



We Are Family
dragonfly.org/chicago



2025

IMPACT REPORT

The Dragonfly Foundation - Chicago

FROM OUR DIRECTOR TO YOU



Throughout my 17 years at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, including three years working directly with pediatric oncology patients, I've seen firsthand how critical immediate support is for families facing cancer. Too often, help came too late. In 2020, I brought The Dragonfly Foundation from Cincinnati to Chicago to change that reality - ensuring families receive practical, timely support when they need it most.

When a parent needs gas money to get their child to treatment, we help. When a family can't afford groceries after leaving work to stay bedside, we respond. When caregivers and siblings feel isolated by a diagnosis, we connect them with others who understand. The need is there, and our Dragonfly Chicago community is showing up in response.

This past year, we accomplished something extraordinary. We served over 560 families across eight hospital partners and invested 90% more in programs. Now, we're turning that momentum into a plan for the future. Guided by input from families, clinicians, and supporters, we're developing a Strategic Roadmap to strengthen our programs and ensure we remain responsive, effective, and aligned with real needs.

I'm so proud of how far we've come. And for that, I want to thank you. If you're reading this, you care deeply about our mission. You've given in ways big and small: volunteering your time, sponsoring events, donating toys and meals, sharing our story, hosting fundraisers, and so much more. You're the reason we can say yes to families when others can't.

Thank you for standing with us. We're excited for what's ahead and to have you be a part of it.

With much gratitude,

Jessica Merar, CCLS
Executive Director, The Dragonfly Foundation Chicago



OUR MISSION

The Dragonfly Foundation Chicago is a 501c3 nonprofit dedicated to supporting local pediatric cancer patients and their families by offering strength, courage, and joy at the time of diagnosis, throughout treatment, and beyond.

We do this by fulfilling day-to-day essential needs (brought to our attention through front-line staff at all eight of our area partner hospitals), such as gas cards, grocery cards, household essentials, toys, and more.

We create community - by providing opportunities for our families to enjoy sports games, holiday outings, and fun experiences, which provide a distraction from their daily treatments.

Our many hospital programs help our partner clinical teams to provide stellar, developmentally appropriate care, such as our hair loss kits and treatment-related stuffed animals.



PARTNER HOSPITALS



LOYOLA
MEDICINE



Story of **HOPE**

Ethan is an 8-year-old boy who adores martial arts, has the funniest sense of humor, and loves giving free hugs to everyone!

His family's life suddenly changed in the summer of 2021 when Ethan was diagnosed with leukemia.

Being the outgoing, happy kid that he is, Ethan rarely complained. He has dealt with multiple procedures, inpatient stays, and many of the side effects that come with treatment, all with a smile on his face.

Thanks to generous donors, Dragonfly was able to step in and offer various activities and support which brought joy to their family. As mom Kathy states, **"Dragonfly has been there during our darkest days, and we know they will continue to walk alongside us while we continue to help our son through treatment."**

Ethan's strength and attitude throughout treatment has been admirable.

Keep it up, Ethan. We are all cheering for you!



*Scan to watch
Ethan's full story*

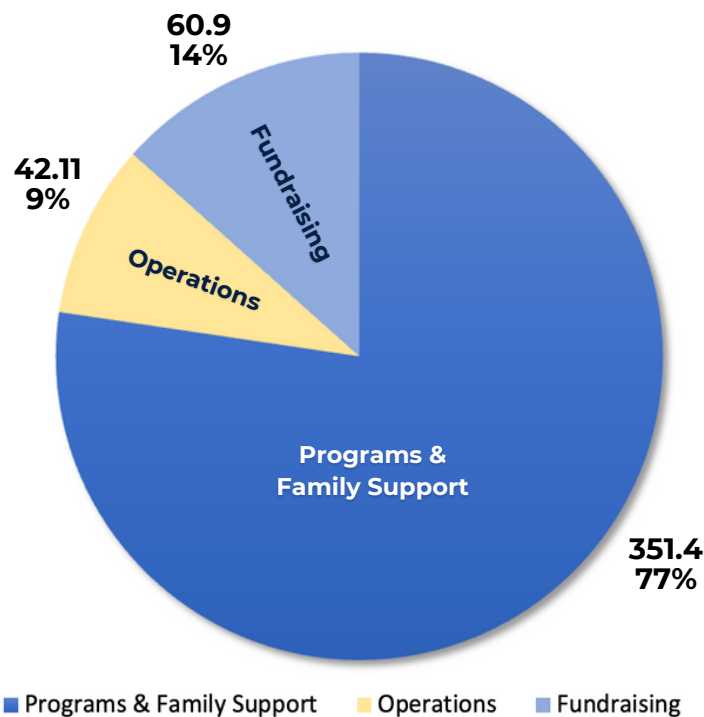
FY25 FINANCIAL INVESTMENT



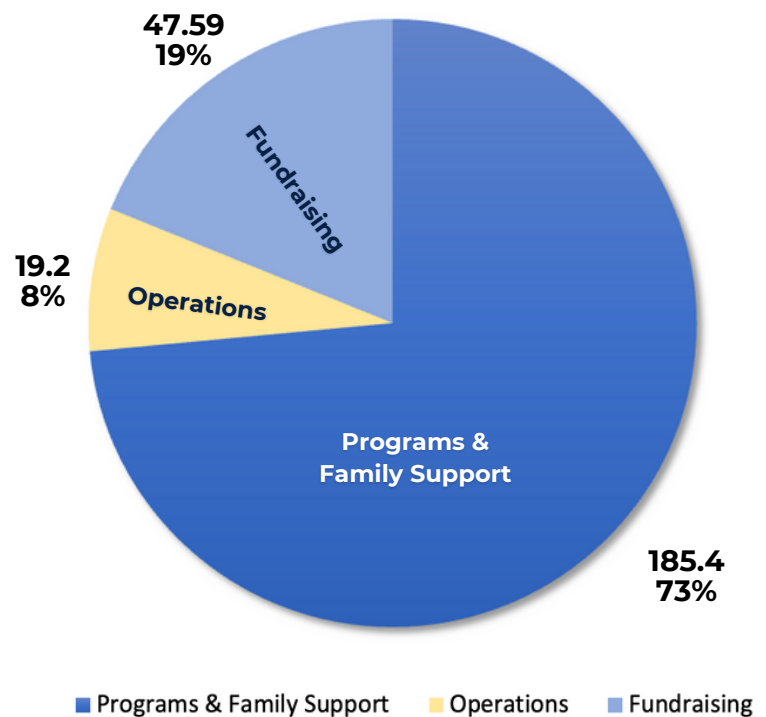
When we show up for each other in the hardest moments, we strengthen the whole community. This past year, Dragonfly Chicago supporters did just that - in record numbers.

- \$351,398 went directly to programs and resources for families through Urgent Requests, Family Events, and Hospital Supports.
- This represented a 90% increase in program funding from FY24.
- The overall investment in carrying out the Dragonfly Chicago mission increased by 80%--surpassing our cumulative growth from the prior four years.

FY25 Investment: \$454,402



FY24 Investment: \$252,182



(For financial information regarding The Dragonfly Foundation, please see our audited financials and Form 990 at [Dragonfly.org/chicago](https://www.dragonfly.org/chicago))



PROGRAM IMPACT



Each program reflects the belief that families facing pediatric cancer deserve immediate support, genuine community, and the dignity of choosing what helps them most.

URGENT REQUESTS



158 daily needs fulfilled

When 8-year-old Maya needed to get to treatment but her mom's car broke down, an Uber ride was just a phone call away. When the Johnson family lost their home during their son's inpatient stay and had to move, their new mattresses and bedding arrived at the new place so that they could focus on what mattered most. The Urgent Requests program addresses the daily realities that cancer brings—gas money for long drives to the hospital, grocery vouchers when a parent can't work, parking fees that add up during extended stays. Families receive support within days, not weeks, because cancer doesn't wait for bureaucracy. This program trusts that families know what they need most.



THE DRAGONFLY FAMILY



221 families were reminded they are not alone

Community replaces isolation through monthly events, birthday celebrations, and milestone moments that help families rediscover joy during their most challenging season. When the Martinez family attended their first Dragonfly event after months of hospital visits, their teenage daughter said it was the first time she'd laughed in weeks. These connections remind families they're not walking this journey alone. Every celebration tells a child they matter beyond their diagnosis and shows parents their whole family deserves moments of happiness.

ADOPT A FAMILY



81 families supported through the holiday season

Holiday magic remains protected when families face their hardest seasons. The Williams family never imagined their 7-year-old's leukemia diagnosis would mean choosing between presents and medical bills. Their three children woke up to gifts under the tree and felt the love of an entire community. Adopt a Family preserves childhood joy and family traditions when everything else feels uncertain.

HOSPITAL SUPPORT



106 families received
comfort and care
within hospital walls

Sterile medical environments transform into spaces of genuine care and community. From comfort items for long stays to appreciation for frontline staff who become like family to patients, these programs ensure healing happens in an atmosphere of compassion. Quality cancer care includes attention to the small comforts that make an enormous difference—the soft pillowcase during hair loss, the art supplies that provide creative outlets, the recognition for nurses who go above and beyond.



4th Annual **NIGHT OF COURAGE:** CASINO FOR A CAUSE



Because of the generosity of our supporters, nearly \$300,000 was raised at the fourth annual Night of Courage benefit held at Fields Lexus Glenview.

Events like Night of Courage play a vital role in sustaining our mission—raising both the funds and awareness needed to respond to families' most immediate needs. This year's event, chaired by Laura Nessel, brought together more than 400 guests and 40 sponsors, including Wintrust, the Chicago Bears, Clayco, and Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

Thanks to your support, guests enjoyed a memorable casino-themed evening featuring incredible food from Lettuce Entertain You, decor by Epic Events, jewelry and piercings by Dana Rebecca, music by Kat V, and more - all in celebration of the impact you make possible for families facing pediatric cancer, like Ethan's, who was honored throughout the night.



MEET OUR TEAM



Jessica Merar, CCLS
Executive Director,
Chicago



Silvia Dulsat Planas
Director of Programs
and Patient Relations

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The Dragonfly Foundation Chicago gratefully acknowledges the generosity of those who contributed during fiscal year 2025. Their support strengthens our ability to respond quickly to the urgent needs of pediatric cancer patients and their families. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the donors recognized below.

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A large, stylized dragonfly graphic in a lighter blue-grey color is centered on a dark blue background. The dragonfly's body and wings are elongated and pointed, creating a sense of motion.

a special *thank you*

to all our Dragonfly families, our Cincinnati team, our dedicated volunteers, our partner hospitals and their front-line staff, Shay James Photography, our nonprofit partners, our crucial sponsors, our generous donors, our loyal local businesses, our corporate partners... and each of you who have supported our mission since March 2020.

The Chicago chapter would not be possible without you!



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