

collaboration
CATALYST
trust
commitment
data-based
local decision making
accountability
experience



Georgia Family Connection

**20 years of strengthening communities
one family at a time**



What I've Learned

We quickly learn as children that when we get together with our friends and put all our toys together we have more to play with—and have more fun doing it.

That basic philosophy took root in Georgia back in the early '90s when Family Connection emerged from a simple, common-sense idea: If we all work together—and share our resources, talents, and expertise—we will make better strides to help struggling families progress toward stable, self-reliant lives than if we go it alone.

It's an idea that people inherently believe is just right, and it has blossomed in ways we could never have imagined. We've improved our strategies and evolved as a statewide network over 20 years, but we've remained faithful to our original principles.

The beauty of Family Connection is that it looks very different in every county in Georgia. The beauty of Family Connection also is that it *is* in every county in Georgia. On any given day in any given month there's a table in a county in our state where caring, concerned citizens are sitting down to grapple with the complex issues that challenge our children and families.

Honoring local decision-making requires that we at the state level sometimes get out of the way, because each county looks different and sets priorities based on its own local data, hopes, and dreams for its children.

No other state in this country has made the kind of investment in public-private partnerships and collaboration as ours has. Georgia has led the way for two decades, and now other states are asking us to share what we've learned. And that's exactly what we intend to do.

We have a lot more to learn and a lot more to offer as we embark on our next 20 years. Georgia Family Connection and our partners continue to amaze me, not only by their achievements, but also by their mutual commitment to our children and families.

I have high hopes for our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gaye Morris Smith". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and legible.

GAYE MORRIS SMITH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
GEORGIA FAMILY CONNECTION PARTNERSHIP



We **bring together**—at the same table—the social worker, the nurse, the sheriff, the teacher, the minister, the business person, the public servant, and parents, then **let them figure out the best way** to help their kids thrive.



We envision a Georgia **where all children are healthy,** ready to start school and do well when they get there, and **where every family is stable** and self-sufficient.



“The fact that we at Georgia Family Connection are celebrating 20 years is testament to the value of our purpose and the quality of our work. Collaborating to help struggling families progress toward stable, self-reliant lives just by its very nature makes sense.”

—Doug Reid, GaFCP Board Chair

Imposing Burdens on Those Least Able to Cope

Imagine the challenge of achieving success as a family that lacks the knowledge, self-confidence, resources, and skill in handling complex bureaucracies. Before 1990 Georgia’s youth and social services organizations didn’t talk to each other, they didn’t work together, and they didn’t know about each other’s services. Members of the same family appeared on multiple caseloads, and caseworkers from different agencies would unintentionally visit the same home. The complex challenges confronting families, the data, and proposed solutions all seemed unrelated; meager resources weren’t being leveraged; and local

communities were never asked to contribute their perspectives.

Georgia’s fruitless system was fragmented.

The wake-up call came in 1990 when the first *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, ranked Georgia 48th in the nation in child well-being. Appalled by the dismal report, Gov. Zell Miller called for an immediate common-sense solution—collaboration. All Georgians needed to work together in their communities, across state agencies, and within the private sector to help struggling families progress toward stable, self-sufficient lives.



More than 175 youth, parents, community leaders, and concerned citizens attended the Table Talk Teen Forum, sponsored by the Rome-Floyd Commission on Children and Youth.

Collaborating from Day One

Hall County Family Connection Network (HCFC) was among the original 15 counties that volunteered to pioneer the Georgia Family Connection initiative in 1991. HCFC coordinator Mary Parks, who has been there since the beginning, watched the seed of local collaboration take root in Hall County and across the state.

"The principles of collaboration have served our organization well over the years—especially as we plan and develop realistic goals for our community," said Parks. "Being part of a statewide network has increased our knowledge of evidence-based programs, and the professional support we receive would not be cost-efficient for a single agency acting alone."

According to Hall County Chief Juvenile Court Judge Cliff Jolliff, a 20-year collaborative partner, the most important aspect of being at the table is that he can articulate an issue directly to the person who can change a policy or initiate a new program.

"The value of our collaborative is in the ability to bust artificial barriers that keep us from efficiently serving our constituents, thanks to our participating agency directors and political leaders," said Jolliff.

District Public Health director and collaborative Board member David Westfall values HCFC's work with local agencies involved in various aspects of child health.

"If HCFC were not here we wouldn't have the capability to coordinate our activities with all the other agencies," he said. "We would return to duplicating or omitting services that are critical to the community."

While the collaborative has made great strides, Parks acknowledged that fragmentation still occurs in Hall County.

"Our work is not done," she said. "There are few fully coordinated services for families. But the good news is communication between agencies and organizations has become much better when problems do surface."

Like Parks, Christy Moore of Northeast Georgia Medical Center has learned that open communication is crucial in delivering optimum services for children and families.

"HCFC is a valuable partnership where representatives from organizations that serve children and families can share information and talk honestly about obstacles and opportunities," said Moore. "By easing access to quality services that promote healthy, productive lives, this network focuses on our most precious assets: the children and families who live here."

As Georgia Family Connection prepares to move into its third decade, Parks reminds collaboratives to value autonomy and remain focused.

"No two counties work the same," she said. "Keep your minds open to what will work in your community. Encourage local leaders to talk and come to consensus on at least one common goal."

Lt. Scott Ware, commander of the Multi-Agency Narcotics Squad in Hall County, uncovers a potential hiding spot for drugs during a Hidden in Plain Site interactive workshop. This workshop, made possible in part by a grant from The Walmart Foundation and GaFCP, walks parents and educators through a life-size replica of a teenager's bedroom to present indicators of high-risk behaviors.





“As one of the first 15 county coordinators, I’ve watched this cutting-edge effort flourish, and after two decades we continue to strengthen and revitalize this work.”

—Donna Scohier, Community Facilitator

Working Together

Miller created a two-year pilot initiative in 1991 designed to synchronize services for the physical, educational, social, and economic well-being of Georgia’s most vulnerable citizens. He called this public-private partnership Georgia Family Connection.

That same year the Joseph B. Whitehead and Kirbo foundations invested in 15 counties that volunteered to become pioneers in this innovative idea called community collaboration. Those counties were asked to be innovative and specific, test strategies, and to modify services to their unique needs.

Family Connection county collaborative organizations (collaboratives) began to work together and listen to each other. They dismantled the silos of local work through a network of support, provided a forum to share best practices, and broke down systems barriers. Family Connection was changing the way services reached children and families by committing to five core principles that continue to guide us after 20 years:

- Collaboration
- Local decision-making
- Accountability
- Public-private partnerships
- Leveraging resources

We collaborated with our partners and funders to identify a common vision that all of Georgia’s children

Through the Cherokee Youth Works program, Cherokee County is helping at-risk youth like Zia Crenshaw graduate high school, enroll in college, prepare for the workforce, and focus on building a strong future for herself and her son, Phoenyx.

will be healthy, that they will be ready to start school and do well when they get there, and that families will be stable and self-sufficient. We connected all our work to these outcomes so we could measure our successes and hold ourselves accountable for results.





GEORGIA KIDS COUNT INDICATORS OF Child and Family Well-Being

Georgia KIDS COUNT tracks 45 indicators of child well-being in five result areas. We report trends and disparities on child well-being to inform planning, budget, and policy decisions about the priorities, services, and resources that affect children and their families.

Healthy Children

- Low birthweight*
- Infant mortality (per 1,000)*
- Eligible children enrolled in Medicaid or PeachCare
- Eligible children, birth through 4, enrolled in the WIC program
- Child deaths, ages 1 – 14 (per 100,000)*
- Teen pregnancies, ages 15 – 17 (per 1,000)
- Teen births, ages 15 – 19 (per 1,000)*
- Teen mothers giving birth to another child before age 20, ages 15 – 19
- Incidence of STD for youth, ages 15 – 19 (per 1,000)
- Teen deaths, ages 15 – 19 (per 100,000)
 - By homicide, suicide, and accident; ages 15 – 19 (per 100,000)*

Children Ready to Start School

- Eligible 3-year-old children enrolled in Head Start
- Eligible children enrolled in the Georgia Pre-K program
- Children from low-income families enrolled in the Georgia Pre-K program
- Number of out-of-home childcare settings that have national or Georgia accreditation
- Babies born to mothers with less than 12 years of education

Children Succeeding in School

- Children absent more than 15 days from school
- 3rd grade students meeting or exceeding state standards on CRCT promotional test in Reading
- 5th grade students meeting or exceeding state standards on CRCT promotional tests in Reading and Math
- 8th grade students meeting or exceeding state standards on CRCT promotional tests in Reading and Math
- Students who graduate from high-school on time
- Teens who are high school dropouts, ages 16 – 19*
- Teens ages 16 – 19 not in school and not working*
- High-school graduates eligible for the HOPE Scholarship

Stable, Self-Sufficient Families

- First birth to mothers age 20 or older with 12 years of education
- Children living in single-parent families*
- Substantiated incidents of child abuse and/or neglect (per 1,000)
- Children leaving foster care who are reunified with their families or placed with a relative within 12 months of entering foster care
- Eligible households, with children, receiving Food Stamps
- Children living in families where no parent is in the labor force*

Strong Communities

- Adult educational attainment
 - High school graduate or higher
 - Bachelor's degree or higher
- GED graduates
- Unemployment
- Poverty status
 - Children living in poverty*
 - Students eligible to receive free or reduced price meals
- Families, with children, with annual incomes less than 150% of the federal poverty threshold
- Homeownership
- Crime rate, age 17 or older (per 1,000)
 - Violent crime
 - Other crimes (burglaries, etc.)
- Voter participation

*National Kids Count indicators

With infants receiving a healthy start and all children reading on grade level by third grade, Georgia has the potential to shatter barriers of poverty, and racial and economic disparity . . .

Evolution

We learned that transforming statewide systems begins in neighborhoods and that improving local decision-making rooted in community priorities must reflect the opinions and needs of the families who live there. Another common-sense idea that emerged from this initiative is that the families we empower must have a seat at the collaborative table.

We've learned that when stakeholders come to the collaborative table around a common vision and purpose, ready to participate and share, when we stop guarding our turf, when we are intentional about drawing on best practices, and when we

measure what we do, our targeted indicators of child well-being will improve.

We also learned that money is leveraged best in the form of local-state partnerships, and that Georgians must have the opportunity to shape investment in their own communities. Georgia Family Connection leverages \$5 for every \$1 of state funding from local, state, and federal funds.

This commitment to Georgia's children and families—grounded in our guiding principles—began to catch on across the state, and by 2002 all 159 counties joined Georgia Family Connection, making it the only statewide network of its kind in the nation.

How We Know Collaboration Is Working

Georgia Family Connection coordinates a broad array of individualized services and supports that will allow children to grow up in stable, self-sufficient families. Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) has cultivated a twofold approach to accounting for the results of local collaboration on improving indicators of child and family well-being.

State-level Investigations

The GaFCP Evaluation-Results Accountability Team has conducted state-level investigations of KIDS COUNT indicators that include low birthweight, teen pregnancy, high-school graduation, and child abuse and neglect.

Our investigation of low infant birthweight, for example, revealed that Family Connection collaborative organizations in 25 Georgia counties targeted this indicator for two or more

years during an eight-year period. Using a statistical technique called propensity score matching we determined that these local efforts prevented 50 low-weight births during the eight years, compared to rising low birthweight rates in approximately 400 comparable counties in other southern states. This statistically significant finding we further determined has saved Georgians \$3.7 million per year in costs associated with low birthweight babies.

Local Evaluation

We provide local collaboratives with technical assistance as they conduct their own investigations. From 2002 through 2010 GaFCP required 157 Family Connection collaborative organizations from all counties across Georgia to submit local evaluation reports. The Evaluation-Results Accountability Team—two Georgia State

University faculty members and several Community Psychology Program doctoral students, and four researchers from EMSTAR Research, Inc. and Metis Associates, Inc.—reviewed the reports and found steady improvement in their scientific rigor. Almost all studies reported positive collaborative effects while many included significant positive findings derived with solid scientific rigor. For example, a study of the Wayne County S.T.A.R. strategy for high-risk adolescents showed improvements in attendance, grades and disciplinary citations across all who received one of the three component programs. Benefits increased for those who received two program components and were even more pronounced for those who received all three.

The scientific evidence continues to mount. Collaboration is working.

Targeting Low Birthweight



We've learned that when stakeholders in a community come together around a common vision and purpose, and when they apply best practices, and measure what they do, the indicator of child well-being they're targeting will indeed improve.

One indicator that jumped out at us at Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) a couple years ago was low birthweight (LBW). The national rate had reached its highest level in 30 years while the rate in Georgia was among the highest in the country at 9.6 percent. Alarmed, we called on the Promising Practices Network and RAND Corporation to collaborate with us in addressing this unmitigated but solvable issue.

Together we shed light on the challenges and high costs of caring for babies born too small too soon. With financial support from Healthcare Georgia Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, we compiled *Improving Infant Health: Addressing Low Birthweight in Georgia*, a compendium of data, research, new ideas, and promising practices that dispels LBW myths, sets direction for preventing and reversing negative health trends in Georgia, and provides resource information for counties addressing LBW.

We embarked on a pilot county-level project in 2010 and identified three Family Connection collaborative organizations in counties where LBW rates are higher than the state average. With additional money from Kaiser, and with our support, those counties made a commitment to focus on improving birth outcomes.

The increased attention to LBW Butts County Life Enrichment Team has brought to the county is

contributing to a downward trend. The most recent LBW rate of 8.9 percent in Butts County is lower than the state rate of 9.5 percent in 2009. The local public health clinic and the school system's Parents as Teachers program formed the cornerstone of their strategy.

In 2009, the four-year (2004-2007) LBW rate average for Heard County was 9.8 percent. The county's most recent two-year LBW rate (2008-2009) is 6.6 percent, well below the 2009 state rate. Heard Community Partnership expects the increased health education efforts and attention to women's health along with the factors that help ensure a healthy birth to contribute to the ongoing downward trend.

Lamar County's LBW rate had exceeded 10 percent since 2004. In 2009, the four-year LBW rate (2004-2007) was 11.8 percent. Lamar County Family Connection Collaborative expanded women's health education services through public health, providing folic acid, prenatal vitamins, smoking cessation and free exercise classes. The county's recent two-year LBW rate (2008-2009) remains high at 11.5 percent, but with heightened community attention, strong partnerships, and enhanced services in place, we expect a continuing positive impact on the health of women and their infants there.

These counties are reporting successes, but we've learned that targeting an indicator is only the beginning. It's also vital that we sustain our efforts and track trends or the gains we made will slip back. We at GaFCP are committed to offering every county in Georgia continued support and guidance as we maintain our focus on preventing LBW.

Working Together to Help Vulnerable Kids and Families Succeed



Georgia Family Connection has much to be proud of as it celebrates a 20-year history of community-driven, collaborative efforts to improve the educational, social, economic, and physical well-being of Georgia's most vulnerable children and their families.

Although Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) was formally established as the Annie E. Casey Foundation's state KIDS COUNT grantee in 2003, its story began much earlier, when former Georgia Governor Zell Miller laid eyes on the inaugural *KIDS COUNT Data Book* in 1990. Alarmed by the state's overall ranking of 48th, he launched a pilot initiative that called for the departments of Education, Human Resources, and Medical Assistance to work together to develop a community-based approach to increase school success and reduce teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and juvenile delinquency.

Thanks to steady state leadership and support, local collaboration, and community mobilization, today all 159 of the state's counties are part of the Georgia Family Connection collaborative network. Your public-private partnership truly serves as a model for government, the private sector, and communities to join forces in working toward better outcomes for children and families.

GaFCP embodies key principles that have informed and will continue to underpin the Casey Foundation's work in the coming years, including:

- focusing our investments on strategies that support strong, resilient, and economically secure families as a path to improved outcomes for children;
- using sound data not only to drive decision-making and compel people to action, but to offer evidence that there are effective strategies to address the problem; and
- ensuring that successful programs with proven track records are taken as far as they can go and serve as many families and children as possible.

The Partnership's work also complements the efforts of the Casey Foundation's Atlanta Civic site with its focus on results, community engagement, and bridging the outcome gap between children living in poor neighborhoods and those in better-resourced districts.

Effective public-private partnerships are critical in today's tough economic landscape, as states enter their third straight year of budget deficits and child advocates struggle to maintain hard-won victories. It is more important than ever that we use collaborative models like Georgia Family Connection. Congratulations on your efforts to attract and make efficient use of existing resources, and helping bring evidence-driven programs to scale to better serve all children and families.

—Patrick T. McCarthy, President and CEO
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

"Collaboration is an unnatural act between non-consenting adults."

—Charles Bruner,
Executive Director, Child &
Family Policy Center in Iowa

collabo

The word "collaboration" has become so overused and meaningless that it appears on most top-10 lists of nonprofit jargon to avoid. But collaboration is not a word we take lightly at Georgia Family Connection.

After 20 years we've learned to embrace rewarding challenges that emerge when we collaborate to serve the needs of children and families.

The power behind our statewide network is in our ability to convene stakeholders committed to common goals they can't achieve in isolation.

Middle school students on the Teen Advisory Board in Coffee County promote community awareness on the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs during the Red Ribbon Week campaign.



When we collaborate we eliminate duplication and overlapping services, and replace them with more efficient and effective services, and ultimately, better results. Change comes for Georgia's children and families when we collaborate, promote results-focused

planning, and rely on local decision-making.

Collaboration also comes with trials and tribulations. It requires determination and patience. It can take years to move a hodgepodge of individuals to a team with a shared vision.

"Everybody talkin' 'bout collaboration ain't collaborating," says Savannah Mayor Otis A. Johnson, former executive director of the Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority. "We expect our partners to show up, become outcome driven, pool funds, share staff, and co-locate. They must also establish common intake, information, and case management systems, and

col•lab•o•rate (kə-lăb'ə-rāt) *intr.v.*
-rat•ed, -rat•ing, -rates. **1.** To work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort. **2.** To cooperate treasonably, as with an enemy.

Different Realities for Different Localities

Technical assistance (TA) is the support Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) offers county collaborative organizations to help them develop the skills they need to improve—and sustain—conditions for children and families.

Collaboratives use technical assistance to stay on the cutting edge, to access data, to plan, to understand why they do what they do.

GaFCP is not a state organization. It's a statewide organization that serves 159 individual county collaboratives. We recognize that each local collaborative

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set objectives with measurable performance results standards. Collaboration calls for a persistent evolution of perspectives, and a lasting commitment to recognize and accommodate differences.”

Georgia Family Connection’s particular model of collaboration can be risky because it preserves individual partners with their unique specialties and points of view. Collaboration is thorny at times because a child may be different things to each partner at the table, but rarely a whole child to any of them. Therefore, for collaboration to succeed, partners must see a contribution to their own mission and purpose. Turf guarding, however, blocks change, and when people simply advance their own personal agenda, and when they’re concerned about their own piece of the pie, children and families lose.

Because the collaborative process is always changing, it requires frequent learning opportunities, repetition, and backtracking every time a new partner comes to the table. It involves false starts, sudden stops, punting, kicking, and finally scoring.

is in a different place and not every locality can produce results the way we define them. One size does not fit all.

Our distinct style of TA is an empowerment model. We listen to our local collaborative coordinators and customize what we offer to what they tell us they need in their own counties. This is a radical—and somewhat risky—approach.

TA is about listening, looking, and studying the data to assess where a collaborative is and what it needs to move one step closer to the next developmental level of the Georgia Family Connection model.



103-year-old Jamcie Cotton and Kayla, a high-school sophomore, became close friends while working together on the Calhoun County Family Connection Senior Citizen/Youth Book Project.

The Georgia Family Connection Model

WHEN :

- local collaborative organizations have a robust infrastructure, the right mix of partners at the table, and commitment from the community . . .
- they understand the conditions in their community . . .
- they recognize the barriers to service delivery they need to shatter . . .
- they have set priorities around target indicators of child and family well-being . . .
- they get those target indicators moving in a better direction by replicating best practices . . .
- collaborative members who communicate their results back to the community are sharing tasks and decision-making . . .
- they have identified funding streams and are leveraging dollars . . .
- they’re using evaluation data to help drive their thinking, and . . .
- they are engaging families in decision-making . . .

That’s when they have attained the highest developmental level of the Georgia Family Connection model.

**What we believe, stand for, and do transcend partisan politics.
Georgia Family Connection is the longest standing public-private
partnership in the state.**



“When I look back on my time as Georgia’s governor, one of the programs I am most proud of supporting is Family Connection. It was one of those common-sense ideas that cost little money but would produce big results. In fact, the beauty of Family Connection is how simple it is: Bring together at the same table the social worker, the nurse, the sheriff, the teacher, the minister, the parents, then let them figure out the best way to help their kids thrive. It is local folks finding local solutions. When it comes to our kids, Georgia Family Connection knows that one size doesn’t fit all.”

—Zell Miller
Georgia Governor
1991-1999



“Family Connection is exactly the kind of state and local partnership that we need in every county in Georgia to turn the tide of high-school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, child abuse, and juvenile crime. The healthy development of our children and youth depends on strong alliances and partnerships among a wide range of state and local partners. As we continue to work on policy issues for children, Family Connection will be front and center in our plans and will play an important role.”

—Roy Barnes
Georgia Governor
1999-2003



“Community involvement and local decision-making are vital to addressing the issues facing our citizens. Collaboration at the local level is even more critical in our current economic crisis. Having strong partnerships will help make efficient use of existing resources and will improve the ability to bring in new resources. Because we live in the era of small government and greater personal responsibility, we need organizations like Family Connection to fill the gap. State government can’t do it alone. We need communities to lead. The future will continue to challenge us, so we must stay committed to public-private partnerships and work together to help Georgia and all citizens reach their potential.”

—Gov. Nathan Deal

Reinforcing the Network

Expanding Family Connection to that scale and scope called for a formalized state-level intermediary to support the collaborative network. So the state legislature merged Family Connection with fiscal agent Georgia Academy for Children and Youth Professionals in 2001 to form Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP). This new public-private nonprofit organization began to help collaboratives collect and disseminate data; support the network with training and technical assistance; guard the vision; and convey to state and national partners all 159 counties' priorities, practices, and challenges.

We provide state agencies and policymakers with data to inform their decisions about priorities,

services, and resources that have an impact on Georgia's families.

While GaFCP has evolved with a lean staff that has adopted new strategies to improve outcomes for children and families over the past decade, we have been resolute in our purpose. Our commitment to supporting the network of 159 counties has remained constant. We also continue to maintain and enhance the private investments in this work because we must not rely solely on taxpayer dollars. These are our priorities and always have been.

We've worked long and hard in building the trust of funders, communities, partners, and Georgia's General Assembly—the kind of trust that can only be developed over time, by honoring our commitments, and through open, honest relationships.

"When the previous coordinator resigned from Coweta County Family Connection, we saw an opportunity to restore the fidelity of the collaborative process there," said Georgia Family Connection Partnership community facilitator Sonya Hope. "The collaborative organization brought the players together, shared the information, educated those at the table and motivated people to do what they do best in concert with the strategies developed. They took ownership and it worked."



Rebuilding

Over the years, Georgia Family Connection collaborative organizations have evolved throughout the State of Georgia in a 159 different ways. Each collaborative defines itself free

from the constraints of fitting into a predetermined mold. Free to bring to life a living, breathing, entity beholden to varying partners dedicated to the growth and development of the people within a community.

Like a child seeking identity within a world of previous misconceptions, uncertainty, and mistakes, Coweta County Family Connection has evolved into a strong, purpose-driven, young collaborative.

Compassion, respect, transparency, and open communication were the driving forces behind Coweta's transformation. Giving the collaborative members freedom to create our own identity, and determine our own future, yet remain true to an overall mission, has produced a renewed collaborative, passionate in our vision and purpose.

We should never stop growing and evolving into the very best we can be. Wisdom comes from letting past experiences shape and mold our future in a responsible and respectful manner. Keeping a positive, proactive and productive approach, contributes to the ability for individuals, families, and collaboratives, just like Coweta, to become strong, stable, and self-sufficient.

—Carol Prince, coordinator
Coweta County Family Connection

The Power of the Network

Georgia Family Connection is a voluntary statewide initiative that cultivates local decision-making among people who care about children and families. Guided by reliable data, those decisions are rooted in neighborhood priorities, public-private partnerships, and county-based collaboration.

A nationally recognized model, Georgia Family Connection is the largest network of its kind in the country, with a collaborative organization (collaborative) in all 159 counties committed to improving the quality of life for children and families. Collaboratives work within communities to:

- establish relationships with local partners,
- inform policymakers about local issues,
- eliminate duplication of services,
- apply proven programs and practices, and
- leverage \$5 for every \$1 of state investment to support community plans.

A collaborative coordinates human services by gathering local partners—with unique expertise and

experiences as residents of the community—who share a common vision.

Each collaborative identifies local priorities and needs, manages its own planning process, shares resources, and evaluates programs and practices. Every collaborative in the network also holds itself accountable for results of its work by tracking locally selected indicators of child well-being using Georgia KIDS COUNT data.

Georgia Family Connection is a pioneer at working toward smaller government, improving local control, and addressing complex issues through cross-sector private engagement.

Camp Remix, a program of FACTOR Grandparents and Kin Raising Children Support, is an annual Grief and Loss camp for children 7-14 being raised in relative care homes in Fayette County. It is designed to allow children to enjoy the camp experience with therapeutic activities.



Children and Families in 2031

The experience we've gained from our 20-year journey tells us that:

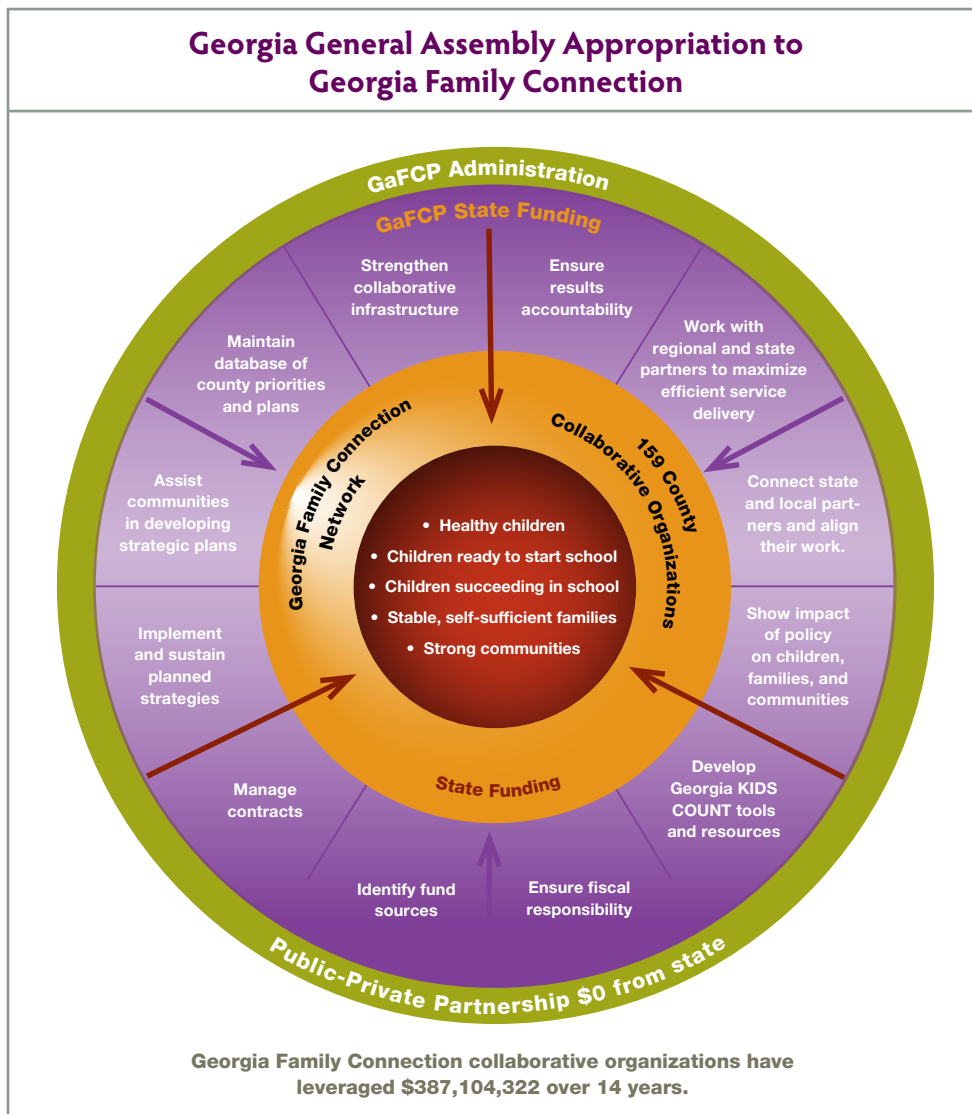
- change is inevitable, but our values and principles must remain resolute; and
- true collaboration is hard work—built over time on a solid foundation of trust and open, honest relationships.

Every success and every failure we've encountered have presented learning opportunities that we've seized to better understand and embrace

collaboration. We must always keep these lessons at the forefront of our work—to guide us as we continue to improve conditions for Georgia's children and families.

Georgia is rich in social capital, environmental and intellectual assets, a robust university system, and fervent and creative families and leaders. We're all obligated to work together to make this state as great as it can be.

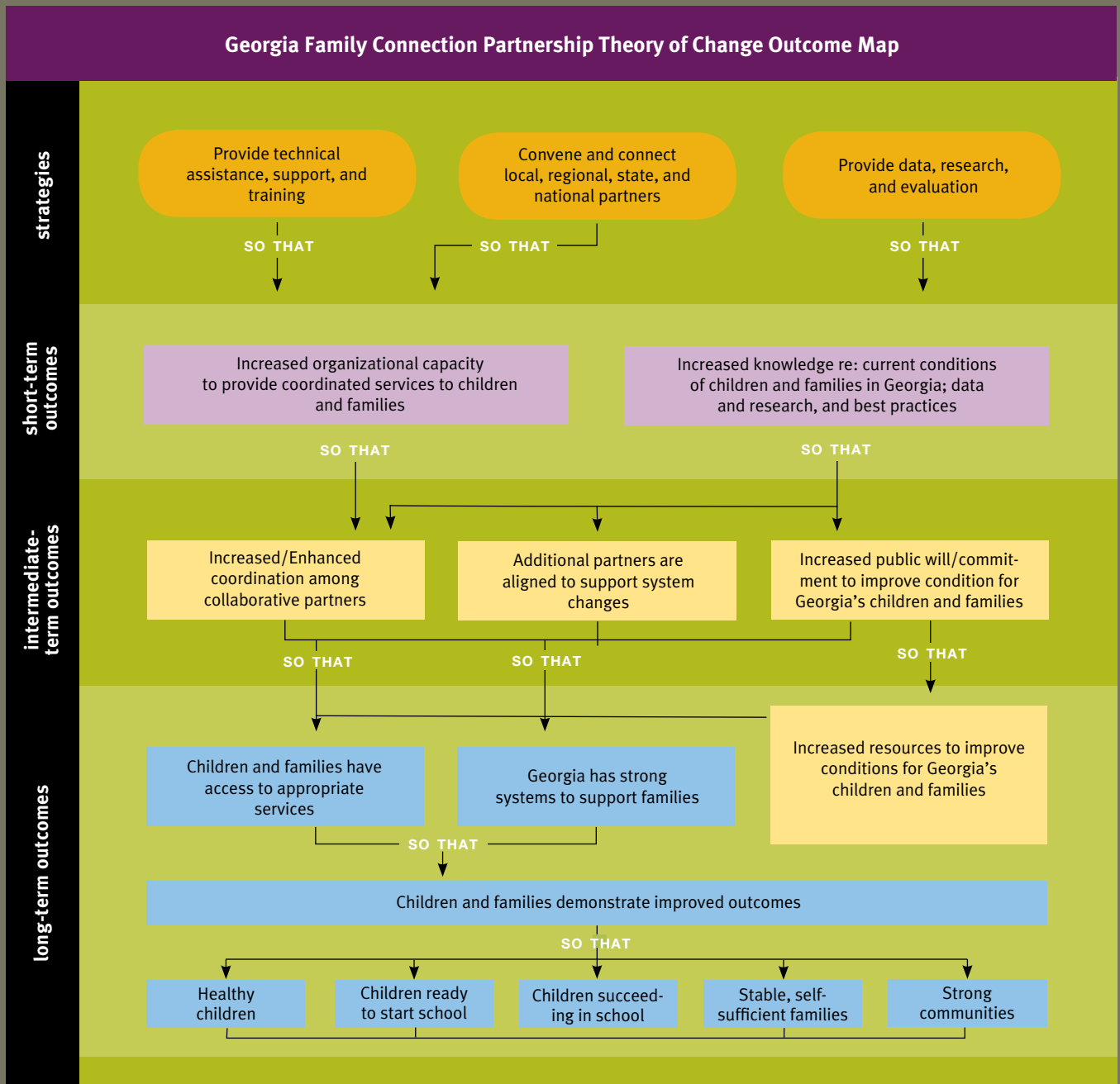
We will continue to address low birthweight, a primary predictor of how well children will fare down the road. We'll create a wrap-around approach that supports healthy beginnings and provides a strong foundation for school success. We've also placed a stake in the ground to make grade-level reading a



Supporting Children and Families in Georgia through Georgia Family Connection

Georgia Family Connection Partnership's technical assistance system and the General Assembly's state appropriation support the Georgia Family Connection collaborative organizations working to improve conditions for children and families in 159 counties. This illustration demonstrates how state funding flows to local communities.

The Theory of Change outcome map shows how we at Georgia Family Connection Partnership connect our work at the state level to our desired outcomes of improved conditions for Georgia’s children and families. We’ve learned that we can only reach our goals by working in concert with our state partners and organizations, and with communities that support children and families across the state.



state priority over the next decade. We believe we can significantly change the trajectory of Georgia's future by targeting our efforts on this critical indicator.

With infants receiving a healthy start and all children reading on grade level by third grade, Georgia has the potential to shatter barriers of poverty, and racial and economic disparity that have kept us at the bottom for too long.

We can't do this alone. Take action in your community and sphere of influence. Get involved with your local Family Connection collaborative organization, cultivate relationships with your legislators and keep them informed of practices and

policies that affect child and family well-being, and support Georgia Family Connection Partnership as we continue to preserve our statewide network.

Today, with so many partners from the public and private sectors working together to strengthen children and families across the state, we must never allow Georgia to revert back to the fragmented system that existed before 1991.

We will continue to sustain collaborative tables across the state to ensure that all children and families have access to a seamless network of support so they can be healthy, educated, stable, and self-sufficient, and can contribute to their communities. Because that, in the end, will make our state great. ■



Helping Partners Strengthen Families

“Although we share the same goals, we’ve learned after 20 years that each collaborative organization is in a different place. That’s why our distinct style of TA empowers every locality in every county across the state to produce results in its own way.”

—Sayge Medlin, Director of Community Support & Information

Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) is a public-private nonprofit intermediary that supports the Georgia Family Connection statewide network. Our sole purpose is to sustain local and state collaboration.

We offer training and technical assistance to help collaborative organizations develop local strategies and generate innovative ideas for improving conditions for children and families. Governed by a Board of Directors with 51 percent from community representatives we:

- provide technical assistance, support, and training;
- convene and connect local, regional, state, and national partners; and
- provide data, research, and evaluation.

As the state's grantee for KIDS COUNT, a state and national effort to track the status of children, paid for by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, we provide a neutral home for one of the largest repositories of data on child well-being in the nation. Our value is in synthesizing and interpreting data into customized information and tools specific to our partners' and policymakers' needs.

Communities have the power to help families, but they can't do the work alone. We connect more than 3,000 partners committed to strengthening families so they can learn from their peers, share resources, and replicate best practices that are making a difference in communities.

It's All About Families



Teinique Gadson and Timothy Bruin with their children, LaTahja and Timothy

“Encouraging my daughter to complete high school and enroll in college makes me feel good about the parent I’ve become because I have given her not just lessons, but lessons of experience.”

—Teinique Gadson

Back in the early '90s, Teinique Gadson was on the wrong path.

“I became a mom at age 17,” she said. “My mom made sure I stayed in high school, but after I graduated I didn’t feel like I was college material.”

It was the local Georgia Family Connection collaborative organization that pointed Teinique in the right direction and gave her the opportunity to mature.

“Chatham Savannah Youth Futures Authority (YFA) encouraged me to join the Youth Corps of Savannah, a construction apprentice program,” she said. “We assisted the city with housing development by renovating buildings.”

The YFA staff saw potential in Teinique and offered her a job as a custodial worker. It wasn’t long before she turned in her mop as she worked her way up to receptionist, then administrative assistant, and on to bookkeeper. As she continued to grow, Teinique took advantage of every opportunity, and went on to earn an associate’s degree in accounting and a bachelor’s degree in business administration.

“I took things backward,” she said. “I started in the workforce and then got my education, because my children were depending on me to provide for them. I

was able to grow at a rapid pace because YFA led me to agencies and services I didn’t even know were out there.”

Teinique’s journey changed direction when YFA called on her to help create a new agency, the Neighborhood Improvement Association, Inc. (NIA). She later jumped at the opportunity to become asset coordinator—joining the system that once helped her. Today Teinique is executive director of NIA. Her 19-year-old daughter, LaTahja, is majoring in criminal justice, and her 13-year-old son, Timothy, is in middle school.

“Helping people through NIA is something I needed to do,” she said. “There are lots of services out there. People need to know where to go to retrieve them because they don’t know how to get connected.”

Teinique is quick to point out that she is not just a product of the system that supported her, but a participant as well.

“I have my mother and family to help me,” she said. “But there was always someone from YFA giving me that social service guidance—linking me to services I needed to help me reach the next step in my future. It was up to me to follow the paths and recommendations they offered. I’m grateful to them for walking me through those steps.”

Eradicating Word Poverty in Georgia

According to the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress scores, only 29 percent of fourth graders in Georgia read at a proficient level or better.

Like low birthweight, grade-level reading (GLR) is a predictor of other indicators as a child grows up, and one of those indicators all of us across the state can get behind. We believe if we set the standards our children are more likely to succeed in school and move onto post-secondary education or career.

If we pay attention to reliable data and we study trends, then change attitudes, behaviors, and systems, we expect that every child in Georgia will learn to read by third grade and read to learn as they move onto fourth grade.

This immense task is one we cannot achieve in isolation. That's why we at Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) have teamed up with the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) and The Annie E. Casey Foundation to lead the nation in a 10-year commitment to grade-level reading.

Solutions to improving the reading crisis are comprehensive and long-term as we prepare a better-educated workforce by closing the literacy gap and raising the bar for academic success for all children. Our work involves building community support of the GLR campaign by:

- convening local partners and stakeholders who work with children from birth to age 9 to share research, programs, and practices proven to work successfully in communities; and
- engaging parents, community leaders, and interested adults in behaviors and activities that research tells us support the future academic success of these children.



The Tift County Foundation for Educational Excellence targets summer learning loss as one strategy to resolve the very solvable literacy achievement gap crisis.

Georgia has reason to be excited as new opportunities emerge to raise the bar in reading and education:

- Georgia Family Connection collaborative organizations in Fulton, Chatham, Laurens, and Polk counties are expanding community resources and support for the grade-level reading campaign.
- As one of 12 Race-to-the-Top grant winners, Georgia received \$400 million to invest in education reforms to improve schools and help close the achievement gap.
- Two Promise Neighborhoods program grants allow Athens and Atlanta to implement a "cradle to career" education approach.

"Now we can begin to identify our challenges and honor our commitment to Georgia's most vulnerable citizens," said GaFCP Executive Director Gaye Smith. "With these opportunities, Georgia is well-positioned to move forward in meeting our great expectations for every child to read at or above grade level."

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GaFCP Director of Policy and Communications

Taifa Butler

Editor

Bill Valladares

Contributing Writers

Janet Bittner of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government
at the University of Georgia

Curtis Brantley of The Children's Initiative (ret.)

Pearlette Cid, GaFCP Communications Associate

Juanita Blount-Clark of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government
at the University of Georgia

Steve Erickson, Ph.D., GaFCP Evaluation-Results
Accountability Team Leader

Ashley Mitchell of GaFCP Policy and Communications

Naja Williamson, Georgia KIDS COUNT Coordinator

Designer

Marcia Wasserman Design

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For more information about our work, contact:

Gaye Smith at gaye@gafcp.org or Bill Valladares at william@gafcp.org

to locate your local county family connection organization, visit:

gafcp.org

“There is no greater power than a community discovering what it cares about. Ask, ‘What’s possible?’ not, ‘What’s wrong?’

Keep asking. Notice what you care about. Assume that many others share your dream. Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.”

—AUTHORS MARGARET J. WHEATLEY
AND MYRON KELLNER-ROGERS



235 Peachtree Street
Suite 1600
Atlanta, GA 30303-1422

404-527-7394

gafcp.org