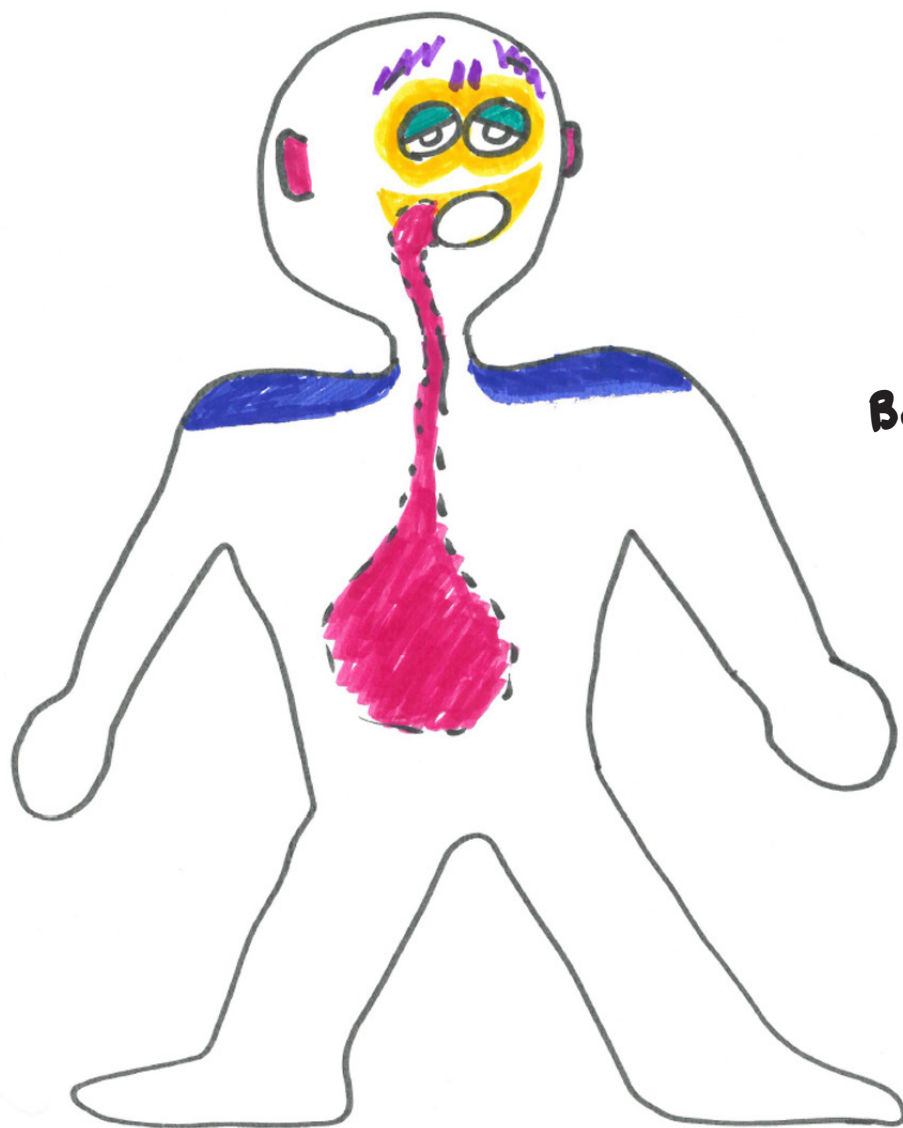









# Gerard's House

...for grieving children



## Body Map of Feelings

-  NERVOUS  
ANXIOUS
-  HAPPY
-  SAD
-  LONELY
-  WORRIED

## How to embrace uncertainty?

## The questions that guided us in 2021

March 2022 | Annual Report

**Starting in 2020 and continuing into 2021, questions continually arose for our Gerard's House team about our ongoing pandemic response.**

Answers to these questions came from grieving people we serve combined with our own brainstorming and innovation. Often, our answers were fueled by amazing collaborative partners. Learning from them meant we did not have to reinvent the wheel. Working closely together meant that all our work was better supported. Below are some of the main questions that guided our work. As you read or look through the report, you can see how each story is a response to one or more sets of these questions.

## **How do we keep grieving children and families safe?**

### **GRIEF CONNECTIONS UPDATE**

Everyone knows the old saying about what to do with too many lemons. With the support of beloved, longtime group leaders and new faces with fresh ideas, Grief Connections managed to make gallons of lemonade in 2021!

Our dedicated team of 13 volunteers served 99 grieving children and 50 adults this year. We delivered hand sewn quilts to the doorsteps of our participants, created clay pinch pots together online to hold candles for closing circles, and drank hot cocoa and celebrated our loved ones as the year came to a close. Whether virtual or in-person our volunteers stepped up to provide our community with dependable, creative forms of support.

**Amidst so much loss, how can we make our community more grief sensitive and prepare the next generation of grief facilitators?**

Launched three years ago, our Internship Program is thriving. In 2021 we were able to interview and accept four out of seven applicants. These extremely capable, masters-level students with futures in social work and counseling offer Gerard's House 60 unpaid hours of support each week. They are involved with direct services as well as case management and administrative duties. We provide them with an extensive 27-hour training along with ongoing biweekly trainings, personal grief support and 1:1 supervision meetings with assigned staff. We are hopeful to see that thus far 75% of our interns have returned to volunteer after gaining employment – a true investment in the next generation of community service.



***“The most helpful thing I got out of group has been identifying my feelings and getting to be part of everyone else’s journey with them.”***

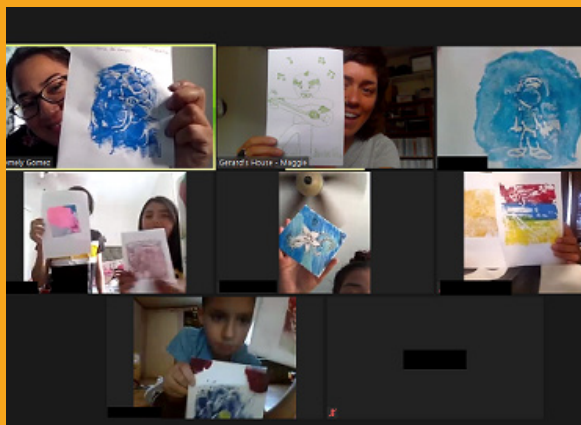
## NUESTRA JORNADA PROGRAM

The program kicked off 2021 with seven virtual grief support groups including students from all over the district. With far-reaching pandemic losses and distance learning we worried students wouldn't want to spend even more time online talking about grief and loss, yet each week youth logged on eager to play games, make art and share in a judgment-free zone.

Virtual adult groups met consistently throughout the pandemic, demonstrating the value of Gerard's House philosophy of acceptance and peer support as a lifeline for students. By the fall, due to high demand and with determined volunteers, we returned to the schools and facilitated nine (very full!) in-person and two virtual groups.

Our team administered individual needs assessments with each student or their caretaker. The increased number of requests for more mental health support and help meeting basic needs revealed the safety families felt to ask us for what they really needed. We were grateful to have trusted collaborative partners to connect them with.

We welcomed families to our food and clothing drives and to apply for direct financial assistance from Gerard's House. Each element of support is part of a larger message of hope for both children and their families that there are those in their community that care deeply and understand that our well-being is interconnected.



## How can we meet the immediate needs of so many grieving young parents while also creating opportunities for their peers?

Our Nuestra Jornada young parents program has expanded massively during the pandemic. Enrollment has increased by 500% (from 15 participants to 75).

### PEER NAVIGATION PROGRAM

In partnership with Fathers New Mexico, The Santa Fe Community Foundation for Early Opportunities for Young Parents, and Gerard's House's own Nuestra Jornada Young Parents Program, we've been able to hire, train, and supervise two young peer navigators who are former volunteers from our programs.



Our licensed, bilingual navigators received training in relationship-building tools, trauma informed perspectives, community resources, family-centered and strengths-based frameworks, anti-racist practices, confidentiality, boundaries, and much more.

They work to connect other young parents to basic needs resources such as food and rental assistance; engage them in coaching, planning, and career training; facilitate support groups; and even personally deliver diapers.

## How do we demonstrate appreciation for our devoted (and drained) staff in concrete ways?

Over the last two years, we have come to view our staff - alongside our volunteers and Board of Directors - as our most precious resource. Hands down. And it's not even close. Our organization is so lucky to have each of these amazing individuals and we believe one of our leaders' most important responsibilities is to express that in meaningful ways. Although we have always innovated to support staff, by the end of 2020 we realized that in our nine-month urgency to meet the needs of grieving families —our most precious resource was drained and exhausted and our leadership needed to answer for that. We started 2021 with this commitment.



In the first months of 2021, focus on staff wellbeing was at the forefront and it paid off. By March, we could see immediate benefits as our team's morale bounced back. From our experience during 2020, we learned the cost of pushing our team too hard. We reflected on how to read the early signs so we would not make that mistake again. Fortunately, appreciating our staff has been easy. The beautiful contributions each person made during the pandemic fostered a strong sense of togetherness. It also empowered each individual to shine, to feel accepted, valued and respected, and meet their individual needs.



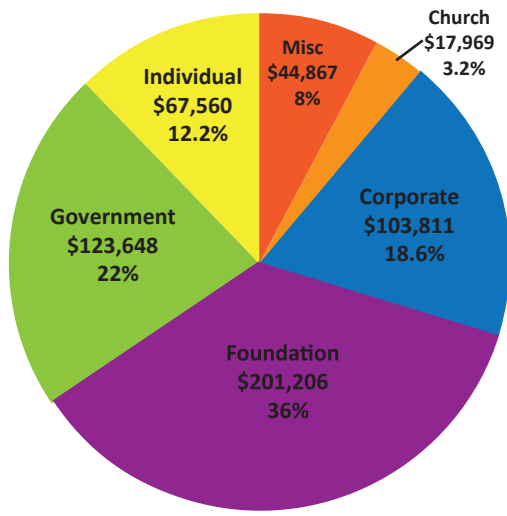
Prior to the pandemic, our work culture included flexible schedules, a welcome for parents to bring their children to the office, teambuilding during staff meetings and confidential, individualized support built into the work day. In 2021 with the support of funders who also value staff wellbeing we added annual retirement contributions, the creation of at-home work stations, air filters, nutritional supplements, and top quality laptops. During the last two years when many of us were working from home, we met for virtual "Happy or Not" Hours. When in person, we made time for mindfulness and stretching during meetings. We took time to have ceremonies together, honoring special moments and reflecting on our lives and careers. Through it all, perhaps the most important contribution that leadership makes to our staff is a spirit of gratitude, remembering always that each person is a precious treasure.

Our gratitude goes to supporters and partners of our mission:

Santa Fe Public Schools | New Vistas | Santa Fe Teen Court | La Familia Medical Center | Cooking with Kids | Tewa Women United | Solace Resolve | Presbyterian Medical Center | Adelante | Santa Fe Dreamers Project | Fathers New Mexico | Youthworks | Alas de Agua | SITE Santa Fe | ARTSMART | International Folk Art Museum | Many Mothers | Communities in Schools | Widener University | Santa Fe Prep Highlands University | Santa Fe Community College | LifeLink: Sojourners Cafe | Las Cumbres | EarthCare and the Mutual Aid Network Food Depot | Santa Fe Baby Fund and Opportunity | Youth Shelters | The Sky Center



## GERARD'S HOUSE 2021 SOURCES OF REVENUE



### FAST FACT:

In 2021, with the help of these generous supporters, Gerard's House provided more than \$55,000 of direct financial assistance to families in our care. All funds paid directly for rent, utilities, food and other urgent basic necessities.

## GERARD'S HOUSE IS BUILDING UP OUR COMMUNITIES

1,053 children, teenagers and adults received grief support services



419 individuals benefitted in our food distribution program

2,000 hours were contributed by our amazing volunteers

Gerard's House has been serving our community for 25 years



2,025 urgent needs were met beyond grief support - presentations, community support and basic needs

More than \$150,000 of direct financial assistance has been distributed since March 2020

We added 17 new Grief Connections Families  
18 grief support groups were offered each week

In Santa Fe County, mothers ages 24 and younger account for 25% of the births to mothers of color.



We helped 72 young mothers and their 125 babies, with 27,000 diapers

# THE GRIEF WE CARRY: BACKPACK ANALOGY

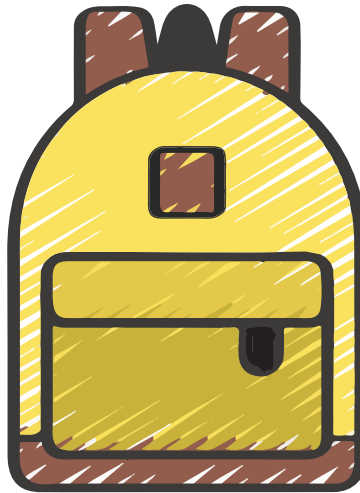
One of the activities that is often done during grief support groups at Gerard's House is the "Grief for me..." activity. This activity describes and validates feelings associated with grief, while also giving youth specific names for feelings they have felt but may not have the words to describe.

This activity was facilitated in a Nuestra Jornada grief support group for 7th and 8th graders at a middle school in Santa Fe. The students are given time to circle feelings and behaviors that resonate with them while they are grieving. Once this step is complete, facilitators and students talk about what they noticed. In this particular group, one student discussed the feeling of being overwhelmed due to feeling multiple "big emotions" at the same time and how it often leads to feeling burnt out or numb. They explained that you can mistakenly think you don't feel anything, but really it's that you feel SO much.

To honor this experience, the facilitator mentioned that carrying all of these feelings around while also having other responsibilities, such as being a student, can feel like you are "carrying a big heavy backpack". This analogy landed with the students and they discussed their experiences of each carrying around their big, overloaded backpack. Below are some of the thoughts they shared:

***"Sometimes I forget that I am carrying the backpack and other days I can feel it a lot."***

***"Sometimes I forget my backpack at home and have a really good day, but when I get back home I see the backpack again."***



***"Some days I feel like I am carrying this big heavy backpack up a steep hill."***

***"Sometimes I do not feel my backpack but then something will happen or I will move a certain way and I begin to feel it again."***

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