



Hand to Hold™
NICU BABIES · PARENT SUPPORT

2025 Impact Report

handtohold.org

Carrying Hope Forward

In 2025, Hand to Hold walked alongside thousands of NICU families, meeting them with compassion, connection, and care when they needed it most.

Together, we delivered **89,914 sessions of support** through counseling, 1:1 peer mentorship, support groups, bedside peer support, and more. We expanded services at three partner hospitals, welcomed **550+ NICU parents and professionals** to our NICU Mental Health Conference, refreshed our *NICU Graduate Handbook*, continued sliding-scale counseling, and released **30 new podcast episodes**, each designed to reach families wherever they are.

Guided by the enduring vision of hope inspired by our founder, Kelli Kelley, this year reflected both growth and deepened commitment, strengthening programs, expanding access, and centering family voices across our work.

Thank you for standing with NICU families and helping to ensure they continue to feel seen, supported, and never alone.

With gratitude,
Katrina Moline
Executive Director

*On September 11, Austin City Council recognized Hand to Hold with a **formal proclamation during NICU Awareness Month**, celebrating our impact on families and marking a milestone for our organization. Hospital leaders, board members, and NICU families attended.*



Our Mission

Hand to Hold® is dedicated to providing early-intervention mental health support before, during, and after a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) stay, ensuring that all NICU families thrive.

2025 Board Members

Cory Ritthaler, Board Chair
Eva Wheatley, Board Chair Elect
Kam Looney, Board Treasurer
Tiffany Gladdis, Board Secretary
Efrem Colmenero
Chantelle Barretto
K. Machel Delange
Kellie Lavergne
Adam Law
Meredith Mallory
Avid Noble
Moline Pandiyan
Tyler Rudd
Doak M. Worley, IV

2026 Board Members

In-Hospital Support

By your side in the NICU in Austin and Houston, TX

We provided **23,054 support sessions in Texas Hospitals** through our 1:1 bedside and group programs. We also facilitated annual educational weeks focused on nutrition, bonding with baby, and Kangaroo Care (skin-to-skin contact), along with holiday events designed to meet NICU families where they are, acknowledging that celebrations may look a little different in the NICU.

Key Highlights

- Expanded our team of Family Support Specialists to increase bilingual support
- Expanded support to families at Dell Children's Hospital Cardiac Care Unit in Austin, TX
- Provided culturally responsive, trauma-informed support to parents across different languages and backgrounds, helping them to connect with peers and staff



501

individuals attended our in-hospital educational events, with **record attendance** at our Mother's and Father's Day events

100%

of parents surveyed reported feeling supported by their Hand to Hold mental health peer specialists

100%

of NICU Managers agree Hand to Hold helps provide a better understanding of how to support NICU parents

What families say ...

"I was hesitant at first ... After attending my first session, it was a great relief to find a group of women who had been through a similar journey. The support has been tremendous and overwhelmingly good for my soul."

– Pam K., Texas NICU mom

Powered by Experience

Our secret ingredient is our on-staff Family Support Specialists who bring lived experience of a NICU journey and are also board certified through the State of Texas as mental health peer specialists. This unique model allows our support staff to provide compassionate, relatable support that resonates with families.

Research shows our peer-support model effectively reduces anxiety and depression in maternal health settings [1].

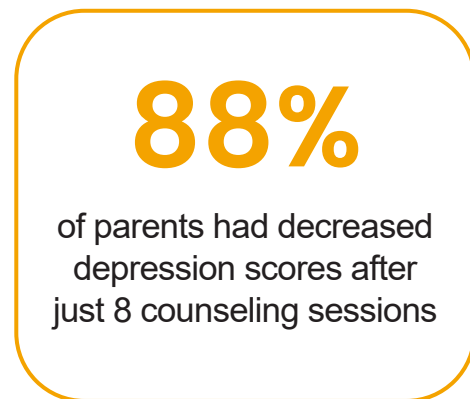


1. Center for Maternal Mental Health. (2023, April). *A Significant Solution for Maternal Mental Health: Certified Peer Specialists* [Issue Brief]. <https://policycentermmh.org/certified-peer-support>

Counseling

Professional care for parents navigating grief, stress, and trauma

Parents can access our individual and couples counseling services in English and Spanish. Our licensed counselors are trained in trauma, grief and loss, and perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs), which are common among NICU parents. This year, we **expanded our Internship Program** by hosting a second intern through Baylor University, strengthening our workforce pipeline. We also **expanded professional networks and expertise** by building partnerships with new organizations and attending continuing-education conferences, including the Postpartum Support International Conference.



What families say about our support ...

"I felt so hopeless. I was fresh out of the hospital. I had gone through a life-saving surgery and my baby was in the NICU for 16 days. Hand to Hold therapy has truly helped me get better with dealing with my emotions concerning the near-death experience I had and bonding with my daughter. I couldn't have made it this far without Hand to Hold. Thank you."
– L.S., Florida NICU mom

How to Request Support

Who's eligible:

- Families who have experienced a NICU stay or loss, or are navigating a high-risk pregnancy, are eligible for **8 free counseling sessions**
- Texas and Florida residents

How it works:

1. Complete a brief online request
2. Hear from our team within 1–2 business days
3. Schedule a virtual session with your assigned therapist

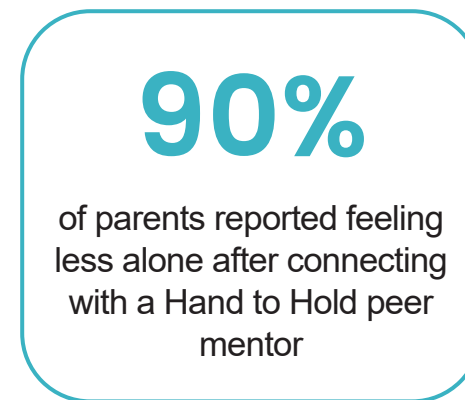
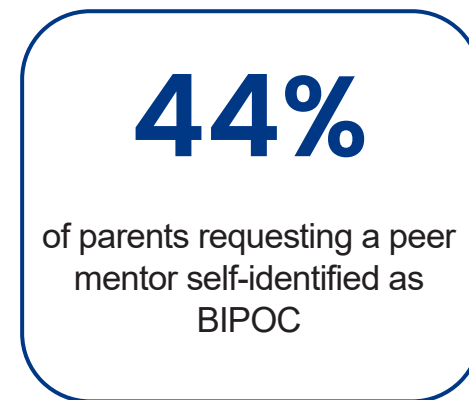
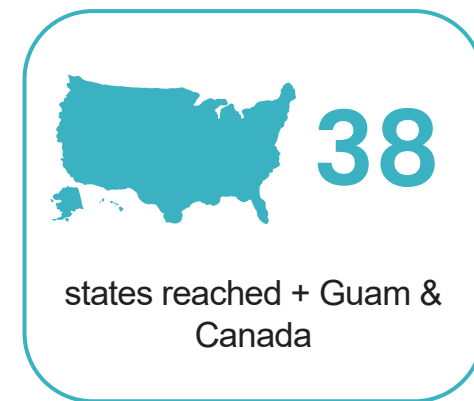
Request Support



Virtual Program Support

Online peer support, mentorship, and resources

Through our free, bilingual virtual programs, parents can access support groups, 1:1 peer mentoring, a parent podcast, and a mobile app to provide connection, guidance, and reassurance beyond the hospital walls. This online model removes barriers to care, giving parents consistent emotional support and community from the NICU through the transition home and beyond. This year, we saw an increase in requests from Spanish-speaking parents and embarked on a new and improved version of the Hand to Hold App, with more to come in 2026!



What families say about our support ...

“Having a peer mentor means not feeling alone as a parent with a baby in the NICU. It means having someone who truly understands what you're going through, who can empathize, be a sounding board, or give advice during the overwhelming moments. It's invaluable to have this kind of emotional support during the isolating time of being in the NICU.”

– Monique W., Texas NICU mom

Connect with Us

[Join a Virtual Support Group](#)

[Request a Peer Mentor](#)

[Volunteer to be a Peer Mentor](#)

[Listen to NICU Babies, Parent Support Podcast](#)

[Listen to NICU Heroes Podcast for Professionals](#)

[Download the Hand to Hold App](#)

[Subscribe to Our Newsletter](#)



Partners in Impact

Highlights of partnerships strengthening our impact on NICU families



Championing NICU families through essential support and national awareness

[Learn More](#)



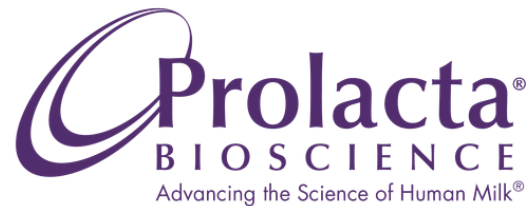
Advancing NICU family mental health and amplifying family voices through national education and storytelling

[Learn More](#)



Supporting initiatives focused on improving outcomes for NICU families and infants, with Hand to Hold serving on its Advocacy Advisory Council

[Learn More](#)



Social impact campaign elevating awareness of NICU and preterm infant needs

[View Campaign](#)



Pilot launched: Microlearning Video Series for NICU professionals

[Explore the series and earn CEUs](#)

Explore a Partnership with Us

Corporate partnerships are a powerful way to drive meaningful, measurable impact for NICU families nationwide.

[Learn more about partnering with Hand to Hold](#)

Hands-On Helping

Our volunteers help us work smarter! Through partnerships with organizations like National Charity League NW Austin and BCBSTX, we've been able to leverage volunteer support to make our processes more efficient and support our day-to-day operations.

In 2025, we launched **Weekly Wednesday Morning Volunteer Days**, giving individuals and groups the chance to contribute more consistently. Together, our amazing volunteers contributed 815 hours, equivalent to \$28,353 in support!

Interested in helping?

[Learn More About Volunteering](#)



Pictured: Nolan Ryan Foundation Volunteer Group

Parent Voices of Hope

Across every program, parents tell us the same thing: support doesn't remove the fear – it makes it survivable.

“Hand to Hold is definitely a game changer. You all can't stop the scary things from happening but having someone to ride the roller-coaster beside me has allowed me the chance to walk around confidently.”

– Stephanie M., Tennessee NICU mom

“Having a mentor... helped me to understand what I went through wasn't my fault and I couldn't keep blaming myself.”

– Desiree P., Texas NICU mom

“Having the support of a peer mentor has meant having someone who truly understands the challenges I'm facing because they've been through them too. It's been incredibly reassuring to know I'm not alone, and that there's someone I can turn to for honest advice, encouragement, and perspective. Their support has not only helped me stay motivated but also inspired me to be a better father.”

— Chris P., Pennsylvania NICU dad

“Hand to Hold has been visiting almost daily since my son arrived at Texas Children's Hospital... We shared fears and successes, charges forward and setbacks. Was a blessing to know you are not alone and these babies thrive outside of NICU!”

– Texas NICU parent

Real stories. Real support. Real hope.



Impact at a Glance

“El conversar y compartir experiencias me ayuda a sentir confianza.” [Talking and sharing experiences builds my confidence.]. – Texas NICU parent

100% of parents reported feeling feel less alone in their journey with Hand to Hold’s support

89,914 sessions of support provided in 2025

93% of parents reported feeling more hopeful with Hand to Hold’s support

88% of counseling clients reported decreased depression after just 8 sessions of treatment



Moments of Hope

Celebrating families, milestones, & the power of community

NICU Mental Health Conference

Our national virtual conference brought together 550 NICU professionals and parents from 46 states and 7 countries, advancing education on strengthening mental health support for NICU families.

NICU Hero Awards

Sponsored by Keenova (formerly Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals), these national, parent-nominated awards honored an outstanding NICU physician and team, Richard J. Shaw, MD, and the Ascension Dell Children's Medical Center NICU (Austin, TX), with awards presented live during our conference.

NICU Graduate Then & Now Contest

Sponsored by Huggies®, this national contest celebrated NICU graduates and their families while raising awareness across the U.S. In 2025, 1,015 families participated from 47 U.S. states and territories, 2 Canadian provinces, and 1 Australian state.

NICU Graduate Reunion

At our signature NICU graduation celebration in Austin, TX, more than 1,300 people gathered to honor NICU graduates and hold space for families whose journey included loss.

Hope Gala

More than 300 community leaders and NICU parents gathered in Austin for an inspiring evening that raised \$355,000+ to support our mission and honor champions of the NICU community.

NICU GRAD
THEN & NOW
PHOTO CONTEST
2025

ENTER YOUR GRAD

AZRAEL THEN

AZRAEL NOW

Celebrate. Make an Impact. Win Prizes

Presented By: **HUGGIES**

Hand to Hold.
NICU BABIES · PARENT SUPPORT

The graphic features a green background with silhouettes of people. It includes two polaroid-style photos: one of a newborn baby in a hospital bed with medical equipment, labeled 'AZRAEL THEN', and another of the same child as a toddler wearing a red bow and a 'Darlin'' t-shirt, labeled 'AZRAEL NOW'. A starburst graphic says 'ENTER YOUR GRAD'. At the bottom, it says 'Celebrate. Make an Impact. Win Prizes' and 'Presented By: HUGGIES'. The 'Hand to Hold' logo is also present.



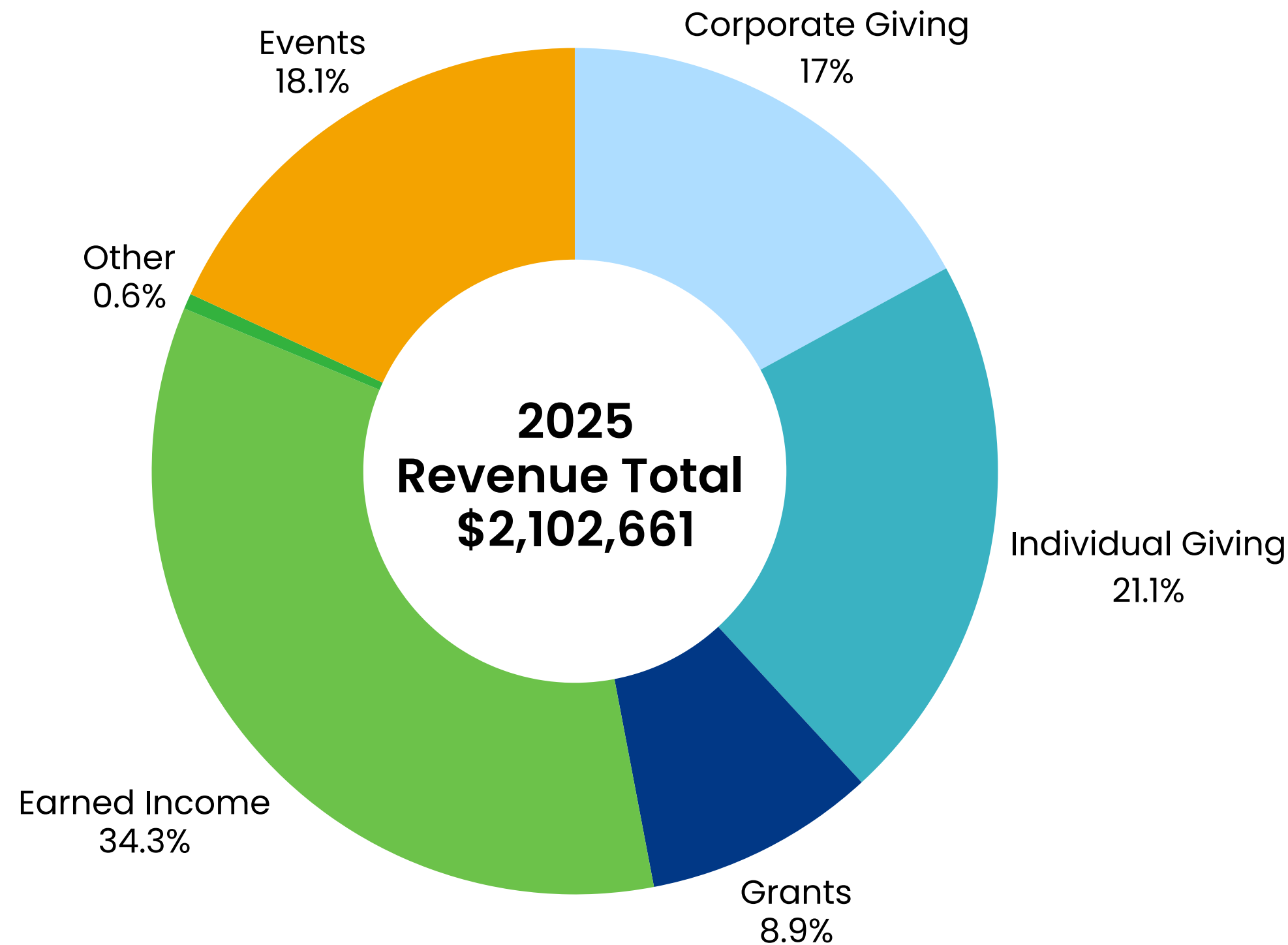
Financials

A Commitment to Mission-Focused Spending

Historical Expense Allocation

Over the past five years, more than 75% of our expenses each year have been programmatic, reflecting our commitment to mission-first stewardship.

- 2020: 80% programmatic
- 2021: 75% programmatic
- 2022: 78% programmatic
- 2023: 81% programmatic
- 2024: 77% programmatic
- 2025: 2025 figures are preliminary and will be reflected in our forthcoming IRS Form 990



Shaping the Next 3 Years

Building on a strong foundation of growth and impact, Hand to Hold is finalizing an inclusive strategic plan to guide our work from 2026–2028, grounded in community voice and focused on expanding access to compassionate, measurable NICU-family support.

A Community-Centered Approach

This strategic plan was shaped with the community we serve. Hand to Hold leadership, board members, staff, NICU parents, NICU professionals, funders, and partners engaged through surveys, facilitated working groups, and strategy sessions grounded in data, lived experience, and organizational learning. Together, we defined clear priorities, SMART goals, and outcomes that reflect both what families need most and what will allow Hand to Hold to grow responsibly and sustainably.

Our 2026–2028 strategy is anchored in six interlocking pillars:

1. **Workforce & Infrastructure** – Building a resilient, mission-driven team
2. **National Leadership** – Advancing NICU-parent mental health nationwide
3. **Hospital Partnerships** – Expanding in-person family support
4. **Visibility & Storytelling** – Amplifying family voices and impact
5. **Funding & Sustainability** – Securing long-term financial strength
6. **Technology & Innovation** – Extending reach through smart tools



Hand to Hold Staff, December 2025



Remy & Family Leaving the NICU



Remy Now

Thank you for helping to ensure NICU families thrive!

Donate Today

