



2024
ANNUAL
REPORT

MOMENTUM

STEP
BY_—
STEP

healing & empowering
young single moms



A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2025 will mark a major milestone for Step By Step as we celebrate 30 years of walking alongside thousands of young single mothers ages 12 to 24 and their children throughout our community. When sharing our work, I find myself reaching back to the beginning with reverence. Though my tenure only spans the past 11 years, I recognize that we are here because of the vision, determination, faith, and pure grit of those who came before us. Our founders, Terri Behrens, Susan Roark (née Freeman), and Tammy Fryman recognized the gaps in services available for young families leading to their decision to meet the demand for tangible community support that would impact the quality of life for our community as a whole. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a leader in child welfare research:

*“By providing targeted assistance to help them manage the challenges of both adulthood and parenthood, we can significantly improve outcomes for both the young parents themselves and their children, creating a long-term positive impact for society as a whole.”**

Our founders grew their idea of providing child abuse reduction education centered in love coupled with emotional supports into a beautiful reality, making a difference in the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens, inspiring many volunteers and supporters along the way.

Over the years, Step By Step has expanded our vision to include trauma-informed and healing-centered evidence-based programming, strategic community partnerships resulting in comprehensive resource referrals, advocacy centered in research and data, and empowerment through youth-centered leadership development, mentorship, and SMART goal setting resulting in a holistic approach meeting young families where they are along the journey.

This year, we have chosen the annual report theme “Momentum,” because though we have served our community for three decades, we know that the challenges facing the current generation are more complex than ever before. The lack of affordable housing that plagues our communities, the increase in the need for hunger alleviation strategies for young children, the challenges of workforce development facing young adults, and more call for innovation, vision, and solidarity across industries.

Step By Step is dedicated to bringing creative solutions to some of the most pressing concerns of our young families, and centering their voices at every opportunity. We are grateful you are joining us.

Tanya Torp

Tanya Torp, Executive Director

*<https://www.aecf.org/work/child-welfare>



CONTENTS

- 03 Letter from the Executive Director
- 04 Revive
- 06 Echo & Resound
- 08 Step Into Freedom
- 10 C.A.R.E.
- 11 Volunteer Spotlight
- 12 Impact & Financials
- 14 Vision for the Future
- 16 Partner Spotlight
- 19 Step Into Beautiful
- 20 Radiant & Resilient
- 21 30th Anniversary
- 22 How to Support SBS

STEP BY STEP

healing & empowering young single moms

OUR MISSION ...

We're here to empower and embolden young single mothers to improve their lives, their families, and their communities through healing, encouragement, faith and education.

OUR VISION ...

We envision a Lexington that fosters belonging and empowers young, single mothers to positively impact their families and communities.

REVIVE REVIVE

HEATHER'S STORY: BUILDING COURAGE, COMMUNITY, & A WAY FORWARD

"When I walked in, the first thing I noticed was all of the staff and volunteers literally cheering for me and my kids. 'You made it! We're so glad you're here!' I wondered how they knew it took everything for me to even be able to make it. I worked all day in a childcare classroom caring for other people's kids and I was exhausted. Then, getting my three kids ready to go after being gone since early morning seemed like too much effort. I was just so worn out and dragged down and didn't know if I even wanted to be there. Would anyone like me? Would I fit in? I wish I could go back to my nervous self, filled with anxiety and say, 'You don't know it yet, but Revive is going to change your life.'"

Revive Night is the most popular and longest running program at Step By Step. For 29 years we have met on Thursday nights providing transportation to and from our program, a hot meal prepared and served by volunteers, and children's programming so that moms can have some downtime with other moms while their kids enjoy crafts, Awana lessons, and structured play in a safe environment. We discuss topics chosen by our moms like the College & Career series where they learn resume writing and practice their interview skills through mock interviews with local leaders. We also focus on building community and deeply supportive friendships between the moms.

Almost 3 years ago, Heather finally built up the courage to join us on a Revive night, and she has seldom missed one since.

"One night, a mom who had graduated from the program 10 years ago returned to share her story about surviving an abusive relationship and I recognized my own story in hers. I finally admitted to myself that the relationship I was in was hurting me and the kids. Though I wasn't ready to leave yet, I started to see that there was a way out and that Step By Step could support me through the journey. It took more than a year for me to have the courage to step away, but through Revive nights, I kept hearing the truth and seeing other moms live it out: 'I am worthy.' Being with someone who controlled my finances, my emotions, and my schedule left me walking in fear and anger. Now, I am starting to see the darkness lift. I moved in with my family, and my kids and I are safe. I am saving up for my own place and my kids and I are attending therapy to heal. If I had not walked through those doors with those cheering women, I would still be where I was. I told a member of the Program Team that without the help of SBS, I don't think I would have ever had the strength to actually leave him. Their response sums up Step By Step to me. 'That strength was already inside of you. Sometimes you just need people to come alongside you and call those things out in you. We are here to support you!'" »»

"I wish I could go back to my nervous self, filled with anxiety and say 'You don't know it yet, but Revive is going to change your life.'"



"It feels so good to share my story with other moms and to encourage them in our support groups. Leading them reminds me that I have had this ability all along."



LEADING THE WAY: NAOMI'S STORY OF TRANSFORMATION

Naomi first attended Step By Step when she was 19 years old. She had a two year old and had recently found out she was expecting another child. Her housing was unstable, and she had a goal of becoming an entrepreneur. Like many of our moms who experience housing insecurity, she disappeared and came back a year later, when her newborn was three months old. She was in and out of Revive nights without much consistency.

"I had a lot going on in my life. I was trying to hold down a job and parent alone with very few resources. Sometimes I would couch hop, other times I would stay with my father. It felt like so much chaos. But one thing that never changed was the fact that I wanted stability for my kids. I just didn't feel like I had the space in my life for Step By Step. Little did I know, it is what I really needed to move towards stability."

Naomi attended off and on for a few years and then in 2019, "I got really serious about improving my situation. I started attending Revive regularly and I noticed Step By Step staff starting to tell me how much leadership potential I had. It felt good that they saw something in me, but I did not really see it in myself."

"I went through the Dare To Dream goal setting program and learned a lot about myself. I started to see that I could set goals for myself and reach them when I had encouragement. I started to learn what motivated me. It was my kids and my belief that I could have more."

"The staff offered me a place on the first Echo & Resound pilot program and I jumped at the chance. But then, I let life get in the way and I stopped showing up. I lost my job and I just felt like a failure. I felt embarrassed and ashamed like I had let everyone down. But, they kept reaching out to me. Even though I had dropped out of the leadership program, they still told me they saw so much in me. It took a lot to come back from that. They gave me a therapy referral and I started learning about my trauma and healing. I started to believe that the things they said about me were true. The things they reflected back to me that they saw in me were really there. My self-esteem improved the more I attended. I am not gonna lie... it was hard to overcome that shame, but I believed them. I did have potential."

This summer, Naomi returned to the Echo & Resound program and has soared. She has learned leadership skills, such as public speaking, active listening, and group facilitation, which she is able to take with her and use, not only to lead other moms at Step By Step, but lead in her home, her workplace, and in our community. "It feels so good to share my story with other moms and to encourage them in our support groups. Leading them reminds me that I have had this ability all along. Walking it out is challenging but so worth it."»»



READY FOR THE STORM: BUILDING SECURITY THROUGH FINANCIAL FREEDOM

Breyonna came to Step By Step about a year ago and the first thing the staff noticed is that she is an incredibly dedicated mom to her three year old daughter. She had found the strength and courage to leave an unhealthy relationship after five years to give her child stability, and she felt she needed to be surrounded by other young moms that could show her how to be independent and reach her goals for a better life for them both.

Soon after she started participating, Breyonna joined the Step Into Freedom Financial Literacy Program where she learned about budgeting, credit, and how trauma and poverty can affect our views and habits with finances. After completing the workshop portion of the program, Breyonna, along with the other participants, opened up an Individual Development Account at a local bank, selecting one of five savings goals with the potential of having their money matched up to 2:1 once the goal is reached. Out of the options to save for a house, car, paying existing debt, education expenses, or an emergency fund, Breyonna's goal was to secure a rainy day fund for emergencies.


"One of the hardest things about being a young single mom is the lack of resources and money. I was always one missed payday away from losing

everything and I wanted to make sure if there was an emergency, I would be covered."

Like so many of our young families who have incredible work ethics and work long hard hours to provide for their children, Breyonna has been a dedicated employee in a childcare facility receiving accolades from her employer. She brought the same level of dedication to the course. Even after working long hours, she made sure to complete her homework, work on her budget, and started a plan for the future.

In just a few months, she met her goal of building a fully funded emergency fund and Step By Step matched her money dollar for dollar. The following month she experienced a real emergency when her apartment was condemned after a large storm and she was forced to quickly find a new place to live. Thanks to her emergency fund, Breyonna and her daughter were quickly rehomed and safe.

"I had no idea I would need it so quickly but I am so glad I had it. But the best part is now I know how to continue what I started. I have the habits but more importantly, before I participated in the program, that setback could have ruined me financially for years. Instead, I was ready!" »»



"But the best part is now I know how to continue what I started. I have the habits, but more importantly, before I participated in the program that setback could have ruined me financially for years. Instead, I was ready!"





FROM OVERWHELMED TO EMPOWERED: RONNIECE'S JOURNEY THROUGH C.A.R.E.

"I feel like I can do anything now."



Ronniece called Step By Step months before we met her in person. She was apprehensive to join the program. Like most moms, overcoming the social anxiety of showing up on a Revive night where everyone is a stranger and you are not sure what to expect kept her from taking the next step.

The mom of an energetic and loving four year old son, the first night she attended, her kindness and big sense of humor quickly made her stand out. We could see the resilience peeking through. Though she often faced depression and overwhelm, she was resourceful and always looking for solutions and authentic connection.

One of the first things our staff did was establish regular check-ins with Ronniece to build a relationship based on mutual trust through our C.A.R.E. (Connections, Affirmations, Resources, Empowerment) program. Moms participating in the program meet with the C.A.R.E. Team regularly to be connected with community resources and receive emotional support.

The team then assessed Ronniece's strengths and provided referrals for therapy and began the Dare to Dream goal setting process with her, setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable,

relevant, and time-bound) goals broken down into smaller tasks with follow up and accountability. Her first goal was to enroll her child in preschool. Collecting the necessary paperwork and speaking to the correct people felt so daunting.

"It felt impossible to get through all of the requirements, immunizations, and paperwork. I just felt like I couldn't do it. But, with the help of the CARE team, we broke the tasks down into smaller tasks I felt like I could do. They checked in regularly, sometimes several times per week to see how things were going, to give me encouragement and tell me I could do it!"

"I took my son to the doctor and found out he needed glasses. That would normally have been a setback. Like, another thing that just seemed so big. But once we broke down the steps, I got him glasses and then got him enrolled in school. It has not been easy. He has some delays and the school and I are working together to do what we can to help him overcome them. But I can call the office or message the C.A.R.E. team any time I need prayer or advice and they are right there for me. I feel like I can do anything now... I am ready to set another goal!" »»



"The programming and the dedication to fulfilling their mission are truly outstanding."

PASTOR BRADLEY THOMAS

Step By Step could not reach our full impact without our volunteers. Currently, we have a roster of over 340 volunteers working in several capacities. Pastor Bradley Thomas first heard about our work as a member of the staff of Immanuel Baptist Church. The church has generously and faithfully partnered with Step By Step for over 25 of our 30 years. When he expressed a desire to serve, he began driving a van for us regularly, picking up moms and kids for Revive nights. This year, he joined our Board of Directors and has been an incredible leader.

"I've been blessed to serve in full-time ministry for 20 years, during which I've had the privilege of working with churches that have partnered with nonprofit organizations across various sectors. When I came to Immanuel and saw first-hand the impactful work that Step By Step is doing, I was not only eager to learn more about its mission and values but also felt a deep desire to get more hands-on and help this ministry expand its influence throughout our city. The programming and the dedication to fulfilling their mission are truly outstanding."

As we look to the coming year, Pastor Bradley is passionate about partnering with Step By Step to make a difference in our community.

"I believe that young families face increasingly difficult challenges in today's economy and social landscape. While expenses continue to rise, wages have remained stagnant. Higher education costs have skyrocketed, and everyday essentials like groceries and gas are more expensive than ever. Our communities and systems have made it harder than ever for young families to work hard and improve their lives. That's why I believe Step By Step is making a meaningful difference. They're doing the tough work of walking alongside these families, offering essential support in areas like education, parenting, childcare, financial planning, and spiritual renewal—things that are often missing in our communities. In short, Step By Step is truly making a difference!" »»

OUR IMPACT

340

Active Volunteers
(32% increase)

9,485.6

Volunteer Hours Completed
(83% increase)

288

Moms and Kids Served
(7% increase)

1,432

Interactions with Young Single Moms
(28% increase)
65 in-person mom visits

3,559

Basic Needs Items Delivered
(125% increase)

- Health (1)
- Domestic Violence (1)
- College/Career (3)
- Transportation (3)
- Housing (8)
- Parenting (8)
- Financial Assistance (14)
- Mental Health (16)
- Food (30)



Basic Needs (254)

Revive Attendance:



OUR PROGRAMS



REVIVE
REVIVE KIDS

REVIVE
REVIVE

(((Echo)))
& RESOUND



STEP into
READING

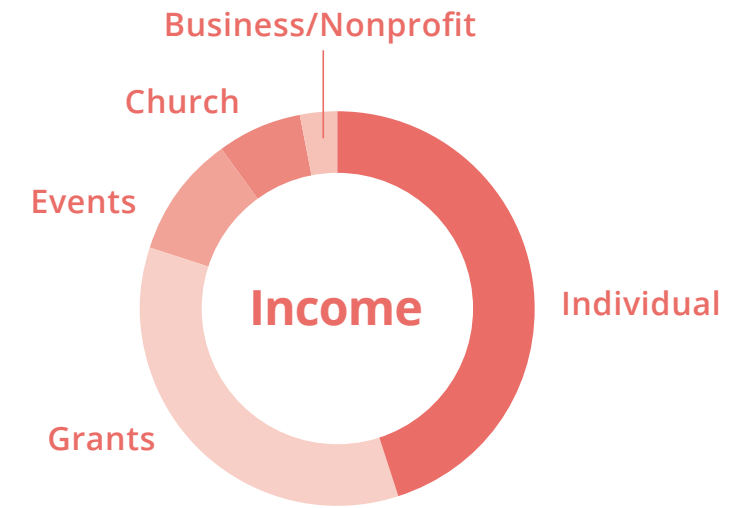


Rooted



THE NUMBERS

Data as of October 31, 2024



Income Distribution Raised to Date

85%

\$476,724.81

Total Funds Raised to Date

\$561,859.02

2024 Operating Budget



Scan the QR Code or visit sbslex.org/donate to help us meet our budget.



DRIVING CHANGE: OUR VISION & IMPACT FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Step By Step's Advisory Committee

In 2023, Step By Step formally launched an Advisory Committee comprised of a collection of local business leaders and professionals with unique knowledge and skills to augment those of the formal Board of Directors and staff. The aim was to develop a think tank of local leaders to offer a community perspective outside of our staff and board. Together, we studied the topics most pressing to our moms such as housing insecurity, mental health, and poverty. Along with local experts like Charlie Lanter, Commissioner for Housing Advocacy and Community Development, Step By Step moms were invited as keynote speakers to ensure that the perspective of those most directly impacted was always at the center.

In 2025, the committee will focus on child welfare and the foster care system. Roughly 35% of our moms are referred to us by the Department of Community Based Services: Child Protection Branch and the majority of them were in foster care themselves at one point. To break cycles and lean into innovation, we must first understand the landscape from the perspective of local professionals and our young single mothers. Our strategic plan over the next five years will be reflective of the topics the committee and our Mom Advisory Committee are researching, fact finding, and taking a posture of becoming more learned and informed.



Flourish: A Catalyst For Endurance

Step By Step's existing commitment to walk with young single mothers and their children navigating crises is part of our DNA. Through our C.A.R.E. Case Management program we work in tandem with our young families and community partners to provide support leading to resilience. The day-to-day emotional support and referral services are integral to our work.

The Flourish Campaign is an additional effort to bridge the gap between crisis and stability financially. Flourish will provide the funds to tangibly support a Step By Step family in a crisis when community resources are unavailable in order to avoid catastrophic consequences. This is not benevolence or a hand-out. This is a stop gap with wrap around services to help families move towards long-term stability.

The Flourish Campaign will fund this program for two years, including:

- A bilingual staff member dedicated to facilitating and overseeing the Crisis Care program.
- The maintenance and distribution of our Mom's Pantry of basic needs items, such as diapers, wipes, cleaning supplies, and hygiene products.
- A monthly budget to assist families with housing, utilities, and transportation costs. >>>



To learn more or give now, scan the QR code or visit sbslex.org/flourish.



MEET OUR NEW CRISIS CARE COORDINATOR, ANA DENHAM

Ana first found Step By Step in 2008, at the age of 18 raising her infant daughter on her own.

"I didn't have any support. In my community being a teen mom is looked at in shame. I had no one. I got the love and support I needed from the volunteers and other moms at Step By Step. They gave me the encouragement to know I could be a good mom to my daughter."

Ana faithfully attended Step By Step and became part of the first iteration of our leadership development program for moms in 2014 before getting married and expanding her family. As we sought to expand our team through a new Crisis Care Program, we knew we wanted to once again hire a Step By Step Graduate to bring their unique experience, voice, and advocacy. Ana more than fit the bill and joined our staff full time this fall.

"I know what they've been through and how they feel, the heartbreak of struggling. Being able to give back makes what I went through mean something." >>>

ANNE MURRY, THE MURRY FOUNDATION

Philanthropy has been a catalyst for change and innovation within our communities. When organizations have what they need to do the work, a deeper impact can be made. Unfortunately, most small to medium-sized nonprofits like Step By Step are often overlooked as viable on the ground solutions.

In 2017, the Murry Foundation reached out to us to learn about our mission. At the time we had three full-time employees, and only one was working directly with moms and kids. Wes and Anne Murry quickly became vocal advocates, financial supporters, and trusted advisors to our organization. In part because they and others saw the potential of a scrappy organization with vision and dedication, they invested in us. We now have six full-time and two part-time employees, all cross-trained to work directly with our young families.

The Murry Foundation's mission is to "invest and engage in collaborative disruption to break the cycle of poverty in our community." They are a force of focused goodness, impacting the nonprofit landscape and investing in infrastructure and

"... I really believe in the leadership of Step by Step. I know their hearts and the education they share is the right match for these moms."

sustainability practices throughout our community. Anne Murry serves on our Advisory Committee and Wes Murry has been a voice providing expertise on critical issues such as affordable housing, connecting extensive business acumen to the practical needs of our community.

Why has the Murry Foundation chosen to partner with Step By Step over the last seven years? According to Anne, "I have seen the difference the programming at Step By Step makes in the lives of young moms and their children. Step By Step is giving the moms the tools to change their lives and prepare their babies for the future. I know the team is empowering them access to education and supports where their lives can be fundamentally different."

The Murry Foundation has a unique approach to philanthropy that is sparking a revolution. They spend time with their grantees, getting to know the staff and participants on a deep level.

"What has impressed me most is that I really believe in the leadership of Step By Step. I know their hearts and the education they share is the right match for these moms. I also trust women to help women."

Recently, the Murry Foundation has invested in our Flourish Campaign, and have inspired and encouraged others to get on board.

"I know that the Flourish campaign is so vital because it is meeting basic needs. I don't believe you can heal physically or emotionally if you don't have your basic needs met." »»



BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: LEVERAGING DATA & RESEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

"The impact Step By Step is making in Lexington is so impressive and it needs to be known on a broader level."

During one of our Advisory Committee meetings focused on mental health, Dean of the University of Kentucky College of Social Work, Justin "Jay" Miller, Ph.D., shared data and strategy around supporting youth who are experiencing crisis. When he finished his presentation, he asked what Step By Step needed. We responded "Partners who can aggregate data and conduct research." His answer: "You've got it." Within a week, Aubrey Jones, Ph.D., MSW, a University of Kentucky College of Social Work Assistant Professor, was assigned to work with Step By Step to enhance evidence-based practices, create articles and aggregate data pertinent to our mission. Her research background includes examining aspects of reproductive health including behavioral health, access to care and health disparities.

At the forefront of her research, she has studied postpartum depression, unintended pregnancy and child maltreatment, and stigma in seeking mental health support. Her research will aid Step By Step as we look to build evidence-based, trauma-informed, and healing-centered programs and practices over the next 10 years.

Why is the research you are conducting vital to the future of our organization?

First, it is important to highlight all the great work Step By Step is doing and have it documented. Having data will help with future grant applications and donor requests and being able to prove that what Step By Step does work beyond anecdotal evidence, helping to fund the future vision.

What have you found most interesting so far?

My favorite part is the Revive nights. It's beautiful to experience the community, to sit and eat dinner with some of the moms and hear their conversations about how they have built community at Step By Step.

And hearing the staff talk about the work, I can hear the passion in all of their voices, and that brings me joy.

What do you hope your work will do for SBS?

I am hoping that it benefits the team to be able to grow and expand. The impact Step By Step is making in Lexington is so impressive and it needs to be known on a broader level. I hope this work will help bring light to what Step By Step is doing. »»

STEP *into* Beautiful

Step Into Beautiful early bird registration is now open. Our signature event, featuring a tea and a table decorating contest, increases in popularity every single year. Our 15th annual event takes place at Keeneland on **March 8, 2025** and features emcee Renee Shaw. With nearly 400 guests in attendance, we have the opportunity to share our mission through reflections from our graduates.

Support Step By Step by sponsoring a table and attending with your friends.

Reserve your table today at sbslex.org/sib2025



WHAT'S COMING

WHAT'S COMING

radiant & resilient

MOTHER'S DAY BRUNCH

STEP
BY_
STEP



We've seen over the years that when Mother's Day arrives, the gratitude and love many mothers receive is absent for these resilient go-getters who are doing it on their own against the odds, daily. We want to shower them with love, fun, and inspiration.

Our **second annual Mother's Day Brunch coming May 2025** is just for them.

Contact Development Manager Alicia Sims at alicias@sbslex.org for sponsorship opportunities.



SAVE THE DATE

30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2025 @ 6 PM
KENTUCKY THEATRE



As we celebrate 30 years, join us for the first public viewing of the Step By Step Documentary. Scan the QR Code for tickets.

PRESENTED BY



WAYS TO SUPPORT SBS:

MAKE AN IMPACT TODAY



Get started by scanning the QR code, visiting sbslex.org/donate, or using the enclosed donation card and envelope to invest in our mission.

MAKE AN ONGOING IMPACT

Monthly giving plants the seeds for organizational growth while providing young families lasting support. Thank you for considering making a lasting impact. Join by scanning the QR code or visit sbslex.org/donate/donatemonthly.



GIVE WITH THE GREATEST IMPACT

(AND RECEIVE THE BEST TAX BENEFIT!)

Visit sbslex.org/donate/taxsmartgiving for more info!

- STOCKS OR APPRECIATED ASSETS
- QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTIONS (QCDs)
- DONOR-ADVISED FUNDS (DAFS)
- LEGACY GIVING

Step By Step's Entity Identification Number/Tax Identification Number is 61-1313872



LEVEL 1: COMMUNITY CHAMPION \$30/month (\$1/day)

Provides transportation to and from Step By Step programming for three families.

LEVEL 2: STEADFAST SUSTAINER \$60/month (\$2/day)

Covers the cost of one month of case management for one young mom through our C.A.R.E. program and Dare to Dream goal setting program.

LEVEL 3: INSPIRED INNOVATOR \$150/month (\$5/day)

Empowers three moms in our Echo & Resound Leadership program to develop soft skills like communication and leadership for one month.

THANK YOU TO OUR CURRENT MONTHLY GIVERS!

Michelle Howell
Mary King
Roger Grigsby
Noa Gimelli
Lauren McDowell

Josh Sims
Susan Sabatino
Daniel Cooper
Kathlyn Bertram

Sheila Sekela
Christy Hiler
Amy and Dan Pecaro
Lindsay Bell
Nicole Washburn



VOLUNTEER

To learn more about volunteer opportunities to find out which might be the best fit for you, visit sbslex.org/volunteer.

Special thanks to the following service providers:
Hannah M Segura • Studio46 • S. Wright Creative



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

From the Step By Step Team

**STEP
BY _
STEP**

healing & empowering
young single moms