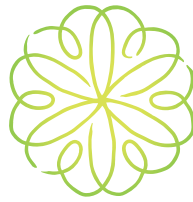


ANNUAL
REPORT
2019



Bellis



MAKING
CONNECTIONS

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

CONNECT

Our growing network wouldn't be complete without you. That's why Bellis offers a variety of opportunities to gather together in discussion, community and fun. To learn more and register for any Bellis events — some of which are listed here — please go to mybellis.eventbrite.com. Events are also announced on the Bellis Facebook and Instagram pages.

Adoption Speaker's Workshop

January 26 and March 21, 2020; 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.



Evenings of Adoption Connection

January 26, March 29, May 31, July 26,
September 27, November 22, 2020 • Headway
Emotional Health Services in Brooklyn Center

Bellis hosts regularly scheduled opportunities for our volunteers and other members of the adoption community to have time for in-depth conversation. These meetings are for adoptive parents, birth parents, adopted persons, birth or adoptive grandparents, family & friends. The event is free for attendees. Casual gatherings on alternative months are often hosted at Common Roots Café in Minneapolis.

Bellis Tea & Talk

May 2, 2020 • Brookview in Golden Valley

At this annual spring event, guests will enjoy food, music and conversation about the value of sharing our adoption stories across decades and experiences. This event is free and all are welcome. With donations and auction purchases, guests will have the opportunity to invest in Bellis' peer-based support programs, including the Stronger Together retreat for birth mothers.

Mini Retreat for Adoption Social Workers

May 30, 2020 • Charlson Meadows in Victoria

Adoption social workers are invited to a mini retreat to explore together the common threads of joys and challenges related to this demanding field. The day ends with an evening meal and bonfire. Overnight accommodations are available. 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 Day Retreat

May 31, 2020 • 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 18–20, 2020 • Near Deerwood

This weekend retreat offers peer-based support for birth mothers in a nurturing setting. One participant reflected: "This retreat...woke me up and grounded me back to find myself again. I leave with tools to weave all pieces of my identity back into my life, a way to be more positive, and loving and giving myself permission to be okay..." 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.



Evening of Adoption Connection meeting in July



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Tracy Murphy, President

'An empowering voice for adoption that connects, inspires and transforms'

That is what we do at Bellis. This sentence perfectly summarizes who we are, and I am so proud to introduce this as our new mission statement.

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

Our panel discussions with high school students, our retreats for birth parents and adoption social workers and our growing Evening of Adoption Connection meetings touch everyone in the adoption triad, including birth and adoptive grandparents. And our programs lift up the adoption experience with grace, humility and a recognition of both the beauty and heartbreak inherent in the decision to choose adoption.

We frequently hear that we fill gaps not addressed through other resources and offer support that reaches well past the legal adoption proceedings. We are here for the whole journey — from the birth parent who begins her search, to the new parents of a child recently adopted, all the way to the adults who were adopted and want to celebrate both their biological as well as forever families. Together, we bear witness, honor and affirm their experiences.

And, as adoption changes, we are preparing to support those changes, as well, including families built from foster-to-adopt and understanding the needs of parents whose rights have been terminated involuntarily.

This work is emotionally exhausting, but also deeply rewarding. We can't do it without you. To our volunteers, our staff, our program participants, our funders, our families and our cheerleaders — thank you. We are so grateful and humbled that you trust us with your stories and your hearts.

To the future!



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Bellis is to be an empowering voice for adoption that connects, inspires and transforms.

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.

COMMON CLASSROOM QUESTIONS REVEAL NEED FOR MORE EDUCATION

Even those who refer to themselves as “wallflowers” find themselves loving public speaking in high school classrooms with Bellis. Why? Teenagers are highly engaged listeners. Their astonishment at even the most basic facts about adoption shows the need to cast light on the topic.

In speaking with about 5,800 students in the past year, they told us some of the most surprising things they learned. Here is a sample of their verbatim comments:

- “I did not know that it could take so long to adopt a child.”
- “They have extremely extensive checks on the families.”
- “Saying ‘put up for adoption’ isn’t the correct term.”
- “Parents actually love their adopted kids like they are their own.”
- “The adoptive parents and birth parents can become like family in some sort of way.”
- “There’s such thing as an open adoption, because I thought you’re not supposed to have any contact at all.”
- “There are 750 kids that need to be adopted from foster care. I’m just shocked about how many kids need to be adopted.”



Katie Harms tells Hopkins High School students her story of meeting her birth mother 25 years ago.

Bellis is on track to visit more than 50 schools, often multiple times each year. This is possible only because of about 80 speakers who speak in teams, providing dynamic presentations that are often among the students’ favorite.

With few exceptions, the volunteer speakers take time off busy careers as physicians, engineers, managers, teachers, etc. With training and support, they share their personal stories of adoption and educate about modern adoption, including adoption from foster care, in general. A few months into the new school year, 81 percent of the students reported having a more positive understanding of adoption.

One student’s message to our volunteers reflects the universal appeal of adoption stories: “I think they are really smart and brave. And I really admire that they considered all the possibilities and took the decision that worked best for themselves and their children.”

Have you thought about sharing your adoption story?

Bellis hosts quarterly workshops for new volunteers. Whether your adoption story is international, domestic, open, closed, recent, past, foster or something else, we welcome you to learn about this unique opportunity to serve as a voice for adoption in Minnesota classrooms.

Watch for information about our next workshop at mybellis.eventbrite.com.



Speakers: At St. Michael-Albertville High School, Kristine Moser, Suzanne Walczak and Autumn Stewart shared their stories of growing up adopted, adopting siblings from foster care, and making an adoption plan for a baby.

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to Kristi Lalan, the 2019 Volunteer of the Year. Kristi steps up to serve wherever needed...sharing her compelling story in classrooms, giving real-life perspectives to professionals, hauling groceries in for a retreat, and even driving to a meeting in a snowstorm to greet other brave souls who showed up. Often dismissing her volunteerism with a shrug and a "I'm just trying to pay back what I've been given," Kristi is the welcoming hug new volunteers seek out.



We have photos of Kristi volunteering, but this photo of her pictured at right with her daughter and mother is especially important. As a community, Bellis has listened to her story unfold — first searching for her daughter decades after placement, then introducing her daughter to her mother, who passed away months later.

We appreciate Kristi's invaluable role as a volunteer and especially appreciate the way she relates to others as they courageously explore new parts of their adoption stories.



**LEGACIES ARE NOT THE RESULT OF
WISFUL THINKING. THEY ARE THE
RESULTS OF DETERMINED DOING.**

A LEADER'S LEGACY, JOSSEY-BASS, SAN FRANCISCO.

IN MEMORIAM



Mary Lou Stewart of Minnetonka, a driving force behind our organization, passed away on April 27. A legacy leader, she worked tirelessly for three decades to shape a nonprofit that would fit a unique need in our communities — the affirmation of the adoption option.

Mary Lou infused in our work many of her personal gifts, especially a magic touch for hospitality. Board meetings at her home included a glorious spread of food in a lovely setting. This set a tone that the rigorous demands of fundraising and program development, which she fearlessly led, should be met with a sense of comfort and love to be shared with all in our growing network. We aspire to live up to her standards, and grace, in all of our efforts today.

We are grateful to her husband, Floyd, and her children, Sloane and John, for sharing Mary Lou with us for so many years. They applauded her passion and admired her convictions, together with her supportive, tight-knit group of friends.

We extend to them our deepest condolences as we, too, grieve the loss of such an important figure in our community.

— Jenny Eldredge

SILENCE CAN SIGNAL A DEEPER CONNECTION

By Kate Olson, Board Member

Under one roof with nearly 30 women, moments of silence catch us off guard at the Stronger Together weekend retreat for birth mothers. But silence — always fleeting — can mean the impact is so monumental that it takes a few days or weeks for the words to find their way out. Sometimes we have to sift through what the heck just happened in that quiet lodge up north before we're ready to explore why we feel so different after leaving.

When we returned back to reality, the voices of the once-quiet observers became louder, and they shared a similar message with Bellis — “I finally found my people!”



The profound moments of the retreat are balanced with a healthy dose of goofiness. This year, scavenger hunt teams captured the friendships that begin during the weekend and continue in the year ahead.

I was filled with so much love and joy. I was surrounded by a group of women, from all different backgrounds and with all different stories, but with one common bond. We were treated with respect, compassion and love. Bellis has changed my life. Without it I don't know where I would have gone or who I would have turned to. I knew I needed help and support, and Bellis was right there. There is no other birth mom support out there like this in our area and I am so grateful for all that they do.

— Cassidy Stumm

As a birth mother with a closed adoption, I carried the guilt, shame and stigma of surrendering my child for 47 years before I was finally able to speak about my daughter. I had built a wall around me so that no one could see the loss and grief that I was carrying with me. Being a part of the last three Bellis birth mother retreats has had an incredible impact on my life. Meeting other birth moms, forging lasting friendships and knowing that someone else gets it.

— Kristi Lalan

A place of real rest, warm open arms that embraced me from the moment I arrive. No judgement, no right or wrong answers, just get to be me and be loved on. Messy parts, confusion, hurt, lost and loved. Every moment of the retreat you feel supported and cared for in the ways we try to care for others. It is the only place in this world we don't have to explain what it means to be a birth mother and all the emotions that come along with that story. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for a space to remember and believe in the good.

— Annie Meehan



Participants in the 2019 Stronger Together weekend retreat for birth mothers wrapped up in homemade quilts. While the retreat program is relatively new, comforting traditions are valued. Each year, a birth great-grandmother (the granddaughter is a birth mother) has been behind an effort to gift cozy blankets to each retreat participant. We call them “a hug to take home.” We are grateful for the countless, heartfelt acts of kindness that support this program.



Executive Director's Report

WE'RE STRIVING TO LISTEN TO EVERY VOICE

By Jenny Eldredge, Executive Director

All year long, we witness with awe the transformations that happen when people share their adoption stories with honesty — and welcome others' stories with acceptance. Bellis is so good at creating responsible, welcoming, brave spaces for these connections. But one question is always on my mind: Who is missing from the table?

To help us find out, we turned to Wilder Research. Through a complete literature review related to the experience of birth mothers, Wilder Research identified exactly what we see with our own eyes:

- Birth mothers often feel grief-stricken, anxious, and ashamed
- The grief associated with such a loss is not typically resolved easily or quickly, particularly due to its ambiguous nature, and may endure for years

Wilder Research could identify only a handful of other organizations across the country that offer varied levels of the types of services identified as beneficial, such as:

- Opportunities to share feelings and stories so that they feel understood and validated
- Peer support or other supports not connected with the agencies involved with their child's placement

In addition to providing those services and more, we are guided in our work by licensed professionals, and we have no affiliations with political or religious agendas, nor any child-placing service. This is what distinguishes Bellis.

Now, to the “who's missing” question. We asked Wilder Research to identify organizations that offer adoption-informed care to women who have lost custody of their children because of intervention by child protection services (e.g. foster care). Sadly, the answer was: no one.

If Bellis expanded to offer peer-based support to combat shame and emotional isolation to individuals whose children have entered the foster care system, research indicates that we could provide the same benefits to this population as we achieve with most people we serve:

- Improved ability to experience trust
- Diminished sense of failure and powerlessness
- Improved capacity for productive lives

Bellis is doing good work, but there is much more good work to be done. As always, your support encourages us along the way as we strive to listen to every voice in the adoption community. Please stay tuned.

Bellis is so good at creating responsible, welcoming, brave spaces for these connections.

But one question is always on my mind: Who is missing from the table?

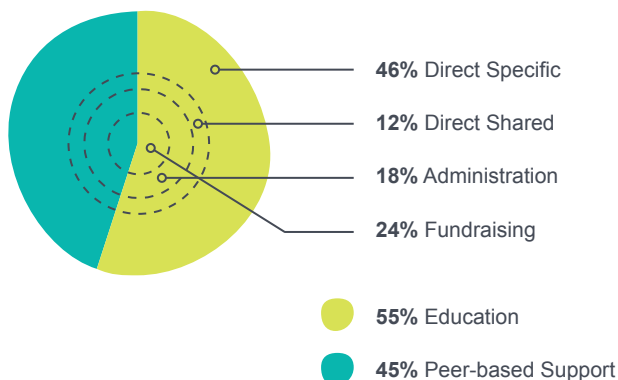
FINANCIALS

Bellis strives to comply with current standards for nonprofit management and reporting. While we still use a pie chart to show the percentages of each income source, we use a graphic, developed by Propel Nonprofits, that more completely tells the story of our expenditures. This graphic shows that a solid core at the center of our organization, in the form of fundraising and management, is essential to our mission and program successes. With a small staff, 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.

Some highlights of our budget:

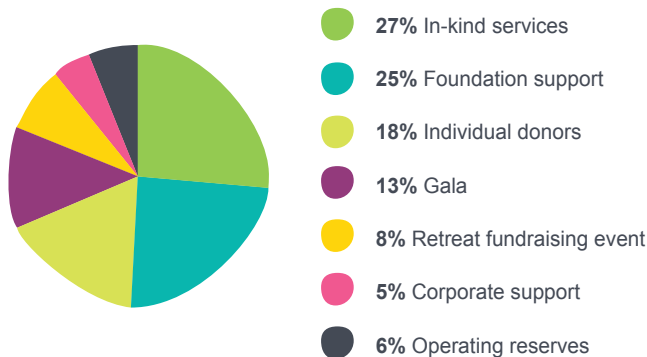
- By the end of our current fiscal year on June 30, 2020, we anticipate actual expenses will total \$119,467. On top of that, we have budgeted \$45,448 in in-kind services, which includes creative, printing and marketing services, venue rental, and other donated services by professional firms. This brings our expenses to \$164,915.
- Because Bellis adheres to the Heartfelt Connector model (as described by the Stanford Social Innovation Review) as a way to build and nurture a community of volunteers and supporters, a large portion of management and fundraising resources is invested in events that cultivate supporters and volunteers.
- For the current year, we anticipated cash-based contributions at \$115,500 and in-kind services at \$45,448. We opted to pull \$10,000 from operating reserves in order to invest in expanded peer-based services as well as an administrative assistant to support all program areas. This brings our total anticipated revenues to \$170,948.

EXPENSES



Projected for current fiscal year (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)

INCOME



Projected for current fiscal year (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)

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.

LEADERSHIP TEAM SETS NEW STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Bellis leadership has worked hard this year to ensure a sound framework for strategic growth. Having successfully met the objectives of our 2015 three-year plan, we worked in May with Strategic Consulting & Coaching in St. Paul to set forth new, exciting goals. These goals include expanding current programs, creating new peer-support opportunities, and finding our own office and meeting space.

Is this your year of brave, bold thinking? The board welcomes applicants for volunteer leadership positions that will advance Bellis' knowledge in the areas of diversity, CPS-related relinquishment, social media and more. Contact Christi Thompson at christi@mybellis.org to learn more.



BELLIS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Back, from left: Elizabeth (Libby) Onchiri, MSW, LICSW; Vice President Kristine Moser, SHRM-SCP; John Overson; President Tracy Murphy; and Monique Lindquist
Front, from left: Executive Director Jenny Eldredge; Treasurer Lis Moriarty; Kate Olson; and Christi Thompson

BELLIS STAFF

Outreach Coordinator
Pam Hulstrand,
Executive Director
Jenny Eldredge,
Administrative Assistant
Kristen Asleson



BELLIS BRINGS TRAINING TO AGENCIES TO RECRUIT NEW FOSTER CARE SPEAKERS

Bellis is offering in-house training workshops to Twin Cities agencies that help families adopt children from foster care. The goal of this special initiative is to recruit additional classroom speakers — professionals and clients — with foster care experience to enhance Bellis' ability to serve as a voice for all types of adoption.

Thanks to designated funding by the Leonette M. & Fred T. Lanners Foundation, Bellis will offer CE units for professionals, gift cards for client participants, and a light meal for all during the training. Contact Bellis to learn more and schedule a training.



Bellis

About Bellis

Founded in 1983, Bellis is a volunteer-driven, multi-service nonprofit with no political or religious agenda. It brings adoption education into schools and communities. Bellis also provides peer-based support, including a healing weekend retreat for birth mothers and Adoption Connection gatherings for anyone with an adoption experience. The organization was formerly known as Adoption Option Council of Minnesota.

To learn more about investing in the work of Bellis, as a donor or volunteer, connect at:

Bellis, P.O. Box 75
Elk River, MN 55330

952-944-0866
info@mybellis.org
mybellis.org

Federal tax ID:
41-1444119

THANK YOU, DONORS!

\$50,000 +

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Carol Williams*

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Our special thanks to the following partners
for their in-kind contributions to Bellis:

Christiansen Creative, a Hudson-based design agency

Headway Emotional Health Services (meeting space)

Tin Whiskers Brewing Co. in St. Paul

Remembering Special People in Our Lives

In Memory of Mary Lou Stewart

Higher Power Training
John Burton, Best & Flanagan
Margaret Munson, LANDSTYLE
Sandra Rud, Lafayette Interiors
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In Honor of Jessica and Sean

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In Honor of Maya and Ryan Fratzke

Cathy Yseth

In Honor of My Mother, Gwen

MJ Herrmann

In Honor of Sarah McNally

Kathleen O'Sullivan

In Honor of Our Three Adopted Children

Hal & Katie Johnson

In Honor of Lis Moriarty

Jane Harper & Doug Ollila
Natalie Dahlgren

In Honor of Kristine Moser

Doug & Melissa Lezer

In Honor of Kate Olson

Jayne Funk

In Honor of John Overson

Elaine Anderson

In Honor of Chuck Votava

Cy & Mary Ann Votava

In Honor of the Weldy Family

Anonymous Household

In Honor of Dave and Roxie Thorsen

Steve & Phyllis Ellefson

In Memory of Jerry Castle

Marion Eldredge

In Memory of Bob Hamel

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In Memory of Mary Kennedy Hamel

Mark & Beth Hamel

In Memory of My Sister, Deidre Hedrick

Marcia Schug

In Memory of Charles Eldredge

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In Memory of Patricia Grace Maxeiner

Madeline Maxeiner

In Memory of Kelo Overson and Gladys Cuddigan

John & Patty Overson

In Memory of Paul Radde

Jackie Radde

In Memory of Marlys Toogood

Marion Eldredge

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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**BELLIS
BLAST**

Bellis

THE BELLIS BLAST ON OCTOBER 6 WAS A FAMILY-FRIENDLY TWIST ON OUR FALL FUNDRAISING EVENT.



We had a blast! Thank you to everyone who joined this celebration of adoption. Thanks especially to businesses that stepped forward as sponsors and pro bono supporters. Old National Bank, Larkin Hoffman, My Adoption Advisor, Overson Financial, TransForm Corp., Jennifer Friedman - Edina Realty, Virtual Bookkeeping USA, Christiansen Creative, Tin Whiskers Brewing Co., and Away We Go Weddings.



mybellis.org

info@mybellis.org

phone: 952-944-0866