

GEORGIA  STATE OF

hope

**Making the Case for Building
a State of HOPE in Georgia**

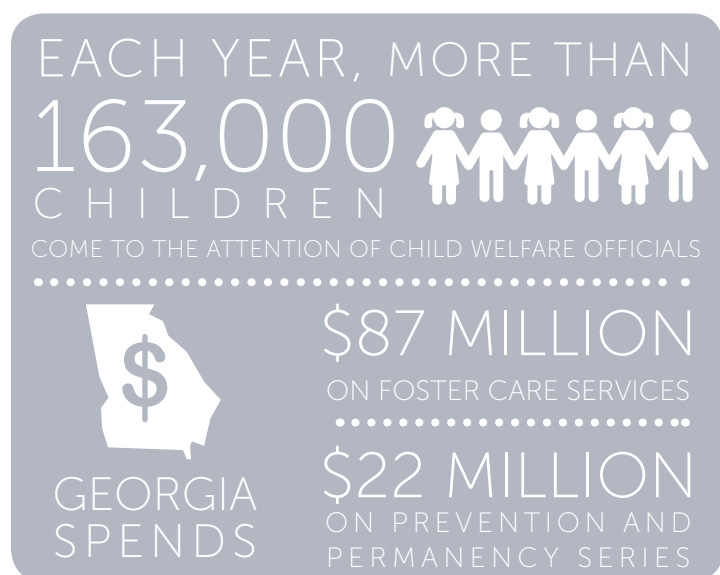
June 2018

Why Georgia Needs Hope

HOPE is more than a way of being. It's a way of doing. HOPE is needed in every community in Georgia because families deserve to be safe and supported in their neighborhoods, having resources that are designed with their input. Creating a State of Hope in Georgia has the opportunity to put the human back into human services and activate the power of the community to do good and take care of its members. It is knitted together by a network of partners working together to create a better quality of life for children and families in Georgia and informed by the collective wisdom of communities.

[State of Hope](#) (SOH) is a collaborative approach in which people from all walks of life share a vision of safety and success for every child, family and individual who lives in their community. It is also a place where public and private organizations – non-profits, philanthropies, government, businesses and communities – collaborate closely to help achieve that vision. As a result, children are safer, families are stronger and communities are more supportive places for all of its members to thrive. Making Georgia a place where HOPE lives can make communities stronger and more nurturing but also creates a ripple effect for those who need it the most.

According to [The 2017 KIDS COUNT Data Book](#), Georgia ranked 42nd among all states in child well-being pointing to the need for greater investment in the welfare of our youngest citizens.



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Meet Savannah. At 11 years old, she had been living in an 18-wheeler for years and suffering multiple forms of horrific abuse at the hands of her parents. She lived in isolation – no community to call home, no friends and no formal education beyond kindergarten.

After hatching a plan at a truckstop to escape, she came into foster care at 11 years old. With the support of her case manager, therapist and a loving foster family, she began to thrive.

Today, Savannah and her younger sister are permanent members of that foster family. While she re-entered school several years behind, she graduated last year ahead of schedule and just completed her freshman year of college.

Although she was a victim of abuse, she is full of hope. She wants her story to be an inspiration to others.

HOPE Lives Here!

¹ Source: Casey Family Programs. (2017). State fact sheet: Georgia. Retrieved from <https://casey.org/media/state-data-sheet.GA.pdf>

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN GEORGIA ENTERING FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

2013	7,600
2014	9,000
2015	10,000
2016	12,000
2017	13,200
2018	15,000 ²

Source: KIDS COUNT Data Center: A Project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Updated as of February 2018.

As the number of children in Georgia entering foster care steadily increases, it becomes more critical for states to focus on prevention and make smarter investments. With the passing of the [Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018](#), states have an opportunity invest differently and focus on prevention rather than foster care services.

Foster care is a direct response to abuse and neglect – not a solution. Yet the number of children in Georgia entering the foster care system is steadily increasing.

We know that children do not grow up in programs and services, but rather they are nurtured in healthy, vibrant communities. However in order for them to thrive, it is critical for families to have the necessary safety net supports. An alarming number of children in Georgia are not thriving. ***In 2015 alone, more than 465,000 Children under the age of 18 were living in households where there was an uncertainty of having, or an inability to acquire, enough food for all household members because of insufficient money or other resources.***³ The well-being of our children depends on us.

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services is committed to the safety, self-sufficiency and well-being of Georgia's children and families and has been working to address this crisis. We started first with our three-pillar approach to reforming Georgia's child welfare system by focusing on strengthening our workforce, building and sustaining strong practices, and purposeful engagement with our staff and the community. The Blueprint for Change was more than a reform effort and larger than a movement; it was a journey toward building a State of Hope.

The Division has identified key priority areas in which communities can collectively improve the outcomes for children, youth and their families. We believe that these **Opportunities for HOPE** will have the greatest impact on keeping children safe, strengthening families and empowering individuals, ultimately building a stronger Georgia.

- 1. Education:** Improving the educational attainment of vulnerable youth, most importantly the graduation rates of youth in foster care
- 2. Trauma-Informed:** Increasing the awareness of the impact of trauma and how to mitigate its impact by adopting trauma-informed practices
- 3. Quality Caregiving:** Improving the quality of caregiving across a continuum including, but not limited to, birth parents, kin caregivers, foster and adoptive parents and the larger caregiver community
- 4. Economic Self-Sufficiency:** Strengthening and supporting individuals and families on their path toward financial independence

² Source: Georgia Division of Family and Children Services. Data reflected as of May 2018.

³ Source: KIDS COUNT Data Center: A Project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Updated as of February 2018.

WHAT IS STATE OF HOPE ALL ABOUT?

Offer models for youth and families to shape the work that is meant to serve them



Create convening opportunities where stakeholders can learn from each other and build relationships



Lift up and scale promising practices



Inspire collective impact and innovation



Partner with communities and support efforts that ensure that individuals and families thrive



Connect and support local leaders in prioritizing the needs of families and developing strategies to address these needs



Encourage communities to leverage their strengths



Celebrate community successes and shine a light on HOPE in action across the state



The Importance of Incorporating Human-Centered Design

What separates the State of Hope from other collaborative initiatives is the use of human-centered design thinking and having the voices of youth at the center of the design process. Communities will be able to take the ideas that have been designed by youth in order to inform the strategies that they choose to implement with their collaborative partners (the design-within-a-design concept). [Human-centered design](#)⁴ is an innovative approach for solving complex challenges in which people, and the needs of those people, are at the center of the design process. This process involves building to learn – and learning while building – through inspiration, ideation and implementation.

We recognize and believe that families and communities – not systems and state agencies – are best equipped to raise children and that all families need the support of a caring community to raise healthy, safe and supported children. The State of Hope is intentionally driven to engage a broad base of community stakeholders in order to transform the lives of Georgia's most vulnerable residents. The State of Hope is a new way to harness the power of communities to take care of their own.

It is a shift in thinking for any system that serves families, taking reactive policies and programs and reshaping them into proactive efforts designed in partnership with families and communities. **The goal is to have communities that support individuals, children and families in a way that reduces the risk of harm or abuse and allows them to thrive.** A prevention-focused system is one that is innovative, collaborative and takes a multi-systemic approach.

The State of Hope builds off of the Communities of Hope concept started by [Casey Family Programs](#) and the work of the Northwest Georgia System of Care Advisory Council and the [Northwest Georgia Region of Hope](#). Georgia is the first state in the country to attempt a State of Hope – identifying and anchoring multiple Region of Hope sites across the state.

While the Division does not solely “own” the State of Hope and the transformative work that can only happen within individual communities, we have committed to be the convener of

⁴ Human-centered design is a creative approach to problem solving and starts with the people you're designing for and ends with new solutions that are tailor made to suit their needs. Retrieved from <http://www.designkit.org/human-centered-design>.

this collective impact approach in partnership with several key stakeholders or “hopegivers.” No single group or organization alone can raise up strong, healthy, thriving communities. The biggest impact will be made through multiple organizations working together across systems in support of the same goal. The State of Hope will encompass the entire state from border to border, transcending geographical communities and zip code boundaries. We believe every child in America deserves to live in a Community of Hope, and this statewide approach ensures that will be the case for every child in Georgia. We cannot do this work alone. It will take the partnership and collaboration of every sector of this state to be successful, and we hope that you will partner with us in this effort.

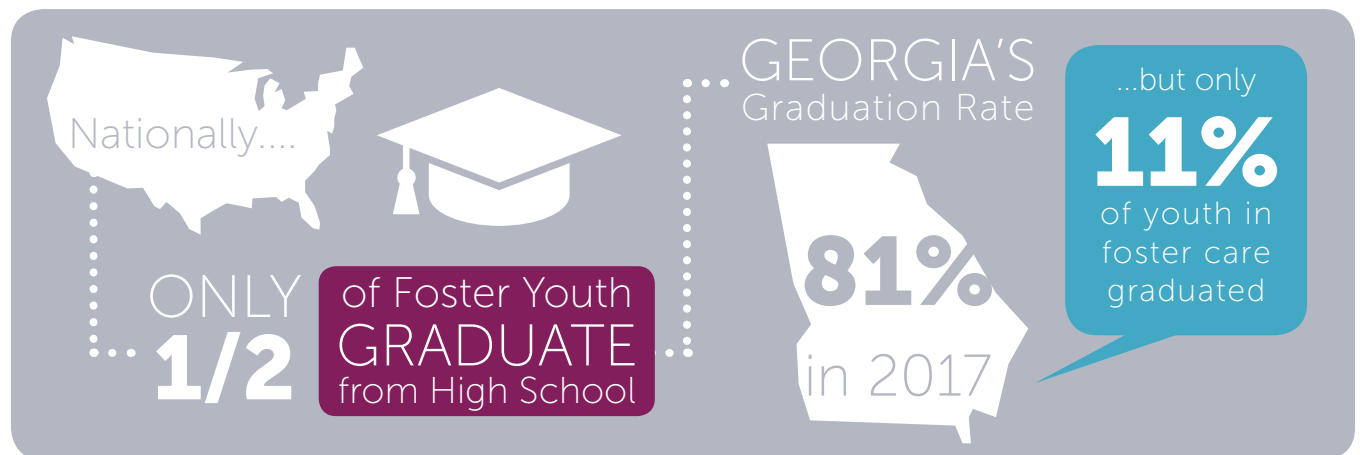
OPPORTUNITIES FOR HOPE

EDUCATION

How are education and the future success of youth in care connected?

Education plays a key role in ensuring that our youngest citizens can thrive from cradle to career. This ranges from providing them with quality early childhood experiences to ensuring that they have academic experiences which support them in successfully graduating from high school and completing postsecondary opportunities that prepare them for career, work and life. For children in foster care, this is especially critical as these positive experiences can counteract the negative effects of abuse, neglect, separation, and lack of permanency.

Research has shown that youth in foster care are more likely to fall behind in school due to frequent school changes and lack of stability in their home environment. Nationally, only half of foster youth graduate with a high school diploma and on average 17-18 years olds in foster care can only read at a seventh-grade level. Foster youth without a diploma are ill-equipped for the job market when they leave the system, hurting not only them but Georgia’s economy. **Young people who exit out of foster care without a high school diploma typically earn \$8,500 less per year in wages.** If foster youth graduated at the same rate as others, they would collectively earn \$59,500,000 more per year, require less governmental support and contribute more in income taxes. With a four-year degree, youth in foster care could increase their work-life earnings, on average, by \$129,000.⁵



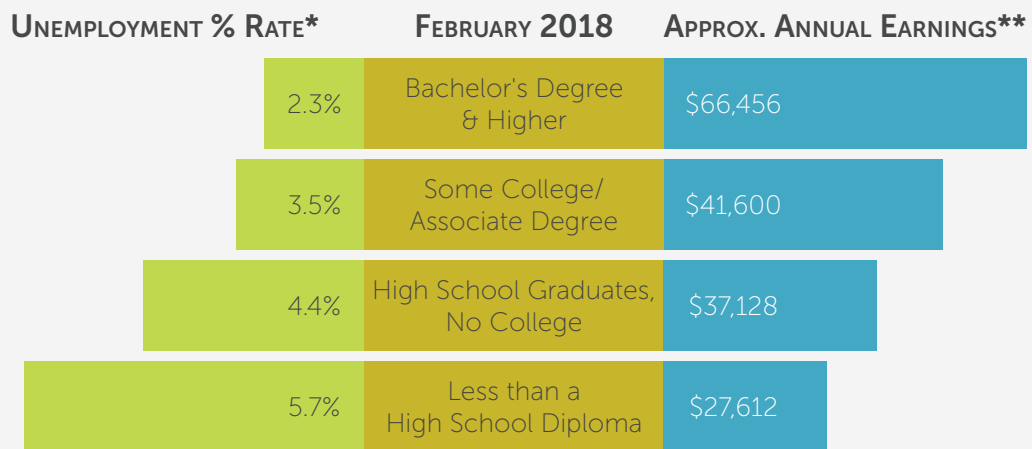
⁵ Source: National Working Group on Foster Care and Education. Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care. Updated as of April 2018.

Georgia's overall graduation rate was 81 percent in 2017, but only 11 percent of youth in foster care become high school graduates. Most jobs that pay decent wages require postsecondary education and skills, often leaving workers with only a high school education stuck in jobs that pay low wages.

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education and Georgia Chamber of Commerce combined efforts for their inaugural report, the [Economics of Education](#), and found:

1. Investing in education is essential to future economic success for individuals, communities, business and the state.
2. When everyone plays a part in whatever way they can, the future economy of Georgia and the citizens of the state will reach their full potential.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT & EMPLOYMENT



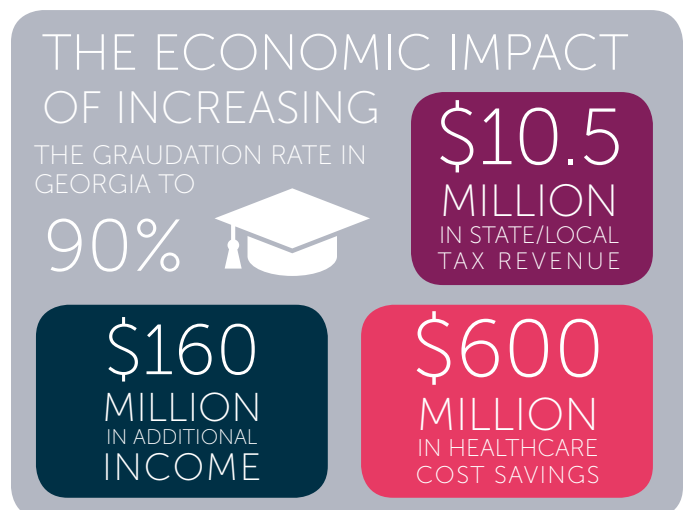
Source:

*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Table A-4. Employment status of the civilian population 25 years and over by educational attainment.

**U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Table 5. Quartiles of usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers, approximation based on median earnings.

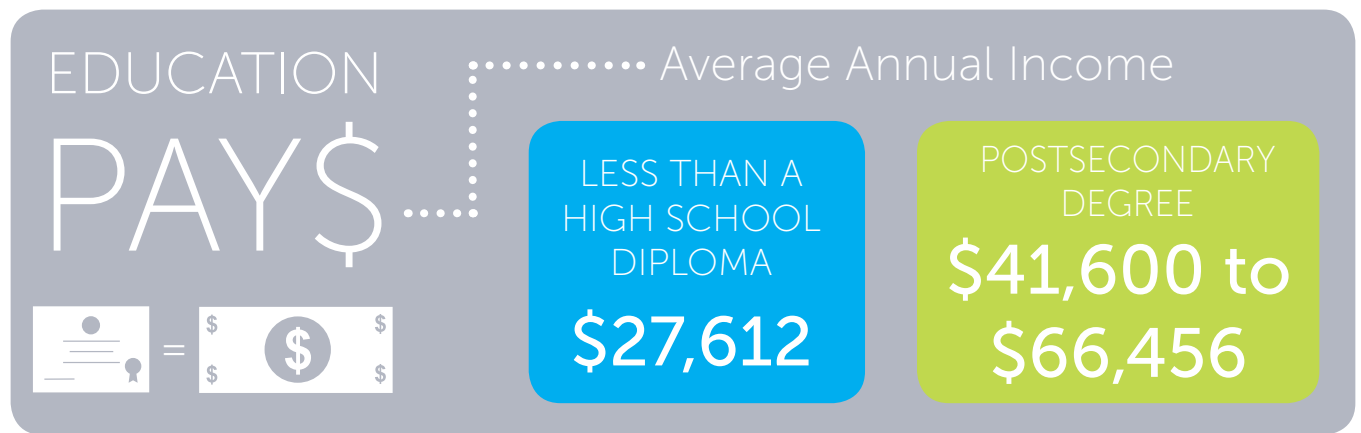
Laying the Groundwork for Success

Addressing the achievement gap will be key to ensuring our future can compete on a national or global scale.⁶ The economic impact of increasing the graduation rate to 90 percent in Georgia would be significant - \$10.5 million in state and local tax revenue, \$160 million in additional income and \$600 million in health-care cost savings. With a high school diploma our youth are better prepared to transition into a successful adulthood with long-term career opportunities. They are



⁶ Source: Alliance for Excellent Education's "The Graduation Effect" with support from State Farm. Retrieved from <http://impact.all4ed.org>.

then more likely to pursue postsecondary education and training, make healthier decisions and engage in less risky behaviors. Georgia's youth would be employable and have higher incomes than students who did not graduate. Education pays...The average annual earnings for someone with less than a high school diploma is \$27,612 while the average annual earnings for someone with a post-secondary degree can range from \$41,600 to \$66,456.⁷



According to the Georgia Budget & Policy Institute, communities with a more educated workforce tend to have stronger economies overall and strengthening our workforce can ensure opportunity is broadly shared among all Georgians. Increasing the graduation of all youth is critical to the economic vitality of this nation but placing emphasis on youth in foster care who are often poorly positioned for success in school, work and life will accelerate Georgia's progress. Building a State of Hope, community by community has the opportunity to fuel innovation through the power of partnerships that will ensure that more foster youth graduate from high school, setting them up for greater financial success and allowing them to contribute to the state's economic engine.

COMPOUNDED IMPACTS OF HIGH SCHOOL NON-COMPLETION

INDIVIDUALS		THE COMMUNITY
Lower Lifetime Earnings	→	Reduced buying power & tax revenues; less economic growth
Decreased health status; higher mortality rates; more criminal activity	→	Higher health care and criminal justice costs
Higher teen pregnancy rates; single motherhood	→	Higher public service costs
Less voting; less volunteering	→	Low rate of community involvement

Source:
Levin, H., et al., (2007). *The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children*.

⁷ Source: Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education and Georgia Chamber. *The Economics of Education*. 5th Edition.



Portraits of HOPE: What Does Hope in Action Look Like?

As we face the challenge of building safe and supportive communities for all children, success will depend upon the effort invested in bringing people together and building long-term partnerships. Here is what Hope in Action looks like when partners come together to collectively solve the toughest challenges faced by children and youth.

[America's Promise Alliance](#), with generous support from AT&T, recently announced that the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) has been awarded a GradNation Acceleration Grant as part of the GradNation campaign to raise the high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020. Georgia DFCS is one of five state and community grant recipients around the country that are poised to accelerate progress for more young people to high school graduation and postsecondary success. The Georgia DFCS will be working in partnership with [MAAC: Multi-Alliance Agency for Children](#) to authentically engage young people in foster care and utilize their input and feedback to inform practices and policies. MAAC will design, test and implement a youth engagement approach for engaging youth in foster care around their educational goals in Fulton and DeKalb. The goal of this approach will be to develop a sustainable model that can maximize local community partnerships and be replicated statewide.

MAAC is a longtime partner of the Division and its member agencies offer a range of services such as intensive psychiatric care, group homes, therapeutic foster care and much more. In 2006 MAAC became the lead agency for the Georgia Youth Opportunities Initiative (GYOI) focused on improving outcomes for youth exiting foster care, and in 2009 became the lead agency for the Teen Parent Connection (TPC) serving parenting teens in foster care. MAAC now works as DFCS's lead agency for the new education service delivery model. Through this partnership, MAAC is also funded to partner with a variety of partner agencies including Communities in Schools-GA and Communities In Schools-Atlanta to provide educational services for youth in care.

[12 for Life](#) is a great example of a partnership with a local business and local school systems to provide HOPE for young people. 12 for Life is a cooperative education program supported by Southwire Company helping students gain extra motivation to finish 12 years of school and enjoy better lives. By providing students with classroom instruction, on-the-job training, key work/life skills, mentoring, and employment opportunities, we're helping them stay in school, graduate, and go on to become successful, productive members of the workforce – ensuring those real-world skills translate into real-life success.

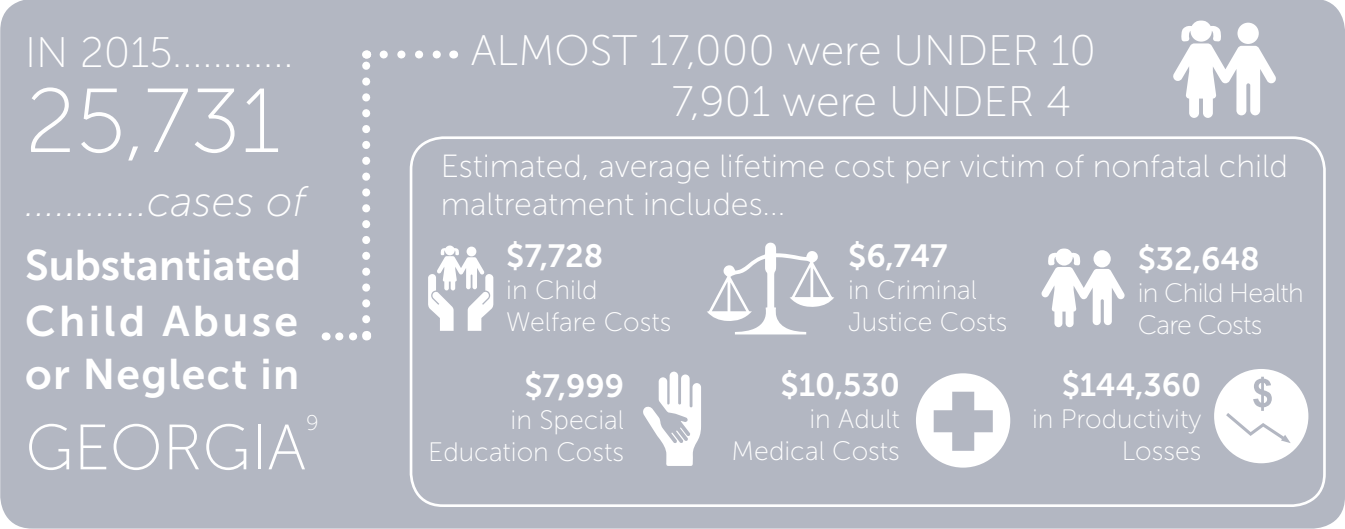
Understanding the Impact of Trauma

What is Trauma?

The term trauma is derived from the Greek word for wound. Trauma is an emotional and physical response that occurs when a person’s internal and external resources are inadequate to cope with an external threat. This response can be activated by acute traumatic events (e.g. natural disaster or physical assault) and chronic traumatic situations (e.g. housing insecurity or ongoing domestic violence). One may experience trauma at any point in their lives; however, research shows that when disruptive events are experienced in childhood, they can cause significant impairments to social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma occur in every socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age group. The data tells us that most people have either been directly impacted or know someone who has been directly impacted by significant adverse experiences (child abuse or neglect, bullying, racism, foster care, etc.) Nationally, 10 states and the District of Columbia surveyed their residents and found that 59.3 had at least one ACE, and 14.3 percent had experienced four or more ACEs.⁸

Complex trauma occurs when children have endured multiple interpersonal traumatic events from a very young age that involve abuse or neglect by a caregiver that results in traumatic stress. The impact of child traumatic stress can last well beyond childhood. Research has shown that child trauma survivors may experience challenges in school such as lower grades and more suspensions and expulsions, increased use of health and mental health services, increased involvement with child welfare and juvenile justice systems and long term health problems. A critical part of mitigating child traumatic stress is developing a coordinated system of supports for caregivers that can work collaboratively to enhance the well-being and resilience of families and increase the capacity of communities to recognize the role that healing, hope and care play in developing young people and fostering strong, vibrant communities. Communities must not only build on the strengths and resiliency of young people but must also ensure that organizations understand, recognize and can respond to trauma and implement programmatic practices that do not re-traumatize young people.



⁸ Data retrieved from the Centers of Disease Control. (2010).
⁹ Source: Georgia Division of Family and Children Services.

Laying the Ground Work for Success

Within the State's 2017-2019 Strategic Plan¹⁰, the Division has prioritized mitigating the effects of trauma by focusing on strengthening its policies and practices and by increasing the awareness of trauma-informed practices amongst external stakeholders. More specifically, Georgia adopted a new implementation of Solution-Based Casework that provides a trauma-informed framework for safety decision making which focuses on reducing the recurrence of maltreatment from 8 percent to 5 percent. Safety is a key concern in ensuring that families and individuals are free from abuse and neglect. ***Ultimately, the goal is to be a trauma-informed state that realizes the widespread impact of trauma, recognizes and addresses the signs and symptoms of trauma in communities, develops and delivers services focused on healing and resilience and works to resist re-traumatizing children and families.***

The success of families and individuals relies on the community's belief that, with the right interventions and support, children and families can thrive. This paradigm shift conveys that Hope is every child and the simple actions that each community member takes can make any community strong and transform into a place where everyone protects HOPE no matter what, in good times and not so good times. By placing emphasis on the collective power of community to restore health and well-being to children and families; building a State of Hope fosters a collective optimism and a transformation of spirit that, over time, contributes to healthy, vibrant community life.

¹⁰ The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services established the 2017-2019 Strategic Plan to operationalize its efforts towards achieving safety, permanency, self-sufficiency and well-being for children, individuals and families. <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/2017-2019-strategic-plan>.

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In partnership with the [Georgia Division of Family and Children Services and Georgia State University's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies School of Social Work Professional Excellence Program, the Child Welfare Training Collaborative](#) (CWTC) was established in 2016 to facilitate collaborative partnerships among community organizations and provide training that would enable stronger relationships with families and promote better outcomes for children. These partners have included law enforcement, placement providers, early childhood, school districts, behavioral health, juvenile courts, pediatric health providers, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and other community and government organizations throughout the state of Georgia. Bringing everyone to the same table creates an opportunity for community partners to have a shared understanding of the issues facing children and families and more specifically an increased understanding about trauma and the impact of trauma on children, families, and professionals who interact with these families. CWTC has trained more than 8,000 community partners on topics such as understanding the impact on brain development and building resiliency. The impact of this training is evident: Three months after training, 9 out of 10 participants reported an improved ability to address a child's lifetime trauma history and their behaviors and reactions. Two out of three participants reported that they collaborated more frequently with partners inside and outside of their agencies.

[United Way of Greater Atlanta's](#) mission is to help make Greater Atlanta a community where everyone can thrive. To do this, they focus their investments on the building blocks of lives and community – education, income, health and housing. They are one of the few nonprofit that bring together people and resources from every sector – volunteers, advocates and donors; partner agencies, counties and governments. United Way has also served as a collaborator, convener and implementer of place-based efforts that include Opportunity Zones, Promise Neighborhood and recently Brighter Futures Clayton. Recently they launched [The Child Well-Being Index](#), which was developed in partnership with stakeholders such as the Atlanta Regional Commission and Neighborhood Nexus to measure child well-being across Greater Atlanta. This tool uses common data sources and combines multiple issues to help leaders identify high-need neighborhoods across the 13 counties so that we can work collectively to change conditions, align efforts and invest our resources for maximum impact.

Using a set of indicators that was diligently selected, the child well-being index is calculated using the dimensions of children, families, and communities and assisted local leaders in identifying neighborhoods of low well-being such as North Clayton – Riverdale, Forest Park and College Park. These leaders came together to collaborate and are working together to improve the outcomes of children and their families through Brighter Futures Clayton. This work will focus on strengthening mental health supports for children through a school based mental health partnership with The Georgia Apex Program, supported by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD). With Clayton County Public Schools as a strategic partner, this effort is designed to increase access to mental health services for school-aged youth and provide professional development for school staff around trauma informed practices.

QUALITY CAREGIVING

Why Connecting Children to Relatives and Other Quality Caregivers is Essential

When children can't live safely with their parents and must enter the custody of the state or tribe, federal, state, and tribal child welfare policy prioritizes placement with relatives or close family friends. Research confirms that children do best in kinship foster care and that family connections to birth parents and relatives are critical to healthy child development and a sense of belonging. This also helps to preserve children's cultural identity and relationship to their community. Research shows that maintaining connections to relatives is more stable than non-kin care and can help prevent disruptions that are harmful to a child's well-being.

In 2016 there were:



Source: Data retrieved from the Centers of Disease Control. (2012)

Kin can play multiple roles during a child's involvement with the child welfare system. They can support children and birth parents with open child protection cases, provide homes for children in foster care, help children stay connected to family while in foster care, including children in group care, and support families once the children return home.

For these most vulnerable youth, the challenges they face can be tremendous without a connection to a positive support system — namely, guidance from family members and caring adults. Older youth in foster care are often disconnected from biological family members and not connected to supportive systems if they have been in and out of foster homes or group homes. These networks are crucial to assisting all young people in navigating and accessing services. Research from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative suggests that by the age of 25, young people need to be connected to families,

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Meet Wendy. 10 years ago she was addicted to meth. She was arrested during a traffic stop for possession and DWI, her young teenage daughter was in the car.

After spending a year working with the Family Treatment Court and doing everything required to get sober and have her children return home to her, Wendy became seriously ill. She was hospitalized for months and during that time her community rallied around her — making sure her children were cared for and were able to visit regularly to maintain the bond they had worked hard to recreate during the past year.

Today, Wendy works with others who are struggling with addiction. Her oldest daughter just completed her freshman year of college — she is attending college on a full academic scholarship.

Wendy says she has hope for her future and that of her daughters thanks to the quality caregiving extended to her and her daughters during her time of need.

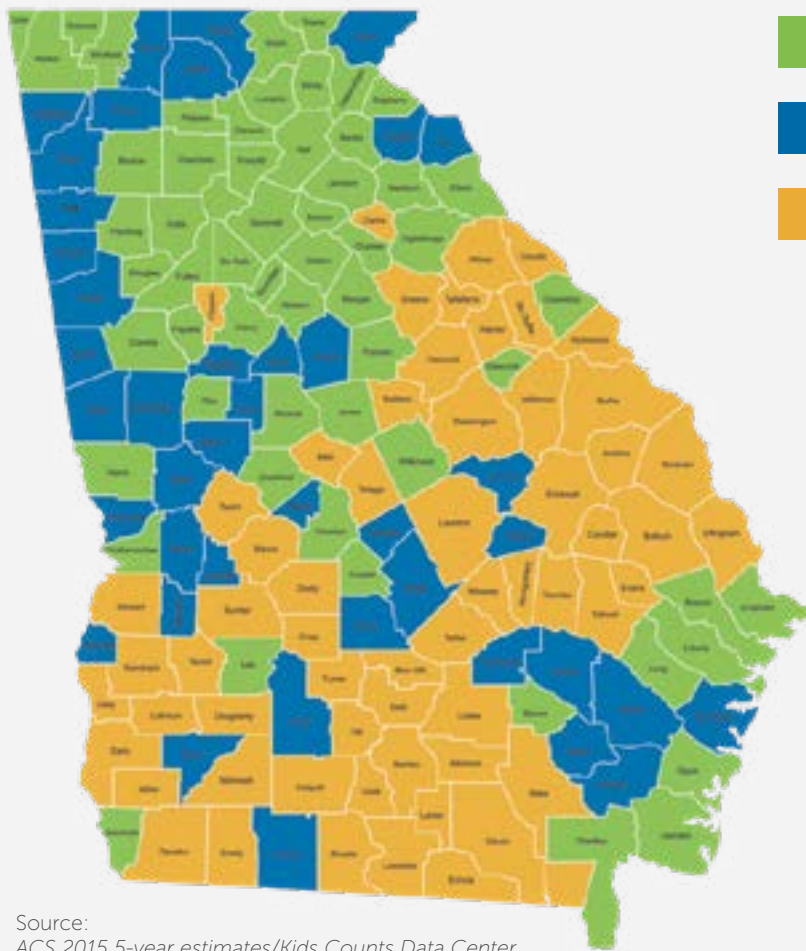
HOPE Lives Here!

friends and communities who can provide guidance, support, and help when they face the crises that are an inevitable part of the transition to adulthood in order to transition successfully.¹¹ This is largely due to how the adolescent brain develops and affects older youth who are in the process of developing greater autonomy and practicing adult roles and responsibilities. Young people are learning from experience and mistakes and are gaining critical coping and resiliency skills during this important developmental period.

Laying the ground work for success:

Increasing quality caregiving, solidifies more permanent situations for youth, making families and individuals healthy and stable. The state plans to ensure relatives caring for children in foster care are provided necessary services to maintain placement stability. Local communities also have the opportunity to create support systems for all caregivers and build a civic infrastructure that invests in innovative strategies that can positively address the needs of our youngest citizens. It is evident that families today are facing multiple stressors but with the support of institutions and community partners along with comprehensive programs and services that remove barriers and ensure access to health and mental health services, housing and family support services can be developed.

BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC GROWTH: POVERTY RATES



- Less than 20%
- 20% to 25%
- Greater than 25%

U.S.....	15.5%
GA.....	18.4%
Atlanta.....	15.4%
Hub.....	21.1%
Rural.....	20.7%
STATE RANK.....	40

Source:
ACS 2015 5-year estimates/Kids Counts Data Center

¹¹ Source: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2011). The Adolescent Brain: New Research and Its Implications for Young People Transitioning From Foster Care.



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[Restoration Rome](#) is a collaborative effort of amongst public and private partners developed to address the foster care crisis in Floyd County. Recognizing that the Floyd County Division of Family and Children Services did not have the all the resources needed to effectively serve foster children in that community, local partners came together to help children in this ever worsening situation. They discovered that Floyd County alone had over 430 children in state custody, 75 percent of which were not placed within the county due to having fewer than 15 DFCS Foster Homes, leaving Rome at #1 in Georgia for removals and cost of care per child. There was need for change, thus Restoration Rome was created to take action towards a Community of HOPE. The East Rome Community of Hope is an isolated community in North Georgia struggling with substance abuse, gang-related activity, lack of access to community resources and limited activities for children and families. Many residents are connected through multigenerational family history. Residents cite strengths as community pride and a sense of local heritage, along with strong faith community churches. Restoration Rome worked with city officials to repurpose a local elementary school into a prevention-focused community center and hub for foster and adoptive services. Restoration Rome opened its doors May 2016 to organizations serving our children and families, including Rome/Floyd Commission on Children and Youth, Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Bethany Christian Services, the YMCA and Floyd County Foster Parent Association. Restoration Rome provides activities and opportunities available within the community for families to ensure the safety and well-being of their children, as well as services to strengthen and preserve the family unit, because families are stronger when they are together. The Comprehensive Care Center provides intake and visitation services for children in foster care, as well as their birth and foster parents, reducing trauma for children and caregivers. The projected fiscal savings through the CCC due to reduction in length of stay, fewer children in care on a daily basis, and fewer children placed out of the county will result in a \$150,000 return on investment equaling \$625,000 year 1, serving just 30 families.

The [CarePortal](#) partnership between [Promise686](#) and the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services was started in Colquitt County in June 2016. Promise686 serves as the statewide lead for CarePortal and is a ministry that assists families and churches who care for vulnerable children by providing financial assistance, community support, and adoptive and foster care related education. The project is a public-private partnership funded entirely by community partners and designed to connect families in crisis with local faith-based organizations willing to lend a hand. The project equips caseworkers with a communications network through which to notify nearby churches of a specific child or family in need, allowing churches to then fill that need based on the resources they have available. Once the request is submitted to the network, local churches fulfill the need. The turnaround rate is almost immediate as most requests are fulfilled within a 24-hour timeframe.

To date, CarePortal has partnered with 49 churches to provide critical services to more than 500 children and had an economic impact of more than \$260,000. Requests have ranged from paying for summer school dues for a young person in foster care so that he could graduate from high school on time, providing bedroom furnishing for a family who was living in an unstable home environment and assisting a grandfather in purchasing school clothes for his three grandchildren that are currently in his care.

ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Why Moving Families and Youth Toward Self-Sufficiency is Important

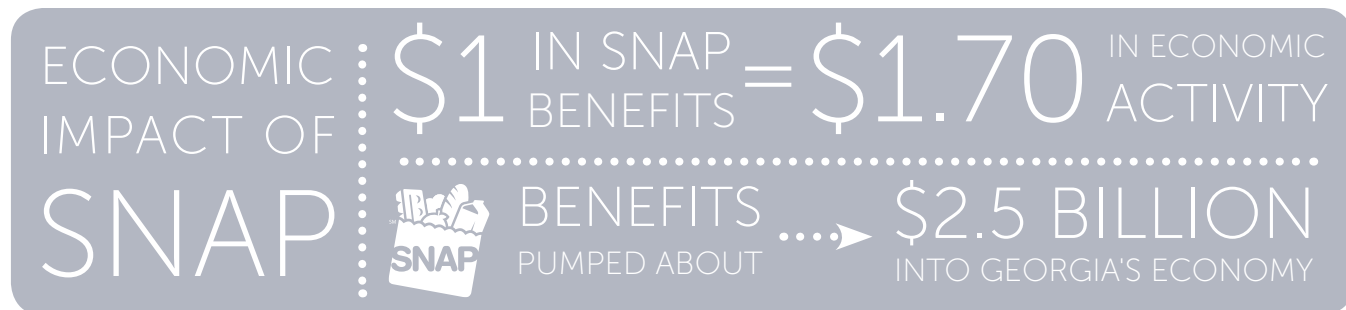
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services' mission statement clearly articulates the Division's belief in strengthening and supporting families toward independence and work. We believe families can reach their highest functioning when provided with the resources and support needed to take care of themselves. This cannot be accomplished without community buy-in and support. Collaboration with our communities creates systems of support and ensures that families and individuals have sustainable financial independence, voice, and choice in services, and are self-directed.

Georgia has become one of the top places to do business in the country, but in many places across the state families are facing significant economic barriers. Families at all income levels struggle with sky-high college and child care costs. Rural communities' face an exodus of people and an influx of opioids. In 2016, 21.3 percent of Georgia's children were living in impoverished communities, whereas the national scale of children living in poverty in 2016 was 19 percent. **In Georgia, 59 of our 159 counties have greater than 25 percent of their residents living in poverty.**¹²

When focusing on a families' structural support, financial security is a large factor. Between 2012 and 2016, the nation's average number of children whose caregivers lacked secure employment was 28 percent; meanwhile, Georgia averaged around 8.5 percent¹³. Georgia also has a 61 percent "high housing cost burden" matching the national incline¹⁴, making housing stability a challenge.

In 2015, nearly three in 10 children (29 percent) lacked a parent with full-time, year-round employment. Although still high, that figure declined 4 percentage points between 2010 and 2015. During the same period, the percentage of children whose families have a high housing cost burden (that is, they spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing) decreased substantially, from 41 percent to 33 percent.¹⁵

Despite these improvements, too many children are growing up in households with insufficient financial resources. In 2015, the child poverty rate stood at 21 percent — three percentage points higher than at the start of the recession. The racial disparities are stark: Among white children, 12 percent lived in poor families, compared with 36 percent of African-American and 31 percent of Latino children. This means helping struggling families keep food on the table and a roof overhead during tough times is critical. According to [Georgia Budget and Policy Institute](#), it is also essential that Georgia work collaboratively together to invest in higher education, job training and economic development to build a strong economy for the long haul that will help families save money



¹² Source: KIDS COUNT Data Center: A Project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

¹³ Source: U.S. Consensus Bureau, 2018

¹⁴ Source: Population Reference Bureau, 2018

¹⁵ Source: KIDS COUNT Data Center: A Project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.



Portraits of HOPE: What Does Hope in Action Look Like?

As we face the challenge of building safe and supportive communities for all children, success will depend upon the effort invested in bringing people together and building long-term partnerships. Here is what Hope in Action looks like when partners come together to collectively solve the toughest challenges faced by children and youth.

[Goodwill of North Georgia](#) is working closely with the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services to expand the SNAP Works Program statewide by partnering with their affiliate network that serve Georgia counties and assist individuals with finding a job and a career. Goodwill has removed barriers to employment for nearly 100,000 people in the last five years alone. SNAP Works is the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program. The program helps food stamp recipients get the skills, training or experience needed to get jobs. The SNAP Works Program has helped many food stamp recipients get jobs and reduce or eliminate their dependency on food stamps. They are employed in a variety of fields from health care and manufacturing, to teaching and welding. They are proving daily that SNAP Works is successful in helping food stamp recipients get the skills, training and work experience they need to build productive lives and end poverty.

An innovative partnership between the Georgia Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, operated by the Division of Family & Children Services Office of Family Independence, the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Regional Operations, Region 4, and Atlanta's Continuum of Care, led by [Partners for HOME Inc.](#), has resulted in a \$1.18 million request for proposals to assist homeless families within the city of Atlanta.

Atlanta's Continuum of Care, led by Partners for HOME Inc., in partnership with sub-grantee partners, Project Community Connections, Inc. and Chris180, will be providing rapid re-housing services to TANF-eligible homeless families within the city of Atlanta. This project will infuse significant resourcing into the Atlanta community by serving at least 100 homeless families.

This partnership is focused on addressing housing instability for families in crisis by implementing a rapid re-housing strategy that helps families quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing. Homeless families involved in the child-welfare system or TANF-eligible families will receive priority services. Participating families will receive comprehensive case management, connection to education and employment opportunities, connection to permanent housing and rental subsidy, and other supportive services. The partnership will utilize a multi-generational approach focusing services to increase families' economic mobility.

Laying the Groundwork for Success

State of Hope's focus is to improve the quality of life among children, families, and individuals through financial stability and economic self-sufficiency. Georgia can help identify the right partners and community resources. Addressing the need for economic self-sufficiency sets a foundation for a strong return on investment when populations are able to then support themselves and invest in their own communities. These communities achieve independence through supportive services that are transformative rather than transferable and the enhancement of already existing services through financial investment and basic supports.

Acknowledgements

HOPE is more than a way of being. It's a way of doing for our community. Thanks for all those who help HOPE thrive by showing up – where people live and work, where they learn and go to have fun. These simple actions you take day after day make our community stronger and more nurturing – where all children grow up safe, where people find jobs they want, where everyone belongs. This is creating a ripple effect for those who need it most – together we are making waves.

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Thanks to the commitment and dedication of the more than 8000 staff statewide who are HOPE champions everyday as they make sure that we have Safe Children. Strengthened Families. Stronger Georgia.

Together we can spread HOPE Across Georgia!



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