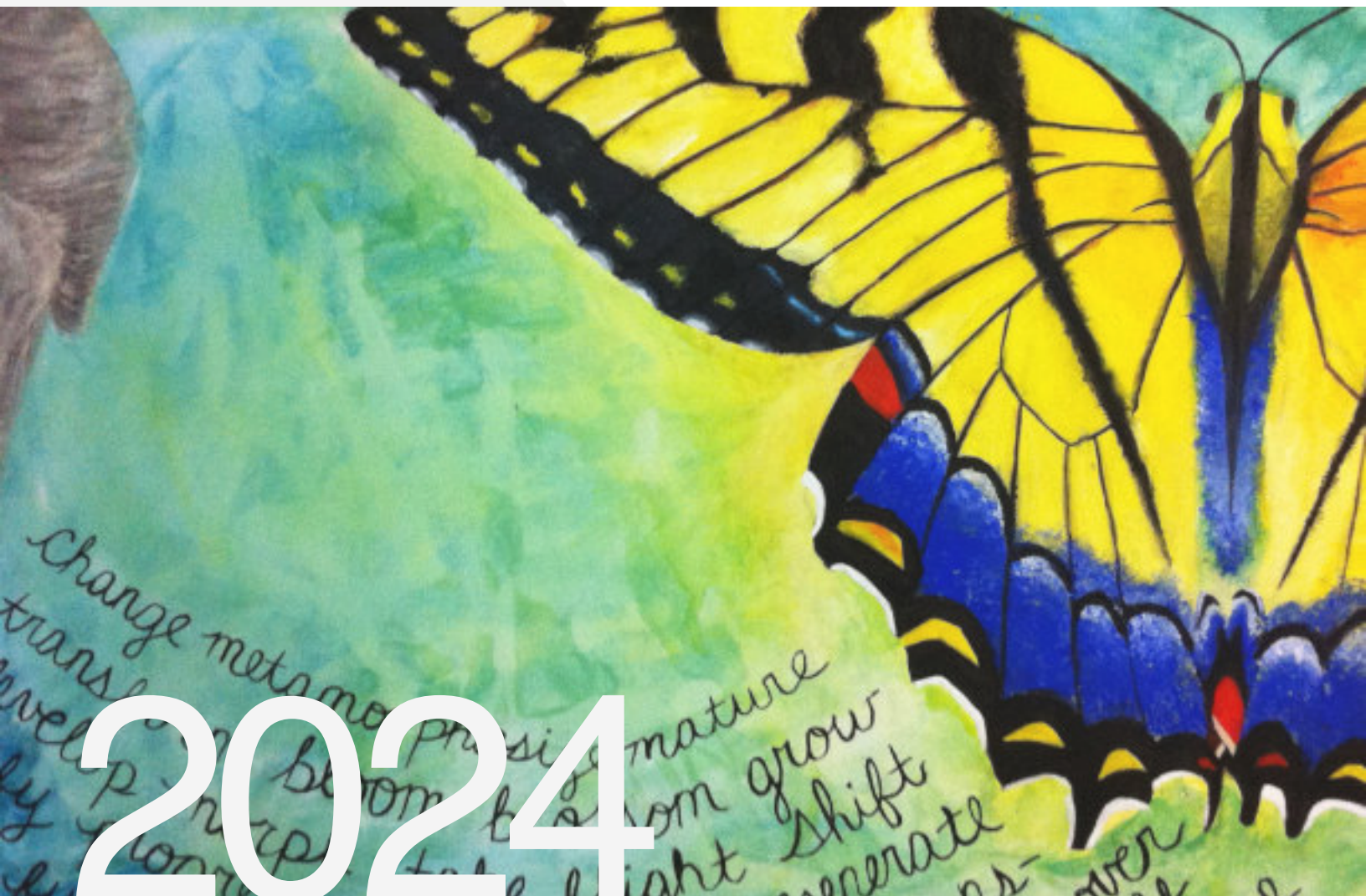


# CREATIVE COMMUNITY SERVICES, INC.

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## ANNUAL REPORT



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## MISSION

Creative Community Services is a private, nonprofit organization that serves foster children, teens, and adults with developmental and mental health needs as well as their families.

For over 40 years, our mission has been to improve their quality of life by providing direct, individualized services and community-based support.



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Dear Friends and Valued Supporters,

In 2024, we found ourselves both looking ahead and digging deep.

This year has been marked by challenge and change, but also by real progress. From navigating a statewide contract delay to developing new partnerships, we've remained grounded in our mission: serving children, youth, and adults with developmental and behavioral needs through individualized, deeply human support and care.

Even in the face of statewide delays and funding disruptions, we continued to serve with courage. Our leadership team worked hard to secure funding that would allow us to keep accepting new children into care — even when the process became complex and slow. Thanks to their diligence and creativity, we now have both a path forward and sustainable funding sources in place for the coming year.

One of the most exciting projects we've begun is the development of our Succession and Transition Plan. With the help of Dr. Steven Goodwin and the book *Reinventing Organizations*, we've been walking our entire team — and soon, our board — through a process of cultural reflection. We're not just planning for the future of our leadership; we're documenting who we are and how we make decisions, so that when it's time for a new CEO (no time soon, as far as I'm concerned!), our culture won't be something to rebuild, but something to inherit.

We've also been working to build new bridges for our youth who are aging out of foster care. For too long, those whose IQs fall just above or just below state service cutoffs have been left without support. That's not okay with us. This year, we began working with agencies like Inspiritus, Sevita, and Goodlife to create new ways forward for these young adults. We are committed to making sure no one falls through the cracks — not on our watch.

And of course, we kept showing up in the ways that matter most. Our team reimaged the Reality Fair for youth life skills development, welcomed new clinical leadership, and continued to build toward becoming an organization that empowers decision-making at every level, rooted in purpose, trust, and wholeness.

If there's one theme that's marked this year, it's this: we are preparing. We're preparing our youth for adulthood. We're preparing our team for long-term success. We're preparing our agency for a future beyond any one person — a future built to last.

Thank you for standing with us. Your support, whether through time, resources, or presence, is what allows us to keep moving forward — not just doing the work, but becoming better while we do it.

With Gratitude,



Sally L. Buchanan, CEO

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

Dear Family, Friends, and Supporters,

2024 was a year of both challenge and deepening resolve. As CCS navigated the ongoing complexities of state contracts and service delivery, the Board remained steadfast in our commitment to walk alongside Sally and the entire staff. Their resilience — not just in maintaining services, but in expanding vision — has been remarkable. And we are proud to support the work they do daily on behalf of some of Georgia's most vulnerable children, youth, and adults.

This year marked the first of my second term as Board President, and I'm deeply encouraged by what we accomplished together. We fulfilled all Board Excellence initiatives laid out in the strategic plan, seated a full 12-member board, achieved 100% board giving, and increased our presence at CCS events like the Reality Fair, the annual picnic, and the holiday party. These weren't just checkboxes — they were moments where our board got to be present with the heart of this mission: the people.

We also took meaningful steps toward the long-term health of the agency. We participated in our first full board retreat to deepen relationships and discern how we can better share CCS's story with the wider community. And most importantly, we are actively engaged in the development of a comprehensive Succession and Transition Plan — not because leadership is leaving tomorrow, but because we believe CCS deserves a future that's as strong and mission-driven as its past.

As we look toward 2025, we do so with hope — not only for the programs and people we serve, but for the culture we are helping to sustain. Thank you for standing with us, investing in this work, and believing in what's possible when care, dignity, and partnership are at the center.

A cursive signature in blue ink that reads "Gayle".

Gayle Ely, *President of the Board*

# TRANSFORMING LIVES

## Success Story: Erica's Journey

Erica, one of the dedicated young mothers in our Teen Parent Connection (TPC) program, reached a major milestone — graduating from phlebotomy school. This accomplishment reflects not only her determination, but also her desire to build a better life for herself and her daughter.

With the guidance and support of the TPC team, Erica also obtained her driver's license and secured stable housing. These essential steps were made possible through her consistent effort, combined with encouragement and coaching from CCS staff every step of the way.

At her graduation celebration, TPC Director Rochelle Grice spoke with pride about Erica's resilience, her commitment to growth, and the kind of intentional, loving parent she continues to be.

Erica's story is a powerful example of what happens when support systems work — when a young parent is surrounded by people who see their potential, speak truth into their journey, and walk with them through the process of transformation. We are proud of Erica, and we're honored to play a part in stories like hers every day.





# DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

100%

REPORTED  
HAVING A  
STRONG SUPPORT  
SYSTEM

100%

FEEL  
SAFE IN THEIR  
PLACEMENT AT  
CCS

100%

100% FEEL  
RESPECTED BY  
THEIR CA/RA

97%

HELP  
STAFF TO MAKE  
DECISIONS ON  
THEIR SERVICEPLAN

This year, CCS served 47 adults with developmental disabilities, offering deeply individualized care that helps each person grow in autonomy and connection. Our 37 active host home families continue to be the foundation of this program — creating safe, consistent environments where adults can thrive.

Host Home Providers aren't just caregivers — they're mentors, advocates, and family. Through meaningful relationships and consistent outings to places like the aquarium, zoo, and local parks, our clients practice life skills, build confidence, and simply enjoy being part of the community. Because everyone deserves that kind of life.

# THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE

When traditional foster care falls short, CCS steps in to provide a deeper level of support for children with complex behavioral or developmental needs. Many of the youth we serve have experienced 15 to 30 failed placements before finding stability with us. In 2023, we partnered with 51 therapeutic foster homes, offering tailored care that prioritizes healing, resilience, and long-term stability.

This year, we served over 100 youth, ranging from infants to young adults up to 21 years old. The majority are teenagers—an age group often overlooked in the foster system. To support their transition into adulthood, we collaborate closely with our S.O.A.R. Program, equipping them with essential life skills for independent living.

## ENHANCED HOMES

In our Enhanced Homes model, the caregiver moves into the youth's existing residence, rather than relocating the child. This approach minimizes disruption, allowing the youth to maintain familiarity with their environment. Caregivers are carefully matched based on experience and compatibility and receive support for rent, utilities, groceries, and caregiving expenses.

## KINSHIP CARE

Kinship care—placing children with relatives or close family friends—offers a profound sense of stability and belonging. Research consistently shows that children in kinship care experience better outcomes compared to those in non-relative foster placements. They are more likely to remain in one stable home, exhibit fewer behavioral challenges, and maintain stronger cultural and familial connections<sup>1</sup>.

In 2022, 34% of children in foster care were placed with relatives, up from 26% in 2010<sup>2</sup>. That shift reflects growing recognition of the deep emotional and developmental advantages that come from remaining with kin. At CCS, we are committed to expanding kinship care so more children can stay connected to the people, places, and stories that made them.



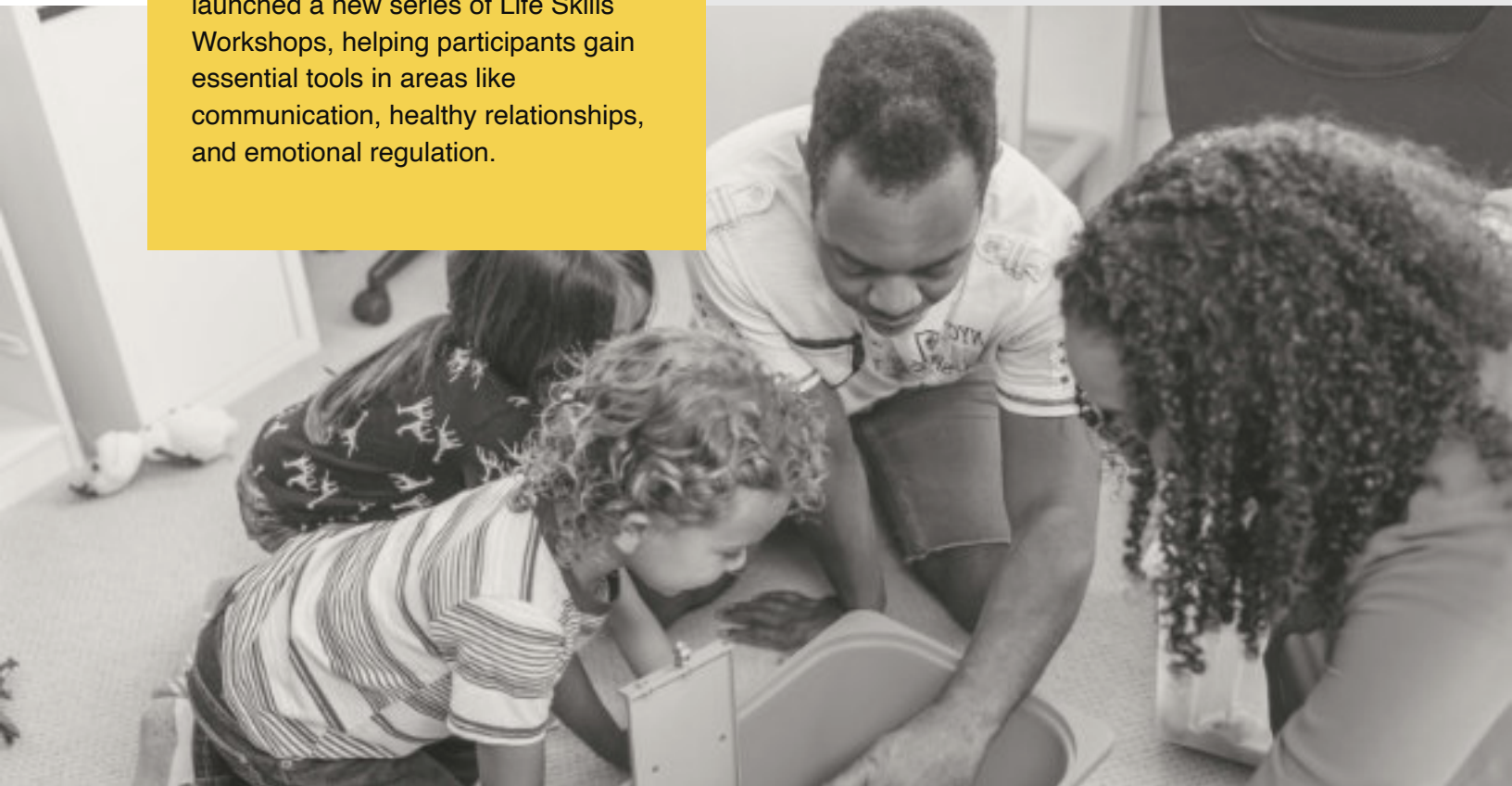
# SOAR

(Supporting Families, Overcoming Obstacles, Achieving Independence, Reaching New Heights)

The S.O.A.R. Program continues to be one of the most dynamic and impactful pieces of CCS's work — walking alongside youth and adults as they navigate the challenges of developmental, emotional, and systemic barriers. In 2024, 82 individuals received direct support through S.O.A.R., each with a tailored plan designed to build life skills, confidence, and community integration.

Throughout the year, our team provided educational advocacy, job training, summer camp experiences, and hosted our annual Reality Fair — a hands-on event where youth learn budgeting, employment readiness, and independent living in a simulated real-world environment. This year, we also launched a new series of Life Skills Workshops, helping participants gain essential tools in areas like communication, healthy relationships, and emotional regulation.

The outcomes speak for themselves: seven S.O.A.R. youth graduated in 2024, each one moving forward into adulthood with greater readiness and a deeper sense of agency. Their successes are reminders of what's possible when young people are seen, supported, and empowered.



# RESPIRE

Caring for children with high needs is deeply rewarding — and demanding. That’s why respite care exists: to give foster parents time to rest, recharge, and return to caregiving with renewed capacity and presence.

In 2024, **51 children** received respite services through CCS, accounting for **1,152 total respite days**. These planned breaks — often two weekends a month — provide short-term stays with certified therapeutic foster homes. And while caregivers get the rest they need, children benefit too: they experience consistency, care, and a chance to build safe relationships beyond their primary placement.

A unique part of our respite model is the Adventure Youth Program (AYP) — a long-standing retreat program designed specifically for youth with severe emotional and behavioral needs. Through outdoor activities, home-cooked meals, crafts, and structured group experiences, youth receive not only rest, but also coaching in social skills, self-regulation, and active citizenship — all in a safe, rustic environment that feels like home.

Respite isn’t just a break — it’s a strategy for stability. By supporting our foster families and offering tailored experiences like AYP, we’re investing in the long-term success of each placement, and the well-being of every child involved.



## EVENTS

In 2024, CCS hosted several key events that brought together the children, youth, adults, families, staff, and board members that make up our community. Each gathering created space for connection, celebration, and growth — reinforcing our mission in tangible, relational ways.



### July: CCS Reality Fair

We kicked off the summer with the **CCS Reality Fair**, an immersive life skills event designed to help teens understand what it takes to live independently. Participants navigated a simulated world of budgeting, employment, housing, and real-life decisions — gaining critical insight into the challenges and opportunities adulthood can hold. The day concluded with a **career fair**, where volunteers from local organizations met with youth one-on-one to discuss job pathways, offer encouragement, and open doors toward their next steps.

### September: Annual Picnic

Our **Annual CCS Picnic** at Pinckneyville Park was a highlight of the fall, drawing families, foster parents, host homes, staff, and board members together for an afternoon of food, games, and music. With a live DJ and a welcoming atmosphere, the event created a relaxed and joyful space to strengthen relationships and celebrate the work we do together.



### October: Trunk or Treat

In October, CCS families gathered once again for our annual **Trunk or Treat** — a safe, fun, and festive way to celebrate Halloween. Creative costumes, decorated cars, and shared laughter made this event a favorite among our kids and caregivers alike.



### December: Holiday Party

We ended the year on a high note with the **CCS Holiday Party**, a time for connection and celebration across the entire agency. The event featured music, crafts, food, and opportunities to reflect on the year's journey. For many, it was more than a party — it was a reminder of the family that forms when people are loved well.

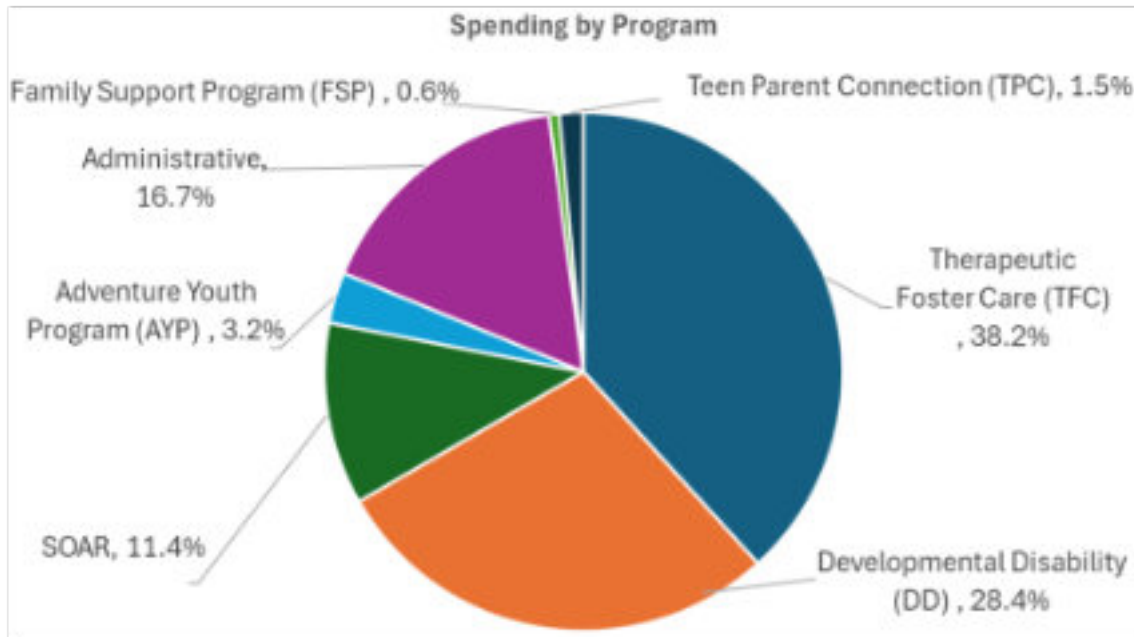
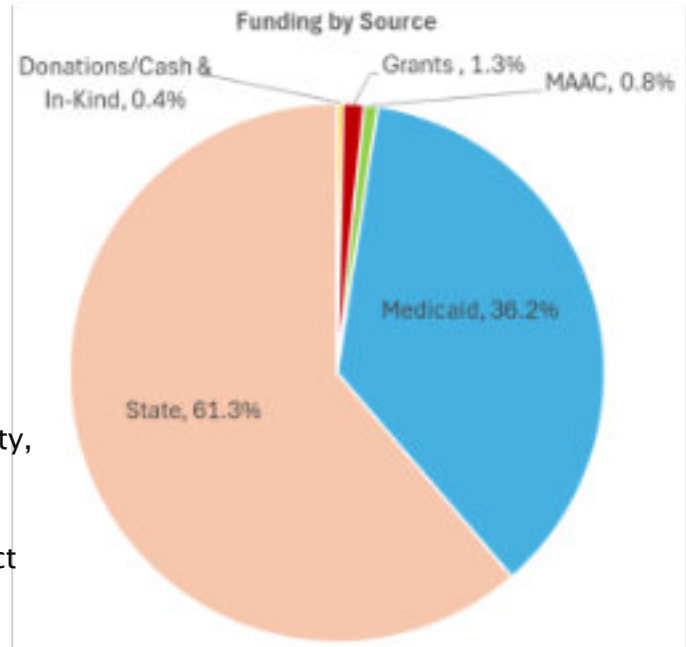


Together, these events served as touch-points throughout the year — building belonging, creating joy, and reminding every individual that they are part of something bigger.

# Financial Stewardship

Through the ongoing efforts of our CEO, Leadership Team, staff, and Board of Directors, CCS continues to raise both public awareness and financial support for our mission. In FY2024, we expanded our efforts to secure both private contributions and public grant funding, ensuring our programs remain sustainable and responsive to the needs of those we serve.

We remain deeply committed to providing high-quality, individualized care for the youth and adults in our programs — while maintaining responsible financial practices that keep administrative costs low and direct service impact high.



# DONORS & GRANTS

## GENERAL DONATIONS

Bobby Cagle  
Diane Palmer  
Erica Strickland  
George Tivy  
John Register  
Megaera Telligman  
Missy Mayer  
Molly Casey  
Rajesh Jobanputra  
Samuel Walker  
Sraddha Timilsina  
Zachary Gaeta  
Marie Fratoni  
Alison Ganse  
Patsie Daniels

## GRANTS

Teen Parent Connection: Promoting Safe & Stable Families (TPC PSSF)  
DFCS CPA Recruitment Grant

## EMPLOYEE CONTRIBUTIONS

CCS is also supported by employee contributions through the Investment in Life Initiative. In this voluntary initiative, employees contribute a portion of their paychecks to support our programs and services.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS (PAST & PRESENT) CONTRIBUTIONS

April Ogden  
Cassandra Johnson  
Dave Collier  
Christopher Dunn  
Drew and Karen Garner  
Gayle Ely  
Jim and Deborah Kerlin  
Richard Walters

## CORPORATE SPONSORS

Citizens Private Wealth  
Citizens Charitable Foundation  
CareSource  
Viasat  
Kroger  
CyberGrants  
Benevity  
The Blackbaud Giving Fund  
Modern Woodmen Fraternal Financial  
GA Gives  
The Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC)  
Amerigroup  
Carl, Riggs, & Ingram  
Marsh McLennan Agency

## COMMUNITY DONATIONS FROM PARTNERS

Kingdom Now Ministries  
Modern Woodmen Fraternal Financial  
CCS Christmas Shop Supporters  
Helping Mamas  
St. Andrews Presbyterian Church



# GET INVOLVED

## Ready to Make a Difference?

Whether you're showing up at an event, offering mentorship, supporting behind the scenes, or opening your home to a child or adult in need — there's a place for you at CCS.

We're looking for people who lead with compassion, stay patient through hard days, and believe in second chances. If that sounds like you, we'd love to walk with you as you explore how to get involved.



## Follow Us!



@CCSGeorgia



@CCSofGeorgia



@CreativeCommunityServices



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

## Help Us Keep the Story Going

Behind every milestone you've read in this report — every first apartment, every graduation, every moment of stability — is someone like you who made it possible.

When you give to CCS, you're not just donating. You're putting gas in the car of a young adult on their way to a job interview. You're filling a backpack with supplies for a child who's finally starting school in a safe home. You're showing up in all the quiet, powerful ways that help people rebuild.

There's no small gift. Every dollar is a step toward healing, dignity, and hope.

