



Wonders & Worries

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

We will, together.



# 2025 Fiscal Year In Review

**WONDERS & WORRIES**

July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025

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

**1,948** Clients received support from Wonders & Worries, **A 23% INCREASE FROM LAST YEAR.**



2025 Fiscal Year Program Highlights

**Advanced Cancer Study**  
Wonders & Worries reengaged our Advanced Cancer Study that focuses on modifications to our Illness Education Curriculum for families with an advanced stage of cancer. We are grateful for our partnership with the University of Texas Steve Hicks School of Social Work for allowing us to initiate this study that paused during covid. With this phase two we are able to have families in all three of our Texas regions participate. Valuable insights are being gained, and we look forward to sharing this information in multiple ways to benefit families and professionals in the coming months.

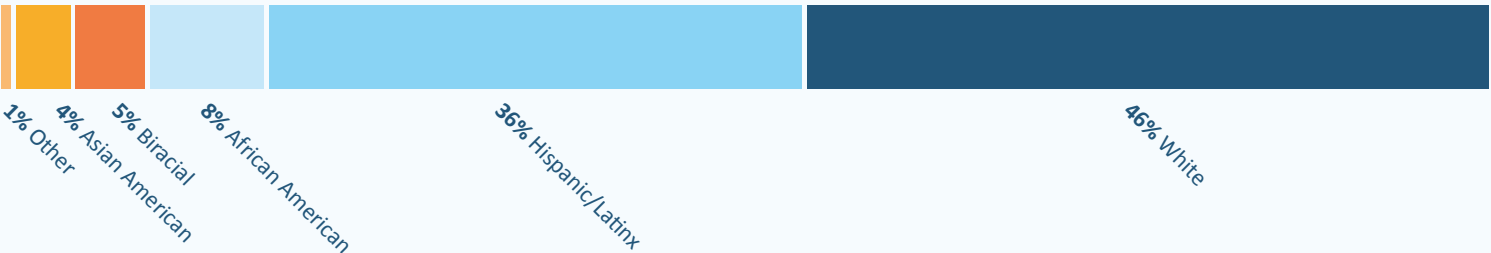
**National Support Through WonderFund**  
Thanks to donor support, Wonders & Worries has successfully piloted a national service model over the past 18 months—delivering free, professional support to children and teenagers impacted by parental illness or injury, no matter where they live. Through the WonderFund, contracted Registered Wonders & Worries Providers (RWPPs) have delivered 583 therapeutic sessions to 127 clients across 13 states. Inspired by the success of the pilot program and its meaningful impact, we are committed to expanding the WonderFund so even more families nationwide can access the support they need during life’s most difficult moments.



**National Conference Recap**  
This year, Wonders & Worries took bold steps toward expanding our national reach. From February through June, our team attended six major conferences across the country—connecting with healthcare professionals, child life specialists, and mental health experts nationwide. With exhibit booths at each event, we introduced our unique model of support to leaders who can help bring our services to more families, ensuring that no child faces a parent’s illness or injury alone.

continued on next page

Services by Ethnicity







### WonderWorks®

WonderWorks® is an activity bundle and parent coaching opportunity that highlights central themes for supporting families as they cope with parental illness or injury. The kit includes eight expressive activities with a guide for exploring and completing each of the activities. The optional individualized coaching support is provided by a professional and available to all families receiving the kit free of charge.

### WonderCast™ Completes Season 7

WonderCast™ podcast has been supporting parents navigating serious illness or injury for seven seasons and 65 episodes! WonderCast™ popularity has spread throughout Texas and across the nation with 4,503 listens/downloads. Parents and professionals tune in for candid discussions with impactful guests who share their stories, provide helpful guidance and resources, and inspire hope and resiliency. WonderCast™ host and seasoned child life specialist Julie May kicks off Season 8 with bi-monthly episodes on your favorite podcast platforms.

### Atlanta Sponsored Location

We recently launched our first in-person services outside of Texas in Atlanta, marking a major milestone for our organization. This expansion was made possible by the generous support of local Atlanta investors who believe in our mission. To help guide our continued growth in the region, we've also established a dedicated Atlanta advisory council, called the WonderCouncil.

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

### 25th Anniversary and Vision 2035

Vision 2035 represents the culmination of 25 years of Wonders & Worries and an ambitious plan for the next 10 years. Vision 2035 creates a long-term future for Wonders & Worries that ensures every family in need of our services nationwide has access to them.

### Child Life Internship Pilot Continuation

In order to support and educate child life students who wish to gain experience in a community-based setting, Wonders & Worries will be assessing and developing a shared child life internship model in additional locations in Texas. 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.

### Longitudinal Research

Wonders & Worries will be launching a longitudinal research initiative beginning this Fall directed at former client families. We have a curated list of research priorities as informing best practices remains a high priority for Wonders & Worries.

### Trauma Informed Care Certification

Wonders & Worries has been selected to be a part of the first cohort for Level 2 Trauma Informed Care Certification which we will begin this fiscal year and plan to complete by the end of the fiscal year. We are thrilled to work alongside the Ecumenical Center to be able to elevate our program by providing a higher level of trauma informed care in our communities.

### Southern Association of Child Life Professionals (SACLP) Conference

The Southern Association of Child Life Professionals (SACLP) conference will be held in San Antonio September of 2025. Wonders & Worries will be hosting the leadership round table, while University Hospital will be hosting the conference. The SACLP strives to foster and promote the professional development of its members by providing education and networking opportunities.

# Wonders & Worries



Wonders & Worries was founded in 2001 in Austin, Texas, by certified child life specialists Meredith Cooper and Melissa (Missi) Hicks. Both had backgrounds supporting pediatric patients in hospitals—Meredith as Austin’s first pediatric oncology child life specialist, and Missi having worked with children with cancer at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston.

Through their work, Meredith and Missi saw a critical need for developmental and emotional support for children whose parents were seriously ill. Children often wondered, “Why is mom losing her hair?” or worried, “Did I cause mom to get cancer?”

Many parents, unsure how to talk about their diagnosis, avoided the conversation altogether. They lacked tools and language to support their children’s developmental needs—their own “wonders and worries.”

Meredith and Missi envisioned community-based child life services to support families facing parental illness—not just in Austin, but across the country. When Missi moved to Atlanta in 2003 and later Raleigh, she remained an ex officio board member while Meredith continued as Executive Director. With the help of dedicated board members, donors, and volunteers, Wonders & Worries expanded to meet the growing need. A second East Austin office opened in 2006 to reach underserved, bilingual families, followed by a North Austin location in 2011 and a Williamson County office in 2016.

In 2017, former client Alex Gabbi was hired by the board to develop a 3-year strategic plan. He became Executive Director in 2018. Meredith transitioned to a founder role, leading geographic expansion and supporting new programmatic initiatives. That same year, Wonders & Worries launched in San Antonio, partnering with the Children’s Bereavement Center of South Texas, and opened a Houston office in 2020. Under Alex’s leadership, the organization expanded virtual services—introducing online professional training, educational video series, a helpline, podcasts, and three virtual reality products.

In FY21, Wonders & Worries began a new 3-year strategic plan, continuing its mission to provide free, professional support to families nationwide. That year, it launched the on-demand Registered Wonders & Worries Program, enabling clinicians across the country to deliver the W&W curriculum. There are now 75 RWWPs in 28 states, Canada, Japan, and Spain.

Virtual programming developed during the pandemic remains a key part of the organization’s services, complementing in-person support in Texas and beyond. Last year brought additional national resources, including a redesigned website, new WonderVR® products, mobile app updates, a parent webinar series, and another season of the WonderCast™ podcast.

In 2025, Alex continues to lead the organization toward its strategic vision with the launch of an ambitious Vision 2035 ten-year plan. The national reach expanded with the first sponsored in-person service site in Atlanta, Georgia. Wonders & Worries also launched WonderWorks®—an activity kit and parent coaching tool focused on helping families navigate parental illness or injury. The organization’s research efforts continue, with the completion of the Advanced Cancer Study and a new longitudinal study launching this fall. In the coming year, Wonders & Worries will continue to grow its national presence, strengthen its brand, expand fundraising efforts, and reach even more families across the country.





# Donors and Supporters

We are grateful for the many contributions from individuals, families, businesses, and foundations during the 2025 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.

**\$50,000+**

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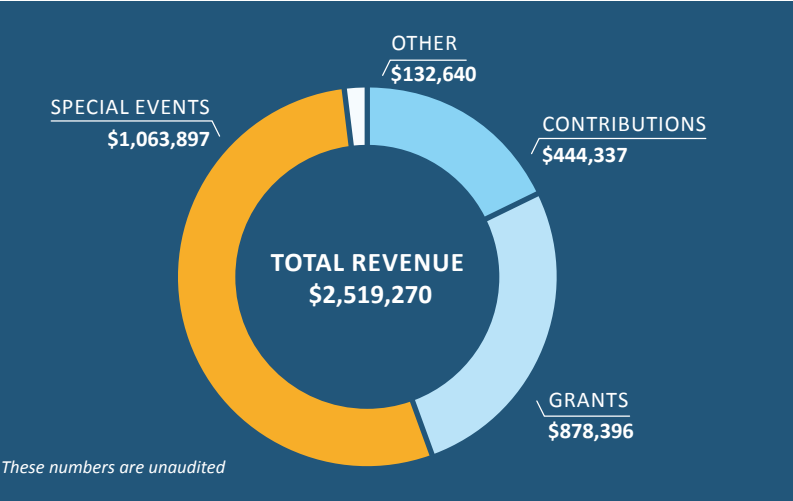
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Wonders & Worries

### Corporate Circle of Excellence

The **Corporate Circle of Excellence** is comprised of a group of organizations who recognize the profound impact of parental illness on children, families, and our community, and choose to directly support the mission of Wonders & Worries.



*More breakthroughs. More victories.®*



# SEWELL

Thank you to these companies for generously sponsoring Wonders & Worries events.

\$30,000+

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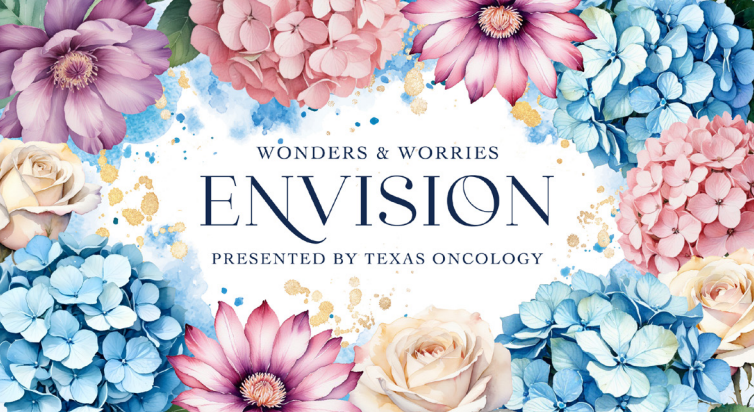
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WONDERS & WORRIES

# ENVISION

PRESENTED BY TEXAS ONCOLOGY

17TH ANNUAL SPORTING CLAY SHOOT



## No Worries Classic

Presented by the Alice Kleberg Reynolds Foundation

OCTOBER 11, 2024

REUNION RANCH

Georgetown, Texas



Wonders & Worries

## URBAN SCAVENGER HUNT

APRIL 26, 2025 | ATX



THE WONDERS & WORRIES

# Pickleball Tournament

THE WONDERS & WORRIES HOUSTON



TOURNAMENT & CRAWFISH BOIL 2025

Sunday, April 26

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Lori Novitski, *Certified Child Life Specialist*  
Maria Patiño, *Bilingual Certified Child Life Specialist*  
Denece Price, *San Antonio Outreach Coordinator, Certified Child Life Specialist*  
Adrianna Ortega, *Bilingual Certified Child Life Specialist*  
Nikki Rosenberg, *Director of Development & Outreach – Houston*  
Zosia Sandweiss, *Special Events Intern*  
Leslie Schulze, *Event Manager*  
Suzi Simmons, *Donor Relationship Manager*  
Deanna Smith, *Program Director – Texas, Certified Child Life Specialist*  
Tatiana Sokolik, *Outreach Coordinator – Central Texas*  
Kacie Stehling, *Certified Child Life Specialist*  
Beth Unite, *CFO, COO*  
Allison Zelinski, *Event Manager*



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