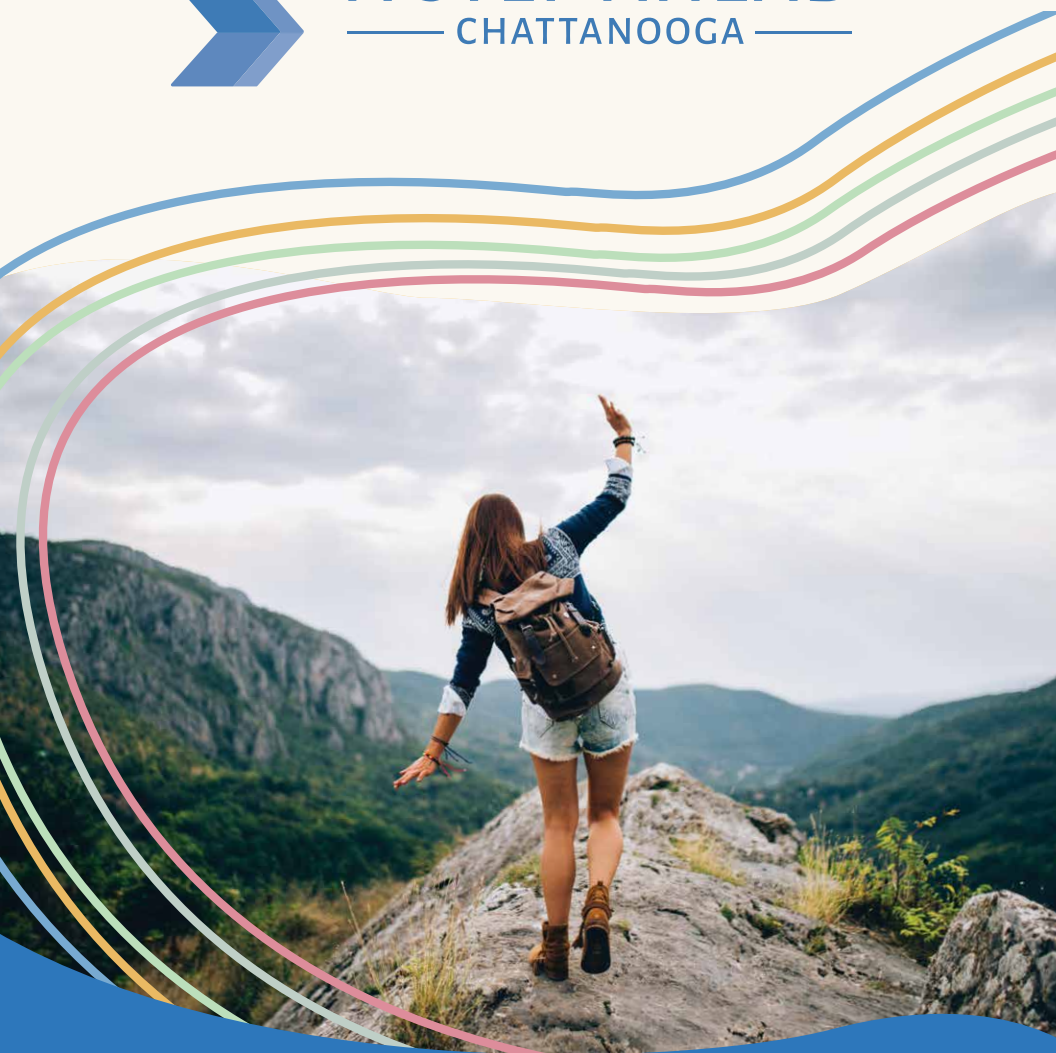




# A STEP AHEAD

— CHATTANOOGA —



*BREAKING BARRIERS.  
CONNECTING COMMUNITIES.*

# 2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

empowering  
women is  
a breeze

A STEP AHEAD  
CHATTANOOGA  
CHATTANOOGA, TN



# LETTER FROM MANDY

DEAR FRIENDS OF A STEP AHEAD CHATTANOOGA,

Last summer, reproductive health became a prominent topic throughout the country. As conversations happened on the front page of the paper, on social media, and in personal relationships, many people reconsidered their contraceptive use. According to a 2022 Harris poll, in just a single month, 21% of women aged 18-44 changed their primary contraception method, many switching to permanent or long-acting methods. In an article published in Cureus, a peer-reviewed medical journal, researchers found that Google searches for IUDs and birth control pills almost doubled. At A Step Ahead Chattanooga, we experienced a 30% increase in calls to our appointment line in the second half of the year. **Your support helped meet a critical need in our community. Thank you.**

Despite increased interest in contraception, **the barriers to accessing it didn't go away.** According to the Kaiser Family Foundation's 2022 Sexual and Reproductive Health Survey, last year, one in five uninsured women had to stop using a birth control method because they couldn't afford it. Over 25% of women with private insurance had to pay out of pocket for contraceptive care. In ASAC's 18-county region, 70,870 women still need access to publicly-funded contraception, which means that they need financial assistance to access birth control. **Because of the contributions of our volunteers, supporters, staff, and community members,** we were able to respond to every single call and meet the increased demand.

What is more important than numbers is what each number represents...someone YOU helped. Here's what one person had to say:

“

Having access to birth control has been a very important part of my life. I recently moved to the area and could not afford health insurance. I was able to see a provider through A Step Ahead. At my appointment, the physician took time to discuss all my options, and I really felt a sense of compassion. I'm so thankful for A Step Ahead providing that option and making it so easily accessible. It has alleviated an enormous weight.”



Thank you for helping us remove barriers to contraception through education, outreach, and access to free birth control. Your gifts ensure that every person has an opportunity to achieve whatever goals they have for themselves.

SINCERELY,

*Mandy Cowley*

## MISSION

Our mission is to remove barriers to contraception through education, outreach, and access to free birth control.

## VALUES

- › Everyone has a right to knowledge about how their bodies work.
- › When individuals have access to accurate information and access to contraception, they are better equipped to make decisions right for them and their families.
- › Health services should be provided free of judgment in a caring, respectful, and safe manner.
- › Every individual should be able to select the birth control method that is best for them.

## THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK

Recent research about the impact of increased contraceptive access confirms what we already knew. When people can time their pregnancies for if/when they are socially, emotionally, and financially ready, it results in **many positive outcomes**. In 2009, a few years before ASAC was founded, the Colorado Family Planning Initiative (CFPI) received a \$27 million donation to expand access to contraception throughout the state of Colorado. Last year, several papers examining the long-term impacts were released. The CFPI program **decreased the percentage of young women in Colorado who left school before graduating by 14%** and led to a **6-12% increase in women obtaining bachelor's degrees**. The CFPI has also led to a significant **decline in the rate of unintended pregnancy, decreased infant mortality, and improved maternal health**. Given the similarity between our model and CFPI's, we are enthusiastic about these findings and the impact ASAC's work has on our region, not only in the immediate future but in the **years to come**.

“



I first heard about A Step Ahead through a friend. I almost didn't believe that I could get access to free birth control. I called, and within 2 weeks I had an IUD placed. Now I'm safe for 6 years. They were incredibly kind, asked no questions about income or insurance. Now I don't have to worry about my reproductive health. I highly recommend A Step Ahead."

**LAUREN, ASAC CLIENT**

"I was told that I possibly had endometriosis, and that an IUD would be most effective at helping to reduce my symptoms. However, I don't have insurance, and the price of the IUD out of pocket was very financially difficult. A Step Ahead allowed me to get the birth control I medically needed, and the method I preferred, without the financial stress. I'm so thankful!"

**ASAC CLIENT**

"Several of the kids love just to run up and give other kids hugs. One girl kept telling people, 'you need to ask for consent before you touch me,' and encouraged the other kids to ask for consent before touching others. I was impressed that this girl was so adamant about consent, so I asked her where she learned about it. The girl answered, 'The ladies from A Step Ahead told me about it!'"

**ATHENA, THE HUNTER ART MUSEUM**

ASAC Community Partner

“

I hear first-hand the gratitude and relief of clients who are able to access education and family planning services they desperately need and deserve. And I have witnessed the increased demand for the services ASAC provides. Providing these services gives some hope for a future in which our communities can thrive."

**CORTNIE, ASAC VOLUNTEER**



Since 2014

6,400

individuals connected with  
access to free birth control

almost

\$2,000,000

in clinic expenses covered

6,500

people educated

38,000

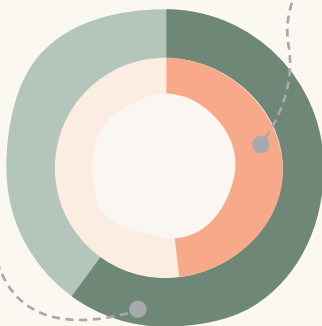
conversations facilitated

2022

## CLIENT DATA

60%

OF THE  
PEOPLE WE  
SERVED WERE  
COMPLETELY  
UNINSURED,  
COMPARED TO  
39% IN 2021.



48%

OF THE PEOPLE  
WE SERVED HAD  
HOUSEHOLD INCOMES  
BELOW THE FEDERAL  
POVERTY LEVEL (FPL).  
IN 2022, THE FPL FOR  
A FAMILY OF 3 WAS  
\$23,030 ANNUALLY.

15%

OF OUR CLIENTS DID NOT USE BIRTH CONTROL (INCLUDING BARRIER METHODS) BEFORE CONTACTING A STEP AHEAD CHATTANOOGA.



25%

WERE STUDENTS AT THE TIME THEY RECEIVED SERVICES.



77%

OF THE PEOPLE WHO RECEIVED CLINICAL SERVICES WERE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 20 AND 39

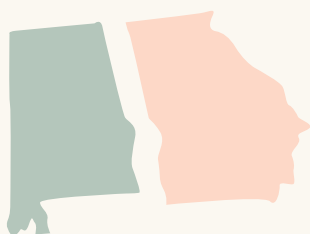
CONDOM REQUESTS INCREASED BY



64%

TRANSPORTATION SUPPORT REQUESTS INCREASED

140%



THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WE SERVED FROM GEORGIA AND ALABAMA GREW BY

53%

In 2022, we **expanded our services** to cover a year's worth of birth control pills through a telehealth partner, Twentyeight Health. Since the launch in June, **we've served 53 people through that partnership.**





## CONNECT HER RECAP

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, we hosted an event called “ConnectHER”. This was an opportunity to celebrate hitting the milestone of connecting over 5,000 people with access to free birth control and an acknowledgment that **your contributions made that possible!** If you couldn’t attend this event, we hope you will join us for a future event!



**Photo Credit**  
Brooke Bragger  
Photography

Thank you to our  
presenting sponsor:







## 2022 SUCCESSES

Late in 2020, A Step Ahead Chattanooga received a two-year grant through the Department of Human Services for a project called the “Plan Ahead Program”. This grant has allowed us to expand our outreach and education efforts throughout our Tennessee counties with a particular focus on the rural areas of our service region. This funding, paired with funding from The Soderberg Foundation, allowed us to expand our staff and educational programming significantly.

Over the course of the project, we reached almost **20,000** people through our education and outreach efforts. We also established **268** new referral partners and provided specialized training to **20** medical providers and social service staff.

We are so grateful to the state of Tennessee and the Department of Human Services for helping us expand our capacity, which in turn helps remove barriers to contraception and reach our community in an entirely new way.



## INDEPENDENT EVALUATION UPDATE

We recently completed an Independent Evaluation conducted by the Research Triangle Institute International (RTI). Over a period of about twelve months, they conducted **thirteen focus groups** with former clients, potential clients, and ASAC staff. They also interviewed **seventeen stakeholders**, including clinical partners and community-based partner organizations. Additionally, they **analyzed our quantitative data**. The key research questions related to our **impact, reach, and implementation** of our DHS-funded Plan Ahead Program.

The key findings from the community were:

01

**Expanded health education services are essential.** Partners, community members, and potential clients all cited the lack of evidence-based reproductive health education as a key driver in unintended pregnancy rates. Parents cited a lack of health education as a significant barrier to supporting their children through puberty and young adulthood.

02

**Community and generational context matters.** In both rural and urban settings, community members noted silence and stigma related to sex and contraceptives. Numerous people described how religious influences and generational divides limit reliable education from trusted adults and accessible health services for young people.

03

**Cost remains a significant barrier to accessing reproductive health care.** In both rural and urban areas, focus group participants reported that high costs—including co-pays and deductibles—limit their ability to obtain contraceptive care.

04

**Contraceptive decision-making is a personal process that is shaped by individuals' prior experiences.** Focus group participants discussed various considerations when selecting contraceptive methods, including cost, side effects, hormonal vs. non-hormonal options, and family planning goals.

Three key recommendations resulted from the evaluation:

01

ASAC staff, clients, partners, and community members all emphasized the importance of **expanding health education offerings** in the future.

02

ASAC staff and community partners highlighted the importance of sustaining new relationships through **meaningful collaboration**.

03

To meet the contraceptive needs of the community, ASAC needs to **expand contraceptive offerings beyond long-acting reversible methods**. ASAC staff, clients, clinicians, and community partners all highlighted that the best way to support reproductive autonomy is by providing access to a broad range of preventive contraceptives, including pills, patches, rings, and injectables.

We are so grateful to everyone who participated in the evaluation process and look forward to using these findings not only to **demonstrate our success** but also to work to **improve our programming** to continue to meet the needs of our community.



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THANK YOU TO OUR AMAZING VOLUNTEERS, WHO GAVE MORE THAN 1,729 HOURS OF THEIR TIME IN 2022, A VALUE OF \$45,012

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