



fairplaysm
childhood beyond brands

Annual Report
July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023





Friends,

When Fairplay was founded more than 20 years ago, many people viewed our mission as a narrow one. But now, thanks to our work, our supporters, and an abundance of scientific proof, the harm caused to children by Big Tech's advertising-supported business model is considered one of the most important issues of our time.

In this new environment, our fight for safeguards to protect our children when they're online—and help them get the offline time they need to thrive—has moved to the biggest stages. We have been passionately advocating in Congress for the Kids Online Safety Act and the Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act—and both bills have advanced further than any similar legislation in the last 25 years. At the Federal Trade Commission, where Fairplay is the leading organization advocating on behalf of kids, our filings are not only making headlines but leading to real changes in how Big Tech platforms treat our children. And from state houses around the country to the US Supreme Court, we are at the center of the debate about how to regulate the companies that our harming our kids.

All of this momentum is made possible by you, our supporters. Your donations have helped us triple our budget in just a few years, allowing us to deepen our work, try new strategies, and position ourselves as leaders in this field. Our parent activists have told their stories over and over to the media and members of Congress, allowing us to move our policy agenda further than ever. And our Screen Time Action Network members are creating game-changing resources, like our *Screen Aware Early Childhood Action Kit*, which has been distributed to thousands of early childhood centers around the country.

However you support Fairplay and our growing movement, thank you. As you'll see in these pages, together we are making a real difference.



Angela Campbell, JD
Board Chair, Fairplay



Josh Golin
Executive Director, Fairplay



Creating the internet kids need

We know that laws are needed to rein in Big Tech's business model of manipulative design because it creates so many online risks for young people. So, this year, the Fairplay-led Designed with Kids in Mind coalition continued our advocacy campaign to ensure that kids will have safer experiences online and to help children get the offline time that is so critical to healthy development.

In July, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation advanced the bipartisan Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) and the Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA 2.0). KOSA requires that Big Tech companies put the needs of children first when designing their online apps and platforms, while COPPA 2.0 prevents online companies from collecting data of children under 17. For years, Fairplay has been actively involved in getting both bills to be as strong as possible. In fact, our Executive Director Josh Golin testified before Congress in support of these online protections. We are thrilled that these bills are progressing so quickly. ■



Executive Director Josh Golin testified before Congress in support of these online protections for children and teens. We're excited to see wide bipartisan support for creating a better, safer internet for young people.



Our aims for a better, safer, less exploitative internet for kids and teens also resonates with the President. In his February 2023 State of the Union address, President Biden called for bipartisan legislation to ban Big Tech from advertising to children online and prohibit digital content providers from collecting personal data on our kids.



In state news, California enacted the Age-Appropriate Design Code (AADC) in September 2022. The law requires online providers to set default settings to the most private, to consider the protection of children when designing any digital product or service, and to refrain from using data about kids in any way.

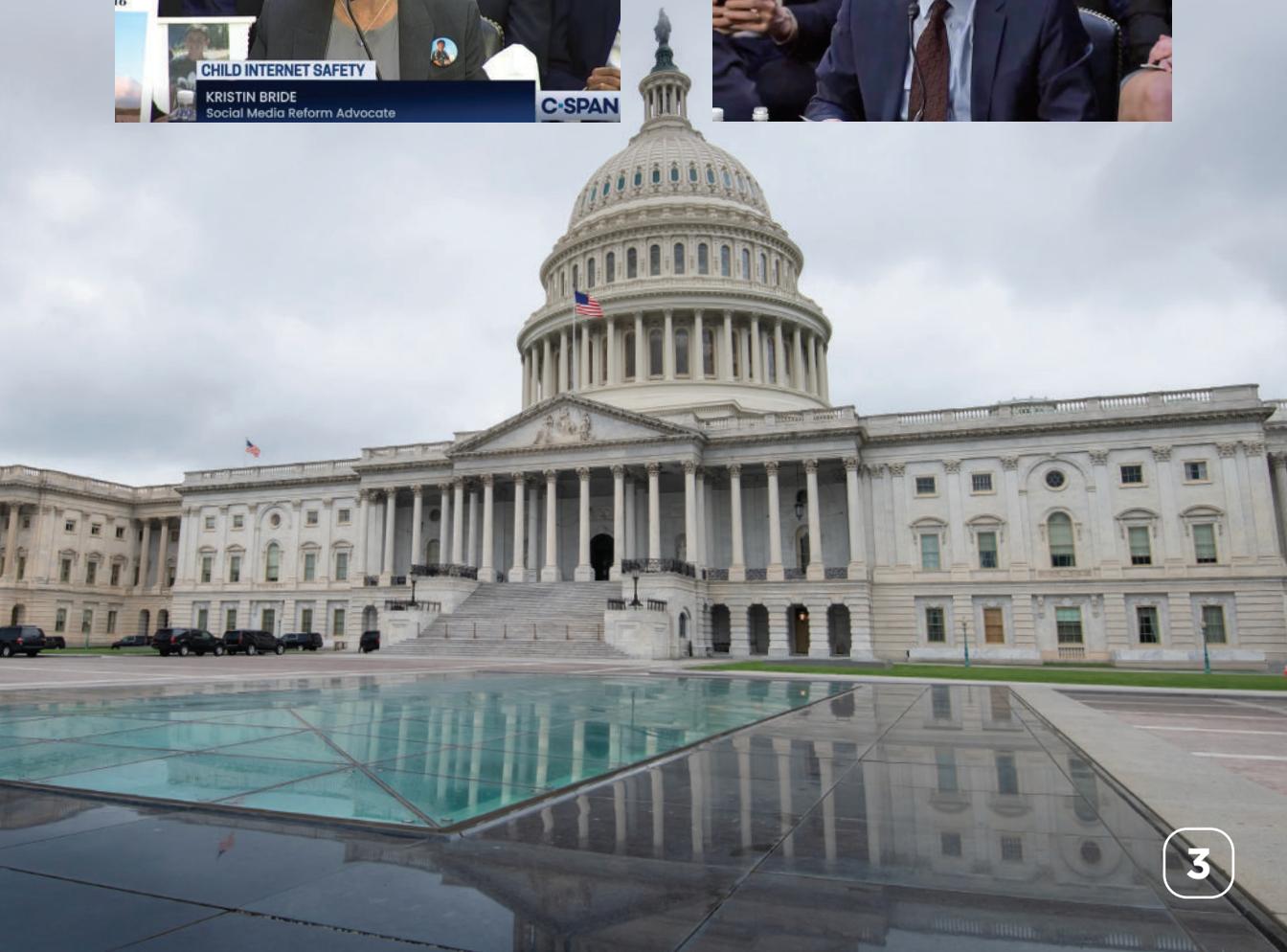
Fairplay brings the facts to Congress

In February, for the second year in a row, our Josh Golin testified before Congress about the significant harms caused by Big Tech’s business model. He also made recommendations on how Congress can reduce the online risks to our children.

At the Senate Judiciary Committee’s hearing on protecting children online, Josh testified that the goal of the Big Tech algorithms that choose content for young users is to maximize profit without any regard for children’s wellbeing. “The resulting impact on children and families has been devastating,” he said in his testimony. “Compulsive overuse, exposure to harmful and age-inappropriate content, cyberbullying, eating disorders, harms to mental health, and the sexual exploitation of children are just some of the problems linked to Big Tech’s insidious business model.”

Also testifying was Kristin Bride, a member of our Action Network’s Online Harms Prevention group and the mother of Carson, who died by suicide at the age of sixteen after vicious anonymous cyberbullying. Kristin said that such tragedies are the direct result of products designed to hook and monetize America’s children.

Josh emphatically called on Congress to enact legislation that expands privacy protections for young people and requires online operators to prioritize children’s wellbeing in their design choices. ■



Our original research

In September, we released new research investigating risky online challenges in a report called *Dared by the Algorithm: Dangerous challenges are just a click away*. This report explored two dangerous trends: car surfing—where people are filmed standing or riding on top of a moving car—and train surfing—where people ride on the top or outside of trains. The research shows how readily the algorithms on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube show videos of these well-known trends to a research account registered as a 14 year-old boy.

Then, in June, we released *Unfair Impacts: How LGBTQIA+ Youth are Disproportionately Harmed by Online Platform Design Decisions*, which revealed the serious harms facing LGBTQIA+ youth online as a result of manipulative social media platform design, including compulsive use and increased exposure to pro-eating disorder content, drug content, and more. Our report documents how LGBTQIA+ youth experience a disproportionate amount of risk on the internet as compared to their straight cisgender peers.

Both reports shed light on the relentless manipulative tactics Big Tech uses to make money off teens and added to the increasing number of research studies that support the need for design code legislation. ■

Dared by the Algorithm:

Dangerous challenges are just a click away

SEPTEMBER 2022



Unfair Impacts:

How LGBTQIA+ Youth are Disproportionately Harmed by Online Platform Design Decisions

JUNE 2023



FP in DC

This year, we continued to petition the Federal Trade Commission to use its power to rein in Big Tech’s bad business model. Along with our friends at the Center for Digital Democracy, Fairplay led a coalition of 19 other advocacy groups in urging the FTC to prohibit tech companies from using manipulative design practices to keep kids online and “engaged.”

Engagement-maximizing design fuels some of the worst risks to kids and teens online today. When young people can’t put down a game or log off a social media platform thanks to endless scroll and autoplay, they become far more likely to encounter harmful digital content. More time online increases the likelihood that kids will encounter advertising messages that promote a negative body image; online bullies, age-inappropriate material; sexual exploitation; algorithmically-induced FOMO; and content that encourages dangerous challenges.

We also filed an amicus brief (our first-ever!) in the United States Supreme Court case *Gonzalez v. Google LLC*. In our brief, we urged the Court not to expand publisher immunity to include Google’s algorithmic content recommendations. To do otherwise would insulate Google from liability for damage caused by its algorithmic promotion of inappropriate or dangerous content.

As we look ahead, we’re excited by the prospects of our growing power in the nation’s capital. ■



Powerful parents demand change

In late 2022, 57 parents whose children died as a result of social media harms sent a letter to congressional leaders urging them to pass legislation to protect children online. Organized by Fairplay, ParentsTogether Action, and the Eating Disorders Coalition, the letter emphasized that despite attentive parenting, the risks created by Big Tech's focus on profits above platform safety were impossible for parents to address on an individual level. The lack of meaningful regulation coupled with the mental health crisis plaguing teens has created an emergency that must be addressed, according to the parent advocates.

These parents had lost their children to dangerous online "challenges," to suicide after relentless cyberbullying, and to accidental overdose and fentanyl poisoning from drugs purchased through social media.

In November, Fairplay and our friends at ParentsTogether and the Eating Disorders Coalition organized a trip to Washington, D.C. to meet with lawmakers and urge them to pass legislation that would create essential protections for children online. Joining us to tell their stories were eleven grieving moms whose children had lost their lives or were seriously harmed by social media.

For two days, these moms went from meeting to meeting with members of Congress, White House officials, and FTC commissioners. They told their children's stories, and what they were like before they encountered online harms like racist cyberbullying, the "Choking Challenge," and adults offering them drugs through social media. They described their extensive efforts to keep their children safe online and how those efforts were undermined by Big Tech prioritizing profits over children's best interests. In many instances, the harmful content that cost children their lives was recommended by the platform, not something these kids actively sought out.

The lawmakers we met with were incredibly moved by these parents' stories, and in just two days, we were able to secure the support of key members of Congress for KOSA and COPPA 2.0. ■





During our parent activists' visit to Washington, Kristin Bride, a member of our Online Harms Prevention work group, appeared on CNN in an interview with Jake Tapper.

Kristin shared the story of her 16-year-old son Carson, who was the victim of vicious cyberbullying through Snapchat and anonymous apps. Tragically, he died by suicide in the wake of this relentless digital abuse.

Kristin zealously advocates for Congress to pass legislation like the Kids Online Safety Act in order to impose a duty of care on Big Tech to keep America's children safe online.



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!

FORTUNE

Children's group hits out at TikTok's 'design discrimination' for minors in certain countries July 2022

AP Associated Press

Snapchat and other social media offer parents more controls. But do they help? August 2022

The Washington Post

California lawmakers pass landmark children's online safety bill August 2022

THE HILL

Why 'sharenting' is sparking real fears about children's privacy September 2022

NEWYORKPOST

Big Tech wants your kid to be its consumer, even if it harms them October 2022

The New York Times

Children's Groups Want F.T.C. to Ban 'Unfair' Online Manipulation of Kids November 2022

The Washington Post

'Fortnite' maker Epic settles child privacy case, agrees to make refunds December 2022

AP Associated Press

Report: TikTok boosts posts about eating disorders, suicide December 2022

Psychology Today

5 Ways Parents Can Keep Kids Safe Online January 2023

AP Associated Press

School lawsuits over social media harm face tough legal road January 2023

C-SPAN

The FTC went after Fortnite. Now, the video game industry is on watch February 2023

Tech Policy Press

Transcript: Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on "Protecting Our Children Online" February 2023

The Washington Post

Advocates urge U.S. not to offer 'Big-Tech-favored terms' in trade talks March 2023

WALL STREET JOURNAL

Mothers Power New Drive to Make Social-Media Firms Accountable for Harms April 2023

CBS NEWS

School districts file lawsuits against social media companies, alleging harm to students April 2023

POLITICO

White House raises alarm on risks of social media for kids. The Biden administration announced a new task force to study negative mental health impacts of social media among youth. May 2023

CNN

First on CNN: Pornhub asks users and Big Tech for help as states adopt age verification laws June 2023

Checking in with our Screen Time Action Network

reuniting and recommitting

Last October, Fairplay's Screen Time Action Network held its first in-person gathering in four years! A mass collaboration, celebration, and opportunity for learning, our Action Network Summit brought together child development specialists, psychologists, pediatricians, tech experts, parents, activists, and academics to work together, share successes, and multiply motivation.

Breakout sessions addressed EdTech, mental health, legislation, and Work Group priorities. Additionally, the Solutions Showcase enabled members to learn about colleagues' accomplishments in these areas as well as best practices. Ideas were generated and concrete action steps planned.

Fairplay founder Susan Linn closed the summit by delivering a compelling presentation on the state of marketing to children in 2022, based on her newest book, *Who's Raising the Kids?*

By coming together as a community, we were able to share our thoughts, learn from each other, and plan to achieve more together to reduce excessive screen use and keep kids safe online.





action network experts in your living room

Our *Action Network Live!* webinars continue to resonate with families and professionals alike. Hosted by Jean Rogers, director of Action Network, they feature experts who truly know families, children, and tech. For an hour, practitioners glean insights for their clients, and parents receive practical advice to use at home.



Our January webinar featured Susan Linn, Fairplay's founder and the author of *Who's Raising the Kids?* Susan described how the business model of Big Tech and marketing companies come between you and your kids. Susan and Jean also addressed the effects that screens have on young children, particularly during the years when values, habits, and character are developing.

In May, Dr. David Walsh and Erin Walsh, authors of *Why Do They Act That Way?* discussed the teenage brain and its relationship to the risks and rewards inherent in digital activities.

our members in action

So many of our members are taking action on their own to support our mission! Here are just a few examples:



Scilla Andreen, filmmaker of *Like: A Documentary About the Impact of Social Media on Our Lives and Screenagers*, is working to distribute the Screen Aware Early Childhood Action Kit throughout California public schools.



Jennifer Joy Madden attended the Infant Mental Health Summit in Dublin, Ireland and gathered with interested parties to plan how to raise awareness of the effects of infant/toddler screen exposure.



Lisa Cline, co-chair of the Screens in Schools Work Group drafted and helped pass a resolution for the Montgomery County, MD school district that limits screen time in classrooms unless it provides an educational benefit.



Dr. Hilarie Cash traveled to Kenya with Action Network Youth Advisor Ryan Huh to learn how screens are impacting the culture and education there.

To learn about other members' activism, check out Fairplay's weekly *News You Can Use* digest!



supporting young children's development

A major accomplishment by our Action Network this year was the development and launch of our *Screen Aware Early Childhood*

Action Kit, a resource created by Fairplay's Early Childhood Work Group in response to practitioners' request for research-based educational materials. The kit outlines the ways that screen time in the early years can be detrimental to a child's healthy development, as well as evidence-based guidance for caregivers on managing screen use by and around children from birth until at least age eight.

Created by a multidisciplinary team of child development experts, speech pathologists, educators, and parents, the kit features research-based fact sheets, ready-to-print signs promoting screen awareness, and customizable letter templates for spreading the word. And true to its name, the action kit includes simple strategies for creating healthy screen habits for young children!

Designed for parents, teachers, schools, daycare providers, and other caregivers, the kit includes:

- Guidance for prioritizing healthy child development in a screen-saturated world;
- Strategies for managing screen use (for children and adults);
- Research-based information on the impacts of screen technologies; and
- Resources for promoting screen awareness at home and in the classroom.

The response has been exciting: the Vermont Department of Health has plans to share the action kit with school nurses, pediatricians, and family practitioners throughout the state!

uplifting the next generation of digital activists

For years, we've heard from young adults who want to improve the digital landscape for future generations. So, last spring, the Screen Time Action Network launched a pilot mentoring program called NextGen Connect for thought leaders ages 18 to 26. Our mission is to provide youth leaders with the resources they need to educate and advocate for a healthier digital environment.



The first cohort was an enormous success! Throughout the 12-week program, participants came up with solutions and ideas about how to keep kids safer online—through legislation, education, and holding Big Tech accountable. Each person collaborated with an expert in their area of interest and ultimately presented a final project to our advisory board.

We're happy to report that we just received funding from the Responsible Tech Youth Power Fund for the second cohort of NextGen Connect youth leaders in 2024. We look forward to meeting and collaborating with future leaders in the movement to create the internet young people need!

Meta's manipulative metaverse marketing

In February, a leaked memo published in *The Wall Street Journal* revealed that Meta was planning to allow 13- to 17-year-olds on its virtual reality platform, Horizon Worlds. In their words, they simply want to serve the “true digital citizens of the metaverse.”

But we didn't fall for Meta's attempt to create their own reality. Meta's plan to expand access to its metaverse—a platform rife with sexually explicit insults and racist, misogynistic, and homophobic harassment—shows an absolute disregard for the wellbeing of teens. The company's push to increase engagement among teen users isn't about doing what's right for young people. Instead, this is simply an attempt to save Meta's failing multibillion dollar investment in virtual reality!

So, this April, joined by our friends at the Center for Countering Digital Hate and the Center for Digital Democracy, we led over 70 pediatricians, privacy and public health advocates, and other experts in urging Mark Zuckerberg to cancel Meta's plans to open Horizon Worlds to teens as young as 13 until the company can demonstrate that engaging in such a continually-evolving virtual reality environment is safe for them.

In addition, we launched a petition on this issue, which led Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts to send a letter to Meta putting pressure on the company not to open its virtual world to children.

Looking ahead, we'll be diving into a year-long research project about virtual reality and the pressures kids and teens face to buy virtual goods. Stay tuned! ■





Alexa, what are you doing with my data?

Our amazing Amazon accomplishment

This year, FTC announced a settlement with Amazon for violating the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. In 2019, Fairplay and our partners at the Center for Digital Democracy alerted the FTC that Amazon's conduct regarding its virtual assistant product, Alexa, violated COPPA. In our complaint, we documented that when parents requested that Amazon delete Alexa's voice recordings of their children, the company still kept transcripts of those conversations. And worse, Amazon was using that data.

Acting on our complaint, the FTC conducted an investigation into Amazon's practices, which confirmed our findings. The FTC found additional COPPA violations as well, including Amazon's intent to keep data collected through Alexa forever.

We're proud of the results of our work: the FTC's settlement requires Amazon to delete this data, prohibits Amazon from using it to train its algorithms to target kids, and assessed a \$25 million civil penalty. This settlement sends a clear message to all platforms and marketers who abuse children's data: blatantly violating kids' privacy can't be just a cost of doing business. ■



Q+A with an all-time privacy expert

This year marks the end of Angela Campbell's tenure as Fairplay's Board Chair. Angela is a renowned privacy expert and an architect of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, the only law protecting children online. For over 30 years, she directed a clinical program at Georgetown Law that represents nonprofits before the FCC, the FTC, and federal courts.

A key advisor on Fairplay's regulatory advocacy, Angela's impact will be felt at the organization for years to come. Our communications manager, Sam Garin, sat down with Angela to reflect on her years of service for Fairplay.

Angela, how did you end up at Fairplay as one of our top advisors?

I ran a clinical program at Georgetown Law School where we represented non-profit organizations. For over thirty years we worked on a whole range of different issues, but one of my favorites was trying to get better children's television by limiting the amount of commercials on television and to expand the amount of good quality programming for kids.

Through that work I met Susan Linn. Susan and I hit it off and she asked whether we would do project for CCFC* and we agreed to take on the Baby Einstein complaint that was filed with the Federal Trade Commission back in 2006. And then later we did the Your Baby Can Read complaint also filed with the FTC in 2011.

What have been some of the highlights of your time working with us at Fairplay?

We make a lot of regulatory filings and sometimes, it just takes a long time for change. But, going back to Baby Einstein—eventually Disney had to pay out a whole lot of money for parents and families that had bought these tapes that they claimed were educational for babies when they just weren't. And then we put Your Baby Can Read out of business and they received a huge fine for false advertising.

I would also say our YouTube action was particularly gratifying. We started going after advertising on YouTube Kids back in 2015 and eventually our complaint led to the FTC bringing that settlement with YouTube in 2019 for a lot of money. There have been a lot of changes because of that ruling from the FTC, and while they haven't made the



Fairplay Board Chair Angela Campbell, Executive Director Josh Golin, and incoming Board Chair Criscillia Benford at Fairplay's May 2023 Board retreat.



Angela has been a leader in children’s privacy for decades, and has testified before Congress to share her expertise.

world perfect, they certainly made it a lot better for kids online. It takes a lot of work and a lot of advocacy but we have successes and things get better.

What are some of the biggest changes you’ve witnessed take place in this arena of children’s privacy and marketing to children?

The public understanding of the risks of marketing to children and social media has become so much greater. In my own experience, when my daughter first started using Facebook in high school, I didn’t even understand what it was at all. Now, social media has become such a part of every child’s life and has so great an effect on them, and yet, none of these products are really designed for the benefit of children. They’re designed to make money for for-profit corporations.

One of the key turning points was Frances Haugen’s whistleblowing for Facebook. Before, parents had these vague concerns, and they really didn’t know what they were. And now, I think that we’re getting much better informed. There is still a lot of education needed, but there’s more of an understanding of how these social media platforms work and why they’re sort of taking kids away from things that kids would normally do like spending time with their family or doing their homework or play outside. Parents and caregivers are starting to understand that kids are not doing these things as much because of the appeal of spending time on social media is so strong.

What do you think is on the horizon for Fairplay and other children’s advocacy groups like us?

Well, I really hope that we will get some legislation passed to address these issues. I worked on the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), which passed in 1998. The world was so different then. There was no YouTube, we didn’t have smartphones. We didn’t have pandemics where kids were learning at home for months at a time. So we really need to bring these laws up to date in the most desperate way.

Is there anything else to share about your time with Fairplay?

I just want to say I really love serving on the Board. I’m ready to step down, but just as far as working with the staff at Fairplay, I just loved it all. I have the greatest respect for the staff and the work that you do, and I know how hard you work. And I would also say the same thing about the Board. It’s been exciting to be work with both groups of people, and also just to see Fairplay grow and gain so much more prominence and such a louder voice in the public discourse.

What’s next for you?

I’m sort of looking around trying to figure out what I want to do next. A part of me is thinking I want to do something with kids, like doing some tutoring. I still hope to travel, that’s what I had originally hoped to do when I retired from Georgetown, but it was Covid, so we didn’t really go very many places. I really want to go to Ireland, since I’ve been learning the Irish fiddle! ■

**Prior to 2021, Fairplay was known as Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (CCFC).*

Screen-Free Week 2023



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.

Screen-Free Week, our annual celebration where people all over the globe pledge to unplug and take stock of their screen time habits, took place this year from May 1-7! More than 33,000 people pledged to participate or attended a registered Screen-Free Week event this year, with thousands more participating on their own.

People from across the world joined us in celebration from the US and Canada, as well as Mexico, UK, Scotland, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, Netherlands, Spain, Brazil, Columbia, Nigeria, Cyprus, Pakistan, India, Cameroon, Fiji, and Australia. Hundreds of schools also got in on the action this year. Roanoke Avenue Elementary School started their week with a “Read Aloud Milk and Cookies Night.” Ben Franklin Elementary School painted rocks for the school garden and brought in an ice cream truck. Mathewson Elementary School had a magic show.

We saw more libraries than ever putting on incredible events from Screen-Free Bingo to swimming nights. Wi-Fi free coffee shops, grocery stores, cabin rentals, healthcare systems, pediatricians, travel agents, workout studios, toy companies, IT and cellular service providers joined in on the fun. Even a police department and heating and plumbing company participated!

The widespread participation in Screen-Free Week is a testament to the fact that we all—adults and children alike—need to find balance with our screens. As one family put it, “It was the motivation I needed to turn off TV during dinner! It was great to communicate to my children that I want to communicate with them!” ■

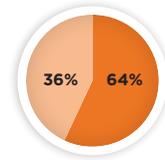


Fairplay Financials as of July 1, 2023

INCOME

Grants	\$ 713,843
Individual Donations	\$ 1,283,556
Total FY23 Income	\$ 1,997,399
Expenses	\$ 1,350,722
Net Increase/(Decrease)	\$ 646,676
Beginning Reserves	\$ 276,469
Net Assets FY23	\$ 923,145

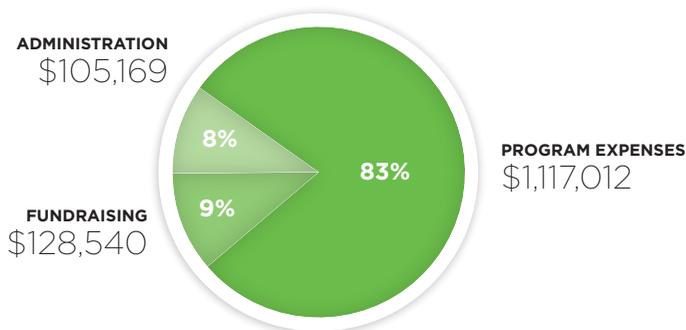
INCOME



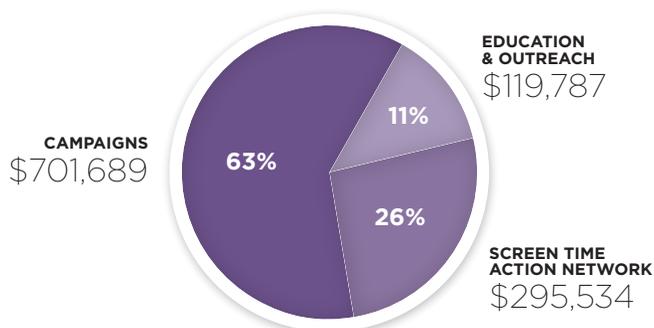
INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS

GRANTS

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$1,350,722



PROGRAM EXPENSES: \$1,117,012



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 FY23 (July 2022 - June 2023), without whom our work would not be possible.

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\$500,000+

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Kathleen Lauster
Susan Linn
in honor of
the Fairplay staff
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Laura Moore Tanne
Dipesh Navsaria and
Rania Huntington
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Karl Rozak
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\$500 - \$999

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Gina Malin
Cream Hill Foundation
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Sherry Turkle
Amy and Daniel Warren in honor
of Ben, Asa, and Westley
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Tim Winter
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\$100 - \$249

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



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