

# our future starts here



**small magic**

2025 Annual Report

# Our children deserve the very best from the very beginning.

Small Magic supports the future stability and prosperity of our community by focusing on our most precious resource: our children. Together, we are ensuring all the children in our community are prepared for kindergarten and a lifetime of economic mobility.



## Dear Friends,

As I look back on this year, I've found myself thinking about how early the future really starts. Not at kindergarten, or graduation, and not even at the first day of school. The future starts in the years leading up to those milestones, and those early experiences shape everything that comes after.

Everything we do at Small Magic ensures that children under five in our community have access to a life of choice and opportunity. We use that phrase a lot: "under five." Our focus on children under five is highly intentional. Ninety percent of brain development happens before children turn five, yet only four percent of philanthropic funding supports those early years.

I know these things are true because I've seen the University of Chicago studies. But I also know they're true because every day I come home to my daughter, who is a living reminder of why every single child is worth the very best we have to offer. She turned five years old two weeks ago (the birthday party was Saturn themed, because "Saturn is the silliest planet"). That milestone made me reflect: Did I read to her enough? Does she know how much I love her? Will this finally be the year she remembers to put her shoes on every morning?

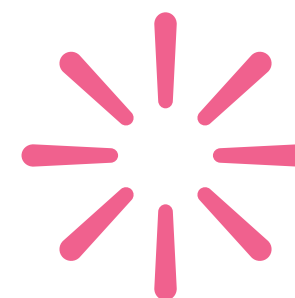
Because of our family's immense privilege, I never wonder if she's ready for kindergarten. I never wonder if she'll learn to read one day, or if her future will be full of choice and opportunity. Every single family in our community deserves that same certainty, regardless of their zip code or income level. Every child deserves to thrive. Their future is our future, and it's worth investing in.

This report highlights some of the investments we've been proud to steward over the past year, including a field-building community assessment (p.8). You'll also get a glimpse into the lives of parents and childcare providers we've partnered with, who are building the future of our community with each bedtime story and diaper change (pp. 10-11).

Thank you for believing in the limitless potential of our community's children and making magic with us.

All good things,

**Ruth Ann Moss**  
Executive Director, Small Magic



# Our initiatives

Our initiatives are designed to maximize school readiness and future economic mobility. We work closely with families and teachers to ensure that every child has the support they need to thrive. We measure how we're making a difference in our community by focusing on three key areas:



## Reach

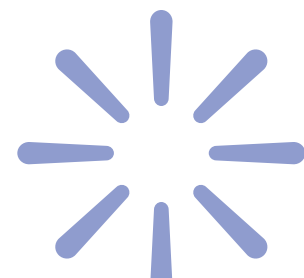
- The number of families, childcare centers, and classrooms we serve through our programs.
- The neighborhoods, zip codes, and communities we serve.

## Impact

- Increases in words heard, conversational turns (back-and-forth exchanges), and reading minutes for each participant.

## Experience

- The Net Promoter Score (NPS) for each cohort, measured by how likely participants say they would recommend our program to a friend or family member.



# Birmingham Talks

Birmingham Talks remains our flagship initiative, supporting parents and early childhood educators with practical tools, personalized coaching, and award-winning technology to strengthen interactive talk during the earliest years of brain development.

## For Families

Our parent-facing program equips families with the tools they need to increase talk between caregivers and their children. This 8-week program includes small group classes focused on increasing interactive conversation. We provide cutting-edge technology, books, educational toys, and personalized coaching to each family that participates.

*“Participating in Birmingham Talks opened the door to a shift in our family dynamics. My oldest son is selectively verbal and communicates differently. It helped me to set aside my own expectations and truly meet my children where they are, and adjust the way I communicate so I can support them in building tools for their future.”*

—Ebony Kimber



## Reach

167

Children served in the past program year through Birmingham Talks for families.

## Impact

93%

Increase in conversational turns along with an **89%** rise in exposure to adult words for children from the lowest-talk environments.

## Experience

94%

Participants who would recommend Birmingham Talks to a friend or family member.

## Birmingham Talks

### For Childcare Providers

Our professional development program supports early childhood teachers directly in the classroom. Weekly sessions prepare teachers to increase interactions and conversational rigor. Classrooms receive developmentally appropriate books, educational toys, personalized coaching, and professional development hours for the teacher.



*“Foundations Early Learning Center benefited greatly from Birmingham Talks, which offered a rich experience for children and teachers. The program’s design encouraged lively conversations throughout the center and inspired teachers to cultivate a more collaborative and inclusive environment, allowing children to expand their vocabulary and explore ideas effectively.”*

—Chenille Watkins, Childcare Center Director



#### Reach

1,497

Children served in the past program year through Birmingham Talks for childcare providers.

#### Impact

98%

Increase in conversational turns along with an **80%** rise in exposure to adult words for children from the lowest-talk environments.

#### Experience

87%

Participants who would recommend Birmingham Talks to a friend or family member.

## Phonics Power

Phonics Power builds on the language foundations strengthened through Birmingham Talks and helps preschoolers develop the early literacy skills they need for kindergarten. Through expert instruction and at-home support we help children master essential phonological awareness skills during a crucial window of development.

*“Phonics Power didn’t just equip my daughter, it equipped me too. I gained strategies for helping her break down words and learned how to support her in a way that builds confidence instead of pressure. I’ve become more patient and more prepared to guide her learning at home.”*

—Nicol Stancil

#### Reach

28

Children served in the past program year through Phonics Power.

#### Impact

50%

Increase in letter sound recognition by children of participating families, a significant boost.

#### Experience

72%

Participants who would recommend Phonics Power to a friend or family member.



### Creating an early learning ecosystem

Small Magic is focused on strengthening the early learning landscape across Birmingham by creating more ways for community voices to guide what we do and how.

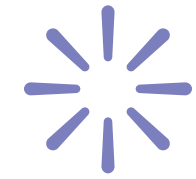
This year, we’re saying yes to bold, evidence-based ideas and inviting the people closest to young children to help shape them. We’re creating new ways for providers and parents to share what they see every day, including the launch of a provider-led council who will meet

regularly to inform decisions that affect early learning.

**We see Birmingham as a place where early childhood innovation can take root and grow.** By meeting bold ideas with practical action, our city can be a proving ground for what’s possible for children under five.

If you’re ready to help build that future with us, contact [hi@smallmagic.org](mailto:hi@smallmagic.org).

# Listening to our community, guiding what comes next



## SPEAK-CAT

This year, Small Magic surveyed almost 2,000 caregivers across Jefferson County through the SPEAK-CAT survey, a nationally recognized tool developed by the University of Chicago. Families and childcare providers caring for children under five were asked to share what they know and believe about children's development, language and literacy, and social-emotional growth.

**Community perspectives are central to everything we do;** SPEAK-CAT gave us a rigorous way to hear from families and teachers and the opportunity to ground our next steps in data and partnership.



### What we learned:

#### Knowledge is power.

In general, families with infrequent financial worries showed a higher understanding of early childhood development. However, that gap disappeared for families who had participated in Birmingham Talks, illustrating that access to resources is key.

#### Learning isn't confined.

No matter their level of formal education, caregivers who participated in Birmingham Talks showed a stronger understanding of how young children grow and learn.

#### Location matters.

Levels of early learning knowledge varied significantly from zip code to zip code. We're using this data to hone our recruitment strategy and refine our delivery model.



## Listen4Good

We believe strong programs are not static and should be shaped by the families and childcare providers who experience them. We partner with a national organization called Listen4Good to strengthen how we gather, learn from, and respond to participant feedback.

Through this partnership, we've improved each step of our feedback process, from designing feedback loops and collecting input to interpreting what we hear and translating it into action. This commitment strengthens not only our **reach** and **impact**, but also the **experience** participants have with Small Magic.

### What we learned:

#### Families need flexibility.

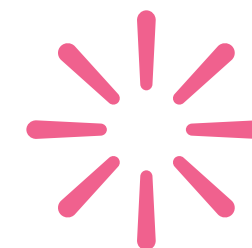
Life with young children is busy and unpredictable. We now offer two virtual group options, giving participants more choice and the ability to switch days when something comes up.

#### Participants want more.

Many shared they didn't want the experience to end. We created additional offerings for Birmingham Talks alumni to stay connected, including initiatives like the Phonics Power program and our Provider Council.

#### Books are in demand.

We now enroll families in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library so children continue receiving books month after month. We've doubled the number of books and interactive toys families receive during a cohort.



# Building our future

Meet the parents, caregivers, and teachers who know our littlest learners best. They're the ones guiding tiny hands, answering endless questions, and creating routines that help children feel safe to explore. Here, they invite us into their everyday worlds, at home and in the classroom, to show what early learning looks like in real time.

*“Small Magic taught us how to understand developmental milestones and build the data we need to make sure that our kids develop properly as they grow.”*

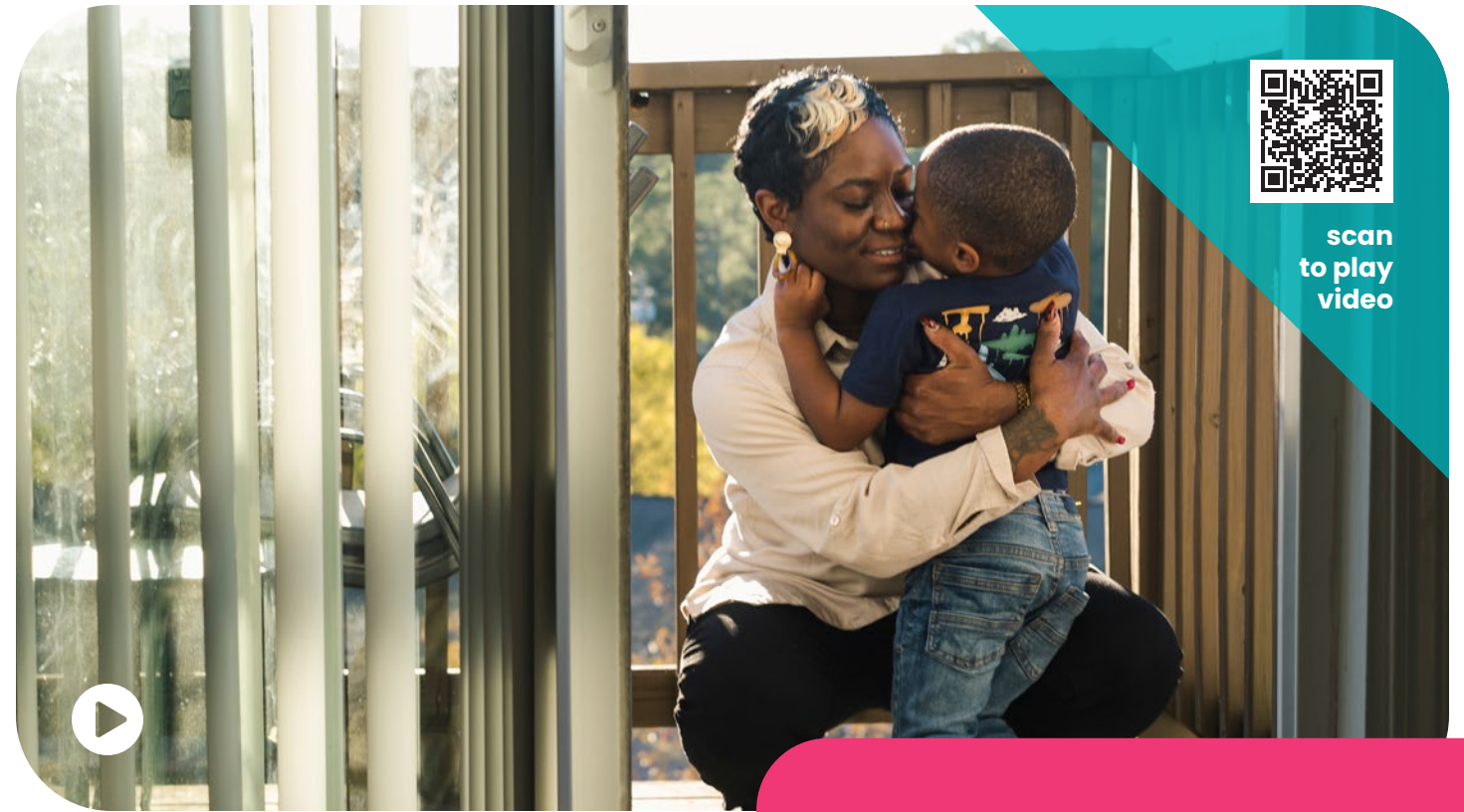
## In the classroom

### Meet New Beginning

New Beginning Child Development Center describes its work as relationship-driven, and you can feel these relationships in every room. Teachers know their children's habits, worries, and favorite stories, and they use that knowledge to create meaningful interactions throughout the day. Birmingham Talks meets them in that strength, offering tools that enhance the ways they support our community's littlest learners.



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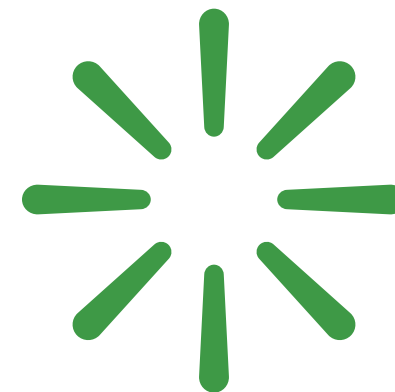
scan to play video

## In the home

### Meet the Chandlers

If you ask Cornesha about her days, she'll describe them as full: full of noise, questions, laughter, and a deep love for her children. She's clear that parenting stretches her and rewards her, often at the same time. Through Birmingham Talks, she's found ways to turn that fullness into chances to connect deeply with her children, creating a foundation for learning that will help shape their future.

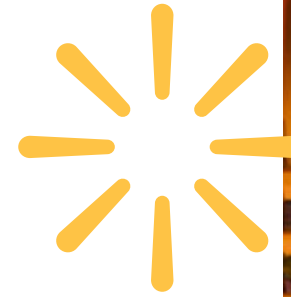
*“Having a free resource to help me and my family has set a great foundation for Major. As he enters preschool, his teacher has been super proud of his growth.”*



# Where the magic happens

As more families, providers, and partners have joined us in this work, we realized the need for a place that brings it all together; a space that reflects the scale of what we're doing and the care we want people to feel when they walk through the door.

Our new early learning hub does just that: it gives us a shared place to think and plan, to welcome caregivers who need support, and to gather the books, toys, and materials that move through our programs. It gives our work a physical center, connecting the early learning happening in living rooms, childcare centers, and classrooms across Birmingham.



## 1,200

Books and educational toys housed on these shelves for families and classrooms.

## 1,625

Children served annually by hosting families in our space and supporting the early learning staff that goes into our community.

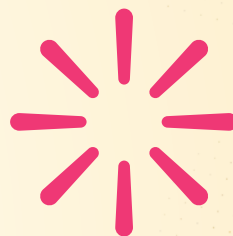
## 100+

Hours spent in meeting rooms holding conversations with national partners, including Results for America, Listen4Good, and the University of Chicago.



*“Brasfield & Gorrie was honored to deliver a space that serves an essential purpose in our community. Every choice was guided by the needs of families and educators. We are proud to help create a home base that will make Small Magic’s growing impact even more efficient.”*

—Wilson Nash, Brasfield & Gorrie



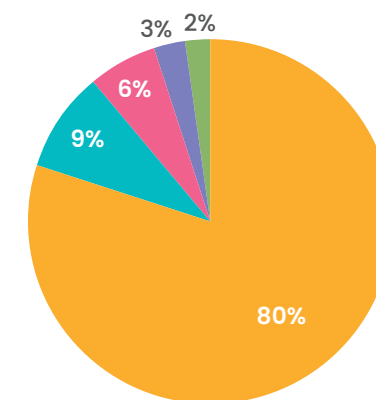
## storytime

Storytime is our annual gathering for adults who believe in the power of words and the limitless potential of children. The 2025 event gathered more than 200 community members at Birmingham’s historic Greyhound Station for an evening of live storytelling. This year’s theme, growth, brought together six dynamic storytellers whose experiences stretched across sectors and backgrounds, including a New York Times bestselling children’s author, a state official, program alum, and other remarkable voices from our community.

Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, partners, and community members, **Storytime raised more than \$75,000 to support Small Magic’s early literacy programs**, helping Birmingham’s children develop the foundation they need for lifelong success. This night of storytelling becomes a night of real impact, ensuring that the next generation of thinkers and dreamers receive the support they need from the very beginning.

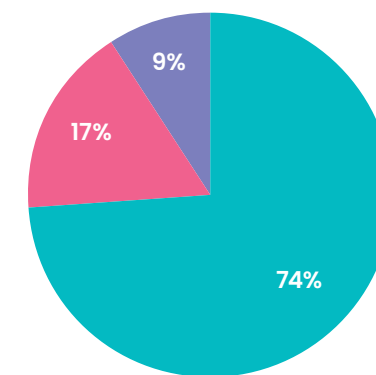
## Financials

Small Magic helps our youngest children maximize their school readiness and future economic mobility. The support we receive allows us to expand our community-centered, evidence-based initiatives, ensuring that every child has access to the resources and support they need. Each dollar invested helps us to provide innovative tools for children, involve parents and teachers in early learning, and enhance the resources essential for preparing children for kindergarten and lifelong success.



### Funding sources

City, State, & Federal Funding	80%
Corporations	9%
Foundations	6%
Investment & Rental Income	3%
Individuals	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,601,130</b>



### Expenses

Programming	74%
Fundraising	17%
Administrative & Operations	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,547,959</b>



# Support the magic



Together, we're ensuring that Birmingham becomes the best place in America to raise a child under five. By supporting Small Magic, you play a vital role in providing our youngest children with the tools they need to be ready for school and set on a path toward lifelong success.

## Ways to donate

### Direct donation

Your contributions power our programs, expand our resources, and help us reach more families and childcare providers. Every dollar allows us to equip children with innovative tools, involve parents, and enhance learning experiences.

### Become a Magic Maker

The Magic Makers Collective is a community of champions committed to seeing our community thrive. Members give a minimum of \$1,250 a year and receive exclusive benefits like tickets to our annual Storytime celebration, special updates, and more.

### Other ways to give

You can leave a lasting legacy by naming Small Magic in your will or trust, as a beneficiary of a retirement plan or life insurance policy, or through gifts like donor-advised funds.

### Looking for more options?

There are many creative, meaningful ways to support beyond a direct gift. We're grateful for contributions of any size and happy to help you find an approach that fits your goals.



*"Monthly support keeps Small Magic's work moving forward day after day, and it's a meaningful way for me to invest in Birmingham's children and the caregivers supporting them."*

—Jasmine Kemp, Magic Maker

To explore legacy giving or other opportunities, contact [development@smallmagic.org](mailto:development@smallmagic.org).

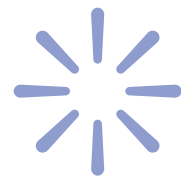


## Stock the shelves

We're collecting children's books to place stories where they do the most work: in home libraries and early learning classrooms. A donated book can become the bedtime favorite a family reads until the cover curls or a classroom's circle-time staple. Donate your gently-used favorites to keep books circulating to the families and childcare providers who turn them into daily routines.

Contact our team at [operations@smallmagic.org](mailto:operations@smallmagic.org) to arrange a donation drop-off.

# Investing in our future



*“As a mom, I value support that helps families thrive. Small Magic is thoughtful about the needs of both children and the adults in their lives, and that care shows in their work. A strong start for children is one of the most practical investments Birmingham can make, and I’m grateful to be part of this mission.”*

—Andrea Hester, CRA Community Development Manager, First Horizon



*“PNC believes deeply in the power of early childhood education, and our support of Small Magic reflects that commitment. Small Magic’s evidence-based approach and its deep respect for families ensure Birmingham’s youngest learners have the strong foundation they need to thrive. When children start strong, communities grow stronger... and Small Magic is helping make that future possible.”*

—Nick Willis, Greater Alabama Regional President, PNC



*“I’ve had the privilege of being close to Small Magic’s work for years, as a donor, advocate, partner, and friend. What keeps me committed is the urgency of the mission and the reality of the impact. I’m proud to serve and proud to give because I want this work to reach as many families in our community as possible.”*

—Jasmine Kemp, Realtor, eXp Realty

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