



# Thrive in Joy

NICK FAGNANO FOUNDATION™



**10 YEARS OF THRIVE IN JOY:**  
Continuing the Ripple Effects  
of Nick's Life

*Thrive in Joy*  
NICK FAGNANO FOUNDATION

**2014-2024**

## A message from Thrive in Joy's Co-founders

**JAY AND I CAN NEVER FULLY EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE** to each and every one of our beloved supporters whose generosity expands the positive ripple effect of Nick's life, which is the theme of this report. You are the reason for all the good you will read about in the following pages. Rather than an annual report, this is a "decade report." We wanted to share the story of Thrive in Joy's growth and impact beginning with our first trip to the Dominican Republic (DR) 10 years ago, and lead you to where we are today with Thrive in Joy's C11 program active on five high school campuses in Los Angeles as well as internationally.

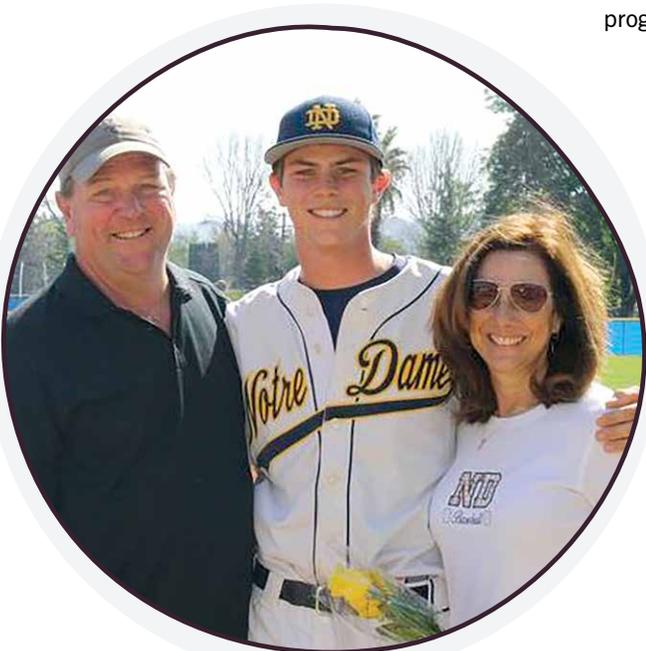
A phrase we use a lot at Thrive in Joy is "no coincidences." At the beginning of our journey to establish a 501(c)(3) to honor Nick's legacy, we never could have imagined all the talented and dedicated people who would walk alongside us while guiding our mission, providing expertise, opening doors, volunteering, and encouraging us. We have been blessed with a fountain of resources providing us, and those we serve, with encouragement and accomplishments. The pages that follow will introduce you to just a few of those who have contributed to Thrive in Joy's growth and impact. While space limits us to include all who deserve to be mentioned in these pages, our hope is that you will see your contribution as you turn the pages.

One of our greatest joys is to hear student leaders who have been part of our C11 program say they feel like they know Nick. This October, we made our 20th trip to the DR and we visited the high school where our C11 program is active. One of the students asked us, "How did you know that Nick cared about other people?" Jay responded with the story of how Nick befriended Michael, a man in a wheelchair with one leg, who would sit on the corner in front of our building in downtown Los Angeles. Nick would visit him almost every day and bring him food... but more than that, he talked to Michael and got to know him. Nick introduced Jay and me to Michael. When we told Michael about what happened to Nick, he asked if he could have a photo of Nick. It's just one example of how Nick touched people's lives... and implanted a responsibility on Jay and me to not let those ripples Nick started become motionless.

Our lives, through Thrive in Joy's mission, are dedicated to expanding the reach of Nick's kindness and his 10 other character strengths—gratitude, honesty, humility, humor, love, perspective, perseverance, spirituality, teamwork, and zest. We see this happening with every young person who becomes involved in Thrive in Joy and we continue to be humbled by how Nick's life has inspired so many teens to want to make a difference with their own lives.

While we've waited 10 years to fully show the extent of Thrive in Joy's impact, we feel this is just the beginning. In the years to come we look forward to sharing how much more we can achieve together. We also hope these pages bring a glimpse of joy as we recognize the challenges confronting our nation and the world. To quote Mother Teresa, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."

At Thrive in Joy, we believe each young life that is inspired to do more through our programs is another series of those ripples. May the stones we place in the hands of today's youth be cast across the waters to create peace and hope, resulting in positive change for our communities and the world.



With joy and gratitude,

Mary & Jay Fagnano  
Nick's Mom & Dad

Co-founders, *The Thrive in Joy Nick Fagnano Foundation*

## Messages from Thrive in Joy's Board Co-Chairs

### DEAR THRIVE IN JOY FAMILY,

I remember the days after the tragic death of our beloved Nick Fagnano ten years ago as though they happened yesterday. There was an outpouring of disbelief, grief, care, love, and support that surrounded Mary, Jay, and Nick's extended family and friends. And there was a clear conviction that Nick lived in joy and faith and that his spirit was with us. In those most difficult of days, the seeds for Thrive in Joy were planted. Initially, we were a group of friends supporting Mary and Jay in keeping alive Nick's memory. Seemingly miraculous, today we are an impactful organization promoting character development that has touched thousands of young lives in California, the Dominican Republic, and, now, South Africa.

By telling Nick's story and operating in his spirit, we have built thriving programs with a school, orphanage, and a community in the Dominican Republic. We have taken scores of persons with us on trips building bridges and community. And we have built a program called C11 that animates young persons to tap into their character strengths and become leaders in their communities. The results have been remarkable. Elizabeth, who met TJNFF as a USC student on a mission trip to the DR, helped develop and implement the C11 program in LA schools and is now our board co-chair. Amy, who met TJNFF as a high school student, became her school's club leader, got into USC, joined the TJNFF Board as a junior member, and is now starting a new C11 initiative among USC students. These are two of the many, many stories of hope and impact.

I have been involved with TJNFF since the beginning and have been board chair for almost five years. There is something magic here. Through Mary's leadership as Executive Director, every time in the past ten years when it seemed we hit some barrier or needed to scale back our efforts, something remarkable happened. Through YOUR generosity (and much serendipity), we have continued to grow and enrich lives. Once again, we are on a precipice—there is more we can do, more requests for C11 programs in LA and beyond than we can meet. This year our campaign is about sustaining and growing our capacity. Thank you for all you have done in the past and please consider supporting us as we seek to live in Nick's spirit and bring JOY to others.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph W LaBrie".

Joseph LaBrie  
Professor of Psychological Science  
Director, HeadsUP Labs  
Loyola Marymount University  
*Board Chair, The Thrive in Joy Nick Fagnano Foundation*

### DEAR FRIENDS OF THRIVE IN JOY,

When I was introduced to The Thrive in Joy Nick Fagnano Foundation in 2016 as a USC student, I was overjoyed to join Mary and Jay on their annual mission trip to the Dominican Republic (DR). I had a wonderful time working with our mission team on restoration projects, community building, and getting to know the children at the REMAR Orphanage and Tia Tatiana School. Since then, I have had the pleasure of joining Thrive in Joy on other trips to the DR, serving alongside the students within the program of our DR partner, Casa Misionera, doing food distributions and celebrating the water purification system in the community of Nagua.

In addition to my involvement with the DR and my other volunteer contributions, I got to know Nick through the eyes of his parents and friends. I contributed as a Board Member and, eventually, assisted Mary on a daily basis in a staff role as the Director of Programs and Development. I worked with the student leaders of our C11 strength of character program guiding them through their Entrepreneurial Social Impact Projects (ESIP) and expanding our C11 program to five Los Angeles schools. I also contributed to the launch of C11 at Global Leadership Academy in South Africa, and I had the privilege of seeing the program in action at Liceo Angel Maria Hernandez Croussett High School in the Dominican Republic. I am inspired by our C11 students' work both locally and abroad and I have profound hope in the future because of them. I've seen firsthand how impactful completing the C11 program can be... students who were once shy are the first to raise their hand and quiet confidence becomes bold character strength. Thrive in Joy changes lives. Students leave the C11 program ready to be leaders in college, in their communities, and in the world.

I am back at USC now as a doctoral student and researcher and I remain committed to Thrive in Joy in a new way. As I embark on this exciting new role as Board Co-Chair, I hope you will join me in continuing our commitment to these students and the C11 program. I look forward to the many memories we will make together as we keep Nick's light shining.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth Rojas, msg".

With peace and joy,  
Elizabeth Rojas, MSG  
*Board Chair, The Thrive in Joy Nick Fagnano Foundation*

# The C11 Program

Inspired by 11 of Nick Fagnano’s character strengths, the C11 Program is a curriculum focused on character development and opportunities for student-led entrepreneurial service learning that supports individual high school students’ confidence and college readiness as they prepare for higher education opportunities.



**AS OF NOVEMBER 2024**, there are five high schools in Los Angeles, one in the Dominican Republic, and one in Jeffreys Bay South Africa with a student-led Club Thrive in Joy on their campus. Each club meeting incorporates the C11 curriculum.

With a focus on schools serving students from low-income communities, the purpose and mission of C11 is to empower high-school students to discover their unique character strengths and make a difference in their communities through programs that support students’ mental health and ability to succeed.

The C11 program was developed to recognize the socioeconomic and cultural factors influencing students at school, at home, and in the community. Activities to alleviate stress students may encounter in their broader communities are emphasized. The outcome is that students develop a positive self-awareness and confidence in pursuing opportunities that, likely, they are the first in their family to experience. 100% of high school students actively involved with Thrive in Joy’s C11 program attend a four-year college or university upon graduation. Furthermore, students involved in Club Thrive in Joy in high school continue to seek leadership roles in college by participating in a wide array of academic, professional, and community leadership positions.

Since 2015 over 2358 teens have been directly involved in Thrive in Joy’s C11 Program.

*These statements are, in part, supported by research conducted by USC Price School of Public Policy Masters Students who chose to work with Thrive in Joy for their practicum capstone project entitled “Assessing a Character Development Program for High School Youth” under the guidance of their professor, Dr. Tara Blanc. The full study is available upon request with an email to [mary@thriveinjoy.org](mailto:mary@thriveinjoy.org).*

## C11 Program Highlights & Accomplishments

**2015** – Mary Fagnano speaks to 80 middle school and high school students about carrying on Nick’s legacy at first meeting of Los Angeles regional chapter of Multiplying Good Students in Action. Students volunteer to do service projects in partnership with Thrive in Joy.

**2019** – 15-week student-led C11 program launches with freshman advisory at USC Hybrid High College Prep.

**2020** – Club Thrive in Joy launches in January at USC Hybrid High. Goes virtual in March.

**2020** – Students in Action delivers third C11 workshop at virtual student leadership conference.

**2016** – Thrive in Joy (TJNFF) signs three-year sponsorship agreement with Multiplying Good Students in Action.

**2018** – Thrive in Joy partners with Creative Visions to tell Nick’s story resulting in three C11 workshops for teens to be presented at Multiplying Good Students in Action leadership conferences.

**2019** – TJNFF renews three-year partnership with Multiplying Good Students in Action and introduces C11 strength of character workshops at fall and spring student leadership conferences.

**2021** – Thrive in Joy partners with USC Price School of Public Policy for drive-through holiday donation of toys for siblings of USC Hybrid High students.





**My experience with Thrive in Joy** has been incredibly rewarding so far. The Summer Leadership Summit gave me valuable insights into effective leadership and community impact, which I've been able to implement as a club lead. In the first month, I've recruited members and started the first Thrive in Joy Club at my school. I'm excited to continue building a supportive and motivated club environment and it's been inspiring to see the enthusiasm and commitment from members.



This school year with Club Thrive in Joy, I most look forward to planning and executing the ESIPs. These projects will allow my club to directly contribute to our community through meaningful service initiatives, while also fostering leadership and personal growth among members. I'm excited to collaborate with my peers to create lasting change and see the positive impact our efforts will have on others.

—Eddy Ju, Senior, University Prep Value High, Los Angeles



### Thrive in Joy 2024 Educational Partners



2021 – Multiplying Good Students in Action winter workshop at UCLA.

2021 – First student ESIP (Entrepreneurial Social Impact Project) at USC Hybrid High focused on frequently undiagnosed student vision disabilities.

2021 – USC Hybrid High Club Thrive in Joy hosts first Annual Winter Wonderland event on campus.

2022 – Club Thrive in Joy launches at second high school, Esperanza College Prep in East LA.

2022 – New Publishing Solutions provides consultancy on competitive landscape for C11 and concludes program is unique, needed, and highly effective.

2022 – C11 mentorship program launches with 15 young adult volunteers who meet with students via Zoom each week.



2023 – Partnership with RetailROI provides pro bono consultants who collaborate with TJNFF's Board Members with educational expertise to finalize program materials including a 192-page C11 Leaders Guide and accompanying student Journey Book.

2023 – Three-Day Summer Leadership Training debuts for new Club leads. Leadership program expands in 2024 with five participating Los Angeles high schools.

2023 – C11 launches at high school in the Dominican Republic, Liceo Angel Maria Hernandez Croussett, in the community of Nagua.



2023 – USC Hybrid High hosts Third Annual ESIP "Move. Thrive. Be." Event ties for first place in Students in Action Los Angeles Regional public service pitch competition. Students go to national competition in Washington D.C.

2024 – C11 Expands international reach with program at Global Leadership Academy in Jeffreys Bay, South Africa, adds third high school in Los Angeles, Alliance Dr. Olga Mohan. Danny Trejo is featured speaker at Mohan students' spring ESIP focused on men's mental health.

2024 – Thrive in Joy holds second annual summer leadership training for student leaders and welcomes Club Thrive in Joy student leaders from two new schools—University Prep Value High and East Los Angeles Renaissance Academy.

2024 – Thrive in Joy receives USC Off-Campus Federal Work Study partner designation. Hires four USC students subsidized by Work Study funding.

# The DR Program

*It all started with the baseball equipment drive Nick organized when he was 13 years-old. He recruited his Little League teammates to collect balls, bats, gloves, cleats, and uniforms to send to kids in the Dominican Republic (DR). No one could have foreseen how Nick's desire to help kids on the other side of the continent would spark the founding of Thrive in Joy, improving the quality of life for over 8,000 children and their families over the past 10 years.*



**AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MARY AND JAY** to join a team of volunteers headed to the DR came up just four weeks after Nick's passing. The intent of the trip was to help install a computer lab at a school in the extremely underserved community of Herrera in Santo Domingo. What was to be just one trip... a small pebble in a vast ocean... became an exponential ripple of life-changing impact in Nick's memory.

As of October 2024, we've made 20 mission trips with a total of 211 team members in partnership with 258 volunteers in the Dominican Republic resulting in 11,340 interactions of service. None of this would be possible without our amazing partners—Nelson Paulino, Director of Casa Misionera in the DR, the Casa Misionera young leaders who serve alongside us, the USC Caruso Catholic Center with whom we partner for their Alternative Spring Break trip for USC students, Notre Dame High School (Nick's alma mater), who recruits Notre Dame students to serve with us in June. Also in the DR, our gratitude extends to the faculty and staff of Tia Tatiana School in Herrera, Mariluz Heredia, the Director of VisionTrust Dominicana, Paco and Yenny, Directors of the REMAR Orphanage, and Pastors Elisandro and Gretty who have established lifelines of hope in the community of Nagua. On every trip we receive far more than we can ever possibly give from the loving people in this beautiful country that is, yet, so full of need.

## DR Program Highlights & Accomplishments

**2014** – First trip to the DR; Visited REMAR and Tia Tatiana. Installed computer lab at Tia Tatiana. Completed a classroom a make-over with new furnishings.

**2015** – Provided classroom furniture to upgrade nine more classrooms at Tia Tatiana.

**2015** – Excavated sports field for REMAR orphanage and provided water tank on roof of boys house at REMAR.

**2016** – Bought kitchen equipment for Tia Tatiana, made first Nick's Favorite Lunch for 420 Tia Tatiana students.



**2017** – Human trafficking education at Ketty's House for girls and at REMAR for all the teens, went to Haitian border to visit learning center, engaged in activities with students at three schools, made Nick's favorite lunch at Tia Tatiana, purchased new kitchen supplies for Tia Tatiana kitchen, career advice for high school students.



**2017** – First DR Trip with the USC Caruso Catholic Center (CC) students. Excavated land at REMAR Orphanage to create sports field. Dedicated field by painting El Play de Nick Mural on back wall.

**2019** – Kitchen demolition at Tia Tatiana and new stainless steel counters installed. USC CC students demo walls at REMAR orphanage to prepare for new kitchen construction.



**2019** – Received donation to purchase 80 shoes for preschoolers at Tia Tatiana plus children at a remote preschool location. Cooked Thanksgiving dinner for Tia Tatiana students and staff. Conducted poetry workshop with Tia Tatiana 5th and 6th graders and C11 workshop with high schoolers. Hosted party at REMAR orphanage.



**We met Jay and Mary** when we started our time of administration at REMAR Dominican Republic. We came with the dream of working for the children in the orphanage, to turn the home into a dignified place for them, and Thrive in Joy gave us the support we needed to achieve this goal. Jay and Mary became family to us, and every member of their team as well. In every visit, they have shown the kids that there are people who believe in them and that they are not alone. They have been an instrument for God to show His love to each child. Thank you, TJNFF.

**—Paco & Yenny, Directors, REMAR Orphanage**

**2020** – New location provided for Tia Tatiana preschool. Funds for teachers to stay employed during school closure due to COVID. Food for families in need. Restroom repairs at Tia Tatiana School.



**2022** – Completed new kitchen at REMAR Orphanage and celebrated by cooking a Thanksgiving dinner for 72 people. First REMAR's Got Talent Show. Hosted REMAR sports day. Christmas Project with students at Tia Tatiana. Food distribution in Herrera and home repairs in Nagua.



**2023** – Ribbon-cutting of Nagua water purification plant, food distribution in Nagua, C11 intro to students at Liceo Angel Maria Hernandez Croussett High School (LAMHC) school in Nagua, C11 skits at Tia Tatiana, REMAR's Got Talent.

**2023** – Nicks Favorite Lunch at REMAR, bracelet-making at REMAR and Tia Tatiana, Upgrades to Tia Tatiana gym with new basketball backboards, nets, and volleyball net. food distribution at Herrera.

**2024** – First DR trip with Notre Dame High School – Cleanup at REMAR, painting, and cement work. Zoo trip with REMAR children and teens, Herrera Food Distro, Deaf School bracelet making and sports. Fiesta at REMAR.

**2024** – Nagua home visits with household items, home repair, and food distribution, C11 career discussion with students at LAMHC school in Nagua, provisions for REMAR Orphanage plus fiesta for the children and teens, visit to Tia Tatiana school with craft project. Assess greatest need for March 2025 project.



# Impact Numbers

## C11 Impact Numbers

Program Year	# of Students Directly Engaged	Volunteers	ESIP Beneficiaries	Total Impact
2015	48	117	133	298
2016	220	42	142	404
2017	225	45	88	358
2018	228	47	150	425
2019	367	45	118	530
2020	310	15	17	342
2021	155	58	58	271
2022	244	226	226	696
2023	264	277	277	818
2024	297	421	421	1,139
<b>TOTAL C11 Impact</b>	<b>2,358</b>	<b>1,293</b>	<b>1,630</b>	<b>5,281</b>



I am writing on behalf of our school community to express our deepest gratitude for the invaluable impact Thrive in Joy has had on our students through your leadership development and skill-building programs. Your unwavering commitment to supporting our students' growth has fostered a profound transformation, particularly among those who have historically struggled with self-advocacy and confidence. The event you hosted last year, where our students had the opportunity to engage with the inspiring Danny Trejo, was nothing short of remarkable. The excitement and generosity, from the free shoes and books to the powerful message shared by Mr. Trejo, left an indelible mark on our students. It is an event they still speak about with pride and enthusiasm.

—Dr. Kyle Perez Robinson, Assistant Principal, Dr. Olga Mohan High School



Scan to read more C11 testimonials from students and educators.

## DR Impact Numbers

Year of Trip	# of Team Volunteers	# DR Volunteers	# Students in DR Impacted per trip (some duplication)	# Staff Impacted (some duplication)	# Households in DR Impacted (some duplication)	Total Interactions
2014	10	3	480	10		503
2015	16	13	960	30		1,019
2016	12	10	1,095	52		1,169
2017	27	12	1,155	83		1,277
2018	25	16	1,000	65		1,106
2019	24	14	1,220	57		1,315
2020 No Trips- Impact Only			80	30	15	125
2021	12	20	140	12	60	244
2022	26	40	1,060	120	90	1,336
2023	21	50	960	75	130	1,236
2024	38	80	1,680	98	114	2,010
<b>TOTAL DR Impact</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>9,830</b>	<b>632</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>11,340</b>



We are so grateful for Thrive in Joy and all the support they have given us to continue impacting our community. Many families have benefited from food provision, which has led many to come to our church and experience the love of God. We are also thankful for the great blessing of a water processing plant, which allows us to supply the entire community with donated gallons of water for those most in need, while also selling water at a lower cost, creating jobs for people within the community. Thank you for bringing to our community so many solutions with immediate and eternal impact.

—Elisandro & Gretty, Husband and Wife Pastors from Nagua



Scan to read more DR testimonials from volunteers and our partners.

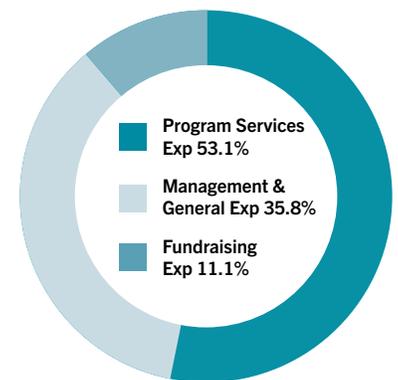
# 10-Year Financial Summary

## 10 Year Summary of 990 Financials

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Revenue	\$53,166	\$55,583	\$64,868	\$60,766	\$86,827	\$149,070	\$311,755	\$232,319	\$300,785	\$1,315,139
Program Services Expenses	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$109,836	\$179,496	\$150,857	\$440,189
Management & Gen Expenses	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$54,998	\$111,382	\$130,496	\$296,876
Fundraising Expenses	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$22,054	\$25,866	\$44,758	\$92,678
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$31,179</b>	<b>\$49,561</b>	<b>\$51,247</b>	<b>\$41,170</b>	<b>\$72,835</b>	<b>\$130,426</b>	<b>\$186,888</b>	<b>\$316,744</b>	<b>\$326,111</b>	<b>\$1,206,161</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>\$21,987</b>	<b>\$6,022</b>	<b>\$13,621</b>	<b>\$19,596</b>	<b>\$13,992</b>	<b>\$18,644</b>	<b>\$124,867</b>	<b>-\$84,425</b>	<b>-\$25,326</b>	<b>\$108,978</b>
<b>Net Assets / Fund Balances</b>	<b>\$21,987</b>	<b>\$28,009</b>	<b>\$41,630</b>	<b>\$61,226</b>	<b>\$75,218</b>	<b>\$93,862</b>	<b>\$218,729</b>	<b>\$133,728</b>	<b>\$115,641</b>	

## Analysis of Functional Expense Tracking as of 2021

	2021	2022	2023	Total
Revenue	\$311,755	\$232,319	\$300,785	\$844,859
Program Services Expenses	\$109,836	\$179,496	\$150,857	\$440,189
Management & Gen Expenses	\$54,998	\$111,382	\$130,496	\$296,876
Fundraising Expenses	\$22,054	\$25,866	\$44,758	\$92,678
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$186,888</b>	<b>\$316,744</b>	<b>\$326,111</b>	<b>\$829,743</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>\$124,867</b>	<b>-\$84,425</b>	<b>-\$25,326</b>	<b>\$15,116</b>
<b>Net Assets / Fund Balances</b>	<b>\$218,729</b>	<b>\$133,728</b>	<b>\$115,641</b>	



- **Early Years (2015-2018):** The organization experienced steady growth in revenue and expenses. Net income remained positive but relatively small. Net assets in the form of cash grew at a steady pace indicating sustainability and good cash management practices during initial program stages.
- **Expansion (2019-2021):** Revenue continued to increase, with a significant jump in 2020. Expenses also rose as programs widened their reach. Assistance with payroll was supported by COVID relief funds.
- **Until the organization exceeded \$150,000 in revenue,** functional expenses were not included on the 990-EZ return and therefore not included in the overall expense breakdown.

- **Outlier Year (2021):** The organization, as well as other education-based nonprofits, overcame the pandemic year recognizing revenue without the ability to make programmatic expenditures, particularly with restricted grant funds. Revenue was allocated to expenditures in the subsequent years resulting in significant cash net asset increases.



- **Recovery and Growth (2022-2024):** Program expansion costs accounted for the year's losses. Accumulated cash reserves and restricted revenue from 2020-2021 were used in 2022 and 2023. Revenue and expenses both continued to grow with a focus on maintaining a healthy financial balance.
- **Overall Financial Health:** The organization has demonstrated resilience and a strong commitment to financial sustainability. The overall trend throughout the past decade has been positive, with total revenue of \$1.3MM, controlled expenses totaling \$1.2MM, and a growing net asset base. The areas of focus for 2024 are to diversify revenue sources so as to finish with a positive net income and stabilize the net assets / cash reserves.

# Donor List

*With great appreciation to our donors for their cumulative generosity over the past 10 years.*

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Gill and John Wagner

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*(Continued on back cover)*

# Thrive in Joy Romances: What could be more life-changing than meeting your soulmate?



## Bethany Cooke and Alex Zamora in Bethany's words...

The year was 2018 and I was a sophomore at the University of Southern California. Being a college student, I wanted to do something fun for my spring break but I remember thinking, "If only I could travel, but also give back to others." By fate, I was connected with the incredible organization, Thrive In Joy, through which I learned about Nick and his legacy. I had an amazing and unforgettable experience traveling to the Dominican Republic (DR) with Thrive in Joy. On that trip, I worked with children in Herrera and was able to give back to one of the most vibrant and inspiring communities I've ever witnessed. My trip with Thrive in Joy ended too soon, and I knew I wanted to be a part of the organization in any way I could. I interned with Thrive in Joy working with Mary on future mission trips to the DR, fundraising, and increasing Thrive in Joy's presence on social media. Very quickly, Mary became my mentor and friend. In July of 2019 Mary told me she had someone she wanted me to meet. *Scan QR code to read more...*



(Continued from page 10)

## Cindy Gonzalez and Josue Najera in Cindy's words...

Our story began when I met Josue in elementary school, but as life would have it, we went our separate ways. Neither of us could have predicted our paths would cross again, but thanks to the Thrive in Joy Nick Fagnano Foundation (TJNFF), we were brought back together in the most beautiful and unexpected way. TJNFF, the nonprofit founded by Nick Fagnano's parents after his tragic passing, became a deeply personal part of Josue's life. As a board member, Josue plans and leads mission trips to the Dominican Republic (DR) to spread Nick's legacy of joy, service, and faith. This work brought Josue close to the USC Caruso Catholic Center (the CC), where TJNFF connects with students through the CC's Alternative Spring Break program. Meanwhile, I was attending USC for my undergraduate studies, completely unaware that Josue was often around the CC, connecting with students who had been on a DR trip with Thrive in Joy. *Scan QR code to read more...*



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