

REAL LIFE CENTER

Real help. Real hope.

Telling the story of



Providing Necessities for Living While Equipping People for Life

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

A Message from our Executive Director

hope. /hōp/ noun

A positive feeling about the future, or something that you want to happen; The person or thing that can help you succeed;

An anchor for the soul, firm and secure, Hebrews 6:19



When we look back on 2020, we often think about the difficult things that took place. For many people, what happened in 2020 has been devastating, and they have experienced a great deal of loss. There has been a loss of health, lives, jobs, and homes, to name a few. Amidst all the hard things, there were also some good things, even amazing things. When I think back to 2020, I am reminded of the beautiful story of hope that I am privileged to be a part of. I saw people come to serve, even amid the unknowns associated with the virus. I saw first-hand a community that gave above and beyond financially. When we were unable to get food and things like toilet paper in bulk, individuals and neighborhoods, businesses, civic groups, and churches went to the store and bought what they could for those needing it more than themselves. In the midst of what felt like darkness to many, 2020 was a beautiful picture of neighbor helping neighbor, offering a shining light of hope in the darkness.

Matthew 5:16 reminds us to be a light for others to see that we may reflect our Father in heaven. This is some of the goodness I was able to see in 2020. For all of you who gave, served, prayed and cared for your neighbor, thank you for being a part of the story of HOPE for many!

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 Greg Georgianni

Operations Support/Orchard Coordinator Steve Thomas

Marketing Coordinator Lina Martin



Board of Directors 2020

James Belanger ✦ Chris Clark ✦ Betty Crisp ✦ Deborah Floyd

Lori Fouts ✦ Pastor Keith Moore ✦ Dan Rankin

www.RealLifeCenter.org



Real Help, Real Hope

Real Life



“We are seeing people coming through the Center that never thought they would be in a situation like this.”

“I met with a lady who came in for an assessment counseling session and she ended up in tears. She and her husband live in a very nice neighborhood in Peachtree City and never in a million years dreamt that they would be in a situation where they were having to come for financial assistance. They are in danger of losing their home. She has been driving through for food every week trying to keep her family food stable and preserving their cash be able to pay their bills. We are seeing people coming through the Center that never thought they would be in a situation like this.”

Jan Fender, RLC Volunteer

At the Real Life Center, our goal is to offer HOPE to neighbors in our community who experience hardships from life's unexpected difficulties such as divorce, major health issues, and job loss. We work to create stability in the middle of a crisis and use a holistic approach over a one-year period that incorporates innovative programs designed to be a catalyst for long-term change. At the same time, we strive to show the love of Christ to our neighbors who are hurting, letting them know they are not alone.



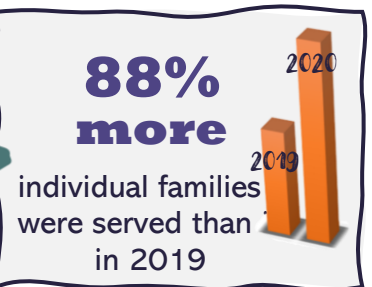
The Real Life Center has been a vital source of help and hope in our community, especially in 2020. We provide food through our modified drive-thru Food Pantry while also helping those who are residents of Coweta and Fayette counties with financial assistance for rent and utilities, keeping families in their homes. These families are people in our community...co-workers, neighbors, employees at the businesses we frequent, and families from our children's schools.

Your Impact Is Changing Lives

A miracle, by definition, is something that only God can do. The only way to describe what took place at the Real Life Center in 2020 – is that God performed a miracle. If you had told our staff and volunteers in January that we would need to serve almost 90% more families than in 2019 and under reduced operating hours, we would have said, “That is impossible!” But with God, *all things are possible!* God performed a miracle, week after week, as He continued to provide. Our community was a part of that miracle through generous food drives, blanket donations, and Christmas gifts for children....the blessings poured in. Many people were a part of this miracle through bountiful financial giving, which helped us pay rent, mortgage, and utility bills for families whose jobs were impacted by COVID-19. We are incredibly grateful to our astounding community for stepping up to serve and give more than ever, meeting physical needs, and providing hope to our neighbors going through hard times.



We helped families and individuals through
12,352 visits
to our Food Pantry



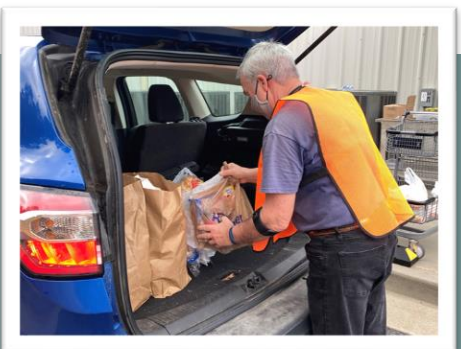
Weekly visits to our drive-thru Food Pantry made it possible for a family to save over
\$400/month
to help pay other bills

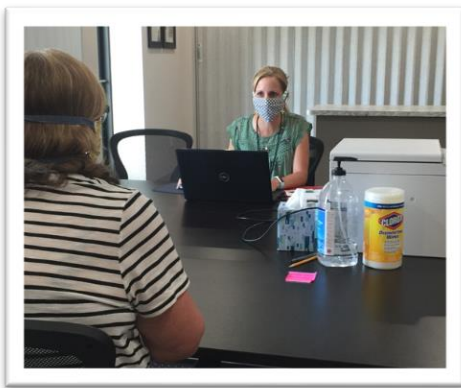
787,578 pounds

of food was distributed



“Dear RLC staff, volunteers, and generous donors, we thank God for each and every one of you. Because each of you opened your hearts to God, to love and serve all of us in the community, we were able to make ends meet. We were able to keep a roof over our heads, warm food on our table, and electricity running for our family. Although we all may pass through a time of drought for a little longer than we want, we thank God that people like you all are willing to help. ” –The Cortez family



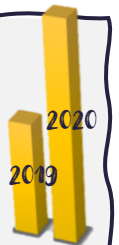


\$237,712

paid by RLC for mortgage, rent, and utility bills helping keep families in their homes in 2020



This amount is
94% more
than we paid
in 2019



Our financial assistance program played a crucial role in changing the trajectory of lives in 2020. Many people in our community became unemployed, losing their indispensable income. Others contracted Covid-19 or had to quarantine, missing several weeks of work as well as the pay needed to remain in their homes. It was important that we safely continue our appointments enrolling families in our full program and providing financial help.



581
first time
financial partners

18
grants



received providing funding
for our programs

85%
of families

contacted by phone
reached 50%
of their goals after
12 months of services



An essential part of our holistic approach is offering our families perspective and hope by setting a long-term goal during their assessment session. During our follow-up process of connecting every three months with our families by phone, we discuss

progress towards reaching their goals and if they are at a place of financial stability. Many families were able to accomplish their goals by using our food and financial assistance services, even during a very challenging year.

RealLife Center

December 21, 2020

Thank you for taking me under your wings during a time of despair and as I was feeling hopeless. Thank you for the rent assistance in the amount of \$200 you paid to The Meridian in the amount of \$200 you paid to The Meridian at Lafayette Apartments which prevented me at the time from becoming a part of the eviction process and placed on the streets. 😊

Your commitment to helping people like me is saving lives and is a blessing. May your organization continue to be blessed with an abundance of resources in the coming years so that you may continue to do God's work in an effort to save lives. God bless you all for years to come!

Real Life Center family



Providing Hope
While Meeting Needs



Maintaining Connection In a Social-Distance World

The Real Life Center addresses the immediate crisis and invests for long-term change by providing a safe place to build relationships and show our families we genuinely care for them. Covid-19 made this very difficult since we had to suspend our educational classes and senior breakfast programs for everyone's safety. We creatively connected with our families, knowing that they, especially seniors, were hungry for

connection during a time of isolation. During Thanksgiving, our seniors remained in their cars while our volunteers visited, prayed, and served them a boxed meal to enjoy. We also reached out to all our new families via telephone to remind them they are not walking through this alone.



“ They let me know that I am not alone.”

“ They make me feel seen. They make me feel valued. They let me know that I am not alone. They encourage me. They let me know that this too shall pass, that I may just be in a rough time..... but it won't always be like this. ”



leisha, RLC Family

Our Neighbors Who We Served

Adults: 51%	Fayette County: 36%
Seniors: 19%	Coweta County: 45%
Minors: 30%	Other Counties: 19%
College/Tech Degree: 40%	
High School Diploma: 48%	
Incomplete Education: 12%	

No one is immune to hard times. We serve all ages and education levels. To feed all those in need of help, the RLC provided food to families regardless of county in 2020.



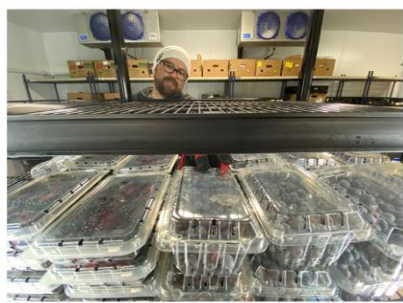
“ 2020 was unique, but even with social distancing and wearing masks, everyone had such a great time picking, laughing, and spending time together. We always have kids of various ages that volunteer as well and they absolutely love it, whether we pick blueberries, muscadine grapes, apples, or peaches. ” – Robin Eskens, UPS



Run entirely by approximately 200 regular volunteers, our beautiful orchard and garden are planted on three and a half acres directly across from the Real Life Center. 100% of the fresh fruits and vegetables harvested compliment the produce given to us by our community farmers and partners, offering the families we serve the nutritional benefits of eating fresh and delicious produce.



In 2020 primarily, our serene orchard and garden provided a source of mental therapy for those who volunteered. During a time of social isolation, families, work and church groups, Scout troops, and many others came out to help us harvest our produce during U-Pick 4 Others. Many expressed that they felt renewed and blessed by the fresh air, safely spending time with others and the beauty around them.



“ My kids really love eating the fruit we get from the RLC. The produce is a huge blessing to our family of five. ”
–Odetti, RLC family



**10,949
pounds**

of produce harvested from
our Harvest for Real Life
Orchard and Garden



Finding Peace

In our Orchard and Garden





Mobile Food Pantry

Another Source of Hope

Each month, our partners at Grace Church host our Mobile Food Pantry, which is in addition to the weekly Food Pantry at the Real Life Center. In collaboration with the Atlanta Community Food Bank, the Mobile Food Pantry serves families

who are food insecure regardless of their county of residence. A variety of food is distributed by volunteers from several community churches providing another source of hope for those who are hungry and benefit from this help.



**2,282
families**



served through the monthly
Mobile Food Pantry

The RLC Backpack Buddies of Fayette program continued to serve local school children identified as at-risk for hunger, increasing the amount of food they received. Funded by the New Family Foundation and the Delta Charitable Pilots Fund, this vital program also oversaw the distribution of over 1000 meals to school-aged children.

**291
backpacks**
with supplies
were given to
children in our
community for
school



The Next Generation

Serving Children

During such a challenging year, our Christmas Program brought joy to struggling families. Our generous community provided toys and gift cards to open Christmas morning, reminding our RLC families of the true meaning of the season and the gift of hope.

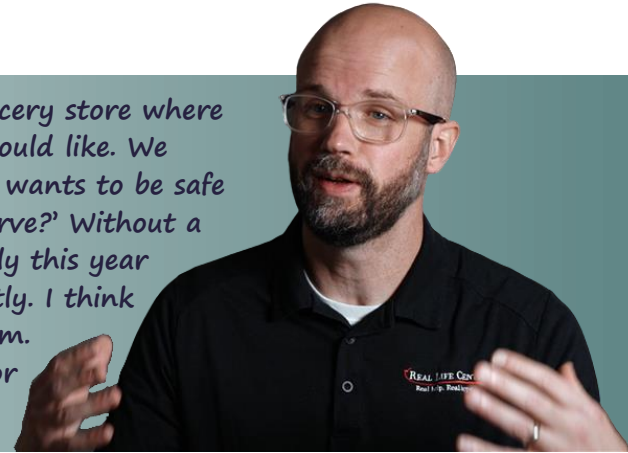


“ The Real Life Center is doing the work of God and I cannot express my gratitude enough. Thank you for the food, the toys, the finances, the love you all have showed at these uncertain times that we are facing. ”

-La Francier, RLC family

“ Without a doubt, the heartbeat of the RLC is our amazing volunteers, especially this year in the midst of a pandemic where we have had to operate differently. ”

“ 2020 was a challenge. Normally we would be open similar to a grocery store where families could come in and be able to shop and choose what they would like. We couldn't do that because of Covid so we had to pivot. Yes, everyone wants to be safe but many of our volunteers contacted me and asked, 'How can I serve?' Without a doubt, the heartbeat of the RLC is our amazing volunteers, especially this year in the midst of a pandemic where we have had to operate differently. I think all of our volunteers realize that difficult times could happen to them. Many have been in difficult times. It really is a great opportunity for us to come together as a community and help each other out. ”



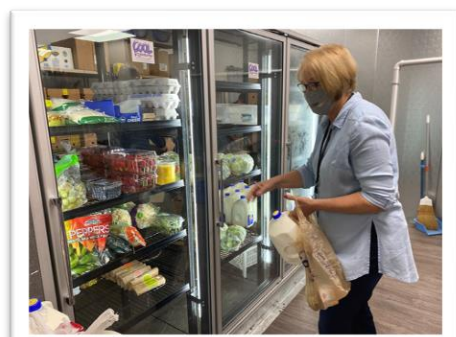
Matt Lowe, RLC Volunteer Coordinator



We are so proud of our volunteers for being selected as the Fayette Hero Spotlight Award winners through the Fayette Chamber of Commerce.



SCAN HERE to view the excellent video tribute by Southern Light Cinema



When Covid-19 moved into Fayette and Coweta counties, we quickly realized that the needs were greater than ever for help with food in our community. Our volunteers jumped right in and worked with us to develop a plan for how to safely and efficiently serve families during this challenging time. Their input has been instrumental in making it possible to serve over 300 families each week through our drive-thru Food Pantry.

over
1000
volunteers
served at the Center and Orchard/Garden



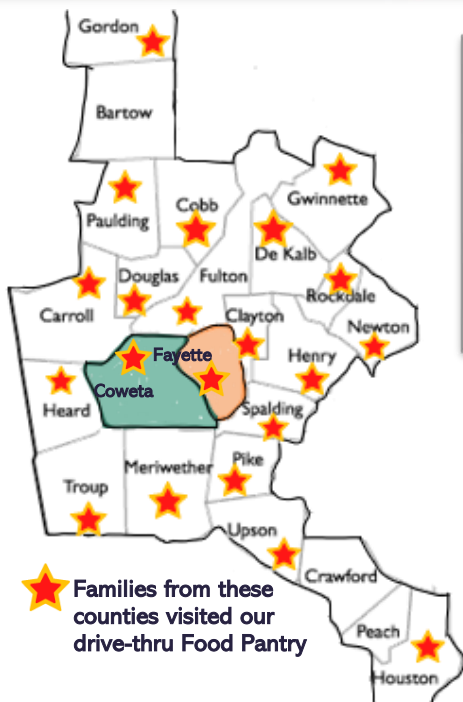
Our Volunteers True Heroes





Expanding Our Reach

Responding to Crisis



The Real Life Center had the opportunity to expand our reach and help our neighbors outside of Fayette and Coweta Counties by partnering with organizations in Atlanta and Union City, providing food and coats for the homeless and others in great need.

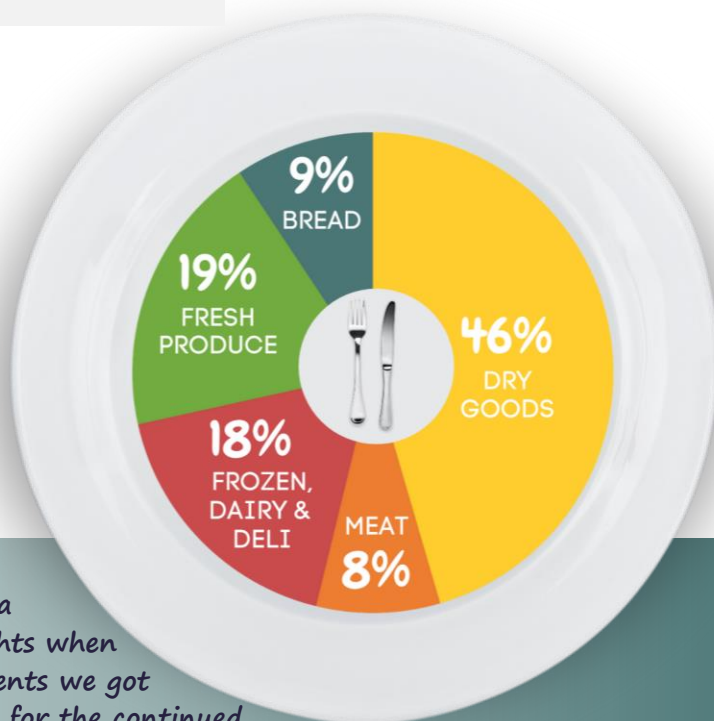


While predominantly serving Fayette and Coweta Counties, families from other counties were able to receive food from our drive-thru Food Pantry. It was imperative that those who were hungry were getting the resources they needed.

What Sets Us Apart

Complete Meals

Families that visit our drive-thru Food Pantry receive food items that are intentionally selected for meal preparation. Unlike other food pantries, the Real Life Center provides meat, dairy items, bread, and fresh produce in addition to canned goods to help prepare whole meals. This variety is made possible by the generous donations from our store partners and local farmers.

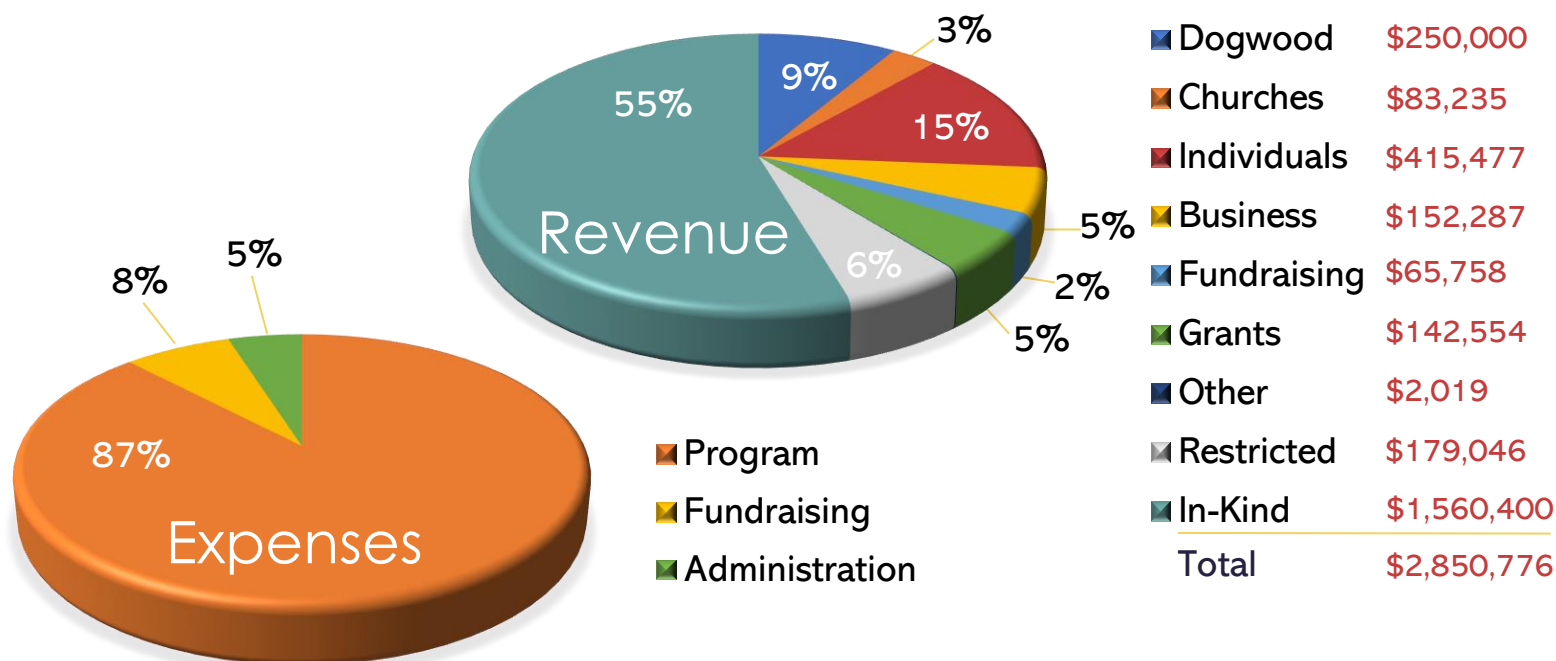


“ I started coming to the Real Life Center four years ago as a single mom of three. Since that time, there have been nights when a majority of our dinners were made exclusively of ingredients we got from the Real Life Center. My family and I are so grateful for the continued support, I just don't know what I'd do without the RLC. ” – RLC Family

Financials

Partnering Together

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



“ I was a Real Life Center client a few years ago. I am forever grateful for not only the assistance received, but also for the love and care shown to me by the staff and volunteers. I have been thinking about the RLC’s mission and vision during these uncertain economic times. I am now in a position to help support the RLC, so I set up a monthly recurring donation. I don’t know many non-profits that are able to manage general operations with 0.4 cents of every dollar received. This is something that solidified my decision to donate. I just wanted to take a moment – not only to thank you for the assistance provided to me – but to express my gratitude for the Real Life Center’s ongoing commitment to the community. ” – Janet

What is ahead for 2021?

- ✓ Safely reopen our regular programs, including educational classes and our senior socials
- ✓ Invest in career support, creating workshops and platforms intended to help families find jobs
- ✓ Continue to work with and offer support to new and existing organizations to implement the RLC Model



“ We meet needs but we also give hope and hope changes everything. All of this is possible because of the support from the community and the people willing to serve. ”

“ People have been willing to stand up and say ‘I’ll help,’ willing to stand up and say ‘I’ll give, how can I serve, how can I make a difference?’ It’s not only meeting needs, it is walking alongside someone so they know they are not alone in this journey. We meet needs but we also give hope and hope changes everything. All of this is possible because of the support from the community and the people willing to serve. ”

Cathy Berggren, RLC Executive Director



Get Involved Partner with Us

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 or individual gifts
- Crowdfunding: Use MobileCause or Facebook to motivate your friends, family and coworkers to raise funds to support our programs in honor of your birthday
- 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

Help harvest our blueberries during U-Pick 4 Others

Visit www.RealLifeCenter.org/support-our-orchard/volunteer-and-u-pick-information/

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

Donate items

- Donate food and personal care items: Please visit www.RealLifeCenter.org/our-wishlist/ for our wish list

Volunteer

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

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Mon-Thurs 9am-12pm, Thurs 5-7pm

Real Life Center is a mission of Dogwood Church