



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



***Lighting the Way:
A Year of Shelter,
Support, and Strength***

Mission: To offer those experiencing homelessness stable emergency shelter, access to housing programs, and the resources for them to achieve their full potential.



www.firstlightshelter.org



205-323-4277

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Each day at First Light, we see firsthand the strength and resilience of the women and children who walk through our doors. They come to us in crisis—often with little more than hope—and through the compassion of our staff, the dedication of our volunteers, and the generosity of our community, they begin to rebuild their lives.

At First Light, we offer more than a place to sleep. We achieved exciting milestones including increasing the number of services being offered and directing more women and children to permanent housing opportunities. We offer safety, stability, and a path forward. Our services—case management, counseling, life skills training, and more—are tailored to help each woman take the next step toward independence. And yet, as the need grows in our community, we find ourselves at a critical point. The number of women and children seeking shelter and support continues to rise. All year long, more than 750 women and women with children came through our doors seeking shelter, direction and hope. For the children, stability is key.

We have worked tirelessly to create a nurturing environment where they can learn, grow, and thrive, despite the challenges they face. Through our programs, we strive to offer them a sense of security and hope for a brighter future. Our current space, while full of care and purpose, is stretched beyond capacity. The growing demand for services has made it clear: we must expand. We must grow our space, our programs, and our resources to meet the urgent and increasing needs of those who count on us.

As we look to the future, we are actively exploring ways to expand services and to use our existing spaces more effectively. Every square foot of First Light carries potential—potential to shelter more, serve more, and offer greater stability to the women and children who need us.

This work is not easy, but it is essential. And we are not doing it alone. Our volunteers give countless hours of their time and hearts. Our donors continue to show up in meaningful ways. And our community reminds us again and again that compassion is alive and well.

To all of you who have walked with us—thank you. You are part of every success story that begins at First Light. And today, more than ever, we ask for your continued support. Whether through donations, volunteering, advocacy, or simply sharing our mission, your involvement makes a lasting difference.

With your help, we can expand our reach and deepen our impact. Together, we can be the light for more women and children when they need it most.

Thank you for standing with us.

Sherry Bray
Executive Director



From the Board President

Dear Friends of First Light,

As we reflect on this past year, I am filled with deep gratitude and hope for the future. At First Light, we continue to serve some of the most vulnerable members of our community—women and children facing homelessness—with dignity, compassion, and resilience. It is our mission to provide not only shelter, but also a path toward stability and independence. This vital work would not be possible without your continued support.

Our Board of Directors have remained deeply engaged in advancing that mission. Over the past year, we have focused on strengthening the foundation of First Light—not only through day-to-day support, but by investing time and energy into long-term planning and strategy. Many hours have been invested in planning the future of First Light so that we can continue to meet the primary mission of the organization, while positioning the shelter as a comfortable and effective facility for meeting the changing needs of our homeless community.

As a result, we are in the process of making much needed improvements to the existing facility in the areas that have experienced significant deferred maintenance over the 25 years that the facility has been operational as a shelter. Primary areas being refurbished are the bathrooms and common areas so that our guests can experience the comfort they deserve in a respectful environment such as the shelter has offered over many years. The Board of First Light has been thoughtful and deliberate in this process to ensure that the shelter remains financially stable and will be in a position to remain a place of refuge, safety, and hope for generations to come.

The dedication of our Junior Board has brought fresh enthusiasm and innovative ideas, helping to engage new supporters and expand our reach. We are celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the Dancing with the Stars of the Magic City fundraising event held by the Junior Board and each year the contribution that they are making is more significant. This is measured not only in financial support but also in expanding the outreach and the “friends of First Light” network which reminds us of how philanthropic the citizens of Birmingham are through all generations.

Every day, more women and children turn to us for help, and we are committed to being there for them. But we cannot do it alone. The strength of First Light has always come from the community that surrounds it—individuals like you who choose to care, to give, and to stand with those in need. Your support—whether financial, through volunteer hours, or simply spreading the word—is what makes this work possible. As we look ahead with excitement and enthusiasm, we ask you to continue standing with us. There is more to be done, and together, we can continue to be a source of light in times of darkness.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you for walking alongside us on this journey and for believing in the mission of First Light.

Davis Goodson, Board President

Illume

A BRIGHTER WAY TO GALA

In honor of Reverend Susan Clayton and Denise Killebrew

May 8th, 2025

*The Kress Building | 6:30pm | 5:30-6:30pm
VIP Experience*

PRESENTED BY



✦ You're Invited! ✦

TO ILLUME, A NIGHT OF LIGHT AND HOPE FOR
HOMELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Emceed by Fox 6 News reporter/anchor Russell Jones and his wife Maree Jones
The recommended attire is modern cocktail

WHEN

Thursday
May 8th, 2025

WHERE

The Kress Building
301 19th St N, Birmingham, AL 35203

Every ticket purchased includes:

- Heavy hors d'oeuvres prepared by Tre Luna
- Specialty Tito's cocktails served by local celebrity bartenders
- Complimentary beer, wine, and cocktails
- Complimentary parking
- Live entertainment by the Dueling Piano act, *Keys to Please*, featuring Brian Less and Matthew Devine

✦ *VIP Tickets include these extras:* ✦

- Exclusive event access, one-hour early
- A specialty cocktail, poured just for you
- Savory wine paired with charcuterie tastings & an engaging presentation from Scott Jones of *Jones is Thirsty* and the "Head Cheesemonger" from *Son of a Butcher*
- Try your luck at our authentic Craps and Blackjack tables, where the thrill of the casino meets a good cause
- Enjoy an electrifying performance by a dynamic electronic violinist, Alex Ahn
- Breathtaking city views from The Kress Building rooftop

.....and exciting surprises for all attendees!

FirstLightIllume.swell.gives

Statement of Activities

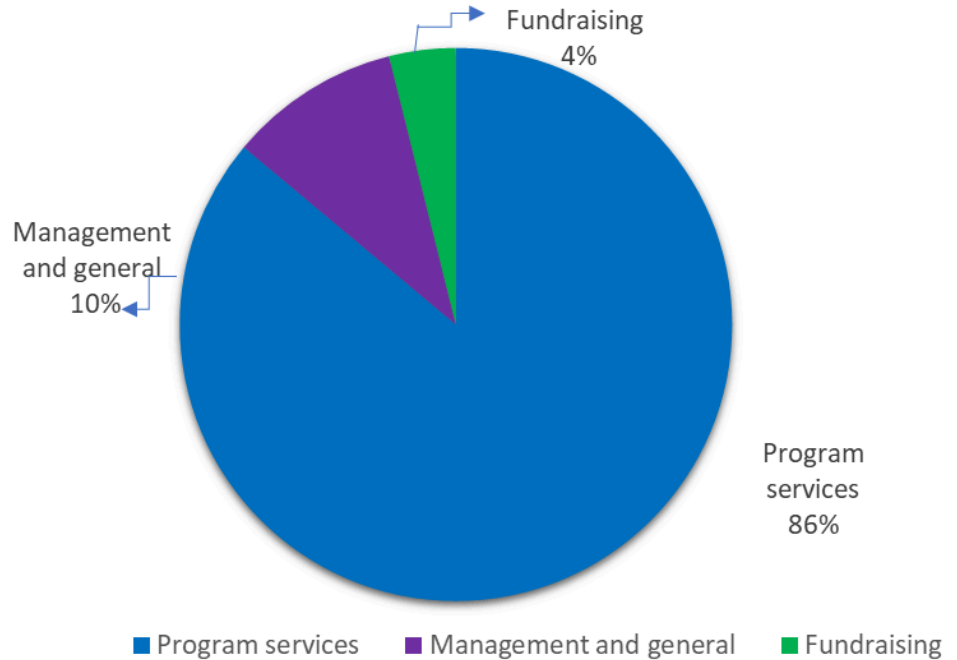
July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024

EXPENSES

Program services
\$1,968,079

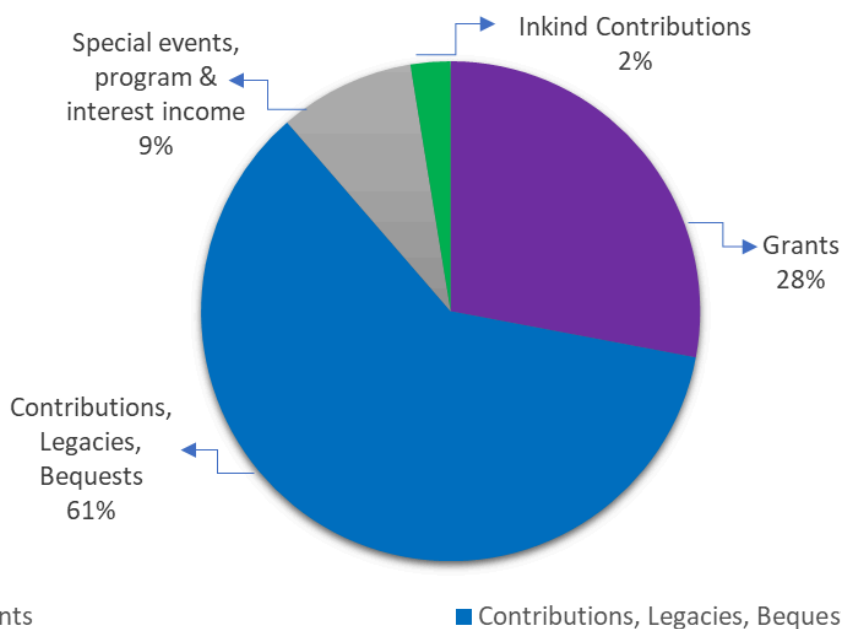
Management & General
\$229,373

Fundraising
\$89,061



For the fiscal year of 2023-2024, our financials reflect a strong commitment to transparency, stewardship, and impact. Thanks to the generosity of our donors and partners, we continued to provide essential services to those experiencing homelessness while maintaining fiscal responsibility. These statements outline how funds were managed to support our mission.

REVENUE



Grants
\$1,340,570

Contributions, Legacies, Bequests
\$2,908,239

Special events, program &
interest income
\$421,451

In-kind Contributions
\$123,786

Meeting Needs Through Community and Care

Thanks to vital community partnerships, First Light continues to meet the complex needs of the women we serve. Medical care is provided free of charge through our ongoing collaboration with Alabama Regional Medical Services (A.R.M.S.).

In 2024, we strengthened our network of support by forming new partnerships with Community on the Rise, Ross Recovery, Craig Crisis Center, and the Birmingham Municipal Court. These relationships expand our ability to connect women with critical resources beyond our walls.

This year over 45 women found stability through our Permanent Supportive Housing Program, designed specifically for those who have experienced chronic homelessness and are living with disabilities. In addition, our Rapid Rehousing Program helped over 65 individuals—including 36 families with children—move into safe, stable housing.

Through a combination of social services, case management, and community collaboration, we continue to offer wrap-around support to women currently in shelter and to those who have moved on to permanent housing—because stability doesn't stop at the door.

Every Step Begins with Hope

At First Light, hope is more than a feeling—it's the first step toward healing, stability, and a brighter future. And in doing so, we walk alongside women and their children as they navigate some of the most difficult moments in their lives.

Thanks to the generosity of supporters like you, our compassionate social workers are able to provide consistent, personalized support to help residents regain stability and hope. Social workers assist families with school-aged children by enrolling them in school and ensuring that each woman is aware of and accessing the full range of services First Light provides. From life skills classes to individualized case management, every resource is designed to empower residents to take the next steps with confidence.

Whether a woman moves on to permanent housing, enters a treatment program, or reconnects with family, we are honored to be part of her journey—and deeply grateful for your role in making that possible.



BY THE NUMBERS

Every number holds a story. At First Light, behind every number is a woman or child who found safety, dignity, and the first steps toward a new beginning. From the number of individuals who found stable housing to those who accessed critical support services, these outcomes highlight the power of compassion, community, and comprehensive care. Here's a look at what we've accomplished—together.



495 unduplicated persons sought shelter and received service



5690 unduplicated bed nights



326 group sessions in Project Healthy Minds



754 unduplicated persons benefited from classes through Project Healthy Minds



150 went to permanent housing or transitional housing



83 went into other stable living situations



One Morning Changed Everything: Jackie's Story of Resilience and Hope

One morning, Jackie and her four children, arrived at First Light in the middle of winter, weary from months of uncertainty, fear, and instability. They had gotten evicted and had to leave immediately. Jackie struggled to find a safe place for them to sleep. The children, too young to understand their situation fully, just wanted a home where they could play and feel safe. But there was Jordan and at just 15 years old and for the first time, Jordan truly understood what it meant to be homeless. Jordan began to think of where he could apply for jobs to help pay rent. But his mother drilled into him that the only thing he was allowed to worry about was school. Life became uncertain, and school felt like a faraway dream—one more thing slipping through his fingers and those of his younger siblings.

Jackie knew that in order for her and her children to be safe, she had to go into a shelter. When they walked through the doors of First Light, they were met with warmth, understanding, and hope. Through the shelter's case management, Jackie received the guidance and resources she needed—housing assistance, employment assistance, and emotional support.

Slowly, Jackie regained her confidence, and with the help of the shelter's dedicated team, she secured stable employment, and the children were enrolled in school. Within four months, Jackie and her family moved into a home of their own, a place where they could finally decorate their room with drawings of superheroes and pictures of ballerinas.

Jackie's story is a powerful reminder that even in the depths of despair, there is hope. With courage, support, and the belief that she deserved a better life, Jackie stepped out of the shadows and into the light—a journey she continues to share with others who are still searching for their own second chance.

- **“My biggest worry when we were homeless was my kids. I was afraid of how it would affect them. First Light made life as normal as possible, helped my kids feel safe and loved on them when I couldn't. They kept us moving in the right direction when I felt hopeless. I will always be grateful for that.”**



Under Construction

Building Dignity and Hope



At First Light, every improvement we make is rooted in our mission: to offer dignity, hope, and a fresh start to every woman who walks through our doors.

We're excited to share that renovations are underway on our first-floor bathrooms and showers, as well as the lobby and dayroom area. These spaces are essential for the comfort, privacy, and well-being of our guests—and soon, they'll be more welcoming and functional than ever.

While construction is in progress, we're working hard to minimize disruptions and ensure everyone continues to feel safe and cared for. These updates are more than just structural—they're a reflection of our commitment to creating a space where women can begin to rebuild their lives with the dignity they deserve.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us. Your support helps us build more than just walls—it helps us build hope.



The Giving Machine

First Light was honored to be selected as a featured nonprofit in The Giving Machine this past holiday season, located at the Riverchase Galleria.

The Giving Machine is a unique and heartwarming initiative that allows individuals to make meaningful donations through a vending machine-style experience. Instead of purchasing snacks, donors could choose to provide essentials like meals, hygiene kits, or a night of shelter—all going directly to nonprofits like First Light.

Being part of this initiative gave us the incredible opportunity to share our mission with the broader community and receive generous support for the women and children we serve. Thanks to this exposure, more people were able to join us in providing hope, safety, and stability to those experiencing homelessness. We extend our heartfelt thanks to The

Giving Machine for selecting First Light and to everyone who chose to give through this special effort. Every donation made a real difference and we could not be more grateful!

National VOLUNTEER MONTH

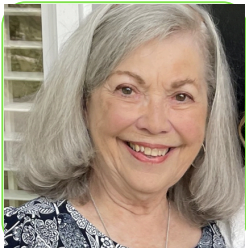


Dinner Liaison Spring Meeting 2025

Every act of service, no matter how big or small, helps create a brighter path for the women and children who come through our doors. At First Light, we are continuously amazed by the generosity, compassion, and commitment of our volunteers. Their time, energy, and heart bring warmth and stability to those who need it most.

This month, we want to give a special thank you to our amazing Dinner Liaisons. These dedicated individuals represent churches and organizations that partner with us to ensure our guests are fed. They gather with us twice a year and coordinate more than 70% of all dinners at the shelter! Some groups commit to entire weeks, others sign up for multiple meals each month, while some prefer a consistent monthly schedule. Their service provides nourishment, comfort, and a sense of community to our guests night after night.

To all of our volunteers, whether you serve regularly or occasionally, thank you for showing up. You are vital to our mission, and we are so grateful for the light you bring to First Light.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: RUTH COOK

Ruth Cook has been a devoted volunteer at First Light for more than 30 years. Her journey began in the early 1990s, when the shelter operated in the basement of First Presbyterian Church. As members of St. Paul's, Ruth and her husband joined a small volunteer team serving meals to women and children in need.

"When the new building opened, we were so pleased to see more interaction at mealtimes. The round tables made a real difference," Ruth recalls. Over time, Ruth's role expanded. During her time as the dinner liaison at St. Mark the Evangelist Church in Hoover, she helped grow a First Light ministry from a handful of meal providers to more than

150 monthly participants and a core team of volunteers serving onsite.

She also treasures the years her entire family came together during the holidays to serve meals- creating meaningful memories and instilling values of service across generations.

"To anyone considering volunteering, I would say this is a heaven-blessed opportunity to do something tangible and needed," Ruth shares. "First Light is more than a shelter, it's a place of hope and encouragement."

We are incredibly grateful for Ruth's decades of unwavering dedication, leadership, and compassion. Her consistency and deep care for others have touched countless lives and helped shape the heart of First Light's mission. Ruth embodies what it means to serve with purpose, and we are honored to celebrate her remarkable legacy of service.

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