Friends,

It’s remarkable to think about all that can happen in just a year.

At this time last year, momentum was starting to build for Fairplay. We announced our new name to rave reviews by our supporters, and we’d just secured a $1 million grant to launch our Designed with Kids in Mind campaign. We knew we had an exciting year ahead of us, but even we couldn’t anticipate just how much we would accomplish in just 365 days.

Our campaign to halt Meta’s version of Instagram for kids resulted in a “pause” that is looking more permanent every day; we testified before Congress about the risks of social media for young people; we grew from a team of six to ten with the addition of four incredible new staff members; and the online safety bills that we helped author have gone further in Congress than any other bills like them in nearly 25 years.

FY22 proved to be groundbreaking for our small but mighty organization—it was a year like no other. Now, we are the advocates putting a national spotlight on the harms created by Big Tech’s broken business model. From the pages of *The New York Times* to the halls of Congress, we are shaping the conversation around kids, tech, and commercialism. And we are (quite literally!) bigger than ever.

With this incredible year behind us, we have even more to look forward to in the year ahead: an exploration of the metaverse and its effects on young people; gathering our Action Network work group members in-person for the first time ever; and creating even more incisive research that gets to the roots of Big Tech’s bad business model.

But first, let’s celebrate the wins of the past year, together.

Thanks for all you do,

Josh Golin
Executive Director, Fairplay

Angela Campbell, JD
Board Chair, Fairplay

Angela

Josh

Executive Director, Fairplay
Putting the brakes on Instagram for kids

In March 2021, we found out some troubling news: Meta was planning to create a version of Instagram for younger children. We immediately went into action, building a coalition of hundreds of experts and advocates; leading members of Congress, and 44 state attorneys general; and hundreds of thousands of concerned parents, grandparents, caregivers, and individuals who agreed Instagram for kids was a terrible idea.

For six months, we led the charge to prevent this dangerous product from ever being released.

Then, our campaign got a huge boost. Privacy advocate and whistleblower Frances Haugen revealed that Meta was aware of how Instagram harms children and teens in myriad ways, despite publicly downplaying research that linked increased social media use and anxiety and depression. Even worse, Meta began planning its Instagram for kids platform after it was aware of how Instagram harms children and teens! The information revealed by Haugen also confirmed what Fairplay had been saying for months: Instagram for kids was part of Meta’s strategy to hook kids when they are young.

These revelations coupled with Fairplay’s relentless pressure got results: last September, Meta announced it would be “pausing” all work on its plans for Instagram for kids!

Since then, Fairplay has been committed to ensuring that that “pause” is permanent, and we’ve seen neither hide nor hair of Instagram for kids. Should Meta ever resume its plans, Fairplay will be here to make sure it doesn’t happen!
Getting the band back together

In October 2021, our small but mighty staff met in person at our Boston office for the first time since March 2020. With folks coming from all over the country, our reunion was a celebration of our hard work as well as a chance for us to tackle some visioning, team building, and to plan for new and ongoing advocacy in the coming year!

Then, in April, our board members arrived in Boston for two days of connection and collaboration, with an aim of advancing Fairplay’s work against targeted marketing to children. Our board members traveled from as far as Spain and California and each brought along their deep passion for and commitment to Fairplay’s mission. From visioning sessions to board development workshops, the meeting brought our staff and board closer than ever.

Fairplay research holds Big Tech accountable

This year, Fairplay dove even deeper into the details of Big Tech’s crooked business model and the costs it incurs to kids and teens’ wellbeing.

In November, research led by Elena Yi-Ching Ho of Reset Australia and our Rys Farthing demonstrated that Facebook continued to use surveillance advertising to market to teenagers, despite Meta’s claims that it would no longer allow advertisers to selectively target teens just months before. Our findings sparked outrage and as a result, we led an international coalition of 47 public health, privacy, child rights, and environmental and consumer advocates in calling on Facebook to live up to its promise and stop all surveillance advertising directed at young people. Senator Cynthia Lummis even held up our report in a tense moment with Instagram CEO Adam Mosseri in December as he was grilled by Congress about his platform’s impacts on young people!

Our April report revealed even more shocking information: Meta is making millions of dollars from pushing pro-eating disorder content to minors as young as 9 on Instagram. Even worse, Instagram’s algorithmic amplification is helping to grow this content’s reach. Our report, Designing for Disorder: Instagram’s Pro-eating Disorder Bubble, analyzed a pro-eating disorder “bubble” on the app consisting of 153 popular accounts that celebrate “thinspiration” or “bonespiration,” and the 90,000 users that follow three or more of these accounts.

The accounts post content such as positive imagery of extremely underweight people or other eating disorder memes. Most distressingly, our report revealed that 33.75% of the accounts in this bubble are underage. Our report caused a stir in the news and in Congress, where key legislation was up for debate. Following the publication of our report, Senators Ed Markey and Richard Blumenthal and Representatives Kathy Castor and Lori Trahan sent a letter to Meta demanding answers.

“At the height of my eating disorder, I used social media as a fuel for my obsession with weight loss. The content recommended to me of perfect toned bodies and tips for weight loss motivated me to continue when I was at my worst. It was up to me to actively try and change my social media feeds—I had to do the hard work.

Even now, I have to take active steps to stop the algorithm recommending this content—Instagram pushes me towards this content, and I have to actively pull myself away from it.” — Kelsey Wu, eating disorder survivor and activist
Giving EA Games a yellow card

In the massively popular video game FIFA: Ultimate Team, users build soccer teams made up of real-world players and compete against each other in virtual live, online matches. But unlike friendly real-life soccer games, FIFA: Ultimate Team is filled with manipulative design features pushing users to constantly spend money for in-game loot boxes that give users a competitive advantage in the game. Because of that, we here at Fairplay think it’s more suitable to call this game FIFA: Ultimate Scam!

Loot boxes like the ones in FIFA: Ultimate Team are a major source of revenue for the video game industry, generating 15 billion US dollars in 2020 alone. They’re also an insidious and manipulative cash grab that encourage gambling-like behavior in underage gamers. In FIFA: Ultimate Team, users are relentlessly advertised FIFA Packs, a loot box consisting of mystery players which may or may not provide their team with a significant boost. FIFA Packs abstract the actual cost of purchases and skew the probability of actually getting a coveted pack. In order to unlock a specific desirable player in the game, users would have to pay about $14,000 or spend three years continuously playing the game!

These odds are hard to beat and harder to understand, even for adults. For the kids and teens playing FIFA: Ultimate Team, their developmental vulnerabilities leave them unable to comprehend how they’re being manipulated. Young gamers haven’t yet developed sophisticated financial literacy skills, have little understanding of the miniscule odds of getting a desired pack, and are driven by the fear of missing out on online matches with their friends.

So, last June, Fairplay took Electronic Arts—the maker of FIFA: Ultimate Team—to task for their manipulative practices! Citing research from our friends at the Norwegian Consumer Council, we outlined the unfair and deceptive nature of loot boxes in FIFA: Ultimate Team in a letter to the Federal Trade Commission. We’ll be keeping an eye out in the months ahead to see if the FTC agrees that EA deserves a yellow card for their unfair practices.
Another groundbreaking year for our Action Network!

In its fourth year, our Screen Time Action Network brought together over 1,800 professionals, parents, and practitioners from around the world to collaborate and advocate for change. The Network’s volunteer membership remained extremely active, especially our 7 work groups dedicated to fighting for children’s rights in the digital age, including:

- Screens in Schools
- Early Childhood
- Cyberbullying and Online Safety
- Parent Support
- Mental Health
- Interfaith
- Nature & Play (new!)

In February, over 75 religious leaders representing Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Interfaith, Humanist, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, Sikh, and Spiritualist traditions signed on to our Interfaith Work Group’s letter to Mark Zuckerberg calling on Meta to scrap plans to launch a version of Instagram for children under 13. Garnering international attention, this letter pushed Meta to stall their scheme for the new app.

Nature as an antidote in our new work group

This year, the Network launched the Nature and Play work group. The group focuses on helping kids develop a stronger relationship with nature as an antidote to media dependence and connects by sharing high-quality videos and articles about the link between screen time and nature deficit disorder.

Bringing the experts to you

Bringing in participants from all over the world, our webinar series Action Network Live! offers real solutions to real problems. One highlight: guest Johann Hari joined Jean to discuss his book, Stolen Focus in March. Throughout the year, we were also joined by experts to discuss screen time across multiple households, cyberbullying, and nature-based education initiatives.

Supporting the next generation of digital wellness leaders

In April, we launched NextGen Connect, a new mentoring program to support young thought leaders who are striving to improve the digital landscape and reduce screen time for their peers.

Our first cohort of NextGen Connect mentees arrived at orientation in May, where they were paired with the Action Network experts they’d be working with over the three month program. Spanning six different time zones and seven countries, this group of passionate people set big goals for their summer collaborations! The program culminated in a final project presentation to Fairplay staff and our Action Network advisory board. We’re so excited to see how these young leaders shape the future of digital wellbeing for generations to come!

Unthinkable stories big tech doesn’t want to tell

In March, members of our Cyberbullying and Online Safety work group collaborated with Joni Siani of NoAppforLife to create a special podcast series called The Harms.

The three-part series highlighted the harrowing stories of three families who have lost their children to cyberbullying and online challenges. Work group members also played huge roles in advocating for both state and federal legislation that would help create a safe internet for all kids.
Supporter Spotlight

When Deb Schmill first reached out to us at Fairplay, she was seeking change. Deb’s 18-year-old daughter Becca died in September 2020 from an accidental drug overdose—drugs laced with fentanyl that she accessed on social media after experiencing sexual assault and cyberbullying. As a tool for healing and generating solutions, Deb founded the Becca Schmill Foundation, which builds awareness around social media harms that lead to substance abuse and funds research and policy change. Upon hearing her story, we connected her with the Cyberbullying and Online Safety Work Group at our Screen Time Action Network. There, Deb both inspired others and gained inspiration. “My relationship with the staff at Fairplay and volunteers in the Action Network has been a source of comfort, support, and learning over the past year, for which I am extremely grateful,” Deb told us.

Throughout her time as an Action Network member, Deb has gained traction in her mission—from sharing Becca’s story on The Harms podcast, to appearing on Today, to speaking to California legislators about the need to regulate Big Tech. But, most of all, she has found a community.

“You hate to see other people living with similar tragedies, but it is comforting to not feel alone in this. I think that has been one of the most affirming aspects of participating in the Action Network. It’s a community of parents and professionals who have an understanding of the pain and loss my family has experienced, and who are dedicated to fighting to protect children.”

Deb’s mission to make sure no one else experiences Becca’s tragedy is one that we here at Fairplay share. “We are experiencing a growing movement that no longer accepts that social media companies can continue to addict and harm our children for profit,” said Deb. “In this way, I am confident that we will see the change that needs to happen.”

With support from advocates like Deb, we are, too.

“Volunteering with the Action Network has made it possible for me, and others, to share our stories in ways that otherwise would not have been possible.”

Deb Schmill

Becca Schmill in 2018.

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. Here are just a few highlights of our press mentions!

- Virtual Pre-K Filled a Void for ‘Overwhelmed’ Parents This Year, But Experts Disagree About Its Role — and Federal Funding — in a Post-Pandemic World
  - July 14, 2021

- Instagram’s privacy changes: Will they actually keep creepy adults away from young users?
  - July 27, 2021

- Social Platforms Feel Policy Pressure on Teen Privacy Controls
  - August 16, 2021

- Facebook under fire over secret teen research
  - September 15, 2021

- Facebook Delays Instagram App for Users 13 and Younger
  - September 27, 2021

- Facebook grilled by Senate over company’s impact on kids
  - September 30, 2021

- Facebook unveils new controls for kids using its platforms
  - October 10, 2021

- Will Eliminating Quantitative Popularity On Instagram Actually Make It Safe For Kids?
  - October 15, 2021

- Republican and Democrat Lawmakers Step Up Efforts to Adopt Tougher Tech Laws
  - October 19, 2021

- Documents reveal Facebook targeted children as young as 6 for consumer base
  - October 29, 2021

- Children’s advocacy groups want the U.S. to follow U.K. teen privacy rules
  - December 2, 2021

- The Era of the Celebrity Meal
  - December 8, 2021

- Even The Clergy Think Instagram’s Kids App Is A Bad Idea
  - February 8, 2022

- California Bill Aims to Make Tech Firms Liable for Social-Media Addiction in Children
  - March 15, 2022

- FTC to set its sights on ed tech companies
  - May 19, 2022

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Deb Schmill

Becca Schmill in 2018.
Screen-Free Week 2022

“In the beginning, I didn’t think I was going to be able to avoid screens, but now, I believe you can do anything if you put your mind into it.” — Middle school student, NY

This year, thousands of people unplugged for a week of rest, creativity, and intention. Over 20,000 people celebrated Screen-Free Week, with events held all around the world—from Scotland to Nicaragua to the American Midwest! We were thrilled to see the diversity and variety of celebrations this year. Some families spent the week on the beach, at the library, or in their own backyards. Often, schools and communities spearhead the celebration; in fact, one Wisconsin community hosted over 15 Screen-Free Week events this year!

Celebrating SFW in unique ways

Making baby quilts
Taking Grammie out to lunch
Attending a church bonfire
Playing with Legos
Reading, reading, reading!
Practicing the flute
Roasting hot dogs over the fire
Celebrating Mother’s Day
Pajama storybook night
Swimming in creeks and lakes
Building forts
Designing fairy houses
Playing with dolls
Horseback riding
Drawing/making art
Flag football
Going to the zoo
Rock painting
Scavenger hunts
Hiking by candlelight
Playing with puppies
Spending time with friends
Attending an art show
Looking through a telescope
Barbecuing and ice cream!
Racing through obstacle courses
Planting flowers
Celebrating Cinco de Mayo
Dancing in the park
Visiting museums

In New York, Ms. Zalewski’s middle school class celebrated Screen-Free Week

All 43 students decreased their screen time dramatically, with 21 going completely screen-free! Here’s what her students shared:

“This week taught me that my life isn’t my phone.”

“This week taught me that you can find out a lot of things you are capable of doing if you are not glued to a screen!”

“I felt more free...sometimes videos (and other things) might make people upset, mad, or even jealous, but when you don’t see the negative things, it makes you feel good.”

“I think you should do this with your class next year because it shows who you really are inside.”

“This week has taught me discipline and finding my own joy with things other than a screen in my face.”

“I felt like the days were longer and happier.”

“We added some spectacular new books to our annual Screen-Free Week Book list

Dozens of people from around the country received copies in our book giveaway, like The Day the Screens Stood Still, Go Out and Play, Chandu and the Super Set of Parents, and many more! ■
INCOME

Grants $531,285
Individual Donations $810,546
Honoraria and Book Sales $2,000
Total FY22 Income $1,343,885

Expenses $1,315,666
Net Increase/(Decrease) $28,219
Beginning Reserves $248,250
Net Assets FY22 $276,469

Fairplay Financials as of July 1, 2022

INCOME

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 2021 – June 2022), without whom our work would not be possible.

Leadership Circle

$250,000+
The Christy & John Mack Foundation • Oak Foundation
$100,000 - 249,999
The Edelman Family Foundation • The Omidyar Network
$50,000 - 99,999
Jacaranda Fund • Ranae DeSantis

Champions

$25,000 - 49,999
Anonymous
Church Communities Foundation
Matt Damon
Patricia Sauer
Stephanie Morrissey

$10,000 - 24,999
Anonymous
Kathie & Chip Masarie
Liz Mcdermott
Jason Nickelson
Danielle Oristian York
Sveta Pais in honor of
The Action Network

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Sveta Pais in honor of
The Action Network

Fairplay is fiscally sponsored by TSNE Mission Works. All of Fairplay’s financial information can be accessed through TSNE’s form 990.
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Marcus Sibert
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Judy Taylor
Carla Wallace
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Renee & Tim Aldinger
Katherine Anderson
Linda Barnes in memory of
Clifford Crain
Alex Benn
Kent Borges & Stephanie DiCenzo
Alice Brofman in honor of
Alice Golin on her 80th birthday
Lawrence Brown
Sam Brown
Blakely Bundy
Geralyn Bywater
Hilary Cash
Marie Cheney
Kate Clark in honor of
Cambridge-Ellis School Leadership Team
Richard Cohen
Evelia Cruz
Dante Moreira
Lynn Davey
Shara Drew
Ingrid Espinosa
Josie Etheart & Jay Feldman
Eric Euvrard
Sharon Febo
Nancy Fleming in honor of
Lauren Paer
Florez Family
Paul Franz
Stefanie Fuhr
Andrea Gambardella
Ginny Garin
Tammy & Chris Garin
Dylan Garrett
m. Scott Tyson
Jacob Waldbauer
Donald Waterbury
Mufie & Scott Waterman
Mark Weitzen
Enid Wetzner
Sharon Winkler in memory of
Alex Peiser
Shel Woris
Michael & Donna Zamorski
Katie Zorn in honor of
John C Mack

Up to $100
Anonymous
Paul Abrinko
Ellen Adler in honor of
Susan Linn
Girishil Alamuri
Erik Assadourian
Nicol Auckerman
in memory of Melissa
Sarah Batchler
Peter Beyersdorf
Stacy Brown in honor of
Blake Brown-Goldner
Poonam Chhabria

Ramon Monras-Sender
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Brigid & Bob Murphy
Douglas Murphy
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Marion Odell
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Gerry Shapiro
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Beth Steeves
Catherine Steiner-Adair
Deana Stevens
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Lonna & Lou Thom
Jaime Thompson
Sara Tirschwell
Amy & Scott Tyson
Jacob Waldbauer
Donald Waterbury
Mufie & Scott Waterman
Mark Weitzen
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Sharon Winkler in memory of
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Katie Zorn in honor of
John C Mack

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Rosemary Clough
William Conaway
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Susan Danowitz
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Julie Dobrow
Niles Donegan
Andrea Doukas & Richard Behrman
Judith Doyle
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Ben Dunlap
Anne Olcott
Wally Elton
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The Farina Family
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Susan Linn
Faith Garfield
Mary Sheila Garin
Mark Grotzke
Elizabeth Grushkin in honor of
Harrison & Truman
Jennifer Haefeli
Cindy Hamilton
Hugh Hanley in memory of
Eleanor Lewis
Mona Harley
Dyanne Harshman
Nancy Hartman
Julia Hartung
Harriet Heath, MD
Denise Hingle
Ellen Honnet
Horwitz Charitable Fund
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Michelle Husain
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Sonja Johansson
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Lucas & Ronni Kamal
Joyce Daniels
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Tim Kasser
Terri Keaveny
Christina Kennedy
Tiger Keogh
Marianne Keuning Muhi
Christina Kennedy
Katherine Myers in honor of
Jean Rogers for her steadfast
dedication to children!
Margaret Myren
Lina Nealon in memory of
Saule Sidrys
Randee Norwood
Jana Odette
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Marcia Schreier
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Joan Spoerl & Ken Saksie
Shoni Things in honor of
children across the world
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Anne Trapani
Rhoda Trietsch in honor of
Susan Linn
Don Webb, PhD in honor of
his grandchildren
Scott Weber

Sheli Wortis
Sharon Winkler in memory of
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Shel Woris
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Lisa Price
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William Conaway
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Niles Donegan
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Ben Dunlap
Anne Olcott
Wally Elton
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Susan Linn
Faith Garfield
Mary Sheila Garin
Mark Grotzke
Elizabeth Grushkin in honor of
Harrison & Truman
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Eleanor Lewis
Mona Harley
Dyanne Harshman
Nancy Hartman
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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.