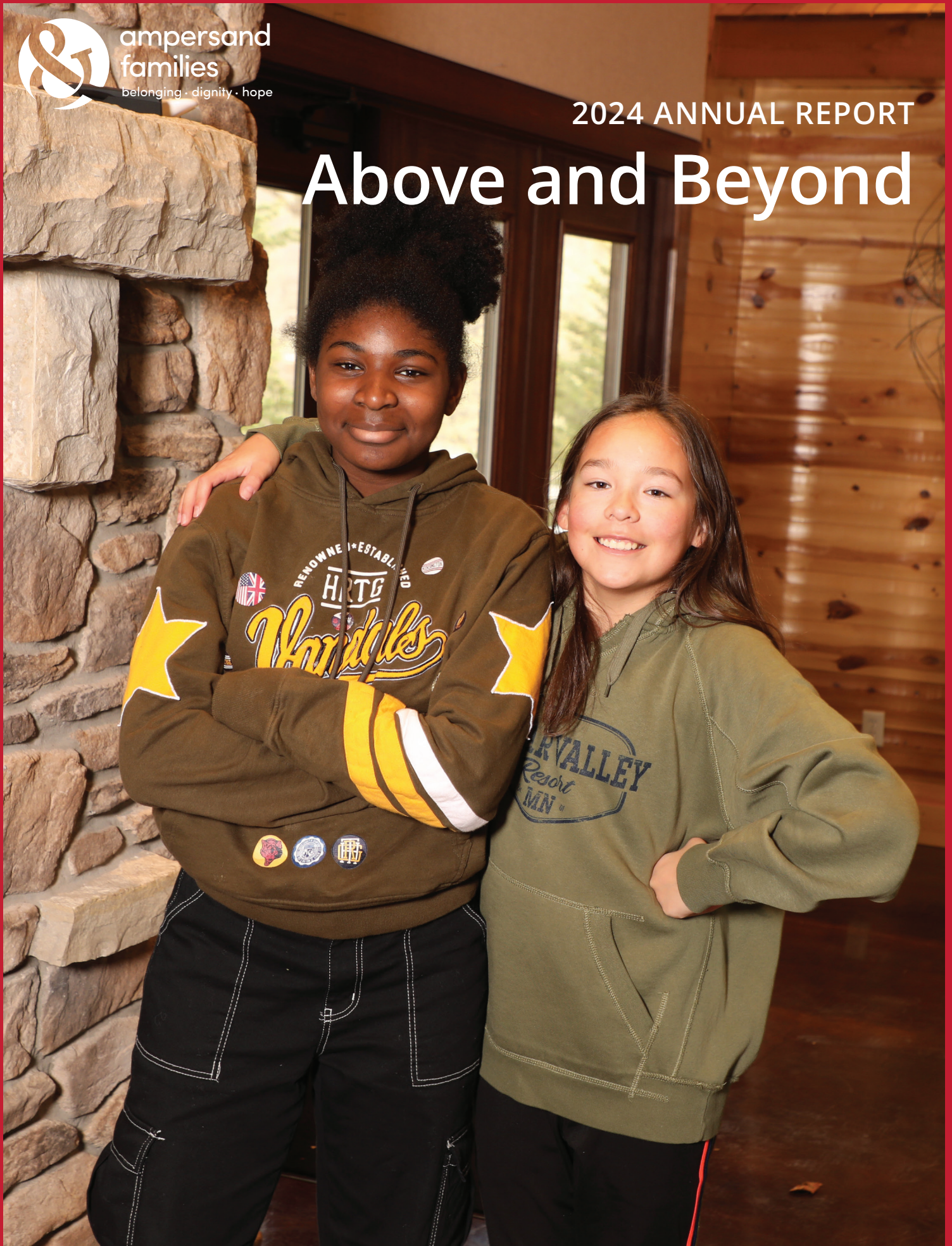




ampersand
families
belonging · dignity · hope

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Above and Beyond





AMPERSAND FAMILIES' MISSION

Ampersand Families' mission is to provide permanency and adoption services to older youth and families who face barriers to equity in child welfare, and to champion systemic changes that advance belonging, dignity and hope.

OUR VISION

Our vision is that every young person whose life has been disrupted by trauma and subsequent child welfare intervention will be restored to a safe, permanent family with an urgency that honors the brevity of childhood

OUR VALUES

Equity

We understand that privilege, systemic racism and economic disparities impact ourselves, the people and communities we serve, and the child welfare field, and we are uniquely charged to advance equity through our practice and leadership.

Belonging

We believe that being connected to family, kin, community and culture are essential aspects of wellbeing. We challenge barriers that keep youth from building or accessing these relationships, and we bravely advocate for practices that create opportunities for connection.

Dignity

We know that the adversarial nature of the child welfare system can leave youth, families and professionals feeling unseen, unheard and powerless. We commit to seeing and honoring the diversity of perspectives and intersecting identities each player brings to the table, knowing that the best outcomes are achieved when youth and families are understood to be more than the challenges they are facing.

Hope

We demonstrate hope through creative ideas, constructive partnerships, commitment to breaking through barriers, and the fervent belief that youth who have been separated from family need and deserve meaningful human relationships.

Integrity

We behave with honesty, act with the highest ethical behavior, and strive for superior performance standards, including holding ourselves accountable for the outcomes of our work, offering transparency in our financial management and honoring the public trust conferred upon us as a nonprofit organization.

Leadership

We champion positive change and proactively advance ideas and innovations that strengthen practices, accountability and outcomes throughout the child welfare system.



Christina Zeise
Executive Director



Steve Kenney
Board Chair

Above and Beyond

We turned 15 last year! And like most 15-year-olds, we're growing and changing. We're excited to share highlights from FY24 in this report that demonstrate our expanded commitment to youth and family wellbeing.

Living in foster care is incredibly difficult. Kids in care consistently report feeling lonely, scared, confused, sad, and hopeless. Teens who age out of foster care without high levels of support face increased risk of social exclusion, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, and poor mental health.

That's why we're going the extra mile to help kids and teens in foster care find family. Young people in care need and deserve people willing to go above and beyond to help them re-establish permanency and stability.

Whether it's finding and contacting 100+ relatives and kin as a potential placement or permanency resource for every child referred, recruiting an adoptive family whose skill sets match the complex needs of a child who's spent years waiting, or helping a teen who declines adoption instead build a network of trusted adults to support them, we listen to youth and we give it our all for each and every young person whose future we are entrusted with.

In this report, you can read about some of the exceptional programs we're proud to offer that go above and beyond our core permanency and adoption services. These programs are helping youth and families build or rebuild family connections, grow their supportive networks, and gain valuable new skills.

Our robust roster of programs was developed over the last 15 years in response to the needs of youth and families and long-overdue changes in the child welfare sector. We're proud to be leaders and innovators in creating programming that doesn't just meet expectations but exceeds them.

Unlike other agencies, we keep the door open to youth and families to receive services and support for as long as needed, even years after an adoption has been finalized or a case closed. Because the work of healing doesn't really have an end date.

We're grateful to the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families for funding a portion of this work. Additional financial support from foundations and individuals has been and continues to be critical to our capacity to go that extra mile to create hope and healing for kids in care and their families.

On their behalf, we thank you.

Christina Zeise, Executive Director

Steve Kenney, Board Chair

2024 AGENCY HIGHLIGHTS

STAYING CONNECTED TO RELATIVES AND KIN

Kin Link and Relative Search & Engagement (RSES) are currently our fastest growing service areas. Through these services, we do an exhaustive search for family members for kids just entering the system as well as kids who have spent years in care and are at risk of aging out. What we see, time and again, is that when provided the opportunity, family takes care of family.

➡ **Last year, we helped 78 young people, age 0-17, maintain or rebuild their connections to family, community, and culture through Kin Link and RSES.**



"We've had a wonderful experience working with the team at Ampersand Families. They're open to taking tough cases, and with small caseloads, they can dive deeply into an expansive family search."

—Ramsey County Social Worker

"We love family retreats! They provide parents the opportunity to learn while knowing our kids are in good hands, and kids the opportunity to connect with others who have been through similar experiences. Retreats also provide us with an opportunity to build memories as a family."

—Erin, adoptive parent of a teen



CREATING FAMILY MEMORIES

Families who welcome a child into their lives through adoption from foster care are courageous and wonderful. They can also feel isolated and overwhelmed by new and unexpected challenges.

Our Family Retreats provide a safe peer group environment for youth and adults that helps normalize the transitions adoptive families experience. Youth participate in fun activities like rock climbing, biking, bowling, sledding, crafts, and naturalist programs while adults connect and learn around issues like trauma and attachment-informed parenting, mind-body interventions, medication management, and special education. These no-cost, fun-filled weekends provide experiences many families would otherwise not be able to afford.

➡ **Last year, we hosted four family retreats at fun locations around the state attended by 100+ youth, caregivers and staff.**

Caregivers who participated reported feeling more connected to other parents, more empowered in their role as parents, and more knowledgeable about the resources available to help them overcome barriers. Kids said they loved the activities and wanted more retreats.



"I cannot speak enough about how much benefit has come from our son's NMT assessment to assist with his high needs. I hope that other families can experience the same education and relief that has been given to our family."

—Kellie, adoptive parent

ADDRESSING THE IMPACTS OF TRAUMA

Childhood trauma has impacts that can last a lifetime. Kids who have experienced abuse or neglect often have trouble regulating their emotions and developing secure attachments to others. This can interfere with socialization and education and create safety concerns for them and their families.

The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics™ (NMT™) is a groundbreaking assessment model developed by Dr. Bruce Perry that identifies the specific impact childhood trauma may have had on a child's brain development and provides actionable steps to heal neglected neural pathways.

Ampersand Families is the only agency in Minnesota offering no-cost NMT™ assessments to young people ages 6–23 who have been impacted by the foster care and adoption systems. Families also receive stipends to fund recommended interventions such as a trampoline, drum set, swimming lessons, yoga classes, pet therapy, occupational therapy, and sensory activities.

➡ **Last year, we completed NMT assessments for 31 Minnesota kids and young adults. 100% of families surveyed indicated they would recommend the assessment to others.**

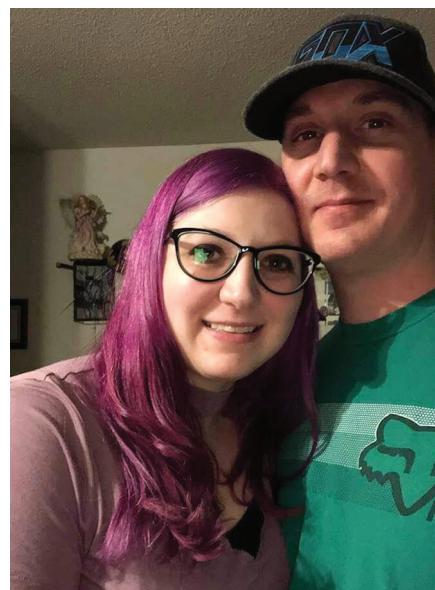
EXPANDING THE SUPPORT NETWORK

An adoptive family's support network can get a lot smaller once their child moves home. People who said they would be there often fade away once a youth moves home and parents actually need help.

Our Buddy Family program was created in response to this difficult truth. Community volunteers are thoughtfully matched with an adoptive family and spend time with a youth at least twice each month, giving everyone a break from the demanding day-to-day work of building a family.

➡ **Last year, we worked with 17 families to provide Buddy Family services to kinship and adoptive families.**

This program continues to evolve to meet community and family needs.



"Being a Buddy Family is a great way to gain experience and help someone. It's also opened up conversations about how we see ourselves as potential adoptive parents in the future."

—Megan and Jon, Buddy Family for an adopted teen

FY24 FINANCIALS

TOTAL REVENUE

\$2,862,097

CONTRIBUTIONS

\$481,270

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

\$49,599

FEES & GRANTS

From Government Agencies

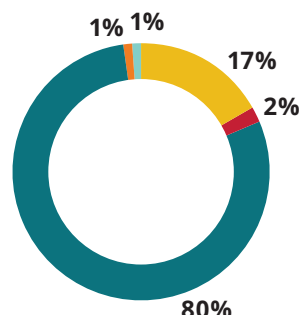
\$2,302,476

SPECIAL EVENTS

\$18,659

OTHER

\$10,093



TOTAL EXPENSES

\$2,915,502

PROGRAM EXPENSE

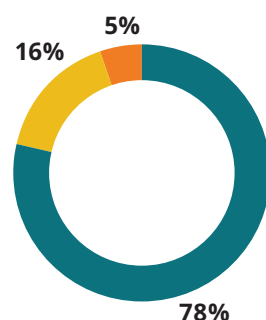
\$2,283,210

MANAGEMENT

\$470,132

FUNDRAISING

\$162,160



Our audited financial statement is available online at www.ampersandfamilies.org

Our service area is all
87 counties in Minnesota
and all 11 tribal nations.

In 2024, we served
249 youth
from **40** counties
and **5** tribal nations.

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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2024 AGENCY HIGHLIGHTS

AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICE

Young people who have been in foster care have life experiences that are different from many of their same-age peers. They may find it hard to develop strong social bonds with young people who don't understand what they've gone through.

MYVoice is a program by and for youth ages 12–22 with lived experience in the foster care/adoption systems. Youth meet regularly for connection, education, and advocacy.

➡ **Last year, 124 youth participated in MYVoice activities including artmaking, book groups, panel presentations, and marching at the State Capitol for Foster Child and Youth Day on the Hill.**

Unlike any other youth program in the state, MYVoice engages youth living in group homes, residential treatment centers, and juvenile detention centers. Ampersand Families was awarded a competitive grant from the MN Department of Public Safety in FY24 to deepen our reach into these restrictive settings.



Art by S.B., MYVoice participant

“MyVoice has brought me joy in the activities and leadership opportunities they provide. I have felt seen, heard, and validated. MyVoice is a place where youth can experience fun, relief and advocacy all at once.”

—MYVoice participant

2024 BY THE NUMBERS

43

New Relative
Search and
Engagement Cases

25

New Child
Specific Recruitment
Cases

35

New
Kin Link
Cases

15

Finalized
Adoptions

124

Youth
Leadership Program
Participants

51

Families provided
financial support to
care for a relative child

31

NMT Assessments
and Consultations
Completed

83

Youth Photo Shoots
for the Minnesota
Heart Gallery



AMPERSAND FAMILIES STAFF



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THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

The Minnesota Department of Children,
Youth & Families
The Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.
Foundation for Development of People
The Robert E. Fraser Foundation
The Giesen-O'Byrne Fund of the Minneapolis
Foundation
The Hardenbergh Foundation
The Hubbard Broadcasting Foundation
The Mardag Foundation
The Montana Right Hand Foundation
The Casey Albert T. O'Neil Foundation
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The Sauer Family Foundation
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Find us on



m DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN,
YOUTH, AND FAMILIES