no-cost sessions



Hope in Motion

(Virtual) NICU Mental Health Conference

Still the only national conference bringing together NICU professionals and parents to focus on mental health, we welcomed 600 attendees representing 42 states and 5 countries.

NICU Hero Awards

Sponsored by Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals and AngelEye Health, these national parent-nominated awards created awareness and celebrated a NICU individual (Sue Hall, MD, MSW) and a NICU team (El Camino Health NICU). Both awards were announced at our conference.

NICU Graduate Then & Now Contest

Sponsored by Huggies®, this contest created awareness and celebrated NICU families and their grads across the U.S. In 2024, we welcomed 1,386 participants from 52 U.S. states & territories, along with 5 Canadian provinces.

NICU Graduate Reunion

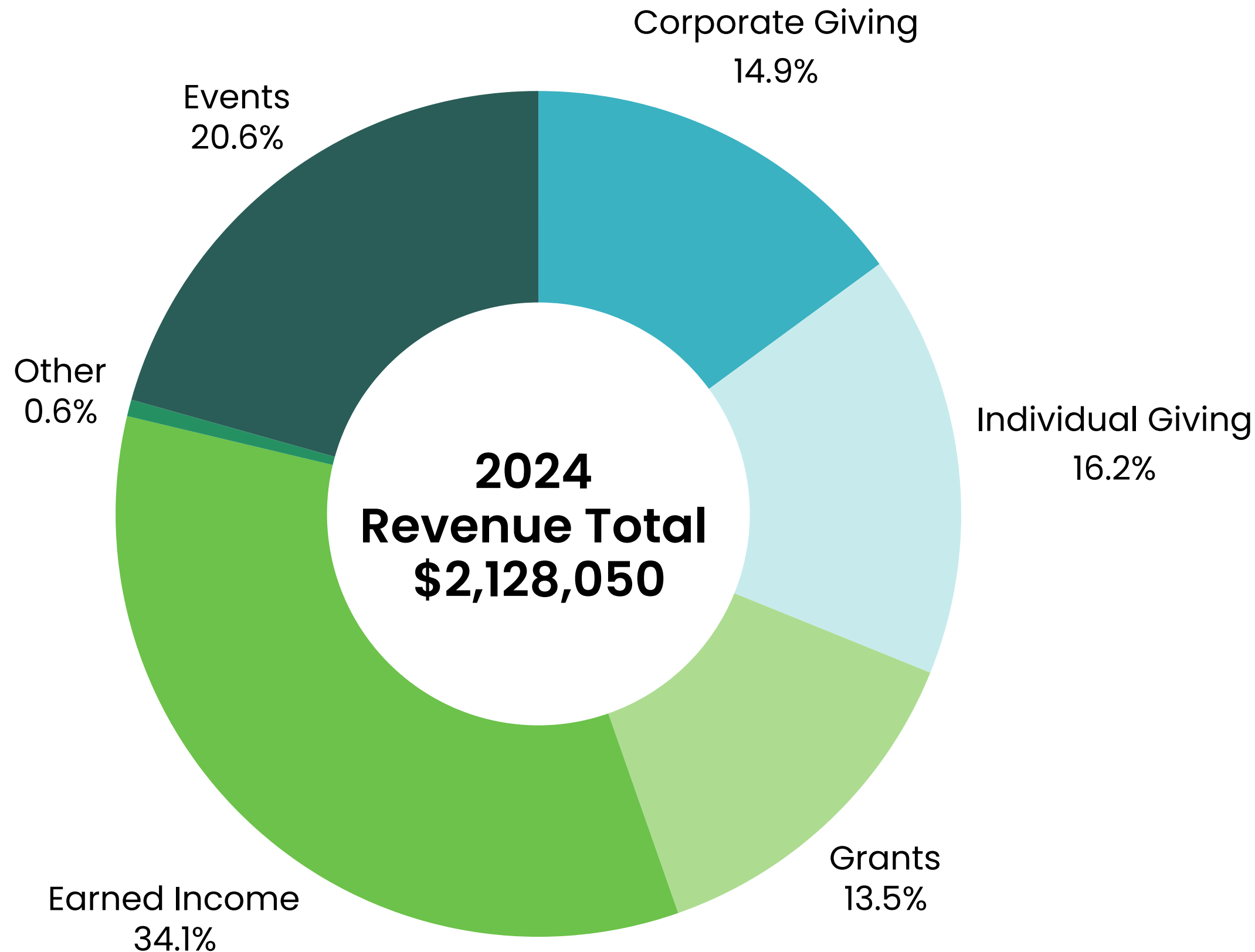
At our NICU graduation celebration in Austin, TX, we welcomed more than 400 families to walk our signature graduation stage, celebrating the resilience of their NICU graduates.

NICU Champions Gala

More than 400 community leaders and NICU parents gathered for an inspiring evening in Austin, TX, to honor those who have demonstrated exceptional support for the NICU community and our mission.



Financials



NICU parents face up to 30% higher rates of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs)² — including depression and anxiety — compared to parents of healthy newborns.

Our early intervention mental health programs:

- Improve parental mental health & access to support*
- Strengthen bonding with baby*
- Empower parents to become confident, resilient caregivers*

² Johnson Rolfe, J., Paulsen, M. Protecting the infant-parent relationship: special emphasis on perinatal mood and anxiety disorder screening and treatment in neonatal intensive care unit parents. *J Perinatol* 42, 815–818 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41372-021-01256-7>

Priorities for 2025

Launch NEW 3-Year Strategic Plan: *Our plan will prioritize growth, equity, and innovation, ensuring we scale to meet the rising needs of NICU families, while maintaining the high-quality support they deserve.*

Expand Support: *Deliver 125,000 Sessions of Support across all programs, a 12% increase over 2024.*

Measure the Impact of Support: *Develop and implement a standardized, validated measurement process to assess the impact of Hand to Hold's programs on NICU families' mental health and well being.*





Hand to Hold[™]
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