

firstcandle

Saving babies. Supporting families.



2023 End of Year Review

**Embracing Hearts and Minds:
Building Community Bonds in Support of Families**



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Barb Himes, IBCLC
Director of Education and
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Stephanie Taylor
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A Note from our Chairperson

Dear Friends and Supporters,

I am pleased to present our annual report, "Embracing Hearts and Minds: Building Community Bonds in Support of Families." This theme reflects our commitment to fostering a supportive community that educates and stands with families, especially during their most challenging times.

Over the past year, First Candle has worked tirelessly to strengthen our community bonds. We have strived to create an environment where families feel supported, understood, and empowered. Our efforts have focused on educating families, helping them navigate their grief, and offering them the resources they need to heal and grow.

We understand that grief is a journey that no one should walk alone. Our dedicated team of grief counselors has been there every step of the way, offering compassionate care and understanding. They have been instrumental in helping our community members find new coping mechanisms and resume their lives after losing a loved one.

Our commitment to community education has also been a significant part of our work. We believe that knowledge is power, and by educating our community about the grieving process, we can help them better support those mourning. This education has taken many forms, from workshops and seminars to one-on-one counseling sessions.

Looking back on the past year, we are proud of our achievements. But we also recognize that there is still much work to be done. We are committed to continuing our efforts to support families in grief and educate our community. We are excited about the opportunities and are eager to embrace them with open hearts and minds.



We are deeply grateful for your continued support. Your generosity and commitment to our cause have made all our work possible. As we progress, we hope you will continue to stand with us in our mission to support families and build strong community bonds.

Thank you for being a part of our community and your unwavering support. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of those who need it most.

Warm regards,

Byron E. Johnson

A Note from our Executive Director

As we turn the pages of another impactful year, I am inspired to share the successes we've achieved together. Your dedication to our mission has played a pivotal role in expanding our community-led work on safe sleep and breastfeeding education, and it is with deep gratitude that I commend each and every one of you for your unwavering support.

In celebrating these accomplishments, it is crucial that we remain vigilant about the challenges that persist, particularly concerning the racial disparities in the rates of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID). Our commitment to equity demands that we confront these disparities head-on, acknowledging that there is much work to be done to ensure that every family receives the support and resources they need.

In the coming year, we are dedicated to redoubling our efforts to address racial disparities and to expand our reach to ensure that every family, regardless of background, has the tools and knowledge to create a safe sleep environment for their infants.

In the midst of our successes and challenges, it's vital to underscore the heart of our mission: providing essential support to families who have experienced the profound loss of their baby. The compassion and solace we offer during

these incredibly difficult times are the bedrock of our organization. Your support enables us to extend a helping hand, offering a sense of community, understanding, and healing to those who need it most. As we acknowledge the disparities and challenges, let us reaffirm our commitment to being a beacon of support for grieving families, guiding them through the darkness and helping them find strength in their journey toward healing.



Together, we can ensure that no family feels alone in their grief, and every parent receives the support they need to navigate the challenging aftermath of infant loss. Your continued commitment to our cause is the light that illuminates this path of empathy and healing for those who seek it. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to our cause. Together, we can forge a path towards a future where every baby has the chance to blow out their first birthday candle.

With gratitude,

Alison Jacobson



LET'S TALK COMMUNITY CHATS

Our community-led program Let's Talk Community Chats has been expanding into more locations including Philadelphia, Atlanta and Ithaca and other communities requesting to partner with us.

Let's Talk Community Chats is a community-based program that ensures families' lived experiences regarding safe sleep practices are heard and respected.

This program addresses sleep-related infant death through a maternal health equity lens and takes into account the lack of access to accurate, non-biased information. It offers up solutions for socio-economic and cultural challenges to adopting safe sleep practices and breastfeeding.

Let's Talk Community Chats are led by trusted community care providers with training from First Candle on AAP safe sleep guidelines, breast/chest feeding support and education on the proper and safe use of infant products.

Trained community facilitators including doulas, lactation consultants, dads and grandparents engage with families in the community on a monthly basis at places families frequently visit. The facilitators are paid a stipend as is the host organization to coordinate and facilitate.

Let's Talk gives every member of the family time for in-depth one-on-one conversations about their unique situations. Most importantly, the information families receive is not only accurate but relevant to them, free of bias and judgment. The support for families includes information on local social service resources and distribution of infant products.



Our program in Harlem has entered its second year with encouraging results:

- 387 people have been reached.
- Less than 20% had received information at the hospital.
- 78% said they learned something new.
- 98% said they'd recommend Let's Talk Chats to their friends.





INFANT LOSS AND STILLBIRTH BEREAVEMENT CONFERENCE

In October we hosted our Infant Loss and Stillbirth Bereavement Conference. This was a hybrid event held in Norwalk, CT and brought parents together both in-person and online to learn from grief experts, share their stories and come together to support one another. Sessions included a dad's workshop, how to manage grief as a couple, the stress of having a Rainbow baby as well as healing through art and breathwork. We ended with a very special remembrance ceremony for our little angels.



MEMORIAL TREES

In partnership with Mary Kay and the Arbor Day Foundation First Candle plants a tree in memory of a baby who has died from Sudden Unexpected Infant Death or Stillbirth. Anyone can request a tree be planted in honor of a baby in one of the locations selected by Arbor Day Foundation. This is an incredibly special way to honor our little angels and we're grateful to Mary Kay for facilitating this program. To date, 256 trees have been planted.

24/7 GRIEF LINE

A cornerstone of our work is supporting families in their grief. To that end, we provide a grief line for families to receive 1:1 support and online support groups. We also have peer support volunteers who are available for ongoing connections with families.

We know that having someone to speak with and offer support immediately upon the death of a baby is critical. This coming year we are working to

pilot a program in Fairfield County, Connecticut to make peer support volunteers available to meet with families

at the hospital immediately after the death of their baby.



There is no footprint too small, that it can not leave an imprint on this world.



PARTNERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

Sadly, this year for the first time in decades, we saw the rates of infant deaths increase. What's more, the disparity between Black infant deaths and non-Black has widened. We have redoubled our efforts to elevate the issue of birth equity and align ourselves with maternal justice advocates who are advancing policies to end racial disparities.

To this end, we are working with Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia on a three-million-dollar, multi-year grant through the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health to support development and implementation of new policies and innovative practices to address policies that may create or perpetuate health disparities in regard to infant mortality.

We are in the second year of the program and have convened a community multi-sector task group and conducted focus groups and environmental scans to better understand the specific issues impacting families as it relates

to safe sleep and breastfeeding practices.

We have been honored to partner with many national and local organizations equally committed to health equity and reducing maternal and infant mortality. These include:

- **Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia**
- **March of Dimes**
- **Reaching our Sisters Everywhere (ROSE)**
- **Reaching Our Brothers Everywhere (ROBE)**
- **Black Mothers Breast Feeding Association**
- **Maternity Care Coalition**

ISPID

This year the bi-annual International Society for the Study and Prevention of Perinatal and Infant Death (ISPID) Conference was held in Florence, Italy.

The conference brings together researchers, scientists, healthcare professionals and parents from around the world. Our Board member Brian Scruton and his wife Lindsie attended, and Brian spoke on a panel about his podcast Guys and Grief and how to reach grieving parents in unique ways.

Our own Barb Himes was honored as Distinguished Educator, a well-deserved honor. The event culminated with a beautiful memorial service for all of the babies gone too soon.

We're excited and honored to announce that First Candle has been selected to be the host of the 2025 ISPID Conference which will be held in Boston. More information and details will be coming in the next year.



NEW YORK CITY MARATHON

This year we had 22 runners as part of our team for the TCS New York City Marathon who collectively raised over \$90,000. Every year we are so inspired by the stories of parents, siblings, relatives and friends who choose to run the Marathon in honor of babies and to raise awareness for Sudden Unexpected Death. If you have interest in running as part of Team First Candle next year, please let us know, we'd love to have you join us.



FAMILY EVENTS

In addition to the Marathon, families once again hosted in person events to support First Candle. Families raised over \$50,000 to support bereavement initiatives and our Let's Talk Community Chat events. Ellie and Dan Crowley have raised over \$10,000 for the Griffin's Gift Fund. Jason and Lysie Murphy held their 15th annual Taylor Cain Golf Classic in August in memory of their son Taylor Cain Murphy. Jason and Lysie raised \$37,000 in 2023 for First Candle. Jonah Blank, a 13 year old SIDS sibling has chosen to support First Candle with his Bar Mitzvah project, raising money and collecting diapers in memory of his brother Gavin.



FOUNDATIONS

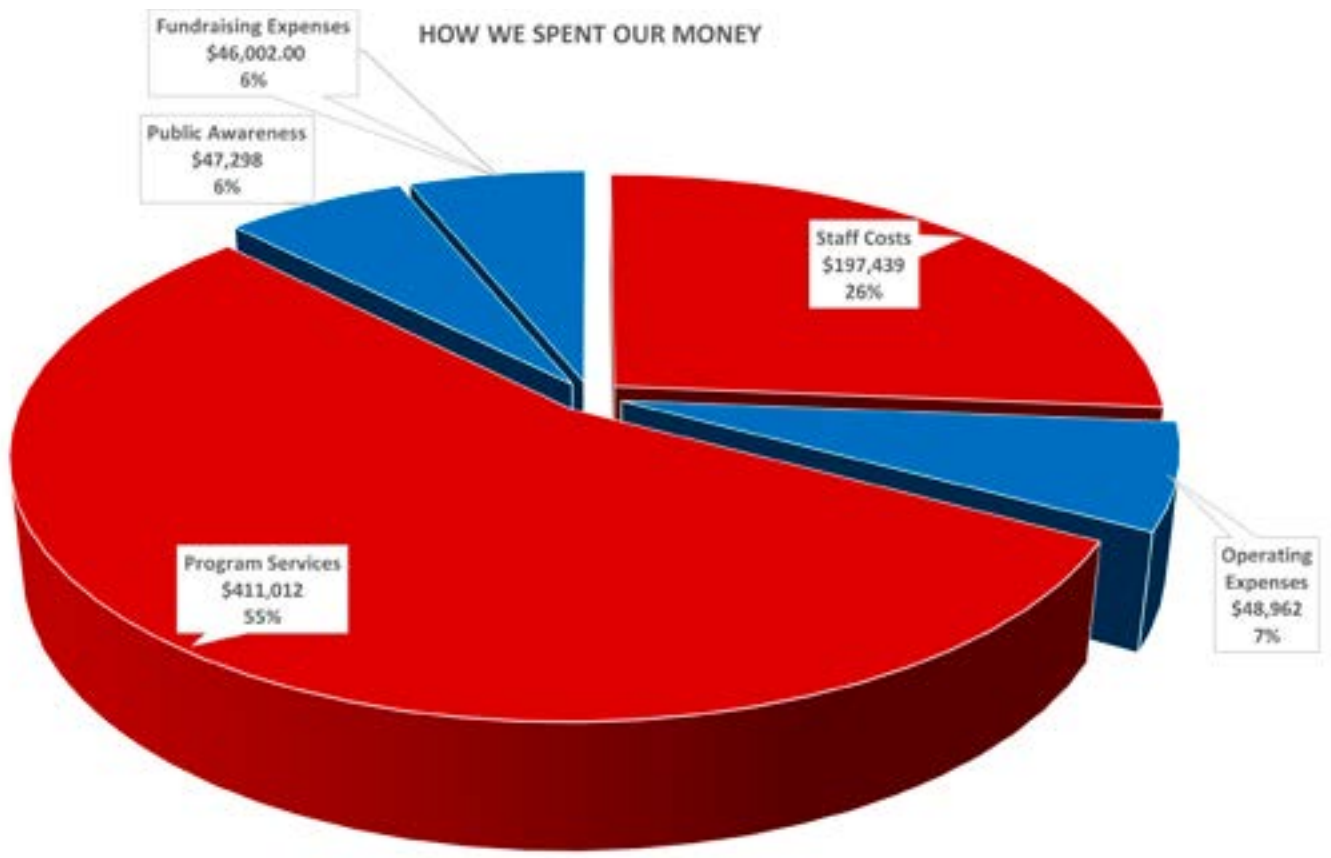
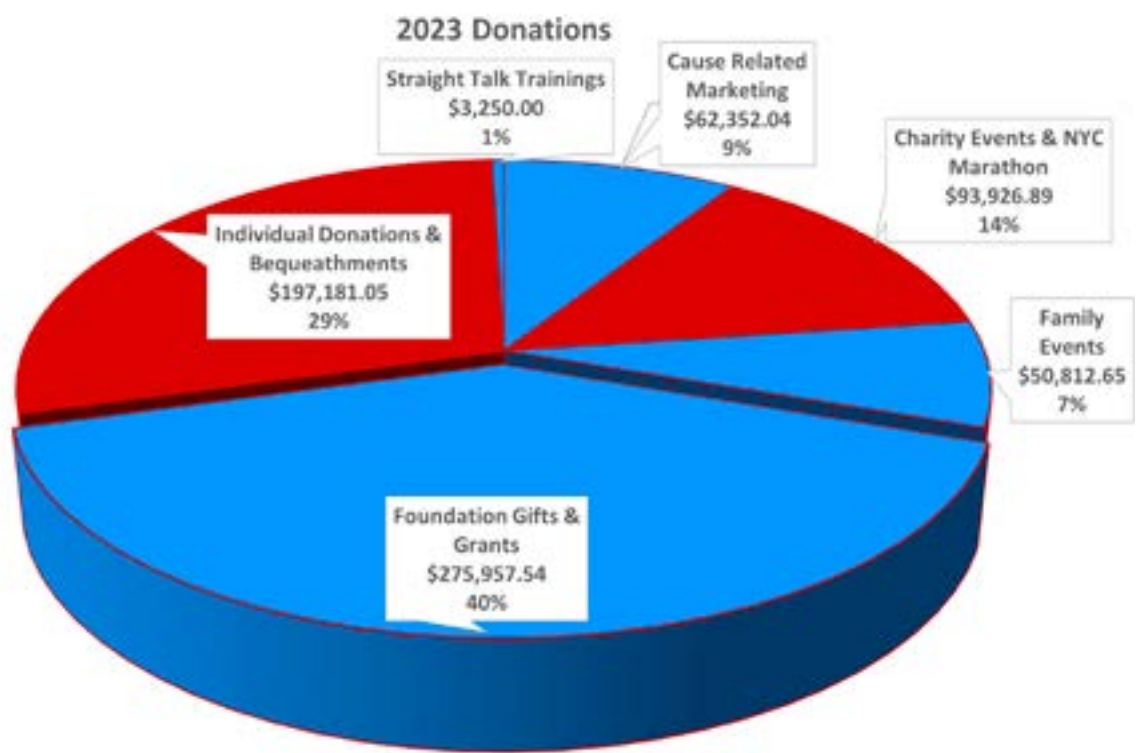
The Ryan Wolfe Kossar Foundation has once again generously supported First Candle with a \$50,000 donation to support Let's Talk Community Chats in Philadelphia. These events will kick off in January to provide education in the Philadelphia area. The German Masonic Foundation in Westchester, NY also provided generous support to First Candle. We are so appreciative of these foundation gifts that support our programs.



FINANCES

Here's how your donations go to work:

- \$25.00** allows us to maintain our grief line and to mail bereavement books
- \$50.00** helps us build our social media presence with safe sleep messages
- \$100.00** supports one person to attend our Straight Talk for Infant Safe Sleep training
- \$250.00** helps cover costs associated with hosting our Let's Talk Community Chats



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Visit www.firstcandle.org or scan the QR code to donate

