



our mission

The mission of Mainspring Schools is to provide children and their families with a community for high quality early education and holistic support so each child and parent has the tools necessary for success in school and life.

NOTICE OF NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY

Mainspring Schools admits students of any race, color, nationality and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, nationality and ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, funding policies, family services programs, nutrition programs, and other school-administered programs.

Research & Writing by Abe Louise Young, Magic Hour Nonprofit Consulting Graphic Design by Recspec Co.

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DEAR FRIENDS,

Mainspring Schools continues to pursue its bold vision of a twogeneration program that provides economically challenged families with the highest quality early childhood education in Austin, alongside holistic support for caregivers. We also pursue play with a serious passion.

Mainspring was established in 1941 as a "War Nursery" in a time of international conflict and national crisis that was preceded by the Great Depression and the Spanish Flu pandemic. Austin Community Nursery School, as it was then known, was the first childcare center—indeed, the first school of any kind—to be built within a federal housing project. The organization's history underscores a purpose and commitment we still uphold: to serve families that might otherwise not be able to afford high quality early childhood education alongside families that can.

In October 2021, we celebrated Mainspring's 80th birthday. One-fifth of the childcare centers in Texas closed during those first COVID-19 pandemic years. However, Mainspring has come out stronger, with a deeply bonded community and a positive balance sheet.

About 20% of Mainspring students have already experienced the foster care system; another 20% have developmental delays or special needs. COVID losses have added to those stressors. We are especially proud of providing trauma-informed care using Trust Based Relational Intervention $^{\text{TM}}$ and Conscious Discipline $^{\text{TM}}$. These best-practice methods help children and families heal and grow.



Magic happens in the act of play. We enter each day with the awareness that playing is how kids (and adults!) learn, connect, and become themselves. Teachers defuse classroom conflicts and behavior moments by pivoting to play. Family Services staff create opportunities for parents and children to play together. We even play with our food!—through gardening projects and nutrition-focused curricular activities.

Each day at Mainspring is joyful, no matter how challenging, because we learn by playing together. In this annual report, you will read about our successes and challenges—and how your support has been critical to the continuity of our mission. Thank you for being part of the Mainspring community!

Tim Weston.

Tim Weston, Board Chair Colin Denby Swanson,

Executive Director

"To adapt is to learn, and joy exists to motivate us to continue adapting to our environment and to learn from it. Joy, it seems, has an important relationship with our propensity to learn."

- LEGO FOUNDATION, 2017

Key Statistics

Across the United States since 2020, the **cost of childcare** has risen by

41%

94%

of **child care providers** in Travis County

have a waitlist.

of the children in Travis County live below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines.

87%

of

low-income children in Central Texas are behind readiness levels when entering kindergarten.

Only 10%
of eligible children in
Texas receive child care
assistance.

75%

of children at

Mainspring Schools receive tuition subsidies, a higher ratio than any other quality care provider in Central TX.

90% and 100%

of Mainspring students test as kindergartenready by the time they graduate from preschool.

IMPACT STORY: FAMILY & STAFF

Colin Denby Swanson EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

My Mainspring story started when I was a foster mom. I was looking for a flexible, inclusive program that would work well with higher needs. Another foster family referred us to Mainspring. I came to take a tour. When I pulled around the corner of Brodie and Live Oak and saw the expansive pre-k playground, my heart caught in my throat. Inside the front door, I saw a menu featuring



Within six months of starting in the Honeybees classroom, my kiddo had met all his developmental goals, and in fact leapt ahead another six months. His language skills just exploded. "That's incredible," I said to his teacher, "He has so many words all of a sudden!" She said, "Yes. We talk

quinoa salad and chickpeas and spinach. This was the place.

to them here."

Jason Gindele came on board as Mainspring's Executive Director in 2017 and hired me as Business Manager, then Managing Director. When the pandemic hit, I realized that the school needed more strategic skills to get through the crisis, utilize our resources, and plan for the future, so I pursued my MBA. In December of 2022, Jason passed the torch and I became the Executive Director.

My vision for the future is growth: organizational growth in capacity to serve more families, and professional growth for our leadership and teaching staff. We love to see the children grow, expand their capacity to talk about what they need, express their opinions, playfulness, and curiosity. I invite all of the grownups who enter the building to commit to this kind of growth for themselves as well!

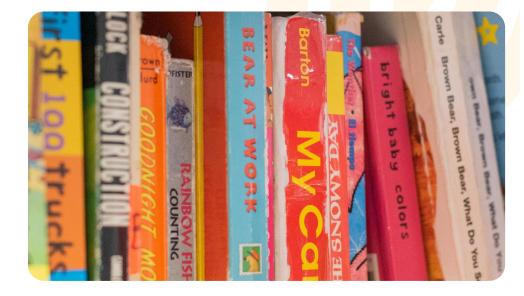
Still to this day, at age ten, my son says, "Mainspring just feels like home." It does—for both of us.

PARTNERS

We are grateful to our partners for infusing Mainspring with energy, hope, support and vital resources, such as...

- Our property, made available for Mainspring Schools by the Housing Authority of the City of Austin
- **4,000 diapers per month** from Austin Diaper Bank
- A community food bank stocked with a range of healthy supplies, including organic, gluten-free, and dairy-free groceries, as well as personal care items and cleaning supplies
- Four classrooms of new furniture in Tadpole, Dewdrop, Mockingbird and Songbird classrooms via the Montandan Foundation
- Hundreds of hours of precious volunteer time, doing gardening projects, improvements, office support, and reading with kids
- Over 1000 books for families to read at home, via our partnership with BookSpring and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library
- **150 new Teddy bears** from American Bank, giving every child a soft companion to take home
- Wrapped winter holiday gifts for every family and child from Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd and the Greater Austin Contractors and Engineers Association
- In-classroom coaching and mentoring from Child, Inc and United Way
- 40,000 healthy meals supported by the CACFP food program and our annual AmplifyATX campaign
- 100 dance classes via Forklift Dance Company and Texas Commission on the Arts
- **100 music classes** led by musician Anthony Basini

- **1,000 dinners for parents** provided by volunteers from the National Charity League
- A maternity clothing closet and baby clothing closet, along with a pre-natal and post-natal support program funded by ImpactAustin
- **Family and kid clothing** supplied by partners like School in the Hills
- Two-thousand crayons!



"The range of support that Mainspring provides to the kids, parents, and staff—which is unlike any other school I've worked at or known of—was a huge part of what drew me to the school, and it's been amazing to watch the mission of Mainspring be carried out every day. There's a strong, welcoming sense of community here and a feeling that the work happening at every level makes a positive and impactful difference in the lives of the children and their families."

-DIANE ALSTON, ASSISTANT TEACHER, SHINING STARS CLASSROOM

IMPACT STORY: FAMILY

Tiara Parr

We first joined Mainspring School eight years ago. My son, Andre, who is now 10, went from age 2 all the way up until elementary school. My youngest, Nila, is there now. She just turned 3.

My life has changed a lot through the time we've been at the school. When I first enrolled my son, I was a young parent. I had him at 21. So many things I didn't even know. I'd just gotten my first apartment. I was trying to just grow and experience things. I didn't know how to manage bills or anything like that. Going to the school got me into the routine of waking up early, dropping him off, then I have my day planned. It was easy to transition from staying at home to going to work because I was able to go to work with a peace of mind: I knew that my kids were going to be taken care of and loved.

I grew to feel safe dropping my kids off there. That was wonderful. Now I have a better paying job, I can take care of my family a lot better now. I'm not a single parent anymore. I'm an Assistant Property Manager at another nonprofit, Foundation Communities. Hopefully we should all be leveling up in life every year, you know? I've grown and learned a lot from where I was at when I first started the program.

I'm really grateful that the teachers do things for my kids that I'm not able to do because I have to work full time. The teachers take on some big responsibilities—getting them potty trained, learning the ABCs, all of those important things. My youngest knows how to count to 10, 15, probably 20! Her vocabulary is just huge compared to most kids her age that are going to other daycares. She knows how to use her words when she needs something.

The school makes sure the kids have a balanced meal for breakfast and lunch. Sometimes I can't always do all that on my own. Even getting them introduced to vegetables that we normally wouldn't try—I really appreciate that. I just wish it was a bigger school, because I feel like it's so beneficial to the kids. They really need it. I wish it had more

classrooms and more kids could get the experience. I wish it could keep going to first grade. Oh, wouldn't that just be wonderful...

With Nila, any little thing throughout the day, the teachers communicate with me. I know when she takes naps, when she's waking up, when she's eating, when she goes potty. They send pictures so I can see her learning, singing, playing with her friends. I probably get four or five pictures a day! It keeps me involved. You know, we wish we could be there with them all the time. We want to see them growing up. It's hard not to be there. So it helps to see her in pictures all day long. I'm really thankful and appreciative of this place in our lives.



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

YES, AND: The Incredible Power of Play to Activate Growth and Healing

When was the last time you played with full abandon? Do you remember the feelings of joy, possibility, focus and room for the unexpected? Did you barely notice time passing? We invite you to hold those memories in mind while learning about the incredible benefits that the act of play provides to a developing child.

Play is at the center of all that we do at Mainspring, for a simple reason: it is the most profound intervention and learning vehicle possible for early childhood learners. We are proud to be included in the 8% of childcare centers nationally that hold top accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); frequent opportunities to play is a key factor that experts with NAEYC look for when assessing the quality of preschools.

On any given day at Mainspring, infants are making faces back and forth with their teachers, hearing music, doing finger play and laughing at silly sounds; toddlers are mixing up pretend soup with wooden spoons and aluminum pots; and 4 and 5 year-olds are swirling outside in small groups making sand castles, running, roaring like animals, telling teachers to watch them run/jump/dance/lift, and negotiating who gets to be the dragon, sack the city or pirouette off the tree roots next.

Every day, our students invent new games, imaginative narratives, roles, rules and scenarios. Our teachers play along, invoking the iconic improv response of "Yes! And?" or, "What is going to happen next?" to affirm the children's explorations and invite organic growth in their ideas. Teachers play with children when invited, and also stand back to let independence blossom in games with peers.

Play Fosters Brain Development and Closes Achievement Gaps

Play is uniquely imperative for young children given that the parts of the brain that are most developed in the earliest years are those that respond to play and activity, experts say. Young children show improvedlanguage skills, math skills and problem-solving skills after playing.



Certain types of <u>imaginative play</u> have even been found to improve perseverance. When children play, their brains release <u>chemicals</u> like endorphin, serotonin and dopamine that can impact memory, motivation, attention and mood, and help regulate emotions and support social skills.

"We don't have to see it as a choice between play or academics, play should be academics for preschoolers," said Alissa Mwenelupembe, the senior director for early learning program accreditation at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Play is so potent that it can be used as an intervention to <u>close</u> <u>achievement gaps</u> between children ages 3 to 6. The Lego Foundation looked at 26 studies of play from 18 countries and found that in disadvantaged communities in places such as Bangladesh, Rwanda and Ethiopia, children showed significantly greater learning gains in literacy, motor and social-emotional development when attending childcare centers that used a mix of instruction and free and guided play.

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University reports that children <u>strengthen important executive function skills through playing</u>—skills they need throughout life such as focusing attention, controlling impulses and expanding capacity for working memory.

A <u>new review of 17 studies</u> found that when it comes to literacy, numeracy and executive function skills, guided play is equal to or better than direct instruction. (Guided play means there is a learning goal set by an adult and children are 'gently steered' to explore.)



Play Helps Heal Trauma

By its very nature, play with others involves being fully present, collaborating, taking turns, and being open to the unexpected. We believe that the brain and body cannot simultaneously be in a state of trauma/fear and play; when play is supported, fear retreats. At Mainspring, we are often moved to see the various experiences of anxiety or confusion that children come in with dissolving—replaced by confidence, expression and a desire to play. Teachers actively work to disarm fear by creating emotional, physical and psychological safety.

Roughly 26 percent of children in the United States witness or experience a trauma before the age of 4, according to the NAEYC. These adverse childhood experiences can include experiencing or witnessing physical violence, emotional or sexual abuse, drug exposure, food insecurity, homelessness, divorce, medical procedures, the incarceration of a family member, or natural disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic or the week-long Texas freeze in February 2021. About 1 in 5 students at Mainspring has experienced the foster system, which brings about layers of loss and trauma. Additionally, 3 out of 4 our hardworking, loving Mainspring families earn low very incomes, compounding stressors on their children's environments.

Given these heightened risk factors, it becomes even more important to build protective factors into every day. Play and games are essential for



helping kids <u>process their feelings and changes in their lives</u>, especially after disruption. At Mainspring, we strive to immerse children in a positive, repetitive, dependable environment of healthy interpersonal interactions.

Children's early experiences of <u>feeling listened to and understood</u> help instill confidence in their ability to make good things happen. When children feel they can trust the people around them, it builds their capacity to seek help and find solutions when they don't know how to handle a situation—as well as to express their needs on a moment-to-moment basis. When a child has a difficult moment at Mainspring, we affirm that they are good. Children hear us talk about their peers in this way—"Charlie's had a hard time, but he's a good kid and he's good inside,"—and know that they too, are good inside.

During child-directed play, teachers follow children's leads, avoiding the use of unnecessary instructions or corrections. When invited, teachers enter into their imaginative worlds, which promotes the child's self-expression, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, brave behaviors, positive peer interactions and secure relationships.

The strong teacher-child bonds at Mainspring rest on a foundation of daily play, and we wouldn't have it any other way.

IMPACT STORY: FAMILY & STAFF

Lina Sabea and Zenah Sabea

Lina and Zenah, sisters, came to the United States as refugees. They began working at Mainspring in nutrition services and are now teachers in the infant classroom.

ZENAH: We came from our country, Iraq, in the Middle East, to United States 13 years ago. We are moms, we have kids. I'm starting here at the school four or five years ago. I have two little kids, they started here. I was working and growing here and my kids were growing here.

We started out four years ago working in the kitchen, but this year, I'm a teacher. That is exciting for me, special for me to be a school teacher. So grateful, I feel. I have a lot to give the little kids and we learn a lot about them, and they make us laugh and feel so much love in every day.

LINA: For me, too, so much love here. Last year I started as a teacher—me and Zenah are in the same class. We help each other. This is special, this is cool. We love to support each other. With the kids, you know, it is a hard job but we like it. When the kids come in in the morning, they smile into us and give kisses and say hi. The parents say, "Here you are at your favorite place! It's nice to be here!" And when they come to pick them up at night, they don't want to go. The parents say, "I'm sorry but you can come back tomorrow!" That's so sweet. We say we work in mom-love jobs. That's why the babies feel safe, supported and they love to be here every single day.

ZENAH: My first job in the country was cleaning things like offices. I was looking for a different job. So I went with my kids for daycare and I asked them here for a job. I found this place, a great place to find, to work with your kids, to be with your kids growing together. I feel with my heart and watch all the kids.

LINA: We feel in the classroom it is like family. Not just work—family. Not just "I'm going to work"—it does not work like that. With the kids every day you're learning. You will learn in front of the children. Every day you go home with so much feeling, so much feeling.

ZENAH: It is a hard job, not an easy job, but we love this job. Because we learn and teach them something every day. They learn how to talk when they need something. And we support them.



We have a schedule in our classroom. In the morning time they come in and we take breakfast, free play, floor play, play with songs. Then we go and give them a snack and take them outside to play, sing, some dancing. We want to come every day with new energy, good energy. That's an important feeling.

LINA: I feel like we welcome and accept all the children. Everyone can come here, be welcomed in and I see them growing more. Whenever they come in, they feel real and home. I see this, it is a light feeling: I'll let you grow in here. If you're starting from a small thing, we'll give you a chance to grow in here.

ZENAH: Yes, like, make yourself comfortable, we help everyone, come in. We are not judging, we are understanding you are good, trying to do your best. We want to support you. You are at home here. Feel love!

LEARNING GAMES TO PLAY WITH CHILDREN

Adapted from the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University

BABIES

conversation games: Six-month-old babies begin to make sounds like "ga," "ma," and "ba." Sit with baby facing you on your lap and make silly sounds. Take a pause and wait to see if baby "talks back." When they babble, squeal, or make a silly face, make the same sounds and face back. Tell baby a story



that is meaningful to you. You can tell them about the day they were born or an important event in your life. Along the way, stop and ask them questions. Even though you won't get "real" answers, baby will add their own colorful details.

TODDLERS: 12 Months

EXPLORE ON THE FLOOR: It's fun for toddlers to explore their surroundings, whether they are crawling, standing with support, or beginning to walk. Join a toddler for some playtime on their level, wherever that may be. Stretch out, sit down, or kneel



on the floor near them and place pillows, couch cushions, or soft toys on the floor between you for "obstacles." Now, encourage them to explore and come to you. Toddlers might climb over the cushions, stack them, carry them, or even pretend to lay down and go to sleep. It's all play!

TODDLERS: 18 Months

MEMORY GAME: Find three cups and three small objects that you can hide underneath, like a toy car, a small ball, or an animal figure. Show the child each toy, say its name ("This is a car"), and let them see you hide it under one of the cups. Then ask, "Where is the car?" and encourage them to



lift up the cup they think it's under. If they're correct, praise and ask them to find the next object. If they are incorrect, encourage them to look under another cup. Vary the game by adding more (or fewer) cups and objects or by moving the cups around after hiding the objects.

TODDLERS: 2-3 Years

FOLLOW THE LEADER: Choose someone to be the leader. (Tip: Start with an adult.) Other players line up behind the leader, who then moves around in any way they choose. They may run, jump, crawl, or walk on tiptoes, for example. The other players must copy what the leader does, and the leader



can change movements at any time. Players then take turns being the leader. These are great tests of working memory, attention, and self-control.

CHILDREN: 4-5 Years

FREEZE DANCE: Play some music and have children dance along, then stop the music suddenly. As soon as the music stops, everyone needs to "freeze" in place and stand perfectly still until the music starts again. Keep the game challenging as children get older by asking them to freeze in a particular position, like standing on one foot.



OPPOSITES BINGO: Matching and sorting games are still fun at this age—but increase the difficulty to keep kids interested. Make your own Bingo picture cards by drawing a grid on a piece of paper, then gluing photos from magazines onto the spaces. Kids can help with this, too! Use small objects like pennies for markers. Instead of having kids mark a match on their card, ask them to mark the opposite of what is called out by the leader. For example, if the leader calls out "daytime," children with a nighttime picture on their card would mark the spot.

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r damia r izarro

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LEADERSHIP & STAFF

Administration

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Angel Harros

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Arlene Martinez

Ashley Martinez

Zenia Moreno

Erica Perez

Rosa Perez

Lindsey Rainey

Judy Roberts

Belkys Ruiz

Lina Sabea

Zenah Sabea

Felicia Torrez

Sam Valentin

Terrie Williams

Jackson Zimmerman

RESOURCES & FISCAL MANAGEMENT

20% of childcare centers in Texas disappeared during the COVID-19 pandemic, struck by a combination of lost enrollment, funding crises and health concerns. The resulting lack of childcare options made life more difficult for working parents, especially those with low incomes.

In that landscape, we are proud that Mainspring provided quality services throughout the pandemic and emerged in a stronger financial position.

Fiscal Year 2021	UNRESTRICTED	RESTRICTED PROGRAMS	TOTAL
REVENUES & OTHER SUPPORT			
PROGRAM SERVICE FEE	995,642		995,642
CONTRIBUTIONS	213,916	10,754	224,670
GRANTS & CONTRACTS	427,504	749,705	1,177,209
CONTRIBUTED GOODS & SERVICES	73,496		73,496
INVESTMENT INCOME	70,413		70,413
NET ASSETS RELEASED FROM RESTRICTIONS	780,292	(780,292)	
TOTAL REVENUE & OTHER SUPPORT	2,561,263	(19,833)	2,541,430
EXPENSES			
PROGRAM SERVICES	1,404,534		1,404,534
SUPPORTING SERVICES			
Management & General	375,796		375,796
Fundraising	116,618		116,618
TOTAL EXPENSES	1,896,948		1,896,948
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	664,315	(19,833)	644,482
NET ASSETS			
BEGINNING OF YEAR	951,062	335,249	1,286,311
END OF YEAR	1,615,377	315,416	1,930,793

This strength results from two temporary sources of funding: a federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan in 2021 and Child Care Funding legislation in the American Rescue Plan passed by President Biden in 2022. We intend to use this strong position to grow and expand to serve even more children and families in Austin in the future.

Fiscal Year 2022	UNRESTRICTED	RESTRICTED PROGRAMS	TOTAL
REVENUES & OTHER SUPPORT			
PROGRAM SERVICE FEES	1,376,387		1,376,387
CONTRIBUTIONS	304,677		304,677
GRANTS & CONTRACTS	618,953	45,820	664,773
CONTRIBUTED GOODS & SERVICES	304,677		304,677
SPECIAL EVENTS	156,383		156,383
INVESTMENT INCOME	(129,446)		(129,446)
NET ASSETS RELEASED FROM RESTRICTIONS	276,687	(276,687)	
TOTAL REVENUE & OTHER SUPPORT	2,566,597	(230,867)	2,335,730
EXPENSES			
SCHOOL ACTIVITIES	1,731,348		1,731,348
SUPPORTING SERVICES			
SOLI OKTING SEKTICES			
Management & General	386,228		386,228
	386,228 109,903		386,228 109,903
Management & General	-		
Management & General Fundraising	109,903	(230,867)	109,903
Management & General Fundraising TOTAL EXPENSES	109,903	(230,867)	109,903
Management & General Fundraising TOTAL EXPENSES CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	109,903	(230,867) 315,416	109,903



Mainspring continues to dream of ways to expand and grow.

The need is evident and urgent. In Travis County, there are close to 147,000 more low-income children (ages 0-5) with working parents than there are available subsidized childcare seats. That amounts to just 214 subsidized spots available per 1,000 children whose families qualify.

Given the vast growth in Austin's population, alongside rising poverty, income disparities, and childcare deserts on the northeast and southeast sides of the city, we can see how this lack of available early childhood education impacts families, employers, schools and the mental and physical health of parents and kids. In August of 2021, Mainspring made a commitment to a competitive starting wage for early childhood educators and annual cost of living increases so our teachers can continue living in Austin.

94% of childcare providers in the Austin area that accept Workforce subsidies have a significant waiting list for enrollment. Mainspring is among them. We want to change that.

We are looking ahead to a vision for growth to help meet the need in Austin. We aim to keep meeting the need for high quality early childhood education and reducing adverse childhood experiences through family services, case management, and proactive parental health.

JOIN US!

DONATE

Private contributions help close the gap and allow for high-impact, high-quality programming.



Low student-toteacher rations



Healthy meals



Well-educated teachers



Art and music programs



Support for the whole family



Literacy and STEM materials

VOLUNTEER

Our volunteers are crucial to fulfilling our mission. Whether you are an individual or a group, we would love your help with:



Landscaping & gardening



Stocking our family food pantry and teacher wish lists



Playground upgrades



Presentations on parenting topics for Parent Suppers



Painting projects



Reading with our students



For further opportunities to be part of the Mainspring Schools community, please find us at www.mainspringschools.org/help-a-child

MAJOR OPERATIONAL PARTNERS

United Way
Child, Inc.

Housing Authority of the City of Austin
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
Workforce Solutions Capital Area

GRANTS & FOUNDATION SUPPORT -

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University Women
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DRM Foundation
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Impact Austin

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RSM
Tamarack Foundation
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Gene Attal

Chris Basilotto

Amazon Smile

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Robin Bedard	Paul Chavez	Edmondson
Brenda Beecher	Kristin Chiles	Epic Games
Elle Beecher	Chrissy Citzler-Carr	Rosary Fabiano
AJ Bingham	Bob & Mary Sue Clyne	Kimberly Famighetti
Tammy Dehay &	George Coldwell	Megan Fanale
William Blacklock	Cesar & Christina Collazo	John Farrington
John Blazier	Sarah Collister	Cynthia & Gary Fegley
Butch & Kay Blum	Commercial Brokers	Catherine &
Ruth & Otho Boone	Association	Stephen Felice
Dianne Borges	Bretagne & Jim Cowan	Evie & David Feltoon
Allison Boumaza	Jay & Katelena Cowles	Kevin Fincher
Mary Braunagel-Brown	Jennifer Winter &	Debbie & John Fincher
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