

2025  
ANNUAL  
REPORT

# LEGACY

ADVANCING A TRADITION OF **IMPACT**

STEP  
BY\_  
STEP

healing & empowering  
young single moms

30 YEARS





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## 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.

### Special thanks to the following service providers:

Hannah Segura, Moments Captured by Hannah  
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## A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This year Step By Step celebrated our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an outpouring of love from past and present participants, supporters, and community members. Over the past 30 years we have seen changes in our community and Step By Step has managed to grow and shift with the times as we continue to make tangible and sustainable impact.

The need for our work has never been more urgent. This year alone, we served over 300 young mothers and children. Each young mother carries dreams for herself and her children. Each child deserves to be seen, heard, and supported. Behind that number are more than 100 personal one-on-one interactions on average with each young mom: late-night calls when hope felt distant, connections to resources that opened doors, moments of encouragement that reminded them of their worth and capability. These aren't just statistics—they're relationships built on trust and encouragement. Through it all, our dedicated team of staff and volunteers work to center the voices of those most directly impacted as we not only walk alongside these young families, but also recognize and cultivate their own avenues of leadership. Transformation becomes possible in a supportive environment where autonomy is seen and valued.

We have chosen the theme "Legacy: Advancing a Tradition of Impact." The young mothers we serve are not problems to be solved—they are leaders to be championed, voices to be amplified, and community members whose gifts strengthen us all. As you read this report, you'll see evidence of what happens when a community chooses to invest in the people closest to

the challenges we face. Thirty years in, we're more committed than ever to building a future where every young mother has the opportunity to excel for herself, her community, and her children.

Tanya Torp, Executive Director





# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

SBS ALUMS CELEBRATE 30 YEARS OF LEGACY



Ten years ago empowered by a storytelling grant, Step By Step gathered seven young single mothers who stood in front of cameras and shared their stories. The documentary, *JUMP: Just Us Moms Performing*, captured their raw, intimate journey as they transformed pain into poetry and hardship into healing. Guided by writers, actors, and movement coaches, these moms crafted deeply personal performances that gave voice to experiences the world often silences—navigating home invasions, financial strain, generational trauma, and the daily weight of single motherhood.

But *JUMP* wasn't just about their struggles. It was about their becoming.

This fall, as Step By Step celebrated its 30th Anniversary, we hosted a special screening of *JUMP* and invited the women featured in the film to return and share updates about their lives today. Four of them came back: Faith, Rhonda, Neshea, and Austin. What they shared was powerful—a testament to the lasting impact of Step By Step's mission and the strength of the sisterhood formed within these walls.



## The Impact That Lasts

When asked about the biggest impact Step By Step had on their lives, each woman spoke to something different—yet deeply connected.

For Faith, it was the practical tools and the community. “The goal setting and having people push me to think more towards my future is something still making an impact in my life,” she shared. “Also being in a space that was nonjudgmental with other moms in the same shoes. Coming from a small hometown, the judgment is high.”

Faith also spoke about the relationships that endured. “I had the opportunity to come back and volunteer. Sometimes people can't understand what you experience, but having that real empathy, I was thankful to be that. I felt like it added to my validity as a volunteer. I still to this day would love to come back. I am still connected to several women and it remains a sisterhood.”

For Austin, Step By Step taught her compassion and perspective. “The biggest lesson I have learned from SBS is to not assume you know what someone else is going through,” she explained. “There was one mom I met that decided to put her child up for adoption. Once I heard her story and saw what she went through, it put a lot into a different perspective for me. I had judgment and learned so much about her and myself.”

Neshea's transformation was deeply spiritual. “My connection with the leadership, all of the mentors I came across, and the organization itself—the fact that people want the best for young moms. I never felt judged but I felt encouraged in how to dream bigger for my life. I also love



that it is Christ-centered. It helped challenge me in my faith and how to give myself grace. I also learned how to pray!”

She summed up her experience beautifully: “Being a young single mom was tough, but when you have a community that helps support you, that loves on you, that builds you up, and that teaches you that God makes no mistakes when he puts you in situations; you have to have faith and come out on top. I'm thankful for the experiences, the tears, the hugs, and the laughs that Step By Step has helped me to navigate through life. Step By Step is where true friendships blossomed. The friendships that stand the test of time, never faltering, are a precious gift when you all strive for the same thing and overcome obstacles to grow, becoming outstanding moms, better people, and women filled with Christ.”

## A Message to Donors

Each of these women wanted donors to understand the profound impact of their support.

Faith emphasized the comprehensive nature of Step By Step's care: “SBS takes care of a lot of things. Transportation, children's activities, the meals, and the support is huge. The reality is that it takes a lot of hands and support. In order to sustain these efforts, you must have consistent support.”

Austin highlighted the long-term ripple effect: “I'd want them to know how impactful it is in so many areas of a single mom's life. Having access to resources that aren't available anywhere else and what they do for our children in the long term is invaluable. Young moms find healing and community

while showing our kids positive friendships and relationships. Their donations provide those moments for a mom that may otherwise not have those moments.”

Neshea spoke to the wisdom of investing in Step By Step: “I want donors to know that SBS is a small organization that does a lot with what they have. The board and leaders are passionate and loving. They make good decisions about where to spend their money. We are a good investment. They gave me the tools to be a better version of myself. I am independent, strong, and a Christ-centered woman because of my time spent as a SBS mom.”

## A Legacy Worth Celebrating

As these four women stood together at the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, they represented something powerful: proof that Step By Step's mission works. Proof that when young mothers are met with grace, equipped with tools, surrounded by community, and empowered to dream bigger, they don't just survive—they thrive.

Ten years ago, they took the stage in *JUMP* and reclaimed their stories. Today, they continue writing new chapters—as independent women, devoted mothers, faithful friends, and living testimonies to the transformative power of a community that believes in them.

Their stories are Step By Step's legacy. And with continued support, countless more stories are yet to be written. **30**





CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

# STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF VISIONARIES: HONORING OUR FOUNDERS

Thirty years ago, three women sat together with an undeniable burden on their hearts. Susan Roark, Terri Behrens, and Tammy Fryman looked at the abuse and neglect rates in Lexington and knew something had to be done. They saw young single mothers—some barely more than children themselves—struggling alone, unsupported, and often invisible to the world around them.

One of the founders had been a teen mom herself. She knew firsthand the isolation, the judgment, the overwhelming weight of raising a child alone without resources or community. She wanted to use that experience to support other moms walking the same difficult road.

What started as a small support group in their church in 1995 has grown into a comprehensive, trauma-informed organization serving hundreds of young mothers and their children each year. Today, Step By Step stands as a testament to what happens when faithful vision meets consistent action—and when a community rallies around those who need it most.

## A Vision Born from Love

Susan remembers the early days vividly: “I remember Terri and I went to a neighborhood where there were houses with broken glass and boarded-up windows, and we were choked up realizing there were families, teen moms and their babies living in this neighborhood. Terri took pictures and created a video to cast the vision with the song ‘Love Will Build a Bridge’ by The Judds.”

And love did build a bridge. “Jesus did, and lives were changed back then and are still being changed now,” Susan reflects. “Same God. Same Spirit of Love. And God’s work continues.”

For Terri, looking back on 30 years feels almost surreal. “When we first began the work of what God was calling us to do to serve young single moms and their babies, I don’t think we could have even imagined that three decades later that vision would still be alive and thriving,” she shares. “All we knew was that there was a need, and there was work to be done. But in those early weary days we could not have foreseen the depth nor the impact this ministry would ultimately have, nor would we have even been able to believe its incredible longevity.”

Tammy remembers those beginning days: “We first started SBS based on a need we saw and a God-given vision of a ministry for young single mothers and their children, offering support, guidance and acceptance through Christ’s love. There was a lot of trial and error in those early years.”

## Passing the Baton

The founders knew they couldn’t do it alone forever. Over the years, they entrusted the mission to others who would carry it forward with the same passion and commitment.

“So much gratitude is owed to the ongoing valiant and noble efforts of the women and men who picked up the baton and kept running with it long after we needed to hand it over,” Terri says. “I am so grateful to the incredibly

hard-working, prayerfully invested staff and board of directors that continues to oversee this organization. There have been countless volunteers who have played such valuable sacrificial roles over these years, and literally thousands of moms and little ones who have chosen to be a part of SBS.”

Terri speaks with particular appreciation for current Executive Director Tanya Torp, who stepped into leadership just over ten years ago. “Tanya Torp stepped into the role of Director at Step By Step with a determination to lead the program faithfully to an even higher level of service and healing for young moms and their children—and she has done just that! It is beautiful to see Step By Step now equipped with a full team of passionate and gifted leaders.”

## More Than They Could Have Imagined

This fall, Terri and Tammy attended Step By Step’s 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration and the screening of *JUMP: Just Us Moms Performing*, a documentary featuring SBS moms from a decade ago. Tammy, who moved out of state after the first five years of SBS and has faithfully supported the organization from afar, had tears in her eyes as she watched.

“I am amazed at the growth Step By Step has experienced over the past 30 years,” Tammy reflects. “Now the vision has expanded far beyond what we could have imagined. I’m so grateful for those who have faithfully and sacrificially led this ministry to the place it is now.”

Susan, watching from afar, echoes that gratitude: “I’m so happy this beautiful program is still going after 30 years! This is a testimony to the faithfulness of God and the beautiful ones who still carry the torch!”

## A Story Just Getting Started

Terri puts it beautifully: “What God has done through Step By Step is a beautiful, often miraculous, story of ongoing

generational impact, and I am thrilled to say that even after 30 years, it looks like this ministry’s story of lives changed and hearts healed is just getting started!”

*“... even after 30 years, it looks like this ministry’s story of lives changed and hearts healed is just getting started!”*

Tammy offers encouragement to those carrying the mission forward: “With ever-increasing challenges facing young single mothers today, the need for Step By Step is greater than ever. To those who are leading and serving in SBS, I know the future may seem daunting at times, but be encouraged—God has faithfully provided for SBS over the past 30 years. He will continue to provide for the future. Be strong and courageous! Remember,

you are making an eternal difference in the lives of these young families.”

The founders describe their early work as offering a small basket of loaves and fishes—humble, limited, but given with faith. God multiplied it into a miracle that now spans three decades. Their vision to walk alongside young single mothers with love, encouragement, and practical support has become a legacy that continues to transform lives, break cycles, and build hope.

As Step By Step celebrates 30 years, we stand on the shoulders of these three visionary women—Susan Roark, Terri Behrens, and Tammy Fryman. Their faithfulness, their courage, and their willingness to say “yes” to God’s call created something that has impacted thousands of lives and will continue impacting generations to come.

To our founders: Thank you. Your legacy lives on in every mom who finds community, every child who experiences safety, every family that breaks the cycle, and every life transformed by the love you built this bridge with 30 years ago.

**The work continues. The vision thrives. And the best is yet to come. 39**

PHOTOS (Left to Right): Susan Roark and Terri Behrens with former SBS kids; SBS Group photo from the 1990s; Sheila Sekela, Heidi Basik, Terri Behrens, and Tammy Fryman at JUMP in 2015; Tammy Fryman; Terri Behrens at the SBS 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.





# REVIVE REVIVE

## FINDING HER PEOPLE: OLIVIA DISCOVERS COMMUNITY AT REVIVE



When a partner agency first told Olivia about Step By Step, she was hesitant. “They said that they could tell that I needed to form healthy connections with other people my age,” Olivia recalls. “I was very nervous to go because I did not have any other interactions with adults at that time.”

As a young mom of two daughters working her way through cosmetology school, Olivia’s days were full but isolating. Her first Step By Step event was a bonfire hosted by the Program Team, and something about the warmth—both literal and figurative—drew her in. Olivia is all about community and making impactful relationships, and she immediately sensed she’d found her people.

### Thursday Nights That Changed Everything

Revive meets every Thursday night and has been the cornerstone of Step By Step’s programming for 30 years. Moms receive transportation, their children enjoy Revive Kids programming, and everyone shares a hot meal prepared by volunteers. It’s a night designed for moms to connect, learn new skills, and find community.

Each week highlights topics the moms themselves request. Some nights are serious—first aid training, recognizing signs of abuse, navigating healthy relationships. Other nights are pure joy—dance workshops, art projects, game nights filled with laughter. Twice a month, Ignite Worship brings moms together for spiritual renewal.

Every Revive night ends with peer-led support groups where moms gather in the same small groups each week, building trust and deep relationships. Many moms report these groups are their favorite part of Revive—a space where they can be completely honest and completely supported.

For Olivia, Revive has become non-negotiable. “No matter what else I have going on, if it’s a Thursday night I make sure to make it to Revive,” she explains.

### Support That Shows Up

Olivia meets consistently with staff—at the SBS office, the library, the park, even at Walmart once for WIC shopping. Staff meet moms wherever is most convenient, recognizing that accessibility builds trust and provides meaningful support.

Through Dare to Dream goal setting, Olivia is working toward completing cosmetology school. “It has given me a support system,” she says of Revive. “It has brought people into my life that I can call when I need to talk. I have learned a lot of different skills and it has helped with

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my anxiety—specifically social skills and about healthy relationships.” Most recently, she enrolled in Step Into Freedom and is learning budgeting skills.

### Community in Action

One Thursday night, another mom shared that her car was stuck at the gas station next door with a flat tire.

Olivia immediately offered to help. “I know how to change a tire! I’ll come look at it with you.”

The two moms loaded up in Olivia’s car with their kids, and Olivia helped change the tire so everyone could make it home safely. That night, a friendship was born between Olivia and the other mom—the kind that only forms when someone shows up for you in a tangible way.

That’s the spirit of Revive. It’s not just a program—it’s a community where moms show up for each other and become the village each other needs.

### A Large Part of Their Lives

Olivia’s daughters love Revive Kids just as much as their mom loves Revive. “I’ve made connections with the volunteers also,” Olivia shares. “I love the Revive Kids volunteers that work with my kids. It takes a lot to trust someone with my children, but the volunteers here are amazing.”

The trust Olivia has built—with staff, volunteers, and other moms—has transformed her life. “Me and my kids look forward to going every week,” she says. “It is a very large part of our lives.”

Olivia came to Step By Step nervous, isolated, and uncertain. She found a place where she belongs, skills that empower her, friendships that sustain her, and a community that sees her and cheers her on. Every Thursday night, she shows up—and her village shows up for her. **30**





# ((Echo)) & RESOUND

## FINDING HER VOICE: VICTORIA'S LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

Victoria remembers the first time she heard about the Echo & Resound Leadership program. She sat in a Revive night in 2017, surrounded by the familiar faces of moms and volunteers who had walked alongside her for years. When staff mentioned the new two-year leadership development program designed for SBS graduates, Victoria's first thought was simple: ***I could never do that.***

Now in her second year of Echo & Resound, Victoria has discovered a profound truth: Leadership isn't about being the loudest voice in the room. It's about being the steadiest presence when someone needs you most.

### Learning to Lead by Learning to Listen

Echo & Resound is intensive by design. Participants develop professional skills like public speaking, active listening, and group facilitation while participating in Bible study and discipleship. They lead other moms each week, help develop and grow the program, and receive a stipend for their time and leadership.

For Victoria, the most profound shift came in the quiet moments. "The biggest thing is learning how to sit and be with God," she says. "Learning how to ground myself, meditate in prayer, and just talk has taught me to be calm and allows me to experience peace."

That practice has become her anchor. Before school each morning, Victoria leads her five children in worship, sharing Bible verses and songs. The spiritual depth she's

cultivated has become contagious—she shares worship songs with other moms and creates space for them to discover what she's found.

### A Leader of Leaders

Something remarkable has happened in Victoria's second year. The other Echo & Resound moms have begun looking to Victoria as their leader. "I've learned with leadership that there's more to leading than just being up front," Victoria explains. "Leading other moms by being there goes a long way. Being able to sit with another mom and showing her she's not alone, showing her ways that I've been through a lot but I've grown—and she can too."

The other moms trust her. Staff have watched Victoria's exponential growth with joy—her faithfulness to the program, no matter what's happening in her own life, has become legendary. "I've grown so much closer to the other ER moms than I expected," Victoria shares. "It's unlike any other friendship I have in my life."

"The biggest impact of being in ER is showing that I'm determined and I can do it," Victoria says. "When I first saw ER, I thought I could never do that. Now I can look back at all of the obstacles I've faced and see that I can do it. I'm strong on the inside."

Victoria came to Step By Step in 2017 looking for support. She found community, faith, and purpose. Now, as a leader of leaders, she's giving it all back—multiplied. **39**

*"I've learned with leadership that there's more to leading than just being up front."*





# ONE STEP AT A TIME: AMELIA’S JOURNEY FROM OVERWHELMED TO EMPOWERED

Two years ago, Amelia arrived in Kentucky pregnant, alone, and uncertain about her future. New to the state with no support system and a baby on the way, she found Step By Step and walked through the doors looking for help. What she found was a team willing to walk alongside her through every challenge, breaking down overwhelming obstacles into manageable steps.

Today, Amelia is the proud mom of a thriving two-year-old son, working toward her goals, and learning to save money for the first time in her life. Her transformation happened through consistent support, intentional goal setting, and the patient guidance of staff and a mentor who believed in her potential even when she couldn’t see it herself.

**Breaking It Down Step by Step**  
When Amelia first connected with the C.A.R.E. (Connections, Affirmations, Resources, Empowerment) team, she was drowning in needs. Finding a doctor for prenatal care. Securing stable housing. Planning for her baby’s arrival. The list felt endless, and the weight of it all was paralyzing.

“I used to become so overwhelmed by all the things,” Amelia reflects. “I didn’t know where to start.”

The C.A.R.E. team helped Amelia access critical resources: therapy referrals for mental health support, connections to healthcare providers, assistance with basic needs, and guidance on navigating systems that felt impossible to understand alone. But perhaps most importantly, they helped her see that she didn’t have to tackle everything at once.

Through the Dare to Dream goal setting program, Amelia worked with staff to identify her priorities and break them down into SMART goals—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Doctor appointments. Working toward her GED. Establishing self-

care routines. Each goal was divided into smaller tasks with follow-up and accountability built in.

“The Step By Step staff made it easier for me to keep pushing,” Amelia says. “It was like you all were holding my hand while I walked through this thing we call life. It was having support when no one else would support me.”

**A Mentor Who Listens**  
Alongside the program team, Amelia was matched with a mentor through the Refine Mentoring program. This one-on-one relationship provided something Amelia desperately needed: someone to walk alongside her, listen without judgment, and offer encouragement when the road felt too hard.

“My mentor has been there when I needed her and listened to me,” Amelia shares. “She didn’t give me feedback in a negative way. She was encouraging and very kind hearted.”

In a mentor, Amelia found acceptance, validation, and belief in her ability to succeed. Week after week, her mentor showed up, celebrated small victories, and reminded Amelia of her strength when doubt crept in.

**Holding Herself Accountable**  
Perhaps the most powerful shift in Amelia’s journey is the change she sees in herself. “I am able to hold myself accountable,” she says with pride. “I am so proud of how far I have come.”

The woman who walked into Step By Step two years ago, overwhelmed and unsure, has become a woman who sets goals, asks for help when she needs it, and keeps pushing forward. She’s building a stable life for her son and pursuing her education.

Amelia’s story illustrates the heart of Step By Step’s holistic approach—meeting moms where they are and walking with them toward where they want to be. One step at a time. One goal at a time. One mom at a time. 30

# A SAFETY NET IN CRISIS: NATASHA’S STORY OF STABILITY THROUGH SUPPORT

Natasha has been part of the Step By Step community, faithfully showing up week after week while raising her three sons, ages 10, 8, and 4. Over the years, she’s grown from a young mom seeking support into a leader—now in her second year of the Echo & Resound Leadership program, receiving a stipend while leading and mentoring other moms.

Natasha has always been a hard worker. For five years, she was one of the top employees at a local childcare facility, seen as a leader among staff. But despite her dedication and leadership, she was still making only \$15 an hour—not enough to build the stable future she envisioned for her family.

This year, Natasha made a courageous decision. She accepted a position with Fayette County Public Schools as a para-educator—a job that would pay more, provide schedule flexibility to meet her boys’ needs, and offer a clear career path forward while she finishes school herself. It was exactly the kind of opportunity she’d been working toward.

But the transition created an unexpected crisis. A lapse in income between jobs put Natasha’s housing at risk just as she was trying to move into a new apartment. Despite doing everything right—working hard, pursuing better opportunities, staying engaged with Step By Step—Natasha found herself facing the kind of emergency that can derail years of progress.

**When Crisis Strikes**  
This is exactly why Step By Step launched the Crisis Care Program in January 2025. It’s not benevolence or a handout—it’s a strategic intervention for moms who are actively participating in SBS, doing everything they’re supposed to do, but face an emergency that could spiral them into crisis and put housing, employment, or stability at risk.

Through Crisis Care, Step By Step was able to help Natasha with her security deposit and first month’s rent, bridging the gap so she could make the transition to her better-paying job without losing everything she’d worked for.

“It has been impactful because I had no other resources to use for that moment in time,” Natasha shares. “It gave me a safety net for me and my children to fall back on. I am very grateful. I do not know what I would have done without it.”

The impact went beyond immediate financial relief. “I have been through a lapse in income before and it was devastating,” Natasha reflects. “This time around, I did not feel like I had to start back at square one just because I got a better, higher paying job. It actually allowed me to move up instead of holding me back.”

**More Than Emergency Relief**  
Crisis Care doesn’t stop with immediate assistance. The program includes follow-up support through Step Into Freedom financial literacy programming, helping moms develop budgeting skills and emergency preparedness strategies to avoid future crises. It’s about sustainability—giving moms not just a one-time rescue, but tools to build long-term stability.

For Natasha, who is already leading other moms through Echo & Resound, the support came at a pivotal moment. Instead of falling backward, she was able to move forward into a job with better pay, better benefits, and a path toward her educational and career goals. Her three sons didn’t have to experience housing instability. The family could stay together, stay stable, and keep building.

“A safety net is everything and having a village is everything,” Natasha says. “Step By Step is my village.”

**Building a Village of Support**  
Natasha’s story illustrates why Crisis Care exists. Young single mothers face unique vulnerabilities—one emergency, one gap in income, one unexpected expense can undo years of hard work and progress. But when moms have a safety net, when they have a village that catches them in crisis and helps them land on their feet, they can keep moving forward.

Natasha came to Step By Step nine years ago looking for support. She stayed, she grew, she became a leader. And when crisis struck, her village was there—not to rescue her permanently, but to bridge the gap so she could rescue herself.

Now Natasha is thriving in her new role, her housing is secure, and she’s continuing to lead other moms who are walking the same path she once walked. She’s proof that with the right support at the right time, young mothers don’t just survive—they rise. 30



*“A safety net is everything and having a village is everything. Step By Step is my village.”*



*"...it's shown me that I CAN save. I am able to limit my spending, living in my budget range, not living outside of my means."*

## DRIVING TOWARD INDEPENDENCE: AKUA'S JOURNEY TO FINANCIAL FREEDOM



Three years ago, Akua walked through the doors of Step By Step with her one-year-old son, Bryan, looking for support and community. What she found was a path toward a future she hadn't dared to imagine—one where she could save thousands of dollars, build financial stability, and achieve goals that once felt impossible.

Now in her first year of the Echo & Resound Leadership program, Akua is leading other moms while receiving a stipend for her leadership. But one of her proudest achievements happened through Step Into Freedom, SBS's trauma-informed financial literacy course specifically designed to meet the unique needs of young single mothers.

### Learning to Save in a New Way

Step Into Freedom addresses questions many young moms face: How do you handle money if you've grown up in poverty? How do you break cycles and build new habits when you've never seen financial stability modeled?

For Akua, the course provided practical tools that changed her daily life. "Step Into Freedom gave me some tips on budgeting and saving more," she says. "Ms. Rhonda gave us a tip to limit spending to two times a week and that's really helped me a lot. I am a lot more mindful of what I'm buying, thinking, 'Do I need it or do I want it?'"

After completing the workshop, Akua opened an Individual Development Account (IDA) with a partner bank—a matched savings account where Step By Step matches deposits up to 2:1 once participants reach their goals. Moms can save toward buying a house, purchasing a car, paying off debt, funding education, or building an emergency fund.

Akua chose to save for a car.

### \$4,000 Saved, Matched, and Growing

Over 18 months, Akua faithfully made deposits into her IDA account. "It has been a challenge getting to the bank to put the money in, having to depend on other people,"

she admits. "But it's shown me that I CAN save. I am able to limit my spending, living in my budget range, not living outside of my means."

The discipline paid off. Akua saved \$2,000—and Step By Step matched it, tripling her investment. Now, with \$6,000 waiting for her, Akua is working to pass her permit test. Once she receives her full license, she'll be ready to purchase a reliable car without taking on a loan.

"I still use the budget planner they gave me in Step Into Freedom to track my spending!" Akua explains. The structure of the IDA account proved crucial. "I'm glad I wasn't able to touch the money I was saving. It's helped me with my spending so I wouldn't spend it just because I had the money."

### A Car Changes Everything

For Akua, a car isn't just transportation—it's freedom, opportunity, and stability. "It would change my life dramatically," she says. "Transportation is really hard as a single mom: going to doctor appointments, going to events, going to get groceries, going to work."

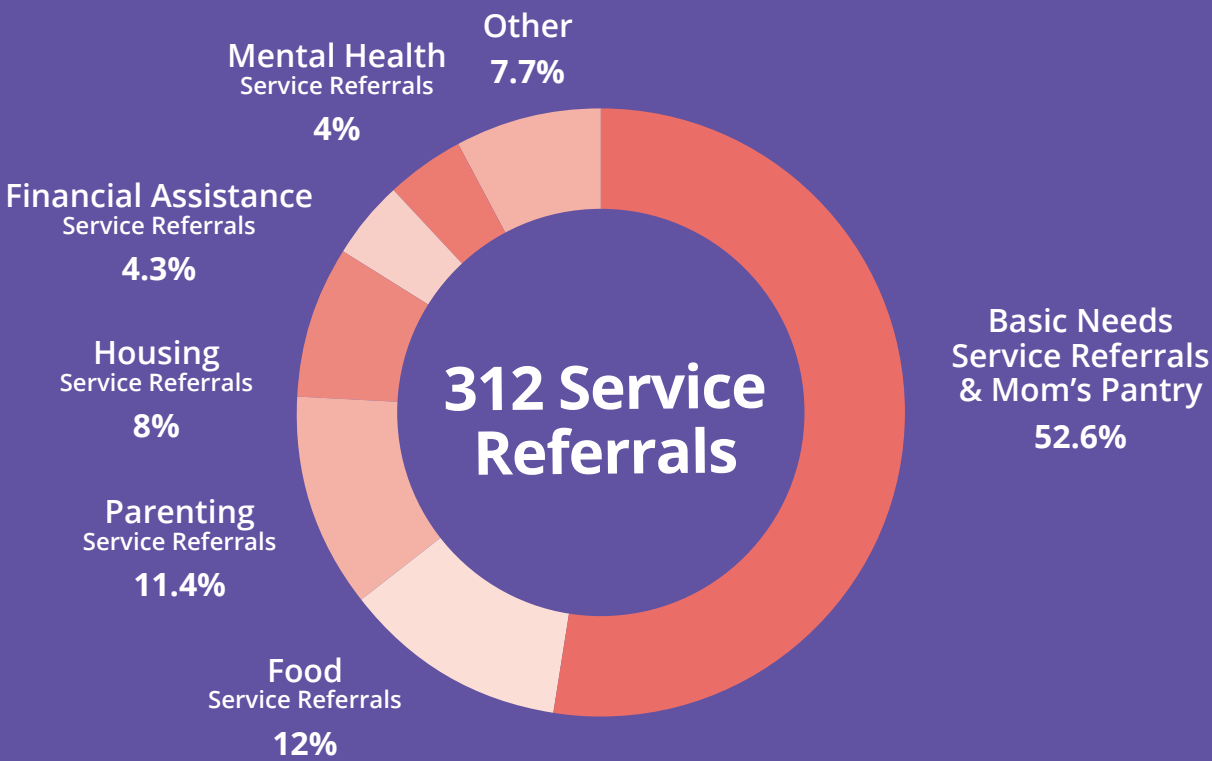
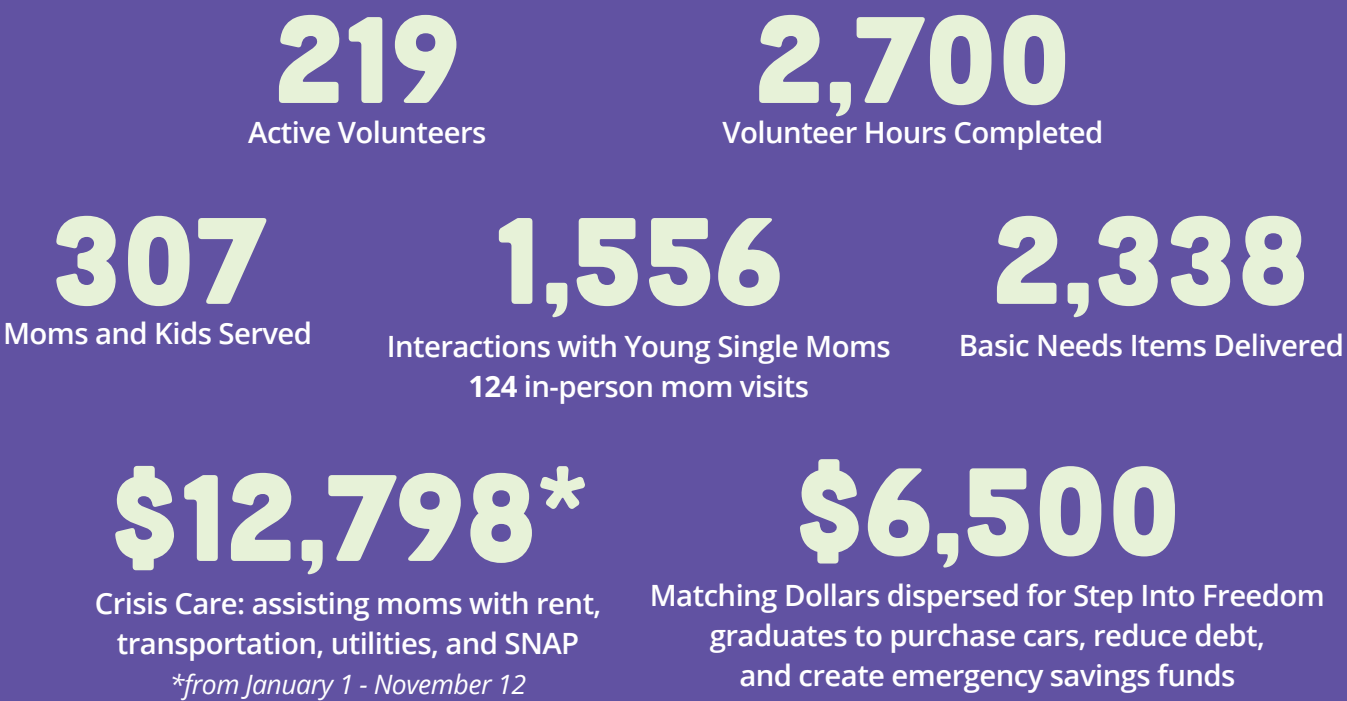
Right now, Akua works at a daycare—a choice driven by necessity. "Since I don't have a car, I have to ride the bus to work. So I have to work at a daycare so I'm not having to ride the bus to a bunch of different places. With a car, I can just drop Bryan off and head to work. I want to get into a job that is more steady."

Akua's goals don't stop with a car. "Now I want to create an emergency fund for myself so I don't fall behind on payments for car insurance," she shares, already thinking ahead.

Through Step Into Freedom, Akua learned that she has the strength and discipline to achieve her goals. She proved to herself that financial stability is within reach, and that the habits she's building now will serve her family for years to come. She's moving forward with skills, savings, and soon, a car—building the life she wants for herself and Bryan, one intentional decision at a time. **30**



OUR IMPACT







# BUILDING FOUNDATIONS: INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION THROUGH REVIVE KIDS

Every Thursday night at Step By Step, something special happens. While moms gather for Revive—building community, learning new skills, and receiving support—their children are experiencing their own transformative program just down the hall.

Revive Kids is far more than childcare. It's a place where children ages infant through elementary experience consistent, loving care while participating in age-appropriate lessons, crafts, games, and activities designed to help them thrive. For many of these children, Thursday nights at Step By Step have become the highlight of their week—a safe, joyful space where they're known, loved, and invested in.

This year, Step By Step took a significant step forward in our commitment to serving not just young mothers, but their children as well. We hired our first Children's Coordinator, Marcia Adkins, a retired nurse with years of experience in children's ministry, to work 20 hours per week leading and developing Revive Kids programming.

## Professionalizing Programs, Deepening Impact

Before Marcia joined the team, Revive Kids was run entirely by volunteers coordinating week to week. While volunteers remain the heart of the program, Marcia's leadership has brought structure, quality control, and intentional development that has elevated the experience for both children and volunteers.

Marcia has implemented consistent processes for quality programming, ensuring each week includes thoughtful lessons, engaging activities, and meaningful connections. She's recruited and trained Revive Kids leaders—dedicated volunteers who are in the rooms each week leading other volunteers and building lasting relationships with the children.

"The kids need consistency," Marcia explains. "Many of them face instability in other areas of their lives. When they come here every Thursday, they know what to

expect. They know they're safe. They know they're loved. That consistency matters."

Having a paid staff person dedicated to the children has also freed up the Program Team to focus more deeply on supporting the mothers, knowing their children are being cared for with excellence and intention.

## Expanding Programming: Education and Wellness

This year, thanks to a grant from Toyota North America, Revive Kids expanded programming to focus on education and literacy. Children are engaging with books, learning activities, and skill-building exercises designed to support their development and school readiness.

Additionally, through a partnership with WellCare, Revive Kids launched a dental hygiene education initiative. Children are learning the importance of brushing their teeth, proper techniques, and healthy habits through fun, interactive lessons. Local dentists have visited to reinforce these lessons, making dental care accessible and less intimidating for children who may not have regular access to preventive care.

"The kids are having a blast," Marcia shares. "They're learning about taking care of their bodies while playing games, doing crafts, and building friendships. They don't even realize how much they're learning because they're having so much fun."

## A Place Kids Beg to Go

The impact of Revive Kids shows up in unexpected ways. Moms regularly share that their children love coming to Step By Step—so much so that even on nights when a mom might not feel like attending Revive, her kids beg her to go.

"My kids ask all week if it's Thursday yet," one mom shared. "They love their teachers, they love the crafts, and they've made friends with other kids who understand their lives. It's become this safe, consistent place for them."



For children growing up in challenging circumstances—often experiencing housing instability, financial stress, or family challenges—having a place that feels safe, fun, and consistent can be life-changing. Revive Kids provides that space.

## Investing in Whole Families

Step By Step has always believed in serving whole families, not just mothers in isolation. When moms thrive, their children thrive. But the reverse is also true—when

children have access to quality programming, education, and care, it frees their mothers to focus on their own growth and development.

Marcia's leadership, combined with dedicated volunteers, generous grant support, and thoughtful partnerships, has transformed Revive Kids from a necessity into a powerful program in its own right. Children aren't just cared for—they're invested in, taught, loved, and given tools to succeed.

"These kids are amazing," Marcia says with a smile. "They're resilient, curious, and full of potential. Our job is to nurture that potential and show them they matter. Every single Thursday, that's what we get to do."

As Step By Step looks toward the future, the investment in Revive Kids represents a commitment to breaking cycles and building futures—not just for this generation of young mothers, but for the next generation as well. 30



*"My kids ask all week if it's Thursday yet... It's become this safe, consistent place for them."*



# A LEGACY OF FAITHFUL GIVING:

## SHEILA SEKELA'S 29-YEAR JOURNEY WITH STEP BY STEP

Twenty-nine years ago, three women stood before a congregation and shared a vision: to support young single mothers with love, encouragement, and practical support. Sheila Sekela sat in the pews that day, listening intently. What she heard wasn't just a presentation about a new nonprofit—it was an answer to prayer.

"I had been praying for a ministry outside of the church," Sheila recalls. "When I heard them speak about Step By Step, I knew this was it."

From that moment, Sheila has been woven into the fabric of Step By Step's story. She served on the original Board of Directors when the organization became a 501(c)(3). When the fledgling nonprofit couldn't afford to hire an Executive Director, Sheila stepped into the role gratis for four years, guiding the organization through critical early growth with no compensation—only conviction.

Nearly three decades later, Sheila remains one of Step By Step's most faithful supporters, continuing to give generously and now including SBS in her estate planning to ensure the mission continues long after she's gone.

### Why She Stays

Most volunteers and donors cycle through organizations over the years, but Sheila has remained steadfast. Why? "Because I know from experience that every penny is stretched," she explains. "I know that the money I donate is used wisely, and I love the work that SBS does. It makes a difference for generations. It is not just the moms. It is the moms and their kids and their kids after."

Sheila has witnessed hundreds of young mothers come through Step By Step's doors over nearly three decades. She's seen transformation that extends far beyond a single mom getting back on her feet—she's seen cycles broken, families strengthened, and children given opportunities their parents never had.

"If Step By Step disappeared tomorrow, there would be a big gaping hole that young single moms and their kids would fall through," Sheila says with urgency in her voice. "They already walk a tightrope. They need those integrative services that SBS finds for them."

For Sheila, this isn't just nonprofit work—it's living out her faith. "If I want to live like Jesus and value what He values, then I have to care for the poor," she says simply. "I want to hear the Lord say, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant.' My prayer every day is that I will be a good steward of everything God puts in my care. I would feel like a traitor to Jesus if I didn't do everything I can to help people who are left behind by the world."

### Leaving a Legacy That Lives On

Sheila has given her time, her leadership, and her financial resources to Step By Step for 29 years. But she's also made the decision to include SBS in her estate planning—a gift that will continue supporting young mothers and their children long after her lifetime.

"To whom much is given, much is required," Sheila explains. "And if you have a significant estate where your family is more than taken care of, what a legacy to care for those who have no one to take care of them? We are blessed and our kids will be fine, so I think it is important to cast a wider net."

For Sheila, legacy giving feels both good and right. "It is only fair. It seems to me the right thing to do and a no-brainer to bless an organization that I know does incredible work. People in the world today are just so behind and struggling to just reach out of the basement of society."

Legacy gifts—planned gifts through wills, trusts, retirement accounts, or life insurance policies—ensure that Step By Step's mission continues for the next generation. They provide stability, allow for long-term planning, and guarantee that young mothers decades from now will have the same support that moms receive today.

*"I love the work that SBS does. It makes a difference for generations. It is not just the moms. It is the moms and their kids and their kids after."*

### An Invitation to Give

Sheila has a message for those who might be considering including Step By Step in their estate plans: "Trust that your money will be used wisely and that the Lord promises whatever we sow we reap ten, twenty, one hundred fold. It is a blessing to give. You don't give just because God is going to bless you, but you will be blessed with joy."

And she's right—giving brings joy. "It is a joy to me to give to SBS," Sheila says with a smile. "It doesn't hurt me a lick. It is nothing but joy. If people gave more, they would discover that."

To future moms who will benefit from legacy gifts like hers, Sheila offers this encouragement: "Look to the moms who have come before you. What so many have been able to overcome, you can do it too. SBS will be there to help you, encourage you, and equip you."

### A Legacy Worth Following

Sheila Sekela's 29 years of faithful service to Step By Step represent more than decades of volunteerism and generous giving. They represent a life lived in alignment with deeply held values—caring for the vulnerable, stewarding resources wisely, and trusting that investing in young mothers and their children creates ripples that extend far beyond what we can see.

Her legacy gift ensures that her impact will outlive her, that her faithfulness will continue blessing families for generations to come, and that the mission she helped birth 29 years ago will thrive long into the future.

As Step By Step celebrates 30 years of walking alongside young single mothers, Sheila's story stands as an invitation: to give generously, to give faithfully, and to give in ways that create lasting change—not just for today, but for all the tomorrows to come. **30**

To learn more about including Step By Step in your estate planning, contact Development Director, Alicia Sims ([alicias@sbslex.org](mailto:alicias@sbslex.org)) or visit [sbslex.org/donate](https://sbslex.org/donate).





# CORPORATE CHAMPIONS:

## INVESTING IN MOTHERS, TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Behind every mom who reaches her goals, every child who thrives in a stable home, and every family that breaks the cycle of poverty stands a network of corporate partners who believe in Step By Step’s mission. These organizations understand that supporting young single mothers creates a ripple effect—stronger families, healthier children, and a more vibrant community. Their generous support enables us to provide trauma-informed programming, financial literacy education, leadership development, and crisis intervention that changes lives. We celebrate these corporate champions who are helping us build a legacy of impact for generations to come.



“Partnering with SBS means investing in stronger families and brighter futures. By supporting these families’ education and career goals, we’re **helping build the foundation for a more resilient community.**”

**Justin Posey**  
Senior Analyst, Corporate Communications, Toyota

“Step By Step is a good investment because it doesn’t just care for and empower young single mothers—it helps break cycles of poverty and adversity by equipping women with the tools, confidence, and support they need to build brighter futures for themselves and their children. By coming together as a community, **Step By Step drives lasting change, fostering critical impact not only in individual lives but throughout the communities we serve.** This mission closely aligns with Meijer’s key values of strengthening families, investing in community well-being, and inspiring collective action for a better tomorrow.”

**Alyssa Upton**  
Louisville/Lexington Market Director, Meijer

“At Independence Bank we believe in strengthening our community one step at a time. The programs at Step By Step encompass holistic engagement, education, support, care and nourishment from the inside out. **Step By Step empowers young women to help them create a sustainable future, not only for themselves, but also for their families.**”

**Stacy Berge**  
President, Independence Bank - Lexington



KATHLYN

# SHOWING UP:

## WHY OUR VOLUNTEERS CHOOSE SBS

### Revive Kids Leader

*Volunteer since 2019.*

I first became interested in Step By Step after hearing about it through my church, Immanuel Baptist Church, while I was a nursing student at the University of Kentucky. I started as a Refine Mentor in 2019, and after that mentorship ended, I began helping with childcare. I especially enjoyed the infant age group, so I stuck around and now help lead in the infant room at Revive Kids.

I continue volunteering because it has been such a strong community for me over the years, and I feel honored to witness the strength of SBS moms working hard to improve their lives and take amazing care of their babies. As a nurse, I get to watch their babies learn and grow at Revive Nights, and I love watching the littles get SO excited to see their mommas at pick-up time.

I’m continually moved by the dedication of SBS volunteers and staff who bring the mission to life. The message at Step by Step is “look what our moms can do” when so many programs focus on “look what we’re doing.” **This organization thrives because the moms and volunteers trust the leadership—not just because they’re good at what they do, but because they don’t make a single move without inviting God into it.**

One funny memory stands out. On a busy night with 12-15 toddlers, we ended up with a large pile of 24+ tiny shoes on the floor and no idea who they belonged to! The mommas helped us figure it all out, and we got smarter next time.





Refine Mentor

Volunteer since 2025.

I first chose to volunteer with Step By Step after completing the Colson Fellows training program and discerning my personal mission plan. My heart for single moms became almost a heaviness. I realized how brave you have to be to move forward as a single parent, and I felt called to make a real commitment to show how much I admire and love these young women.

As a new Refine Mentor, I went through Step By Step's extensive volunteer training—10 hours online and 8 hours in-person—covering trauma-informed care, active listening, and healthy boundaries. I have worked for nonprofit organizations in the past, even as a volunteer coordinator, and Step By Step has the best volunteer program I have ever encountered. **The in-depth training and care I have received makes me feel confident in my volunteer role and prepared for what I consider to be an important calling from God.**

My favorite memory so far was our leadership retreat a few weeks ago—a lovely, unhurried time to connect with other volunteers and get better acquainted. I'm excited to continue volunteering for many years to come!



Revive Leader

Volunteer since 2018.

I first chose to volunteer with Step By Step because I saw the heart behind the mission—to walk alongside young single moms with love, encouragement, and grace. As a former young single mom myself, I wanted to be part of a community that reminds these moms of their worth and potential through presence and God's love in action.

**I continue to volunteer because I've seen transformation—not just in the moms, but in myself.** Their courage and determination to rewrite their stories inspire me deeply. One of my most powerful memories comes from our Ignite Worship Nights. When we first started, many moms hadn't experienced expressive worship before. Over time, something beautiful shifted. At a recent night, I noticed the room filled with a unified sound—staff, volunteers, and moms all lifting their voices together in true surrender. That night, I realized we weren't just hosting worship; we had become worship. It was a sound of transformation, healing, and freedom.



Van Driver

Volunteer since 2010.

My involvement with Step by Step started with helping my wife—collecting Christmas gifts and managing the kitchen at the annual Step Into Beautiful fundraiser. I volunteered because I thought it was important to support my wife in doing something she thought was important, but Step by Step became important to me too.

After I retired in July 2024, I could commit to volunteering during the week. My first wife was a single mother when I met her, and she had a good job, reliable car, health insurance, and strong support—but my involvement with Step by Step showed me her life was an exception, not the rule.

I'm guided by John Wesley's words: "Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can." I know that driving a van once or maybe twice a month is a very small and simple thing, but the Step by Step Revive Creed brings me to tears every time I read it. **I am determined that no mother should ever miss out on the opportunity to participate with a group that expresses such passion just because she does not have the transportation needed to get there.**



Graphic Designer

Volunteer since 2011.

I first volunteered with Step By Step in 2011, bringing a meal with my church—drawn to an organization making a real, tangible difference in the community. In 2019, looking for a way to give back through my gifts and talents, I filled out a volunteer application for graphic design work, and within a week the team had me plugged in. Over the years, I've seen how SBS pours into the moms and kids, but also into the volunteers.

**I've received far more than I could ever give back—**through meaningful conversations, shared prayers, and supportive community. SBS has blessed me abundantly. Additionally, the impact SBS makes is visible right here in our own backyard. The moms and kids they serve are our neighbors. While I can't help on Thursday nights during this season of life, I love that I can help spread the word about the impact they are making in our community.

To anyone unsure if they have something to offer SBS: reach out anyway. There is a place for everyone. You never know how God might use you.



WHAT'S COMING

# 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 16<sup>th</sup> annual event takes place at The Manchester Hotel on **March 7, 2026** and features emcee Renee Shaw. With 300 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/sib2026](https://sbslex.org/sib2026)*



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 **third annual Mother's Day Brunch** coming **May 16, 2026** is just for them.

Contact Development Director Alicia Sims at [alicias@sbslex.org](mailto:alicias@sbslex.org) for sponsorship opportunities.



WHAT'S NEXT

# BUILDING THE FUTURE:

## RESEARCH, INNOVATION, AND BOLD SOLUTIONS

As Step By Step celebrates 30 years of walking alongside young single mothers, we're not just honoring our past—we're building the foundation for transformative change. Through rigorous research, targeted programming, and ambitious vision, we're addressing the root causes that keep young families trapped in cycles of instability.

### Research Committee: Building an Evidence Base for Systemic Change

Our work requires more than compassion. It demands rigorous evidence to identify root causes, measure impact, and drive policy-level change. In 2024, we launched the Step By Step Research Committee, a volunteer group of dedicated researchers from the University of Kentucky and Cincinnati Children's Hospital who bring specialized expertise in research design, data collection, social work research, and public health.

We're building a localized evidence base that documents the specific barriers our young families face, the efficacy of our interventions, and the return on investment our programs deliver. During weekly Revive meetings, the committee delivers surveys, conducts focus groups with moms and volunteers, and provides input on data collection. Rather than relying on anecdotal evidence or national statistics, we answer critical questions with local data.

We're examining housing insecurity, interactions with the child welfare system, and workforce development. How do stable housing and basic needs security correlate with family reunification rates, educational attainment, and economic mobility? Which program components produce the greatest measurable impact?

This commitment to data-driven decision making ensures the efficacy of our programs—programs we hope can be studied, replicated, and scaled to serve even more families.

### Restore: Supporting Families Navigating the Child Welfare System

This year, our Advisory Committee—composed of stakeholders, local business professionals, academics, and partner representatives—focused on understanding the child welfare system and its impact on our community. A particularly powerful moment came when Cecile, a Step By Step alumna, courageously shared her journey: the heartbreak of having her eight-month-old son removed from her care and the obstacles she navigated during their nearly two-year reunification process.

Drawing on guest presentations, research, and data analysis, the committee identified a crucial gap: 35% of our young mothers ages 12 to 24 currently have open cases with Child Protective Services, yet lacked targeted support addressing their unique circumstances.

In response, we are launching **Restore**, a comprehensive support program that integrates parenting education, one-on-one mentoring, peer-led support groups, and specialized guidance to help mothers navigate the reunification process and strengthen their families.

The impact extends far beyond mothers. When families are successfully reunified, children experience the stability and security essential for healthy development. Research shows that children who remain with or are reunified with supported, capable parents have better educational outcomes, stronger emotional health, and reduced likelihood of entering the child welfare system themselves as adults. By equipping mothers to successfully navigate the system and rebuild their families, we're breaking intergenerational cycles and giving children the gift of growing up in their own homes with parents who have the tools and support to care for them well.

Restore represents the Advisory Committee's purpose—translating knowledge, data, and lived experience into meaningful action that transforms lives across generations.

### Breaking Ground, Building Futures: Our Housing Vision

The stories we hear from our mothers reveal a painful truth: the lack of affordable housing has reached crisis levels, and our families are bearing the weight of this systemic failure.

This year, mother after mother shared experiences of instability—living in hotels when funds allow, sleeping in cars when they don't, cycling through emergency shelters, or couch-

hopping between friends and relatives. These young mothers don't simply need a roof; they long for stability, safety, and a place where they can parent with dignity.

Housing insecurity impacts their ability to maintain employment, keep custody of their children, access healthcare, and build the foundation every family deserves.

Wraparound services, while essential, cannot fully address the needs of families without stable housing.

Our **2026 Strategic Plan** will outline a bold commitment to provide tangible housing solutions. This plan will detail our approach to developing:

- **Emergency housing** for families in crisis
- **Transitional housing** that offers stability while mothers build their capacity for independence
- **Permanent supportive housing** that provides long-term security paired with continued mentoring and resources

We don't yet have all the answers about how we'll accomplish this ambitious goal, but we know this: our mothers and children deserve more than temporary fixes. They deserve homes. And we are committed to figuring out how to make that happen.

As we look toward the future, our research foundation, targeted programming, and housing vision represent our commitment to not just serving families, but transforming the systems that have failed them. This is the legacy we're building—one grounded in evidence, driven by compassion, and bold enough to tackle the barriers that have kept young families struggling for far too long.

**The next 30 years start now.**



# WAYS TO SUPPORT SBS:



## 1) MAKE AN IMPACT TODAY



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

## 2) 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](https://sbslex.org/donate/donatemonthly).



**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.

## 3) GIVE WITH THE GREATEST IMPACT

(AND RECEIVE THE BEST TAX BENEFIT!)

Visit [sbslex.org/donate/taxsmartgiving](https://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

## 4) VOLUNTEER

To learn more about volunteer opportunities to find out which might be the best fit for you, visit [sbslex.org/volunteer](https://sbslex.org/volunteer).

### THANK YOU TO OUR CURRENT MONTHLY GIVERS!

- Lindsay Bell  
Kathlyn Bertram  
Suzanne Burns  
Daniel Cooper  
Iris Cornelius  
Pace Cooke Emmons  
Noa Gimelli  
Roger Grigsby  
Christy Hiler  
Michelle Howell  
Sherri Jones  
Mary King  
Lauren McDowell  
Amy and Dan Pecaro  
Amanda Riley  
Melissa Rondeau  
Susan Sabatino  
Sheila Sekela  
Josh Sims  
Dr. Carol Taylor-Shim  
Nicole Washburn





**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

*From the Step By Step Team*

**STEP  
BY\_  
STEP**

healing & empowering  
young single moms