

# Shaping & Strengthening Community Report | 2024

“It makes me feel happy knowing I am not the only person who is sad.”



*“It made us carve time out to focus on our mental health and healing, while providing support for us to figure out our new lives.”*



“It’s great to have a comfortable safe space to share the weight of our experience.”



**FERNSIDE**

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND  
FAMILIES THROUGH GRIEF

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the children and families we serve, thank you for your support of Fernside this past year. On the following pages, I am proud to share the impactful and meaningful ways we are stewarding your gifts to Fernside. The photos are a reminder that behind every number, is a person who needed our help.

A highlight of the past year was the creation of a new Fernside Advisory Committee. We are grateful to the community members who are serving in this capacity: Eli Hart, Alex Kuhns, Cassidy Lekan, Priya Sharp and Barb Tobias. These engaged and dedicated individuals are helping **shape** Fernside's future and were major contributors to Fernside's three-year strategic priority plan.

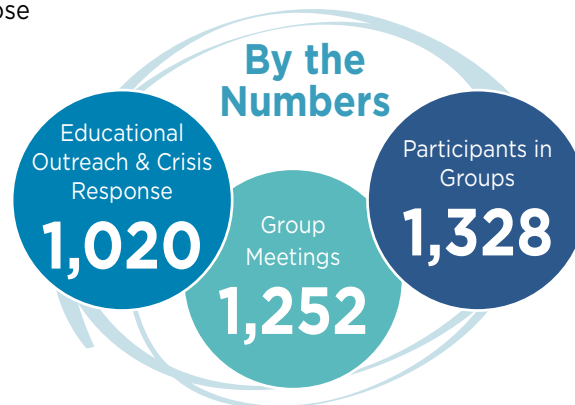
We have already begun work on this important strategic map for Fernside. One of our top priorities is to **strengthen** existing partnerships with local schools and community organizations while creating new ones to expand our reach. Below we highlight our work with Mason City Schools, a long-time beneficiary of Fernside's school-based programs, our robust relationship with Hamilton County Disabilities Services and a new relationship that is beginning to take **shape** with the Butler County Latino Network, where we are creating impact by utilizing a train-the-trainer model to support the Spanish-speaking grievers they serve. We are proud to be collaborating with these social service agencies as we continue to live out our mission of serving and **strengthening** grieving families in our community.

None of these accomplishments would be possible without the unwavering support of so many including our amazing volunteers and all of you – our loyal and generous donors. You are helping **shape** the future for the children and families we serve by providing support at a critical time in their lives. And because of your generosity, all Fernside's services remain 100% free of charge to everyone. Thank you for supporting the work we are doing to **strengthen** both Fernside and those grieving in our community.

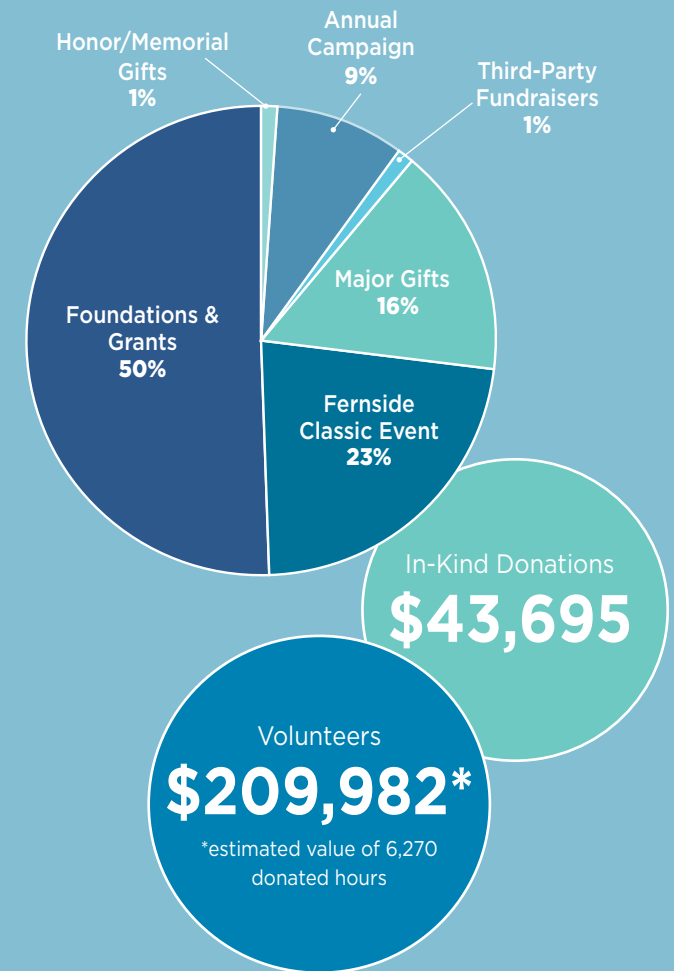
With gratitude,



Vicky Ott, MA, LPCC-S  
Executive Director, Fernside



## Circles of Support



“My daughter knows she is not alone in her grief journey. She is learning strategies to cope with how she feels and has great adult role models who are there for her.”

FY25-FY27 Strategic Plan

# Taking Action on Our Strategic Priorities



Fernside staff and our Fernside Advisory Committee participated in strategic planning sessions to identify four priorities where we will focus over the next three years. The Fernside team has developed action plans for this year and have already begun to make headway. We're excited about our future!

## Strengthening Partnerships

# Expanding our Reach with DDS & the Latino Network of Butler County

*Hamilton County Developmental Disabilities Services greatly values its partnership with Fernside Center for Grieving Children. This longstanding partnership has had a positive impact on adults with developmental disabilities. It has been an outlet and resource for many who have lost a loved one and are going through the grieving process.*

— Amber Cowart, Advocacy Coordinator ALIFE Team, Hamilton Co DDS



HAMILTON COUNTY  
**DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**  
SERVICES



Fernside was invited to attend the December 2023 meeting of the Latino Network of Butler County (LNBC) to share about our services. One of the members, Pastor Lourdes Cordero, reached out shortly afterwards and a collaboration was born! We worked with Pastor Cordero and DeAnna Shores of Middletown Connect, to create a Fernside train-the-trainer model to provide grief support groups to the Spanish-speaking population they serve.

## Mason City Schools & Fernside

# Expanding Our Relationship

Fernside has provided grief support for students in the Mason City School District for the past 19 years. We've offered 71 groups in that time and most recently, held a group for Mason High School faculty who had experienced their own losses. We're proud to have partnered with over 60 local school districts to expand our reach and want to thank Mason City Schools for trusting Fernside with their family support needs.



*"It's meant a lot to me. It helped me open up and made me feel like I belonged. I like this group and hope it can help others in the way it helped me."*

Number of Mason Students & Staff Served

# 454



# Why Fernside?

Fernside's free programs make a lasting impact for grieving children and families.



“Being part of Fernside has helped provide a positive outlet to deal with our grief. It made us carve time out to focus on our mental health and healing, while providing support for us to figure out our new lives.”

In their own words:

**Family:** Fernside has instilled a belief that although our lives will be forever different, we will eventually enjoy and appreciate and thrive after this loss.

— *Family Program Participant*

**Donor:** As a pediatrician whose son graduated from one of the programs after the loss of a friend, I was astonished by the profound impact the team at Fernside had on his grief and our family. The program provides a safe and loving environment to navigate the loss and coping skills to process the emotional confusion and hurt in an individual way as part of a community. It honors the experience of the grieving child. The operational endowment creates sustainability and the ability to keep up with Fernside's growth, with the expanding needs of our children and families.”

— *Bing Hinton, Trustee of the David R. Clare and Margaret C. Clare Foundation*

**Volunteer:** Fernside was an amazing program in the late 90's when I lost my

mom, but it has proven to be an even more extraordinary organization as I've grown older and seen the incredible growth and expansion of things within Fernside over the years.

— *Vanessa Wurtzler-Jung*

**School:** Fernside's dedication to offering grief counseling has been invaluable in helping our community navigate through the difficult emotions and uncertainties we have faced over the years. The care and professionalism demonstrated by Fernside counselors have made a significant impact on the healing process for both students and staff. Fernside's efforts have not only provided comfort but have also strengthened the bonds within our school community, fostering a sense of resilience and hope. We are profoundly grateful for Fernside's commitment to our well-being and for the difference that Fernside has made in the lives in our community.

— *Dan Distel, Assistant Principal at Mason High School*

## Turn your WHY into HOW you can help.

We are able to **keep Fernside's programs free to all** because of the generosity of our donors, and the support of our volunteers.

**How can you help?** Please consider making a tax deductible gift to Fernside to help us continue to help all grieving children and families. Volunteer opportunities are available, as well. Contact us to learn more about ways you can keep Fernside's vital services available to our community—visit [www.fernside.org](http://www.fernside.org).

*Fernside is a 501(C)(3) organization supporting programs for children and families who have experienced a death. All donations are 100% tax deductible under U.S. law.*