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PRESIDENT'S LETTER



In looking back on 2020—a year unlike any other in recent memory—it would be easy to focus on all the hardship, suffering, and sadness caused by a global pandemic, a bitter election season, and searing racial strife across the country.

But instead, I choose to see all that was accomplished to help our neighbors through the trying times that 2020 brought. After all, we know the most impactful changes occur in our homes, neighborhoods, and communities when people help people.

That is the model we live our lives by every day at the Georgia Center for Opportunity. It is in our communities where lives are formed and, when things go badly, where lives are transformed. And it's there that neighbors, businesses, communities of faith, schools, and nonprofits can come together in local unified action.

This focus has helped us excel at helping our communities in Georgia in 2020:

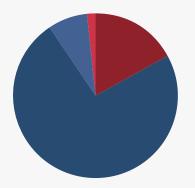
- We've adapted to changing circumstances due to the pandemic by taking our in-person content online, including through developing a virtual Healthy @ Home curriculum and hosting a virtual Breakthrough conference.
- With Georgia's unemployment rate skyrocketing to 12.6 percent in April, the need for our Hiring Well, Doing Good initiative was never stronger than this year. We formed key partnerships and made important advancements.
- The need for immediate access to the right education option was felt by families across Georgia this year. That is why we waged a campaign in support of using federal CARES Act funds for Georgia to make direct microgrant payments to families to assist with their educational expenses during the pandemic.

As we enter a new year, let's let our lives match the high standard set by Georgia's earliest founders, who took on these timeless words as their motto: Not for self, but for others.

Randy Hicks

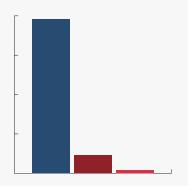
President & Chief Executive Officer





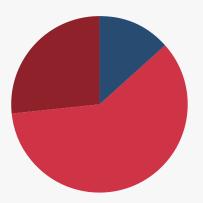
TOTAL REVENUE

TOTAL REVENUE	\$2,118,860
Other	\$33,387
Corporations	\$161,285
Foundations	\$1,561,750
Individuals	\$362,438



TOTAL EXPENSES

TOTAL EXPENSES	\$2,237,973
Fundraising	\$42,973
Administrative	\$234,262
Program	\$1,960,738



PROGRAM BREAKDOWN

TOTAL BREAKDOWN	\$1,960,738
Family Formation	\$522,003
Employment	\$1,172,964
Education	\$265,771



FOR EVERYONE AND EVERY LEARNING NEED

Every day we are greeted with choices—from the many products available through local grocery stores to the millions of apps available on smartphones. So, why would we expect anything different in education?

A locally zoned and assigned school is indeed the best option for many students. But other families need alternative options to help their children succeed.

In many instances, local schools are ill-equipped to handle the unique needs of these students. That was certainly the case for Cammie Alkire and her daughter, Savannah, who has had severe learning disabilities from an early age. Cammie calls Savannah "her million-dollar child" because that's how much all of the medical care and therapies have cost over the years.

Although the Alkires support the local public school system (Cammie is a graduate of Forsyth County Public Schools), they weren't willing to subject Savannah to another year of bullying in order to qualify for Georgia's Special Needs Scholarship.

Today, Savannah is enrolled in a small private Christian school that's meeting her unique needs. But the Alkires struggle each month to meet the cost of her care entirely on their own.

"These are the kids who fall through the cracks. They get bullied. They turn out to be cutters. They are emotionally and mentally struggling, but not screaming loud enough to be heard. And our government refuses to extend any type of financial help to these parents," Cammie shared with us.

(cont.)



We also think of students like Ryan, who was born with half a heart. Because of his disability, Ryan faced severe ridicule in public school due to the fact that he couldn't read and was dyslexic.

"I never truly felt like I was part of society," Ryan says. "I used to hear teachers talk so bad about me. And then students would do it in front of my face, acting like I couldn't even hear, like I wasn't even human."

But everything changed when Ryan went to the Bedford School—a private school in Atlanta dedicated to serving students with learning differences—with support through the Special Needs Scholarship Program.

"I felt like I was part of something bigger. On the last day of school, I could barely feel my legs. So Mr. James (a teacher at Bedford) picked me up, tossed me on his shoulders, and walked me to the car. No one has ever shown the kind of kindness that he has done for me. I've never in all my life felt wanted, truly, as much as that moment."

Stories like Cammie and Ryan's are why our team at the Georgia Center for Opportunity works so hard to provide immediate access to the widest possible range of educational opportunities. One of the ways in 2020 came through our advocacy for Gov. Brian Kemp to use federal CARES Act funding to give microgrants to families of special needs students specifically earmarked for educational needs.







SEPT 2020

Georgia groups push Kemp for virtual-learning microgrants

"In a letter sent Sept. 15, groups... urged Kemp to reserve more than \$20 million in federal COVID-19 funds for microgrants, which cover small one-time expenses."

At Georgia Center for Opportunity we're working with lawmakers in the Georgia legislature to expand options for students in impoverished areas, while working locally to promote schools and organizations devoted to helping these students.



RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Latesha Jackson from Columbus, GA is a mother, student and Hiring Well, Doing Good success story.

Raised primarily by her mother, Latesha still lives in Columbus. Her mother's dedication to provide, she recalled, would inspire her to challenge herself.

Graduating from high school was a huge family milestone. "I was the only one of my siblings to graduate high school," Latesha proudly mentions. After high school, she went to work and used the income to help her mom pay the bills. At 19, Latesha decided to start life on her own. A year and a half later, she gave birth to her oldest daughter. With three more children to follow, Latesha thought she had put college in the rear-view mirror.

Paying rent became a challenge early on, as parenting duties increased. "If you are a single parent with small kids, you won't be able to work," she remembered thinking. Doing what she could, she would leave her children with relatives, but after several at-risk incidents, she chose to leave the workforce and had to rely on government assistance instead.

Without a degree, Latesha began bouncing around between food service jobs for years before coming into contact with Hiring Well, Doing Good.

"I happened to walk into the local Habitat [for Humanity] office to pay my mortgage, and the woman there was handing out flyers for this program called Hiring Well, Doing Good," Latesha recalled. "She said 'you might want to call these people to and check it out." Latesha was frustrated but motivated to find a job that felt satisfying, paid well, and offered good benefits. "I called Kristin at the Georgia Center for Opportunity immediately."

(cont.)



Hiring Well, Doing Good "has helped me get interviews and other connections," Latesha mentions, "I've learned how to properly format a resume, I've learned a lot of different things that are very practical, and I've had a lot of job interviews."

Now in school, Hiring Well, Doing Good was able to connect her to a position at the on-campus Chick-fil-A while she finished her business degree. In February, Latesha was notified that she has been invited to the honors program.

The legacy of her hard work and the benefits of HWDG live on. All four of her children have graduated high school – her eldest daughter now has two degrees and is on her way to nursing school. Through inspiration and hope, she has begun the journey to end the cycle of poverty in her family.

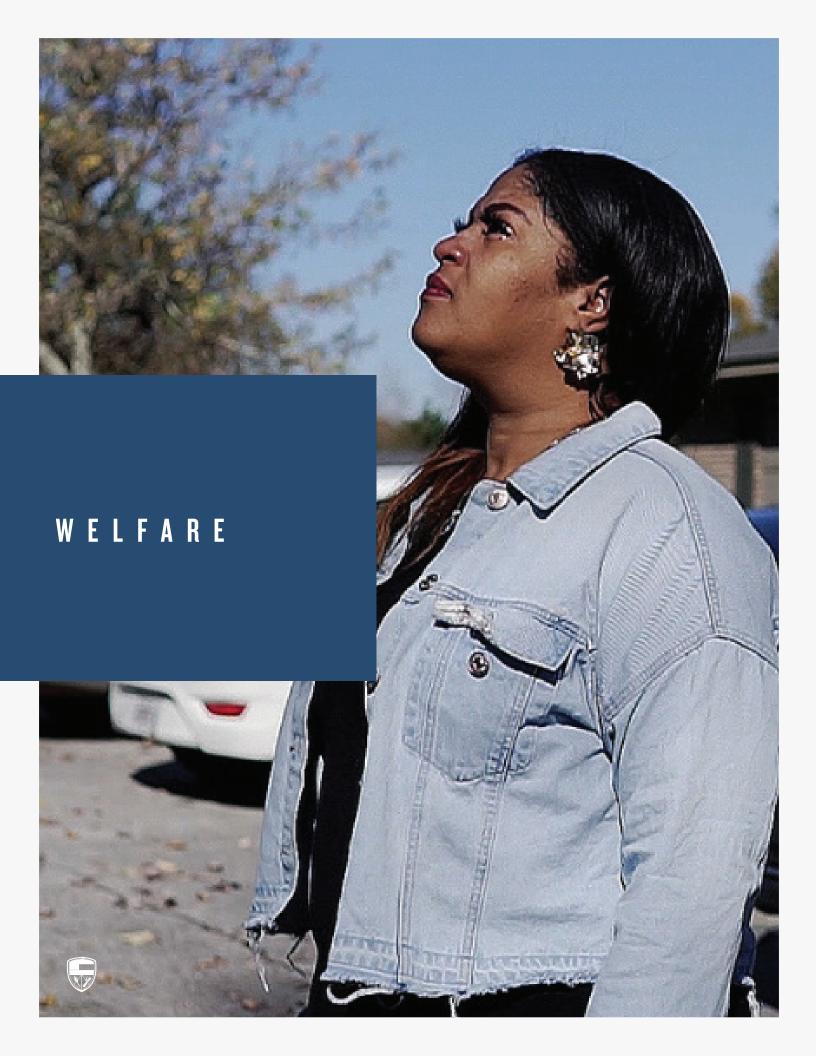


MAY 2020

IN THE <u>NEW</u>S

Reopening not about haircuts, it's about relieving suffering

"A job is about so much more than just a paycheck. We know that human beings function best when they are involved with meaningful work. Until this point, the dialogue on reopening has largely focused on 'essential' vs. 'non-essential' jobs. But every job is essential for the person who holds it. And not just from a financial standpoint: It's one key gateway to what makes life meaningful for many of us."



JOYELLE GOT AN EDUCATION, A JOB, AND A PROMOTION. SHE NEVER EXPECTED HER SUCCESS WOULD MEAN THIS...

Joyelle never expected to be in a position where the very system she thought was a safety net ultimately failed her.

After fleeing an abusive relationship, this single mother of four ended up in public housing in Lawrenceville, Georgia. Until that point, Joyelle had never relied on welfare for help. She always paid her rent on time and made ends meet. So, falling back on public housing was an entirely new scenario for her. It was not where or how she wanted to live, or where she wanted her four children to grow up.

That's why she was determined to get back on her feet. She graduated from school and was offered a full-time job with the state of Georgia, a career trajectory that put her above the poverty line. Things were looking up.

"I was excited and grateful," Joyelle says. "I had worked hard: I started out with the state as a student assistant and worked my way up."

But that's when Joyelle got a shocking surprise: Due to her new salary, her subsidized housing allowance disappeared and she was forced to pay almost \$1,000 a month in rent.

(cont.)



"I was heartbroken," she says of learning that she was losing her housing subsidy. "You work hard. They tell you to go to school and get a job. You do all these things, and you're still not able to provide for your family. That's devastating. I suffer from anxiety. It causes stress. It causes severe depression."

She now faces the difficult decision of looking to move but being unable to afford apartment rent even with her salary increase.

Joyelle encountered what we call the "benefit cliff," where well-intentioned policies actually prevent people from getting off public services. They make just enough to not qualify for services, but not enough to make up for the services lost in extra income. The result is a system that keeps people trapped in poverty rather than one that propels them toward self-sufficiency and the dignity that comes with it.

"There's no help for people like me, stuck in the wealth gap," Joyelle shares. "You have help, but if you help yourself you're faced with adversities that you shouldn't be faced with."

We believe these services should move people into a prosperous life, not keep them stuck in cycles of dependency. Visit **welfarecliff.org** to learn more.





THE STORY OF HEALTHY @ HOME

As it for so many of us, COVID-19 required a pivot for our Healthy Families Initiative (HFI) team.

Joyce Mayberry (VP of Family) and Katherine Greene (HFI Program Manager) were in the middle of launching 10 classes at local nonprofits, schools, and churches on healthy relationships and family dynamics when the COVID-19 pandemic forced an end to in-person gatherings.

Their immediate emotions were anxiety and concern. These families needed intervention and help, and the pandemic would only worsen the situation.

But Katherine and Joyce's anxiety soon turned to determination as they pivoted HFI to be effective in the new dynamic. They got on the phone to revamp their in-person classes into virtual offerings through Zoom. Remarkably, HFI's new emphasis on virtual instruction led to partnerships with several new schools that wouldn't have happened before.

Joyce and Katherine also explored innovative ways to bring their content to a wider audience virtually. The result was Healthy @ Home, a video series dedicated to helping couples and families through the new norm of the COVID-19 pandemic—from mental health strategies to coping with kids at home to how to best structure your day.

"One hidden blessing of the pandemic is that people today see the value of family more than ever," says Katherine. "People also have a more listening ear to accept the importance of mental health and what it should look like," Joyce adds. "And they see the importance of relationships in a new way."





OCTOBER 2020



UGA grant will help Georgia couples improve relationship skills

"Among the community-based partners is the Georgia Center for Opportunity in Gwinnett County, a nonpartisan organization that conducts public policy research and mobilizes community resources to address education, employment and family issues. 'A collaboration of this magnitude will put us in the position to transform lives and create a blueprint for families in the near future,' Joyce Mayberry, vice president of family for the Georgia Center for Opportunity, said."



KEVIN'S STORY



Kevin Johnson dropped out of school and got into a life of crime at an early age. He spent nine years incarcerated. He left prison in his late 20s with a felony on his record, a significant roadblock to employment. But he did know

one thing: He wanted something more out of life, and a job was the only way to get there.

That's when Kevin learned about the Second Chances Program at local employer Columbus Water Works. He showed up one morning and asked for a job—and they gave Kevin a second chance as an apprentice in their environmental services department.

"He has taken off since then," said Inez Godbee, employee services coordinator for Columbus Water Works. "He is now a tech level two and just doing phenomenally. Kevin is one of our success stories, and we're very proud of him."

Kevin now has a benefits package with health insurance and retirement benefits. Perhaps more importantly, in his own words, he has "a sense of direction" now. "And I have hope," he adds. "Now I can see a little bit better where once it was blurry. I'm thankful. I'm grateful."



TRUTH'S STORY

If anyone had a right to use her life circumstances as an excuse for giving up, it was Truth Graf.

She was living a happy life as a PTA president and full-time mom of three children when her life fell apart: Her husband wanted a quick divorce so that he could start a new life with a coworker. Adding to the pain, the woman was a neighbor and friend whom Truth helped get the job with her husband.

Truth had no work or credit history, and she struggled to make ends meet after the divorce. She got her Realtor's license and began pursuing that career, but then the 2007-2009 housing bubble burst. She was drowning financially, so she turned to cocaine to cope.

"I just fell into it. I crashed and burned my old life. I felt hopeless and couldn't see a way out of addiction. I spent thousands on the drug's quasi-comfort," Truth says.

Falling further into financial distress, Truth's boyfriend at the time suggested she burn down her own home for an insurance payout—out of desperation, they did. For her crime, Truth ended up serving a harsh prison sentence given it was her first offense.

At 48, she was a drug addict and in prison, separated from her children. But behind prison walls she found a path to recovery and steps toward a new life.

After leaving prison, Truth faced the immense challenge of finding a job with a felony on her record. But that didn't stop her, and she was passionate about providing the type of help to other people that she wished she had had. Truth founded a peer recovery support center in Fulton County before going to work full-time as a Peer Recovery Specialist for Fulton County Superior Court. She helps men and women avoid prison, through their drug court recovery program. When graduates finish the 18-24 month program, they are fully integrated into the community for the first time in their lives—drug free and contributing to society.

Today, Truth partners with us at the Georgia Center for Opportunity in criminal justice reforms. "I used to be taken to the courthouse as a prisoner in an orange jumpsuit and handcuffs," Truth shares. "But now when I walk through the doors it's a whole different story—I go to advocate for people in addiction recovery. Coming full circle is the best way to describe it."



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