



Be Not Afraid, Inc.

Dear Friends of Be Not Afraid,



Grandparents are an important source of support for parents carrying to term following a prenatal diagnosis, but often they need care as well. Below is Johanna Cantrill's story of welcoming her precious grandson diagnosed with anencephaly, and her important work with BNA.

Sincerely,
Bridget Mora
BNA Communication Coordinator

On Thanksgiving Day 2019, my daughter Sofia and her husband, Mike, FaceTimed us from Hawaii telling my husband and me that she was pregnant. What a joyous day that was! It was so exciting to tell the news to my friends. I had envied those who already were grandparents. It felt very surreal for a long time.

Sofia went through morning sickness. We would communicate about progression of her pregnancy and eventually received ultrasound pictures and ever so precious heartbeat sounds. On March 13th, they went for their 20 week anatomy scan, and I got a phone call from my daughter sobbing... "Mom, my baby does not have brain." The diagnosis was anencephaly, and they named their son Oliver David.

They decided to carry Oliver to term. They believe that the Lord is the author and Creator of all life and that Oliver's life was precious just the way it was. Sofia carried him 4 more months with no hope of him surviving. What a journey that was for all of us!

Sofia and Mike celebrated all things of pregnancy: they had photos taken, talked with Oliver, read him books, had him listen to praise music, took him to church, introduced him to many foods, swam in the Pacific Ocean, but most importantly they prayed with him nightly, and yes, he also had to endure all the complications of the pandemic.

Soon after the diagnosis Sofia, listened to a Podcast on anencephaly in which BNA was mentioned. She knew she and Mike needed support through this journey. Within days, she connected with the BNA team who supported her throughout the next four months, including helping her write a birth plan. It was such a comfort to know that my daughter and son-in-law had sound, life-honoring support. I felt helpless as a mother/grandmother. All I was able to do was cry and pray with them. I had my own grief to deal with.

Soon after contacting BNA, Sofia told me that someone from BNA was going to call me. I was very impressed that they reached out even to me, grandma! I remember her telling me that facing a terminal pregnancy is particularly difficult for the mother of the pregnant mother. That was such a validation for my own grief, for I had been focusing more on Sofia's immense pain and placing my own on the backburner. She put me in touch with another grandmother of a BNA baby, Erica Joy, who had died at 37 weeks in utero. It was priceless to be able to share my pain with someone who had gone through something similar and truly understood. Lori and I have become friends since, and still text and talk regularly, sharing life.

Sofia developed high blood pressure on Friday, July 9th. She was admitted to the hospital. Oliver's birth was a long process, but finally he was born, and died July 13th, 2020. I was very blessed to be allowed to be in the room for the whole four days in spite of the pandemic. I am also eternally thankful that Mike and Sofia wanted me to be part of the birth. I was able to hold Oliver and count his perfect fingers and toes! Those were long days, but the BNA team stayed in touch with me through texts throughout the whole time. It also brought me peace knowing that so many at BNA were praying for us.

My view in life is Biblical, thus I am confident that God had a purpose in all this, as painful as it was. Soon after Oliver's memorial service I flew home from Hawaii and knew that I wanted to be part of BNA. Three years later I have crocheted countless baby blankets for BNA and provided support to BNA families newly home with infants. It has been such a blessing to be part of this wonderful organization that also recognizes the need for support of the extended family. The blessings of BNA and all the volunteers continue to be with me in my journey of life.

Sofia and Mike are doing well. Oliver will always be part of our lives, but they have nothing to regret, partially because of the support they received from BNA. AND we were blessed with the birth of Oliver's little brother, Aiden Joseph, in December of 2022. I know the BNA team is rejoicing with us!

What do parents say about BNA?



“Three days before Christmas, a routine 18-week ultrasound and the diagnoses that immediately followed turned what had been an ecstatic pregnancy into a devastating chapter of terrifying uncertainty and emotional overload. A friend from our parish was praying alongside me and said “I know exactly who you need to talk to.” Enter – BNA. The BNA team were the ultimate and timely blessing to us for the remainder of my pregnancy and three month NICU stay. We are forever grateful for the multiple hours of phone calls sharing their knowledge and resources, and to all the volunteers who gifted us with care packages and supportive prayers. God bless BNA for being a bright light throughout this journey.”

Mom of Baby Gabriel, born May 2, 2022

“I can’t imagine having walked this road without Be Not Afraid. They were by our side through an unimaginably hard situation with our twin girls, Ada and Elisha. Not only had we received a devastating suspected diagnosis for our very tiny little Ada, but we were also at a critical point of needing to discern when it would become safe and ethical to deliver Elisha. The conversations we had with BNA were absolutely priceless to us. They were available when we needed them most, supporting us emotionally and spiritually during the hardest moments of our life. They were the first people we reached out to when we found out we had lost Ada, and they were there in the weeks that we waited for our girls to be born. They helped us with the birth plan, walked us through what to expect, and gave suggestions so that we could make the most of our precious time with both girls in the hospital. Their support continued as we planned Ada’s memorial service, and in the time that has followed as we grieve as a family. Because of Be Not Afraid, we have a sense of peace we would not have had otherwise. God used these amazing people to answer our cries for help and to show us His loving and gentle hand at work through this entire journey with our girls. Words cannot describe our gratitude.”



Mom of Baby Ada, † October 19, 2022, and Baby Elisha, born October 19, 2022



“BNA gave my husband and me direction when we were trying to understand how to handle a prenatal diagnosis of Trisomy 18. BNA volunteers gave us the comfort we needed during a very difficult time. We will always remember the sacred moment of opening our first of many care packages. We saw Zelema’s name in writing for the first time embroidered on a beautiful blanket. Our BNA Parent Care Coordinator helped us feel empowered to navigate the birth process and our time in the NICU. We had a successful delivery and realized our dream of bringing our daughter home. During Zelema’s life, we used the skills BNA taught us to continue to successfully advocate for her. When she passed away 5 months later, we knew how to arrange for precious time and space to say goodbye. We are eternally grateful for the love and support BNA continues to give us as we celebrate and grieve our sweet Zelema.”

Mom of Baby Zelema, † February 7, 2022

“BNA walked with us through the rollercoaster of pregnancy, birth, surgeries and passing of our son, Philip. They tirelessly guided us through our pregnancy and birth, answering questions and walking us through the many cardiology appointments. When Philip developed complications due to his needed open heart surgery post-birth, we were able to receive constant support, prayers, and guidance from them through it all. When Philip passed away, yet again, BNA was there providing us with a community of families that understood the pangs of child loss as well as assisting us with grief counseling. They have been such a gift to my family on every hill and in every valley. We truly believe that God gave us the gift of BNA as a way for us to know that He was and always will be close. They truly have been the hands and feet of Christ to us and for that we will forever be grateful.”

Mom of Baby Philip, † November 21, 2022



2022 BNA Service in Numbers

BNA assumed a two-fold mission in 2022. While continuing to provide a service of comprehensive case management to parents carrying to term following a prenatal diagnosis, BNA also initiated the development of a national training program. This program is part of a national initiative to provide a prolife response to prenatal diagnosis and involves the work of BNA, Heartbeat International, the Charlotte Lozier Institute, and HerPlan. BNA received letters of support for its training program development from the National Catholic Bioethics Center, the American Association of Pro-life OB/GYNs, and the American College of Pediatricians.

In addition to case management support, BNA also offers an “outreach” service which captures data for all referrals made to the program as well as other contacts requiring response. Outreach is provided to all parents with whom we had contact who did not accept case management support, and others seeking information regarding BNA, and/or information regarding funeral planning and bereavement resources for families not supported by BNA.

Finally, it should be noted that roughly 30% of our support of parents occurs after normal business hours to accommodate parental needs around births and health crises as well as parental working schedules across time zones.

2022 Families Supported Carrying to Term

Comprehensive case management support was provided to 30 families with varying prenatal diagnoses. Twenty-eight of the families served lived in the U.S., one in the United Kingdom, and one in New Zealand.

Outreach Data

117 hours of outreach support provided
78 personalized outreach packets of resource information distributed

Support (from diagnoses to one-year anniversary of birth) Data

1,800 hours of case management support provided
(includes direct parent contacts, coordinating referrals, advocacy, etc.)
100 hours of peer support provided
60 hours of birth planning support provided (includes provision of diagnosis-specific packet of resource and research material, birth plan meeting, and birth plan editing support)
100% of birth plans were approved by both the obstetric and neonatal providers
30 hours of neonatal consult support provided
8 hours of ethics consultation provided
28 parent gift packages distributed (includes the following handmade items: two identical knitted blankets, one personalized name blanket, baptism kits, baby soap, bracelet or rosary, and gown)
13 NICU gift packages distributed

Bereavement Support Data

Bereavement support was provided to 65 families
130 hours of peer support
18 Newborn loss boxes were distributed
25 packages of grief booklets sent
41 One-Year Anniversary gifts distributed

Parent Care Coordinator Training

Completed development of 70% of curriculum content
Provided in-person, day-long sessions in Charlotte, NC and Philadelphia, PA
Initiated development of online learning platform
Initiated training of twelve organizations

Miscellaneous

Presented, NCBC Biennial Workshop for the Catholic Bishops, Dallas, TX
Panel Member, Law of Life Summit, Chicago, IL
Presented, World Congress for Catholic Nurses, Doylestown, PA

What do parents say about BNA?



“At our 20-week ultrasound, we found out that our son had a heart condition, called Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome (HLHS). His hospital stay was not an easy one with the added challenge of being in the hospital during a pandemic. BNA’s phone calls and text messages, uplifting emails, prayers and care packages...made our time in the hospital more bearable for us and for our other children. Our initial hospitalization had a lot of ups and downs as Philip had additional complications and needed extra surgeries that couldn’t have been predicted. Ultimately, he passed away later in the year at the age of 9-1/2 months. We are incredibly grateful for the time we had with our beautiful boy and thanks be to God that we found BNA, who gave us hope, when we felt like there wasn’t any, and love and support...from prenatal diagnosis to death and beyond.”

Mom of Baby Philip, † November 16, 2022

“I’m so thankful for the support BNA has provided my family with our boys. Our journey with BNA began Sept of 2020. We received scary news and saw some significant growth restrictions with the baby I was carrying. We decided to give him any chance he could have. I reached out to BNA and they were a guiding light and made me feel so safe, validated, and loved. I delivered Jonah on Oct 16, 2020. His cord was around his neck three times. My time in the BNA family was only a few weeks, but they went above and beyond, and handled everything regarding Jonah’s final moments. It was such a whirlwind, and I can’t imagine having to do that without them.

I mentioned they helped with our “boys.” In January 2022, we were expecting our rainbow baby and it was his anatomy scan! Unfortunately, we were given the news that he had a rare and complex brain abnormality. They didn’t expect him to make it to birth and if he did, they ultimately believed he would live only minutes.



BNA walked Jericho’s entire pregnancy with us...every up and down, good and bad...every goal post shift. During my pregnancy, Jericho continued to do everything that the doctors were saying he wouldn’t. They were so doubtful, and I could always call my BNA Parent Care Coordinators and vent, laugh, cry, scream or any other emotion that arose on that roller coaster. They celebrated his victories with us and filled our journey with care packages from volunteers! They explained our options for additional testing and care and helped us make sure he was honored and given the dignity he deserved. BNA gave us hope in a world of doubt. They were very honest about every step, but it was delivered with such love and respect.”

Mom of Baby Jonah, † October 16, 2020, and Baby Jericho, † May 25, 2022



“After receiving our baby girl’s diagnosis at 20 weeks and being totally abandoned by the physicians at the OB/GYN office, we learned the road to keep our baby safe, and getting to term with her was going to be very difficult. In the middle of those difficult days, we found BNA... and our lives changed. The BNA Team gave us the hope and the power that comes with knowledge. They walked with us during our pregnancy and every day of Alana’s 5 months of life. Without their support, helpful advice, and resources we wouldn’t have been able to fight for Alana’s life and rights. We were blessed with 5 months with our joyful baby girl and BNA was with us every step of the way, even stepping in when we needed them the most to help us with her final moments. We cannot thank them enough and we hope to someday be able to give back some of what BNA gave to us.”

Mom of Baby Alana, † September 14, 2022

For information on how organizations can develop BNA-modeled services through the Parent Care Coordinator Training, please visit:
<https://courses.benotafraid.net/>