

# 2020

---

## BETTER TOGETHER

---

### Annual Report



**2020  
WAS OUR  
MOST  
IMPACTFUL  
YEAR YET.**

In a year where many people felt powerless, Better Together sprang to action. With six full-time staff and hundreds of caring volunteers, we served every single family that asked for our help.

Even in a pandemic, our volunteers opened their homes to children while helping parents find jobs, safe places to live, trusted child care, virtual schooling, treatment programs, and more. **Together, we saved 828 children from entering foster care.** When millions of Americans found themselves on the unemployment line, we pivoted quickly—within two short weeks—to develop a virtual job fair model. **By year's end, we had connected more than 4,000 people nationwide with local job openings.**

Our church partners and volunteers showed us that civil society is alive and well. They provided practical and immediate solutions for families that didn't have time to wait for the government to help them. And it wasn't an overnight effort—it was the result of years of investing personally in the lives of our neighbors and communities.

When the pandemic suddenly hit, Better Together was ready. Our volunteers knew the movers and shakers on the ground. As we evaluated the needs of each family asking for help, we connected them right away to the people and resources needed to navigate their crisis, or avoid it entirely.

The need for our services is growing, but so are we. Looking ahead, we're building capacity and growing our staff to support more churches and volunteers who are willing to help families. **We are excited to continue scaling our Better Jobs program nationwide, and to expand our Better Families program into 4 new regions—totaling 10 new counties—of Florida in 2021.**

Awareness of our programs is growing. In two cases, our media exposure resulted in donations and random acts of kindness from readers in the community. **We raised 50% more in private funding, compared to last year.** I'm beyond proud of our team and the talent and passion they bring to everything we do. This type of team can achieve the impossible. To all those who donated time, talent, and treasure to help us mitigate the social aftermath of COVID-19 in our country, thank you.



Megan Rose  
CEO, Better Together



( Megan, Mason, Ellie, Brady and Emma Rose )



## 2015

- Megan took the helm of a Chicago-based nonprofit and started the program in SWFL

## 2016

- Moved away from government funding
- Tarren Bragdon helped start nonprofit FlourishNow
- Hosted first job fair at Summit Church, SWFL
- Philanthropy RoundTable major gift given through the Culture of Freedom Initiative
- Andrew Brown appointed to oversee the city-based job fair initiative

## 2017

- Modified the program to be more preventative by adding relationship-based family advocacy where volunteers work with parents weekly for six months, helping them with budgeting, employment, parenting and other important life-changing skills
- Continued to develop a strong partnership and track record with the state of Florida and Department of Children and Families (DCF)



## 2018

- Left Chicago-based franchise due to creating a superior, sustainable model
- Re-branded to Better Together
- Megan Rose appointed CEO
- Innovated job fair model to be more scalable, sustainable, and impactful
- Decided to focus on Better Families expansion in Florida
- Philanthropy Roundtable sunsets Culture of Freedom Initiative and funding

## 2019

- Trained the first cohort of five churches in Washington D.C. to successfully implement our new job fair model
- Restructured the board of directors and added new members
- Megan wins the Manhattan Institute Civil Society Award
- Hosted our first SWFL Gala and raised \$279,000
- Grew and diversified our donor base

## 2020

- Shifted to a virtual job fair model, which served over 4,000 job seekers
- Better Families expansion efforts began in six new Florida counties
- Hosted first Nationwide Day of Second Chances jobs event
- Megan became a fellow with the Manhattan Institute
- Named 2020 Rising Nonprofit of the Year by Cape Coral Community Foundation

**FOCUSED ON  
OUTCOMES  
THAT  
IMPROVE  
LIVES**

**34,000**  
job seekers served



**60%**  
find employment  
within six weeks

**2,619**  
children saved from  
foster care



**98%**  
have no further  
involvement with DCF

**8.9 million**  
dollars raised  
since 2016



**100%**  
privately funded  
by 1,181 unique donors

**Better Families** in **13** Florida counties

**Better Jobs** activity in **21** different states

# BETTER FAMILIES

## Preventing the need for foster care



Without Better Together, I really feel like we would have lost our kids. We are so grateful, they helped us to be better, to not be in this situation again. They didn't judge us, they loved us and gave us the resources and support we needed to be better parents.

- Miquetta



( Miquetta, Josiah, and Eric )

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.

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**.

# More Families Helped Every Year

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

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>105</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>828</b>

Over 2,600 children helped in Florida since 2015



“ I’m a work in progress but I’m grateful that I was given a chance to do better, and the people that were once strangers are now my family, and are helping me be a better dad to our son, Jack. ”

- Jason

	Better Families	Florida Foster Care
Average Cost:	<b>\$1,200</b> private dollars per child, per year	<b>\$30,000</b> taxpayer dollars per child, per year
Average Stay:	<b>41 Days</b>	<b>596 Days</b>

## When Better Families Steps In:

Homelessness	<b>32%</b>
Parental Crisis/Family Conflict	<b>16%</b>
Medical Crisis	<b>14%</b>
Substance Abuse Treatment	<b>12%</b>
Domestic Violence	<b>11%</b>
Respite	<b>10%</b>
Prison	<b>3%</b>
Mental Health	<b>2%</b>

# BETTER JOBS

## Restoring hope and dignity through work

“

I participated in the virtual job fair today sponsored by Better Together and Cape Christian. I heard of the event on Fox 4. I had been out of work for quite some time and was really feeling down because everywhere I applied never called me. I was really discouraged as to what I was going to do. I had never experienced something so unique.

This was my first job fair I ever attended and I did not know what to expect. I come from 28 years of experience in medical and health care work. One of the employers there was one that I had applied to a couple of days before. They said they had over 400 applications for the position I had applied for. I was able to speak with the employer directly and they had me email my resume to the right person that day! Much to my surprise, I received a call the same afternoon asking to set up an appointment for a phone interview. Within two days I was offered two wonderful jobs! I consider this a success showing that the job fair can get you noticed and give you the encouragement you need to succeed! Out of 400 people, I'm not sure that they would have called if it weren't for the job fair.

Thank you to everyone who put this together to give myself and others the opportunity of finding our new careers. I am so thankful to have my job still, almost eight months later.

”

- Suzanne



( Suzanne O'Connell  
Job Seeker  
Cape Christian Virtual Job Fair )

# 35 Million Americans

are out of work due to the pandemic.

We're getting America back to work through the power of the local church.

Economic mobility is on the decline. **More than 90%** of children born in the 1940s surpassed their parents' income as adults, while only seven in ten 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 **less than \$25,000**

**71%** do not have a college education

**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.

Of the **34,000 job seekers** we've served nationwide  **60%** found a job within 6 weeks.

# NOT YOUR TYPICAL NONPROFIT

## Our core values:

We don't see obstacles,  
we see opportunities

We strive for excellence and  
have integrity in all we do

We drive a shared goal  
with a diverse team

We believe that real compassion  
is a hand up and not a handout





“

Right when I was about to give up, I was reminded of my potential and given a second chance at employment.

-Annie

”

“

I'll now be able to financially provide and be a strong role model for my infant son.

-Brandon

”



# A Breakout Year *for* MEDIA

GRANDEUR  
MAGAZINE.COM

## She keeps families together

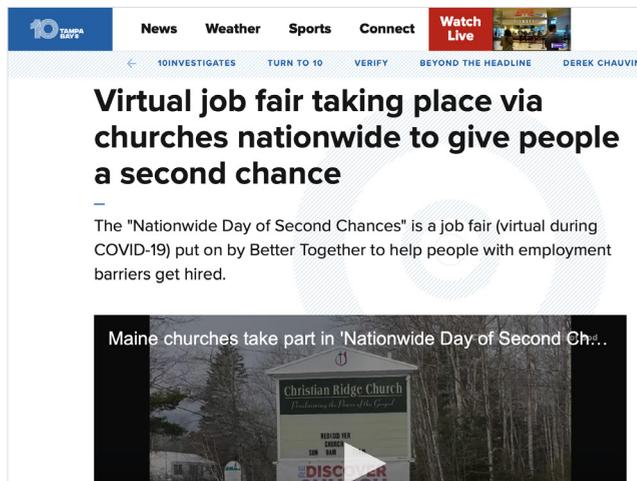
BY ANNE REED OCT. 03, 2020 MIDNIGHT

On a hot July afternoon, in the height of Southwest Florida's COVID-19 wave, Megan Rose is on the road, fitting in an interview during her packed work day. As the CEO of Better Together, an organization that works to help families in crisis, Megan has seen an increase of 155% in calls for help since the start of the pandemic.

One of those calls involved Krystal and Jack — a story shared by Better Together through social media and its website, documented through the lens of photojournalist Kinfay Moroti. Krystal moved to Fort Myers from Pennsylvania but struggled to find a safe place for herself and Jack, her 1-year-old son. Better Together volunteers provided a safe, loving family for Jack while Krystal and Jack's father worked with Megan, her staff and volunteers to secure employment, create a budget and find housing.

On the day of our interview, Megan was headed to Krystal's new home for the big reunion. Jack was coming home — another family safe, supported and together.

Megan's story starts in Florida. She was born in Orlando and grew up in the North Port area. She attended Liberty University in Virginia, graduating with a degree in psychology, then studied abroad in Europe for two years as she pursued her master's degree in human services with a concentration in family and group dynamics and leadership.



## BETTER TOGETHER CHAPTER 2

### Portrayer portrays rival Biden as part of radical left

Trump promotes success stories at his roundtable

By Tom Ichniowski

President Donald Trump opened to Florida legislators on Friday evening to talk before he returned to a crowded White House of great uncertainty in the upcoming week. Trump provided some "radical left" examples, including when newly elected members of Congress from Colorado, Maryland, Minnesota and North Carolina were elected, and when Joe Biden was elected. Trump also mentioned the "radical left" when he talked about the "radical left" in the manufacturing industry. Trump, however, when he talked about the "radical left" in the manufacturing industry, he talked about the "radical left" in the manufacturing industry.



## Jack's parents confront heartbreaking decision

Pair realizes the time still isn't right to reunite with toddler as a family

By Tom Ichniowski

Jack's parents, Jason and Megan, are not ready to reunite with their 1-year-old son, Jack, as a family. The decision is heartbreaking for the pair, but they believe it is the right one for Jack. Jack was born in Florida and was adopted by a family in North Carolina. The adoption was finalized in 2019. Jack's parents, Jason and Megan, are not ready to reunite with their 1-year-old son, Jack, as a family. The decision is heartbreaking for the pair, but they believe it is the right one for Jack. Jack was born in Florida and was adopted by a family in North Carolina. The adoption was finalized in 2019.

## Virtual job fair taking place via churches nationwide to give people a second chance

The "Nationwide Day of Second Chances" is a job fair (virtual during COVID-19) put on by Better Together to help people with employment barriers get hired.



## On 'Giving Tuesday,' give local

Like most things in 2020, the holiday season looks a little different this year. Many people have lost loved ones, jobs, and homes. When you consider the damage COVID-19 has inflicted on the financial, physical, and mental health of families nationwide, it can feel impossible to solve.

But solutions exist, and you don't have to look far to find them. Fred Rogers once famously said, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'"

Nobody connects the helpers to the hurting more efficiently than a local charity. Giving to a local charity provides the chance to see your gift have an immediate and profound impact on the community around you — the people you see in the grocery store, the children on the school bus that passes your house each morning, the neighbors who are quietly struggling to put food on the table, much less buy Christmas presents this year.

Local nonprofit organizations have a deep understanding of the need in your community because the people running them are your neighbors. They have the local knowledge needed to tackle the messy problems of homelessness, unemployment, hunger, and more. They also have the flexibility to adapt when the aid way of doing things is no longer working.

Local volunteers know a one-size-fits-all approach to society's biggest challenges is not going to cut it. They invest a Herculean amount of time and effort into finding solutions that work, one person and one family at a time.

At my organization, Better Together, a voluntary alternative to foster care in southwest Florida, we have built a deeply committed support system that includes people, churches, mentors, coaches, and other leaders of the community. We know from experience that when families enter a crisis, it's rarely "just one thing" that pushed them over the edge.

Like many local nonprofit organizations, our volunteers are ordinary people with extraordinary hearts. They provide temporary relief for children in their homes and offer parents everything from shoulders to rely on to job coaching to help with securing housing, seeking treatment, finding reliable child care, making household budgets, and more.

Those relationships grow over time, and a real community forms out of these experiences.

**News-Press.**

Now live 87%.

Cape Coral Sports Opinion Restaurants Obituaries E-Edition Legal

## Looking for work? Southwest Florida gets its first-ever major virtual job fair - plus free advance coaching

**Amy Bennett Williams** Fort Myers News-Press  
Published 6:02 a.m. ET, Apr. 27, 2020 | Updated 1:29 p.m. ET, Apr. 28, 2020

View Comments

## BETTER TOGETHER CHAPTER 2

### A heartbreaking decision is made

Collier plan clears hurdle



As his parents struggle to find stability and a home, Jack will remain with his host family

Jason and Megan, who made the decision to adopt their 1-year-old son, Jack, as a family, are not ready to reunite with their 1-year-old son, Jack, as a family. The decision is heartbreaking for the pair, but they believe it is the right one for Jack. Jack was born in Florida and was adopted by a family in North Carolina. The adoption was finalized in 2019.

**ELECTIONS 2020**  
US DISTRICT 13 CONGRESSIONAL RACE

Watch the District 13 Debate tonight

On Tuesday, September 22, 8pm-9pm, the candidates for the US District 13 Congressional Race will debate. The candidates are: Jason Williams, Megan Williams, and Tom Ichniowski.

Go to [www.us13debate.com](http://www.us13debate.com) for more information.

## Local mask orders to stay in place

Collier County's mask orders will remain in place. The county health department is monitoring the situation and will update orders as needed.



Collier County's mask orders will remain in place. The county health department is monitoring the situation and will update orders as needed.

## How mother got her Jack back

Better Together volunteers housed 1-year-old white who overcame obstacles before recent reunion

Jack's parents, Jason and Megan, are not ready to reunite with their 1-year-old son, Jack, as a family. The decision is heartbreaking for the pair, but they believe it is the right one for Jack. Jack was born in Florida and was adopted by a family in North Carolina. The adoption was finalized in 2019.

## October to bring new laws to Florida

Legislative session will start in October. The session will focus on various bills related to the economy and healthcare.



Legislative session will start in October. The session will focus on various bills related to the economy and healthcare.

## US House Democrats unveil virus aid plan

The House has passed a \$2 trillion relief package. The package includes funding for state and local governments, as well as direct payments to individuals.

**ELECTIONS 2020**  
US DISTRICT 13 CONGRESSIONAL RACE

Watch the District 13 Debate tonight

On Tuesday, September 22, 8pm-9pm, the candidates for the US District 13 Congressional Race will debate. The candidates are: Jason Williams, Megan Williams, and Tom Ichniowski.

Go to [www.us13debate.com](http://www.us13debate.com) for more information.

# DONOR SPOTLIGHT

## The Wyatt Family



“ Unemployment creates so many issues for a family. It reduces the amount of money you have, but it also creates family issues, substance issues, children issues, marriage issues. Things begin to deteriorate. That was all true before—but unemployment and reduced wages seen by average families during the pandemic have really accelerated this need. Now is the time to meet a lot of needs quickly. Better Jobs is simple, scalable, and works. We can't think of a program that gives the church the ability to serve those needs any better—or any quicker—at this moment than Better Together. ”

– Lee Wyatt

Lee and Jaci Wyatt support the Better Jobs program at every level.

Their growth investment has resulted in the training of **50 new churches** that have since connected **more than 4,000** people with immediate job openings. Whether it's serving on the board, making a gift, or greeting job seekers at a local job fair, the Wyatt's are committed to helping more people find work through Better Jobs than ever before.

**W**hen Lee and Jaci Wyatt first heard about Better Together at Covenant Church in Naples, they knew it was something different.

*“The Lord gave us a strong urging that we should get to know that organization better,” Lee says.* They began volunteering at job fairs and were blown away by the unique event atmosphere and potential for growth.

### Can you tell me about those job fairs and what you saw?

**Jaci:** I helped greet the people waiting in line out in the heat at Fort Meyers, and it was quite a thing. Outside they had free clothing, haircuts, makeup. Job coaches helped people get ready for the interview. When people entered the job fair, they were ready to go. Later, you’d hear the Opportunity Bell ring, and know someone got a job. It was very exciting.

**Lee:** It was an encouraging experience, unlike most job interviews. They can be pretty tough, especially if you’re not the most polished candidate, or your resume isn’t the strongest. In this ministry, everyone is welcomed and encouraged—sometimes people don’t get a job the first time, but as they build up confidence, with support from the local church, the second time around they get a job. It’s not just a one-and-done job fair.

### Why are you so passionate about growing the Better Jobs program?

**Lee:** It allows churches to be witnesses for their communities, and to show God’s love to needy people through helping people and families find jobs. I don’t know of any other programs that really allow the church to do that. The ministry is simple and scalable, and you can meet the needs of many people very fast. Even during the pandemic, adapting quickly from an in-person to a virtual job fair model allowed people to find work despite the limitations you had out there in the community. Churches are hungry for ways to help the community and show their love, and any church, small, medium, or large, can immediately bring a lot of resources with it. The model is compelling on many levels.

### What makes you most excited about the future of Better Jobs?

**Lee:** I think what’s most exciting is the number of people we can help, and at a time when it’s needed so much. The potential for growth is huge—once a church does one job fair, they can do two events a year, and the impact will only continue to grow, and get better.

**Jaci:** Better Together has really blossomed, and it’s not that old. So that’s really exciting when you see the numbers just keep growing. They set goals they can attain and hold, and stay together because of it.

**Lee:** When you’re around it, you sense the Lord is really blessing the ministry of Better Together. We’re very pleased and humbled to be a part of it.

# OUR BIG VISION

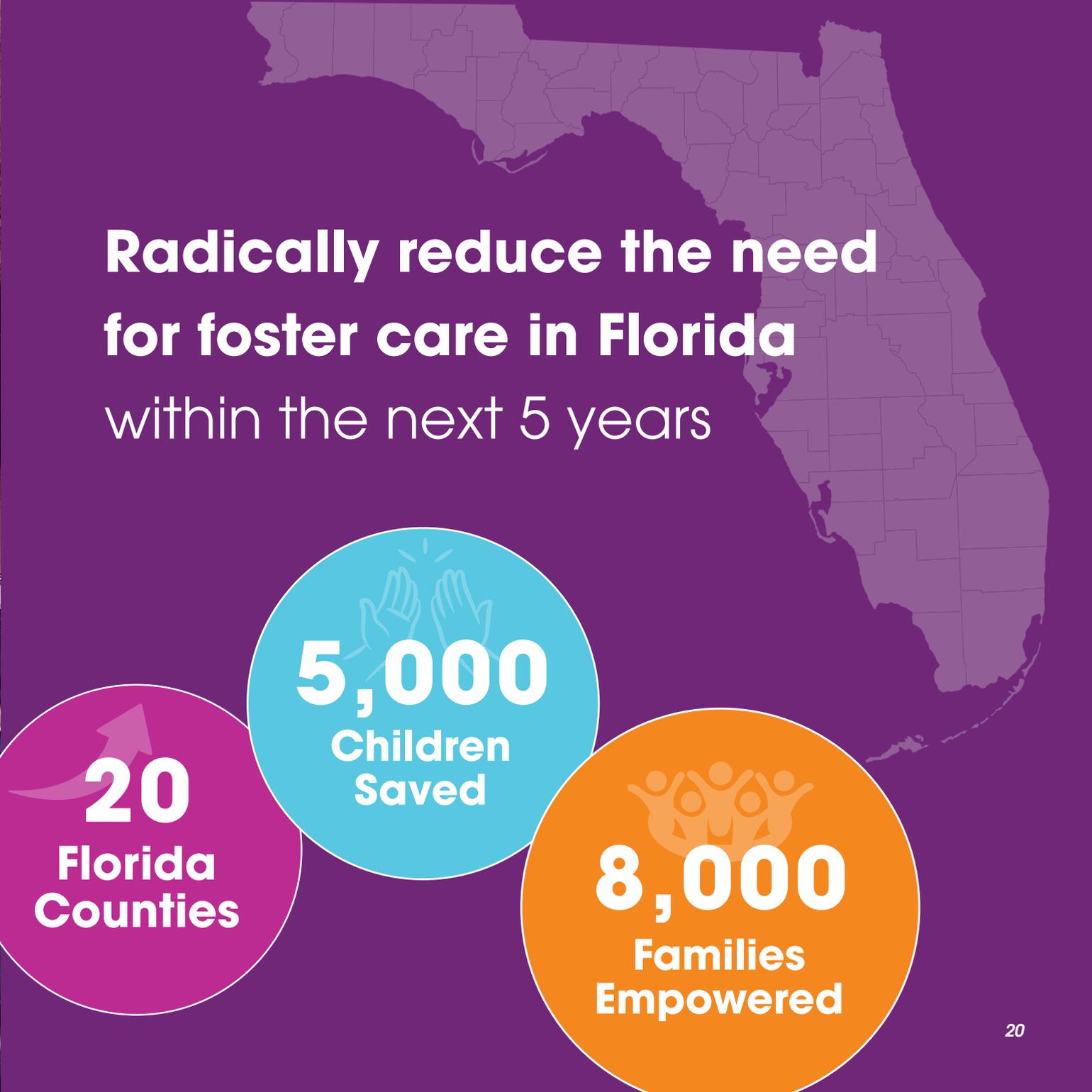
*Serve*  
**1 MILLION**  
Job  
Seekers

*Through*  
**1,000**  
Churches

*Over*  
The Next  
**5 YEARS**







**Radically reduce the need  
for foster care in Florida  
within the next 5 years**



**20**  
Florida  
Counties



**5,000**  
Children  
Saved



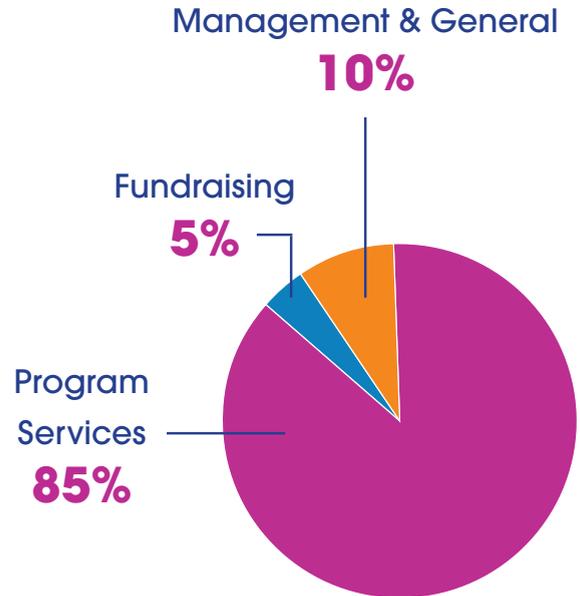
**8,000**  
Families  
Empowered

# FINANCIALS

## REVENUE

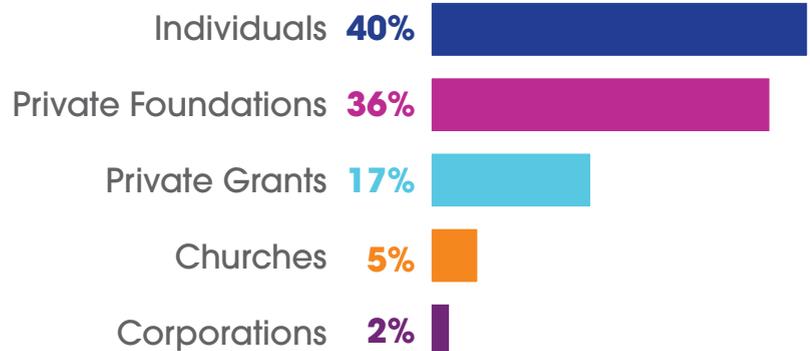


## SPENDING



## PARTNERS

Better Together's growth and impact are only possible because of our generous and passionate financial partners.



# DONORS' 2020 RETURN ON INVESTMENT

**828**

Children saved from foster care

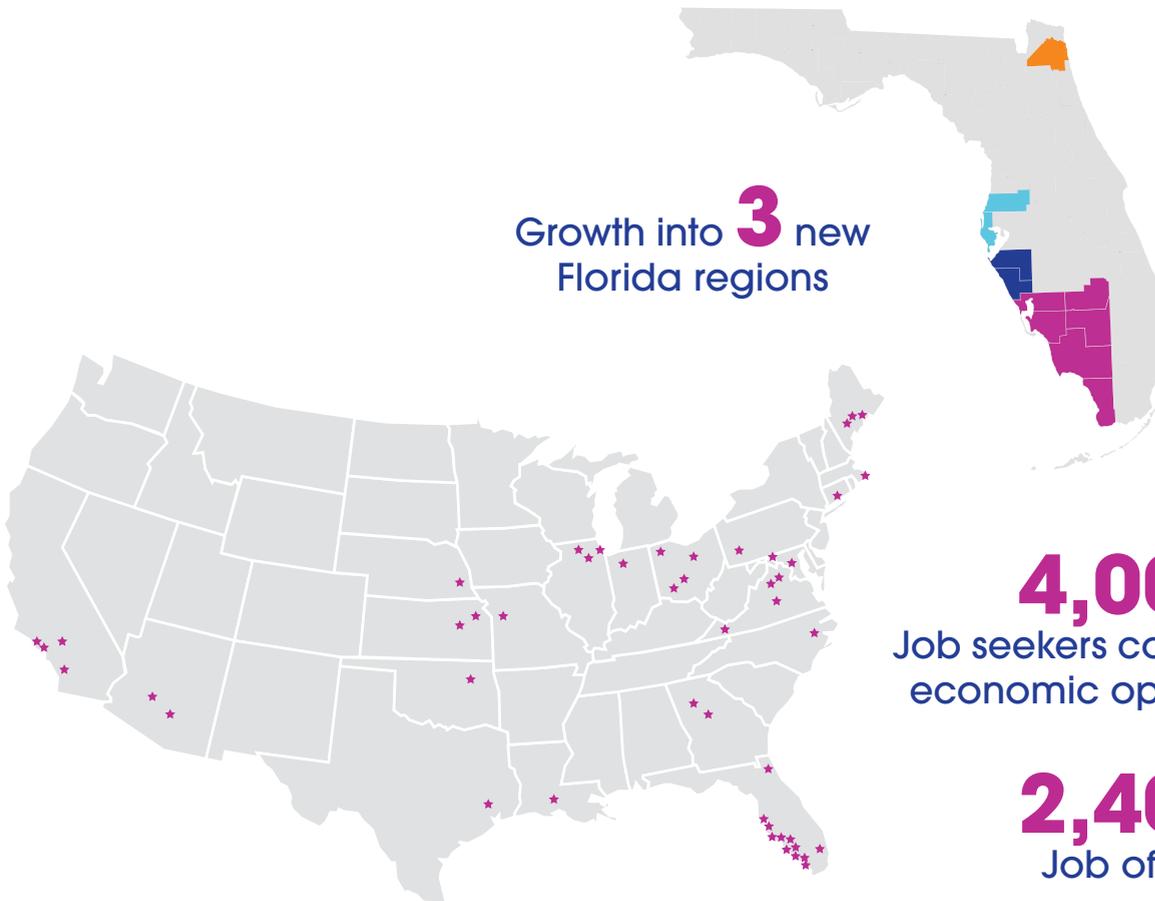
**1,200**

Families strengthened and supported

**98%**

Had no further DCF involvement

Growth into **3** new Florida regions



**4,000**

Job seekers connected to economic opportunities

**2,400**

Job offers



**Megan Rose**  
Chief Executive Officer

**Lora Bostick**  
Executive Assistant and  
Development Connector



**Isis LaRose**  
Director of Programs



**Tristan Starbird**  
Director of Development

“I moved my entire family across the country during a pandemic because I believe in this mission. We don’t just treat the symptoms, we help fix the family. That starts with the stability of a job, the safety net of the church and community support we build around our families, and our amazing team helping moms and dads set goals and lovingly hold them accountable to keep them on track for true transformation.”

# A team with talent and passion



**Paola Rendon**

Collier County Family Coordinator

“I believe we all deserve an opportunity to be better and do better. This organization sees people not for what situation they find themselves in, but for the potential in them. I love that we get to show people in a tangible way the love of God, with no expectations or strings attached.”

**Melissa Foster**

Engagement  
Director

**Brittnie**

**Steinmetz**

Lee County Family  
Coordinator

**Christy Sanchez**

Training Specialist

**Krista Shafer**

Bay Area Catalyst

**Vanessa Estrada**

Program Administrator



**Dawson Jordan**

Creative Director



**Gisela Weigel**

Better Jobs Project Manager

## EXECUTIVE BOARD

Chair of the Board  
**Tarren Bragdon**

Director  
**Lee Wyatt Jr**

Director  
**Dr. Alise Bartley**

Director  
**Doug Campbell**

Director  
**Christian Spilker**

# 2020

was a **BIG YEAR** for us,  
*but we believe ...*





# THE BEST IS YET TO COME.

Since 2015, Better Together has helped thousands of families and children avoid the need for foster care through the power of the local church.

**It's only the beginning of what we believe we can accomplish together.**

We are absolutely determined to see the day when the foster care crisis is over for good — when everyone, everywhere in America has access to economic opportunities, a healthy community, and can achieve the American Dream.

**We can't wait to celebrate that day with you.**



## HEADQUARTERS

15275 Collier Blvd • Suite 201-279  
Naples, FL 34119

[bettertogetherus.org](http://bettertogetherus.org)  
(850) 320-7949

