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 Trebotte  
**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
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
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Goal Setting</th>
<th>Follow Up at 3 months</th>
<th>Follow Up at 6 months</th>
<th>Follow Up at 9 months</th>
<th>Follow Up at 12 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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

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

*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.

### Education Level of our Clients

- **36%** College or Technical school
- **50%** High School
- **14%** Did not complete High School

*Information based on Heads of Households Only*

### Service Area

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

- **52%** Coweta
- **47%** Fayette
- **1%** Other

1,280 Active families served representing 7,524 visits
Creating Community
Our Classes and Senior Breakfast

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.

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

“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

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**

- **Total Revenue:** $2,316,692
- **Operating Expenses:** 86%
- **Program:** $1,955,018
- **Fundraising:** 10%
- **Administration:** 4%

**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.

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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.

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

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

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

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

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

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.

Over 257 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.

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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/ 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 17th 2020

Help harvest our blueberries during U-Pick 4 Others

Volunteer
Visit www.RealLifeCenter.org/get-involved/volunteer/

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Tyrone, GA 30290
770-631-9334
Email: rlc@reallifecenter.org

Mon-Thurs 9am-12 pm
Thurs 5-7 pm
www.RealLifeCenter.org

Real Life Center is a mission of Dogwood Church.