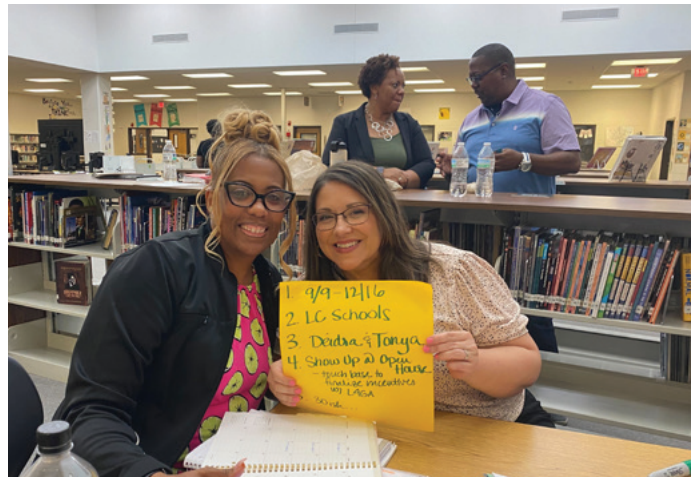




GEORGIA
— CENTER FOR —
OPPORTUNITY

2024
ANNUAL
REPORT





PRESIDENT'S LETTER

A few months ago, my colleague Amber Gorman shared some feedback from one of our BETTER WORK clients that stopped me in my tracks.

"This is what I've been looking and hoping for—a chance to better myself."

There it was—the purpose of GCO in a simple yet profound statement.

Our work focuses on empowering individuals who, for far too long, have been made to feel like helpless victims. We help them recognize their inherent dignity and discover their ability to build better, more fulfilling lives.

This report is the story of YOUR impact on these individuals in 2024. Inside you'll see encouraging results and inspiring testimonials that were only possible because of your support.

Whether it's shaping public policy or equipping community leaders to expand opportunities close to home, our work together is creating the conditions that enable people to lead thriving, self-sufficient lives. What do those conditions look like? They include safe communities where people can access high-quality education, secure steady employment, and raise healthy families.

One of our proudest accomplishments in 2024 was the successful passage of the Georgia Promise Scholarship, a program that will help low-income students in the bottom 25% of public schools to access education opportunities better suited to their needs.

Education may be a powerful tool to escape poverty, but systemic barriers within the welfare system continue to make the path to employment and family stability difficult and discouraging. This year, we championed federal legislation to give more states flexibility to integrate their safety net and workforce programs. At the same time, we armed several state leaders with research and solutions to address benefits cliffs in welfare programs, ensuring smoother transitions to

self-sufficiency. Through our BETTER WORK initiative, we connected job-seekers with local job opportunities, achieving a nearly 50% increase in successful hires compared to 2023.

If we want our neighborhoods to have better opportunities for education, jobs, and healthy families, public safety is an essential prerequisite. That's why we continue to champion policies that prevent violent crime from becoming a barrier to opportunity. In 2024, we drove national conversations on public safety solutions with 15 op-eds read by over two million individuals, in addition to dozens of broadcast appearances. We also passed reforms in two of the nation's most challenging public safety environments—Kentucky and Washington, D.C.

On the family front, we expanded our Raising Highly Capable Kids program, serving 127 parents through 12 workshops. This evidence-based program is empowering communities to help parents learn the tools that prepare the next generation to thrive in school, work, and life. These accomplishments are just the beginning. Throughout this report, you'll uncover stories of communities made stronger through our collective efforts. Each success builds on the foundation we've laid to ensure that all our neighbors can experience lives of purpose and fulfillment.

None of this progress would be possible without your unwavering support and shared vision for a world where poverty doesn't dictate opportunity. We look forward to continuing to partner with you to expand opportunities that empower every person to achieve their full potential.

Randy Hicks
President & Chief Executive Officer



*The Georgia Center for
Opportunity Team, February 2025*

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OUR VISION

Vibrant communities where everyone can achieve their potential



OUR MISSION

To remove barriers so that every person—no matter their race, past mistakes, or the circumstances of their birth—has access to opportunities to build a flourishing, fulfilling life.

WHAT WE DO

GCO addresses the primary barriers that trap people in poverty: unsafe communities, unhealthy family dynamics, lack of access to quality education, and barriers to employment.

Through a mix of policy reforms and community programs, we work to remove these barriers so that everyone has the opportunity for better work, better education, stronger families, and safer communities.

HOW WE DO THIS

- ▶ We **build partnerships** because addressing poverty isn't a solo endeavor. It requires cooperation from people who can meet the needs of underserved communities where it matters most—in homes and neighborhoods.
- ▶ We **develop replicable community-based programs and tools** so that communities are equipped to be the first line of support in creating opportunities that break the cycle of poverty.
- ▶ We **advance policy solutions** that improve social and economic mobility at the state and national level.

OVERVIEW OF OUR INITIATIVES

We believe what happens in homes and communities is most important and most consequential to the outcomes of each person's life, and this belief is reflected in our policy priorities and community programs.

Through the combination of our priority initiatives, we are putting work, dignity, and opportunity back at the heart of government systems and civil society so that both serve as true and trusted pathways out of poverty.

GCO INITIATIVE	OUR GOAL
Public Safety	Equip cities in Georgia, Kentucky, and beyond to lower crime, reduce fear, and improve economic mobility in America's high-crime neighborhoods.
Safety Net Reform	Redesign the safety net system to restore the culture of work, empowering Americans to exit welfare programs sooner; experience the personal, relational, and economic benefits of work; and find a sustainable path to self-sufficiency.
BETTER WORK	Empower civil society to meet the needs of those in poverty through better community support systems that prepare people for work and help them find and keep steady jobs.
Family & Relationships	Minimize the need for government dependence later by equipping parents and communities with skills and confidence to raise healthy, responsible, caring kids.
Education	Give every child in Georgia access to quality education without restrictions of wealth, race, circumstances of birth, or zip code.

2024 IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

8

policy reforms passed or advanced

6

states plus D.C. using GCO's solutions

120+

employer and community partners

120

media citations

629

million aggregate readership via earned media

15

public safety op-eds with 2+ million reach

13,928

email subscribers

510

job-seekers served through BETTER WORK

173

BETTER WORK clients hired into local jobs

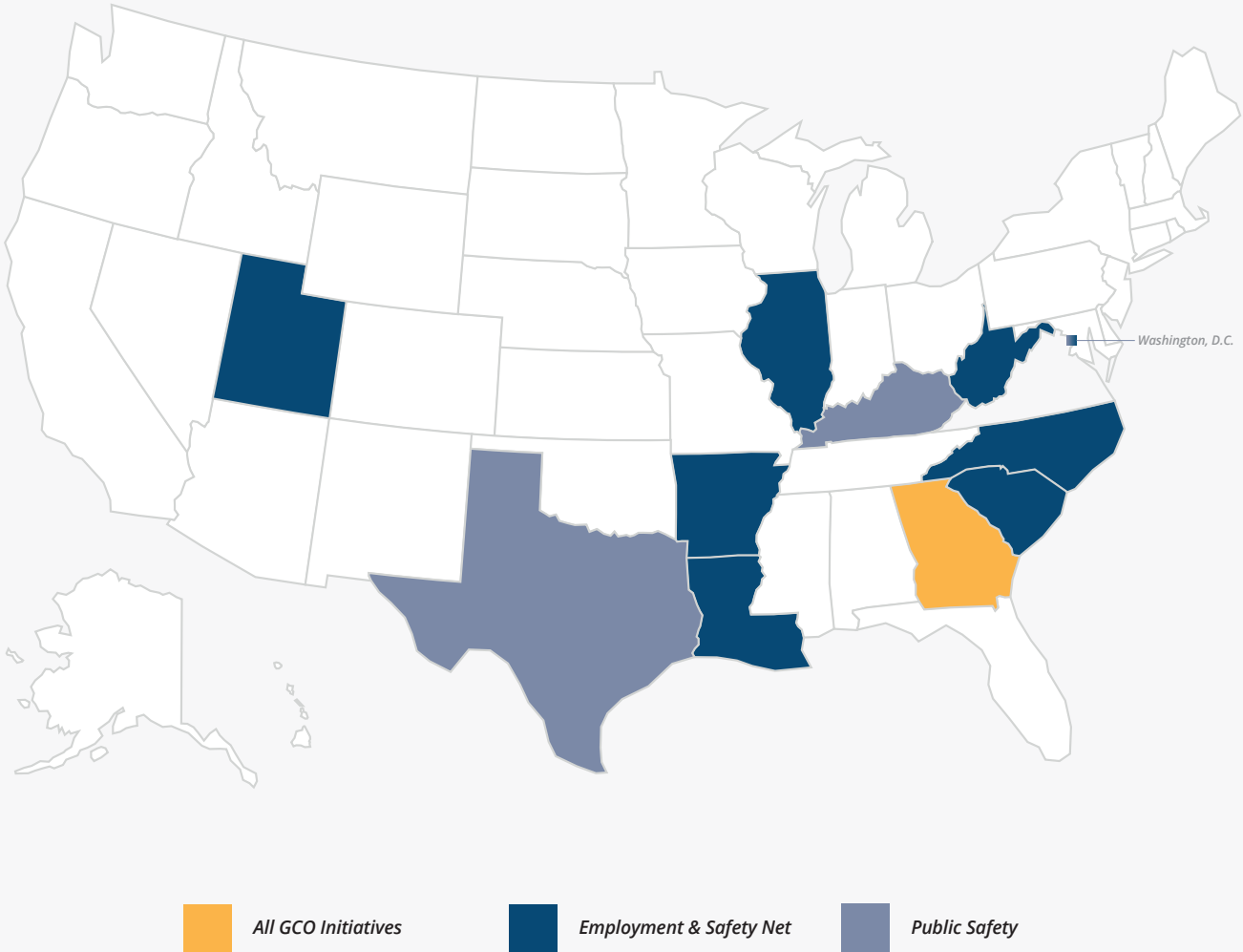
127

parents served by Raising Highly Capable Kids

Up to **22,000** students covered by Georgia's first-ever ESA

OUR REACH

Even when we're working on state-level policies, we do so with an eye toward how they affect people on a local level. Georgia continues to be our home base for impact, but as our work has gained traction and attention, **we have been asked to assist leaders in the government, business, and nonprofit sectors in D.C. and other states** who have a shared desire to improve opportunities for individuals and families.



FAMILY

Strengthening Parental Involvement to Improve Outcomes for Kids

The trajectory of a child's life starts with a single relationship: the bond with their parents.

Research has shown that when parents are involved in children's education and development, children tend to have more motivation and success in school, fewer behavioral issues, and better social skills. Studies have also revealed that warm, positive relationships between parents and children are linked to greater happiness, less depression and drug use, and increased likelihood of those children contributing to their communities as adults.

Through our work in disadvantaged communities, we know that this is a tall order for families caught in the cycle of poverty. When parents are struggling with severe loneliness, uncertainty, and the burden of making ends meet—even just for today—it can be tough for children to learn important life lessons and skills.

This is a need that government assistance will never be able to meet. No amount of material help addresses the fact that overcoming poverty and building a flourishing life is deeply tied to healthy relationships and family dynamics.

At GCO, our work is rooted in the belief that human flourishing is measured not only by material well-being, but also by the sense of purpose and belonging that we're all wired for. We are at our best when we know that we have inherent value as human beings and that our choices and actions matter to those

around us. The first and most influential place children learn this is in their relationships with their parents.

That's why, over the last few years, we've dedicated our Family Initiative to equipping communities to impact family health by focusing on parent-child relationships. Our core program, Raising Highly Capable Kids (RHCK), gives parents of at-risk kids the skills, confidence, and community support to guide their children toward success and self-sufficiency at school and in life.

In 2024, your support helped us increase the number of RHCK classes offered in communities and add new partnerships to grow the program in 2025 and beyond.

With RHCK, parents finally have a way to access what government will never be able to provide: the knowledge and community support that empowers them to believe flourishing is within reach for themselves and their children.



COMMUNITY IMPACT

RAISING HIGHLY CAPABLE KIDS: 2024 IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

12

Raising Highly Capable Kids workshops

7 workshops through our Parents First Initiative community partnership
5 workshops in collaboration with additional community partners

127

parents served

267

**children
impacted**

78

**parents completed
the full program**

31

**RHCK workshop
facilitators trained**

11

**school and community
partners engaged**

97

**informational and recruitment
presentations completed**

OUR KEY COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Lawrenceville First United Methodist Church
Central Gwinnett High School
Jordan Middle School
Moore Middle School
Lawrenceville Co-Op
Choices Crisis Pregnancy Center
Next Generation Focus
Lamar County Family Connection Collaborative
GIVE
Healing Hearts
Gwinnett Coalition
Building Babies Brains

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Supporting Central Gwinnett Families Through the Parents First Initiative



Raising Highly Capable Kids workshops conclude with a graduation ceremony to celebrate and encourage parent participants.

Our Parents First Initiative (PFI) is a unique collaboration between GCO and Lawrenceville First United Methodist Church that focuses on supporting at-risk families in Gwinnett’s Title 1 schools. PFI leverages the Raising Highly Capable Kids curriculum as its central resource and offers a network of support around the program to encourage adults along their parenting journey. In 2024, we increased the number of RHCK workshops through this partnership, allowing us to offer classes in both the spring and fall.



GCO’s team has walked alongside us in every aspect of this project and the results have been nothing short of amazing. We have heard from countless parents who have gone through the workshop that it has impacted their families in profound ways...They feel more empowered through learning together to equip their children with the resources they need to succeed. The bonds that have formed have impacted the parent culture in the local schools, as well as the culture of our local church. I truly believe that Parents First Initiative and the partnership with GCO will have long-lasting impacts.

— Lawrenceville First United Methodist Church

EXPANDING OUR REACH TO NEW COMMUNITIES



RHCK parent participants with GCO Family Program Manager, Johnathan Hill

A significant milestone in 2024 was expanding our Raising Highly Capable Kids program beyond central Gwinnett and into Norcross, Lamar County, and Raven County. In each of these areas, we partner with a local organization and collaborate with them to establish Raising Highly Capable Kids as an additional resource they can offer to meet the holistic needs of at-risk families. Our key partners in 2024 included Next Generation Focus in Norcross, Lamar County Family Connection Collaborative, and Choices Crisis Pregnancy Center. Through this expansion, we offered five RHCK workshops across these new communities, serving dozens of parents and reaching the hispanic community with workshop options in Spanish.

A LOOK INSIDE A PARENT'S EXPERIENCE WITH RCHK



Terri Rozier lives in Barnesville, GA, and is a parent to three adult children and a nine-year-old she's helping to raise. She participated in a Raising Highly Capable Kids workshop in fall 2024.

GCO: What was your greatest takeaway from RHCK?

Terri: The understanding of the 40 developmental assets that are crucial for helping children navigate their lives. These assets are like building blocks that support their growth, resilience, and overall well-being. Learning about them has given me a clear framework to focus on in my parenting while fostering stronger connections and emotional stability in the children I'm raising.

GCO: How did this program impact you?

Terri: It reinforced the importance of being present and engaged in my children's lives, not just as a provider but as a supportive and understanding parent....It also made me more aware of the need for balance and the value of creating a nurturing environment at home. The supportive atmosphere of the workshop reinforced that I'm not alone in facing parenting challenges, and it provided a network of resources and people to lean on.

GCO: What would you tell a parent who is considering taking the workshop?

Terri: Parenting takes patience, resilience, and adaptability. This workshop showed me that there's no one-size-fits-all approach and that it's okay to seek help....The program confirmed that love and effort matter most, and it provided actionable tools to become a more effective and empathetic parent. I highly recommend it to anyone, and I'd say it's an invaluable experience that will equip you with knowledge, strategies, and a supportive community to navigate the challenges of parenting.

DRIVING BIG CONVERSATIONS

Media Spotlight: Elevating the Need to Call Men Back to Purpose



The Center Square
Randy Hicks, President & CEO

"The question is not whether there will be fathers in the world, but what kind of fathers there will be. We need to call men back to purpose. Right now, too many men are mired in addictions, but the way forward is to get out of themselves into a broader mission and sense of life purpose."

We need to bolster men in America through two key ways forward: Helping men who are detached from the workforce reintegrate into the meaning and purpose found in work, and help these same men reconnect with positive relationships, principally through family life."

Educating National Leaders on Work and Marriage Penalties in Government Programs



Randy Hicks, Eric Cochling, and Erik Randolph were featured speakers at "Marriage and Work Penalties in Government Programs," a conference hosted by the American Enterprise Institute. Through this event, we shared observations from our research and from our on-the-ground work in Georgia communities, helping policymakers understand the real-life ways that government programs discourage people from pursuing marriage and work.

EDUCATION

Expanding Education Opportunity to Prepare Kids for Flourishing Lives



It's tempting to think of education outcomes in terms of numbers. Graduation rates, test scores, literacy rates—all are important indicators of progress, but they don't provide the full picture of how education impacts children's futures.

The K-12 years are not just a crucial time to learn fundamental skills like reading and math. They are formative years for developing relational skills; building social capital through relationships with teachers, coaches, and friends; and nurturing their capacity to envision a future made rich by healthy choices, meaningful work, and service to others.

Helping students get the most out of these years requires honoring every child's unique needs.

Yet, Georgia has persisted in propping up a one-size-fits-all education system where

opportunity has been dictated by ZIP codes and not the needs of the student. That is, until 2024.

In 2024, a new era of education opportunity dawned for Georgia families when Gov. Brian Kemp signed the state's first-ever education savings account program into law. The Georgia Promise Scholarship Act (SB 233) will give low-income families \$6,500 per year to access the schooling option best suited to their child.

For GCO, passing the Promise Scholarship bill in 2024 was a high priority because we believe that institutions should exist to serve people and communities, not their own agendas. SB 233 puts the focus of our education system back on families, especially those who struggle with financial and social barriers to quality education. Thanks to this victory, Georgia is closer than ever to a system where every child can access the education option best suited to their needs, regardless of income, race, ZIP code, or other life circumstances.

POLICY IMPACT

Passing Georgia’s First-Ever Education Savings Account Program



In 2024, we made history by passing Georgia’s first-ever education savings account program. Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, the Georgia Promise Scholarship Act (SB 233) will give eligible students in the lowest-performing public schools up to \$6,500 a year to access better education options.

Governor Brian Kemp signs the Georgia Promise Scholarship Act on April 24, 2024.



One size does not fit all for every child or every family—and unfortunately, that means extra out-of-pocket costs for families who choose different paths to properly educate their children. Promise Scholarships would empower parents to do what they think is best for their children, whether it’s a family like mine that requires flexibility for a unique circumstance ... or a family that simply chooses a private school option. Our tax dollars should follow the child and meet the individual needs.

— Molly Gareau, West Cobb parent

Increasing Support for Charter Schools



Georgia’s charter schools provide an accessible, affordable education to communities, but their success has been hampered by unpredictable and unequal funding. In 2024, GCO helped pass two bills to expand investment in charter schools. House Bill 318 transferred oversight of local charter schools from the Department of Education to the State Charter School Commission—a change that helps ensure equal resources and oversight of all Georgia charter schools. House Bill 1122 increased funding for charter school support staff and reinstated reporting of public school ratings for parents’ awareness and decision-making.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Growing the Number of Students Benefiting from School Choice

To date, our efforts have led to over 330,000 Georgia kids benefiting from expanded education options, including charter schools, private school scholarships, and special needs scholarships.

149,866

Private School Students

(less tax credit and special needs scholarships)

92,590

Homeschool Students

39,639

**State-Approved Charter
School Students**

25,767

**Locally-Approved Charter
School Students**

19,516

**Tax Credit Scholarship
Recipients**

5,788

**Special Needs
Scholarship Recipients**

Up to

22,000

Promise Scholarship Recipients

(new in 2025-2026)

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Empowering Parents to Navigate Georgia’s Education Options



Passing the Promise Scholarship bill was only the beginning. Now, it's time to make sure good intentions become reality for Georgia parents. In collaboration with coalition partners and state leaders, GCO launched a campaign to promote Promise Scholarships to parents for the 2025-2026 school year. Our goal is to build parent and community demand for the program so that lawmakers are encouraged to open it up to every Georgia kid in the next few years.

GCO's Guide to Georgia's Education Opportunities gives parents a roadmap to Georgia's school choice programs, including the Promise Scholarship.

Media Spotlight: Governor’s Signature on School Choice Bill Is Good First Step



The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Randy Hicks, President & CEO

“This bill will help shape an education system that honors every child’s unique situation and prevents a lack of quality education from locking children and communities into poverty. Georgia’s future depends on preparing these future generations for health, resilience and success in today’s world.

Part of what makes SB 233 so significant is that it recognizes kids stuck in failing public schools — many of whom are from low-income and impoverished situations — are part of Georgia’s future, too. In an education system that limits choice, they are the ones most at risk of being left behind, without the means to afford a school option suited to their unique needs. Education savings accounts, like SB 233, are good policy because they give kids immediate help.”

EMPLOYMENT

Restoring the Benefits of Work to Communities

When it comes to addressing poverty, the unstated assumption among many politicians and institutions is that better futures depend on government action. But if we look at the trends of the last 60+ years, the fruits of government intervention are nothing short of alarming.

Despite a 62% decline in child poverty, nearly half of children raised in the poorest households still end up in the bottom 20% as adults. The poverty rate may have fallen from 19% to 11.1% since 1964, but since the 1970s, food stamps and Medicaid have seen year-over-year enrollment increases, leading to 41 million Americans on food stamps and nearly 90 million Americans on Medicaid. A 2024 report from The Wall Street Journal showed that, in Georgia alone, 70% of counties rely significantly on income from government.

While these numbers might prove that government can keep people from falling into destitution, what they really confirm is that government intervention is failing to help people move up. It's the tragic outcome of an institutional response that treats poverty solely as a financial problem where the only answer is "more"—more programs, more money, more recipients, and more of their time in the welfare system.

We've forgotten that, when it comes to leading a flourishing life, how people support themselves is just as important as income itself. As government takes over larger and larger shares of household income, it's feeding a different cycle of human suffering: disengagement from work.



Our research, along with our involvement directly in communities, has proven time and again that work is a gateway to believing in a better future—and actually achieving it. Work contributes to all sorts of benefits in life—better physical and mental health, longer lifespans, the ability to overcome past mistakes (like addictions and criminal activity), the formation of stable families and households, and higher chances of upward mobility for children.

Thanks to your support, GCO is restoring these benefits of work in communities that need them most. In 2024, our efforts at the federal and state levels advanced reforms to remove barriers to work within the welfare system. We also grew our partnerships and resources in communities, empowering hundreds of people to discover local pathways back to work and hope for the future.

POLICY IMPACT

- ▶ Passed federal legislation for the One Door policy in the U.S. House of Representatives with bipartisan support.
- ▶ Collaborated with policymakers, agency leaders, and partner organizations in five states (Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, Louisiana, and Utah) to support state-level safety net reforms.
- ▶ Published three research reports covering the benefits of work, the impact of workforce engagement on income disparities, and solutions for benefits cliffs in Medicaid.



Since my time at USDA, I have recognized GCO as an innovator in improving public service delivery to support people flourishing. GCO's team is great in guiding us through policy options, agency structures, and implementation strategies. GCO's research also helped inform Members here at the North Carolina General Assembly as they work to better serve North Carolinians in need.

— Wesley Gwinn, Senior Analyst, North Carolina General Assembly House Oversight Committee

STATE REFORM SPOTLIGHT:

GCO Testifies on Childcare Assistance Reform in Georgia



Childcare assistance programs create some of the biggest disincentives to work in Georgia's welfare system. As lawmakers have considered expanding these programs, GCO has been developing alternative reforms so that families can receive help without getting locked into government dependency. In December 2024, GCO testified before the Senate Study Committee on Access to Affordable Childcare. We explained the barriers to economic mobility in Georgia's childcare assistance programs and shared alternative reforms, which were included in the final set of recommendations to lawmakers.



FEDERAL REFORM SPOTLIGHT

Advancing Work-First Reforms in Congress

Thanks to GCO's efforts, Congressional leaders took up one of the most significant welfare reform bills since the 1990s. It was a bill to allow states to integrate their workforce and welfare programs—a type of flexibility that, shockingly, states have never had.

GCO has seen the need for this flexibility for years—ever since we discovered how and why the web of safety net programs traps people in poverty and disincentivizes work and marriage. So, in collaboration with our Alliance for Opportunity partners, we developed legislation for this solution and recruited lawmakers to carry the bills in the U.S. House and Senate.

The bill went further in Congress than any other federal welfare reform of the last 30 years. In April 2024, it passed the U.S. House of Representatives with broad bipartisan support and advanced to the Senate. Despite broad bipartisan support, Congress ran out of time to pass our federal One Door reform before the end of 2024. However, in light of the interests of the new administration and specifically DOGE, GCO has more opportunities in 2025 to push this reform forward.



GCO consistently brings an unmatched level of policy expertise, professionalism, and genuine hunger for productive collaboration that is personally invigorating and strategically impactful. The partnership between Sutherland Institute and the Georgia Center for Opportunity is an essential part of the positive momentum we've seen on the state and national level to improve our safety net system and strengthen the American Dream for all who yearn for it. I'm grateful for their leadership, partnership, and friendship in this shared effort.

— Nic Dunn, Vice President of Strategy and Senior Fellow, Sutherland Institute

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Better Work: 2024 Impact by the Numbers

2

communities
served

(Columbus and Gwinnett)

510

clients receiving
coaching

30

clients completing
training

302

job interviews
completed by
clients

173

clients hired into
local jobs

108

employer and
nonprofit partners



Better Work has been a great resource for those applicants attempting to re-enter the workforce. It provides educational guidance and personal development assistance around the application process, interviewing skills, and actually where to look for a job that meets the applicant's personal qualifications. Piedmont has been fortunate to partner with Better Work, and we have been able to hire several employees that completed the program. We look forward to the continued partnership and referred applicants to meet our workforce needs.

— Jan Woodham, Piedmont Healthcare in Columbus, GA

Our managers are saying your candidates are at the top compared to our other community partners. Keep doing what you're doing!

— Tonya Alexander, Essendant in Gwinnett, GA



BETTER WORK hosts graduation ceremonies with Jobs for Life participants to celebrate their completion of the class, as well as their personal progress.

Jobs for Life Classes: Helping People Rediscover Purpose and Connection in Work

A core resource of our BETTER WORK program is our Jobs for Life classes, which connect job-seekers with the support system in their own community. These classes teach essential job skills in a way that restores a positive mindset around work, inspiring people to see that work is a source of purpose and a way to contribute to something bigger than ourselves. At the same time, Jobs for Life provides a platform to help participants build local relationships. Businesses, service organizations, and community leaders are involved along the way so that Jobs for Life participants can access services, job opportunities, and friendships that encourage them toward a better future.

“
This was a 10-week journey that changed our lives for the best. We were given tools, hope, a boost of confidence, and love from every angle. We learned to not limit ourselves to what we thought we were worth, but to credit ourselves for who we knew we could be. We learned, most importantly, that we are not alone.
— Mickie, Fall 2024 Jobs for Life Participant

I feel joy every time a student makes progress. I am in awe at the real growth that happens in this program and the ripple effects that will surely happen in our community and for generations to come. It feels good to be a part of something so good and so effective.
— Nancy Wood, Jobs for Life Volunteer

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT



GCO and Torch Tech Empower Low-Wage Workers to Navigate Benefits Cliffs Through Financial Planning

In 2024, GCO launched an innovative partnership with Torch Tech, an organization that provides financial planning support to low-wage workers as they strive for financial independence. Our benefits cliffs model caught Torch Tech’s attention because it’s one of the only tools on the market that offers safety net data down to the county level.

By integrating our model with Torch Tech’s resources, we are helping employees anticipate benefit changes as their income grows. They can then receive financial coaching to navigate the transition to self-sufficiency. Thanks to this partnership, more low-income Americans are no longer forced to choose between government benefits and good jobs as they work toward economic independence.



GCO’s pioneering work on benefits cliffs provides essential visibility into a complex problem that affects thousands of families seeking economic independence. What truly sets GCO apart is their commitment to collaboration and their genuine care for families. They don’t just identify problems—they actively partner with organizations to develop and implement solutions. We’re proud to partner with an organization that approaches these complex social challenges with rigor and compassion. Together, we’re making meaningful progress in addressing benefits cliffs and creating more opportunities for families to thrive.

— Torch Tech

DRIVING BIG CONVERSATIONS

Local Media Highlight: Columbus *Ledger-Enquirer* Features Fall 2024 Jobs for Life Graduation



Scan the QR code to watch the *Ledger-Enquirer's* feature story

“As the time for his graduation ceremony approached, Michael Averett joined his classmates in a small classroom. He donned his cap and gown. Just down a short hallway, family and friends waited for the ceremony to commence. When asked for his thoughts, Averett said it was a great feeling: ‘It just feels like putting on another shield of armor to try to conquer my career.’ Averett was one of nine students who graduated Nov. 14 from the Jobs for Life program at Victory Mission in Columbus, Georgia....This night means I’ve achieved another milestone in my life to become a better person,’ said Averett.”

National Media Highlight: GCO Calls for Leaders to Ease the Labor Shortage by Fixing the Social Safety Net



The Hill
Randy Hicks, President & CEO

“Without a doubt, we need a well-functioning social safety net. But it needs to be just that—a net to catch people—and not a way of life, not a system that creates generational poverty. The bottom line is that we can better address the suffering of poverty, unemployment, and community fragmentation by creating a more humane system that rewards work.”

Educating National Leaders on Work and Marriage Penalties in Government Programs



Randy Hicks, Eric Cochling, and Erik Randolph were featured speakers at “Marriage and Work Penalties in Government Programs,” a conference hosted by the American Enterprise Institute. Through this event, we shared observations from our research and from our on-the-ground work in Georgia communities, helping policymakers understand the real-life ways that government programs discourage people from pursuing marriage and work.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Strengthening Public Safety as the Foundation for Prosperous Communities

For millions of children and their families, violent crime is a part of everyday life.

When a high-poverty community develops a high rate of violence, poverty gets locked into place. Violent crime drives out families and businesses who have the option to escape, leaving behind those who are most disadvantaged and forcing them to face a future with fewer job opportunities, unsafe or underperforming schools, and overwhelming fears that violence could tear apart their families or take lives—including their own.

Left unchecked, violent crime becomes one of the most serious barriers to human flourishing because it feeds the generational cycle of poverty. Decades of data confirm that nearly half of children raised in the poorest households—the bottom 20% of incomes—end up in that bottom 20% as adults.

Exposure to violence only makes this outcome more likely. Studies have found that children born into low-income households are less upwardly mobile and do worse academically and behaviorally if they grow up in high-crime communities.

If leaders truly care about jobs, quality education, and stable families, they must embrace the reality that those opportunities start with a safe community.

Spearheaded by our Director of Criminal Justice Initiatives, Josh Crawford, GCO's public safety initiative now has multiple years of research showing how to restore safety



to crime-ridden communities. Through a mix of community, legislative, and media avenues, we have been equipping elected officials in Georgia, Kentucky, and beyond with roadmaps for crime reduction. Thanks to your support, our work has spurred awareness and adoption of proven public safety solutions that lower crime, reduce fear, and improve economic mobility in high-crime neighborhoods.

POLICY IMPACT



Safer Kentucky Act

Though it's one of the most challenging public safety environments in the country, Kentucky has made impressive progress, thanks to crime reduction policies based on GCO's research. To help Kentucky build on this success in 2024, GCO authored and advanced major portions of House Bill 5, the Safer Kentucky Act. The bill included several provisions, again based on GCO's research, that will improve the state's approach to gang violence, repeat violent offenders, and re-entry programs. The legislation passed with bipartisan support and the governor's signature.



Secure DC Act

In 2020, as crime worsened across the country, it became abysmal in Washington, D.C. Elected leaders doubled down on bad policies, reducing prosecutions and lessening punishment. Residents and businesses were fed up with feeling unsafe and being victimized. So, when lawmakers went looking for real solutions, we were ready. We advised policymakers on best practices and helped provide a path forward, while continuing to echo those residents and businesses saying enough was enough. The final outcome was passage of the Secure DC Omnibus Act of 2024, a bill with dozens of provisions, many of which were bolstered by our research and advocacy and drew broad support from both the mayor and the city council.



Doing Right by Kids

Doing Right by Kids, a new book from the American Enterprise Institute, included a chapter on "Kids and Community Violence: Costs, Consequences, and Solutions" authored by Josh. Weaving together real-life stories and research findings, Josh explained how high rates of community violence are linked with worse outcomes and less upward mobility for children. With the publication of *Doing Right by Kids*, GCO has been able to hand influential leaders—nationally and locally—another resource to address the barriers keeping disadvantaged kids locked in poverty.

DRIVING BIG CONVERSATIONS

OUR REACH	KEY APPEARANCES
<p>8 public safety op-eds</p>	<p><i>The Hill, National Review, Washington Examiner, Inside Sources / DC Journal</i></p>
<p>25 television, radio, and broadcast interviews</p>	<p>Fox 5 DC interview, plus blanket coverage during the Republican and Democratic conventions to discuss the impact of crime on the 2024 election.</p>
<p>7 speaking engagements at events sponsored by think tanks, advocacy groups, and universities</p>	<p><i>Doing Right by Kids</i> Book Launch Panel hosted by American Enterprise Institute, Georgia State College of Law, Americans for Tax Reform, and Act for Justice conferences</p>

152 State and Local Media Outlets Pick Up GCO’s Perspective on the 1994 Crime Bill

Inside Sources, a media outlet and op-ed wire service, asked GCO’s Director of Criminal Justice Initiatives, Josh Crawford, to contribute to a debate feature on the impact of the 1994 Crime Bill. In his op-ed, Josh made the case that specific policies in the bill prompted the crime decline that began in the mid-1990s. The piece was picked up by 152 local papers and wide-reaching state outlets—including the *Miami Herald*, the *Sacramento Bee*, the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, and the *Raleigh News & Observer*—and reached over four million print readers.

“Overall, the 1994 Crime Bill marked a significant policy accomplishment and helped usher in a 20-year decline in violent crime that yielded fewer victims and more capacity for human flourishing in neighborhoods previously held captive by violence.”

— Josh Crawford, “When Violent Crime Was at Its Worst, Congressional Action Helped” (*Inside Sources/DC Journal*, October 2024)

SHAPING THE CONVERSATION ON CRIME AND THE 2024 ELECTION

As the political conventions convened and the 2024 election kicked into high gear, Josh was a sought-after voice in the conversation about how the public's concern over crime could sway their votes. Through op-eds and numerous broadcast interviews, Josh delivered a powerful message to DC insiders, state officials, and the public: Safe communities are the first step to prosperous communities, so it's no surprise that voters want leaders who prioritize effective policing, accountability, and a just system that doesn't let fear and lawlessness reign.

There's a Crime Divide Between Americans and Politicians, and Voters Are Watching



The Hill
Josh Crawford

"Voters are fed up. Even in progressive enclaves, they are rejecting elected officials who don't share their concerns. Voters instinctively know what policymakers would do well to remember: Rising crime is a policy decision, not a circumstance. People are demanding better because policy can produce better."

Impact of Crime on the 2024 Election



FOX 5 DC
Josh Crawford



"Crime has skyrocketed to one of those top issues for most Americans, and that's largely the function of two issues: increases in crime, especially in urban cores across the country, and general dissatisfaction with how they feel elected officials have handled that problem. Americans know that public policy can fix these issues, and that's what they're demanding."

CALLING OUT FAILED SOFT-ON-CRIME APPROACHES IN SUFFERING CITIES



Want to reduce crime in DC? Ramp up enforcement and sentences



Washington Examiner
Josh Crawford

"The city has averaged 81.9 carjackings per month [in 2023]... Homicides are also at their highest total since 1997, and a poll from last March found that only 29% of Washington residents feel 'very' safe in their neighborhood, compared to 59% of residents in the Virginia suburbs. None of this resonated with the D.C. Council, which still seems to be committed to the idea that the solution to the crime crisis is less punishment."

San Francisco Should Try Punishing Criminals, Not Businesses



National Review
Josh Crawford

"[San Francisco's Tenderloin District] has been deemed 'high crime' for good reason. The twenty blocks are a hotbed for open air drug use and sales, robbery and other violent crime. But reducing economic activity isn't a smart crime solution. It's a tragic sentence to a life of fear and poverty."

GCO WELCOMES NEW TEAM MEMBERS TO GROW OUR IMPACT



DAVID DOVERSPIKE
VICE PRESIDENT OF FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

David is an accomplished professional with a distinguished career at Blue Trust and advanced academic achievements, including a Juris Doctor and a Master of Laws in Taxation. Joining the GCO team, David brings deep expertise in estate planning, tax strategy, and charitable giving. His extensive experience in financial strategy, operational management, and philanthropy plays a vital role in advancing GCO's mission to empower individuals and families to excel. Beyond his technical proficiency, David is deeply passionate about fostering community engagement and mentoring the next generation of professionals, demonstrating his commitment to both financial excellence and positive societal impact.



JOHNATHAN HILL
FAMILY PROGRAM MANAGER

John Hill brings deep commitment to cultural engagement, inclusivity, and breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty to the GCO team. With over a decade of community development experience in Guatemala, John has cultivated a holistic approach to supporting families through pastoral leadership, nutritional education, and building meaningful cross-cultural connections. A graduate of Lee University with a bachelor's degree in ministry leadership, John has a passion for empowering diverse communities and equipping families with the tools they need to thrive. At GCO, he applies his expertise to expanding our parenting programs and involving the community to build hope and dignity for those GCO serves.



ANGELINE SEAMES
DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

With a bachelor's degree in sport management from Bowling Green State University and a master's in sport administration from Belmont University, Angeline brings extensive experience to her role. She previously served as senior associate manager at United Way of Greater Atlanta, where she managed corporate partnerships, led workforce campaigns, and cultivated donor relationships, contributing to \$6.45 million in revenue for the child well-being agenda. As a new member of the GCO team, Angeline is dedicated to refining and enhancing the organization's development processes, ensuring impactful and sustainable growth.



JESSICA SNELLINGS
RESEARCH ANALYST

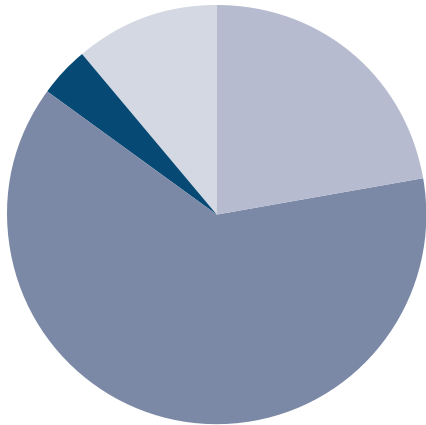
Jessica drives the success of GCO's initiatives through data-driven insights and research analysis, with a primary focus on public safety research. Jessica holds bachelor's degrees in psychology and sociology, as well as a master's degree in educational research, all from Georgia State University. Before joining GCO, she worked with education nonprofits, where she specialized in data analysis and research to address critical areas such as teacher workforce solutions and college attainment rates. Outside of work, Jessica likes to spend time with her two cats, knit, read, and learn new skills.



JODY WIRTZ
DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Jody brings over 30 years of expertise as a commercial banker in metro Atlanta, specializing in financial management, relationship building, and team leadership. Throughout his career, he has worked closely with entrepreneurs, business owners, and high-net-worth individuals, providing solutions and guidance to meet their unique financial goals. A proud graduate of Wofford College with a BA in finance, Jody combines professional excellence with a deep commitment to community service. Now, as a member of the GCO team, Jody is leading efforts to engage major donors and corporate partners. His focus is on advancing GCO's mission to remove barriers to success for vulnerable members of our community, bringing vision, leadership, and heart to this important work.

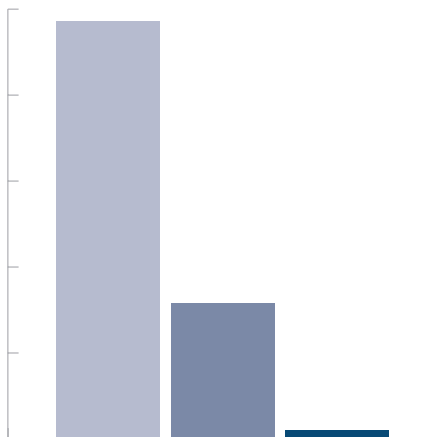
2024 FINANCIALS



TOTAL REVENUE

●	Individuals	\$845,053
●	Foundations	\$2,354,911
●	Corporations	\$148,112
●	Other	\$416,277
	TOTAL REVENUE	\$3,764,353

YEARLY REVENUE COMPARISON



TOTAL EXPENSES

●	Program	\$3,243,506
●	General & Admin	\$575,280
●	Fundraising	\$41,452
	TOTAL EXPENSES	\$3,860,238

LEADERSHIP AND STAFF



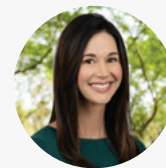
DAVID BASS
Writer & Editor



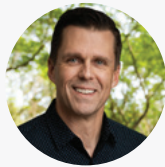
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Vice President of
Workforce Solutions



BUZZ BROCKWAY
Vice President of Policy



KIMBERLY CHALEK
Vice President of
External Affairs



ERIC COCHLING
Chief Program Officer
and General Counsel



JOSH CRAWFORD
Director of Criminal
Justice Initiatives



DAVID DOVERSPIKE
Vice President of Finance
and Operations



JIM ECKSTEIN
Executive Vice
President



AMBER GORMAN
Program Manager,
BETTER WORK Columbus



RACHEL HAMILTON
Grants Associate



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Accounting Analyst



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Family



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Institutional Giving



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BETTER WORK Gwinnett



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Vice President of
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Web Developer



ANGELINE SEAMES
Development
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JESSICA SNELLINGS
Research Analyst



KATELYN STEWART
Raising Highly Capable Kids
Program Manager



KELSEY UNDERWOOD
Vice President of
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JODY WIRTZ
Director of External
Affairs

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RANDY HICKS

President and CEO, Georgia Center for Opportunity

TONY KITCHENS

Reentry and Reintegration Specialist

AL PENTRANGELI

Chief Operating Officer, Carroll Daniel Construction

HOW TO SUPPORT OUR WORK

Together, we can relieve the suffering associated with poverty, unemployment, and family fragmentation and make it possible for the most vulnerable in our communities to believe in and achieve better futures.

GIVE BY CHECK

Checks should be made out to Georgia Center for Opportunity and mailed to:

5051 Peachtree Corners Circle, Ste. 200
Norcross, GA 30092

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Scan the code to make a gift through our website.

SUBSCRIBE



Our quarterly newsletters keep you updated about the impact of your support throughout the year. Scan the QR code to sign up.

