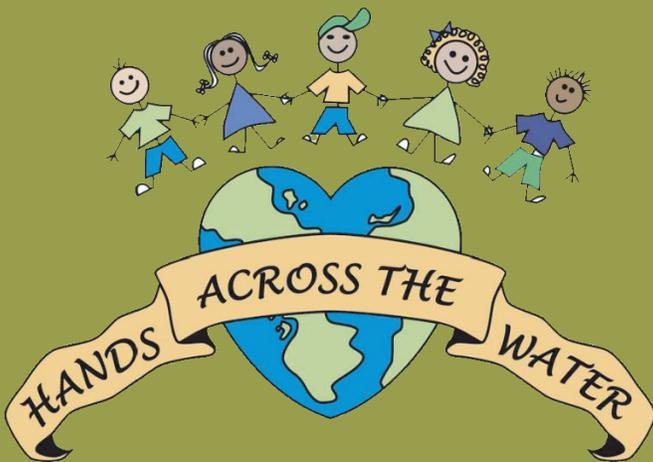




**Hands
Across
The Water**
2019 Annual Report



**20th Anniversary
Edition**

1999-2019

Mission

Hands Across The Water supports and empowers children and families through inclusive, strengths-based services.

Vision

We envision a community where every child is valued and has a safe home and loving family where they can thrive.

Board of Directors

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Board President

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Vice President

Craig Fry, BS
Treasurer

Emily Rusnak, PhD, CCC-SLP
Secretary

Belinda Needham, PhD
Board Member

Darlene Middleton, BA
Board Member



Leadership

Hands Across The Water's Executive Director, **Katie Page Sander**, earned both her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology ('95) and a Master of Social Work degree ('97) from the University of Michigan. She has twenty-two years of experience in the field of child welfare, including direct practice, supervision, training, community organization, program management, and policy development. Her work spans across the fields of foster care, adoption, youth development, parenting education, Wrap-around programs, prevention services, and family and youth advocacy. In addition to adopting two children through Hands Across The Water (once internationally and once through the agency's Waiting Child program), Katie held numerous positions at HATW since 2002 before having the honor of becoming the agency's Executive Director in 2016.



From the Desk of the Executive Director

Dear friends,

This past year, in honor of our 20th anniversary since the founding of Hands Across The Water, we have updated our mission and vision statements to align more closely with the wide range of services we now provide.

Hands Across The Water's mission: to **support and empower children and families through inclusive, strengths-based services** succinctly encapsulates the culture and guiding principles that our staff have lived by since 1999. Today, we envision a community where every child is valued and has a safe and loving family where they can thrive.

Within the pages of this report, you will see a glimpse into the ways in which our community, staff, families and children have come together this year to live that mission and vision; through donations, grants for special projects, our Innovative Inclusion designation by the Human Rights Campaign's All Children All Families initiative, reunification of children in foster care with their families, the strengthening of families through adoption, and the empowerment of children and parents through behavioral health and parent education programs. Our inclusive, strengths-based services emphasize a child or family's strengths as a starting point in addressing challenges, while celebrating the diverse identities and experiences that make us all unique.

Thank you for interest in the work we do at Hands Across The Water. We look forward to another 20 years serving our community.

With gratitude,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie R. Sander, MSW". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

2019 Year in Numbers

300

individuals (76 families) received in-home parent education services to improve the safety of their home and their skills and capacity as a parent



60

youth in our care found their forever family through our adoption programs

110

youth and adults received behavioral health treatment through expanded services to Medicaid recipients



178

youth in the child welfare system received high-quality foster care services through HATW

15

15 women facing an unplanned pregnancy received free in-home pregnancy options counseling

117

supportive donors contributed to core programs, special projects, and directly to clients' emergent needs



Trauma Informed Yoga

Funded by Galens Medical Society through 2020, Hands Across The Water's Trauma-Sensitive Yoga Family Seminars support and empower vulnerable children and their caretakers by teaching them about the effects of trauma on the brain as well as practical skills to mitigate the effects of trauma in their own lives. Up to eight youth and their caretakers attend one of four, one-day, small group seminars focused on psycho-educational training as well as mindfulness/meditation/yoga practice. The seminars are focused on fun activities, connection, and skill-building. Participants will receive the necessary tools to continue to practice what they have learned at home. The goal of the program is to equip caretakers and youth with concrete skills and tools aimed to heighten body awareness and promote self-regulation, decrease emotions of stress and anxiety, and increase feelings of physical and emotional well-being.



Teen Support Group

Funded in 2019 through the Ann Arbor Thrift Shop's Anne M. Hayes Grant, Hands Across The Water hosts an annual 6-week Teen Support Group (TSG) program for adopted and fostered children who have experiences of being involved in the child welfare system. The TSG program discusses a range of topics that apply to experiences and emotions stemming from involvement in the child welfare system. Previous TSG groups have addressed topics such as empathy, social skills, identity, self-esteem, self-care, etc. The TSG program is designed to help teenagers process their adoption/foster care experience and meet with other peers who may be familiar with how they feel. Teenagers will be able to interact with peers, gain a deeper understanding of their families, and build a network of social supports with each other and HATW interns.

Back to School Celebration

HATW's annual Back to School Celebration provides an excellent opportunity for the community to connect and provide for the foster care kids that our agency supports. Through extensive community outreach and supportive community involvement from local business and individuals, HATW was able to help to provide over 100 foster youth with new backpacks and school supplies, the opportunity to "shop" for new shoes and clothing, free haircuts and hairstyling, tons of food and treats, carnival games, therapeutic gardening, face painting, firetrucks/fire safety demos, and more!

This event not only provides school supplies to youth but also allows staff and volunteers to interact with families outside of the environment of the office/home, connect foster families to build another level of network and support, offer a chance for families to bond with youth in their care, and reduce the financial burden of school preparedness.

Photo: Management staff from Lakeshore Apartments stand next to school supplies donated by residents of the complex



Annual Holiday Party

HATW ended the year by celebrating with families that we serve at our annual Holiday Party. Our 2019 Holiday Party was filled with fun games and activities, cookie decorating, live music sang by local choirs, and gift unwrapping for each child in attendance! Additionally, families were able to pick out hats and mittens of their choice from the Hat & Mitten Tree and enjoy delicious food. Even the characters from Frozen made an appearance!

This event was made possible in 2019 through the generous monetary support of Blue Cross Complete Community Outreach, Red Ventures Detroit and cash and in-kind support from local community businesses and individuals who generously donate supplies, gifts, food, and other materials that lend a huge hand in making this event so successful for families and staff.

Photo: Volunteers dressed as Frozen's Anna and Elsa entertain HATW families at the holiday party



Nia Fundraiser

In the Fall, we danced through an evening of fun with a Nia fundraiser.

This donation-based session of Nia, led by certified teacher and HATW supporter, Dominique Abed, was a full body, mind, emotion and spirit cardio fitness experience. Nia is a sensory-based movement practice that draws from martial arts, dance arts and healing arts. All proceeds supported HATW's programs.

A big thank you to Dominique Abed for donating your time and talent, and to The Mix Studios for sharing your space!

Photo: HATW staff, family, friends, and supporters pose for a group photo after the Nia fundraiser



Enrichment Funds

Funded by the Kiwanis Club of Ann Arbor Foundation, the Enrichment Funds for Youth Program offers up to \$250 to foster care families to support their ability to provide their foster youth with diverse and exciting opportunities to promote their skills, abilities, self-esteem, and over-all well-being. Past opportunities kids have participated in due to the support of these funds has included registration fees for art and music camps, summer camps, sports teams, school fieldtrips, among others.

While HATW would like to support every foster family and child with these funds, priority is given to families who have exhausted other means of financial aid and to those who are in most need. If you believe you qualify for or are interested in the Enrichment Funds for Youth Program, please do not hesitate to reach out to HATW to seek more information.

Client Testimonials



“There are friends, there are family and there are friends who become family. Hands Across the Water is more than an agency, they are family. They have been walking beside me my whole journey and I have never been so honored to be a part of such an amazing family.”

- Tanesha McLaughlin, HATW Foster Family

*To read more or submit your own HATW journey, visit
www.hatw.org/family-stories*

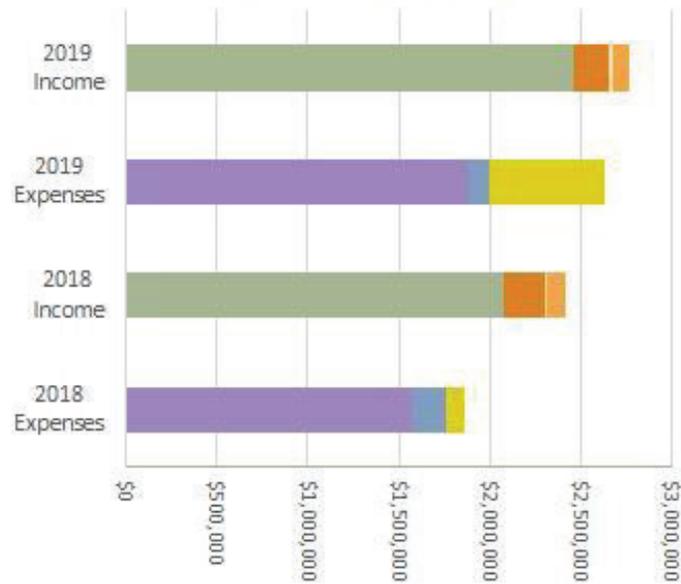
"Now that both of our children's adoptions are finalized, we look back at those uncertain periods in our lives and are so thankful we found a reliable and ethical agency like Hands Across The Water. If we ever decided to add to our family, Jill would be our first call. I wouldn't dream of venturing into the adoption world without her invaluable guidance."



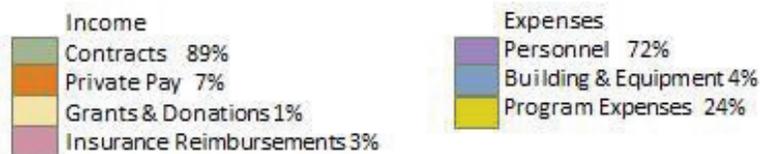
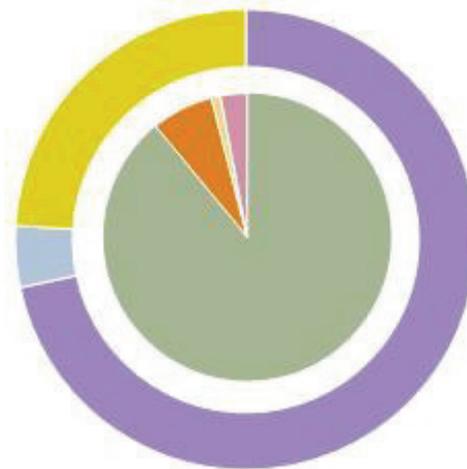
- Angela Edmond, HATW Infant Adoptive Family

Statement of Operations

2018 to 2019 Financial Growth



Income and Expenses 2019



HATW is proud to achieve eight consecutive years of recognition from, and partnership with, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) as Leaders and Innovators in Supporting LGBTQ+ families and children.

This year, we were awarded the Innovator Seal of Recognition.



Recognized for our agency's implementation of innovative approaches to LGBTQ inclusion in each of the seven key policy and practice areas and for demonstrating leadership in areas like policy advocacy or organizational partnerships.



"We were thrilled to learn that not only did HATW speak publicly about being LGBT affirming, they had a strong track record of successfully matching birth families with same-sex couples. In our research, we found some agencies that were happy to work with same-sex couples, however, they did not have much experience in matching them with potential birth parents. HATW was the exception."

- HATW client



Waiting Children



According to a person close to her, “Brittney is a bright, bubbly, energetic child. She is funny and enjoys laughing and making others laugh too.” Brittney is a young lady with a pleasant personality who shows empathy for others.

Her caring attitude will benefit Brittney when she gets older, with her strong desire to become a nurse. Brittney’s favorite things to do include singing and listening to music.

Brittney

There’s little idle time in Dre’s world. He loves playing basketball any chance he gets. When he’s not playing it, basketball occupies Dre’s thoughts. He dreams of visiting Oakland, CA to see the Golden State Warriors in action, and he wishes to meet the team’s star player, Stephen Curry.

Dre also likes watching movies and going to the mall with his friends, dancing and listening to music, and wants to become a music producer when he gets older.



Dre

If you are interested in waiting child adoption or to read more about waiting children in our care, please visit: <https://www.hatw.org/waiting-child-adoption>

Overcoming Your Odds with Oleg Lougheed

Oleg Lougheed, 27, was adopted from Russia at the age of twelve years old through Hands Across The Water's international adoption program.

More than a decade later, Lougheed is working as a motivational speaker and in 2017, founded a non-profit organization and podcast called Overcoming Odds, a platform for adoptees and foster youth to share their experiences, embrace their own individual journey, and to learn that they are not alone.

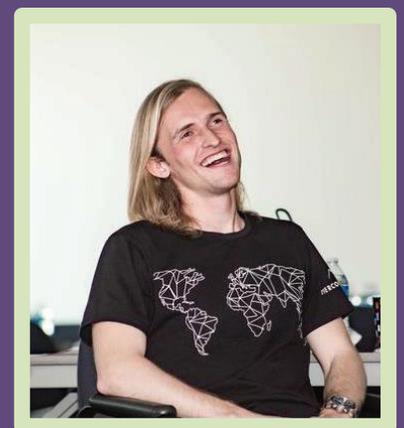
"I am driven by a passion to create a space where we can understand each other," said Lougheed.



Despite overcoming adversities and obstacles as an international adoptee, Lougheed noticed a trend among other adoptees from similar backgrounds who struggled to make it through the barriers that he once endured and ultimately, wanted to determine what factors helped to influence his own journey.

The mission of *Overcoming Odds* is to help other adoptees live a better life, despite their hardships and misfortunes. Through storytelling and shared experiences, Overcoming Odds restores a sense of community and belonging, provides a safe place to develop one's individual voice and connect individuals through unique life circumstances.

"In hearing other people's stories, I am also healing myself. I choose to see myself in other people's journeys. That helps me to stay aligned with what I am trying to do," said Lougheed.



Read more at <https://www.hatw.org/post/overcoming-odds>

Commitments to Racial and Social Justice

Hands Across The Water is committed to having the difficult conversations and to make the changes necessary to confront head-on the racial disparities present not only in society as a whole, but in our agency and in the work that we do with children and families. Our mission, to support and empower families through inclusive, strengths-based services, is the core of our identity.

However, we recognize that our work itself exists within a context of historically racist systems, and thus are challenged to use our positions of power within those systems make changes from within, advocate for those who have been negatively affected and to demand reform. Hands Across The Water remains dedicated to addressing these challenges in the following ways:

- Implicit Bias training for all agency staff
- Regular trainings, roundtable discussion and resource sharing for staff to address cultural competency topics
- Intentional focus on the recruitment and retention of a diverse staff, Board members and foster/adoptive parents for the children in our care
- Establishment of a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee whose mission is to grow and maintain a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion in all departments at HATW. Our strength is our pledge to be inclusive with strategies that intend to welcome and uplift historically marginalized peoples within our field and the communities that we serve
- Staff participation in statewide Racial Disparities in Family Preservation workgroup
- Monthly reflective supervision with outside consultant for all social work staff, supervisors and managers to address impact of personal experiences and identities in their work with children and families and the impact of their work on their personal lives.
- Agency focus on education and thorough assessment for foster and adoptive parents who are parenting transracially.
- Expansion of agency family preservation and prevention services, as well as strengths-based and inclusive approaches with families to increase the likelihood of family reunification after removal.
- Commitment to serving underserved communities in behavioral health through Medicaid providers and sliding scale fees.
- Free, non-coercive pregnancy options counseling with services to support women long-term regardless of their decision to parent, terminate a pregnancy or to make an adoption plan.

We believe that our work, when done with a constant eye towards improvement and self-reflection, demonstrates social justice in action. Hands Across The Water is committed to ensuring that the marginalized communities we serve are respected, heard and served with equal regard, care and dedication.

Thank You to Our Major Funders and Donors 2019

Alanna Angell
Alison & Michael Lecloux
Amanda Lynn
Andrew Cisler
Angela Vu
Anna Daoud
Ann Arbor Thrift Shop Anne M. Hayes Grant
Ashlee Ciaramitaro
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Beth Storms-Randall
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Tasinda Ridsdale
The Lakeshore Apartments
The Mix Studios
Thomas & Michelle Bules
Trader Joe's
Van Buren Eagles Auxiliary #3996
Walmart Foundation
Zingerman's

Contact & Connect With Us!

Hands Across The Water supports and empowers children and families through inclusive, strengths-based services.

We envision a community where every child is valued and has a safe home and loving family where they can thrive.

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