

# McKenzie's Rays of Sunshine

When goodbye comes too soon, families deserve more than an empty room.



*Memory-making care and practical support for families experiencing infant loss.*

## WHY WE EXIST

### **McKenzie was here. She was held, known, and deeply loved.**

Before we tell you what we do, we want to share how this journey began.

When McKenzie was born, our world changed forever. She entered a family that loved her deeply, and although our time with her was only six days, those days were filled with extraordinary love. Her death was unexpected. The palliative care nurses and hospital staff around us encouraged us to simply be her parents: to hold her, dress and bathe her, read to her, and create memories together. They helped us preserve her handprints and footprints, record her heartbeat, take photographs, and gather other mementos we will treasure for the rest of our lives.

Only later did we learn that many of those keepsakes had been paid for by hospital staff or donated by other bereaved parents. Their generosity showed us both what compassionate care can mean and how fragile access to it can be. While we were in the hospital, we grieved that McKenzie would never see the sun. The name McKenzie's Rays of Sunshine grew from that heartbreak - and from our promise that her light would reach other families. We created this organization so parents facing the loss of a baby can be free to love and parent their child, preserve irreplaceable memories, and know they are not alone.

**OUR PROMISE** We cannot change what happened. We can change what a family has in its hands, whom it has beside it, and whether it must face the next year alone.

### **Vision**

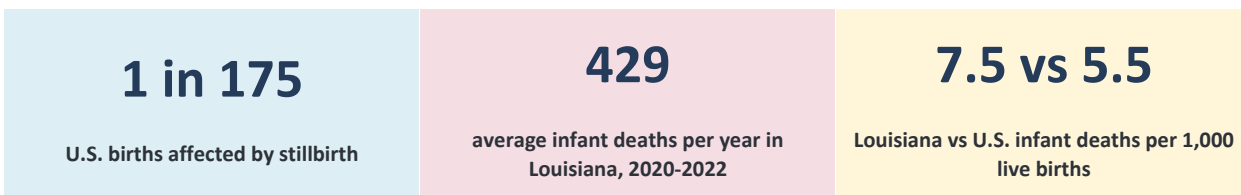
We envision a future in which every family facing the loss of a baby is surrounded by compassionate care, from the first overwhelming hours in the hospital through the first year of grief. Every parent will have support to make precious memories, meaningful ways to carry their child's presence home, and a community that continues to remember their child by name.

### **Mission**

McKenzie's Rays of Sunshine exists to ensure that families experiencing pregnancy and infant loss receive compassionate, practical support at the hospital and throughout the first year of grief. Beginning in Southeast Louisiana, we provide memory-making kits and funeral assistance while building a continuum of follow-up care that helps parents honor their child, preserve irreplaceable memories, and feel less alone.

**WHY THIS WORK MUST EXIST****The need is not theoretical. It is here.**

Families across Louisiana encounter pregnancy loss, stillbirth, neonatal death, and infant death every year. The crisis is medical. What follows is also emotional, practical, financial, and lifelong.



The CDC reports that about 21,000 babies are stillborn in the United States each year - roughly the same number who die before their first birthday.<sup>1</sup>

Louisiana's 2024 Child Death Review reported an average of 429 infant deaths per year from 2020 through 2022. During that period, Louisiana's infant mortality rate was 7.5 per 1,000 live births, compared with 5.5 nationally.<sup>2</sup>

Professional guidance recognizes that compassionate care includes more than clinical treatment. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists identifies family photography, keepsakes, and hand- or footprint molds as constructive memory-making options when consistent with a family's wishes.<sup>3</sup>

ACOG also calls for follow-up after miscarriage, stillbirth, or neonatal death that includes emotional support, bereavement counseling, and appropriate referrals to counselors and support groups.<sup>4</sup>

**WHAT WE CLAIM** A memory kit does not erase grief. It does something more honest: it gives parents choices, connection, and irreplaceable pieces of their child's story while there is still time to preserve them.

**WHAT WE DO**

## We put something loving and practical into a family's hands.

At the heart of the program is a carefully assembled memory kit designed for the hospital bedside. We build and refine each kit with nurses - the people beside families during the first hours of loss - so it meets real bedside needs.



*A prepared memory kit brings several forms of memory-making support together in one place.*

| What families receive                                | Why it matters                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Weighted bear with heartbeat recorder</b>         | Matched to the baby's birth weight, with a recorder inside to preserve the baby's heartbeat.          |
| <b>NICU clothing for micro-preemies and preemies</b> | Specially sized clothing lets parents dress their baby when standard newborn sizes are far too large. |
| <b>Hand- and footprint casting and ink supplies</b>  | Casting and ink materials preserve tiny hands and feet in molds and prints for loved ones.            |
| <b>Personalized keepsake plaque</b>                  | Space for a photograph, handprint, and footprint in one lasting piece.                                |
| <b>Memory and guidance materials</b>                 | A place for a lock of hair, a card, and gentle printed guidance for the hours ahead.                  |
| <b>Funeral assistance</b>                            | Direct financial help, separate from the kit, when resources allow.                                   |

**CURRENT UNIT COST** Approximately \$130 covers the present material cost of one complete kit, including modest room for the printed parent guide now in development. Costs are reviewed as supplies and customization change.

## EARLY PROOF

## Small enough to be personal. Real enough to be working.

The organization is young, but the model is already moving from living rooms to hospital care teams—and from a family's vision to growing community support.

|                                                                 |                                                           |                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>2</b><br>Southeast Louisiana hospital<br>placements launched | <b>Community Backed</b><br>Donor and volunteer confidence | <b>Direct help</b><br>provided toward funeral expenses<br>for multiple families |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

In its first months, McKenzie's Rays of Sunshine has assembled and delivered kits to two area hospitals, worked directly with hospital staff, provided funeral assistance, and earned meaningful donor confidence. The numbers are not yet large - and that is precisely why support is so leveraged now. A gift at this stage builds inventory, relationships, routines, and the first-year care model before demand outgrows the founders' personal capacity.



*Hospital delivery in Southeast Louisiana: resources placed with the people who will be beside families in the first hours of loss.*

**WHY EARLY SUPPORT MATTERS** Donors are not being asked to fund a theory. They are being invited to strengthen a working local response while it is still nimble, personal, and inexpensive to expand.

**WHAT YOUR SUPPORT MAKES POSSIBLE****The next family should not have to wait for us to be bigger.**

**Funding now allows McKenzie's Rays of Sunshine to build deliberately: keeping the bedside program reliable while extending care beyond the hospital.**

|                                                                                 |                                                                                |                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b>                                                                        | <b>2</b>                                                                       | <b>3</b>                                                                            |
| <b>Hospital readiness</b>                                                       | <b>A full year of care</b>                                                     | <b>Funeral assistance</b>                                                           |
| Keep kits stocked and expand to additional hospitals before a family needs one. | Build consistent follow-up, grief resources, remembrance, and peer connection. | Grow a responsive fund so cost does not prevent a family from honoring their child. |

**A clear, tangible ask**

| Gift            | What it can place in families' hands                                                                                   |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>\$130</b>    | Helps one family preserve precious memories of their child through a complete keepsake kit.                            |
| <b>\$650</b>    | Helps approximately five families receive meaningful ways to remember and honor their child.                           |
| <b>\$1,300</b>  | Supports approximately ten families through an unimaginable goodbye with keepsakes made to last.                       |
| <b>\$5,000</b>  | Helps approximately 38 families leave the hospital with tangible reminders that their child was here and deeply loved. |
| <b>\$10,000</b> | Helps approximately 75 families be met with tenderness, dignity, and something meaningful to hold onto.                |

*Giving levels are based on an estimated \$130 material cost per kit and are intentionally approximate. Funeral assistance and first-year follow-up care are funded separately.*

**A GIFT BECOMES READINESS** It means the box is packed, the hospital has it, and the care team does not have to search for resources while a family is in crisis.

**AN INVITATION****Help us be there before the worst day arrives.**

**No donor can prevent every loss. Together, we can prevent families from facing that loss without memory-making tools, practical help, and a continuing community of care.**

McKenzie's Rays of Sunshine is building the kind of support its founders wish every family could count on: ready at the bedside, personal enough to honor one child at a time, and steady enough to continue after everyone else has gone home.

The organization does not need to be the largest nonprofit in the field to be essential. It needs to be present, trusted, prepared, and sustainable in the communities it serves. Every kit placed, every funeral cost eased, and every parent remembered during the first year is a reason this work must continue.

**JOIN US** Sponsor a kit. Strengthen a hospital placement. Help build the first year of care. Give another family something lasting to hold onto.

**McKenzie's Rays of Sunshine**

**Louisiana 501(c)(3) nonprofit | EIN 41-3375360**

Connect: @mckenzie-rays-of-sunshine

**Selected sources**

**Source 1:** [CDC - Data and Statistics on Stillbirth](#) - National stillbirth estimate and frequency; updated August 26, 2025.

**Source 2:** [Louisiana Department of Health - 2024 Child Death Review Legislative Report](#) - Louisiana infant mortality data for 2020-2022.

**Source 3:** [ACOG - Perinatal Palliative Care](#) - Family-centered comfort care and constructive memory-making options.

**Source 4:** [ACOG - Optimizing Postpartum Care](#) - Follow-up after miscarriage, stillbirth, or neonatal death.

*Living document note: update the version date, early-momentum figures, priorities, and unit cost as the program grows.*