

# Ripples of Change

FY2024 IMPACT AND BEYOND



**GEORGIA<sup>™</sup>**  
**APPLESEED**

*Center for Law & Justice*

*Center*



# MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP



2025 will mark 20 years of Georgia Appleseed. Over these two decades, the community of supporters, staff, and volunteers that make up Georgia Appleseed has transformed Georgia in fundamental ways. Together, we have strengthened the juvenile justice, education, foster care, and housing systems. We've launched initiatives that protect wealth for our lowest-resourced communities, like addressing heirs' property and raising graduation rates. We've reshaped how Georgia discusses education, mental health, and housing for its most vulnerable children. The impact of our collective work is difficult to overstate.

People often ask, "How do you accomplish so much?" The answer: we refuse to settle for quick fixes. We dig deep, seeking cures, not just treatments. We're relentless in addressing root causes and building lasting solutions.

And our small staff of eleven can accomplish so much because our efforts are supported and extended by thousands of pro bono experts across the nation. This year alone, professionals from twenty-seven firms donated more than 2,000 pro bono hours for a total value of \$1,067,000 in programs services.

We exist to tackle challenges faced by Georgia's most underserved children, from courtrooms to classrooms to the very homes they live in. This focus on problem-solving is the heart of our approach, guiding us toward greater impact and more comprehensive solutions.

## The Lock of Life | Anonymous

"I had all of my walls up so I couldn't get hurt, and inside of the lock was bright and creative."

## What problems do we solve?

Our journey has shown us that keeping kids out of jail requires far more than legal system reform or free representation. It's about keeping them in school, providing behavioral supports, and ensuring they have safe, habitable homes

“... we refuse to settle for quick fixes. We dig deep, seeking cures, not just treatments. We're relentless in addressing root causes and building lasting solutions.”

On the cover:

## The Duck Pond Erica Harrod

"The world is just a pond, and we're all ducks. And our actions just leave ripples in the pond."



to return to. School discipline issues often stem from traumas, disabilities, or other unmet needs. Today, we're working not just within the legal system, but within schools and communities to address the root causes that could eventually lead children into the juvenile justice system.

## Why is this work so critical?

**Data tells a stark story: More than 21,000 kids in Georgia won't graduate this year, and they will face consequences beyond lost income and missed opportunities.** The data tells us that these kids will live, on average, 10 years less, collectively earn \$5 billion less over their lifetimes, and experience higher rates of chronic illness, homelessness, and joblessness. They're also more likely to encounter the criminal justice system than their graduating peers.

Because these kids didn't make it through to graduation, the State of Georgia will lose \$290 million in tax revenue, along with thousands of college and associate degree graduates. It will also shoulder millions in costs related to juvenile justice, criminal justice, and healthcare.

In short, what happens to these 21,000 students is a humanitarian crisis—and an economic one.

**The data and our experience also tell a hopeful story.** The right reforms matter. Because of our advocacy efforts, graduation rates have risen over the last two decades. We're also providing legal assistance to individual kids with lawyers and advocates who fight to make sure that they have the mental health and behavioral supports they need to succeed and graduate. With your help, we can change the trajectory for the 21,000 kids, and get them through school and on to a better life.

## Thank you.



*Eric S. Fisher*

**Eric Fisher** | Board Chair  
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*Michael Waller*

**Michael Waller**  
Executive Director

# Power of Pro Bono

Just this year,  
**27 firms donated 2,077 hours to:**

- Conduct a 50-state child welfare policy scan to **identify successful metrics and reforms for Georgia.**
- Analyze legal protections and **recommend policies for extended-stay hotel residents.**
- **Chart national, state and local affordable housing trust funds** benefiting Georgia.
- Create a Magistrate Court template to **inform tenants of eviction rights and resources.**
- Review and draft model legislation to **ban corporal punishment in Georgia schools.**
- Assess policy to **address youth mental health policies, funding, and school-based care integration.**
- Analyze and **visualize 10 years of Georgia school discipline trends and data.**
- Draft a moot court brief for APS Young Litigators to **build students' advocacy skills.**
- And so much more.



# IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

## Legislative Wins

**House Bill 404: Safe at Home Act.** Prior to our successful advocacy to pass HB 404, Georgia was one of just a few states where rental properties were not required to be “fit for human habitation.” Now, rental homes must have basic plumbing and utilities, security deposits are capped, and tenants have a grace period before an eviction can be filed. These protections stabilize families, prevent displacement that can lead to children entering foster care, and alleviate the economic burden of millions of dollars in hospital costs caused by poor housing conditions.

**Senate Bill 169: Fairness in School Discipline.** After seeing our FAIR students waiting up to 55 days out of school – with no instructional materials – before being given a school disciplinary hearing, we drafted SB 169 to ensure timely hearings and continuous access to learning materials for students facing long-term suspension. These reforms reduce learning loss, ease the burden on teachers catching them up, and keep students on track for graduation.



### Legislative Wins for Georgia’s Children and Families.

Georgia Appleseed helped secure two critical legislative victories that will improve the lives of children and families across the state with the passage and signing of HB 404 and SB 169 by Gov. Brian Kemp.

## Coalition Leadership

The **Georgia Education Climate Coalition** convened government, educational, community, nonprofit, and health professionals to tackle pressing education policy issues: using mediation for school discipline, ending corporal punishment, promoting school safety, and addressing youth mental health.

This year the **Georgia Healthy Housing Coalition** met in Valdosta, Riverdale, Savannah, and Augusta to advance safe and healthy housing policies. We re-energized our members and implemented significant goals of the coalition’s 10-year advocacy plan of conducting a Housing Safety Code Survey and passing the Safe at Home Act.



## Program Advancements

**FAIR (Fairness, Advocacy, Individualized Representation) Project.** Building on our experience representing children in foster care, we expanded FAIR to reach other children who needed our help. We provided legal support to more than 200 children, working with schools to decrease disciplinary action, increase behavioral and educational supports, and keep students learning in school (an average of 122 days more per student). In addition to adding new online training modules, we conducted virtual and in-person trainings across the state, equipping more than 1,000 advocates this year to effectively champion children’s rights.

**School-Based Behavioral Health Resources (SBBH).** Nearly half (46%) of Georgia kids who need behavioral or mental health services lack access to critical care. We’re working to change that by promoting SBBH services.

- Through our SchoolBasedBehavioralHealth.org website, we’re consolidating, improving, and adding resources to help schools, families, and students bring behavioral health services to their schools.
- We’re delivering technical assistance to school districts implementing behavioral health programs.
- We’re pursuing legislation to address the shortage of SBBH providers, such as school counselors and medical professionals, who are essential to helping struggling kids succeed.

## The Result?

Each child who we keep on track to graduate will:

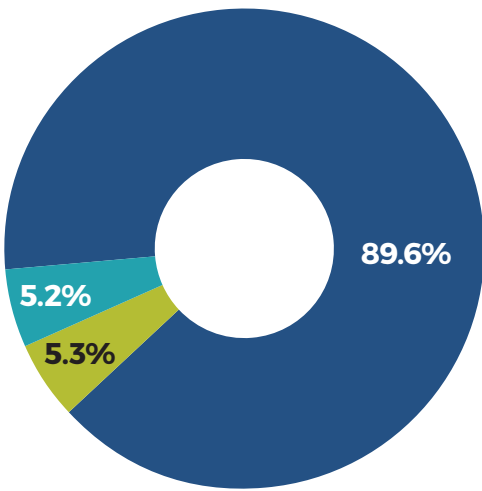
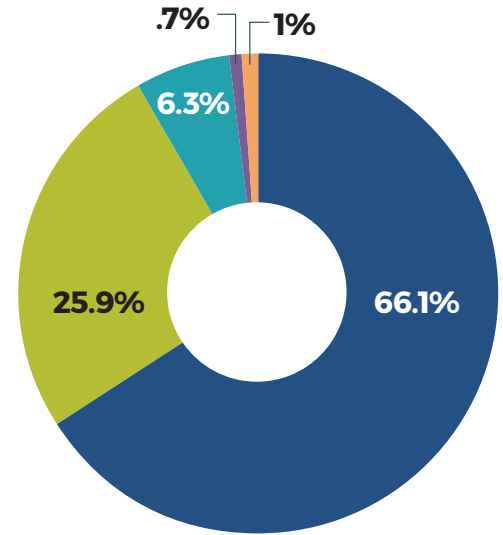
- **Earn an average of \$501,904 more over their lifetimes;**
- **Live 10 years longer, with improved health outcomes; and**
- **Save the state at least \$41,753 annually through increased tax contributions, lower healthcare costs, and reduced expenses related to crime.**

# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

JULY 1, 2023 to JUNE 30, 2024

## REVENUES AND SUPPORT

Contributions and Grants	\$2,724,858
Contributed Services	\$1,067,262
Fundraising and Special Events	\$260,794
Contributed Facilities	\$30,220
Other Income	\$42,894
<b>Total Revenues &amp; Support</b>	<b>\$4,126,028</b>



## EXPENSES

Programs	\$2,154,404
Management and General	\$127,797
Fundraising	\$122,207
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$2,404,408</b>

**Total Increase in Net Assets \$1,721,620**

### MILLION DOLLAR MILESTONE:

## Georgia Appleseed Awarded \$1 Million By Yield Giving

In the spring of 2024, Georgia Appleseed received a \$1 million grant from MacKenzie Scott's Yield Giving initiative, the largest gift in our history. Awarded to fewer than 6% of 6,353 applicants, the grant is a powerful validation of our mission and impact. The funds will grow our programs and help more children statewide stay in school, secure stable housing, and avoid the criminal justice system. This transformative investment positions us as a trusted, high-impact organization worthy of further support. It's not just funding—it's an endorsement of our ability to drive meaningful, lasting change.

The \$1 million grant from MacKenzie Scott's Yield Giving initiative is the largest gift in our history.



# DONORS + SPONSORS

## **\$1,000,000**

Yield Giving Open Call

## **\$500,000-\$999,999**

Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation

## **\$100,000-\$499,999**

Georgia Bar Foundation, Inc.  
Georgia Dept. of Human Services, DFCS  
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**About the Artworks** | We have included two paintings, commissioned by Georgia Appleseed, from our special exhibition "See Me: Pieces of Life from Youth in Care." These moving art pieces represent the lived experiences of Georgia's youth navigating the foster care system. See the collection of art, interviews and more at [piecesoflife.org](http://piecesoflife.org). Background texture throughout the report comes from drawings of children attending a housing listening session with their families.