



The Tiny Miracles Foundation

Our Story.
Our Mission.
Our Impact.



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BORN OF COMPASSION

In a perfect world, pregnancy would be a time of excitement, anticipation, hope, planning, celebration and, yes, some anxiety.

Nine months pass and a healthy child fulfills the dreams of the expectant parents.

In reality, **one in 10 babies is born preterm** (prior to 37 weeks); some, dangerously long before their due dates. Instead of going home to a specially chosen bassinet in a thoughtfully appointed nursery, the undersized, underdeveloped child is rushed into a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for days, weeks and even months of critical medical care. Parents may be limited on how often they can hold or even touch their baby, who – shockingly – might weigh less than 2 pounds. These parents may be nervous even to touch their baby.

Thanks to today's advanced clinical care, most preterm babies survive and do go home to that special nursery, growing to be indistinguishable from their classmates. But some of these tiny miracles face long-term physical-development challenges.

Until recently, parents in southwestern Connecticut were left alone to cope with the overwhelming anxieties and fears of a preterm baby.

Today, The Tiny Miracles Foundation is fulfilling the emotional, practical and financial needs of the families of more than 1,200 babies born prematurely each year in Fairfield and New Haven counties. **The only organization of its kind in Connecticut**, Tiny Miracles supports parents during and after their baby's NICU stay with compassionate mentoring and resource programs delivered through on-site partnerships with the counties' six leading hospitals.

Thanks to generous individual and corporate donors, all support is offered to families free of charge.

The Tiny Miracles Foundation is touching the lives of more parents and their preemies than at any other given time in our 18-year history. As requests for our services expand, we are committed to easing the occasions' emotional stresses and financial burdens, so that preemie parents can focus on being mother and father to their tiny miracle.

Our Story: Mission and History

The Tiny Miracles Foundation was established in 2004 by Gwen Noto of Fairfield and Meredith Daniels of Stamford, who had both experienced the traumatic impact of the births of severely pre-term twins. In late 2000, Noto and her husband navigated through the birth of her boys at 25 weeks, desperate for information and reassurance during the long hospitalization. About a year later, upon learning of the birth of another set of 25-week twins at Stamford Hospital, Noto sat outside the NICU with her boys to stake out the unknown mother, determined to offer the hope she had once needed. That mother was Daniels.



Together, Noto and Daniels recognized the urgent unmet need to provide preemie families with the support to cope with this frightening, isolating ordeal. Initially operating as a support network within a local parenting group, Noto and Daniels eventually decided that a separate, more-comprehensive organization was needed. After consulting with staff at Stamford Hospital, other physicians and other parents of preemies (most notably, another mother of preemie twins, Leelee Smith Klein of Darien), The Tiny Miracles Foundation was born. None too soon.

Tiny Miracles was established to provide for the emotional, practical and financial needs of the families of premature babies. Its foundational approach was to be a complete resource for parents, while also advocating for “family-centered care” for the baby. This approach – still novel in 2004 – has the NICU medical staff partnering with parents to together decide the best needs of the baby as well as of the family, with their unique personalities, values, experiences and backgrounds.

Stamford Hospital was first to partner, gracious in its support, even offering a spare room for Tiny Miracles to furnish and use as a place for preemie families to wait, consult, visit and rest. Over the next decade, often at a hospital's invitation, Tiny Miracles partnered with four more Fairfield County hospitals: Norwalk, Bridgeport, Danbury and St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport. In May 2021, Tiny Miracles expanded into New Haven County when Yale New Haven Children's Hospital became the sixth and - by far - largest partner.

More partner hospitals means more preemie families to help. Tiny Miracles meets this need with a growing team of dedicated volunteers, welcomed from a familiar pool: preemie parents who, after gratefully accepting support from Tiny Miracles, in turn want to offer the same compassionate care to new preemie families.

Beyond partner expansion, the foundation's services also have grown dramatically in the past 17 years. From its core focus on peer mentoring, Tiny Miracles' programming expanded to offer counseling, education and financial aid - for families with babies in the NICU at first, and then also after the transition home.



From the first preemie family helped to now more than 1,000 each year, Tiny Miracles' work is made possible by generous foundations and individual and corporate donors. First seeds came from a fundraiser picnic in 2004 that generated \$35,000 to furnish the resource room at Stamford Hospital and to hire a first administrative assistant. Today, Tiny Miracles operates on revenues of just under \$500,000 a year.

Tiny Miracles' small staff has grown to meet the needs that are critical to fulfilling its mission. In 2019, Tiny Miracles' took the big step of hiring its first Professional Lead Parent Mentor to work directly with parents in the hospital. A licensed social worker, this person often is the first point of connection between Tiny Miracles and parents. Additionally, since adding the Lead Professional Parent Mentor, our programs show a consistency that had not been achievable solely through volunteers and outsourced trainers. This staff member has training and experience that has elevated our creditability and strengthened the assistance we provide.

Our Approach

A major pillar of The Tiny Miracles Foundation is providing personal one-on-one mentoring for parents with a baby in the NICU, during the initial hospital stay and also in the years immediately after.

In the NICU, the amazing medical staff's focus is on the babies. It is not their job to counsel parents torturing themselves with frantic questions and misplaced guilt.

“ What did I do wrong to make this happen?”

Tiny Miracles is there to help answer those, and so many other questions, and to assist medical staff with the rollercoaster of emotions that NICU families experience. Other, larger nonprofit organizations nationally fund the care for infants and children with medical issues. Several of our partner hospitals have social workers on staff to be available to all admitted patients. But The Tiny Miracles Foundation is the only local organization specifically focused on supporting parents and families of preterm babies – emotionally, practically and financially.

Through our six partner hospitals, we serve preemies and their parents across Fairfield and New Haven counties – just two of the state's eight counties, yet home to half of the state's residents. It is a diverse population, reflective of southwestern Connecticut's mix of urban and suburban communities, including some of America's wealthiest zip codes but also some of the state's most underserved neighborhoods.

Preterm births favor no race, religion, socio-economic status or primary language, nor is any demographic in our community innately prepared for the NICU experience. The Tiny Miracles Foundation responds without regard to national origin, race, religion, financial status, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, primary language or military status.

“ How will I ever manage when she comes home?”



Tiny Miracles comes to overwhelmed preemie parents in the NICU, the eye of their emotional hurricane, to give personal one-on-one support – with both a licensed social worker and volunteer mentors who are experienced parents of preemies themselves. The original and deepest source of our compassionate calming care, our volunteer Peer Parent Mentors receive regular training to respond to the different circumstances and emotions in each NICU situation. Including time devoted to Tiny Miracles' post-NICU programs, these dedicated volunteers give greater than 3,000 invaluable total hours each year.

We know that challenges, concerns and frayed emotions aren't left behind in the hospital when a preterm baby goes home, so Tiny Miracles' emotionally centering care continues with programs post-NICU. We offer preemie parents the opportunities to gather, share and unburden during peer playgroups, group-therapy sessions and other helpful meet-ups.

Programs of The Tiny Miracles Foundation
fall into two categories:

Emotional Support

Financial Assistance



Emergency Financial Assistance

Depending on the need, Tiny Miracles is able to provide levels of financial assistance to qualifying families that range from basic baby supplies, like car seats and strollers, to emergency payments for rent, mortgage and utilities.

“How much leave from my job can we afford?”

Offering this assistance is how Tiny Miracles is fully responsive to the needs of overwhelmed NICU parents. Financial worries only add to the emotional impact of having a baby born early. Many families are dependent on dual incomes and, unfortunately, mothers often lose their jobs because of the many days devoted to their baby in the NICU.

Working closely with each hospital's social worker and NICU medical staff, our team identifies families in urgent financial need. Tiny Miracles' Director of Family Services receives their applications and reviews needs with the parents.

For qualifying families, Tiny Miracles will make short-term direct payments to service providers for rent, mortgage, heat and utilities. We can aid with hospital travel expenses by issuing bus and train passes, gas cards and – in the case of Yale New Haven – parking passes.

We also may provide strapped families with much-needed infant equipment and supplies, such as baby monitors, car seats, strollers, pack 'n' plays, clothing and other basic needs of new parents.

In sum, through our Financial Assistance Program, Tiny Miracles helps to ensure that preterm babies have a safe, secure and nurturing home environment.

Emotional Support

Central to The Tiny Miracles Foundations' mission is providing emotional support and practical guidance to frightened, overwhelmed parents of preterm babies. We accomplish this by inviting parents to meet personally and regularly with licensed and specially trained mentors in the hospital, and also through continuing care during individual and collective gatherings after the children go home.

Preemie children grow with no recollection of their time in the NICU, but the experience sears in parents' memories. Standing helpless in the NICU. Limited in even touching your tiny beautiful fragile baby, who may weigh less than 2 pounds, with arms the size of their mothers' index finger. Isolettes. Feeding tubes. Breathing tubes. Beeping monitors. Ventilators. Respirators. PDA. Bradycardia. Jaundice. Transfusions. PICC lines. The crib at home still empty.

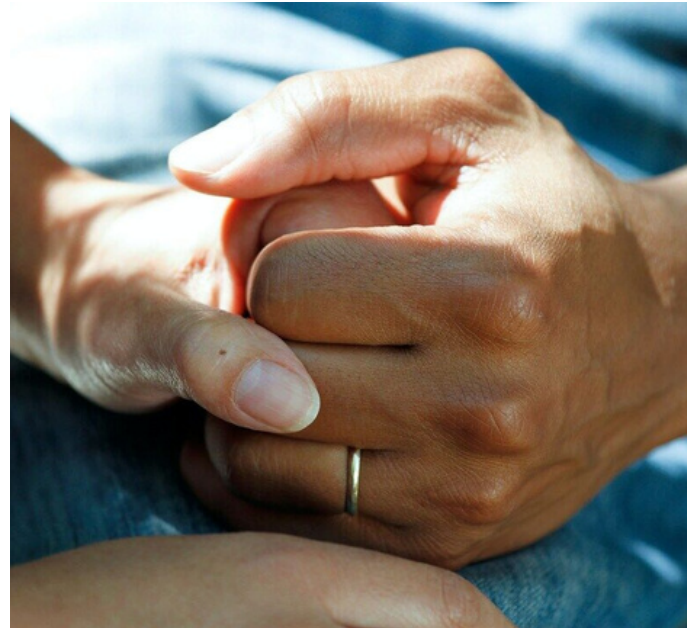


Tiny Miracles is right there in the NICU with parents to provide emotional support and practical guidance. Often, our Professional Lead Parent Mentor is the first non-clinical professional the parents meet in the NICU. A licensed social worker, she meets weekly with parents in each partner hospital and serves as an ongoing, vital resource, especially for those whose situations require in-depth counseling.

More regularly available to parents is a team of volunteers who know first-hand the traumatic experience of having a son or daughter fighting for life in the NICU: other preemie parents.

These Peer Parent Mentors use their unique understanding to help fraught parents navigate their NICU experience and support them during their transition home. Studies show that parents of premature babies who receive peer support have less stress, depression and anxiety. Our Peer Parent Mentors are in the hospital nearly daily, offering peer-to-peer emotional support; are available to families remotely 24/7 through calls, texts and emails.

It's not easy to remain calm or to accept warm support while sitting on a cold hard waiting-room chair, so Tiny Miracles' care extends to physical comforts as well. Because most premature babies spend multiple weeks or months in the NICU, Tiny Miracles worked with all of our partner hospitals to create and furnish special resource rooms. Embedded in the NICU and designed to look and feel like a residential living room, these spaces provide an oasis, a second home or even a work space, for families during their child's time in the hospital.



Preterm birth complications are the leading cause of death among children under age 5. Tiny Miracles' mission is to support and guide all parents of children born prematurely, including the heart-breaking cases beyond the advanced abilities of clinical care. We have parent mentors who, having suffered the loss of a child, bear the unique ability to provide comfort and understanding to bereaved parents. We also offer referrals to local and online bereavement support services, groups and blogs, in addition we refer families to memory portrait artists, therapists, burial support services and other resources.

Welcome and Tiny Treasure Bags

The material needs of preemie babies and their parents can be quite different and much harder to meet than those of a full-term infant. Relatives and friends often are unprepared, unable and even hesitant to shower preemie families with baby gifts. The Tiny Miracles Foundation stands ready with support, in the NICU and when it's time to go home, sometimes with the only favors a preemie family will receive.



Welcome Bags are given to parents in the NICU, providing needed supplies while also introducing Tiny Miracles as an understanding, compassionate resource. The gift bag includes a Snoedel baby bonding doll, a NICU journal, a personalizing isolette craft kit, and breastfeeding supplies.

Tiny Treasures is a home-care starter kit designed to ease parents' concerns as they transition home from the NICU with their babies. It contains preemie-sized clothing, diapers, booties, swaddles, a lullaby CD and product samples specific for preemie and infant care.

After the NICU: Family Support Programs

This special multi-tiered program extends Tiny Miracles' professional and compassionate care to preemies and families after the NICU experience and for the challenges of the first few years of development.

Even the happiest NICU outcomes – those tiny miracles – still leave parents with emotional scars and lasting concerns about their children's development. A pre-term child may have lasting developmental challenges that add parental stressors, but even just the illnesses common to young children can be triggers. Through our ongoing interactions with parents, hospitals and community-service agencies, Tiny Miracles has laid the groundwork to address the many emotional challenges experienced by parents as their preemies grow older.

Tiny Miracles' post-NICU programs provide critical community connections for parents experiencing varying degrees of isolation, depression and even posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Core programs are presented under the guidance of Tiny Miracles' therapists.

- **Connections Groups:** held in-person and virtually, these sessions provide parents with the opportunity to meet to share and discuss personal issues and emotional challenges.
- **Playgroups:** these more-casual meet-ups offer classes in music, movement, yoga and other developmentally appropriate activities. As with Connections Groups, playgroups offer the chance for mothers to share concerns and offer mutual support. But playgroups have the added value of including the children, which can help parents feel reassured about their own tiny miracle by interacting with other families.
- **"After the NICU Education Series":** features experts who discuss topics relevant to parents as their children grow, such as nutrition, sleep health, and managing anxiety after the NICU.

Additionally, Tiny Miracles offers special events to encourage healing social connections, such as Dad's Night Out socials and an annual Family Fun Day reunion celebration.

Our Partners: Hospitals

Tiny Miracles supports parents during and after their babies' NICU stay with programs delivered through on-site partnerships with Fairfield and New Haven counties' six leading hospitals. The organization's non-clinical services compliment the stellar medical care provided via these hospitals.

The Tiny Miracles Medical Advisory Board is comprised of two leadership level representatives from each partner hospital.



STAMFORD HOSPITAL
Partner since 2004



NORWALK HOSPITAL
Partner since 2005



BRIDGEPORT HOSPITAL
Partner since 2007



DANBURY HOSPITAL
Partner since 2012



ST VINCENT'S MEDICAL CENTER
Partner since 2018



YALE-NEW HAVEN CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL
Partner since 2021

Our Partners: Community Volunteers

Fundamental to the success of Tiny Miracles are the dedicated volunteers from the Southwestern Connecticut community.

In addition to the volunteer Peer Parent Mentors, every year generous adults, teens and corporations assist across the organization. They assemble Welcome Home and Tiny Treasures supply bags; crochet and knit hats and other small hand-made items; organize gifts for families' first holidays spent in the NICU; assist with office administrative duties; and make bag drop-offs to our partner hospitals.



OUR IMPACT

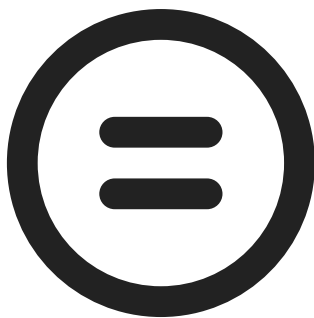
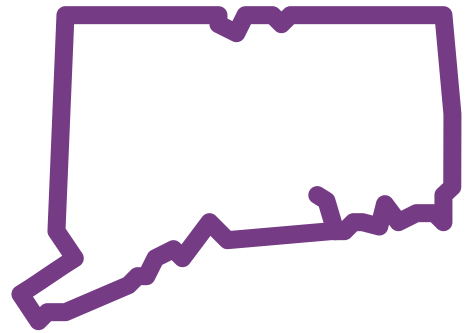


6,000+

**FAMILIES SUPPORTED
TO DATE**

More than 50%

of the state's population covered
by hospital service area



Access for All

Prematurity can affect any pregnancy. All programs and services available regardless of age, race, household income, sexual orientation or any other factor.

\$750,000+

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED TO FAMILIES

Success Metrics

The true measurements of success for The Tiny Miracles Foundation aren't in numbers and data, but in testimonials and family stories. They're in parents attaining the skills, the emotional strength and the connections to help them through the challenges of having a baby born prematurely.

“Your blanket humanized our 2-lb. baby that lay helpless in the incubator...”

We measure our impact in the increasing numbers of hospitals that welcome Tiny Miracles into their NICU process; that actually offer space to us – an outside, non-medical volunteer service – when all space in a hospital is at a premium. One of those hospitals is Yale New Haven, the largest children's hospital in Connecticut.

“The emotional support was invaluable – it was so helpful to meet other women who had been through this and not only survived but have beautiful children and happy families.”

And we measure achievement in the mothers who, after being successfully guided by Tiny Miracles through the preemie experience, volunteer with us to do the same for new families on their prematurity journey.

“We were so blessed to have volunteers from Tiny Miracles at our side... There were many times that volunteers came in to check on how I was doing, and let me cry on their shoulders. They helped me to see there was an end in sight, and encouraged me to continue to be strong and have hope.”

Eighteen years ago, two mothers of severely premature twins vowed to lessen the trauma for future preemie families. Today, some 1,200 families each year feel less alone, less afraid, less strapped, and more informed, more comforted and more able to devote their hearts fully to their new tiny miracles.



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