

REAL LIFE CENTER

Real help. Real hope.

"You have done a number of things to make me feel loved, wanted, and hopeful. I love being a part of the Real Life Center because you are truly a great friend for me. The Real Life Center gave me hope." - Kim



Providing Necessities for Living While Equipping People for Life



A Message From Our Executive Director

When I was younger, I'm not sure I really understood the concept of the journey of life and all that it entailed. I never really knew the beautiful gift it is to have others walk with you. It was when I was the one walking through the hard times that it all made sense. It was then that I could really see the impact when someone walks alongside you! The swirl in our logo is the reminder of walking on the road of life and the importance of "real help" and "real hope" on the journey. That's the beauty of The Real Life Center – all of us, a neighbor helping another neighbor, walking with each other when we need it the most. Hope does change everything!

For all of you, thank you for being that neighbor and for offering hope. 2018 was a year filled with growth and many stories of life change. It is those stories, along with the dedication of so many and the sacrificial giving, that keeps us going. Thank you! We look forward to 2019 embarking on our 20th Anniversary and moving to a permanent space. How exciting is God's provision! I have tears in my eyes as I reflect on this journey of life – both my personal life and the journey of the Real Life Center. I truly stand amazed at the hearts of each of you and your support.

May you too be encouraged!

Cathy Berggren

Executive Director

Our Team

Real Life Center

Executive Director Cathy Berggren

Business Director John Leake

Client Care Coordinator Karen McClean

Volunteer Coordinator Matt Lowe

Operations Coordinator Pete Trebottle

IT and Operational Support Dana Eisfelder

Food Drive Coordinator Kristen Phillips

Educational Coordinator Melanie Rosebrock

Orchard Coordinator/Operations Driver Steve Thomas

Marketing Director Lina Martin

Real Life Stores

Fayetteville Store Manager Diana Guthrie

Fayetteville Store Assistant Manager Pam Mercer

Tyrone Store Manager Leslie Dell

Tyrone Store Assistant Manager Lee Ann Trimble



2018 Board of Directors

James Belanger

Missy Bryan

Chris Clark

Lori Fouts

Vicki Lewis

Jay Vineyard

Troy Slezak

Real Life

There are times that real life doesn't work out the way we planned, and we need a helping hand to get our lives back on track. No one is immune to the unforeseen challenges of life. When people are frequently living on a tight budget, and experience a sudden loss of work, a cut in hours of pay, an unexpected divorce, or serious health issues, they suddenly face a significant problem. Even a government shutdown can create real difficulties for a family who has not financially planned for such a situation. Several in our community are facing the struggles of underemployment.

Real life happens to people we know in our circles. It happens to our neighbors. It can and will happen to all of us. The Real Life Center is committed to being the neighbor that offers the support and encouragement needed during these tough times.



Real Help

For those in need of assistance, a helping hand is a lifeline when financial and life issues become overwhelming. The Real Life Center provides a safe place for people to come for help. We care for the whole person - understanding that the physical, emotional, relational, financial, and spiritual are all interrelated. We work to not only meet the needs of an immediate crisis, such as paying a rent payment so a family can remain in their home, but we also assist individuals in developing an action plan, setting goals, and connecting them to resources within the Real Life Center and community.

We have found that by investing in the families we serve for a year and providing accountability, our programs and processes are a catalyst for change.



Real Hope

Many families who come to the Real Life Center initially feel discouraged, hopeless, and overwhelmingly defeated. Truthfully, it is hard to keep going without hope. The renewed hope they receive from people caring about them, encouraging them, praying for them, and tangibly meeting their needs is often the real force for change.

At the heart of our work is an understanding that in many cases people feel shame when they are in need of financial help. We want to help people value themselves and know they are not alone. Our staff and volunteers desire to share love, encouragement, resources, community, and accountability to restore the hope of a better tomorrow.



When a family is facing financial struggles, they can meet with an assessment counselor where we learn their immediate financial need.

Our staff works together to release funds to the various agencies, landlords, and utility companies in a timely and accurate manner to prevent eviction or utilities being cut off.

Those we serve have access to fresh bread, fruits, and vegetables in our Bread Pantry. This food has been made available through donations from local farms, businesses, and master gardeners, as well as through our Harvest for Real Life Orchard and Garden.

This fresh produce helps provide not only nutrition but also dignity and hope.

Our Food Pantry is unique in that it is filled with non expired food, provided mainly by food drives in the community, and designed to make complete meals.

Along with canned food items, we are blessed to offer a variety of meat, milk, eggs, laundry detergent, and other paper goods necessary for daily life.

Donations of clothing, coats, and shoes from the community enable us to provide free clothing to those we serve.

By shopping in our Clothes Closet, clients can save the expense of buying new or used clothing furthering them on the road to financial stability.

The monthly Mobile Food Pantry provides food for over 200 families a month as they drive their cars through and volunteers load the food in the trunks. This is a service open to anyone regardless of county of residence.

Our Programs

Assessment Counseling

Financial Assistance

Financial Counseling

Educational Classes

Food Pantry

Bread and Fresh Produce

Clothing Closet

Extensive Network and Referral

Mobile Food Pantry

Senior Programs



What Makes Us Different

- At the Real Life Center, families experience the love of Christ. Not only do we provide a safe place for people in need to receive assistance and encouragement, but we also respect each person and treat others as we would also want to be treated. We share our faith, our hope, and our joy, and that can profoundly change lives. We offer the hand of Christian love, investing in the people we serve.
- Our programs address not only the initial need but also the causative factors. In doing so, we can help our families look beyond their current circumstances with hope, resources, and guidance.
- We help our families set attainable goals. We follow up, regularly to encourage our clients and gauge their progress with the desired result of ultimately rejoicing in their achievements.

98%

of families contacted by phone achieved stability after 3 months of services with the RLC in 2018

82%

of clients contacted by phone achieved more than 50% of their personal goals in 2018

53%

of families who received more than 25 services in 2018 took at least one educational class

Creating Community



We know that the challenges our clients face can lead to isolation which can lead to loneliness and feelings of worthlessness and despair. Over the past few years, we have added programs to help provide community and connection to help combat isolation. Volunteers serve faithfully at the monthly "Take A Break" program which gives our seniors an opportunity to socialize while enjoying a delicious breakfast made by volunteers. "This senior social is more than serving breakfast. Each month we gather to talk, share stories, receive support from each other and most of all laugh. This interaction sets a positive mood for the rest of the day. Sometimes it is the only interaction someone has for the week. We all gain from this social time together," shares volunteer, Diana Britt. "Take A Break" not only offers an opportunity to fill an empty stomach but also to replenish a heart and mind by increasing self-esteem and giving our seniors a sense of belonging and self-worth.

Our class coordinator intentionally schedules classes that focus on subjects that regard an individual's physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual health. These weekly classes are mostly taught by volunteers who have expertise in the area of the class topic. During our cooking classes, the clients are learning helpful cooking tips and ideas and also benefit from the interactions taking place while eating together. The socialization and encouragement that take place during the weekly classes have the positive effect of creating feelings of being loved and affirmed. The sense of community and family created through these programs is essential in getting over the roadblocks to stability. We are blessed to be able to provide avenues to connect those we serve to each other through these programs.

Your Impact: 2018

583,575



Pounds of food
given to the families
we serve

16,557

Pounds of produce
distributed from our
Orchard and Garden



1,215

Active families
served representing
6,664 visits.



\$122,600

Financial assistance for rent,
utilities, etc.

48



Classes offered
regarding finances,
spiritual, physical and
emotional health

Pounds of meat
provided to the
families we serve



58,314

Pounds of food
distributed through the
Mobile Food Pantry



104,344



11,801

Clothing and household
items given to the
families we serve

Hours
served by
volunteers



19,482

The Real Impact to Our Community



By helping a family in Fayette or Coweta County reach stability, the Real Life Center reduces the likelihood that the family will become homeless.

By helping provide nutritious food to a hungry individual, the Real Life Center provides support to improve their physical health, eases the financial situation so that food isn't sacrificed to pay rent or utilities, and helps to ensure that children can get the nutrients they need to grow.

By assisting individuals with personal growth through classes, counseling, and community, the Real Life Center helps provide an environment of empowerment and self-sufficiency so individuals can realize their full potential as members of their families and our community.

By meeting an immediate need, providing food and clothing, and backpacks filled with supplies, the Real Life Center helps a child to keep his world filled with innocence and free of hunger or worry by having their basic needs met.

***"When I first started coming to the Real Life Center,
I was homeless."***

Kim's Story



When Kim came to the Real Life Center over a year ago, she was homeless. She called with the pressing need of paying a utility bill that was going to collections. Kim had been homeless and living in her car while keeping her belongings in a storage room. Overwhelmed by her situation, she had a folding chair in her storage room where she would stay at times, finding rest and reprieve.

"I was at a point of my life where I was going to give up when I called the Real Life Center. I was very distraught."

Alone in the area, Kim had to leave her home due to unexpected family circumstances and didn't know where to go. It wasn't that she didn't have credit or some money, it was just that the economy had shifted and she didn't have a plan.

"When you don't have a plan, you don't have hope. You don't have anything. I didn't know what to do."

At one of the lowest points in her life, Kim recalls her experience coming to the Real Life Center.

"When I walked in the Real Life Center, I could immediately tell it was a place that loved and cared for people. Everyone I met hugged me or prayed for me. None of the other places I went for help prayed with me; I was just like a number that came through that day. I may have received the help of food; however, when I left, I was still without solutions, I still went back to living in my car. At the Real Life Center, they offered me help with solutions. They helped me assess my situation, and with the help of different people, they helped me set goals and identify a plan."

Kim says that Executive Director, Cathy Berggren, played a key role in walking alongside her on her journey, especially during an unforeseen medical illness.

"Cathy has a God-like heart. She never looked at me differently. Cathy never held me to any standard. She just welcomed me with open arms. She listened and reached out."

Kim shares that before coming to the Real Life Center, one thing missing was her closeness to God. She says that Cathy Berggren and the Real Life Center have played a key part in her re-connection. She eagerly attends services at Dogwood Church and says the messages touch her heart. Kim is also enjoying being a part of a new community of friends and support by joining the Dogwood Tuesday morning Bible Study, "Redemption." She shares that this study has been invaluable.

"In being a part of the Real Life Center, I was able to deal with the shame and guilt of being homeless. Those were both things that kept me from moving forward. Through the people and programs at the Real Life Center, I learned there was no shame in it. I also learned that there was a purpose for what I went through."

Blessed to have found a Christian transitional housing facility for women through a church in Fayetteville, Kim held on to the hope of having her own home once again. She included the Real Life Center in her rejoicing as that hope became a reality - she moved into her own apartment! Kim has found that a part of her purpose in her struggles is to help someone else through writing a book about her experience with homelessness and regaining stability. God blessed her to find a Writer's Circle through the library, another community to be a part of. She has discovered her joy in writing and has even been invited to join the Writer's Conference in May. Even though she is about halfway through her book, her story is coming full circle, and the Real Life Center has been privileged to be a part of it.

"God gave me an ending to my book. He gave me a place to call home."



Our Orchard and Garden

Run entirely by approximately 200 active and dedicated volunteers, the Harvest for Real Life Orchard and Garden is housed on three and a half acres on the Dogwood Church property and was planted with the purpose of providing fresh produce to the families served by the Real Life Center. Seasonally distributed through the Bread Room, this fresh produce offers the families we serve the health benefits of eating fresh fruits and vegetables.

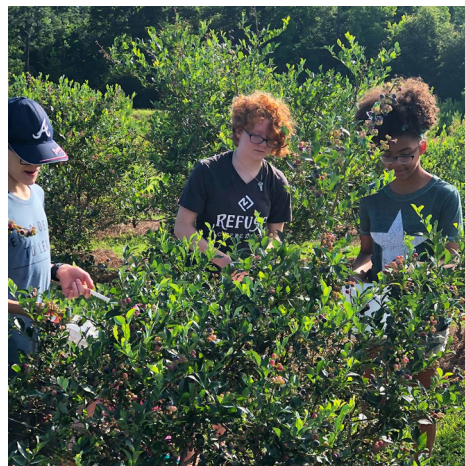
In full production, the orchard will produce approximately 30,000 pounds of fruit a year. This amount equates to 3-7 pounds of fruit per family per week. Volunteers plant, fertilize, prune and harvest more than 7,500 pounds of peaches, and close to 10,000 pounds of apples, not to mention the plums, persimmons, muscadines, figs, and pomegranates that are grown.

During the months of June and July, it is a delight to see people of all ages from our community come to the Orchard to pick our blueberries and blackberries during the crisp, beautiful mornings before the heat of the day begins. The excitement in the children's faces is evident as they see the volunteers bag the portion of the berries their family can take home at no charge as a part of our community U-Pick.

The half-acre vegetable garden produces more than twelve varieties of vegetables. The summer garden brings a harvest of fresh tomatoes, corn, watermelon, cantaloupe, bell and banana peppers, yellow squash, and zucchini; and the winter season brings a crop of nutritious greens: collards, turnips, broccoli, cabbage, radishes, and kale.

We hope that the Real Life Center impacts not only our local community but beyond. One way we do this is through a team of volunteers who are responsible for preparing the soil for future garden projects located at other churches wanting to begin gardens. Also, it is frequent that other groups who desire to replicate our efforts will come to visit our Orchard and Garden to learn from our volunteers.

The Harvest for Real Life Orchard and Garden provide much-needed food for the families we serve and have been a blessing to them as they would not be able to purchase most of the produce from the grocery store on their limited budgets.



Thanks to the generosity from our community the Real Life Center runs two thrift stores, one in Tyrone and another in Fayetteville. Our Real Life Stores provide an upscale shopping experience with discounted prices.

Racks of stylish clothing, furniture, art, home decor, housewares, and many other items create a great place for customers to enjoy wonderful bargains on a variety of gently used items.

All proceeds go to the Real Life Center to invest in local families by helping meet critical financial needs in areas such as rent and basic utilities.

Our stores not only provide the community a place to donate gently-used items, but they are also a fun place for individuals, families, and groups to come together and serve. We are always seeking those who enjoy this environment to assist our shoppers with their buying experience and to help with the daily operations of the stores.

Because of the generous donations from our community, the loyalty of our customers, and the dedication from our Store staff and volunteers, our Real Life Stores contributed \$108,570 of net income to the operations of the Real Life Center in 2018.



Individual Donor Spotlight



Dr. Anne Marie McKenzie-Brown,
Director of the Emory Pain Division in the
Department of Anesthesiology

Dr. McKenzie-Brown learned about the Real Life Center while attending Dogwood Church many years ago. Since then, she has chosen to be a faithful financial supporter of our mission. When asked why she chooses to make a difference in our community in this way, she responds, "Investing in people is important to me. It is also important that I trust who is behind the organization I support. I see the innovative way that the Real Life Center helps those in need to become self-sufficient, offering support that has boundaries. Their philosophy of giving a hand up versus a hand out really resonates with me. Also, the way the Real Life Center provides help maintains the dignity of those who receive it; this is unique."

Dr. McKenzie-Brown has volunteered by picking blueberries in our Orchard and says about the Real Life Center, "I also like how they have created concepts that involve the community such as inviting the community to pick berries in the orchard and offering nice clothing at very reasonable prices to shoppers at the Real Life Stores. I have a lot of respect for what the Real Life Center does." We thank Dr. McKenzie-Brown and all of our financial supporters for making our mission of investing in families to help create long-term change a reality.

Revenue Sources

In-Kind Donations	\$1,200,157	58%
Real Life Stores	\$316,473	15%
Individual Donations	\$162,406	8%
Dogwood Church Support	\$125,000	6%
Church Network	\$91,345	4%
Gala Fundraiser	\$70,944	3%
Business Donations	\$55,716	3%
Other	\$51,975	3%
Total	\$2,074,017	

Our Donors: you make it happen!

We are exceptionally grateful for the faithfulness of our supporters and their commitment to our mission. The financial and in-kind support through donations has allowed the Real Life Center to evolve into a network of programs so effective and innovative that other nonprofits regularly visit and seek advice. This is a reality because of our generous supporters.

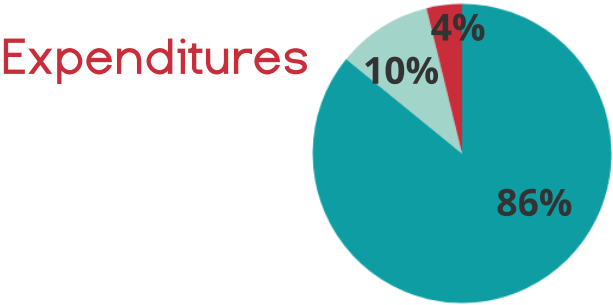
Church Partner Spotlight

The Real Life Center was blessed abundantly by a very generous financial gift from Southside Church as a part of their "Be Rich" Campaign. When asked why they chose to support us in this way, lead Pastor Jason Dixon replied, "As a church, our goal is to love and serve our community as well as we possibly can.



We have local partners that do that even better than we can in certain situations. Real Life Center is one of those partners. They love well. They serve well. That's why we give to their outstanding organization. "

The Real Life Center is so grateful to Southside Church and all of our Church Partners! Thank You for your support!



Programs	\$1,700,666
Fundraising	\$204,015
Administration	\$75,721
Total	\$1,980,402

A Glimpse of Our Amazing Community

neighbor helping neighbor
to promote change



870 turkeys were purchased through T-shirts for Turkeys by our community for the families we serve for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners.



Boy Scouts in our community collected 12,277 pounds of food for the Real Life Center during their Scouting for Food Campaign.



Volunteers of all ages from our community picked over 2330 pounds of berries from our Orchard to help provide fresh produce for our clients.



Supporters helped raise \$70,714 through ticket purchases and sponsorships for the Harvest for Hope Gala.

Volunteers from several churches served monthly to distribute over 104,340 pounds of food to those in need at the Mobile Food Pantry.



175 Real Life Center families received the gift of new foam mattresses thanks to a generous donation from Elite Comfort Solutions in Newnan.



Real Life Center offers year-round opportunities to help companies inspire their employees to engage in community service. In 2018, employee volunteers from companies such as Georgia Power, Eaton, Certainteed, UPS, Panasonic, and Hoshizaki worked in our warehouse, stocked our food pantry shelves, picked berries in the orchard, and conducted food drives that were instrumental in keeping our supply aligned with the need.



Archer Western Contractors generously presented the Real Life Center with a check for \$15,000 from their Charity Golf Tournament.

"We don't always know what our neighbor is going through, but in this community, thankfully there are many people willing to help." - Cathy

The Heart Beat of Hope: Our Volunteers



Our volunteers are critical partners with the Real Life Center. Be it teaching classes, stocking the pantry, helping customers at the Stores, planting trees in the Orchard, loading food into trunks at the Mobile Food Pantry, helping to plan our fund-raising gala, donating time or goods or simply being an advocate and holding a food drive - it all makes a difference! Their consistent commitment is commendable and critical to the success of our programs.

The impact they make is immeasurable!

Over 350 Volunteers.
Over 19,480 hours donated.



Come serve with us!

- ***Real Life Center*** Help families shop, sort incoming donations, hold a food drive or fundraiser, donate your expertise or teach a class.
- ***Real Life Stores*** Assist shoppers, create store displays, sort incoming donations or gift gently used clothing, home decor and furniture.
- ***Real Life Orchard and Garden*** Be a part of a produce team (i.e. Peach team) where you are directly responsible for planting, nurturing, and harvesting nutritional produce for the families we serve.

For more information, visit www.RealLifeCenter.com/Get-Involved.



In 1999, Fayette County was in a considerable period of growth. Whenever there are both growth and people, there are unexpected circumstances that happen. Braelinn Church, which is now Dogwood Church, received a high volume of calls from people who needed financial help. I had the privilege of participating in a gathering of a newly formed board along with several others who began to brainstorm about how to help people in a different way who were experiencing hardships. We asked the question, "What would it look like if we could genuinely help by being a catalyst for change?" We longed for something that could not only meet the immediate needs of those who were hurting but indeed create change. It was then that Braelinn Community Services was incorporated under the leadership of Pastor John Hamblen.

I started as a volunteer and began to pray and brainstorm on what it should look like. I marvel as I reflect on the past and think of where God has brought us to today. We started out delivering bread and building relationships to those we knew had needs. Our first actual space was the hallway in a trailer on our Church campus. We eventually added the use of three rooms in that trailer; adding financial assistance, clothing, and food. In 2003, we moved off of the church campus and became the Real Life Center. Over the years we have added and taken some programs away as we continually try to do things with excellence and to be the most effective we can be, never wavering on building relationships, always offering hope and sharing the love of Jesus.

Today we have grown to five areas that we serve: the Center, two Stores, the Harvest for Real Life Orchard and Garden, and the Mobile Food Pantry. We function with a staff of eighteen full and part-time employees and an amazing volunteer group of approximately 350 dedicated folks that serve tirelessly. I have watched countless lives helped and touched. I have been a part of distributing over four million pounds of food. Best of all, I have been a part of reminding hurting folks that they are not alone.

I think this note from an individual served by the Real Life Center says it all: "Thanks to all of you for not only helping me with my needs but caring about me as a human being and bringing me back to my faith in Jesus."

Thank you for your part over the years – I can't wait to see what God has in store for the next 20!

- Cathy Berggren



Get Involved

you can be a part of providing hope

Donate Funds. Check with your employer about a Matching Gift Program. Recurring gifts allow you to spread your donation over time. Raise money for the Real Life Center by organizing a fundraiser. Shop using Amazon Smile and the Krogers Community Rewards. Visit our website to make an on-line donation.

Donate Items. Donate new or gently-used items to our Thrift Stores. Donate food and personal care items to the Real Life Center. Host donation drives. See our website for our wish list.

Support our Gala. Purchase a ticket or sponsorship for the Harvest for Hope Gala in September. Donate a basket, product, or service to our silent auction.

Volunteer. There are a host of different opportunities available for volunteering at the Center, Stores, Orchard and Garden and Mobile Food Pantry.

REAL LIFE CENTER

Real help. Real hope.



2019 Dates to Note

- First Day in new Real Life Center facility - March 20
- Open House of new facility - April TBD
- U-Pick Berry Picking opens to public - beginning of June
- Fayette Celebrity Dancers Charity benefit - June 08
- Harvest for Hope Gala* - September 12
- PTC Dragon Boat Races * - September 28

*Sponsorship opportunities that support the Real Life Center are available for these events. Contact lmartin@reallifecenter.org for more information.

Real Life Center

Beginning March 20:

975 GA-74 North
Tyrone, GA 30290

email: rlc@reallifecenter.org

Mon-Thur 9-12, Thur 5-7

www.RealLifeCenter.org

770-631-9334



Real Life Store Fayetteville

400 N. Glynn St.
770-719-0880
Tues-Sat 10-4



Real Life Store Tyrone

992 Senoia Rd.
770-632-3590
Tues-Sat 10-4



Real Life Center is a mission of Dogwood Church.