



GEORGIA
CENTER for OPPORTUNITY



2016 ANNUAL REPORT





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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The past year has been one of growth and impact. We have remained dedicated in our work as a nonprofit, state-based organization focused on removing barriers so that all Georgians have a real opportunity to succeed. We've invested our time and resources in three areas proven to have the greatest impact on human flourishing – education, employment, and family formation.

We continue to demonstrate that strong communities, empowered by solid leadership and engagement are the foundation for a free and prosperous nation.

Specifically, during the last year, we:

1. Saw our final recommendations on prisoner reentry reform enacted into law which will improve the ability of returning citizens to obtain employment, a key to reducing recidivism.
2. Launched a healthy families initiative designed to provide relationship training to thousands of individuals over the next three years, while reaching hundreds of thousands with a positive message about marriage and family life.
3. Laid the groundwork for a major initiative focused on removing disincentives to work and marriage in the welfare system.
4. Built the case for why Georgia students need education savings accounts.

In addition, we created new and essential community partnerships that share our focus on education, employment and family as the keys to individual success and community health.

Investments in GCO help students access the education that meets their needs, help individuals find and maintain employment, and help strengthen families and marriages. We envision a Georgia in which everyone has the chance to succeed through family support, education, and hard work – regardless of the circumstances of their birth.

Sincerely,

Randy Hicks

President & Chief Executive Officer





INTRO TO OUR WORK

The primary pathways to opportunity — a quality education, fulfilling work, and a healthy family life — have experienced a rapid decline in recent decades.

- The statewide high school graduation rate for 2015 was only 78.8 percent.
- In some of the poorest communities in Georgia, as many as one out of five adult men are behind bars on any given day.
- One in every four children in Georgia is living in poverty.
- 45 percent of children in Georgia are now born to single moms.

Georgia Center for Opportunity (GCO) is independent, non-partisan, and solutions-focused. Our team is dedicated to creating opportunities for a quality education, fulfilling work, and a healthy family life for all Georgians. To achieve our mission, we research ways to help remove barriers to opportunity in each of these pathways, promote our solutions to policymakers and the public, and help effective and innovative social enterprises deliver results in their communities. Our ultimate goal is to see every Georgian who is willing to seize the opportunities presented to them living a life

that can be characterized as truly flourishing. Our work is focused on three primary impact areas:



Thriving communities are built by rewarding virtues that lead to liberty, self-sufficiency, and earned success.

Our ultimate goal is to see every Georgian who is willing to seize the opportunities presented to them living a life that can be characterized as truly flourishing.



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Tax-free savings for disability expenses:

Georgia passed a version of the ABLE Act, modeled after the federal version which passed in 2014. The new law provides for tax-free savings accounts to cover qualified disability expenses such as housing, education, or transportation, while also not affecting a disabled person’s eligibility for social security or food assistance benefits.

Tax credits for rural health care:

Modeled after the successful Tax Credit Scholarship Program, which provides education choice to more than 13,000 students, a new tax credit was created to help provide healthcare in rural Georgia. The new law allows individuals and corporations to receive a credit for donating to a rural health care organization, defined as a nonprofit that must treat patients who are indigent or on Medicaid or Medicare and must be located in a rural county. Credits are capped at \$50 million in the first year (2017), \$60 million in year two, and \$70 million in year three.

Reforming foster care policies:

A new law was created with the intention of helping children in the foster care system (or helping them to avoid it altogether). The law prioritizes placing children with family members or kinship caregivers for a short time, when it is in their best interest. It also gives a legal framework for families to grant Power of Attorney to these relatives or caregivers who are temporarily caring for the children. In other states, this model of fostering— often called “Safe Families” — has shown great success.

Education reform:

Unfortunately, significant legislation to improve education in Georgia was delayed until 2017. Governor Deal announced during his State of the State address in January that he was holding off the pursuit of his large education reform package until 2017 to give the legislature and the education community more time to fully vet the proposal. Presumably the Governor also wanted to not pursue new education reform measures until after the November vote on his Opportunity School District (OSD) plan. This signaled that it would be a lighter year than usual for education legislation. However, a few bills were introduced and fewer still saw final passage.

Passed:

- All teachers (and other state employees) saw a 3% raise included in the budget.
- A bill passed that reduces the percentage of student achievement that factors into a teacher’s evaluation from 50 percent to 30 percent and reduces the number of in-classroom observations for some teachers. It could also make Georgia the only state in the nation with statewide testing in grades 1-12.

Did Not Pass:

- A bill to create a new tax credit scholarship program for low/ middle income children.
- A bill, called “Junior GI,” to give children of military families scholarships for use in grades K-12.
- A bill to give children eligible for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship more flexibility in how they use their scholarship dollars.



In January the red carpet came out for Ludacris and Keisha Knight-Pulliam as they joined GCO and friends at Liberty Plaza at the Capitol to spotlight school choice options for Georgia’s students during National School Choice Week. More than 2,000 gathered to hear celebrity guests, community leaders, legislators and Governor Deal pledge their support for school choice. Governor Deal also presented a proclamation declaring it National School Choice Week in the state.

Ludacris and Keisha Knight-Pulliam both addressed the crowd sharing their personal education journeys and their passion for empowering Georgia parents with more educational options. With multiple local media outlets also in attendance, the chants for school choice rang loudly throughout the city while students showcased their talent with the National School Choice Week dance.



Quinxavier is beating the odds!

Quinxavier is 18 and lives in the most crime-ridden zip code in the southeast. A zip code in which roughly 40 percent of kids don’t finish high school, 62 percent of adults don’t work, and almost every child is born to a single mother.

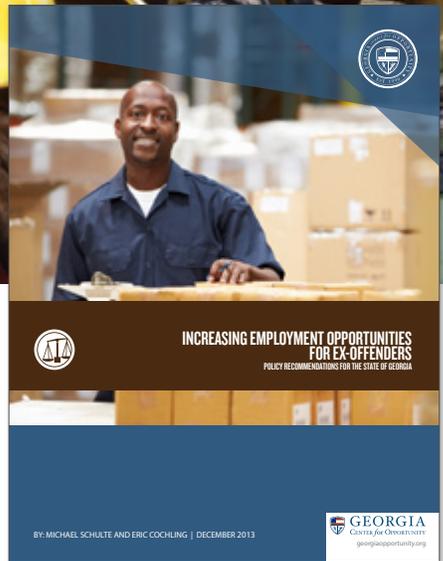
But Quinxavier is beating the odds. He graduated from high school this year as a National Merit Scholar and, according to his educators, is likely to achieve his goal of being the first member of his family to graduate from college.

Quinxavier has been a participant in the Tuition Tax Credit Program, which wouldn’t exist without GCO and your faithful support. This program allowed him to attend a private school where he could receive quality academic instruction, participate in after-school programs, and receive additional support to help him reach his dreams.

Quinxavier was able to seize educational opportunities that helped him succeed.



PRISONER REENTRY



This year we were happy to see additional prisoner reentry reforms enacted consistent with our recommendations in our report “Increasing Employment Opportunities for Ex-Offenders.” Because of the research provided by GCO in this whitepaper, several additional recommendations were included in Senate Bill 367.

Because of these reforms, individuals who were incarcerated will now have wider access to occupational licensing, and driver’s licenses will be reinstated to those previously convicted of a drug-related offense that did not involve a motor vehicle. While seemingly small, these changes will have a major impact on giving work opportunities to the formerly incarcerated, which should translate into less recidivism and greater public safety.

GCO is helping parents find work and support their children

GCO published a white paper in July 2015 outlining the benefits that Parental Accountability Courts (PACs) are having in Georgia and encouraging the state to expand these courts to all judicial circuits in the state. PACs are designed to help parents with child support orders address the underlying barriers that prevent them from being gainfully employed and consistently paying their child support obligations. Barriers may include such things as a criminal record, a suspended driver’s license, a substance abuse or mental health issue, inadequate education, and limited job skills. These courts provide much-needed accountability and assistance for those who face potentially serious consequences for failure to support their children – even the possibility of incarceration.

Henry County Superior Court Judge Brian Amero stated, “GCO’s research on Parental Accountability Courts made the case for their effectiveness and helped pave the way for their growth in the state.”

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The paper projected that if the program were expanded to all 49 judicial circuits, PACs could collect as much as \$2.1 million a year in child support and save an estimated \$13.4 million a year from not incarcerating parents found in contempt of court for non-payment of child support. The white paper was favorably received by state leadership, and in April 2016, the General Assembly allocated money to fund the expansion of these courts over the next several years.

PAC Program Impact: Harold Stroud

Harold Stroud has done a great job of improving his circumstances since entering the PAC program in July 2015.

Upon entry into the program, Mr. Stroud was unemployed, living with his nephew, and working on vehicles occasionally for money. At that time he was not making substantial payments towards his obligation on three child support cases handled by this office. Mr. Stroud has some criminal background issues that interfered with his ability to obtain employment and was experiencing health issues that resulted in termination from Target as a forklift driver.

The PAC program assisted Mr. Stroud with completion of applications for employment, creating a resume, obtaining a new Social Security card, numerous job leads, and getting his license back.

Despite having doors shut in his face on many occasions while in the program, Mr. Stroud was relentless in his search for employment. He consistently followed up on applications, submitting and humbling himself in his requests for an opportunity to work to support his family.

After determining that he'd done his best in Henry County, he and his family moved to Coweta to start fresh and look

for better opportunities. They initially moved in with his wife's grandparents, who gave them six months to get on their feet. Mr. Stroud was soon hired at Little Giant Farmers Market and began making consistent payments through wage withholding. However, having three cases and working only 35 hours a week for \$10 an hour, he was still struggling to meet his full obligation on each of his cases.

Refusing to give up, Mr. Stroud continued to take on as many additional hours as possible, and he continued making inquiries about working in the Meat Department, which would offer him a raise and as many as 80 hours of work per week. To his satisfaction, he was offered a position in the Meat Department and has already begun working this new job. Mr. Stroud has also moved his family into their own rental home and purchased a used truck, which has removed his family's dependency on his in-laws. All of these accomplishments have made him extremely proud.

As you can see, GCO's work is providing opportunities for people who face real obstacles to achieving self-sufficiency. Whether promoting effective public policies, community solutions, or some combination of the two, GCO is committed to removing barriers to opportunity.





HEALTHY FAMILIES INITIATIVE

We have made it our mission at GCO to overcome barriers that threaten family formation and healthy relationships. We are driven by a belief — supported by experience and research — that people from all walks of life are more likely to flourish if they have an intact, healthy family and strong relationships.

Unfortunately, the reality is that divorce is common, and cohabitation and unwed childbirth are on the rise. Even many families that remain intact struggle to maintain healthy relationships.

For more than two decades we have worked to strengthen families in Georgia, and in January we launched our latest project focused on the Norcross and Peachtree Corners area, called the Healthy Families Initiative.

This program is designed to focus on transforming relationships and families in the Norcross and Peachtree Corners area through a community-based collaboration between individuals, nonprofits, churches, and businesses. Our goal is simple but not easy — increase healthy relationships, family formation and stability, and reduce childbearing outside of marriage.

Through this initiative members of the community can participate in free workshops that focus on the pillars of healthy relationships through proven curricula like 24/7 Dad, Boot Camp for New Dads, Strengthening Families, PREP, and How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk or Jerkette.

GCO has also partnered with subject matter experts like Dr. Brad Wilcox, a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies and Director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia. In addition to being an advisor for the project, Dr. Wilcox is evaluating whether the project is changing attitudes in the community about marriage and family life.

Local businesses, nonprofits and churches are the backbone of the community, which is why HFI also recruits area businesses and organizations to be involved in the program. We are proud to be partnering with the following organizations:





MEET JOYCE & JUNIOUS

After three years of marriage and a move to Atlanta, Joyce and her husband Junious realized they were experiencing great challenges as a blended family. After seeking help through marriage counselors, who had no experience with blended family issues, they were still at square one.

In desperation, Joyce began scouring the internet for anything she thought might save her family. She was connected with Georgia Center for Opportunity. Joyce and Junious were able to take a course called Smart Steps designed specifically for blended families and invited other blended families they knew to attend, too.

Joyce and Junious not only participated in the course, but they experienced a dramatic turnaround in their family as a result. They have since become certified trainers to encourage other families on the road to healing and stronger relationships. Seeing a need for training and tools for families like theirs, they made it their life mission to serve blended families. As a couple they have chaired their church's couples ministry, worked on the board for organizations providing help to blended families, and currently lead courses for families as part of GCO's Healthy Families Initiative.

The Smart Steps class was the beginning of our journey and exposure to helping families and couples.





BREAKTHROUGH NORCROSS



The Breakthrough Norcross Initiative is a pilot project in the Norcross area of metro Atlanta that provides collaborative solutions to complex social issues throughout the local community.

It is rooted in the belief that programs serving disadvantaged individuals frequently work in silos, and by bringing together local schools, churches, nonprofits, and businesses under a common agenda, we can make effective change in the Norcross and Peachtree Corners region—promoting self-sufficiency, and paving a road to success for children and their families.

The initiative focuses on all areas of the “success sequence” at the local level - increasing educational opportunities, job readiness, and the number of stable families — thereby leading to more individuals experiencing social and economic well-being.

With a growing team dedicated to the work of Breakthrough Norcross, we fully expect to see the nonprofits, schools, churches and businesses we are working with increase their impact this next year through coordinated activities, shared measurements, and increased consistent communication.

The initiative focuses on all areas of the “success sequence” — increasing educational opportunities, job readiness, and the number of stable families.



WELFARE REFORM

While early welfare reform efforts in the late 1980s and 1990s were met with success, specifically around Aid to Families with Dependent Children (now Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), serious problems still exist around the dozens of welfare programs untouched by these early reforms. Welfare cliffs, in particular, are a major problem facing welfare recipients who are trying to become self-sufficient. They occur when people earn more money, whether it is from a pay raise or by accepting a new job, but face a dramatic decrease in their earnings due to the loss of government benefits.

In order to better understand the problem and find a realistic solution, GCO engaged Erik Randolph, a Senior Fellow with both the Illinois Policy Institute and Pennsylvania's Commonwealth Foundation, who has over 27 years experience in administering welfare programs, to create a model depicting how the welfare cliff impacts welfare recipients in Georgia. This computer model demonstrates how Georgians are being negatively affected by the welfare system when trying to provide a better life for their families. In September, the findings were published in our report entitled, "Disincentives for Work and Marriage in Georgia's Welfare System," which can be found in the resources section of GCO's website.

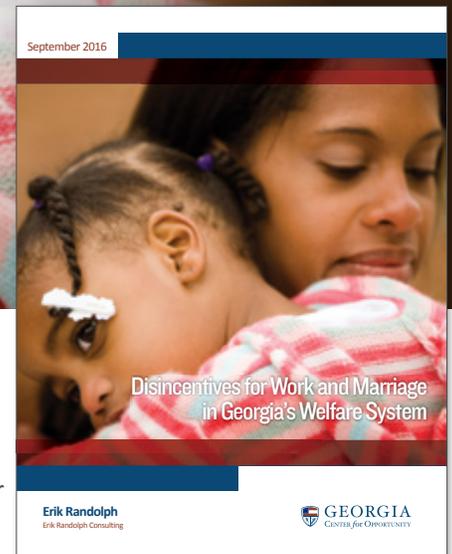
The computer modeling shows just how damaging welfare cliffs can be to those within the welfare system struggling to get ahead. Welfare cliffs can occur within just one program, but they are most prevalent when a family is receiving benefits from multiple

programs. For example, a single mother who accepts a 25 cent per hour pay increase can find herself losing many thousands of dollars of welfare benefits annually, forcing her to have to make the terrible choice between increased earnings or overall financial security for her family and the dependence it creates. Unfortunately, this scenario is where many Georgians find themselves; unable to take higher paying jobs because of the immediate drop in benefits flowing to the home.

In addition to the current system creating welfare cliffs, there are financial disincentives for couples to marry in the welfare system. Many couples desire to marry but realize this will result in a steep loss in benefits; therefore, they choose to remain single. GCO realizes this is hurting our communities and our states.

To help remove the disincentives to work and marriage in the welfare system, GCO is working on reports pointing out what states can do (with or without federal help) to reform welfare programs. Our goal is for work and marriage to be encouraged at every turn because they represent the surest paths to escape or avoid poverty.

Welfare cliffs are hurting our communities and our states.





DONOR PROFILE: STEVE AND KENT BUTLER



Kent, Steve and their granddaughter Lela

Steve and Kent Butler are longtime friends and supporters of GCO. Steve served as the Chief Executive Officer of W.C. Bradley Co. and Chairman of the Bradley-Turner Foundation Inc. He has been an Independent Director at Synovus Financial Corporation and currently serves as Chairman of the W.C. Bradley Company, Inc., a Trustee at St. Francis Hospital, Inc. and Chairman of the Advisory Board of Columbus Bank and Trust.

How did you become involved with Georgia Center for Opportunity? Why do you support GCO?

Kent and I were introduced to GCO several years ago by a friend. This friend knew of our concern about family fragmentation and the failure of family formation as a root cause of most all of the problems in our society including poverty, crime, unemployment, failure in education, drug and gang related activity, and just about all others you could name. We began to see GCO as an effective solution to these problems and so we have supported this work ever since.

What do you think is the most important thing GCO does?

I think GCO is most effective at identifying barriers to opportunity and developing both public policy and community-based solutions to those barriers. We have seen firsthand in Columbus how helpful they were in assisting us in establishing Right from the Start, modeled after First Things First in Chattanooga, as an organization focused on family formation, fatherhood initiatives, and unwed childbearing.

What do you think is the biggest issue facing Georgians today?

Personally, my conviction is that the disintegration and lack of formation of families is the most damaging issue we face. We live in a culture that does not value or appreciate the critical role families play in a healthy society. In some parts of our culture substantially more than half of all children are born to unmarried parents.

What is your wish for Columbus and Georgia broadly?

If we can be successful in communicating the importance of family formation and can help eliminate barriers to education and employment, we will be addressing a multitude of problems and issues in our culture.

What would you say to someone considering investing in GCO's work?

Check it out and discover the effectiveness of this organization as we have. Begin to understand the critical importance of this work and then become a part of enabling it.



THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS

CHAIRMAN'S CIRCLE (\$10,000+)

AFC Growth Fund
David and Donna Allman
The Lynde & Harry Bradley
Foundation
Steve and Kent Butler
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National School Choice Week
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BREAKTHROUGH SOCIETY (\$1000+)

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Stephens
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Ben and Jessica Teague
Tip Top Poultry
Michael and Holly Villa

Watkins Christian
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Greg and Jan Winchester

SUSTAINING MEMBER (\$100+)

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Centers
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Pete Canalichio
Steve and Rosalind Chapman
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Butch and Debbie Floyd
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Jimmy Swain
Rick and Dani Swope
Siu Tjoe
Joyce Whitted
Glenn and Janet Wilson
Mark and Kimberly Zachocki

By making a tax-deductible gift to Georgia Center for Opportunity, you are helping to create opportunities for a quality education, fulfilling work, and a healthy family life for all Georgians. To learn more about ways to give and how your donations make an impact, please contact Kelly McGonigal at 770-242-0001 ext. 705 or Kelly.McGonigal@GeorgiaOpportunity.org

List includes donors who gave \$100 or more in the 2016 fiscal year.



EVENTS

Every year Georgia Center for Opportunity makes it a priority to host events within the community to help educate fellow Georgians about the work we're doing throughout the state. At these events we have a chance to get to know our neighbors, make new strategic partners, as well as meet with donors and provide a presence in the community.



Family and Economic Opportunity

A new study by Dr. Brad Wilcox, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies and Director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, was highlighted in December at a Cobb Galleria luncheon. He discussed the role marriage and family play in fostering free enterprise, laying the ground work for future GCO projects regarding healthy family formation and welfare reform.



Day Under the Gold Dome

The new year kicked off with a "Day Under the Gold Dome," giving our partners and donors a chance to be part of Georgia history as they toured the state's capitol building, visited the senate and house floors, and met with state leaders for a legislative update.



Community Matters: Creating Opportunities

Multiple communities across the state have shown interest in our Breakthrough Communities model, which has given Randy the opportunity to meet with supporters to discuss the success of GCO's initiatives, and how they may be specifically tailored to fit the needs of other areas around the state.



Georgia Forum on Police Community Relations

During the recent violence that occurred nationally in 2016, GCO's Eric Cochling participated in a panel discussion hosted by the Georgia GOP and Morehouse College on the issue of Police-Community-Relations. The evening discussion fit hand-in-hand with GCO's focus on the ability of citizens of all stripes to succeed in Georgia if given the chance to receive a good education, find fulfilling work, and form and sustain a healthy family.



Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association Conference

GCO's Eric Cochling presented our prisoner reentry work at the CMCA National Conference.



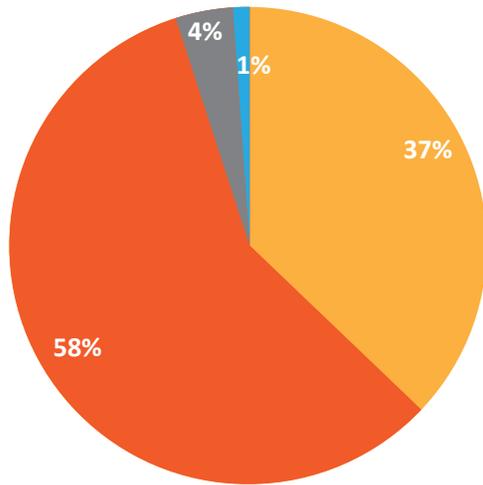
2016 Georgia School Choice Week Celebration

Over 2,000 gathered on Liberty Plaza at the Capitol to bring awareness to school choice options across the state. Students, parents and teachers were joined by Gov. Deal, Sen. Hill and Rep. Glanton, plus Ludacris and Keisha Knight-Pulliam also made appearances and addressed the crowd.



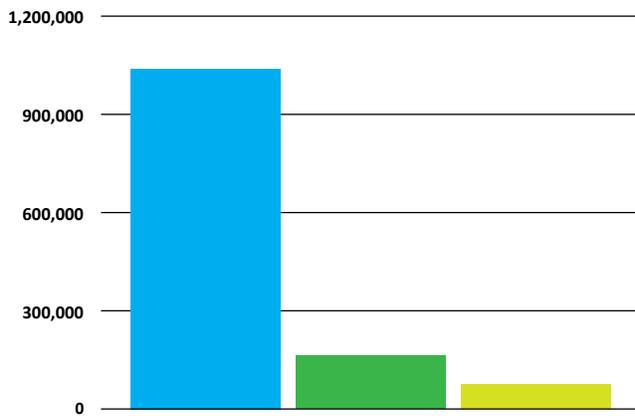
FINANCIALS

The unaudited financial information is from the 2016 fiscal year ending June 30, and shows how Georgia Center for Opportunity continues to make an impact in the lives of Georgians while remaining fiscally responsible.



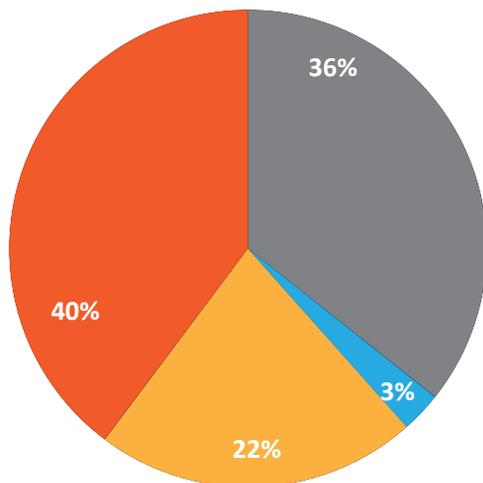
Total Revenue

Total Revenue:	\$1,747,861
Individuals:	\$649,263
Foundations:	\$1,011,775
Corporations:	\$77,341
Other:	\$9,482



Total Expenses

Total Expenses:	\$1,290,762
Programs:	\$1,075,568
Administration:	\$64,664
Fundraising:	\$150,530



Program Breakdown

Total Expenditures:	\$1,075,568
Breakthrough Norcross:	\$29,503
Education:	\$384,737
Employment:	\$234,050
Family Formation:	\$427,278



STAFF AND BOARD MEMBERS

GCO's mission depends on a talented and dedicated team. Their commitment to serving the people of Georgia makes all that we do possible.

Board of Directors

- Giulio Gianturco, Board Chairman
- Randy Hicks, GCO CEO & President
- Karin Douglas, Secretary
- Allen Sells, Treasurer
- Jerry Thames
- Shaunti Feldhahn
- Keith Schneider



Randy Hicks, President and CEO
wife Marilyn and kids Jessica,
Madison, Carson, Jesse and Lexie

Eric Cochling, EVP and General Counsel
wife Laura and kids Aidan,
Grant and Elise



Josiah Vega, Development Associate
(Second from the left)
Jesse, Edwin, Carrie,
Moriah, and Mikaela



Jamie Lord, Director of Government Affairs, Hank the dog and husband Andy



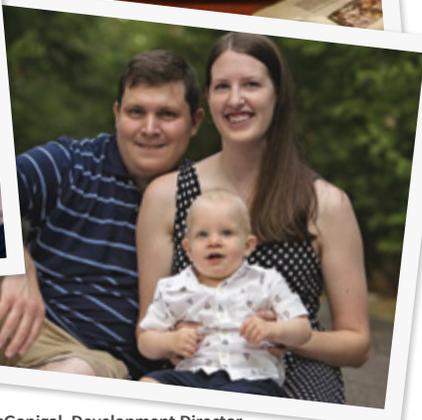
Katelyn King, Policy Analyst
(right) Sister,
Kambrelyn King



Joyce Whitted, Healthy Families Initiative Program Director



Katherine Greene, Healthy Families Initiative Program Coordinator, husband Carlos and kids Isaac and Cameron



Kelly McGonigal, Development Director, husband Shane and son Michael



Kimberly Sawatka, Communications Manager, husband Mark and daughter Ruby



GEORGIA CENTER FOR OPPORTUNITY

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