

# REAL LIFE CENTER

Real help. Real hope.



Providing Necessities for Living While Equipping People for Life

## ANNUAL REPORT 2019



## A Message from our Executive Director

**home.** /hōm/

The place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household

I think most of us recognize the gift of having a home. Home is our safe place where we can be ourselves and where we belong. What a beautiful thing it is to come home at the end of the day and have a place of respite! We have been blessed at the Real Life Center to have a place to call home. We are grateful to Dogwood Church for this provision. While it is awesome to have some permanent space for us, we recognize that our new home is so *much more*. It is a place where the people we serve *feel* they have a safe place to come to, a place where they belong, a place where others care. We are so thrilled to have a warm and inviting space that quietly says “Welcome home. You are safe. You are loved. You are valued. You are not alone. You don’t have to give up hope.” Having a place to come is the first step in a renewed hope and the beginning of change. This has been an amazing year in our new space with classes that help create the sense of belonging, learning, and growing *together*. A year of meeting needs and changing lives. A place for neighbor to help neighbor.

For all of you that serve, give and pray I thank you for your part in creating this home and all that it takes to invest in the lives of our neighbors. May you truly be blessed this new year! **Cathy Berggren**

## Our Team

**Executive Director** Cathy Berggren

**Business Director** John Leake

**Development and Special Projects Manager** Jennifer Nolder

**Operations Manager** Pete Trebottle

**Client Care Coordinator** Shannon Echevarria

**Volunteer Coordinator** Matt Lowe

**Food Drive Coordinator** Kristen Phillips

**Educational Coordinator** Melanie Rosebrock

**Operations Support/Orchard Coordinator** Steve Thomas

**Marketing Coordinator** Lina Martin



## Board of Directors 2019

James Belanger ♦ Betty Crisp ♦ Lori Fouts ♦ Vicki Lewis ♦

Pastor Keith Moore ♦ Dan Rankin ♦ Troy Slezak

[www.RealLifeCenter.org](http://www.RealLifeCenter.org)



# Sonya's Story.

## Real Life.

"The Real Life Center is a huge part of my life. I am disabled, live alone and on a very small, strict budget. I barely make enough to pay for my living expenses."

## Real Help.

"I do not have enough for food and depend on the Real Life Center weekly for food in order to live. This place and the work they do is a blessing from the Lord. I feel the presence of the Lord through this ministry."

## Real Hope.

"Not only do I depend on them for food, but I also depend on their prayers – it is a huge part of my weekly visits. The prayers they send up are heard. This gives me hope that I will see better days ahead."

"The people that volunteer their time are so wonderful and kind, which in this day and time is hard to find. They truly care about my and others' well-being and I feel so blessed by them."

-Sonya

## What We Do

People need hope. They need support and for their community to give them a helping hand when that one thing in life happens that knocks them off their feet. No one is immune to the unexpected challenges of life, be it a health crisis, a sudden loss of work or a divorce. Since 1999, the Real Life Center has offered a safe and friendly place where our staff and volunteers guide people through the process of getting back on a solid foundation and finding hope. At the Real Life Center, we use innovative strategies and programs to create long term change in the lives of the individuals and families we serve.



# Your Impact In Our Community

Thank you to our community partners, donors, and volunteers who supported the Real Life Center in 2019 – together we have helped over **4540** people who were hungry and hurting in our community.

## Feeding and Clothing those in Need

- ✓ Weekly Bread and Fresh Produce
- ✓ Monthly Food Pantry
- ✓ Senior Boxes
- ✓ Mobile Food Pantry
- ✓ Clothing Closet
- ✓ Weekend Meal Program for Children



*"I am a single parent that has a job at Emory. The help Real Life Center has given me with food allows me to have enough money to pay other bills. It gives hope that everything will be ok when times are tough."*



**616,258**  
lbs food distributed  
to families we serve



**135,910**  
lbs food distributed  
through Mobile  
Food Pantry



**65,766**  
lbs meat  
distributed to  
families we serve

## Keeping Families in their Homes

- ✓ Financial Assistance towards Rent and Utilities
- ✓ Financial Counseling
- ✓ Career Counseling



*"We found the Real Life Center at a time that my wife and I both lost our jobs. This is a facility that truly provides real help and hope and operates in love and excellence."*



**\$122,746** given in financial assistance for rent and utilities

## Creating Community

- ✓ Classes on emotional, physical, relational, financial, and spiritual health
- ✓ Senior "Take-a-Break" Breakfast



*"Our spirits are nourished during classes. We can feed our family better. We feel a relief in our financial needs. The Real Life Center is making a HUGE difference in each of us."*



**589** Real Life Center clients attended our classes

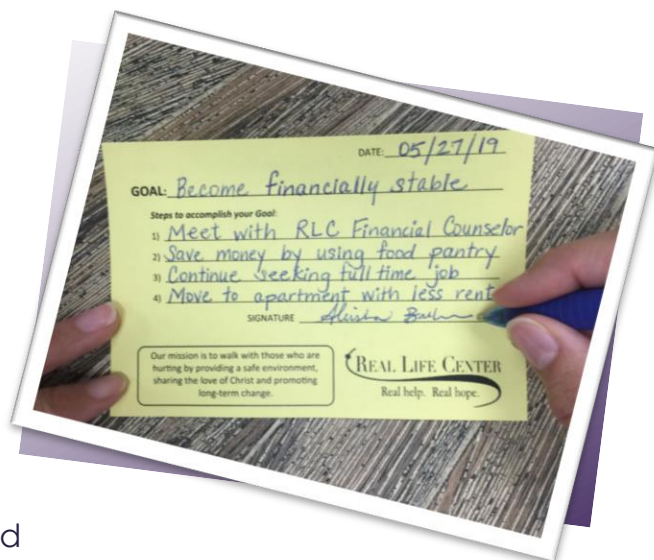
# A Hand Up

## Achieving Goals

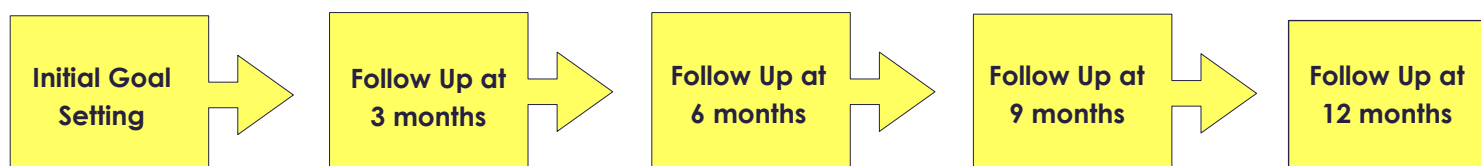
*"At the Real Life Center, I filled out a little goal card.*

*I look at that card all the time. I still have it."*

– Kim



When someone comes to us for help in the middle of a crisis, talking about where they want to be in a year from now gives them perspective and hope. During the initial assessment, each family sets a long-term goal and is coached through the steps necessary to accomplish their goal. Our goal setting and follow-up process allows us to track stability over the course of each family's one-year program. We realize that stability in the home leads to healthier families and healthier communities. Research shows that once someone hits a crisis, a second crisis typically follows three months later. At 3 months, 55% of Real Life Center families remained stable in their home in 2019. At the end of their one-year program, over 54% of our families reached at least one of their goals.



Savings Available to our Families who Maximize use of our 12-month Programs



RLC Program	frequency of visit	savings per YEAR	savings per MONTH
Weekly Bread Pantry	49 visits/year	\$4,753.00	\$396.08
Monthly Food Pantry	12 visits/year	\$1,752.00	\$146.00
Clothing Closet	4 visits/year	\$2,620.00	\$218.33
<b>Total Savings</b>		<b>\$9,125.00</b>	<b>\$760.42</b>

*\*based on a family of 4*



During the initial assessment to enroll in our programs, our volunteer counselors talk each client through their sources of income and the expenses they incur each month. This comparison is important in understanding how beneficial it is to budget in the savings a client receives by maximizing the use of our food programs and clothing closet. This savings allows the opportunity to reserve funds normally spent on food and clothing for the following rent and utility payments thus helping a family to get back on their feet financially.





# Our Neighbors We Serve

There are times that life doesn't work out the way we planned. No one is immune to the unforeseen difficulties experienced in life. Real life happens to people we know in our circles, across all ages and socioeconomic levels. The Real Life Center is committed to being the neighbor that offers the support and encouragement needed during these tough times.

## Did you know?

**1 in 10**  
seniors in  
Georgia are living  
below the  
poverty level.

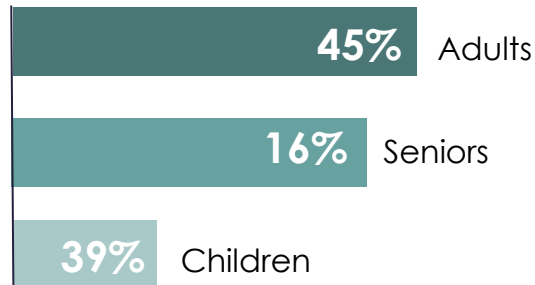
*Hunger in America Study,  
Atlanta Community Food Bank*

**1 in 5**  
Georgia  
children live in  
households where  
having enough  
food is a daily  
struggle.

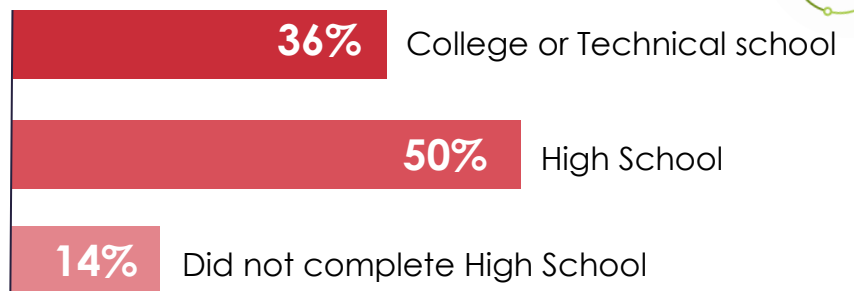
*Map the Meal Gap Study 2017,  
Feeding America*

An individual must  
earn **\$15.09** per  
hour in Georgia to  
provide for a family  
of 4, yet the state  
minimum wage is  
**\$7.25.**

*Living Wage Calculator, Published January  
2018, Dr. Amy K. Glasmeier and MIT*



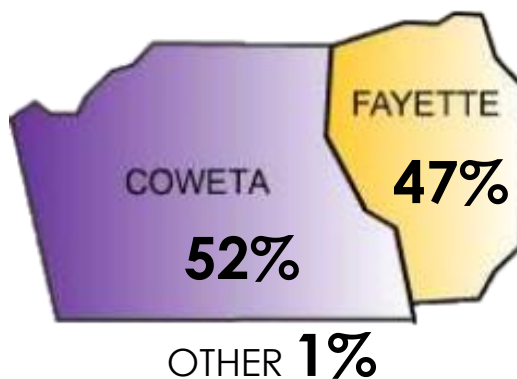
## Education Level of our Clients



*\*Information based on Heads of Households Only*

## Service Area

We serve families who  
are residents of either  
Coweta or Fayette  
Counties.



**1,280**  
Active families  
served representing  
**7,524** visits



# Creating Community

## Our Classes and Senior Breakfast



**69**

Classes offered regarding finances, spiritual, physical and emotional health



Our classes and monthly Senior Breakfast provide community and connection for our families which combats isolation. Taught by volunteers, the classes focus on health and wellness, spiritual growth, money management and healthy relationships. Our classes provide a safe place to share, encourage, and build relationships. Empowering our families towards long term change, each class attended earns them additional visits to the food pantry.

Our new home has provided wonderful space for us to grow our educational class program!

**69 classes in 2019**

Increase of  
**44%**

**48 classes in 2018**

**589 attendees in 2019**

Increase of  
**69%**

**348 attendees in 2018**



## Taking Care of Our Children

We believe that growing up in a stable family is one of the biggest predictors of children getting out and successfully staying out of poverty. Stability forms the backbone of a child's life and is critical for that child to thrive.

We have several programs that enhance the lives of children. These programs include:

- our winter coat program
- distributing backpacks filled with school supplies
- supplying much-needed nutritional produce
- functioning as a safety net for local schools, working with school counselors to help children in need

We are excited to have introduced two **NEW** programs focusing on children in 2019:

- Weekend Food Bags to help children who are food insecure
- Christmas Gift Program including our Gift Cards for Teenagers Program



**571**

Backpacks given to children in our community





# Homegrown Goodness

## Our Orchard and Garden

Housed on three and a half acres directly across from the Real Life Center is our Orchard and Garden. It is run entirely by approximately 200 active volunteers with the purpose of providing fresh fruits and vegetables to the families we serve. This fresh produce compliments what is given to us by our community farmers and partners and offers the families the nutrition benefits of eating fresh fruits and vegetables they otherwise would not be able to afford on their limited budgets. Through the Orchard and Garden, we are building community and encouraging a healthier lifestyle for our families.



“ I have been trying to eat healthy for the last two years. The Real Life Center has been an amazing blessing to me and has impacted my ability to eat healthy because I am able to eat homegrown fruits and vegetables at no cost to me. Eating healthy can be very expensive. ”  
-Teresa

### What Do We Grow?

Peaches  
Apples  
Plums  
Persimmons  
Muscadines  
Figs  
Pomegranates  
Blueberries  
Blackberries  
Tomatoes  
Watermelon  
Cantaloupe  
Bell and banana peppers  
Yellow squash and zucchini  
Collards  
Turnips  
Broccoli  
Cabbage  
Radishes  
Kale  
Corn



**9,799**

**lbs produce  
harvested from our  
Orchard and Garden**



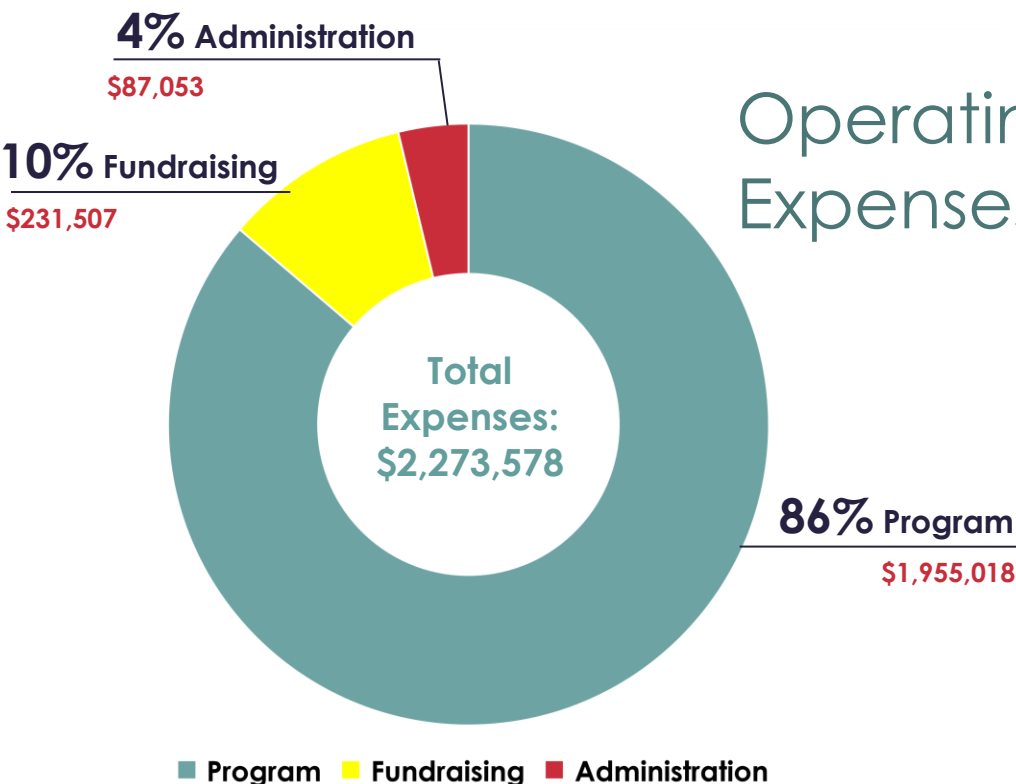
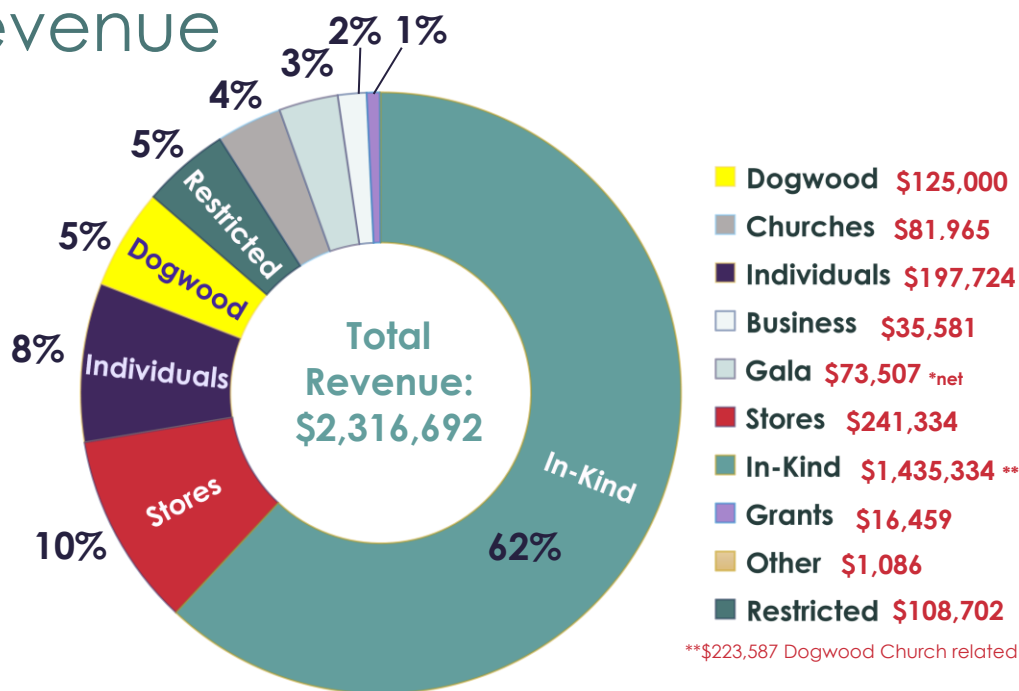


# Financials

## Partnering Together

We are incredibly grateful for all of our supporters. When you choose to partner with the Real Life Center, you are directly responsible for giving hope and changing lives. We could not do this without you!

### Revenue



### Operating Expenses



### What can your donation do?

Your gift may  
**FILL A CART FOR A FAMILY AT OUR BREAD AND FOOD PANTRIES**  
 Providing nutritious food for those in need.

Your gift may  
**FILL THE GAS TANK FOR THE RLC TRUCK**  
 Which picked up 358,652 pounds of donated food in 2019.

Your gift may  
**PAY A UTILITY BILL FOR A FAMILY EXPERIENCING FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS**  
 Keeping the heat on another month allowing them to remain in their home.



# Hometown Generosity

## Highlights of 2019

**131** food, clothing, toiletries and other drives were held by schools, churches, businesses, organizations and individuals in our community



Several hundred community members helped us celebrate our new home at our Ribbon Cutting Ceremony



Panasonic and Southside Church collected over **570** backpacks for children in our community



A record **1,139** paper or frozen turkeys were donated during the JoyFM 93.3 T-Shirts for Turkeys



**31** Groups gave their time to serve at the RLC



**237** brand new mattresses were donated by Elite Comfort Solutions for our families



Our amazing community has supported our Fayetteville and Tyrone Real Life Stores for over **12** years. Shoppers and donors shared their encouragement as our Stores said farewell



We received a bountiful financial gift from the Southside Church Be Rich Campaign



**507** pounds of blueberries were harvested by our community during U-Pick 4 Others

Over **\$73,000** was raised at the Harvest for Hope Gala to support our mission



Palmer's Restaurant Owners, Billy Karwisch, John and Ashley Edwards, and their small group served Christmas dinner to over **225** individuals from the Real Life Center



Businesses and organizations such as ATL Tracon and NATCA provided Christmas gifts and gift cards to **256** children



An average of **206** families per month received food from the Mobile Food Pantry



# Our Volunteers

## Join our Family



Kind people are our kind of people!

Thank you to our family of volunteers for all that you do to support our mission!

Volunteers at the Real Life Center serve in many areas to bring change to the lives of our families! They show love and value to each person who comes to the Real Life Center for help, showing them dignity and truly loving them for who they are, without judgment. Be it teaching classes, stocking the pantry, working in the Orchard, serving at the Mobile Food Pantry or helping families shop, they are all critical partners and make a huge difference in furthering our mission.



17,066

Hours of service  
from our volunteers



# Get Involved

By giving, praying or volunteering, you could be the one thing that changes a person's story....forever.

## Donate funds

- Match your gift: Check with your employer about a Matching Gift program
- Recurring gifts: Consider 20 monthly gifts of \$20 to help us celebrate a new decade in 2020
- Crowdfunding: Use MobileCause or Facebook to motivate your friends, family and coworkers to raise funds to support our programs
- Community Fundraising Events: Raise money for the Real Life Center by organizing a fundraiser
- Give a gift in honor or in memory of a friend or family member

## Donate items

- Donate new or gently used clothing, linens and towels
- Donate food and personal care items: Please visit [www.RealLifeCenter.org/our-wishlist/](http://www.RealLifeCenter.org/our-wishlist/) for our wish list

## Donate when you shop

- AmazonSmile: go to <https://smile.amazon.com> and select the Real Life Center as the charity of your choice
- Kroger: go to <https://www.kroger.com/communityrewards> and follow the member enrollment steps for linking your Kroger Plus Card to the Real Life Center

## Attend our Annual Harvest for Hope Fundraising Gala

September 17<sup>th</sup> 2020

## Help harvest our blueberries during U-Pick 4 Others

Visit [www.RealLifeCenter.org/support-our-orchard/volunteer-and-u-pick-information/](http://www.RealLifeCenter.org/support-our-orchard/volunteer-and-u-pick-information/)

## Volunteer

Visit [www.RealLifeCenter.org/get-involved/volunteer/](http://www.RealLifeCenter.org/get-involved/volunteer/)



975 Highway 74 North  
Tyrone, GA 30290  
770-631-9334  
Email: [rlc@reallifecenter.org](mailto:rlc@reallifecenter.org)

Mon-Thurs 9am-12 pm  
Thurs 5-7 pm  
[www.RealLifeCenter.org](http://www.RealLifeCenter.org)



Real Life Center is a mission of Dogwood Church.