

ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2020



Bellis

# THE RIPPLE EFFECT



A trusted adoption resource for schools, communities and individuals since 1983.

# CONNECT

Every new story enhances our community. Join us! Bellis offers a variety of opportunities to gather in discussion, community, and fun! In 2021, we hope to see you, virtually or in person. Visit [mybellis.org](http://mybellis.org) for details on upcoming events. Events will also be posted on Facebook and Instagram.

## **ADOPTION SPEAKER'S WORKSHOP**

January 23, Fall Dates TBD

Adoption stories are real and tender. And, when they are told, they have the power to open hearts and minds, as well as dispel old myths and end painful stigmas. As more schools request Bellis presentations, we need more speakers — like you! To learn more and start your training, please plan to attend our next workshop.

## **STORYTELLING WORKSHOP with KATIE KNUTSON**

December 5, February 20, March 13

Whether you are new to speaking in classrooms or a veteran speaker, your story matters and can make a large impression on students! At these storytelling workshops, professional storyteller Katie Knutson will train participants on techniques to keep stories fresh and compelling. Join us via Zoom to gain new skills and find confidence to deliver your story in a highly compelling way for modern learners!

## **EVENINGS OF ADOPTION CONNECTION**

January 31, February 28, March 28, April 25, June 27, July 25, August 29, September 26, October 24, November 21

Evening of Adoption Connection meetings are for all touched by adoption and foster care. This wide spectrum of experiences brings a sense of commonality that is affirming and encouraging. The event is free for attendees. Evening of Adoption Connection meetings will take place via Zoom until March.

## **BELLIS TEA & TALK**

Tentatively Scheduled for May 2 in Roseville

At this annual spring event, we celebrate the transformational power of Bellis' peer-based support programs, including the Stronger Together retreat for birth mothers. Join us for inspirational stories, friendship, great food and entertainment — and the opportunity to invest in this important work!



## **STRONGER TOGETHER DAY RETREAT**

May 22, 2021 • Charlson Meadows in Victoria

Birth parents are invited to participate in educational sessions, activities and discussions intended to address topics of grief, self-care, self-worth, and identity. Most importantly, the retreat seeks to form new bonds of friendship. Lunch and snacks are provided. Discussions will be facilitated by Meagan Galbari, MA, LPCC, who has extensive experience in professional adoption support and Bellis programming. A registration fee of \$25 is requested.

## **STRONGER TOGETHER WEEKEND RETREAT**

September 17–19, 2021 • Near Deerwood

This weekend retreat offers peer-based support for birth mothers in a nurturing setting. One participant reflected:

“The connections are the most amazing thing — I have a place I belong.” It is the only weekend retreat for birth mothers in Minnesota, and one of only a few in the country.

Contact Bellis for information at [info@mybellis.org](mailto:info@mybellis.org).





# PRESIDENT’S REPORT

By Tracy Murphy

## “RIPPLES OF THE WATER REPRESENT THE FAR-REACHING EFFECTS OF EACH PEBBLE YOU DROP.”

Bellis has long dropped pebbles to create a broader ripple effect of compassion, empathy, and understanding in our communities.

When our volunteers expertly share their stories in schools, teachers (and all of us) are so amazed at the compassion their students share with their classmates and take home to their families, advocating for adoption through foster care.

When Bellis created one of the only birth mother retreats in the country, we realized we weren’t just helping individual women. Beautifully, each retreat participant took home new tactics to advocate for herself and other birth mothers in their families, workplaces, and communities.

Now, we are dropping another pebble... Supporting mothers who have lost custody of their children. This is a scary, exciting, and much-needed effort in our communities.

Take a look at the cover of this annual report. We want to offer a sense of calm and serenity as we collectively face more uncertain months in a pandemic.

But the ripples of the water represent the far-reaching effects of each pebble you drop when you support Bellis. You aren’t just supporting schools, program participants, and volunteers. You are supporting YOUR community.

We want ALL families to be celebrated, supported, and cherished. And, we need our community to embrace both the beautiful and tragic circumstances of adoption with empathy and compassion.

Thank you for your continued trust in our mission, support of our services, and belief in our vision. Now more than ever, we need both your financial and moral support. Thank you for considering a gift of your time, treasure, or talents.

I am grateful for this community.



Tracy Murphy (second from right) worked with board members and staff to assemble “event-in-a-box” gifts in October. When leaders delivered the gifts to stakeholders, they took the opportunity to have a conversation about Bellis’ expanded grief and loss outreach. Happily, the ripple effects were immediate. We’re grateful for a supportive network!



### MISSION STATEMENT

Bellis is a unique and authentic organization that celebrates people finding support, care and affirmation through sharing their stories and forming connections.

### VISION STATEMENT

A world where everyone with an adoption story belongs and has a voice.

### CORE VALUES

Community is at the core of all Bellis seeks to accomplish and how it aspires to operate. Within this context, Bellis most highly values:

- Honor in all interactions, seeking to earn and nurture trust and respect.
- Vulnerability in relationships, acknowledging that growth comes through openness.
- An inviting approach in gatherings, believing that an accepting and nonjudgmental space is necessary to discuss adoption experiences.



# NEW WAYS TO DIG INTO STORIES

You are invited to join two new volunteer-driven programs that offer time to connect, expand perspectives, and grow as storytellers. Register by visiting the calendar at [mybellis.org](http://mybellis.org) or the events listing on Facebook (MyBellisCommunity).

## Bellis Book Club



*Throughout our adoption journey, I have found solace, understanding, insight, and even some laughs in books that discuss adoption. Most often, these books have been memoirs, written by birth mothers, adopted persons, and adoptive parents, although occasionally I've found a novel that portrays adoption realistically. As we live through these unprecedented times, when connection is more important than ever, join me each month for a conversation about a book that speaks to the experience of adoption. I have a number of favorite books to share, and we will also feature memoirs by authors within the Bellis community. So, find a favorite place to curl up and dive into a good book. Then come together for discussion and connection with others.*

- Laureen Harbert, longtime Bellis classroom presenter, community volunteer and avid reader

The Bellis Book Club will meet via Zoom on the following evenings. Please check the registration details for the start time (which may change based on participants' needs related to family schedules).

- Thursday, Dec. 3
- Thursday, Jan. 7
- Thursday, Feb. 4
- Sunday, March 7
- Sunday, April 11
- Thursday, May 6
- Sunday, June 6

## Bellis Storytelling Circle

Your story is invaluable — to you personally, of course, and to the students with whom you share it. Whether we're in the classroom or on Zoom, the more effectively we communicate our stories, the greater our impact. For new speakers and seasoned pros, the new Bellis Speakers Circle kicks off in January to continue our tradition of supporting our speakers with the tools they need to bring their storytelling to the next level. Get ready for professional storytelling workshops, opportunities for practice and feedback, cool rewards, and more. Stay tuned! Jennifer Sheridan and I will lead the way!

- Hal Kaufman, longtime Bellis classroom presenter and 2019 Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute Angels in Adoption Honoree



The Bellis Storytelling Circle will meet monthly via Zoom, combining training workshops and practice sessions. Please watch for upcoming information about times and dates.

# “I WANTED TO BECOME TRULY MYSELF, AUTHENTIC AND WHOLE”

By Rachel Lantow, retreat participant

## **I didn't really know what I was looking for when I first came to the Bellis weekend retreat for birth mothers.**

I had never been in a large group of birth mothers before. I knew I wanted to meet more women who understood my experience. I knew I was looking for somewhere I felt I belonged. I knew I wanted to examine the lies that made me feel like I had to hide and be ashamed. I knew I wanted to become truly myself, authentic and whole.

There is so much stigma and misconception about adoption and birth mothers. The loss involved with being a birth mother is already too much. Being open about ourselves to the world and fighting off those misconceptions and stigma can be deeply painful and exhausting.

There was something about Bellis' gathering of birth mothers that created a refuge, shelter, and sisterhood. It was encouraging, empowering, rejuvenating, and healing to be in a group of women who understood my journey in a way that no one else could. Even though our stories were all so different, we all had common ground. The doubts and fears I faced they had faced, too. It was powerful. “You are not alone.” I admired them for their strength, bravery, and deep empathy. And it occurred to me, as I heard my story reflected in theirs:

## **I was one of them.**

## **I was admirable. I was strong. I was brave. I had deep empathy.**

I left the retreat feeling like I belonged somewhere. Not alone. And that I could be authentically myself, wherever I was in my journey, even in everyday life – because I was proud of the beauty in the women I had met and knew that was who I was, too. I wanted to be brave like them and for them and others affected by adoption.

One day more people will be aware of the beauty and the pain of adoption. We can let the light in to help others find community and healing in their stories. Not just for birth mothers either. Our families. Our placed children and their families. Every time someone shares their story, it shines one more light in the darkness.



## STRONGER TOGETHER

Using safety guidelines related to COVID-19, Bellis hosted two in-person Stronger Together retreats for birth mothers this year – a one-day retreat in May and a weekend retreat in September.

These gatherings offer a neutral space, not affiliated with an agency nor religious organization, where licensed professionals guide peer-based support in a nurturing setting. We believe each element of that description is essential to success and also makes the Stronger Together Model unique in the country.

The diverse mix of funding – from foundation grants to family donations to individual homemade gifts – illustrates the widespread support of this program. It seems we don't have to look far into our own history to think of a birth mother who has not received the emotional support she deserved. Collectively, this generosity causes a ripple effect of compassion that, we hope, makes it easier for all birth mothers to find support.



The Stronger Together weekend retreat for birth mothers was staffed by: Melanie Waller, LGSW; Miranda Barker, MSW LGSW; Elizabeth (Libby) Onchiri, MSW LICSW; Jenny Eldredge, Bellis Executive Director; and Betsy Trondson, MSSW LISW.



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

By Jenny Eldredge

## OUR STRONGER TOGETHER MODEL CAN SERVE MORE WOMEN

Children do better when everyone they love is healthy – especially their moms. And we know moms who need help. Building on our organization's commitment to serving birth mothers, Bellis is answering a call from the community to do more. In 2021, we will offer our Stronger Together peer-based support program to women who have lost custody of their children after intervention by child protection services. (Stay tuned for details early this spring.)

An unsettling reality is that hundreds of Minnesota women are left without emotional support related to the fact that someone else will raise their children. Before and after the final court hearing, other resources are available for specific needs. But, as one such mother described, "I had zero support. I was at a sober house with no one to talk with about losing my daughter." Grief and loss become overwhelming and can lead to more crisis.

**An independent study conducted by Wilder Research found no organization in the country is doing the work we propose to serve mothers who have lost custody.**

For the past seven years, our Stronger Together peer-based support program has transformed lives because it brings birth mothers together to help each other learn to manage grief and make sense of life moving ahead. We know that when you meet vulnerability with compassion, it changes things.

Innovative work is only successful with a solid base of partners and believers. We are honored to collaborate with a growing group of social service organizations, including FamilyWise, Tubman, and Washington and Scott counties.

Financially, this will be a heavy lift. But we are ready and we believe you are ready, too – to invest, to tell your network and to cheer us on. Many thanks to Old National, which stepped forward with matching funds!

### Add \$100 to your gift & Old National will match it!



#### IF EVER THERE WAS A YEAR TO DIG DEEP WITH CHARITY AND COMPASSION, THIS IS IT!

As Bellis strengthens our existing programs, we are expanding to support folks beyond our current network. This is brave work.

#### THAT'S WHY OUR FRIENDS AT OLD NATIONAL ARE STANDING WITH US AND ENCOURAGING YOU TO GIVE!

*"We feel it is our responsibility to strengthen the communities in which we serve. For four years, we have sponsored Bellis and have seen the great work of its volunteers and the effectiveness of its programming. The matching funds are our way of boosting year-end giving to ensure Bellis can reach its goals," said Carrie Lumex, Banking Center Manager, AVP.*

#### HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

Old National will match every \$100 you give over and above your 2019 year-end donation. For example, if you gave \$40 last year. Your gift of \$140 this year will result in \$240 for Bellis, thanks to Old National!  
(\$40 + \$100 + \$100 from Old National = \$240)

Give now, using the enclosed envelope. Give online.  
Or watch for your personalized annual appeal letter in November.

**Thank you!**

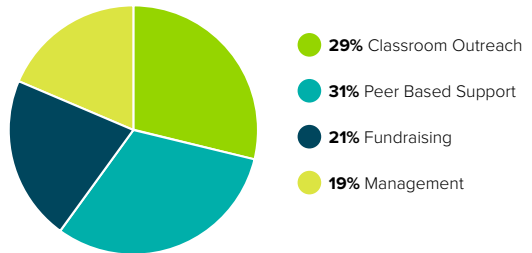
# FINANCIALS

In a word, Bellis' financial status is healthy. Founded by daughters of the Depression Era, the board has always kept funds in reserve to weather any storm, including a pandemic which has greatly limited our ability to gather. The reserves were enhanced with a large unsolicited donation in 2018. We know 2020 and 2021 may be lean years, so we are making prudent financial decisions while keeping our eye on important strategic goals. Bellis utilizes an outside bookkeeping firm to maintain internal control procedures. While the budget doesn't meet the threshold required for an annual audit, Wipfli's nonprofit group prepares our tax returns and ensures all state and federal reporting requirements are met.

## FINANCIALS

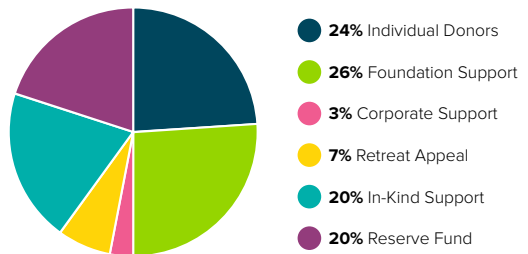
- By the end of our current fiscal year on June 30, 2021, we anticipate actual expenses will total \$136,931. On top of that, we have budgeted \$35,000 in in-kind services, which includes creative, printing and marketing services, venue rental, and other donated services by professional firms. This brings our expenses to \$171,931.
- For the current year, we anticipated cash-based contributions at \$102,500 and in-kind services at \$35,000.
- A portion of our budget expenses is dedicated to a new service area, providing peer-based support for women who have lost custody of their children. We are aggressively seeking grants to start up and sustain this initiative. While we are optimistic, we are also realistic that if we aren't awarded grants, the new program will be scaled to fit our financial capacity.
- Our major fundraising event is held each fall. It is our largest and most volunteer-intensive event. We had already decided, even before COVID social distancing requirements, to use a different format – a smaller gathering of key stakeholders that allow for intimate heart-to-heart conversation that would lay the foundation for broader community buy-in for this new program specific to mothers who have had their parental rights terminated. Because of social distancing requirements, we canceled the gathering. Instead, board members delivered “event in a box” items to the stakeholders. Outcomes reported by our board members included many robust conversations with the stakeholders and often generous donations being made.
- Using operating reserves was intentional in our FY 2021 budget. This budgeting decision recognized our decision to change the format of our traditional fall fundraising event. With the impact of COVID 19 in FY 2021, this strategy has proven to be a wise one.

## EXPENSES



Projected for current fiscal year (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021)

## INCOME



Projected for current fiscal year (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021)

*We benefit from programs at several corporations that match employees' donations and volunteer hours. Please contact your human resources representative at your place of employment to see if your donations or volunteer hours can be matched.*



# MEET THE BELLIS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*What motivates these dynamic and high-caliber leaders to volunteer on a time-intensive working board, focusing on precise strategic planning and prudent budget forecasting? They explain in their own words:*



**TRACY MURPHY, President**

The connection people have to adoption is so personal and intimate. There is real magic when people come together and share their stories in a brave space. It lifts everyone and creates community in a sacred way.



**KRISTINE MOSER, Vice President**

Bellis is a light for me. Surrounding myself with people who seek to share their experience in community. It's truly beautiful to see the growth, love, and passion.



**LIS MORIARTY, Treasurer**

Bellis provides a community for those whose lives have been impacted by adoption, where our stories have similar threads of love, grief, loss, and hope. It's a place where all voices in adoption are heard.



**KATE OLSON, Past President**

As a birth mom, Bellis has given many other birth moms and me a voice, a purpose, and a safe place to connect and heal. Together, we help pave a better path for birth moms of future generations.



**PARINAZ KASSEMI**

As the daughter of Iranian immigrants, I understand the advantages that a person can have if given the right circumstances. It is the backbone of everything I do. I stand by Bellis' mission to grow and spread goodness into the world.



**KRISTI LALAN**

Bellis has been an important part of my life for four years. Being involved with Bellis and people who "get it" about adoption has been so crucial in my journey. My objective is to pay it forward and be there, like Bellis was for me, so birth mothers' voices are heard and not silenced.



**MONIQUE LINDQUIST**

With Bellis, I can educate youth about adoption and help make our world a more inclusive place for those with adoption stories. I can help support and lead an organization that provides one-of-a-kind support for birth moms.



**LIBBY ONCHIRI**

I enjoy being a part of Bellis to help provide a warm and nurturing coming-together place for those touched by adoption.



**LEAH SCHMIDT**

It is because Bellis came into my life that our adoption journey started in the first place. From the beginning, I saw the love and passion all who are involved with Bellis possess. It brings me joy to share my passion with those who care about adoption as much as I do. I'm truly proud to be a part of this incredible organization.



**LORY SUTTON**

Bellis is such a gift to me! At every interaction, I've found a community of wise and wonderful people to support me on my adoption journey. And, I've found a welcoming and dedicated organization where I can volunteer my professional talents during retirement. Bellis feels like home.



**CHRISTI THOMPSON**

After every Bellis program, my heart is filled with gratitude for the space it creates to have transformative, authentic, and transparent conversations surrounding foster/adopt.



**JENNY ELDRIDGE**  
Executive Director

With Bellis, I can help lift up voices that for generations have been silenced. These powerful voices and stories strengthen and inspire everyone who hears them.

# THANK YOU, DONORS!

## \$2,500 to \$9,999

### Foundation

The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation  
John Sluck & Anita Sluck Foundation  
Colleen Rooney Powers & John Kevin Powers  
In Memory of Kathleen & John Rooney  
Leonette M. & Fred T. Lanners Foundation

### Individual

Ralph Ebbott  
Jeff & Justine Fritz  
Robert & Sally Fritz  
Robert Maxeiner  
Thomas & Tracy Murphy

## \$1,000 to \$2,499

### Foundation

The Agape Foundation  
The Patricia Grace Founders Fund  
Catholic Community Foundation

### Company

Great River Energy  
Moser Homes, Inc  
Overson Financial  
Team SPS Gives Back Charitable Fund of The Minneapolis Foundation  
Virtual Bookkeeping USA

### Individual

Kevin Dehn  
Jenny Eldredge & Cam Potts  
Doug & Ronda Collier  
Andrew & Kathleen Ebbott  
Laureen & Willie Harbert  
Vicky & Michael Iacarella

## \$250 to \$999

### Foundation

The Walsler Foundation  
Our Lady of the Lakes Council of Catholic Women

### Company

Blue Cross Blue Shield Eaton  
Elton Eyecare Inc.  
General Mills  
KimbleCo (Julie Kimble)  
Maguire Agency  
Tin Whiskers Brewing Company

### Individual

Anonymous Family Fund of the Catholic Community Foundation  
John & Julie Adams  
Joline & Chad Anderson  
Stephen & Sheila Brzica  
David Duxbury & Margaret Maxeiner-Duxbury  
Marion Eldredge  
Kyle & Trish Kircher  
Mat & Monique Lindquist  
Annie & Gregory Meehan  
Rick & Jan Moser  
Ryan & Kristine Moser  
Nate & Cory Ober  
Jennifer Sawyer  
Cindy Schramm  
Kerry Sheehy  
Autumn Stewart  
Lory Sutton  
Allison & Larrie Thorne

## Up to \$249

### Foundation

AmazonSmile Foundation

### Company

Ameriprise Financial  
Allina Health  
Cargill  
Deluxe Corporation  
Larkin Hoffman  
MN School Social Worker Association  
My Adoption Advisor  
UnitedHealth Group

### Individual

Kristen Asleson  
Miranda Barker  
Scott & Mary Jane Berglund  
Paul & Margaret Berrisford  
Leo & Carole Brietman  
Edward Caldwell  
Cheryl Carlson  
Matthew & Samantha Chadwick  
David Colwell  
Earl & Charlotte Cordes  
Andrew Courneya  
Steve & Gina Ehni  
Brian Engelking  
Mary Eldredge-Sandbo  
Jeffrey Erager  
Judi Funk  
Janette Gilbertson  
Maxine Gillen  
Karol Gresser  
Julie Gordon  
David & Tracy Guest  
Katie Harms  
John Hedrick  
Diane Hinds  
Fr. Paul Jaroszeski  
Helen Kleaver  
Kristi Lalan  
Louise Larsen  
Barb LeCuyer  
Douglas & Melissa Lezer  
Sarah McNally

Jeff & Lis Moriarty  
Geraldine Mooers  
Diane Moser  
Kat Moses  
Vanessa Mullenix  
Jill Murphy  
Bruce Nowlin & Maggie Jones  
Arlis & Margaret Olson  
Patrick & Kate Olson  
Meg Payne Nelson & Christopher Nelson  
Paul & Susan Plunkett  
Jim & Kathy Reed  
Mark & Mary Rishovd  
Kelly Roehl  
Kathy Samilo  
Steve & Sheila Schumacher  
Barbara Sheehan  
Joseph & Sharon Soderlund  
Lynn & Julie Suilmann  
Christi Thompson  
Wallace & Paula Trulen  
Colleen Tronson  
Suzanne Walczak & Cyriaque Sukam  
Jean & Jon Weber  
Anfonzo Wenker  
Joe & Danielle Wenker  
Angela Zurick



# HONORING & REMEMBERING SPECIAL PEOPLE IN OUR LIVES

**In Honor of Bev Anderson, my birth mother**  
**In Honor of Louise Larsen, my mom**  
**In Honor of Don & Anne Larsen, my dad**  
Deb Geis

**In Honor of Kristine Moser & Jason Overson**  
John & Patty Overson

**In Honor of Paul & Lauren Zappa**  
Fr. Paul Jaroszeski

**In Honor of our three adopted children**  
Hal & Katie Johnson

**In Honor of Trish & Kyle Kircher's wedding day**  
Susan Valek  
Kristin Sandy  
Julie Hadzima

**In Honor of Jenny, Cam, Allison & Mary**  
Andrea Wenker

**In Honor of Pam Hulstrand**  
Roger Toogood

**In Memory of my sister, Deidre**  
Marcia Schug

**In Memory of Dick Sheehan**  
Joyce Kauth

**In Memory of Irene Berg**  
Elwin Berg

**In Memory of Marleen Slattery, my cousin**  
Deb Geis

**In Memory of Mary Kennedy Hamel**  
Mark & Elizabeth Hamel

**In Memory of Mary Lou Stewart**  
Floyd Stewart  
Nancy & James Stannard

**In Memory of Nanette & Barb**  
Rosemary & Dave Zlimen

**In Memory of Thomas J. Lausen**  
Marjorie Lausen

**In Memory of Paul Radde**  
Jackie Radde

**In Memory of Robert Hamel**  
Robert Bennett

## **Our special thanks to Christiansen Creative.**

Production of our new website, mybellis.org, is a gift from this talented Hudson-based design agency.

**We appreciate the generosity of Headway Emotional Health Services,**  
which shared meeting space with Bellis.

**And many thanks to Tin Whiskers Brewing Co. in St. Paul**  
for including Bellis in its Pints for a Purpose events.

*Every effort is made to accurately recognize every individual and organization that has given a financial contribution to Bellis since the printing of the last annual report. This list does not include registration tickets or purchase of clothing items, nor does it include those who have given donations of items for various fundraising and hosting functions. The list of friends, supporters and volunteers is long and we are truly grateful!*

*Please inform us if your name is not presented as you wish.*



# Bellis

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## WEAR YOUR HEART FOR ADOPTION!

**Our popular Bellis clothing  
can now be purchased at Styled Stems floral boutique!**

The selection includes t-shirts, (adult and youth sizes), sweatshirts and coffee mugs. Caps, stickers and other items will be available for sale at our future in-person gatherings. Styled Stems is owned by longtime Bellis volunteer and new board member, Leah Schmidt.



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Blaine, MN



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