

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



HATW
HANDS ACROSS THE WATER



HATW

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MISSION

Hands Across The Water supports and empowers children and families through inclusive, strengths-based services.

VISION

We envision a community where every child is valued and has a safe and loving family where they can thrive.

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NEW SATELLITE OFFICE

HATW opened a branch office in Adrian in fall 2020. This location in Lenawee County offers more flexibility to both clients and staff. Find us at 115 E. Maumee, Suite 170, Adrian MI, 49221.



HATW is part of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, the National Council for Adoption, and Hague-accredited through IAAME. HATW has been annually recognized by the Human Rights Campaign as a Leader in Supporting and Serving LGBTQ Families since 2011.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER

My children tell me that I am not allowed to utter the word “unprecedented” about anything ever again after the overuse of this adjective to describe 2020, but it’s hard to find a better descriptor. At the beginning of the pandemic, I could be heard confidently saying to staff “we are experts in times of crisis, we were built for this!” But as the weeks turned into months, we, like the rest of the world, have faced ever-evolving challenges for our families and children while handling our own personal needs in unprecedented ways. I am so proud of the resiliency and teamwork of our dedicated staff who have juggled their responsibilities to our clients’ safety and well-being while caring for themselves and their families with grace and strength. We were able to weather 2020 without laying off or furloughing staff through conservation of resources, taking advantage of pandemic assistance programs and again, through the flexibility and dedication of staff who stepped up in new roles where needed.



Amidst these challenges, our work never slowed, because the needs of families in our communities increased. Hands Across The Water was well-prepared to meet those challenges due to well-timed investments in technology prior to the pandemic. We have discovered that we are able to do far more remotely than we had previously imagined possible.

In 2020, HATW unveiled a new, updated logo AND website, both long-wished-for projects that align with the agency’s commitment to continuous improvement of our inclusive, strengths-based services. In 2020, Hands Across The Water again achieved the highest tier of recognition, the Innovative Inclusion Seal, through the Human Rights Campaign’s All Children All Families initiative. Intentional efforts which began in 2019 to expand the agency’s focus on broader issues around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in our work were amplified in 2020 by the collective outrage across the country around long-standing issues of systemic racism and violence against Black citizens. In the field of child welfare especially, where Black and Brown children are disproportionately represented, there is much work to be done. We are committed to continuing the difficult work of identifying and challenging our own biases and elevating the voices and experiences of all marginalized groups to achieve our vision of a community where every child is valued and has a safe home and loving family where they can thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Page Sander". The script is fluid and cursive.

Katie Page Sander, LMSW

Executive Director

Our programs and services

Hands Across The Water may have started its life as an international adoption agency, but has grown into so much more over the course of 21 years. Supporting and empowering families through inclusive, strength-based services means our programs include:

- international, infant, and waiting child adoption;
- pregnancy options counseling that uses a non-coercive, supportive approach that centers choice and works with everyone involved in the pregnancy;
- foster care services that include case supervision of youth in care, licensing of foster families, and facilitating visits with parents and siblings;
- parent education to assist families that have been referred through Child Protective Services; and,
- mental health services provided by a team of therapists who have a special understanding of issues faced by children and adults who have experienced adoption or foster care, as well as an LGBTQ+ identity-affirming approach.

All of these services experienced significant operational changes during the pandemic. They're called "social services" not only because they serve society, but because they involve person-to-person interactions, and work to the connections that bring us together. Here are some highlights of our highly unusual year.

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

Not only were international adoptions affected by travel restrictions, but postal service delays hit this program harder than any other. Nevertheless, four adoptions were finalized in 2020, and 79 families in total were served by our team throughout the year in some capacity.



INFANT ADOPTION

In 2020, our infant adoption team completed four adoptions and post-placement supervision for seven families listed with national agencies and matched with infants out of state. In addition, we completed seven initial home studies and 17 home study updates.



PREGNANCY OPTIONS COUNSELING

We provide free, non-coercive counseling to anyone facing an unplanned pregnancy. While some choose to make an adoption plan, the vast majority of those looking for support ultimately select to have an abortion or to parent their child. In 2020, we served 10 people experiencing a crisis pregnancy.

STATE ADOPTION

Part of our focus on best outcomes for children and families is that our team works hard to find the right parent for every child, a seemingly small but important difference from the right child for each parent, especially when it comes to older children. Forty-three adoptions were finalized through this program in 2020.

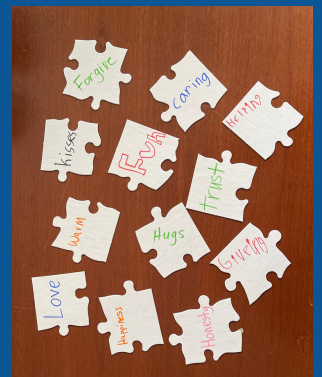


BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Our therapists served 97 clients in 2020. One unexpected gift of the pandemic was that telehealth offered the ability to continue working with some clients who might otherwise have found the travel time to our office an insurmountable burden, and for that we are grateful.

PARENT EDUCATION

The Parent Education team served 208 individuals in 2020. One hundred percent of the families that were intact when they entered the program remained intact upon completion. Ninety-seven percent of families served did not have a substantiated CPS complaint within three months of completing their time in the program, something to be celebrated given the extra stress of the pandemic.



FOSTER CARE

Our foster care program is made up of our foster home licensing and foster care case management staff. In 2020, HATW licensed 25 new foster families, served 162 children and their parents, and celebrated the reunifications of 15 children with their families.

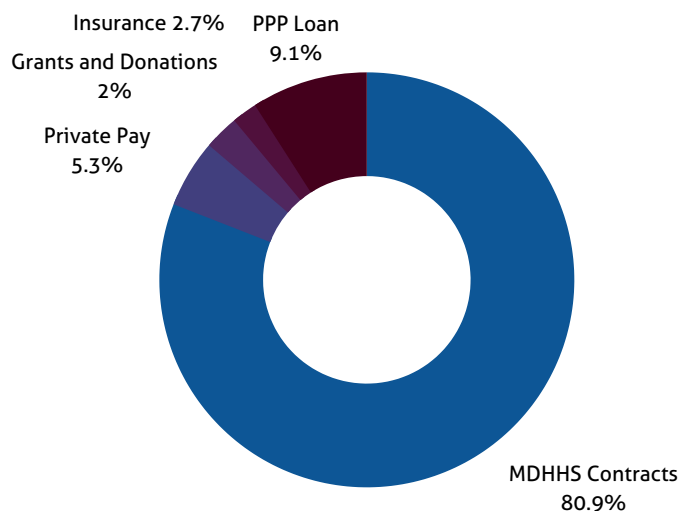
Events

The pandemic changed the way we gathered in 2020. Gathering was almost entirely off the table, unless it was outside and distanced. Trauma-sensitive yoga sessions went online. The Back To School event we participate in with partner organizations ensured children had needed supplies for the most unusual school year in memory. We held our first-ever, socially-distanced Halloween Road Rally. And instead of having our traditional holiday party, we sent families to see Holiday Lights at the Detroit Zoo, courtesy of Blue Cross Complete. We found some bright spots during the year!

Photos courtesy of HATW staff, Board Chair Melissa Danyeshar, The Detroit Zoo, Michigan Foster Care Closet, Jennifer Brooks

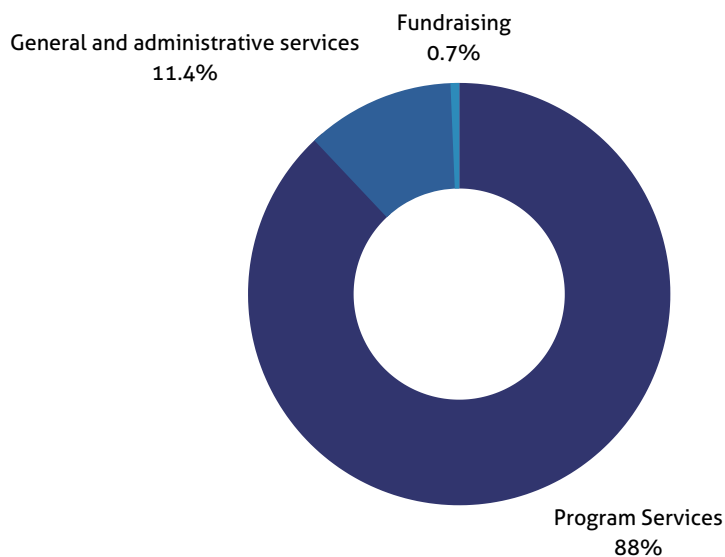


2020 Income



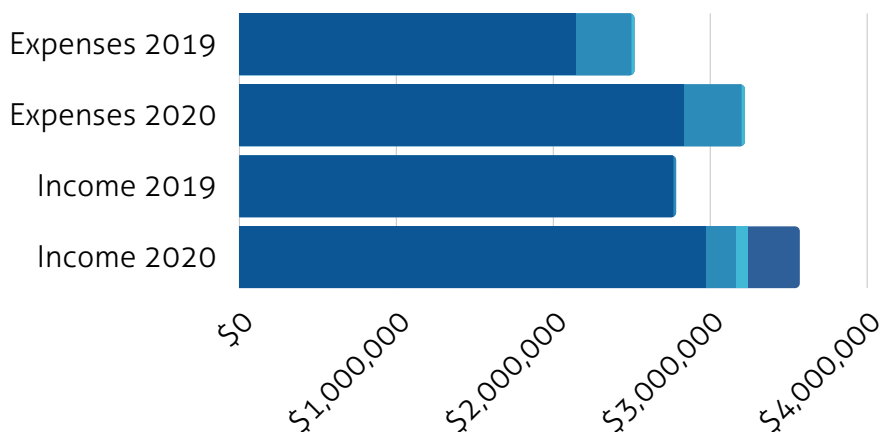
MDHHS contracts \$2,968,041
 Private pay \$194,584
 Insurance reimbursement \$99,539
 Grants and donations \$72,628
Total Income: \$3,343,904
 plus PPP loan \$332,550

2020 Expenses



Program services \$2,831,333
 Supporting services:
 General and administrative \$365,802
 Fundraising \$21,280
Total Expenses: \$3,218,415

Year over year growth



Our clients, in their own words...

"Working with Hands Across The Water to grow our family was the best choice we could have made. The licensing process was very clear and our licensing worker was very flexible to our busy schedule. Our adoption worker was an excellent advocate for us throughout the process of finding a match and getting the adoption of our son finalized. The HATW team made sure that we were matched with a child who is a perfect fit for our family, and supported us tirelessly during the adoption process. We were able to match with a child and complete the process in about a year, which was fantastic!"

"Everyone at HATW was professional, helpful, and engaging. Our case worker was wonderful and helped us along the journey. We are so grateful to everyone that helped us. We have and will continue to recommend HATW to our friends and those seeking to adopt. Thank you!"



Our clients, in their own words...

"My partner and I have been fostering off and on since 2012. When we decided to pursue adoption of a waiting teenager in 2019, our most recent license had been closed for about 3 years, and while we'd had a decent experience with our first private agency, it was headquartered a bit far from us, so we decided to try another agency. We had inquired with HATW in the past, before our first license, but while it didn't feel like the right fit at the time, it was an agency I wanted to come back to for their supportive policies toward LGBTQIA+ families and youth. At her first home visit, (our social worker) brought a flowchart she had created herself to help new adoptive families understand the process. That was, hands-down, the most helpful document in our possession. Every month when she came to visit, she would review that sheet with us and update us on our progress. Our adoption was finalized over Zoom during the COVID lockdown in spring 2020, and the hardest part of the entire thing was not getting to say a face-to-face goodbye and thank you to her before the case was closed and we closed our license again. However, I love HATW so much that I am still involved with the agency to a small extent; in February 2020, we piloted a foster care information party hosted at our home, and we are also a mentor family to others who are newly licensed and fostering or adopting teens. We have found an agency home with HATW, and should we ever do this again, there is no other agency for me!"



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