



GEORGIA
CENTER *for* OPPORTUNITY



**20
17** | **ANNUAL
REPORT**





2017

Annual Report





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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Why do we produce this report every year? Well, I can tell you it's not simply because it's expected or because we like to brag a little about our work. It's to help you better understand what your investment in us – whether that's through your time, financial resources, or moral support – is doing to help the people of our state.

As you will see in the following pages, your support is helping shape public policy and create local community efforts that lead to a quality education, stable employment, and a healthy family life for a greater number of people in our state.

Your support is helping to inform policymakers that all options – including Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) – must be on the table when it comes to ensuring that struggling students have access to a good education now.

Your support is helping state and federal leaders understand how to reform a welfare system to encourage work and marriage and, in the process, help those who need help the most.

Your support is putting trainers in the local community and bringing together diverse partners to ensure that more young people and couples are ready to form and sustain a healthy marriage and family life.

I could go on.

I will end by saying what I hope you know to be true: none of our success is ours alone. Without you as a friend and partner none of what we have done would be possible.

On behalf of the team, I want to express our appreciation to you and invite you to celebrate an eventful year with us. These are your achievements, too.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Randy Hicks'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Randy' being more prominent.

Randy Hicks

President & Chief Executive Officer

INTRO TO OUR WORK

Helping Every Georgian Flourish

We remove barriers to opportunity through education, employment, and family formation.



Georgia is experiencing a crisis-level opportunity gap. We are the 44th poorest state in the nation with a poverty rate of 18.3 percent, a figure that has increased by almost 50 percent

over the last decade. Our food stamp participation has more than doubled since 2008, with 1.8 million currently enrolled in the program. Georgia consistently lags behind much of the country in academic achievement and is ranked 39th nationally. We are facing an epidemic of males between the ages of 24-54 out of the workforce.

At Georgia Center for Opportunity, this data is not just public policy talking points—it represents a tragic and self-perpetuating loss of human potential. It represents shattered dreams, broken families, and wasted lives.

Breaking the barriers to social mobility in Georgia is key to helping individual citizens and our communities as a whole flourish. While we believe that restoration is possible, it requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort, connecting the disadvantaged to the right people and resources. We know

that together, a good education, steady job, and healthy family create a success sequence that greatly increases the odds of an individual achieving their potential. Our goal is to see more people in Georgia's communities flourish—moving from dependency to self-sufficiency—and we believe that civil society holds the key.

Georgia Center for Opportunity is independent and nonpartisan. We are dedicated to increasing opportunities for a quality education, fulfilling work, and a healthy family life for all Georgians.



Education: A quality education is key. It provides a primary path for breaking cycles of poverty.



Employment: Work is far more than simply a way to earn money. It's a human need that provides a source of structure and meaning in life.



Family Formation: Everyone longs and needs healthy relationships. The family is where it all begins.

How will we know when we're successful?

- When all students have access to the education that best fits their needs
- When every able-bodied person can obtain meaningful work
- When every individual and couple can access information and skills to form and sustain healthy families



Legislative Update

Education

Many bills to expand school choice in Georgia were introduced during the 2017 legislative session:

- **HB 482 and SB 68** would have created an Education Savings Account program for all public school students.
- **HB 483** would have created an Education Savings Account program for all students zoned for failing public schools.
- **HB 411** would have created an Education Savings Account program for students of military parents.
- **HB 217 and HB 236** would have raised the cap on the current Tax Credit Scholarship Program from \$58 million to \$65 million, allowing for 10% growth thereafter so long as the program is oversubscribed, up to \$100 million.
- **HB 430** provided facilities funding for public charter schools.

Of all these measures, only HB 430 passed and was signed by the Governor. HB 217 passed the House with a vote of 111-62, but was voted down in the Senate (despite being watered down, only allowing increases in the program up to \$85 million, and cutting administrative allowances for nonprofits administering scholarships) by a vote of 12-39.

Healthcare

Hospitals in rural Georgia have been closing at an alarming rate. These hospitals typically treat patients who are older, poorer, and under/uninsured. Last session, in an attempt to provide revenue without expanding Medicaid, a tax credit was created, allowing corporations and individuals a credit

against state income taxes for donations to qualifying rural hospitals. However, at 70 percent, the credit was not enough to entice many donors to participate (the program raised less than \$1 million). This session, HB 180 passed, raising the credit to 90 percent in hopes of generating greater interest.

Family

HB 159 would have updated Georgia's adoption code for the first time in a generation. After passing the House unanimously, the Senate, in its last official act of the session, voted to send the bill back to committee rather than pass it.

** 2017 was the first year of a biennial session, so all bills introduced in 2017 (so long as they were not defeated) remain "alive" when the legislature resumes in January 2018.*





Stories of School Choice

School choice programs help thousands of students like Mary and Jacob access an education that meets their unique needs.



Mary Thompson

Mary Thompson graduated from high school this May, like many other 18-year-olds in the state. However, Mary wasn't always sure she would receive her diploma.

Mary was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder from a very young age and struggled to keep her emotions in check. After transitioning to middle school, the new schedule and larger classes proved to be too much for her. One day, her parents received a phone call from the public school counselor stating Mary had threatened to kill herself at school. She was unable to return and was sent for a short stay in a mental institution.

Mary was now without a school, and her parents couldn't afford a private school. Fortunately, Mary's parents were introduced to Arete Scholars, who provided a tax credit scholarship for Mary to attend a private school that was better able to meet her specialized learning needs. Mary went from hopeless to hopeful in just a short time. She is now a high school graduate and an accomplished Irish dancer. In the future, she hopes to help other children also suffering from Bipolar Disorder through the ability to dance.



Kap Sian Sang "Jacob"

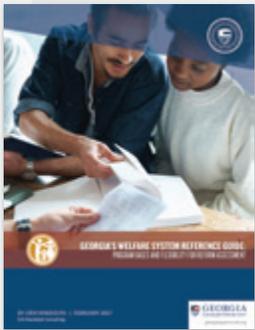
Jacob and his family were persecuted by the soldiers in his home country of Myanmar. To pursue a better life, they left everything they knew to come to America. They moved to Georgia, and Jacob enrolled in a neighborhood public school, but unable to speak English, he fell into the local gangs and fell behind academically.

With the assistance of a local organization that specializes in helping refugee families in Georgia, Jacob was able to receive one of Georgia's Tax Credit Scholarships. The scholarship allowed him the chance at a new life in a private school that understood his background, language barrier, and was able to meet his learning needs. Jacob left the gangs and has excelled academically.

Jacob's father only received up to a fourth-grade education, so it is important to Jacob and his family that he finishes high school and goes on to college. Jacob dreams of being an "important person" someday to help those like him and his family who have come to America seeking a better life. He plans to pursue a career in electrical engineering.

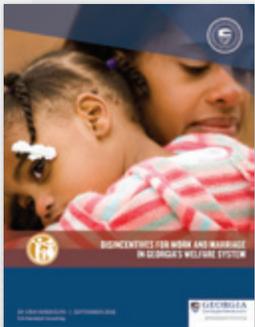


Welfare Reform Research



"Georgia's Welfare System Reference Guide"

Our reference guide provides much needed clarity about how the major welfare programs work, while also explaining why they were created and what flexibility states have to reform these programs now.



2017 update to "Disincentives for Work and Marriage in Georgia's Welfare System"

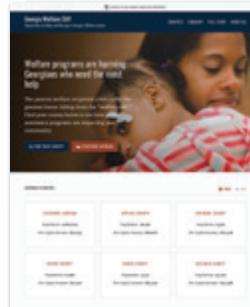
GCO updated the information found in our September 2016 report, "Disincentives for Work and Marriage in Georgia's Welfare System," to reflect the most current data. Due to cost of living and changes in welfare benefits, the welfare cliffs

Georgians can experience change year-to-year.

Based on research, the most common welfare recipient in Georgia is a single mom with two children. Because of the welfare cliff she could lose thousands of dollars a year by just accepting a pay increase.

For those who are trying to become self-reliant, facing a stiff penalty for earning more amounts to a punch in the gut. GCO

believes that people should be rewarded when working to improve their economic condition, not penalized.



Welfare Cliff Website www.welfarecliff.com

Because of the importance of welfare reform and its complexity, GCO has created an interactive website, [welfarecliff.com](http://www.welfarecliff.com). This website allows users to easily build a visual representation of welfare cliffs for any

county in the state and customize the graphs based on family make-up.

GCO is confident this tool will be a tremendous asset to individuals, legislators, and other nonprofits who desire to understand this issue better. Seeing the financial cliff a family could face while attempting to get off welfare will help drive discussions on meaningful reform.





Employment Solutions that Work: Georgia Works!



GCO partners with other nonprofit organizations within the state who provide effective help to those who need it most. One of the standout programs providing hope and employment to the homeless in Atlanta is Georgia Works!

Georgia Works! transforms chronically homeless men into self-sufficient and productive members of society. The organization's mission is to develop and implement cost-effective, comprehensive programs that meet the needs of a diverse population working to break the cycles of homelessness, addiction, and criminal recidivism.

The program houses participants at their facility for one year, while they earn at least \$7.40 an hour, working 30 plus hours a week. The program is also designed to break down barriers keeping participants in vicious cycles of dependency, by treating addictions, offering personal support and life preparation tools, and providing GED classes. Georgia Works! also helps participants adjust to normal life, such as getting a driver's license and setting up a bank account.

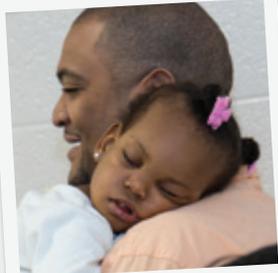
The goal of the program is to help each man develop stability in his life through fulltime employment and permanent housing.

Our efforts to help spread the excellent work of Georgia Works! include facilitating Congressional testimony by the program's founder and introducing the program to our network of more than 1,000 state-level leaders and policy makers.





Healthy Families Initiative



In recent years, healthy families and the percentage of children being raised by their married moms and dads has continued to decline.

Healthy families are the pillars of thriving communities, and so we have made it our mission to promote healthy families within

our own Peachtree Corners and Norcross neighborhoods.

Through the Healthy Families Initiative (HFI), GCO is engaging with other community organizations, nonprofits, businesses, and churches to help people build and maintain strong families. We are doing this through relationship enrichment workshops, recruiting seasoned married couples to mentor newlyweds, and a public-messaging campaign to promote the value of healthy relationships and marriage.

Importantly, HFI is an opportunity for the community and its leaders to rally together in support of society's cornerstone - the family. There were a number of community events throughout the year to help foster awareness of the program and promote the campaign goals, including:

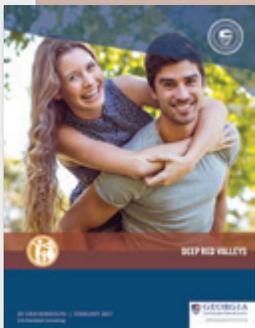
- Love on Your Family Retreat
- Watermark Church Marriage Ministry Training
- Pastors' Breakfast - Coffee, Compassion, and Community
- Spring Festival with Peachtree Corners Presbyterian Church

The new year brought the start of a local advertising campaign designed to change attitudes toward family life and marriage. The campaign has already reached thousands of area residents with a positive message about healthy relationships.



HFI Community Partners

As HFI grows in size and success, we will continue to expand our reach with strategic community partners. Next year will be an exciting one with new programs being offered in conjunction with Peachtree Corners Presbyterian Church, Rainbow Village, Good Samaritan, and Gwinnett County Juvenile Court.



"Deep Red Valleys"

Marriage has long been seen as the bedrock of a thriving society— a union in which children are nurtured and educated and learn how to develop meaningful relationships of their own. Unfortunately, the current welfare system places a steep financial penalty on marriage. This penalty is causing

single-parents, desiring marriage, to avoid marriage because of the economic consequences.

GCO engaged Erik Randolph to determine the severity of marriage penalties in Georgia. Randolph is a Senior Fellow with both the Illinois Policy Institute and Pennsylvania's Commonwealth Foundation, and has over 27 years experience in government, including serving as a program evaluator for the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Based on computer modeling of current welfare programs, Randolph has shown significant marriage penalties exist in Georgia for single moms on welfare.

For example, a mom earning minimum wage and receiving all available welfare benefits would have to marry a man earning \$28 per hour to avoid a financial penalty. If a mom earns more, a potential husband must continue to earn a higher dollar amount for a marriage to make financial sense. GCO is now working with state and federal officials to promote the need and options for deep reforms.



Michael Kirkland: A personal story of HFI's Impact

It all started when Michael Kirkland, Director of Children's Ministries at Peachtree Corners Presbyterian Church, was invited to a GCO event

last year. The message of strengthening marriages and families resonated with Michael and became an avenue for his church to reach out to the community while also building up the families already within the church.

"The Healthy Families Initiative (HFI) fuses everything we're trying to do as a church to focus on families," said Michael. "As a small church, we don't have the resources that most larger churches in the Peachtree Corners and Norcross areas have, so we are grateful for the partnership with Georgia Center for Opportunity."

Through this partnership, Peachtree Corners Presbyterian Church has been able to grow its weekly activities by incorporating HFI courses on marriage and family - bringing in several families who were not church attendees. The dedication of the GCO team and the HFI program has also provided stability to the church during a recent leadership transition. In 2018, Michael, and his church members are excited to see continued growth of the HFI program.



Employment

Hiring Well, Doing Good events

Our Hiring Well, Doing Good events, which have been held in downtown Atlanta and Peachtree Corners/Norcross, serve to educate businesses on hiring the chronically unemployed. Topics covered include legal and liability considerations, tax incentives available to businesses hiring from certain populations, nonprofits businesses can partner with, and experiences of other businesses who use their hiring processes as a way to be good corporate citizens. These events have garnered support from the Atlanta Falcons, Uber, the Arthur M. Blank Foundation, Goodwill Industries, and CKS Packaging, among others.

We had 130 community leaders attend our most recent event and roughly 30 businesses sign up for intentional efforts to hire the chronically underemployed. Our goal is that through the events and the follow-up activities, new partnerships will develop between businesses and those serving the unemployed so that more people find work.

Employment Working Groups

As a result of Hiring Well, Doing Good, and in partnership with the Southwest Gwinnett Chamber and others, we are forming a working group to identify both short- and long-term strategies to increase employment in Southwest Gwinnett. We seek to measurably reduce unemployment and develop a replicable model for how businesses, nonprofits, and communities of faith can address employment needs of the chronically underemployed.

Apprenticeships

Getting young people the training and education they need for the workforce is essential to both thriving communities and a strong labor market in the future. To make this a reality, we are working with Dr. Robert Lerman of the Urban Institute to research employment trends in Georgia and how to increase work opportunities through apprenticeships.

We also hosted a leadership meeting to discuss increasing the participation of schools and businesses in apprenticeship programs in Gwinnett County. Participants in that meeting included:

- Justin Haight, Georgia WorkSmart Program Manager, Governor's Office of Economic Development
- Mike Beatty, President & CEO, Great Promise Partnership
- Adam Forrand of Partnership Gwinnett (Gwinnett Chamber)
- Melvin Everson, Director of Business and Industry, Gwinnett Technical College
- Dr. Robert Lerman, the Urban Institute
- Chris Moder, Economic Development Director, City of Norcross

The goal is to help the state incorporate best practices in apprenticeships, understand how to develop more robust business participation in providing apprenticeships, and promote apprenticeships to students and businesses.

Breakthrough Programs



Our Breakthrough Programs initiative is designed to help our communities break barriers and connect people to resources, one neighborhood at a time. It is rooted in our belief that by working together, businesses, nonprofits, churches, schools, and city leaders can harness and

mobilize resources to effectively address the unique needs of each community.

Our Plan. To accomplish this, we are developing cross-sector partnerships to challenge the status quo. Breakthrough Programs is a community-centered initiative that empowers our partners and encourages collaborative design and implementation of local programs to achieve measurable improvement in people's lives.

Our Role. Our role is to provide a framework that cultivates and supports long-term partnerships. We use a variety of tools to help our partner organizations understand the issues, identify problems, recognize barriers to necessary behavior change, mobilize resources, work in concert with one another, and find appropriate solutions.

Our Success. The key to our success is ensuring that a balance exists between knowing the local community and understanding how it all fits into the bigger picture. While each community struggles with different issues, the data show us that "those who finish high school, work fulltime, and marry before having

children are virtually guaranteed a place in the middle class. Only about 2 percent of this group ends up in poverty. Conversely, about three-fourths of those who have done none of these three things are poor in any given year" (Brookings Institute, 2009). We use this as our benchmark for impact and it guides our community partners to create ongoing initiatives around the areas of education, employment, and family formation. Our objectives involve improving educational outcomes, including college preparedness and job readiness; increasing access to and readiness for employment among adults; and promoting healthy family formation and stability.



Donor Profile

Ben and Jessica Teague are longtime friends and supporters of GCO. Ben is managing director of Walton Communities LLC and serves as the Board Chair of Focused Community Strategies (FCS). Jessica serves on the Board of the Atlanta Mission and facilitates Jobs for Life classes for women in Vine City. They live in Atlanta with their four children.



Why do you support GCO?

The idea of advocating on behalf of those at the margins is close to our heart, and we see GCO doing that.

GCO is addressing real societal needs and diving into policy with a shared worldview.

GCO understands — like we think most people do — that government is limited in what it can do. Lives are lived out, and families are formed, in communities. So most of what people need to flourish is to be found there. The focus on education, employment, and family life locally can be transformational.

What do you think is GCO's greatest strength?

GCO has chosen to focus on real issues that affect real people. They're not trying to be culture warriors but rather are focused on gathering a broad group of people to address systemic issues with the goal of helping people flourish.

GCO is very thoughtfully engaged and focused on inviting people to come along and join in the issues they agree on. There's a level of intentionality in GCO's approach. It's about being engaged, thoughtful, Christian citizens.

We love how GCO is digging into real, specific barriers, and, by changing small things in policies, having a huge impact — all with the goal of allowing flourishing.

How does your business experience shape your perspective?

Our family business, Walton Communities, focuses on affordable housing and a lot of our residents are the individuals GCO is focused on serving. In underserved communities, we see real issues for lower income families in the areas where GCO works. They have a hard time finding stable housing, often are in areas with failing schools, and there's a multi-generational effect. You see cycles building.

The goal of Walton Communities' Adventure Centers is to provide opportunities, communities and connections with the hope of potentially changing the trajectory of their lives. And what GCO is trying to do is working for a common goal by helping those very same people to escape those holes.

Where do you see GCO in 5 years?

GCO has a cool opportunity to build bridges and find people who advocate for these issues across all ideological silos. They can have continued impact on helping people have conversations that we don't know how to have a lot of the time. GCO can be that convener — finding diverse experts who have common ground.

What would you tell others who are considering supporting GCO?

Do it. This is where politics meet reality. They're not just talking heads.

Why give back?

We encourage others to take some space and reflect on what's around them. Be involved. There's a responsibility we have, but you also receive from giving and get to be a part of something.

Scripture tells us to do justice and look after widows, orphans and the poor. Look around in our communities and you will see broken families, kids without a father or mother, and single mothers. Join in with those already working to help our communities.

Thank You to All of Our Generous Supporters



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Jesse Walker
Joyce Whitted
Carl and Susan Woodruff

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 2017 fiscal year.



Events

As part of GCO's mission, we work within the community and provide opportunities for education, collaboration, and exchange of ideas. Through these events we are able to break down barriers in all areas of our work.



Stories of Aspiration

GCO President & CEO Randy Hicks and special guest Bruce Deel, Founder & CEO of City of Refuge, discussed their shared interests and GCO's important role in the state of Georgia and cities throughout Atlanta.



National School Choice Week Rally 2017

Bright Futures Academy students and Utopian Academy students gathered together at Bright Futures Academy to celebrate school choice options. They were joined by state lawmakers Hunter Hill and Michael Williams to shine a spotlight on the need for more choice options in Georgia.



Hiring Well, Doing Good Georgia Chamber Breakfast

In the fall, many of Georgia's business leaders came together over breakfast to learn how area businesses are partnering with local nonprofits to employ the jobless and underemployed while still improving their bottom line.



Hiring Well, Doing Good Southwest Gwinnett Chamber Luncheon

The first Hiring Well, Doing Good was such a success that GCO was asked to host an additional luncheon for a chance to further the discussion about breaking down employment barriers. With a packed room and dynamic list of panelists, the conversation was productive and has spurred the need for more events like this one around the state.



Day Under the Gold Dome

Every year GCO provides an exclusive opportunity for a handful of donors to see our legislature in action. During this time, donors are able to tour the capitol, visit the House and Senate floors, meet with lawmakers, and receive a legislative update from our GCO team. There's even time for a photo-op with the Governor!



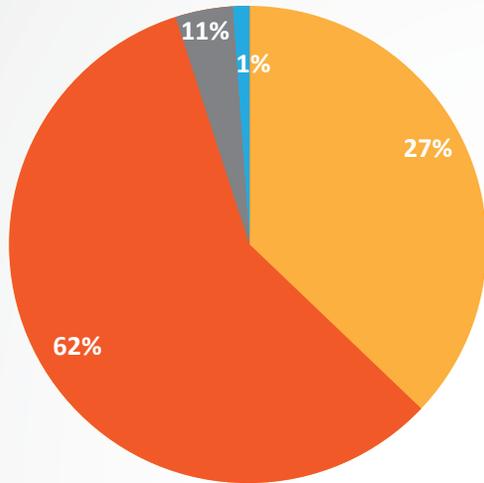
Georgia Justice Day at The Capitol

Georgia Justice Day was an opportunity for GCO to join our allies in promotion of criminal justice reforms. The event was a success with 275 people participating, representing 44 senate districts and 80 representative districts across Georgia.



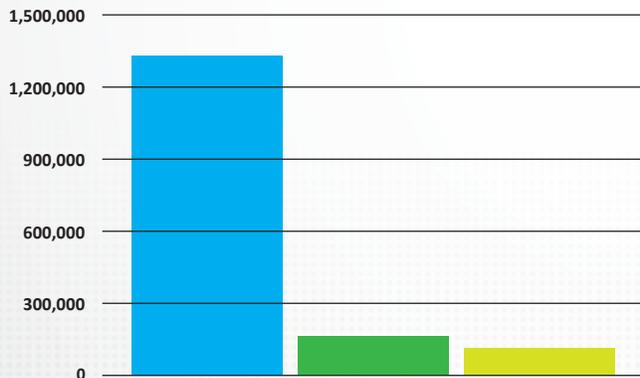
Financials

The unaudited financial information is from the 2017 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.



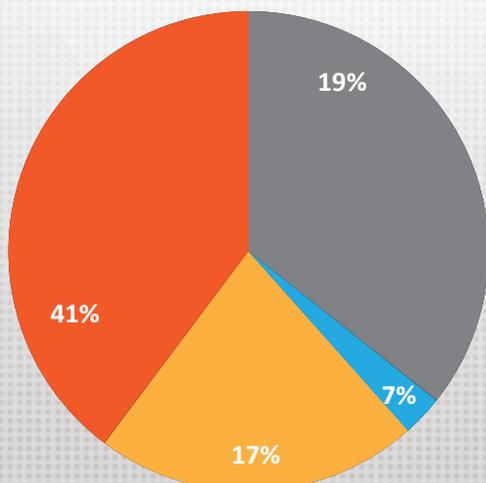
Total Revenue

Total Revenue:	\$2,100,977.00
Individuals:	\$558,775
Foundations:	\$1,297,700
Corporations:	\$229,285
Other:	\$15,217



Total Expenses

Total Expenses:	\$1,631,601
Programs:	\$1,372,272
Administration:	\$113,573
Fundraising:	\$145,756



Program Breakdown

Total Expenditures:	\$1,372,272
Breakthrough Norcross:	\$114,640
Education:	\$282,800
Employment:	\$306,849
Family Formation:	\$667,983

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
 Jerry Thames
 Shaunti Feldhahn
 Keith Schneider



Randy Hicks, President & Chief Executive Officer



Eric Cochling, Executive Vice President and General Counsel



Katherine Greene, Healthy Families Initiative Program Specialist



Katelyn King, Operations Manager



Jamie Lord, Director of Government Affairs



Kelly McGonigal, Director of Development



Kimberly Sawatka, Communications Manager



Dawn Steele, Director Of Breakthrough Programs



Josiah Vega, Development Associate



Joyce Whitted, Healthy Families Initiative Program Manager



Jason Leming, Digital Strategy, Big Picture Digital



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