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2021 ANNUAL REPORT





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P R E S I D E N T ' S
L E T T E R



2021 has been a transformative year for the Georgia Center for Opportunity. The struggles of the past few years—underscored by the pandemic, further fraying of our public discourse, and worsening living conditions for so many Georgians—have produced a heightened understanding of the value of our work. More and more, our neighbors in underserved communities face barriers to opportunity and success.

We believe—as you do—that our God-given responsibility is to do everything in our power to remove barriers to human flourishing and alleviate suffering. We believe the best way to do so is by coming alongside our neighbors to help them walk the three steps of the success sequence: graduate from high school, wait until marriage before having a child, and attain stable employment.

Recent events in our state and nation have made achieving the success sequence even more challenging. But the GCO team has stepped up:

- As school requirements changed and curriculum shifted, parents looked for alternatives to meet their child's unique needs. This opened the door for GCO to advocate for expanding educational options for kids with special needs.
- As families and relationships were strained from disconnection due to the pandemic, GCO joined with allied groups to offer new relationship enrichment classes, making a huge difference in our communities.
- As many Georgians struggled to find meaningful work, we saw hundreds of new applicants to our BETTER WORK program, an initiative that moves people off government dependence into a life of self-sufficiency.

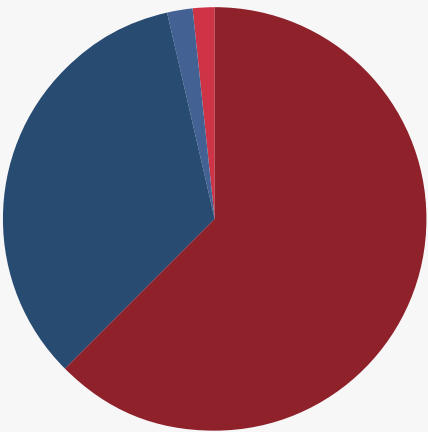
Our work here in Georgia has gained national attention, as other policy and humanitarian organizations seek out our solutions and form partnerships. We plan to further those collaborations even more in 2022.

The challenges of our culture are many and aren't going away, but we believe progress is possible. In the pages of this report, I hope you'll find inspiration as you read more about the work and impact you make possible through your generous partnership, prayers, and participation.

Randy Hicks
President & Chief Executive Officer



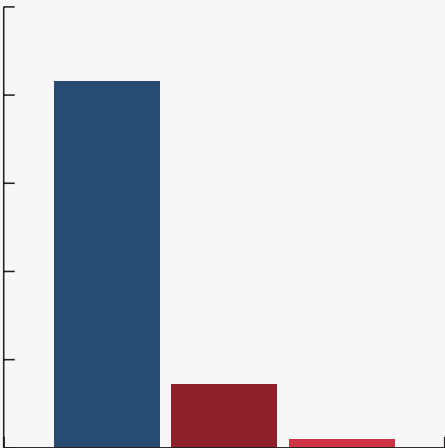
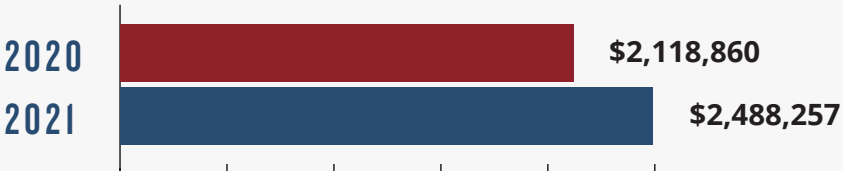
2021
FINANCIALS



TOTAL REVENUE

●	Individuals	\$1,560,661
●	Foundations	\$843,900
●	Corporations	\$44,096
●	Other	\$39,600
TOTAL REVENUE		\$2,488,257

Yearly Revenue Comparison



TOTAL EXPENSES

●	Program	\$2,079,966
●	Administrative	\$357,458
●	Fundraising	\$48,544
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$2,485,998



SC THRIVE: BETTER WORK partner

The Georgia Center for Opportunity was excited this year to partner with SC Thrive for the first time to share our Benefits Cliffs model.

We worked with SC Thrive to integrate the Benefits Cliffs model into their case management system, called Thrive Hub. SC Thrive currently has around 180 case workers who are using the Benefits Cliffs modeling to help their clients, who are people on welfare, in poverty, or unemployed.

The goal is to help clients “map a path to success” by identifying where someone lands on the graph, based on their pay and welfare benefits. Then, where there are contrasts with where they want to go: For example, a goal of a raise or promotion or a new, better paying job. The Benefits Cliffs modeling shows how that might impact them. The end result is that SC Thrive is able to connect clients with supplemental low-cost or no-cost resources that help them replace lost benefits with higher paying jobs.

The potential impact is in the thousands, since each case worker typically works with multiple individuals.



NICOLE'S STORY:

How a raise meant losing food stamp benefits for this mother of four

Nicole had high hopes when she moved her family from a rural area in south Georgia to Henry County in the Atlanta metro.

The cost of living went up, but the job opportunities were more plentiful and paid much better: She went from making \$25,000 a year to over \$35,000 as a corrections officer.

But that's when Nicole got an unpleasant surprise. Her new salary level meant that her safety-net benefits from the government went entirely away—not reduced, but entirely eliminated. She ended up getting around a \$10,000 raise but losing approximately \$12,500 in benefits.

"I ended up getting kicked off social services because I made a couple dollars more than the max I could," Nicole shared.

Nicole is 32 years-old and the single mother of four boys. "I'm the only income. I don't get child support payments or anything else," she said.

Losing her benefits—particularly food stamps—was a severe blow, especially during the pandemic. Although she has gotten help from local church-based food banks to help her make ends meet, her situation is still stressful.

To further bridge the gap, Nicole is working as much overtime as possible. But she would need to earn significantly more—to the tune of \$25 an hour—in order to fully make up for the benefits she has lost. Even in an economy where wages are quickly rising for many workers, that raise level is a tough haul.

Nicole encountered what we call the "benefit cliff," where well-intentioned policies actually prevent people from getting off public services. They make just enough to lose their benefits, but not enough to make up for those lost benefits. 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.

While it is wonderful to see how the community has stepped up to help Nicole fill the gaps left from her losing access to food stamps, not everyone is so fortunate.

The best way forward: Our goals should be to shore up the safety net for those who truly need it, eliminate these benefit cliffs, and create a system that encourages (rather than discourages) people from climbing the economic ladder.





LARRY'S STORY:

“First Week Out” documentary shows the struggles of those leaving prison walls

Larry spent 42 years in prison.

Just imagine that for a moment: 42 years being told when to sleep, eat, bathe, and how to act.

Then, in fall 2020, Larry was released. Needless to say, Larry faced new challenges and an unclear future. He hadn't known life on the outside since the 1970s. For those who have lived behind bars for decades, the first week of freedom is often the hardest. Many struggle to get a foothold, return to crime, and eventually to prison.

What Larry needed was an opportunity. With the help of a specialized transitional home, Larry got a place to stay, coaching on unfamiliar technology, and help finding a job.

Because of this help, his future is bright.

Larry's story was featured in a new joint collaboration between GCO, Iron Light Labs, and the Atlas Network—an award-winning documentary called “First Week Out.” The film shows what can happen when newly freed people get the support they need to make a successful fresh start.

Ultimately, Larry's story is an all-too-familiar one faced by those in underserved communities. It is one of the biggest barriers that must be overcome if we are to properly address poverty and expand opportunity to all.



AIDAN'S STORY:

How a private school saved a young man's life

"Every day was truly a dark day."

That's how Tiffany Pearce describes life during the hardest weeks of trying to care for her son, Aidan. Diagnosed with bipolar with mania, on top of an earlier diagnosis of autism and sensory integration disorder, Aidan couldn't do most things we take for granted—everything from communicating his feelings to using the restroom.

But tragically, that extended to Aidan trying to hurt himself during his manic episodes. To help, Tiffany would try to hold Aidan to prevent injuries. The results from this strong eight-year-old boy were that Tiffany herself would often get injured.

"He was having episodes three to four times a day lasting anywhere from one hour to three or four," Tiffany says. "With these episodes, it's like he didn't know who he was at the time."

When the manic episode calmed down and Aidan would recover, he would look at the blood on his mother and ask, "Why don't you move out and leave. I don't want to hurt you any more."

Tiffany took her son to a long list of doctors and specialists for help before he was eventually admitted to the Atlanta-based Peachford Hospital, a behavioral health treatment facility. But even that didn't help. Aidan continued to struggle. It was all made worse by the fact that Tiffany could not stay with him at night.

"I'll never forget the time he looked up at me and said, 'Mommy, I want to be in heaven.' You just feel completely helpless as a parent at that moment," says Tiffany. "To hear an eight-year-old say that is devastating."

Later on, Tiffany waged a battle with the insurance company to move Aidan from Peachford to a residential facility where they would better be able to serve his needs. At the same time, she had to make a choice about where to send the young man to school.

But Tiffany soon discovered that not many schools were willing to support a child like Aidan. The local public schools in Cobb County wanted to put him on an EBD (Emotional and Behavioral Disorder) satellite campus, but Aidan's doctors and therapists said that would have been detrimental to his behavioral and development issues.

Thankfully, there was another option: CORE Community School, a private school in Atlanta.

"I'll never forget them saying, 'We want him. We want Aidan.' That was the first time I felt hope in a year, because he deserves to be wanted. All kids should feel that. They deserve that," Tiffany says.

Today, Aidan is thriving at this private school that prioritizes serving students with unique needs and challenges.

"Being at school is the first time in a year and a half that I saw Aidan smile," Tiffany says. "I didn't think I would see that again. I wondered if this boy with the biggest heart would ever feel like he was worth anything. And he did here."

Stories like Aidan's are the reason GCO is working to expand educational opportunity.



CURTIS AND TONIKA'S STORY:

How Elevate helped their relationship survive
the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has put stress and strain on peoples' relationships like few other times.

In this challenging environment, the Georgia Center for Opportunity has stepped up to be involved in a new series of relationship enrichment classes called Elevate for Couples.

Curtis and Tonika are one couple who recently went through the class. Theirs is a mixed family of five children: Curtis brought four children to the marriage and Tonika one.

"What won me over was just watching him with his children just take care of the spiritual, education, just everything," Tonika shared. "I watched him do this effortlessly. He had a heart of gold, because most people would run away."

Navigating the challenges of a blended family has been one of their biggest obstacles, and that was what prompted them to join the Elevate class.

"The class did offer me some insights that I was able to extract," said Curtis. "Marriage within itself is a challenge, coupled with children is another challenge. But in a blended family, they don't teach you that in school."

Tonika's greatest takeaway from the class was to continue engaging with Curtis. "It's easy to forget about engagement with a busy day-to-day life," she said. "For me, it helped remind me of what's most important. You have to make it a priority or it'll just be on the list."

Curtis' takeaway was to achieve better balance in life. "I'm at that place where everything can't be a priority. A lot of things that used to matter to me don't really matter anymore."





DONOR PROFILE:

Ken and Tina Manning

Ken and Tina Manning moved to Atlanta over 30 years ago to start their careers and life together.



After living in Atlanta for a few years, it was clear to them that Atlanta would be their new home. They raised their three kids and have invested their time, energy and resources in family, business and philanthropic endeavors in Atlanta.

Ken has spent most of his career operating and advising early and growth stage technology companies while Tina has split her time between practicing law; being a mom and working as a volunteer.

GCO's unique mission statement and GCO's focus on the three prongs of the success sequence—work, family, and education—were what prompted the Mannings to become supporters of GCO. Ken & Tina recognize that the blessings and resources that they have in their own lives were only made possible because they have been provided access to strong, loving families; great educational opportunities; and have found meaningful work that they love. They began as givers in a small way in 2013 and since have become regular committed donors to GCO.

"The success sequence is fundamental," said Tina. "It's the combination of three factors together— work, family, and education—that create the foundation for people to have opportunities in their lives and which in turn enables them to lead rich and fulfilling lives." "We've seen it with our own lives; in the lives of our family members; and in the lives of our colleagues and friends."

"When we thought about where we wanted to direct our giving, we found that GCO aligns very much with our passion to help everyone gain access to these building blocks for success," Tina added.

OUR TEAM



"I love GCO because of our mission and culture and because it has allowed me to pursue my passions alongside people I admire and respect."

ERIC COCHLING

Chief Program Officer & General Counsel

"I love working at GCO because I am reminded daily by my co-workers, and the people I serve, how to display God's Love."

JOYCE MAYBERRY

VP of Family

"I love GCO because each day I get to see the impact on people and communities when they are given opportunities to thrive."

COREY BURRE

VP of Communications

"GCO is, hands down, the best organization I have ever worked for. I love that everyone walks their talk and lives our values both inside and outside of the office."

KELSEY UNDERWOOD

Agile Product Manager

"I love GCO because of our supportive and motivating work culture. After every team meeting, I leave feeling even more motivated and inspired."

XAVIEA BROWN

Social Media Manager

To see what all our employees think of GCO, search [#ILoveGCO](#) on Instagram or Facebook.

STATS

2021 Policy Highlights



Legislative session, passed a bill to expand the special needs scholarship to reach an additional 65,000 students



Significant progress on getting an Education Savings Account bill through the legislature



Significant progress on getting a bill to remove the sunset provision from the Tax Credit Scholarship bill through the legislature



Secured legislative sponsor for our reforms to the states Asset Forfeiture system

Better Work Columbus 2021 Highlights

20

New business partners

50+

Individuals with connections to jobs and service providers

12

Mentors trained to assist candidates

Better Work Gwinnett 2021 Highlights

20+

New business partners

65

Candidates to employer partners

12+

New mentors

GCO Family 2021 Highlights

3

School partnerships with classes beginning at each starting in 2022

75+

Women participated in Every Women Works classes

26

Couples elevated their relationships in new partnership with UGA

