

A photograph of a woman and two children, all smiling and embracing each other. The woman is holding a gift bag with 'FROZEN' and 'Summer Camp' printed on it. The scene is set outdoors with trees in the background. The entire image is overlaid with a blue-to-purple gradient.

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

**BIG SOCIAL
PROBLEMS NEED**

**BOLD
SOLUTIONS.**

The policies and social programs created to tackle the challenges of hunger, homelessness, neglect and poverty tend to ignore one simple, but critically important truth: Societies are made up of individuals, and no two people or families are the same.

We do things differently at **Better Together**. We are building a community of people willing to help those who are hurting, one person and one family at a time. The kind of community that takes years of time and trust to build, with the kind of people who are in it for the long haul.

Our volunteer community is now **over 5,000** people strong across Florida and the nation. Our full-time staff grew to **25**. We are expanding both of our programs slowly and strategically, keeping our promises and delivering on results.

Our dedicated team is proving a nonprofit can scale while keeping overhead costs down and maintaining its effectiveness, all while staying 100% privately funded.

In 2022, we expanded our Better Families program to 15 Florida counties, serving more than 5,200 children by year's end. Our success rate—the number of families who stay together and out of foster care—tops 98%, even in the three regions where child removals are highest: Hillsborough, Pinellas and Manatee counties.

When the need for our services spiked, our volunteers doubled down. They served every family who asked for our help, giving children places to live and helping parents find jobs, homes, child care, treatment programs, and more.

We created new ways to connect directly with at-risk families through local educational lunches and Parent's Night Out events to give parents a night off.

When a near-category 5 hurricane struck Southwest Florida, we put boots on the ground and took supplies and resources door-to-door to make sure our community's most vulnerable families didn't slip into crisis.

At the same time, the challenge of getting families back to work changed radically. Our job fair churches pivoted quickly, hosting job fairs for smaller, focused groups of people. What resulted was an unprecedented depth of attention that our local employers, mentors, and job coaches could provide for the job seekers we serve. Our success rate doubled, with nearly half of all job seekers getting hired on-the-spot.

Around **800** people were connected to job opportunities in 2022, including in major cities like Chicago and Miami. Not only do these new workers have a paycheck to fight back against inflation, but they are also proud to be providing for their families with dignity and building a better life one day at a time.



(Megan, Mason, Ellie (4), Ava (4 months), Emma (2) and Brady (6) Rose)

Social problems cannot be resolved overnight—it takes years of investing personally in the lives of our neighbors. There is no metric for hope restored, shoulders cried on, friendships formed, and the weight that gets lifted off a person's soul when they realize for the first time they have someone to call when life gets hard. You can't measure the miracles of redemption, healed marriages, and strengthened faith. Nor can you measure the grit of the people we serve, or the compassion of the volunteer mentors and host families who stand in their corner.

We were put here to love and serve each other. Big social problems don't need one answer—they need millions of small ones. This is how we grow our impact, one person at a time. Our mission will never be done, and it will always be worth it. Thank you for walking alongside us.

Megan Rose
CEO, Better Together



2015

- The state allocated \$200,000 to start the Safe Families for Children program in Southwest Florida.

2016

- Tarren Bragdon, who helped secure the original funding, helped form the 501(c)(3) FlourishNow, which is now known as Better Together.
- The organization moved away from government funding, which led to a major gift from Philanthropy Roundtable through the Culture of Freedom initiative.
- Andrew Brown was appointed to oversee city-based job fair initiative that focused in Phoenix, Dayton, Ohio, and Jacksonville, Florida.

2017

- Developed the framework that would become Better Families and expanded our relationship with the Florida Department of Children and Families.

2018

- The new organization officially became Better Together and Megan Rose was appointed CEO.
- We focused Better Families in Southwest Florida and innovated the job fair model to be more scalable, sustainable and impactful.



2019

- Trained the first cohort of five churches in Washington, D.C., to successfully implement the new job fair model.
- Restructured the board of directors and added members.
- Megan won the Manhattan Institute Civil Society Award.

2020

- Expanded Better Families into Sarasota County and started peer-to-peer parent luncheons.
- Hosted first virtual job fair, which connected 650 people with job openings in Southwest Florida.
- Hosted first Nationwide Day of Second Chances on Dec. 12.
- Megan named a Manhattan Institute Fellow.

2021

- Expanded Better Families program into Northeast Florida, Tampa Bay region and Manatee County.
- Started Parents' Night Out events in each region.

2022

- Expanded Better Families into Marion County, home of Ocala, and expanded the Northeast Florida team.

OUTCOMES BY THE NUMBERS

**LIVES
CHANGED.**

39,000
job seekers served



70%
find employment
within 6 weeks

7,132
children served



98%
have no further
involvement with DCF

\$16,885,848
raised since 2016



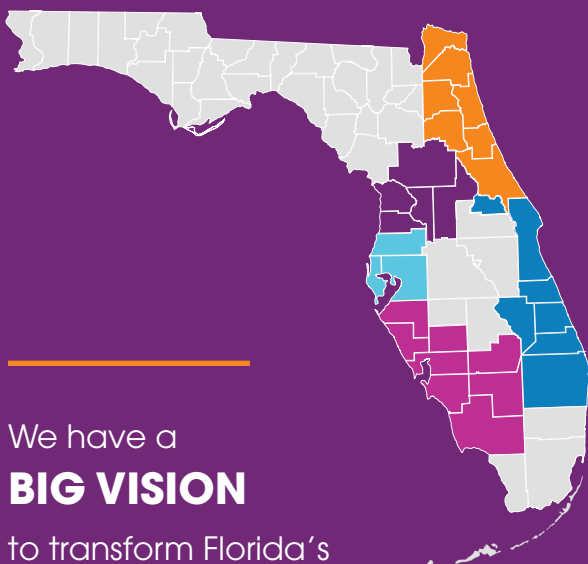
100%
privately funded
by **1,084** unique donors

Better Families in **16** Florida Counties

Better Jobs activity in **22** States,
plus Washington, D.C.

BETTER FAMILIES

Preventing the need for foster care



We have a **BIG VISION**

to transform Florida's child welfare system, and we're just getting started. Based on current numbers, we expect to reduce the number of children in foster care by **20%** in the next **5 years**.

Most children enter foster care as a result of poverty and family crisis, not abuse.

About **22,000** calls are made to the Florida Abuse Hotline each month and of those, only **1,458** are deemed unsafe and **3,859** meet criteria for further assessments.

A majority of these children do not need foster care. They need healthy parents and supportive friends. Our program keeps children safe and out of foster care by providing a support system that empowers parents to help themselves. Better Families is grounded in professional services and support, but powered by local volunteers who give children safe places to live while mentoring parents to achieve their true potential. As a result, families have the tools and the support needed to stay together.

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) has a big job to do. They cannot provide the depth of support offered by our program. With our preventative services, DCF is free to concentrate on what it does best—like responding to substantiated claims of child abuse and protecting children in danger of harm. We've built this partnership slowly over time, earning local trust and goodwill through our positive outcomes. Now **more than 60%** of our referrals come directly from DCF and law enforcement.

Better Families

Average Cost: **\$1,300** private dollars per child, per year

Average Stay: **45 Days**

Florida Foster Care

\$30,000 taxpayer dollars per child, per year

596 Days



When Better Families Steps In parents are struggling with:

32% Homelessness	11% Domestic Violence
16% Parental Crisis	10% Respite
14% Medical Crisis	3% Incarcerated
12% Substance Abuse	2% Mental Health

More Families Helped Every Year

Number of children served by Better Together in Florida, by year:

2015 105	2016 289	2017 327	2018 481	2019 589	2020 828	2021 829
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Over 7,132 children helped in Florida since 2015

2022
3,684 (1,895 through hurricane relief;
1,789 non-hurricane relief)

A BETTER FAMILIES STORY



~ Meet Ramona

In early 2022, as a single mom of two girls, Ramona felt alone. She had done much for her girls. She gained her independence from an abusive relationship, got a job working for a hospital and went back to school to finish her education. But when life-threatening medical issues needed treatment, she had no one in the area to care for her girls while she was in the hospital.



“I can say with certainty...that without the resources, community, and host families Better Together has provided, my daughters would be in foster care today,”

Ramona writes in a letter of thanks to staff, volunteers and supporters. More than that, Ramona gained a village, a community, to help her family find strength in the days ahead.

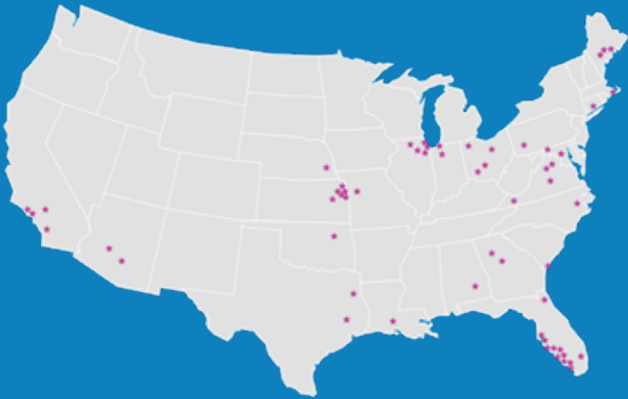
The Morrisons, who hosted the girls twice, became like family to the trio. They kept Ramona apprised of the girls’ day-to-day through texts, phone calls and visits, helping Ramona feel active in their lives, even when she could not be close by.

The two families remain connected, seeing each other every Sunday at church. In fact, Ramona has made several friends at church. She no longer feels alone.

“I wish I could share with you the peace I’m so blessed to have now,” Ramona says. “That is the reason I push myself. I will not give up on a better tomorrow.”

BETTER JOBS

Restoring hope & dignity
through work



Of the **39,000 job seekers**
we've served nationwide

 **70%** found a job
within 6 weeks.

Economic mobility is on the decline. **More than 90%** of children born in the 1940's surpassed their parents' income as adults, while only **7 in 10** people accomplish the same goal today. If you were born into poverty, it is more likely you will stay there.

Poverty is not just a lack of money — it's a lack of relationships and opportunities.

Better Jobs trains and equips churches to connect people with local employers and job coaches who will not rest until they get back to work. We provide a helping hand out of poverty, rather than a handout.

Job seekers at our events typically: have household incomes of less than \$25,000; 71% do not have a college education; and 25% are on food stamps. They struggle to find a path to dignity and employment, often due to lack of experience, limited access to child care, histories of addiction, criminal records, and more.

Church volunteers remind job seekers of their God-given potential. Local employers take the time to get to know the whole person as they conduct interviews and often make job offers on the spot. For those who don't find a job on the first try, hope is not lost. Volunteers keep in touch with job seekers for weeks after the event is over, continuing to remove barriers to employment and success one at a time.



948

Job seekers connected to economic opportunities



247

Hired on the spot

919

Follow-up interviews conducted

44
New
Church
Partners

Who we're serving:

Have household incomes
less than \$25,000

65%

are unemployed

25%

are on food stamps

77%

are millennials

71%

don't have a college education

60%

are unchurched

A BETTER JOBS STORY



~ Meet Nate

For seven months amid a pandemic, Nate couldn't find work. It strained his family and his marriage. He got sick, and it all triggered mental health issues. A **Better Jobs** second-chance job fair changed all that.

Business owner Steven Russell was just as happy to connect with Nate. He had been to three other job fairs. He'd placed help-wanted ads in print and online. Still, he wasn't finding the right workers for his light manufacturing plant in Fort Myers. He was looking for someone with commitment, with curiosity, and a drive to learn the job and do it well.

Russell's company, Creative Architectural Resin Products Inc. (CARP) which he co-owns with Marilyn Santiago, makes resin-based faux architectural elements that look like natural materials, like stone or wood. Quality matters at CARP. The company works with some of the most prestigious builders in Southwest Florida and beyond.

"If I hadn't found the Better Together job fair, it's hard to imagine where I'd be right now," Nate told us. "I'm certainly in a much better place mentally, and it's just helped me out tremendously."

Finding quality employees, however, proved to be a difficult endeavor in 2021, like it was for many employers. Then the couple said yes to a Better Jobs second-chance job fair.

"Most of the candidates that came to our table were good choices and seemed to have experience, or at least ambition, and wanted to really try," Russell said. He was particularly impressed with Nate. He showed ambition, and Russell offered the job.

Nate proved to be a valuable employee, earning more responsibility and pay. "I have something I can be proud of. At the end of the day, I come home and I've pulled my weight."



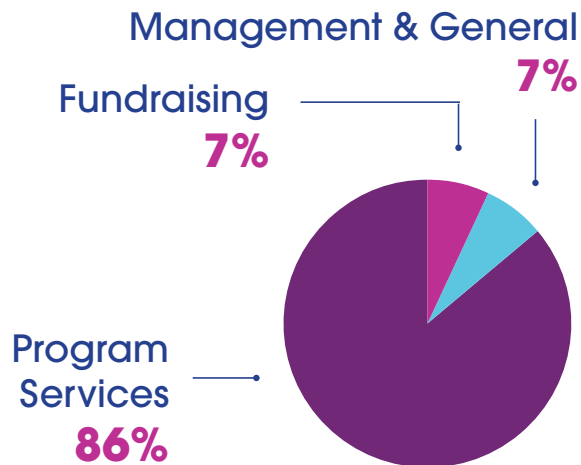
FINANCIALS

Revenue

2022 **\$9,811,655**

2021 **\$1,920,945**

Expenses



DONORS' 2022 RETURN ON INVESTMENT

3,684

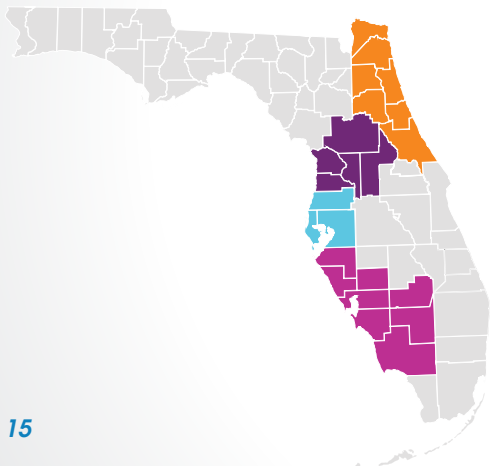
children served

98%

had no further DCF involvement

948

job seekers served



Growth into **3** new Florida regions

Better Together expanded in 2022, providing Better Families programming in four regions and starting exploratory activities into a fifth region with a goal of taking the program statewide in the next three years.



Thriving in the face of a hurricane

On September 28, one of the most damaging hurricanes in U.S. history struck Southwest Florida, the heart of Better Together's beginnings.

We knew a storm of that magnitude would push many more families into crisis. We immediately got boots on the ground.

Our small staff rallied church and community partners and went knocking door-to-door delivering supplies and inquiring about other needs where our programs could assist.

Within a few short weeks, we hosted a **Better Jobs** job fair, helping those who had lost their jobs connect with employers who needed their talents and skills.

Hurricane Ian by the numbers

(as of 11/22/22)

- **10,120** supplies given door to door
- **1,931** children helped
- **442** homes tarped
- **184** job seekers
- **13** children displaced by the storm

A graphic of a spotlight beam shining from the top left corner towards the center of the page.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Andrea & Chadd Hodges



Compassion runs deep among our donors.

In 2016, Andrea and Chadd Hodges learned about **Better Together** as they attended Orphan Sunday at Summit Church. They signed up right away, not only to give financially but to become a host family. They've helped in many ways over the years.

Not only have the Hodges hosted three children in their home, but they also volunteered with their children after Hurricane Ian to take supplies and connection to families door to door. Chadd now serves on our Southwest Florida community advisory board, and his business has been a part of our job fairs. Andrea has shared her experiences with Better Together at formal meetings with community partners.

“It’s great to show that we can support others in more ways than just financially,” Andrea says. “We can use our time and talents to serve others.”

Better Together is unique, Chadd says, because “it impacts the community around us. It’s not just writing a check to some national organization. It’s here. The people that Better Together serves are our neighbors. They shop in the same grocery stores as we do.”

Andrea says she likes that Better Together acts. She’s seen our work first hand, and she’s served alongside Better Together families. “Especially after Hurricane Ian, you guys were on the ground moving, acting and loving the community. You reached people that others had forgotten and that’s the beauty of this organization.”

The Hodges look forward to seeing how God multiplies the efforts of Better Together moving forward.

“We feel blessed to be called to this ministry—that’s what changes generations,” Chadd says, “especially helping those younger children to realize they are loved and cared for and sometimes their parents just need an extra hand or support to get them on their way.”



Meet **Our Talented Team**

- Megan Rose** CEO
AJ Hamilton COO
Isis LaRose VP of Strategic Partnerships and Market Development
Lora Bostick Director of Development
Pam Hayford Marketing and Communications Manager
Gisela Weigel Better Jobs Project Manager



Melissa Foster

Executive Director of Church Relationships

“Serving and loving the community through the power of the local church allows us to show the heart of God. We are able to give the world a glimpse of the heart of Jesus. My heart is to see the church radically step forward to care for the broken and help us bridge the gap that culture has created.”

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Chair of the Board
Tarren Bragdon

Director
Rich Vaughn

Director
Dr. Alise Bartley

Director
Doug Campbell

Director
Christian Spilker

Jessica Braemer, Partnership Manager

“There is something so special happening (and growing) where we get to see the community, government, churches, law enforcement, and families come together and be the Church to change the standard. Not just in the judicial system, but in helping keep children out of foster care, families together, and ultimately restore hope and wholeness to the family unit. Better Together is not just an organization, it’s a solution and I’m so honored to be a part of it!”

Yohana Resto	SWFL Region Executive Director
Vanessa Estrada	Program Administrator
Madison Williams	Outreach Director
Sheena Wood	Outreach Director
Kayla Palacios	Florida Operations Director
Amanda Chisholm	Family Care Coordinator
Amber Freeman	Family Care Coordinator
Sahara Hines	Family Care Coordinator
Sherry Loria	Family Care Coordinator
Alexis Marriott	Family Care Coordinator
Barbara Mendez	Family Care Coordinator
Lisa Perry	Family Care Coordinator
Samantha Watson	Partnership Manger
Dawson Jordan	Creative Director
Joshua Escandon	Digital Marketing Coordinator
Jennifer Bauer	Development Grants Manager
Kristianna Soto	Executive Administrative Assistant
Kelly Harrington	Program Support Specialist
Cassidy Vaughn	Program Support Specialist

Expanding into North Central Florida

Better Together received funding to expand into the Ocala, Florida, region in August 2022. By Thanksgiving, we were serving our first family.



TIMELINE

Received
funding:

08/2022



Hired regional
executive director:

09/2022



Hired family care
coordinator:

11/2022



First
referral:

11/2022



Start of
first hosting:

11/2022

~ Meet Heather

A young first-time mother, Heather struggled with addiction and faced homelessness just a week before the holiday. She grew up in foster care and didn't have the support system she needed to get help. A caseworker with the Department of Children and Families referred Heather to **Better Together**.

The Mosley family stepped up and volunteered to host baby Brayden while Heather got treatment, housing and employment, all in less than three months. Mother and child reunited in February 2023.

Most of our stays with host families are less than three months. The average is 45 days. In the state system, the average child spends a year and a half in foster care.

The Better Together model and the help of passionate partners and volunteers helped us expand into North Central Florida in less than three months. Church of Hope, our first church partner in the Ocala region, stepped up with volunteers, while Tri-Eagle Sales provided the funding.



There is great need in the region. Circuit 5 of the Department of Children and Families, which serves Marion, Lake, Sumter, Citrus and Hernando counties, reported an average of 71 children entering out-of-home care each month in 2022. Nearly half of those children were in Marion County, home to Ocala.

Most of these removals are preventable. More than half—60% in July 2022—were due to parental drug abuse, 19% to alcohol abuse and 14% to inadequate supervision.

“We can change that, says CEO Megan Rose. We are excited to come alongside local partners to help change the trajectory for the Ocala community and its people.”



HEADQUARTERS

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