FRIENDS OF KAREN | FISCAL YEAR 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Defying Gravity

Resilience | Remembrance | Rising Together

Defying Gravity

The theme of this year's Annual Report is **Defying Gravity**. This iconic phrase resonates with us as an apt metaphor for Friends of Karen's role in helping children and their families rise above the impossibly difficult challenges of a child's life-threatening illness. Throughout this report, we focus on the essence of what makes Friends of Karen effective and why for 47 years we have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with thousands of families facing the unimaginable.

The stories you'll read, and the data we highlight address the impact of the comprehensive, family-centered support that is the cornerstone of what makes Friends of Karen unique. We've included a piece on the emotional support component of our work, which in many ways is the heart and soul of Friends of Karen. The personalized care delivered by our dedicated family support team creates stability for a family from diagnosis through the end of a child's treatment, and sadly beyond for families whose child did not survive.

Within the theme of **Defying Gravity**, we celebrate the **Resilience** of brave children, their siblings, parents and caregivers whose gravity-defying strength allows them to endure the physical, financial, emotional and practical hurdles they face every day.

We also remember all the children and families we've been privileged to serve, holding a special place in our heart for those grieving the loss of a child. At Friends of Karen, we never forget. Our annual memorial service for the children who have left us too soon, the personal notes to families on the anniversary of their child's passing, support groups, grief workshops and visits and calls from our social workers define the importance **Remembrance** holds for us.

Finally, **Rising Together**, the third focus of this report, acknowledges the collective power of our donors, volunteers, staff members, friends and families – everyone who comprises our beautiful caring community – coming together to lift up children and families.

Thank you for standing with Friends of Karen, enabling us to serve as a beacon of hope, a pillar of stability and a source of practical help for tri-state region families caring for a child with a life-threatening illness. Defying gravity isn't easy, but with you and Friends of Karen by their side, no family will face their child's illness alone.

Richard Sgaglio
Board President

Judith Factor
Executive Director

636 ill children and their siblings could celebrate their birthday because Friends of Karen remembered them with a birthday gift and the makings of a party – no other organization does this.

Walking Beside Families
A Hallmark of Friends of Karen

When a child is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, the impact reverberates through every aspect of a family's life emotionally, socially, financially, and spiritually. What once felt secure can suddenly become uncertain and fragile. Daily routines fall apart, financial pressures intensify, and fear and confusion take hold. At Friends of Karen, our highly skilled social work team in the **Family Support Program** understands that this is not just a medical crisis, it is a profound human crisis that touches every layer of a family's existence.

As Friends of Karen social workers, **our mission is to walk alongside families from the moment of diagnosis through treatment, survivorship, or grief.** The emotional, financial, and advocacy support we provide is not optional, it is essential care for families facing unimaginable challenges. Each of our social workers brings a blend of professional expertise, cultural humility, and deep compassion.

Our model is both psychosocial and person and family centered, grounded in the understanding that every family's experience is unique. **We don't just focus on the child—we care for the entire family system.** Parents, siblings, and caregivers all carry the emotional and practical weight of illness, and each one deserves to be seen, heard, and supported.

Guided by social work ethics and research-informed practices, our social workers offer **individualized care that includes emotional support, financial relief, and a steady presence** through times of crisis, loss, and healing. Every connection is built on mutual trust and long-term engagement.

Our culturally sensitive approach strengthens families' capacity to cope, adapt, and find resilience in the face of adversity. Friends of Karen social workers, along with our **Sibling Support** team, provide support that is foundational to a family's capacity to cope, endure, and even heal.

The impact of our work with families is profound. For families navigating life-threatening illness, **Friends of Karen is more than a service; it is a lifeline,** walking with them every step of the way to ensure they are never alone.

—Natalia RossEcheverri, LMSW, C-ASWCM

100% of families matched with a Friends of Karen social worker who remains with them throughout their child's illness journey.

Families Served in Fiscal Year 2025 as of 3/31/25

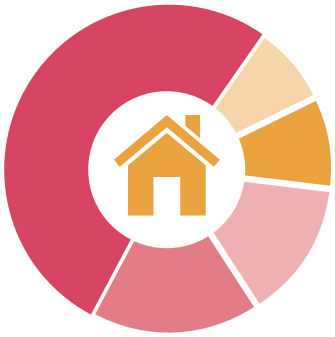
Friends of Karen provides Family Support Services to any child, birth through age 21, with a life-threatening illness and their family that meets our guidelines.

At Friends of Karen, we are committed to fostering a tangible, sustainable and measurable culture of belonging, where every child and every family matters.

This is integral to our mission. We strive to ensure those we serve feel supported, seen, heard, respected, and empowered.

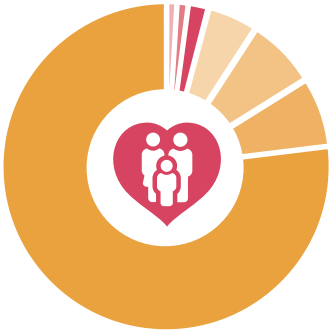
18,742 The total number of children Friends of Karen has helped since our founding in 1978.

33% of Friends of Karen families have an income that is below the Federal Guideline for Poverty ($32,150 for a family of 4)



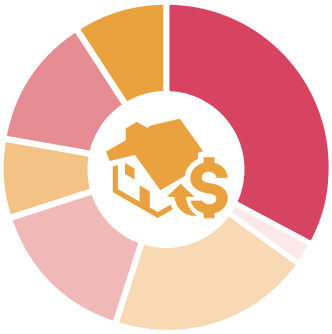
Where Families Reside

NYC	52%
Long Island	17%
Hudson Valley	14%
Northern New Jersey	9%
Southern Connecticut	8%



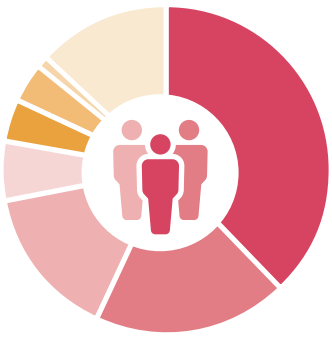
Child's Illness

Cancer *(leukemia, lymphoma, brain tumors, etc.)*	77%
Disorders *(blood, genetic, metabolic)*	7%
Other Illnesses	7%
Sickle Cell Disease	5%
Organ Diseases *(heart, kidney, liver, lung, etc.)*	2%
Anemias	1%
Autoimmune	1%



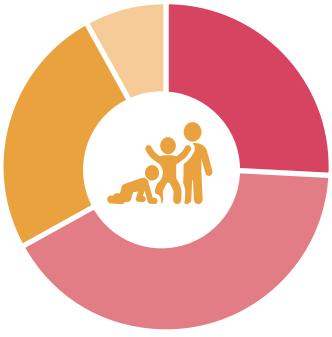
Family Income

$32,150 and UNDER	33%
$32,151- $35,000	2%
$35,001 - $50,000	20%
$50,001 - $75,000	15%
$75,001 - $100,000	8%
OVER $100,000	13%
Unknown	9%



Race/Ethnicity of Families

Hispanic	38%
Black	19%
White	15%
Mixed Descent	6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%
Middle Eastern/North African	4%
South Asian	1%
Other/ Unknown	13%



Age of the Ill Child

0-3 years	26%
4-11 years	41%
12-18 years	25%
19-21 years	8%

Resilience

Finding New Ways to Cope with the Unthinkable

Kelvi with his parents and sisters

"My son Kelvi was diagnosed with Leukemia at the age of 10 and relapsed at 14 while on treatment, making this a very long journey for Kelvi and our family. Thank God we connected with Friends of Karen, because they became a great support system for me and my children. Our Friends of Karen social worker Rhonda provided emotional support and guidance, including how to have difficult conversations about Kelvi's illness. Friends of Karen supported me financially by helping pay some household bills, which meant I did not have to worry so much.

Melissa, a child life specialist, helped Kelvi and his sisters Keylina (age 12) and Keyla (age 7) develop a better understanding of Kelvi's Leukemia beyond what I could explain. She worked with them to identify ways to cope with the challenge of living with a seriously ill brother.

The support and guidance I received played a huge part in surviving this journey. I felt guilty not being able to help Kelvi initially because I didn't know the words to use. Melissa guided me to find new ways to gently encourage him. I noticed when Kelvi received emotional support from Melissa, he was in better spirits and felt like he could take on small challenges. Today, he's considered cancer free and is a happy and confident boy because of the outpouring of love and support Friends of Karen has provided. Every day I thank God for putting this second family in my life, because Friends Karen is for us, a family."

—Isalina, Kelvi's mother

Keeping a Family Whole Through Kindness and Compassion

Valeria and Marcia

"Valeria, who is now three years old, was born prematurely and spent two months in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit before coming home. When she was six months old she had complications like failure to thrive. Things got worse when she caught a cold that spiraled into cardiac arrest. A month later Valeria was diagnosed with the rare genetic disorder Dyskeratosis Congenita that affects bone marrow and more.

In March 2023 she received a bone marrow transplant and that's when Friends of Karen entered our lives. Our Friends of Karen social worker Natalia has been a blessing and an incredible source of support. She takes the time to check in, ask how we're doing, and truly listens. She creates a sense of safety that makes a real difference in our lives.

I basically moved into the hospital to be with my daughter 24 hours a day, so I had to quit my job and give up our apartment. It took almost a year for her to come home. Through it all I still had bills to pay, like my cellphone and car insurance and needed to cover my basic needs. It all left me emotionally and financially broken. How could a jobless single mother manage in this situation? It was only possible because of the help I received from Friends of Karen and the people who donate to Friends of Karen. It wasn't just 'money' to me, it was a blessing, hope and possibilities, and keeping us together when we needed it the most."

—Marcia, Valeria's Mother

Remembrance
Embracing a Grieving Family

Micah was a seven-year-old boy who was diagnosed as a one-year-old with Menkes Disease, a genetic disorder that affects copper metabolism. He lived in the Bronx with his mother Cindy and his older brothers, Terrence (17) and Jahziah (12). Friends of Karen assisted the family with emotional support during end of life and has continued bereavement support after he died in December 2024. Cindy shares how Friends of Karen supported her family during this unimaginably difficult time.

Micah (center) and his brothers early in his diagnosis

"Friends of Karen was truly a lifeline for me and my boys while I was caring for my son, Micah, during his long battle with Menkes Disease. They lifted so many burdens helping with rent, school supplies, Christmas gifts for my kids, birthday cards and always checking in on us.

They were there to listen, to support, and even after Micah passed, they helped with funeral expenses and comforted us through the grief. They gave me the space to focus on my baby Micah and brought my family so much relief and kindness when we needed it most.

Also, something very important to me is how kind, sweet and compassionate our Friends of Karen social worker Alyssa has been to me. She would listen to everything I say and let me vent without interrupting. It felt great to be heard in the midst of all the chaos and overwhelming feelings my family was going through, and her voice was so comforting. Thank you, Alyssa, for that I'm forever grateful.

Without Friends of Karen, I honestly don't know how we would have managed. Being a single mom, the financial stress alone would have been crushing on top of the emotional weight of caring for my Micah. I would have been forced to divide my attention between survival and my son, instead of being fully present with him in his final months. Friends of Karen's support gave us peace of mind, stability, and the chance to focus on loving my beautiful boys during our worst and heartbreaking time."

–Cindy, Micah's Mother

Friends of Karen provides families with support through the ill child's end-of-life and during a family's bereavement.

This includes:

- **Virtual Bereavement Support Groups** for parents conducted in English and Spanish.
- **Annual Living Alongside Grief Retreat** to help parents and surviving siblings understand their personal way of grieving and that they can reintegrate joy into their lives.
- **Annual Memorial Candlelight Ceremony** in celebration of the lives of children who have died too soon.
- **Personal remembrance card** sent to the family on the anniversary of child's death (every year).
- **Birthday and holiday gifts given to siblings** for the year after their brother/sister's death.
- **Follow-up support from the family's social worker** and the children's sibling support specialist as needed.

Financials for Fiscal Year 2025 (4/1/2024 - 3/31/2025)

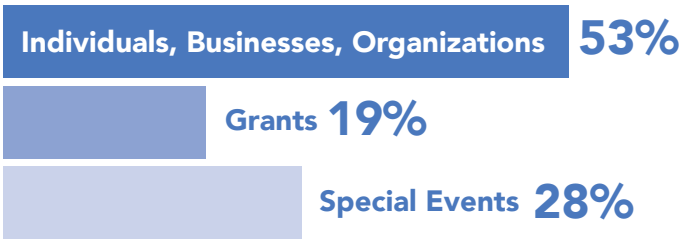
OPERATING REVENUES AND OTHER SUPPORT

Contributions - Individuals, Businesses, Organizations	$	2,237,346
Grants	$	800,125
Special Events (Net of Direct Costs)	$	1,164,088
Other - Administrative Fee	$	16,773
Total Revenues and Other Support	$	4,218,332

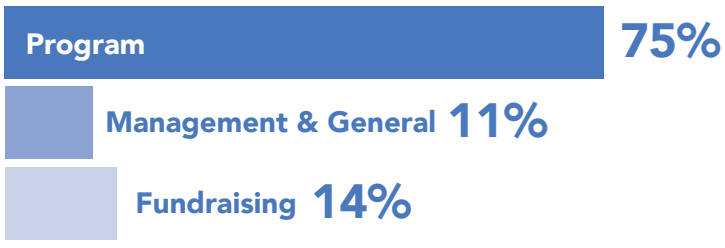
OPERATING EXPENSES

Program Services	$	3,319,914
Management and General	$	475,381
Fundraising	$	621,526
Total Expenses	$	4,416,821
Change in Net Assets from Operations	$	(198,489)
Investment return	$	231,438
Change in Net Assets	$	32,949
Net Assets, Beginning Of Year	$	5,547,004
Net Assets, End of Year	$	5,579,953

TOTAL REVENUES AND OTHER SUPPORT



TOTAL EXPENSES



Rising Together
Mobilizing A Community of Support

"We are fortunate to have a strong community of friends and family that have helped us through our daughter Alessia's two-and half-year cancer journey. Among our group of friends is Vinny, a longtime supporter of Friends of Karen, who knew we would relate to their mission.

First, we attended the 2024 Friends of Karen gala. Then we joined the Long Island Advisory Board, where we learned about the organization's 5K Walk/Run at the Long Island Marathon. Paul and I realized the Walk/Run was a simple way to mobilize the support of our family and friends. It was also symbolic for us to walk for Alessia when she could not walk due to treatment-related paralysis. That first year 50 people participated with us, and our team has been growing ever since.

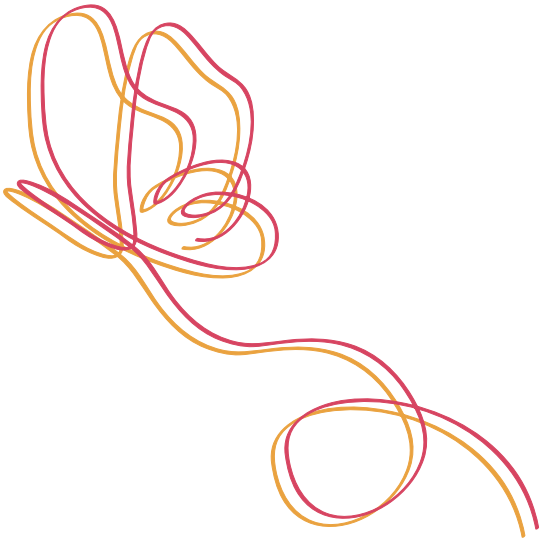
We empathize with what other families go through having been through it ourselves. Friends of Karen has given us a perfect window to get involved and feel fulfilled. So, as much as we give, we get back.

Alessia rang the bell in August 2025, signifying the end of her treatment. We are hopeful she will walk with us at the 2026 Walk/Run."

–Stephanie, Alessia's Mother

$1,311,898 direct financial assistance to families in FY'25 to help cover their basic living and illness-related expenses, with housing, utilities, food, and transportation to treatment as their greatest needs.

96% of families surveyed reported that Friends of Karen gave them the ability to focus on their ill child and/or their other children.



OUR MISSION

To provide emotional, financial, and advocacy support for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families, in order to help keep them stable, functioning, and able to cope.

friends of karen®
est. 1978
supporting critically-ill children and their families

www.friendsofkaren.org

ACCREDITED CHARITY BBB

Platinum Transparency 2025 Candid.

Charity Navigator FOUR-STAR

Friends of Karen is a registered 501 (c) (3) charity established in 1978. All contributions are tax-deductible.

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(1938-1990)

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