



fairplaysm
childhood beyond brands

Annual Report
July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021





Dear Friend,

What a year it's been! From our headline-generating campaign against Facebook's plans for Instagram Youth, to securing a groundbreaking investigation of Big Tech at the Federal Trade Commission, to an entirely new name (goodbye, CCFC!), the past twelve months have been transformative for our work to protect kids.

We're so proud of the work we've accomplished over this past year. And as you'll read in these pages, we couldn't have done it without you. (We mean that quite literally: Check out page 4 to hear the story of supporter Nora Shine, whose advocacy against the math game Prodigy led to our investigation of the app and major changes in her school district!)

As we look back on the past year, we're also incredibly excited to share some big news with you: the launch of our Designed with Kids in Mind campaign.

Designed with Kids in Mind is a wide-ranging, multi-year effort to both secure the online protections that kids need for safe, developmentally-appropriate experiences in the digital world, and to help children get the offline time they need to thrive. Thanks to a generous \$1 million grant from the Oak Foundation, Fairplay is leading the effort to ensure that the design of any websites and apps that are likely to be accessed by children puts kids' wellbeing — not corporations' thirst for profit — front and center.

What does that look like in practice? **No more manipulative design that exploits kids' FOMO and keeps them checking their devices.** No more tricks to get children to divulge their sensitive personal information. No more features that put young people at risk of cyberbullying and predation. No more harmful surveillance advertising that leverages children's interests and online habits to sell them things.

For the past twenty years, we've stood up to some of the world's most powerful companies on behalf of children and families. Now we're excited to stand with you and demand more systemic solutions.

Our children deserve Fairplay. And working together, we'll make sure that they get it. You'll be hearing a lot more about Designed with Kids in Mind in the coming months, as well as how you can get involved, too! In the meantime, we invite you to celebrate the successes of the past year with us.

Thanks for all you do,



Angela Campbell, JD
Board Chair, Fairplay



Josh Golin
Executive Director, Fairplay





fairplay
childhood beyond brands

New name, same great advocacy for kids!



In the more than 20 years that we have been advocating for kids, childhood has undergone a huge transformation. Smartphones, tablets, and an overwhelming array of apps and games have been designed to hook kids, monopolize their attention, and mine their private information for profit, all while ignoring what kids actually need to thrive!

While our advocacy has evolved to match the digital techniques of corporate marketers, our name hadn't. **That's why in June 2021, Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood officially became Fairplay!**

Our new name captures what our organization has been fighting for since day one: a world where kids' needs and vulnerabilities are respected, not exploited by giant corporations for profit. **Whether we're stopping the false marketing of baby media as educational or taking on Big Tech for illegally collecting children's sensitive data, Fairplay is here to stand up for kids.**

This organization has grown so much since our humble beginnings in 2000. Thanks to our supporters, we're no longer a small group of parents, advocates, and educators working to create a better childhood in our spare time. Now, we're the leading watchdog of the children's media, marketing, and tech industries. We're demanding an end to the unfair Big Tech tactics that manipulate children into spending far too much time online. We're testifying on Capitol Hill about the online protections children need. We're working with an increasing number of allies in Congress to craft legislation that will curb Big Tech's harmful business model.

We're Fairplay. ■

Our growing influence in Washington

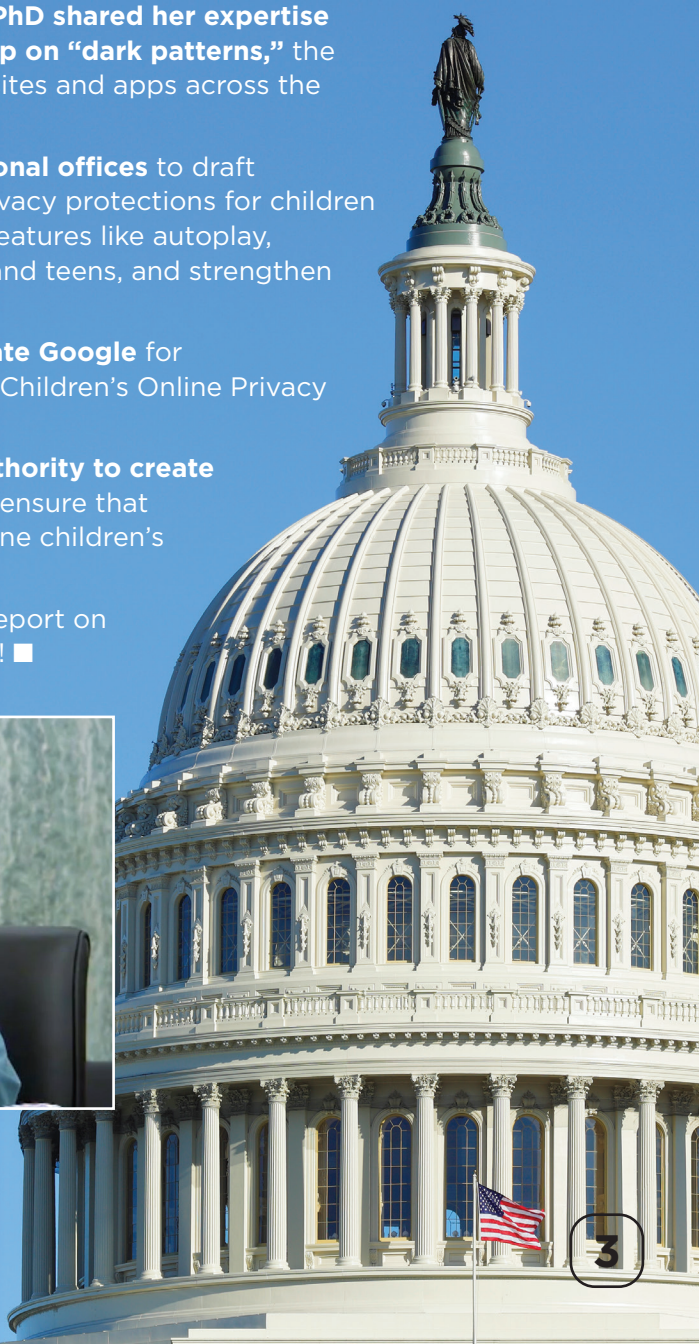
Increasingly, legislators and regulators are relying on Fairplay's expertise. Here's just some of what we accomplished in D.C. this year:

- After a year-long campaign led by Fairplay and our friends at the Center for Digital Democracy, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) announced a **groundbreaking FTC investigation of leading digital media companies and how they collect and use data from children and teens**. The investigation will reveal the details of Big Tech's secretive data collection practices and lay the groundwork for future regulation.
- **Fairplay Board Chair Angela Campbell, JD, testified before Congress** on the need for new regulations to protect kids when they use the internet. In her testimony, Angela explained how current laws and regulations haven't kept up with the rise of new technologies, leaving children vulnerable to manipulative marketers and a whole host of online risks.
- **Board member Criscillia Benford, PhD shared her expertise to a panel during the FTC's workshop on "dark patterns,"** the manipulative design baked into websites and apps across the internet.
- **We worked with several congressional offices** to draft legislation that will expand online privacy protections for children and teens, ban manipulative design features like autoplay, prohibit data-driven ads to children and teens, and strengthen federal student privacy law.
- Fairplay **asked the FTC to investigate Google** for recommending apps that violate the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act.
- **We called on the FTC to use its authority to create strong safeguards for kids online** to ensure that manipulative design doesn't undermine children's well-being and privacy.

In the coming year, we'll have more to report on our progress in Washington. Stay tuned! ■



Fairplay Board Chair Angela Campbell testifies before Congress on the need for updated privacy protections for children in May 2021.



A losing equation for kids

Since the beginning of the pandemic, almost every school in the US had online learning as part of its curricula. Unfortunately some of these platforms have taken advantage of families, exploiting parents’ desire to provide the best possible education for their children despite the challenges of remote learning.

Prodigy, a math game used by millions of students, parents, and teachers across the globe, is one of those platforms.

Prodigy, a math game for 1st through 8th graders, is designed to be played during the school day and at home. In the game, children create customized wizard characters to earn stars and prizes for winning math “battles,” finding treasure, and completing a variety of non-math challenges throughout the game.

But the really coveted prizes are reserved for those who have a pricey premium membership. Kids without memberships are relentlessly teased with the cool stuff they could have if their parents paid.

And not only is Prodigy’s claim that it is “free forever” simply not true, but the game creates new inequities in schools. Even when playing in school, children can see who has a membership and the best virtual prizes.

So, last February, Fairplay got to work filing a Federal Trade Commission complaint against Prodigy for its use of manipulative upselling tactics targeted at children. While Fairplay has filed complaints against entertainment apps for using manipulative design to push in-game purchases before, **this was the first time we — or anyone! — had called out an educational app for using unfair monetization practices.**

Twenty-one advocacy organizations signed onto our complaint and Senator Ed Markey and Representative Kathy Castor sent a letter of support to the FTC. We also met with attorneys general from across the nation to discuss our

action, and we created a resource for parents and educators, outlining seven reasons to say NO to Prodigy. The FTC is currently investigating our complaint and schools from as near as Woburn, Massachusetts and as far as Victoria, Australia blocked Prodigy from their list of approved programs! ■



Prodigy constantly shows kids the perks that come with a paid membership, which include cool pets and fancier prizes. Members can fly around on a cloud while non-members are forced to walk in the dirt.

“Something’s up when kids are putting a math game on their Christmas wish list.”

Nora Shine was suspicious. Week after week, her third-grader, Sabina, had been begging Nora to buy a membership for Prodigy, the math game she used in her Boxboro, MA classroom. Why did her daughter want to do math at home so badly? **When Sabina put Prodigy on her Christmas list, Nora knew it was time to investigate.**

She asked Sabina why she wanted a membership, and Nora was shocked by what she learned. Sabina explained that she needed a membership, and showed her mom all the perks that come with one: premium users can go more places, get extra points in battles, extra prizes, and fancier pets. After many more conversations and sessions of playing the game together, Sabina began to recognize the manipulative tricks the game was using on kids like her. “It’s unfair,” Sabina said.

Inspired by Fairplay’s track record of successful campaigns, Nora decided it was time to get Prodigy out of Sabina’s school, and asked us for help. “Fairplay offers the kind of credential and credibility behind my concern that, even though I’m a child psychologist, as an individual parent I didn’t have on my own,” Nora told us. With our backing, including an opportunity for Nora and Sabina to share their experience on our blog, and the news of our FTC complaint, Nora was able to successfully get Prodigy out of Sabina’s classroom. She even took it one step further and helped their school district create a policy that blocks manipulative marketing from being part of the school’s curriculum in any way!

“I don’t know how I could be successful without the backup from the importance that Fairplay gives to these issues,” Nora told us. **“Fairplay feels like a community of support from like-minded people and it also gives me information that I can use to advocate. That’s huge.”** ■



Nora Shine with daughter Sabina and dog Tilde at their Boxboro, Mass. home.



action network update

creating the resources you need

Our Children's Screen Time Action Network members and work groups have been busy filling our resource library with tools for families and professionals. Take a look at some of what we created below!



healthy screen habits for babies

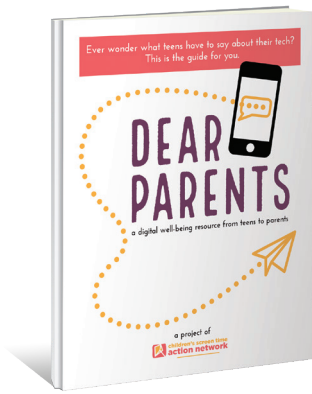
In partnership with the American Speech-Hearing-Language Association (ASHA), our Early Childhood Work Group created Be Tech Wise with Baby, a resource designed specifically for new and expecting parents. The resource aims to help families cultivate healthy screen time habits from the day the baby is born.

hands-on learning resource

As the EdTech industry booms and remote learning continues to impact children across the globe, we created our Teach over Tech blog, a product of our Screens in Schools Work Group. This is a space for educators, families, students, and other voices to shine in support of student-centered, hands-on learning!



After the tragic suicide of my 16-year-old son Carson from anonymous cyberbullying over Snapchat and related apps one year ago, I found myself completely lost and alone. I am so fortunate that I was connected with Children's Screen Time Action Network, an amazing organization that has been instrumental in providing me with a network of supportive professionals with extensive advocacy expertise.



talking screens with teens

Ever wonder what teens have to say about their tech? *Dear Parents* is a unique digital wellbeing resource written by teens for parents and other adult caregivers. Our teen volunteers shared their thoughts about screens, phones, and digital devices — and how they really want to relate with their parents about them!

impactful webinars

Our 9 webinars this year drew thousands of people from around the world, including a three-part series on EdTech in light of the pandemic, a discussion of the film *Coded Bias* and how racist algorithms impact our kids, and a webinar on mindfulness for caregivers!



building community in the action network

This has been our biggest and busiest year yet over at Fairplay’s Children’s Screen Time Action Network! Now totalling over 1500 members from all over the globe, our community is stronger than ever. Our seven volunteer-run work groups have continued to gather

regularly, create focused communities, amplify the individual work of the members, and collaborate on resources and advocacy, all in the name of children’s wellbeing.

We were thrilled to add two brand-new work groups this year! Our Interfaith Work Group supports people of all faith traditions that wish to explore how media is shaping children’s spiritual lives. The Cyberbullying and Online Safety Work Group aims to promote kids’ right to a safe digital media experience. Work group members recognize threats to kids’ health and safety from cyberbullying and unsafe social media “challenges,” and work to hold tech companies accountable, educate families and teachers, and more.



My need to connect with other like-minded parents whose children have suffered similar harm from social media was quickly met with the formation of the Cyberbullying and Online Safety Work Group that is dedicated to advocacy and education to provide a safer online experience for our children.

Kristin Bride

Advocate and member of the Cyberbullying and Online Safety Work Group



Helping families see through the hype

At Fairplay, we believe less tech and more hands-on, active play is most beneficial for young children. But, we also know that no tech, ever, is not a realistic solution for most families. And with so many conflicting messages and pressure to make the right choices, selecting appropriate media for preschoolers can be overwhelming!

So, this year, we created a comprehensive guide to help preschoolers’ families pare down the seemingly infinite options for apps, online videos, and internet-connected toys and smart speakers. Our Safe, Secure, & Smart series walks families through:

- how technology companies claim children learn from them;
- how these technologies actually impact preschoolers’ development;
- features to avoid;
- and how to set limits if you do decide to use a certain app, video platform, toy, or device.

Safe, Secure, & Smart meets families where they are by giving them the foundational knowledge of child development they need to think critically about choosing tech for their young children.

If you haven’t had a chance to check out our guides, companion checklists, or our Safe, Secure, & Smart webinar featuring experts Jenny Radesky, MD, and Roberta Golinkoff, PhD, you can do so by visiting fairplayforkids.org/safe-secure-smart.

This project was made possible by a generous grant from the Rose Foundation for Families & the Environment. ■



SAFE, SECURE, & SMART

A GUIDE TO CHOOSING TECH FOR YOUR PRESCHOOLER

Screen-Free Week 2021

After a pandemic-induced hiatus in 2020, Screen-Free Week was back this year! We invited people to celebrate however they could while keeping safe and healthy, whether that was committing to the whole week, a whole day, or just phone-free evenings. Thousands of families, whole schools, and even whole counties celebrated all over the globe!

The towns surrounding Pulaski, New York put on a regional celebration encouraging people to get outside.

Families did art projects, read books, and went on adventures. A school in Medford, New Jersey put on an essay and poster contest. And in collaboration with Children's Book Week, we hosted a giveaway of some of our favorite Screen-Free Week books, in which over 25 lucky families won some awesome summer reads. Parent Jeffrey Mattison told us, "By the end of the week, I was forgetting my phone at home and the kids were fighting less because there were no TV show choices or time to disagree on!" ■



Making Headlines

Fairplay has become a trusted voice in respected news outlets across the world with reporters seeking conversations with our staff to frame and support journalism about kids, media, and commercialism. Even in this last year, when the news was dominated by election and pandemic updates, Fairplay received more than 150 press mentions. Here are just a few highlights!

**Bloomberg
Law**

TikTok Draws FTC, DOJ Scrutiny Over Privacy, Group Says 7/17/20

THE HILL

Kids face greater online risks with COVID-19; will Congress act? 7/15/20

The New York Times

A Third of TikTok's U.S. Users May Be 14 or Under, Raising Safety Questions 8/14/20

The Washington Post

Kids used to love screen time. Then schools made Zoom mandatory all day long 9/4/20

AXIOS

What we overlooked in the switch to remote learning 9/20/20

The New York Times

Are 'Kidfluencers' Making Our Kids Fat? 10/30/20

salon

33 groups urge Biden to hold Big Tech accountable and keep industry allies out of his administration 12/1/20

**GOOD
MORNING
AMERICA**

TikTok introduces new protections for teen users 1/13/21

NBC NEWS

Child protection nonprofit alleges 'manipulative' upselling with math game Prodigy 2/19/21

REUTERS

Google's 'Teacher approved' apps mislead on kids' privacy, activists tell FTC 3/31/21

The Atlantic

The Dark Side of Box Tops for Education 4/7/21

The New York Times

Mark Zuckerberg is urged to scrap plans for an Instagram for children 4/15/21

BBC

Facebook urged to scrap Instagram for children plans 4/15/21

USA TODAY

Nix Facebook's plan to create Instagram for kids, state attorneys general urge CEO Mark Zuckerberg 5/10/21

The New York Times

Dozens of state prosecutors tell Facebook to stop its plans for a children's version of Instagram 5/10/21

Vox

YouTube's kids app has a rabbit hole problem 5/12/21

USA TODAY

Instagram for kids? Facebook urged to scrap plans as more than 180,000 sign petitions against it 5/25/21

THE HILL

'Fairplay' to launch campaign for children's online protection 6/23/21



Thank you to our volunteers!

We here at Fairplay would be remiss if we didn't thank our volunteers for their tireless work this year! We are so grateful to the leaders of our all-volunteer work groups at our Children's Screen Time Action Network: Sveta Pais, Mindy Holohan, Rhonda Moskowitz, Teodora Pavkovic, Seth Evans, Nadja Streiter, Joann Bogard, Lisa Honold, and Andrea Davis.

Jen Rand and Alhasan Almashyakhi have provided invaluable tech guidance to the Action Network, and research volunteer Lucy Kidwell has been a great help in our campaigns. Matthew Simpson helped immensely in creating the research foundation for our Safe, Secure, & Smart series.

Thank you to Aliza Kopans and Celine Bernhardt-Lanier for their continued work as youth advisors and the genius behind our Dear Parents resource, as well as Lisa Cline, who helped us get our Teach over Tech blog off the ground. We couldn't have done this without you! ■



Instagram for kids? No thanks!

Last March, *Buzzfeed News* broke some incredibly troubling news: Facebook was building a version of Instagram specifically for children under 13.

Plans for an Instagram Youth couldn't have come at a worse time. A year into the pandemic, children were desperate for IRL time with friends, space to play and imagine, and face-to-face learning. On top of that, an image-obsessed app that pushes children to obsessively check their devices is the last thing kids need!

Our plates were already overflowing, but we knew if we didn't organize a response to stand up to Facebook, no one else would. So we drafted a statement citing the most up-to-date research on the harmful effects of social media overuse and excessive screen time on children and teens. We created a powerful international coalition opposing Instagram for kids by mobilizing hundreds of our expert partners and fellow advocates to join us. Just days after the BuzzFeed story was

published, we were putting immense pressure on Facebook to scrap its plans as prominent outlets like *The New York Times* covered our concerns.

We didn't stop there. Just three weeks after our statement made headlines, we secured the support of 44 state attorneys general and four prominent members of Congress in our campaign against Instagram for kids, and hundreds of thousands of concerned citizens signed petitions asking Facebook to scrap the ill-conceived app!

Today, thanks to Fairplay, the pressure keeps mounting. As a result of our ongoing campaign, Facebook announced in September that it would be "pausing" its work on Instagram Youth. We applaud Facebook for listening to the many parents, experts, and advocates who have loudly and consistently told the company this app is a terrible idea. But, Fairplay won't stop until Facebook makes the pause permanent. The safest Instagram for kids is no Instagram at all! ■

We asked some of the folks who signed our petition against Instagram for kids about why they oppose the planned app. Here's what they had to say!



For the sake of my grandchildren, ages 13, 11, 8, and 4, and for all children, I am deeply concerned about an Instagram "just for them." There are already so many social-emotional pressures and opportunities for bullying as children grow during this time of ubiquitous social media.

I don't think there needs to be one more alluring but dangerous vehicle to influence children (and monetize them as well).

- Anne



I'm against the development of Instagram for kids because, as a user of Instagram myself, I am aware of the intentionally addictive design of the platform. As a mom of three, I'm conscious to set limits on how much time I spend using social media. I am already concerned about the rollout of Facebook Messenger Kids at this vulnerable time for our youth.

I feel that getting used to using these platforms paves the way for earlier dependence on social media. In light of the pandemic's widespread impact on the lives of children and families, I am discouraged by the predatory approach that Facebook is taking by proceeding with this project.

- Meryl



I am strongly against Instagram and a lot of social media and tech for kids. Here's why:

- It encourages screen time. All of these apps force kids to be in front of a screen and not in real life or nature.
- It creates a divide. They see what their friends have and they don't and that only divides us further apart because we feel like we are not alike.
- Let kids be kids and not manipulated by data.
- Privacy. I don't want the big companies mining and making profit off my kids, not now, not ever.

- Concerned Parent



Social media is a phenomena that can lead to bad socio-emotional consequences if not approached carefully. Since many adults demonstrably lack tools to control it properly (as proven by observing behavior on Twitter, Facebook and Reddit) it is not reasonable to expect that a child would be somehow able to manage it.

That is why I think Instagram but also Facebook, TikTok, and other digital socialization tools are not okay for children.

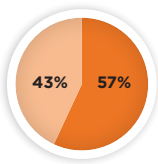
- Vladimir

Fairplay Financials as of July 1, 2021

INCOME

Grants*	\$ 352,000
Individual Donations	\$ 474,927
Honoraria and Book Sales	\$ 300
Paycheck Protection Program	\$ 267
Other Revenue	\$ 120
Total FY20 Income	\$ 827,614
Expenses	\$ 737,390
Net Increase/(Decrease)	\$ 90,224
Beginning Reserves	\$ 414,368
Net Assets FY20	\$ 504,592

INCOME

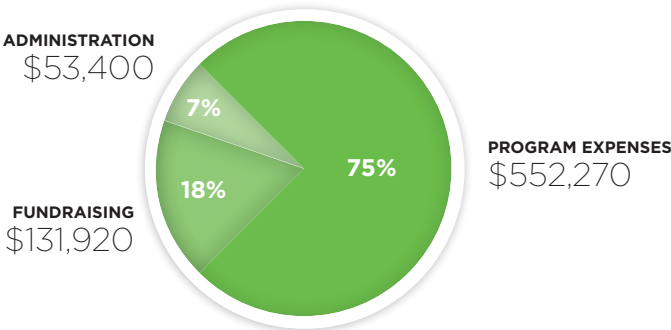


INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS

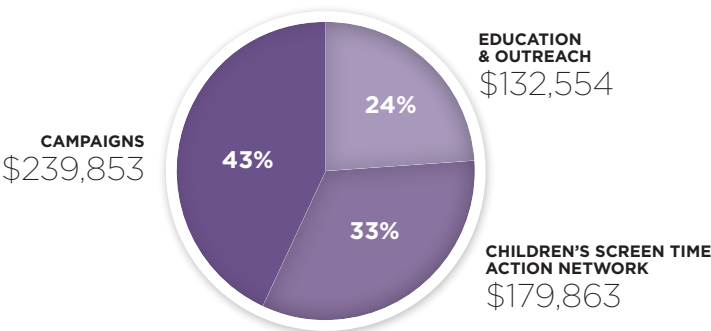
GRANTS*

*Includes \$292,000 from Oak Foundation awarded June 2021 for the period beginning July 1.

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$737,390



PROGRAM EXPENSES: \$552,270



Fairplay is fiscally sponsored by TSNE Mission Works. All of Fairplay's financial information can be accessed through TSNE's form 990.

Our Supporters

We are incredibly grateful for Fairplay supporters who are actively building a world where all kids get the commercial-free time and space they deserve. Below are our donors for FY21 (July 2020 - June 2021), without whom our work would not be possible.

Leadership Circle

\$250,000+

Oak Foundation

\$50,000+

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\$25,000 - \$49,999

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\$1,000 - \$2,499

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\$500 - \$999

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Criscellia Benford & Bill Softky
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in memory of Margot Boyd
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Nancy Freeman
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Joanna Hess
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Maud Winchester &
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Sarah Abrevaya Stein

\$100 - \$249

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Stanley Bak
Sanjeeve Balasubramaniam
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Ritu Bhatnagar
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in honor of my daughter
Montie Meehan
Kimberly Meyers-Wirtz
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in honor of Dr. Susan Linn
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in honor of Ben, Asa,
& Westley
Donald Waterbury
Muffie & Scott Waterman
Mr. Robert Webster
Lucy Weinstein
in honor of Juliana Cohen
Mark Weltner
Kevin Whelan
Sheli Wortis
Roland Young
Michael & Donna Zamonski

Up to \$100

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Erik Assadourian
Elle Ballinger
Sarah Batcheler
Ellen Bates-Brackett
in honor of Susan Linn
Connie Biewald
Eileen Blau
Robin Brooks
Brett Buzzanga
Sarene Caiazz
in memory of Akilah
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in memory of
Nick Cardillo & Nina Rossi
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Our Mission

Fairplay educates the public about commercialism’s impact on kids’ wellbeing and advocates for the end of child-targeted marketing.



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