SUSTAINING



2026 ANNUAL REPORT

STEP BY STEP

healing & empowering young single moms

NOURISHING OUR FUTURE WHILE HONORING OUR PAST



CONTENTS

03 Letter from the Executive Director
04 A Place to Belong
06 Leveling Up
08 Support that Meets Her Where She Is
10 Leaders Raising Leaders
12 The Door is Always Open
13 Planted to Grow
14 Impact & Financials
15 Invested in Her Community
16 Giving Time, Gaining Community
18 Partners In the Work
19 Showing Up
20 Making Room
22 Strategic Plan & Research Update
24 Step Into Beautiful
25 Radiant & Resilient
26 Ways to Support SBS

STEP BY_ STEP

healing & empowering young single moms

OUR MISSION ...

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

OUR VISION ...

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

Special thanks to the following service providers:

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Note: *All individuals featured have been involved in the writing of and provided permission to share their stories.*

A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Last year, so many of you joined us to celebrate a remarkable milestone: 30 years of Step By Step. Together we honored the three founders who, in 1995, set out to support young families and reduce child abuse and neglect. Alumni moms came back, some accompanied by the very children who once toddled through our doors, who are all grown up and making a difference in their own communities. That celebration reminded me that the simplicity of saying yes to addressing the needs in the community is the soil from which something incredible can grow. This year's theme, "Sustaining: Nourishing Our Future While Honoring Our Past," reflects exactly where we stand today.

Our past demonstrates our proven track record and that strong foundation leads us to sustainability today. This year we served 295 young mothers and children and walked alongside moms through 1,574 one-on-one interactions. We watched 5 dedicated moms join our Echo & Resound Leadership Development Program, stepping into a 2-year intensive journey with courage and grace. Behind every number is a relationship: a lonely mom who found her people on a Thursday night at Revive, an excited child who counts down the days until Revive Kids, and a family that stayed safe and housed because of the safety net many of you helped us cultivate for working families through our Flourish Crisis Care Fund.

Our present is asking more of us. This year, we distributed 3,679 basic needs items through Mom's Pantry. That is a 50% increase in the number of items moms requested last year. We provided more Crisis Care referrals and financial assistance than ever. Rent, food, utilities, and transportation emergencies are stretching families further each month. The need is growing, and we are meeting it where it is needed most.

Our future depends on what we invest in today. Meeting rising needs year after year requires roots deep enough to hold. And, it takes bold vision to make systemic change that leads to self sufficiency for our young families.

For the past three years, we have listened carefully to moms and kids, volunteers, community partners, our board of directors, our staff, and our research team. What we heard has shaped a strategic plan we are launching in 2027.

> *"Step By Step has been sustained by people who believe in the dignity and potential of our young families. Your partnership honors that legacy. It meets families in crisis today, and it nourishes the future they deserve tomorrow."*

None of this happens alone. It never has. For 31 years, Step By Step has been sustained by people who believe in the dignity and potential of our young families. Your partnership honors that legacy. It meets families in crisis today, and it nourishes the future they deserve tomorrow. As you read this report, I invite you to see yourself in our story and to keep walking with us, step by step.



LaTanya Torp

Tanya Torp,
Executive Director



PROGRAM UPDATE

A PLACE TO BELONG

TYEISH AND THE THURSDAY NIGHT COMMUNITY

REVIVE

Revive is the heart of Step By Step. Every Thursday night, young moms gather for an evening designed around community, and it has been the cornerstone of our programming for more than thirty years. Because 60% of our moms do not have reliable transportation, our vans pick them up and return them home, so getting there is not another obstacle they have to overcome. Groups from across our community provide hot meals, nourishing families with generosity and care. When families arrive, children head down the hall to Revive Kids, and moms enjoy a night to take a break, build friendships, learn something new, and simply have fun. For Tyeish, that Thursday night rhythm has become something she can count on.

Breaking Cycles

When she became pregnant with her son, at age 19, it was her adoptive mom who encouraged her to attend Revive. Like a large percentage of Step By Step moms, Tyeish experienced life in foster care, and she desired her growing child to avoid the trauma she experienced prior to her adoption. "My mom, who learned about Step By Step at church, said it would be a good support system and I could get lots of good resources to help me," Tyeish remembers.

Tyeish lives with social anxiety, and new places with new people have never come easily. "At first I was afraid," she says. But a friend she already knew was attending Revive, and her mom encouraged her to give it a chance. "In new places I usually feel out of place, but that night I didn't. I wasn't the only one, and people kept talking to me and making me feel welcome."

Words That Stick

Each Thursday, the whole room recites the Revive Creed, an affirmation meant to build the culture at Revive of what we believe about ourselves and each other. At first, Tyeish said the words simply because everyone else was. Now something new sticks each week. "I am not my past mistakes," she says, recalling a line from the Creed from memory. "I do not have to believe those lies about myself, because I am way more than who others think I am." She holds onto the hope that she can break from the hardships of her family's past and be different for her child.

Revive has also given her practical tools. As a mom who is often on her own and overwhelmed, she spent years pushing her feelings down. Now she is learning how to step away, regroup, and allow herself to feel. "Hearing about ways to handle my feelings made me feel better," she shares.

"I am not my past mistakes ... I do not have to believe those lies about myself, because I am way more than who others think I am."

—TYEISH

Highs and Lows, Shared Together

The last portion of Revive nights involves reflecting on the topic or skill moms have learned that evening in peer-led support groups. To create trust and accountability, the group members remain the same from week to week, which gives friendships room to grow. Each mom takes a turn sharing her highs and lows from the week, and the others listen and respond.

That became Tyeish's favorite part. "I'd share my lows and others would jump in to share, and it made me feel better," she says. It helped to hear that others had gone through similar things.

Those friendships reach well beyond Thursdays. "My other friends don't understand why I'm struggling because they don't have kids," Tyeish explains. "My sisters at SBS reach out, and if I'm down, they understand and they're there for me." Sometimes that means a friend offering to watch her son, Bryson, so Tyeish can rest from a hard day, or just someone to provide a listening ear or help her stay motivated to keep growing.

Every Thursday

Tyeish also enjoys the consistency and routine Revive nights offer. "If all else fails, every Thursday I have Revive. It's like a security blanket," Tyeish says. For her, it has been a place of new personal growth, entering healthy relationships, and a place to belong.

This is what it means to sustain a mom. A hot meal, a ride, a safe and loving environment for her little one, and a circle of sisters who will be there next Thursday and the Thursday after that.





PHOTOS: *Moms engaging in community together on a Revive night.*

LEVELING UP

GOING DEEPER, BUILDING STRONGER

Some seasons of life call for a closer look. That is the idea behind our Level Up Series, a collection of short term workshops that each focus on one topic, giving moms space to go deeper in the areas that matter most to them. This year, two of those workshops took center stage: Step Into Freedom, which helps moms build a stronger financial future, and Restore, a brand new support group for moms navigating the child welfare system.

Step Into Freedom: A New Relationship with Money

Step Into Freedom is an eight week, trauma-informed class that speaks directly to the challenges many of our moms face on the road to financial independence. Together, moms explore topics like how growing up in poverty can shape the way we think about money, and why working with predatory lenders can lead to lifelong debt.

For many, it is the first time anyone has explained money in this way. One mom currently in the class says, "I have a really good job and it is something I am very passionate about. I love being an adult caretaker. But I never learned how to actually manage my money. Step Into Freedom is teaching me things about money that I didn't even know I needed to learn, like how sometimes trauma can affect the way I spend. I really think this class will give me the tools I need to set me up for good financial health."

When the class ends, the lessons are put into practice. Moms open an Individual Development Account, choose a savings goal, and commit to saving at least $20 a month for several months. Once they reach their goal, Step By Step matches their savings $2 to $1.

"I never learned how to actually manage my money. Step Into Freedom is teaching me things about money that I didn't even know I needed to learn, like how sometimes trauma can affect the way I spend."

—STEP INTO FREEDOM PARTICIPANT

This summer, that match carried two moms right to the driver's seat. Both purchased cars without taking out a loan.

One of them is Akua, whom you met in last year's report when she shared her dream of buying a car. "It makes me feel accomplished, even though it took longer to complete. I never gave up," she says. Her car means her family can go where they need to go without rearranging appointments or waiting on a ride. "We won't have to stand in the rain, snow, or bad weather waiting on the bus and carrying all of our bags and backpacks."

Restore: Not Alone in the Hardest Season

New this year, Restore was created for moms working to keep or regain custody of their children through the state. It was shaped by our Advisory Committee, who spent a full year with us studying the child welfare system and the gaps our moms face, so we could build the support they truly needed.

Restore includes a parenting class required by the courts, and then it goes further. Moms hear from a family judge, a therapist, a social worker, and a mom who has successfully reunited with her children, each offering a different perspective on what to expect and how to succeed. Just as importantly, they have one another.

"Having other people to talk to while I was walking such a difficult journey, and knowing they understood my situation, meant a lot," one Restore mom shares. "I never felt judged." She has also noticed changes at home. "I feel like I am more patient with my kids than I was before. I know how to care for them better." And when the class ended, she kept coming back. "Revive is so fun! I love getting to do fun activities with other moms and have time to just forget about the stress of my life for a while."

Restore was taught by Faith, a Step By Step alumna who has since become a social worker. She knows firsthand how many barriers moms face while working a case plan, from housing and employment to domestic violence, and why support matters even more when the road gets rough. "When they overcome one barrier, there are still others," Faith explains. "Single parents need support in all different areas."



PHOTO: *Learning life skills together builds community.*

"I will never not give back. Step By Step was there for me, and it is such a critical resource."

—FAITH

What stays with her most is the persistence of the moms in the room. "Even when some stopped coming, I saw others fight to the end. And even for those who didn't finish, we planted some good seeds."

Faith's own story is part of why she gives of her time so freely. "As a single mother, there's still going to be a struggle in the day to day. Even after successfully completing their case plan through the court, it doesn't mean they don't have struggles. A village is necessary, and parenting doesn't stop at 18 or 21." She believes her voice still matters because today's moms face many of the same challenges she once did. "I will never not give back. Step By Step was there for me, and it is such a critical resource."

Skills That Last

Whether a mom is learning to save, to advocate for her family, or to simply breathe a little easier, the Level Up Series is built to leave her with something lasting. These workshops give moms tools, community, and confidence, and they help turn hard seasons into stepping stones. As Step By Step continues to grow into a more sustainable organization, we are committed to helping our moms build sustainable lives of their own.

SUPPORT THAT MEETS HER WHERE SHE IS:

SIARA'S STORY



Siara was just 16 years old and pregnant when she first walked through the doors of Step By Step. Our team has had the privilege of walking alongside her through many seasons. She landed her first job, secured her own apartment, and built a more stable life for herself and her daughter. But Siara still has more she wants to accomplish. As she works hard, sometimes she needs help navigating systems meant to support working mothers as they move towards self sufficiency.

Someone Checking In, Every Week

An important part of Siara's journey with Step By Step is C.A.R.E. Case Management, providing connections, affirmations, resources, and empowerment. Through this program our Program Team checks in weekly with each mom providing holistic care as they get to know her one-on-one, walk her through Dare to Dream goal setting, connect her to resources, and make sure she knows she is not on her own.

That care is practical, too. Our Program Team members are trained KYnectors through the Department for Community Based Services (DCBS), so they can help moms apply for, update, or renew benefits such as food and childcare assistance. Instead of navigating the process alone, moms get help right here at Step By Step, which saves them valuable time they would otherwise take away from their jobs or their kids. It is one more way our team removes barriers so moms can focus on their goals.

When Siara first set a goal to finish her GED classes by the end of 2026, it felt like something she should do, not something she could. Then she sat down with our Program Team and worked through Dare to Dream, our S.M.A.R.T. goal setting process, breaking the big goal into small, doable steps. "It made me realize my goal is actually achievable," she says.

Our team went on to connect Siara with resources through our partnerships, including tutoring, homework help, and GED practice materials. Together, they built a plan that anticipated obstacles and fit the realities of her life as a working mom. And every week, our staff is there to support her. "Staff checks in on how I'm doing on my Dare to Dream goal and how my life is going in general," Siara says. "I have a strong support system from SBS because they provide a community to help with anything I might need."

She has followed through on each Dare to Dream step, and is now almost finished with her GED. Next, she is considering the CNA program at the University of Kentucky and hopes to work there one day.

"It feels good knowing that I can do this one step at a time and start planning my future very seriously."

—SIARA

When Work Wasn't Enough

Like so many of the young moms we serve, Siara is working hard with very little financial margin. This summer, her hours at work were unexpectedly cut, and she was forced to start looking for a new job.

In the middle of that transition, an extreme summer heat wave increased her electric bill higher than usual. Without steady income, there was no easy way to cover it.

Siara knows exactly what could have happened next. "My electricity would be cut," she says. "I'd have late fees putting me in a bigger hole, and my credit score could be affected if sent to collections." She and her daughter would have been left in the dark in their own apartment, in the heat of summer. One missing paycheck could have quickly become several unpaid bills, a damaged credit history, and a setback that took months to climb out of.

Instead, Crisis Care stepped in. This Step By Step program helps working moms bridge the gap during an unexpected emergency before it spirals. Siara reached out, and the process was simple, removing any unnecessary barriers to receiving assistance.

"It felt good to have that support in the moment when I needed it," Siara shares. "I didn't have to worry so much about all of the things I carry. I was able to get one thing out of my way."

Moving Forward, Not Starting Over

Keeping the lights on did more than solve one problem. It gave Siara room to breathe. She paid her other bills on time, kept looking for better work, and kept studying. She did not have to start over.

That progress is already showing. At 19, Siara has built a credit score close to 700, and she is proud of it. "It feels good knowing that I can do this one step at a time and start planning my future very seriously," she says. "It feels good to know I'll be able to buy a car or a house one day."

She's already thinking about her next Dare to Dream goal, to save for a car.

Siara's story is a picture of what it means to sustain a mom. Weekly check-ins build trust. Goals turn into plans. And when an emergency hits, a safety net keeps one hard month from becoming a lasting setback. This is what holistic care looks like at Step By Step: a mom supported in every area of her life, so she can keep moving toward the future she is building.



LEADERS RAISING LEADERS:
ECHO & RESOUND

Every Thursday night at Revive, moms gather, share a meal, and settle into their small groups. Those groups are now guided by someone who sat in that very circle not long ago. They are graduates of Step By Step who have said yes to leading, and they make up our Echo & Resound Leadership Development program.

Called Up, Not Left Alone

Echo & Resound (ER) is a two year leadership development program for moms who have graduated from Step By Step and are ready to lead other moms. It is intensive by design. Participants train in facilitating groups, working in teams, understanding team dynamics, public speaking, and planning curriculum. They attend two leadership retreats and walk through extensive discipleship. Then they put it all into practice, leading on Thursday nights at Revive.

Almost every ER mom starts with the same worry. "I was nervous because I didn't think I could lead a group of people, considering I'm still going through stuff myself," one mom shares. What gave her confidence to lead was preparation and community. "We had lots of training, we had support, we had each other, and I was surprised at how prepared I was."

Confidence That Follows Them Everywhere

The growth does not stay inside the walls of Step By Step. Moms describe carrying their new skills into their jobs, their goals, and their everyday lives.

"I used to let obstacles stop me, but now I'm much more confident at work," one mom says. "My communication skills have improved and I'm being depended on now. I never thought I was a dependable person." Another mom, who used to stay quiet around customers, now sits and has real conversations with them. "I'm not as afraid to talk to people," she says.

For others, confidence does not mean the absence of nerves. "Even when I'm anxious, I can present as someone who is confident," one mom explains. "I can keep going."

Leading Together

Leadership at Revive also means making real decisions. ER moms help plan Revive nights, and their input shapes Step By Step programming. Some discover that their gifts fit naturally and how their varying strengths complement one another. A mom with teaching experience found that planning a night felt much like preparing lessons for preschoolers. Others discovered that leading well is about more than being the loudest voice in the room. "I learned I don't have to always be the one speaking," one mom says. "I don't have to control everything. I can give someone else a moment."

Room to Grow in Faith

Discipleship is a central part of Echo & Resound, and it meets moms exactly where they are. Some are opening a Bible for the first time with fresh curiosity. "I was always scared to approach it, but now I want to get into it and learn more," one mom shares. Others carry a more complicated history with faith and are still sorting out what they believe. For them, SBS has become a safe place to ask questions and explore.

Witnessing Courage Take Shape

Our volunteer leaders have a front row seat to the transformation. "It's encouraging to see them stretch and embrace the fact that they can be comfortably uncomfortable as they try new things," one leader says. "They step into leadership anyways."

What surprises her most is what happens after the moms lead. "When they're leading, they look so comfortable and effortless. And afterward, they're so vulnerable in admitting they were scared. That's the definition of courage, stepping out in faith and fear. It's not a lack of fear, but finding the courage to step out."

> *"We had lots of training, we had support, we had each other..."*
>
> —ECHO & RESOUND MOM

The Future of Step By Step

This is what it means to sustain a mission. Moms who were once supported are now the ones supporting, and the next generation of moms walks into Revive to find someone who has been where they are. After more than thirty years, Step By Step is not only serving young mothers. We are raising the leaders who will carry this work forward.



PHOTO: *Echo & Resound Mom Leaders join Step Into Beautiful emcee Renee Shaw, Executive Director and CEO of KET, at Step By Step's signature event.*



THE DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN

CINDY AND MOMMA'S HIDEOUT

Step By Step has cultivated a safe place for moms to come and simply be in our office, which has come to be known as Momma's Hideout. They stop by to connect with staff, set goals through Dare to Dream, and get help applying for school, a job, or benefits. Staff pray with them, offer guidance, and listen. There is no appointment needed, and the space is welcoming to both moms and their children.

Showing Up for School Credit

Through a close friend from church, Cindy got connected with Step By Step and began attending Revive nights. After finding community at Revive, she started coming into the Step By Step office to complete volunteer hours for college credit. "I love the mission of Step By Step and the way they support and empower single mothers like myself," she says.

When her hours were finished, she kept visiting the office. "It became more than just a place where I volunteered," Cindy shares. "I felt a genuine sense of belonging and purpose there. I felt welcomed, supported, and like I was part of a community that truly cared about me and my family." These days, she stops by the office often, simply because she loves being in such a positive and encouraging place.

"Step By Step has supported me through some of the hardest moments of my life."

—CINDY

Walking Alongside Her, Season After Season

Over the past year, Cindy has faced more than most people carry in a lifetime, including debilitating health challenges and learning how to meet the needs of her neurodivergent child. Our team walked with her as she left a domestic violence relationship and worked to get back on her feet. "During a time when I felt like I had to rebuild so much of my life, they held my hand through the process and gave me a shoulder to lean on," she says.

Today, Cindy has settled into her own apartment. She continues to work hard toward her education, all while raising two young children. She leans on her mentor, her peers, and our staff, and each one reminds her she is known.

"Step By Step has supported me through some of the hardest moments of my life," Cindy says. "Their support has helped me become stronger, more independent, and continue working toward a better future for myself and my children."

Growing Together as a Family

The impact reaches well beyond Cindy. "Being part of Step By Step has helped me build a stronger relationship with my children," she says. "It has given us support, community, and opportunities to grow together." She has also found a place to grow in her faith, bringing her children along with her. "The support they have given me has allowed me to become a stronger and more present mother for my children, and that has made a difference in all of our lives."

The Long Haul

Cindy's story reminds us that Step By Step is a community where moms are encouraged, supported, and known, season after season. Long term relationships are what make lasting change possible, and moms like Cindy are the reason we are committed to being here for the long haul. As we look ahead to our new strategic plan and our focus on housing, we hold onto a simple truth: when a mom has a safe place to land, she can build a future.

PLANTED TO GROW

REVIVE KIDS

On Thursday nights, while moms are gathered for Revive, just down the hall their children are participating in Revive Kids. Kids are reading books and Bible stories, making friends, and laughing over dinner, in an environment where they are loved, accepted, worthy, and safe. Revive Kids is where the youngest members of our Step By Step family spend their evenings, and thanks to our Children's Coordinator, Ms. Marcia, it keeps getting better.

Investing in the Next Generation

This year, Ms. Marcia brought our Step Into Reading literacy program fresh life. Every month, each child gets to take home a brand new book of their very own. Friends from our community partners join us too, sitting down to read with the kids and leading fun literacy activities that make stories come alive.

She has also been planting seeds of leadership in our older kids. Each week, they practice hospitality by helping to serve meals to the younger children. Each month, they focus on a new characteristic, like gratitude, courage, or intention, and put it to work through games and activities. They are discovering that leaders are the ones who look out for the person next to them.

And all along the way, Ms. Marcia is helping kids connect faith to real life. Through simple object lessons, they learn what the Bible says and how it shapes the way they treat their friends, their families, and themselves.

Families Growing Strong

Sometimes the impact of Revive Kids shows up in the smallest of moments. During a recent home visit, Program Coordinator Brittany was greeted by a very excited Lamoni, who wanted to show off the plant she had potted at our Mother's Day event, Radiant & Resilient. Ms. Marcia had put so much time and care into preparing that activity, and months later, Lamoni could not wait to share it.

Ask Lamoni why she loves coming to Step By Step, and her answer is simple. "I like getting to see my friends and teachers."

Her mom, Kailyn, sees the difference too. "The impact I see on my daughter is her learning about God and being able to have more social skills as an only child. My daughter loves coming to Revive every Thursday," she says. Revive is a gift for Kailyn as well. "I know it's a safe place to express whatever I need to talk about without being judged."

Step By Step has supported this family beyond Thursday nights. "They've helped us financially, emotionally, and physically whenever we need it," Kailyn shares. "I know I have someone to call if I need someone to talk to."

That little plant is still growing and thriving, much like the family it belongs to. What looks like a simple children's activity has become a memory, a connection, and a reminder to a child that she is known and cared for.







OUR IMPACT

249
Active Volunteers

2,764
Volunteer Hours Completed

295
Moms and Kids Served

1,574
One-on-one Interactions with Young Single Moms

3,679
Basic Needs Items Distributed

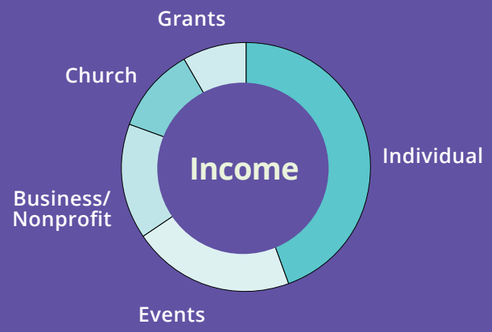
$15,242.94
Crisis Care: assisting moms with rent, transportation, utilities, SNAP and food insecurity

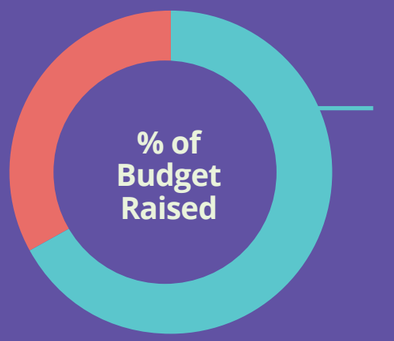
111
Service Referrals including mental health, housing, food, and more

THE NUMBERS

$458,744
Total Funds Raised to Date

$686,296
2026 Operating Budget





67%
Income Distribution Raised to Date

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

Data as of October 31, 2026

INVESTED IN HER COMMUNITY

COLENE ELRIDGE



Colene Elridge is the owner of Be More Consulting, where she helps leaders and organizations thrive around the country as a coach and speaker. For Colene, running a business and caring for the community go hand in hand.

From a Friend's Enthusiasm to a Personal Calling

Colene first heard about Step By Step through our Executive Director, Tanya Torp, and she laughs about how it happened. "If you know Tanya, you know she's always sharing the work of Step By Step!" Once she heard the mission, she wanted to know more.

It struck a personal chord. Colene was raised by a single mom. "She wasn't a young single mom, but that experience gave me an appreciation for what community, resources, and support can mean for a family," she says. "Getting involved felt like a way to pay some of that forward." She has spent several years serving on the Step By Step Advisory Committee and has also provided life skills workshops for young moms during Revive.

Why Local Business Matters

As a business owner, Colene knows how easy it is to focus on what is happening inside your own walls. But she sees how much of life reaches beyond them. "Housing, transportation, access to childcare, and food insecurity all affect the people we employ, the customers we serve, and the community we depend on," she says. "If someone is worried about where they're going to live or how they're going to get to work, that worry follows them into every part of their day. We should care about that."

She believes local businesses have a unique role to play. "We have resources, relationships, and opportunities to share. That might mean financial support, offering flexibility to an employee, making a connection, or helping people learn about an organization like Step By Step."

Learning Alongside Us

Through the Advisory Committee, Colene has learned how many systems our moms must navigate. Sessions on housing and the child welfare system stayed with her long after they ended. "I left with more questions, did additional research, and talked about what I'd learned with so many people afterward," she says.

It deepened her appreciation for how we serve moms. "A challenge with housing can affect transportation, employment, childcare, and so much more. Step By Step understands how those pieces connect and supports families with that whole picture in mind."

What keeps her coming back is the moms themselves. "Every time I hear one of the moms speak, I'm struck by her story, her confidence, and the pride she takes in what she's accomplished. They deserve to have people in their corner."

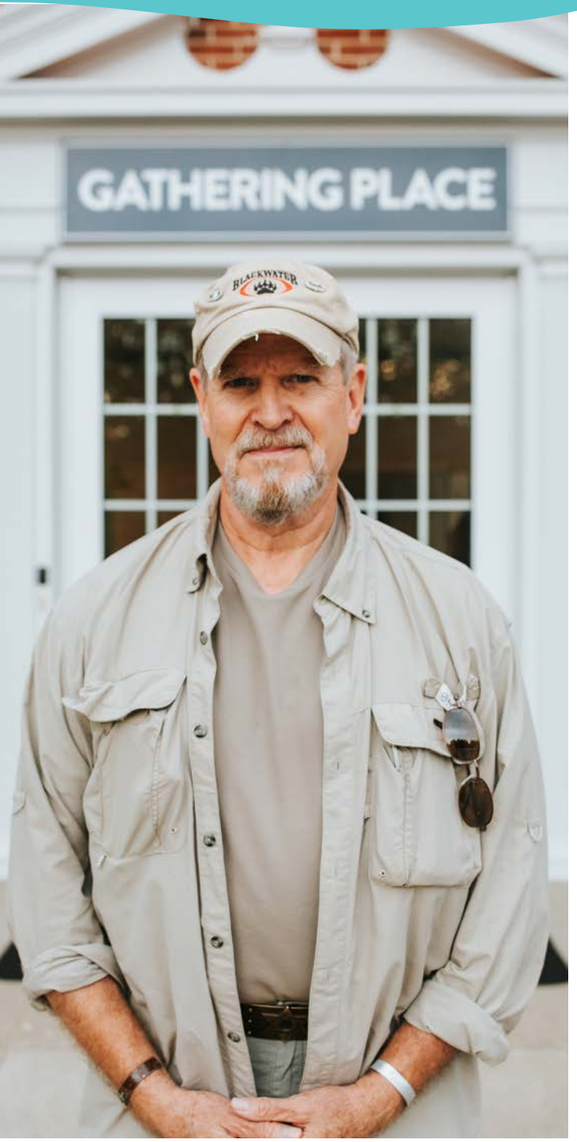
An Invitation to Other Leaders

Colene's message to fellow business owners is simple. "You don't have to solve every problem to make a meaningful contribution. Your time, resources, connections, or willingness to open a door can help create an opportunity a family needs." And the impact reaches far. "It can affect what her children experience growing up and what they believe is possible for their own lives. That's a powerful thing to be part of."

"You don't have to solve every problem to make a meaningful contribution."
—COLENE

GIVING TIME, GAINING COMMUNITY:

WHY OUR VOLUNTEERS CHOOSE SBS



DAN PECARO

Van Driver
Volunteer since 2019

Step By Step is a family affair for me. My daughter, Alicia Sims, is Step by Step's Development Director, so I have had a front row seat to this work and to the people who carry it out. I started volunteering because I saw how much it mattered to my family, and I wanted to be part of it.

My role is driving a Step By Step van, ensuring that moms and kids can get to the programming safely. Many of the moms do not have reliable transportation, and without a ride, they could miss a night of community, a hot meal, and support from people who care. When I pull up and pick them up, I get to be one small part of making sure they arrive.

"I see first hand what happens when you show up and love people through service."

—DAN

I love working alongside other Christians who love and respect young people trying to overcome hard circumstances. I believe the Gospel is the world's only hope for new life in Christ, and I see that hope take shape here.

Driving a van allows you to get to know the individual families well. They are not just stories you hear about but lives you get to witness up close. One example stays with me. Over time, I have watched a young mom show up faithfully, regardless of what is going on in her life or what she is facing. She has come to see that her faith matters, and that no matter what has happened in the past, we do not give up the fight to do what is right. I just know she is going to make it in life, and so is her young child. It is a privilege to witness.

I continue to support Step By Step because I see my family supporting it, and together we are seeing good fruit grow from this shared effort. I see first hand what happens when you show up and love people through service.

HANNAH LAKE

Revive Kids Leader
Volunteer since 2023

I first started volunteering after seeing a plea for help in the nursery. I happened to have the day off, and since I have always loved babies and children, I figured I could help. I never expected that one day would turn into something I am still doing three years later!

I continue to volunteer because I absolutely love it. I love the babies, I love getting to know their families, and I love the mission of Step By Step. It is also amazing to know that while I am caring for their babies, moms are able to focus on their own goals and take steps toward a better future for their families.

I don't have one specific memory that stands out so much as years of little moments that have become meaningful to me. I have watched babies come into the nursery as newborns and grow into toddlers who are almost ready for preschool. At the same time, I have watched their moms reach milestones of their own, like getting a new job, starting college, or accomplishing a goal they worked so hard to achieve. As a nurse, I love seeing children thrive. I may only spend a few hours in the nursery each week, but watching these families grow makes me feel part of something much bigger.





SHANNA MORGAN

Revive Leader
Volunteer since 2026

I felt God tugging at my heart to volunteer at Step By Step at the beginning of 2026, but I told Him I didn't have the time. Later that year during Sunday worship, I felt Him ask, "When was the last time you sacrificed your comfort for My Kingdom?" I was deeply convicted, but I didn't know what to do with it.

That very week, in a meeting at work, one of my leaders introduced Step By Step as our company's new community partner and said we needed boots on the ground to help at some events. I knew right then that was my answer.

My first event was volunteer training, where I met moms for the first time. One of them shared her story with me, and we prayed together. By the end of the day, it felt like we had known each other for a lifetime.

I keep volunteering because God keeps making a way and keeps calling my heart. I am grateful that my company chose to invest in this community, and grateful it opened the door for me to be part of it.

PARTNERS IN THE WORK:

SUSTAINING HOPE TOGETHER

Lasting change takes more than one organization. It takes others willing to invest in young families and to see themselves as part of the story. The partners below do exactly that. Their generosity helps keep our programs strong, our doors open, and our moms moving toward the futures they have worked so hard to build. We are grateful for their partnership.



Lisa Friesen Smith, Public Affairs Manager

For the team at NiSource and Columbia Gas, investing in Step By Step is about far more than meeting a need in the moment. "It enables the organization to walk alongside young single mothers as they build the skills, confidence, and stability needed to achieve success," says Lisa Friesen Smith, Public Affairs Manager for Columbia Gas of Kentucky. And Lisa should know! Multiple times per year she and other NiSource team members attend Revive nights to provide and serve meals, support basic needs drives, and play games with Revive Kids.

"The organization provides the structure and encouragement that can change the trajectory of a family's future," she shares. She points to the many ways our moms are supported, including mentoring, goal setting, and life skills training. Further, financial support from the NiSource Charitable Foundation and Columbia Gas reflects a shared commitment to strengthening families and creating opportunities for long term success.



Lori Flees, CEO

At Valvoline, Inc., giving back begins with their people. "It is in our nature to invest in the development of our people and give back to the communities we operate in," says Lori Flees, CEO of Valvoline, Inc. The company's stated community giving priorities include the physical and mental wellbeing of children, making Step By Step the perfect partner. "Investing in young women who are working hard to raise strong children in Lexington is an easy choice for us."

This year, Lori brought that commitment to life by hosting a leadership dinner for the moms of our Echo and Resound Leadership Development program. For the evening, our moms were the guests of honor. Lori listened intently to their individual stories and then shared valuable business advice and spent time answering questions about what it takes to be successful while parenting. It was invaluable mentorship from a highly decorated leader who is also a mom right here in our community.

"It was a special event that I felt privileged to attend," Lori says. "It was humbling. They have worked hard and continue to work hard to raise their children and progress their lives in positive ways." After meeting many of them, she says, "I am proud that we can support such a positive program in our community." ●



PHOTO: *Echo & Resound Mom Leaders enjoyed an evening of connection and leadership at a special dinner with Lori Flees, CEO of Valvoline.*

SHOWING UP:

MICHELLE SPEIGHT'S STORY OF GIVING

Michelle Speight has supported Step By Step for several years, but if you ask anyone on our team, they will tell you she gives far more than financially. She has served alongside her kids at our Christmas event, she sits on our Step Into Beautiful fundraising committee, and she shows up again and again because she has witnessed the impact of Step By Step first hand.

Moved to Action

Michelle's first experience with Step By Step was as a guest at our annual signature fundraiser, Step Into Beautiful. "It was so wonderful to be in a room with so many amazing people," she remembers. "I immediately saw the professionalism in their work and the care and dedication the Step By Step team has for young moms."

She was struck by how the organization teaches valuable life skills with open arms, giving moms a real chance to reach their goals. This spurred her to take the next step of getting involved herself. "For me, getting involved wasn't just about being part of an organization," she says. "It's about taking the opportunity to learn, contribute, and make a difference, one step at a time."

Seeing It Up Close

The staff of SBS encourages the community to attend a Revive night to witness what we do in real time. Once Michelle attended a Revive night, she observed how many moving parts go into making the weekly programming happen. "The staff thought of every detail for the moms, from transportation to children's programming, to food to learning sessions," she says. "The moms were eager to do their part by participating and learning. I could see the confidence in these women, knowing they were surrounded by a community that supports them."

That is why she calls Step By Step such a good investment. "It is such a well-oiled machine, from the team that runs the organization to the moms participating," she says. "It is all thanks to the hard work and effort of the Step By Step team."

Serving Side by Side with Her Kids

For Michelle, having opportunities to serve as a family is valuable. Every year she and her children serve at our annual Christmas event helping to set up the store where kids shop for their moms. "There is something really special about being able to serve alongside my kids," she shares. "It means so much to watch them experience the joy of giving, connecting with others, and being part of something bigger than themselves."

Seeing Is What Sustains

Our donors are not just supporters from a distance. Like Michelle, they step into the room, meet the moms and kids, and watch lives grow. What they see inspires them to keep investing, and their faithfulness helps sustain this work year after year. ●





MAKING ROOM

ALISON JACKSON COMES FULL CIRCLE

As the Director of Nonprofit Engagement and Community Initiatives at the Blue Grass Community Foundation, Alison Jackson is an advocate for nonprofits making a difference in our community.

Years ago, she walked through the doors of Step By Step as a teenage mom with a five month old daughter. Alison attended some of the very first Revive nights at our organization and gained support and encouragement. Recently, she walked back through those same doors to see for herself how far Step By Step has come.

A Stranger's Welcome

When Alison gave birth to her daughter at sixteen, she was a teenager still figuring out who she was while becoming responsible for another life. She was navigating financial barriers and life in public housing when a community partner referred her to Step By Step.

Walking into her first Revive Night, Alison felt unsure. "I was greeted by complete strangers who knew nothing about me," she remembers. "At that time, none of them looked like me, and I wondered how these women, whom I viewed as well off, could understand my experiences."

What she found surprised her. "Genuine care can reach beyond differences," she says. "They did not see me as a problem to solve or allow my circumstances to define me." Among other young mothers, she found encouragement, strength, and a sense of belonging, along with a faith connection that felt new to her.

"Step By Step showed me what it meant for people to make room for me and believe in my future," Alison says. "It helped me understand that becoming a young mother was part of my story, not the limit of what my life could become."

Believing in What Was Possible

Alison left high school during her freshman year, after being advised that her only focus should be her daughter. At nineteen, she earned her GED, but college still felt unattainable.

The encouragement she received at SBS helped her see beyond what was right in front of her. It came from staff, volunteers, and other moms facing challenges of their own. "We could look at one another and say, 'We can do this together,'" she says. She also learned that parenting looks different for every family, and that following her own path did not mean walking it alone.

Today, Alison holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a Master of Science in Human Resources and Organizational Development. "My path was not traditional, but it was mine," she says, "and SBS helped me believe it was possible."

Giving Back with a Seat at the Table

Alison has watched Step By Step grow over the years. "In the beginning, SBS felt like a support group centered around Bible study, prayer, and bringing young mothers together," she says. As needs became clearer, it grew into a holistic organization, and it has never lost the relationships and faith that made it meaningful from the start.

Now she helps guide that growth as a member of our Advisory Committee, a group of local professionals and community leaders who care about SBS families. The committee researches the issues affecting our moms and helps us develop strategies to address them. This year, that work helped shape our new Restore program for moms navigating the child welfare system.

"I understand the barriers because I have experienced them, and I understand the possibilities because I have lived those, too."

—ALISON

For Alison, it is deeply personal. "When community leaders see me today as a professional, I want them to also recognize that the person sitting across from them has been in the place of the mothers we are discussing," she says. "I understand the barriers because I have experienced them, and I understand the possibilities because I have lived those, too."

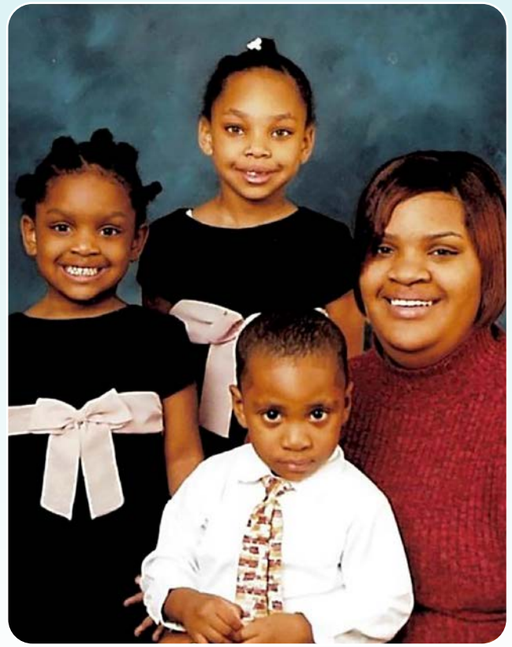


PHOTO: *Alison pictured with her children during her time at SBS in 2003.*

She also has a clear vision for where Step By Step is headed. "Helping someone through today is not the same as helping her build a sustainable future," she explains. "I see SBS continuing to connect immediate support with long term goals."

Hear Her Story in Person

Alison's journey is a powerful picture of what it means to sustain a mom and a mission. Others made room for her, leading her to believe in herself, and now she is making room for others.

You can hear more of her story in person. Alison will be our featured speaker at Step Into Beautiful on March 6, 2027, at The Manchester. We would love for you to join us.

See page 24 for more information on Step Into Beautiful and how to reserve your table, or visit **sbslex.org/sib2027.**

STRATEGIC PLAN & RESEARCH UPDATE

LISTENING, LEARNING, AND BUILDING WHAT COMES NEXT

Over the past three years, our team has been listening. With the help of our research team, we've conducted focus groups with the moms and kids of Step By Step, along with our volunteers, community partners, and board of directors. We asked what matters most, what stands in the way, and what we could become together.

Our research team, led by Dr. Aubrey Jones of the University of Kentucky College of Social Work, has walked alongside us at every step. Through reviewing and researching the data we have gathered, they are helping us better understand participants' experiences and outcomes. This work turns what we see every Thursday night into evidence that guides our decisions and shows the difference this work makes.

Our three-year strategic plan will be released in January 2027. As we look ahead, three areas have emerged as our steady focus: sustainability, so this work can endure for as long as our community needs it; programming, so every mom and child we serve can grow and thrive; and systemic impact, so we can address the deeper barriers families face, beginning with safe, affordable housing.

We are building toward a future where more moms and kids find a place to belong, and where the moms who once walked through our doors return to lead the next generation. We remain committed to the moms and kids who trust us, and we step into this next season with faith, clarity, and confidence in the path ahead.

"Through research, we are working to demonstrate the impact of the programming at Step By Step and build a foundation for evidence-based practice. We are doing so by identifying the participants' experience and outcomes through mixed methods research. This work helps translate the organization's valuable on-the-ground experience into a growing body of evidence that supports continuous improvement and demonstrates program effectiveness."

Aubrey Jones, PhD, CSW
Associate Professor, College of Social Work
University of Kentucky



PHOTO: *Aubrey Jones, PhD, CSW presenting research on Step By Step*

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF THE MOMS WE SERVE

To better understand the challenges and needs of the families we serve, Step By Step completes a standardized, self-reported needs assessment with each mom upon enrollment and every six months thereafter. This ongoing assessment helps us identify emerging needs and better understand the realities facing young single mothers in our community. The data provides valuable insight into areas such as housing stability, household income, and the ability to meet basic family needs, helping guide our strategic planning and shape how we move forward in serving moms and their children.

91.5%
have **insufficient or irregular income** to meet their needs

90.1%
are in **unstable housing** situations

87.3%
are **underemployed**

81.7%
are **facing food insecurity**

78.9%
are **not able to keep up with bills** regularly

56.3%
lack **reliable transportation**

46.5%
lack **social support** or community

45.1%
unable to meet most of their **basic needs**

LOOKING AHEAD

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 17th annual event takes place at **The Manchester Hotel** on **March 6, 2027** 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.
Purchase your table by February 1 for your chance to win a one night stay at The Manchester along with dinner for 2!

Reserve your table today at ***sbslex.org/sib2027***

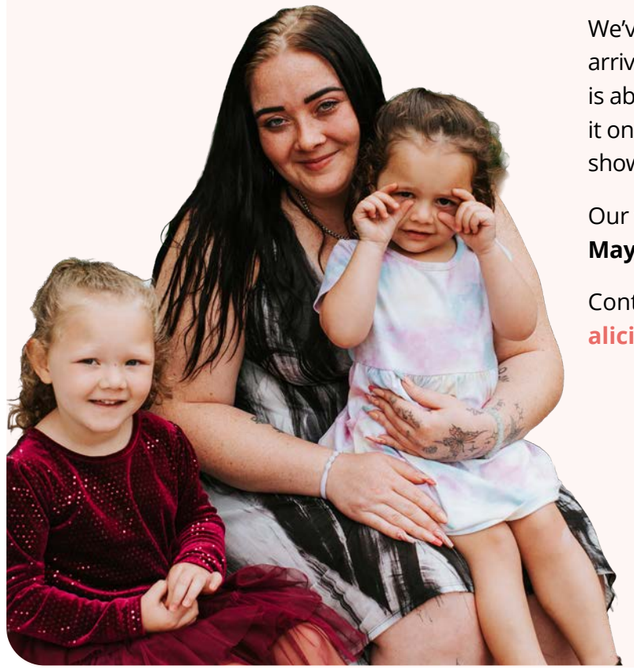












We've seen over the years that when Mother's Day arrives, the gratitude and love many mothers receive is absent for these resilient go-getters who are doing it on their own against the odds, daily. We want to shower them with love, fun, and inspiration.

Our fourth annual Mother's Day Brunch coming **May 15, 2027** is just for them.

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

WAYS TO SUPPORT SBS

1 MAKE AN IMPACT TODAY

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

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**.

ELEVATE MONTHLY GIVING

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** 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**.

5 BUILDING A FOUNDATION THAT LASTS

For 31 years, Step By Step has grown because people said yes to young moms. Now we are asking a new question: how do we make sure the answer is still yes 30 years from now?

By January 2030, we will build a $1 million endowment, a permanent fund whose earnings provide steady operational support that allows us to meet the growing needs of our population. Our goals for the next three years are bold: deepen programs, increase the ways we serve families, and a path to safe, affordable housing. Bold goals need a strong foundation.

Endowment gifts are invested, never spent, so a gift today keeps nourishing families for generations. You can give through a one-time gift, appreciated stock, through a donor-advised fund, a qualified charitable distribution, or a legacy gift in your estate plan.

To discuss ways to ensure your giving has a lasting impact, contact Development Director, Alicia Sims, **alicias@sbslex.org**.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

From the Step By Step Team

STEP
BY_
STEP

healing & empowering
young single moms