



Wonders & Worries

Professional support for children
through a parent's illness or injury.

We will, together.



2024 Fiscal Year In Review

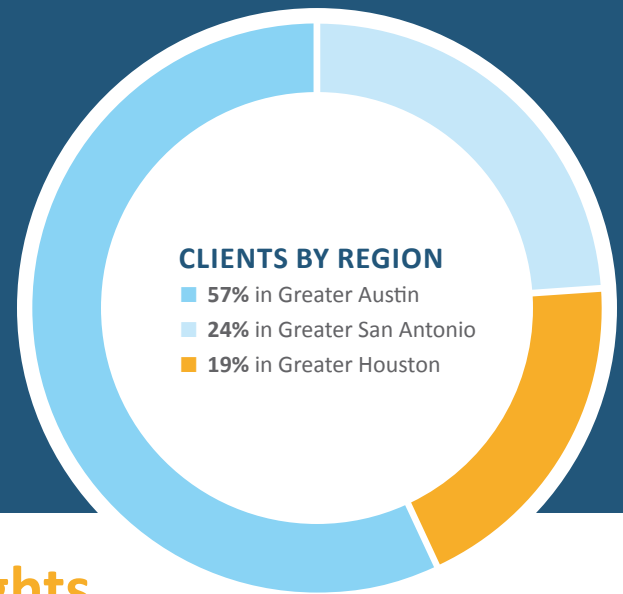
WONDERS & WORRIES

July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024

Our Mission

Wonders & Worries provides free, professional support for children and teenagers through a parent's serious illness or injury.

1,584 Clients received support from Wonders & Worries, **A 14% INCREASE FROM LAST YEAR.**



2024 Fiscal Year Program Highlights



ACLP Conference

Wonders & Worries achieved significant national recognition at the Association of Child Life Professionals conference in San Antonio from May 23-26! Our team delivered four presentations and hosted a sold-out tour of our San Antonio office. It was a opportunity to collaborate, share experiences and come together as a community of child life professionals.

The ACLP represents more than 5,000 trained professionals with expertise in helping infants, children, youth, and families cope with the stress and uncertainty of illness, injury, and treatment. It advances the field of child life by establishing and maintaining professional standards, enhancing the professional growth and development of members, and increasing the credibility of the child life profession by fostering research and promoting the standards of child life practice on a national and international level.

HD Video Hospital Tour and 360° Room Exploration

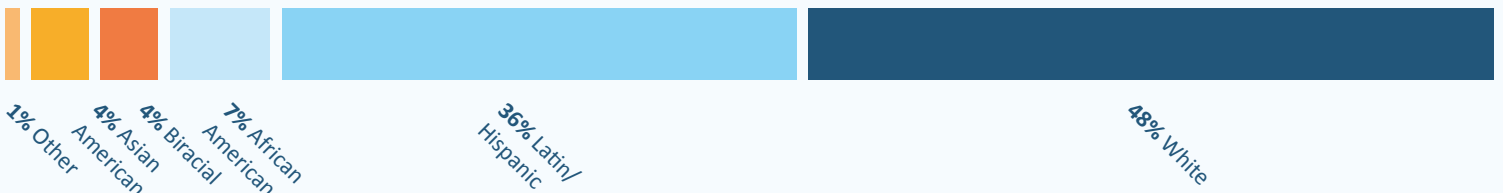
Visiting a parent in the hospital can be challenging for children. There is a lot to take in and process, especially for a first visit. Coordination with the medical team beforehand and providing children with preparation and support throughout can promote coping. Our video provides a tour of a hospital-like setting, reviewing step-by-step what a visiting experience may be like. A 360° tour of a hospital room is also available for additional exploration or for the clinician to use as they are explaining certain aspects of a hospital visit to a child. Thank you to Texas Oncology for underwriting the video and Fairfield University for allowing us to film onsite.

“How to Help Children and Teenagers Understand & Navigate Parental Illness or Injury”

With the goal of expanding our reach to professionals from a variety of mental health or medical backgrounds, we created an on-demand, foundational course for professionals interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of families coping with illness and injury and learning supportive interventions to enhance support. It is focused on the developmental understanding and impact of parental illness and injury on children and teenagers and addresses key stress points that children and families may experience throughout their illness or injury journey. This course is available on our continuing education platform, **Wonders & Worries Continuing Education (thinkific.com)**.

continued on next page

Services by Ethnicity





Wonders & Worries Board Member Meaghan Mooney Recognized as Cure Media Group 2024 Extraordinary Healer

This national award honors nurses in the cancer community who dedicate their lives to making a difference in the lives of patients and their families. In part, Meaghan's nomination read, "It is her unwavering dedication to supporting children and families during a parent's illness, along with her willingness to take her direct patient care to practices within her professional position and her community service, that allows us to say, 'Meaghan is truly an extraordinary healer deserving of this honor.'" This award was announced in Washington, D.C. at the opening night of the Oncology Nursing Society Conference.

Teddy Bear Clinics

For the first time, Wonders & Worries held simultaneous Teddy Bear Clinics in Austin, Houston, and San Antonio! Teddy Bear Clinics allow children to bring stuffed animals into our offices and have them experience the types of procedures that might happen in a treatment center or hospital (ex. infusion, pharmacy, surgery, radiology). The clinics give children a chance to understand what is happening to their parents.

It demystifies what takes place in these facilities, answers the children's questions, and relieves their anxiety and worries. These medical education events are crucial to our program and are incredibly beneficial to the children and their families.

WonderChat for Parents Webinars

Four foundational Wonderchat for Parents webinars were provided by our experienced child life specialists and have received hundreds of views. These recorded webinars are available to guide and support parents through common challenges faced by Wonders & Worries families. Topics include: How to Have Difficult Conversations with Your Children; Helping Children Understand and Cope When a Parent Has an Incurable Illness; Staying Connected: Communicating with Loved Ones Through Stress and Adversity; and, The Grieving Child: How to Prepare Children Naturally for Loss and Death. Additional webinars will be added quarterly throughout the coming year.

Sneak Peek of Wonders & Worries in the Coming Year...

WonderWorks & Parent Coaching Curriculum

WonderWorks is an activity bundle that highlights central themes for supporting families as they cope with a medical situation (Communication | Self-Expression | Connection). Sharing feelings and creating strategies to remain connected as a family can be empowering, especially amid change and challenge. Topics and activity outlines provide guidance as families explore each activity, though there is plenty of room for further customization to meet each families' specific needs. In conjunction with WonderWorks, a parent coaching curriculum is in development to provide individual professional support for parents as they complete the activities with their family.

Child Life Internship Pilot

In order to support and educate child life students who wish to gain experience in a community-based setting, Wonders & Worries will trial a shared child life internship in the spring of 2025. Through this pilot we hope to assess the feasibility of offering ongoing internships throughout our Wonders & Worries locations. This type of internship opportunity will provide support to the child life profession as it continues to expand to community-based settings and enhance our pipeline for hiring qualified child life specialists.

National Exposure and Growth

Wonders & Worries staff has prioritized national awareness and outreach this past year through conference presentations, exhibits and speaking opportunities at health care institutions across the country and will continue to do so in the upcoming year. Wonders & Worries staff presented grand rounds to the Palliative Medicine and Oncology teams at the Cleveland Clinic and have additional presentations scheduled in the year ahead.

Continuation of Advanced Cancer Study

Wonders & Worries resumes our advanced cancer research study in conjunction with the Steve Hicks School of Social Work to examine the effectiveness of the Illness Education Curriculum with adaptations made to accommodate best practices for advanced cancer diagnosis. This initial study was interrupted due to Covid. Funding is now in place for us to reinstitute this study with the added benefit of the study occurring across all three regions of Texas. Adaptations of the curriculum include spacing some sessions two weeks apart, adding a family session designed to create bonding and memory making for the family members, as well as shifts to the cancer education.

Wonders & Worries



Wonders & Worries was opened in 2001 in Austin, Texas by two certified child life specialists, Meredith Cooper and Melissa (Missi) Hicks. Both women had experience working with pediatric patients in children's hospitals. Meredith was the first pediatric oncology child life specialist in Austin at Children's Hospital of Austin and Missi relocated to Austin after working with children who had cancer at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Baltimore and the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston – Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorders Center.

Through their work, Meredith and Missi became aware of the incredible need to offer developmental and coping support to children and families struggling with parental illness. Children were often left alone wondering, "Why is mom losing her hair?" or worrying, "Did I cause mom to get cancer?"

Often parents, out of misguided concern for their child, hesitated to tell their child about their diagnosis and treatment. They lacked the words to offer age-appropriate information and support for their child's developmental wonders and worries.

Meredith and Missi shared the vision that community based, child life services for children and families with parental illness were needed not only in Austin but throughout the nation and world. While Missi relocated to Atlanta in 2003 and ultimately Raleigh, she remained an ex officio board member with Meredith continuing as Executive Director. Many board members, donors, and volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure that Wonders & Worries was able to grow and expand to meet the ever-growing need of new families. A second East Austin office was added in 2006, allowing for a greater outreach to underserved and bilingual families. An additional North Austin location was added in 2011, with a Williamson County office opening in the fall of 2016.

In 2017, Alex Gabbi, a past client, was hired by the board to create a 3-year strategic plan to support this vision. He joined Wonders & Worries in 2018 as Executive Director. Meredith Cooper stepped into the role of a Founder and oversees the geographic expansion efforts, lends programmatic expertise to new initiatives, and works to build national awareness within the child life community. The expansion into San Antonio came with the opening of an office in the START medical complex in spring of 2017 in collaboration with the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas and our first Houston office opened in September of 2020. Alex helped position the organization to expand virtually and in the past few years, Wonders & Worries has created an online continuing education program for professionals, podcasts and online educational video series for parents, and three virtual reality products. At the beginning of FY21, Wonders & Worries embarked on a new three-year strategic plan with the ongoing goal of providing free, professional support to any family in the United States struggling with parental illness. In this regard, in FY21 Wonders & Worries launched an on-demand Registered Wonders & Worries Program, that allows clinical professionals across the country to be equipped with the ability to provide the Wonders & Worries curriculum to their patient population. Wonders & Worries has a growing list of 57 registered providers in 25 states, Canada, and Japan.

Alex continues to lead the organization toward the achievement of the Strategic Vision of providing free, professional support to any family in the United States struggling with parental illness. The development of virtual programming during the pandemic remains a strong option for support while in-person services continue to expand in our Texas geographical locations and through our registered providers nationwide. Last year, additional virtual resources to enhance support for both families and professionals across the country were launched, including a completely redesigned web site, new products in our WonderVR line, updates to our mobile applications for parents and professionals, a webinar series for parents, and a new season of our podcast (WonderCast) for parents. Expect to see Wonders & Worries' name and expertise seen and utilized farther and wider in the year to come along with an emphasis on providing support to an increasing number of families at a national level.



WONDERS & WORRIES

Donors and Supporters

We are grateful for the many contributions from individuals, families, businesses, and foundations during the 2024 fiscal year. Your support and generosity allows us to provide free, professional support for children through a parent’s illness or injury, in both English and Spanish.

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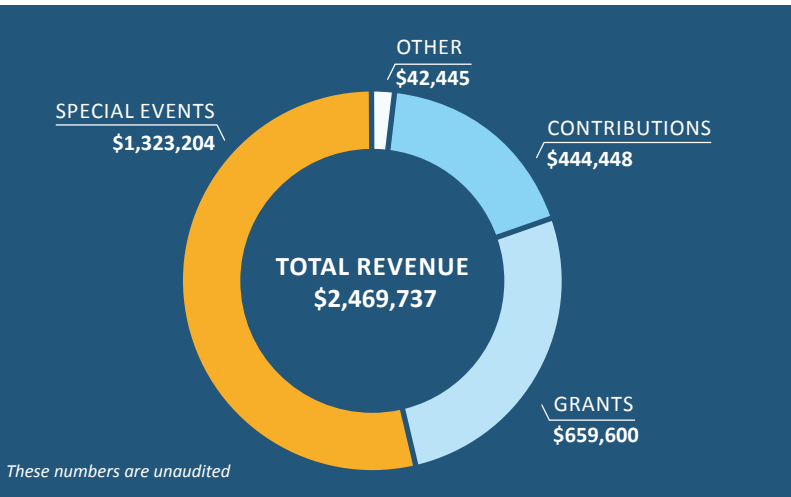
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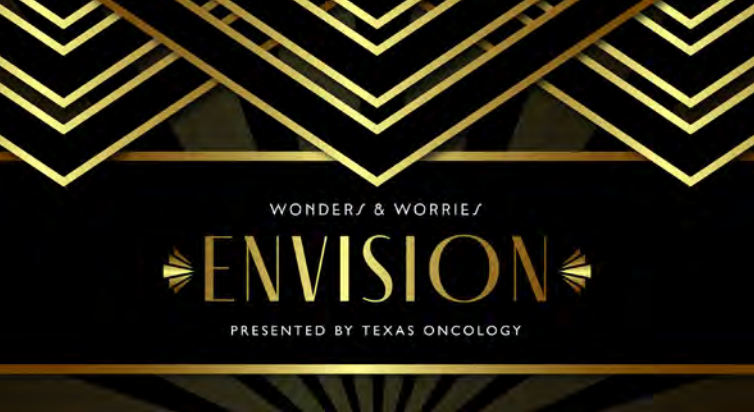
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Wonders & Worries

Professional support for children through a parent's illness or injury.

We will, together.

STAY CONNECTED



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