Hands Across The Water

2025 Annual Report

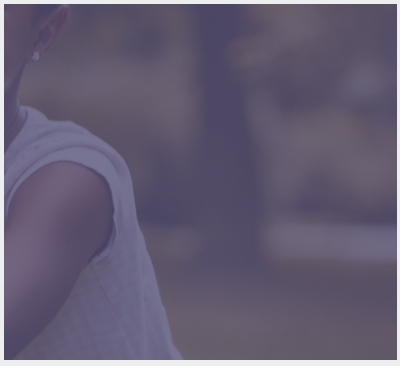
Hands Across The Water supports and empowers children and families through inclusive, strength-based services.















HATW
HANDS ACROSS THE WATER



Letter from the Executive Director



Dear HATW friends and supporters,

Heading into my tenth year at the helm of Hands Across The Water, I am struck by the sensation that it seems like both yesterday and a lifetime ago that I accepted the Executive Director position here. Like parenthood itself, the old cliché “the days are long but the years are short” rings true. The responsibility of carrying on a legacy of high quality, inclusive, and ethical services for children and parents, while forging new paths and planning for the future has been my great honor. 2025 saw continued growth, reflection, advocacy, and proactive planning to take HATW into the next decade and beyond.

Community need, paired with HATW’s reputation for quality services, inspired growth in our foster care, kinship support, and behavioral health programs. 2025 also marked the commencement of our international adoption program’s reaccreditation process - a strategic decision to continue to commit to the unique complexities of facilitating these types of adoptions in a challenging political and global environment.

2025 was also a year of advocacy and proactive support efforts for our dedicated staff through professional development opportunities like the creation of the Michigan Child Welfare Leadership Development Academy (aimed at supporting the growth of emerging leaders in our field), improved pay and benefits, and legislative advocacy to modify laws to support their safety and well-being. It also included advocacy for legislation, funding, policies and procedures that impacted the children and parents we serve; including streamlining procedures for access to psychiatric treatment for youth, a presentation at the National Council for Adoption annual conference on adoptee-centered practices, continued facilitation of the statewide Michigan Consortium on LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Child Welfare, and testimony given in a Michigan Senate committee in support of bills to bar MDHHS from collecting federal social security benefits for youth in foster care to offset costs of foster care.

At a time of significant uncertainty in the world - financial stressors, diminishing access to physical and mental health services, environmental disasters, political vitriol, global violence, and suffering, HATW has managed to remain not only consistent in our mission towards strengths-based, inclusive services, but to grow and look ahead with continued resolve. This has only been possible with the support of our dedicated staff, volunteers, Board, foster and adoptive parents, client families, individual and corporate donors, and private foundations who have generously supported HATW through another quick-moving 365 days. Those days include thousands of moments providing safety and care to kids and those that love them.

Thank you for being a part of our journey.

Katie Page Sander



Katie, members of staff and community volunteers load a truck with holiday gifts for foster youth for transport to HATW's office in December 2025.

Staff Recognition

In 2025, two longtime HATW staff members received significant professional recognition for their exceptional work: we are so proud of them and feel fortunate to have them as part of our team.

Child Welfare Director Heather Gilbert - Michigan Exceptional Continuous Quality Improvement Leader Award

Heather received this award at the 2025 Statewide Continuous Quality Improvement conference and gave a presentation about HATW's strategies for engagement of parents and caseworkers, as well as the prioritization of high-quality parenting time. While the high key performance indicators of HATW's staff are a team effort, Heather's leadership makes it possible. From her nomination: "Heather is a highly respected leader at HATW and in the community. She is a quiet, serious, and thoughtful supervisor who prioritizes staff and family well-being with deft advocacy skills. Heather has nurtured and mentored countless child welfare staff who have made their own incredible contributions to thousands of children and families, creating a lasting legacy for children and families in Michigan."

State Adoption Supervisor Jen Schulz - Adoption Supervisor Excellence Award

Jen Schulz, who received her award at the statewide Licensing and Adoption Conference, has been a part of the stories of hundreds of children and families as well as numerous adoption professionals who she has trained and mentored for more than a decade. Jen has also been a committed member of the state's Adoption Oversight Committee, offering input and perspective about adoption policy and process.

Despite managing a team of adoption specialists, Jen insists on carrying her own partial caseload due to her deep desire to remain on the "front lines" of advocacy for youth, especially those who have been waiting for permanency the longest or who identify as LGBTQ+. Jen forges deep and trusting relationships with youth who rely on her consistent love and care through some of the most challenging times in their lives. She reminds youth, through both her words and her actions, that they are worth fighting for.







Foster Care

Hands Across The Water touches more people through our foster care program than any others. In 2025 the case management, licensing and visitation teams were very busy bringing in new non-relative foster parents, and working to achieve reunification for children with their parents, and an additional team of workers under a new supervisor expanded this program

A grant from the Speckhard-Knight Foundation allowed us to continue the work of recruitment and retention of foster parents we feel is so vital to the successful support for young people and families.





155
Foster youth served




13
Foster families licensed



1
Guardianship placement

11
Youth reunified




Adoption

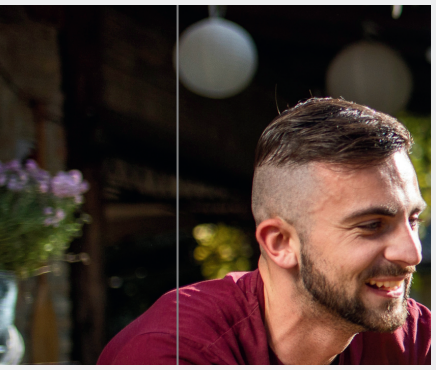
Hands Across The Water continues to support families seeking to adopt internationally or through the State of Michigan.

- The International program served a total of 61 families with 2 finalizations.
- While HATW began winding down infant adoptions in 2024, prior to closing out the program in 2025 we assisted with the finalization of 3 infant adoptions, and served 25 total families.
- 45 state adoption families received service from HATW with 22 finalized adoptions.













22
State adoptions finalized



61
International families served

50
Home studies completed





51
Behavioral Health Clients

30
Support Group Members

Behavioral Health

Our team of therapists seeks ways to accomodate anyone who experiences barriers to service, including some school visits to youth who have no transportation to our office to be seen in person.

After joining the team late in 2024, 2025 saw an additional therapist fill her schedule with clients. We continue to work with MSW students who are interested in the path of behavioral health. MSWs are also instrumental to our ability to offer short-term programs like play groups or our teen leadership group.

The ongoing support group for parents of older adoptees continues to provide an open space for those who seek to connect with others parenting teens and young adults.





205

Clients served

Kinship Care

In our first full year of service, HATW's kinship care team served 205 clients caregiving for children to whom they are related or have a close relationship with. Kinship care serves families both in and outside of the court system.

What our clients say

Each year, HATW surveys clients from all our programs to learn more about where improvements can be made. In 2025, 94 percent of respondents were very satisfied/satisfied with our work, and we love hearing this feedback.

"I would highly recommend HATW! The biggest thing that stands out to me is the transparency during this process. I feel like I can trust the information that we are receiving which gives me confidence in HATW."

"You guys have been awesome and very attentive to me and my daughter and genuinely care."

"HATW has a very responsible, helpful, supportive and friendly group of employees."



Community Member Spotlight

In 2025, Marty and Cindy Kapanowski donated a vehicle to Hands Across The Water that got passed on to a youth about to age out of care. Cindy also volunteered time at HATW's golf outing. The Kapanowskis have no previous experience with foster care or adoption: they got involved with HATW because of their friendship with a staff member. We asked them some questions about why they chose to donate their time and their vehicle.

You didn't have a previous relationship with HATW: what, if anything, have you learned about our agency that surprised you?

It surprised us that kids age out of foster care and have to figure out how to make it from there, with little support.

What motivates you to make charitable contributions (to any agency/cause)? Are there specific priorities that have meaning to you?

Something we feel a connection to. As a parent one has a soft spot for kids, and their development, and their ability to launch and be happy healthy members of society.

How do you think supporting vulnerable children and families makes change in a community?

We look at the support our parents gave us, and the support we gave our kids, and it's not hard to see the confidence it builds in young people to have a little help getting a leg up on life. We hope that our used car will remain viable for a few more years to help someone out getting a start on their own. We hope that some confidence and the means to get around will help them to feel more involved in society and equipped to take on the challenges that life throws at us all.





Events and Activities

Many exciting events and activities took place at HATW over the course of 2025! Between additional supports for the people we serve that are made possible through grants and community partnerships, fundraisers and events that allow us to go into the community and make connections, it was a very busy and rewarding year!

In January, Kelly Darke, BFA, MFA launched a second series of art therapy sessions, finishing out an opportunity made possible by the Ann Arbor Kiwanis Foundation.

Kiwanis



March and April were jam-packed: a pancake dinner organized by social work students from Eastern Michigan University who spent time learning about HATW took place April 2, our second annual Drag Queen Bingo event took place on April 5, and a grant from the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation's Youth Advisory Council funded a six-week teen leadership group beginning in March concluding mid-April.





Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation

For good. For ever. For all.



In June we attended Ypsilanti's Juneteeth celebration and returned as a charity partner of the Dexter-Ann Arbor Run.



Events and Activities



On August 25 we held our second-ever golf outing at Barton Hills, with title sponsor support from First Merchants Bank and both beverage sponsorship and hole-in-one contest support from Walton Insurance, as well as a number of hole sponsorships and many wonderful golfers!

August also saw HATW participating in Washtenaw County's Back to School event where youth in care receive backpacks filled with supplies and a new outfit for the start of school, and they and their families participate in an evening of fun activities. Thanks also to donors from First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth for supplying backpacks for kids who didn't attend the event.



EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Another semester, another class: we were happy to work with a second group of social work students from EMU in the fall term. Our time with students goes beyond fundraising, giving them insight into the daily labor of social work and how it affects the community. This class helped spread the word about the need for foster parents and also raised more than $1000 for our agency.

With substantial support from Blue Cross Complete of Michigan and a range of private donors, we once again had a banner year of meal provision to food insecure clients at the holidays, serving more than ever before--164 people/31 families.







And when we had an emergency situation that prevented gifts for some of our youth arriving from their usual source, donors stepped up to both provide gifts and wrapping services to ensure we could offer every child a happy holiday experience!

Donors

We are so grateful to the individuals, businesses and foundations who support our work, strengthening the ability to provide the best care to our clients. Each of the people, companies and foundations named here played a pivotal role in our work throughout the year

Individual 2025 Donors

Tom & Anne Adams
Cheryl Ambroza
Jessica Anderson
Julie Angeli
Mary Anglin
Edison Aniag
Amy Armstrong
Joshua Ballard
Catherine Bartholomay
Rebecca Belian
Casey Black
Christine Boltz
Terry Bond-Manville
Kerry Bowman
Nancy Boyd
Terry Branoff &
Jorge Guzman De Branoff
Jeanette Bridges
Jessica Burnside
Julius Buzzard
The Caswell Family
Miriam Connoly
Ivan Cortes
Jacqueline Cross
Shelly Crundwell
Melissa Daneshyar
Timothy Davis
H.J. Decker
Anthony DiGiovanni
Jason Ditman
Amy Donovan
Elizabeth Dougherty
Scott Duren
Sarah Ellero
Amira Fawzy
Karolynn Fenton Schofield
Sydney Finkenbine
Peggy Fisher-Kmieciak
Dorthy Flattery
Jamie Frech
Kristan Freitag
Jane Fry
Jolanta Gallup
Jill Geist Dettman
Andrew & Adam Gardner-Northrop
Maya Geryk
Mary Gladstone-Highland
Mark Graves
Harry Grenawitzke
William Grenawitzke
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Darlene Helzerman
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Carol Hildebrandt Sahlberg
Tracy Himmelspach
Catherine Hogans
Daniela Hogle
Matthew Hunwick
Foster Jones
Marty and Cindy Kapanowski
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Amanda Kelch
Christine Kelley
Christin Kelty
Angela Kennedy
Ali Khoyee
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Randy Kuckuck
Allison Lambrix
Kristen Lang
Seana Larson
Jean Lesch
Riccia Lewis
Matthew Licata
Kimberly Lin
Jens Loemker
Kenzi Lynn
Michelle Magee
Atl & Claudia Martinez
Linda Martinez
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Michelle Merkel
Holly Mierzejewski
Rick Modglin-Green
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Mike Morris
Karen Morrison
Rosemarie Moya
Dot Mueller
Amber Munoz
Rachel Naasko
Donna Nafziger
Belinda & Rob Needham
Alison Neff
Richard Ohye
Kyle O'Malley
Andrea ONeil
Hilary Ormond
Gregg Packard
Daniela Page Sander
Katie Page Sander
Maureen Page
Susan Page
Paul Paliani
Michelle Pardee



Jennifer Pedley
Elizabeth Perpich
Sam Pinkus
Donna Preziotti
Jennifer Rekiel
Desiree Ricica
Hailli Ridsdale
Alissa Roath
Julie Roesch
Christian Roberson
Toni Roginski
Larissa Sakimoto
James Sander
Dianne Scherr
Jennifer Schulz
Kristen Seguin
Janet Shea
Adrienne Sheely
Chinmaya Shelgikar
Wendy Shingles
Angie Smith
Willie V. Smith
Denise Sprague
Madeline Stead
Sarah Stone
Jennifer Taylor
Lynn Teribery
Susan Theisen
Sarah Torsch
Stacy Townsend
Jan Ulrich
Subhash Valanju
Christopher van Lent
Colleen van Lent
Aimee Vantine
Ximena Varela
Melissa Vaughn
Rebecca Veenstra
Bianka von Kulajta
Kari Waddington
Dolores Webster
Sara Weidmayer
Bethany Westrick
Joseph Widmer
DeRhonda Williams-Kennedy
Jen Wrayno
Rosemarie Wywrot
Rebecca Yates
James York

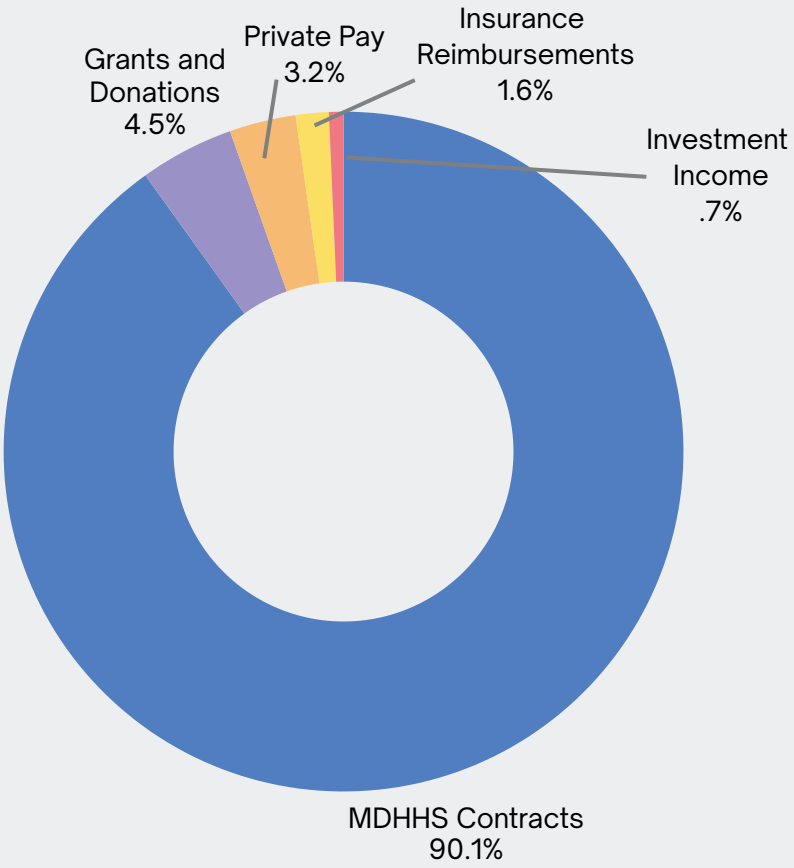
Grants and Corporate Gifts

Altruic Advisors
Ann Arbor Guys for Good
Ann Arbor Track Club
Ash & Elm Massage
Blue Cross Complete
The Carls Foundation
CMR Mechanical
Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan
Coopers Hawk Winery
Dynamic Edge
Ethel & James Flinn Foundation
Galens Medical Society
HAP/Caresource
Kiwanis Club of Ann Arbor Foundation, Inc.
Launch Family Entertainment
Meijer
Mutual of America
Retailers Insurance Company
Speckhard Knight Charitable Foundation
United Way of Midland County
United Way of Southeast Michigan
Walton Insurance Group

If you have questions about how you can support HATW through planned or monthly giving, or if you would like to know more about programs or initiatives that would benefit from additional resources, please reach out to our development specialist by calling our office at 734-477-0135. Make a donation by scanning the code below.



Income and Expense



INCOME

MDHHS CONTRACTS
$5,287,982

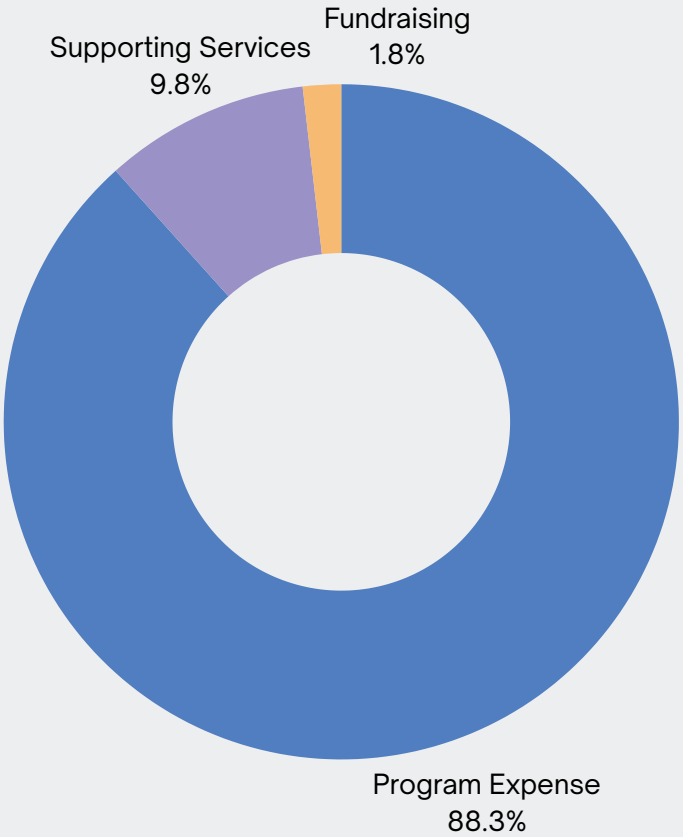
GRANTS/DONATIONS
$263,362

PRIVATE PAY
$185,600

INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENTS
$92,261

INVESTMENT INCOME
$40,334

TOTAL
$5,869,539



EXPENSE

PROGRAM SERVICES
$4,410,021

SUPPORTING SERVICES
$490,193

FUNDRAISING
$91,383

TOTAL
$4,991,597

HATW
HANDS ACROSS THE WATER

Our Mission

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

Our 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

Rick Modglin-Green, President
Belinda Needham, Vice President
William Grenawitzke, Treasurer
Julie Roesch, Secretary
Julius Buzzard, Board Member
Victor DiGiovanni, Board Member
Mary Gladstone-Highland, Board Member
Hilary Ormond, Board Member

Hands Across The Water (HATW) is proud to part of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, the National Council for Adoption, and to be Hague-accredited through the Center for Excellence in Adoption Services. HATW has been annually recognized by the Human Rights Campaign for supporting and serving LGBT youth and families since 2011.



HATW

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781 Avis Drive, Suite 200
Ann Arbor, MI 48018
734-477-0135
hatw.org
info@hatw.org
@hatwfamilies