



Current Initiatives 2022

Greater Birmingham Community of Hope

In late 2020, Casey Family Programs, a national foundation working in 50 states to improve the lives of America's children, families and communities, began exploring the potential for deeper work in the Birmingham region. They saw in Jefferson County both challenges – the high rate of children going into foster care – and opportunities – the high capacity of organizations working to support children and families. Casey began a series of listening sessions to hear from local stakeholders and identify potential areas where they could be helpful. CFGB was invited to participate in these sessions. In Summer 2021, following the issue of a report on their findings, Casey made a commitment to working with partners in the region to build a Community of Hope. This model is a collaborative approach that Casey has implemented in other communities, focused on supporting and strengthening families and communities and preventing the need for more children to enter foster care (while continuing to improve foster care systems). Casey asked CFGB to join as fiscal sponsor and strategic partner to shape the Greater Birmingham Community of Hope and manage partnerships and funding that Casey would commit. In the latter half of 2021, CFGB worked with Casey, Clarus, the City of Birmingham, and the UAB evaluation team to begin shaping the partnership and building a local advisory group of organization leaders and people with lived experience of foster care systems. We also utilized CFGB's competitive grants process to identify proposals that fit the goals of the Community of Hope and to direct over \$65,000 in additional funding to these CFGB grantees from the Casey pool of funds. In 2022, CFGB took the lead on working with the advisory group to facilitate deeper planning for the Community of Hope. This partnership presents an opportunity for CFGB to co-create large scale, collaborative initiative with a highly regarded national foundation and local partners that will advance the goals of our Overcoming Persistent Poverty priority.

Microtransit

In December 2019, CFGB launched a pilot project in partnership with the City of Birmingham and Via called Birmingham On-Demand. It aimed to provide low cost (\$1.50/ride), highly responsive ridesharing service to communities in Western Birmingham, downtown, and UAB/Southside as a means to provide expanded transportation options and meet critical transportation needs. CFGB Catalyst Funds supported the pilot through a \$500,000 grant. Based on the success of the pilot, despite significant COVID-related budget cuts, the city of Birmingham approved FY21 funding to sustain the service at the same level, and continued that service into FY22. As of January 2022, Birmingham On-Demand has logged over 60,000 rides, maintained a 10 minute average wait time with 90% on time pickups, and is extremely popular with a steady 4.86 out of 5 average user rating. Top destinations include grocery stores, health care centers, and the intermodal facility (linking to fixed transit). Over half the riders use the service to commute to work, and 1 in 3 use the service for health care or grocery store visits. It is also serving those who most need it. 7 in 10 riders have an income below \$50,000/year, and 1 in 5 riders have a disability. CFGB is currently helping explore future expansion of microtransit in the region by facilitating meetings with municipal leaders and key agencies interested in more flexible, responsive transit options. With the BJCTA under new leadership and a new strategic plan that incorporates microtransit, and with growing interest across the region in microtransit (see Regional Cooperation below), there is some positive momentum to build on.



Regional Cooperation

In 2016, CFGB (with Catalyst Donor support) made a significant grant to the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) to conduct an intensive study on regional cooperation. With 35 municipalities in Jefferson County and 89 in the seven-county metro-area, the region is a patchwork quilt of jurisdictions. Our metropolitan area has fallen behind regional rivals in areas such as economic, employment and population growth, in part because we lack unifying political or cooperative structures. The study and report (*Together We Can*), launched in June 2017, provided rigorous analysis of our current situation, the collaborative models other cities have employed, and the pros and cons of greater cooperation. It presented community leaders with sound information on which to evaluate possible alternatives for enhancing our region's economic prosperity. After the release of the report, Community Foundation staff has made presentations to 40 organizations representing over 2000 civic and community leaders, met with almost all regional government officials, and reached over 7,500 people through the Together We Prosper website. In 2018, CFGB moved from dissemination and discussion to planning and action. We engaged elected officials to begin building a framework for cooperation and engaged more than 40 area leaders to serve on our Champions Council and provide strategic support to regional cooperation efforts.

In late 2018, CFGB helped bring mayors in the Jefferson County Mayors Association together to shape a regional cooperation agenda. In 2019, CFGB supported the work of mayor-led committees in addressing two initial priorities for cooperation: a countywide no-poaching pledge (signed in 2019 by 23 mayors and adopted in 2021 by the full Mayors Association) and consolidated 911 services. At the next 'deep dive' in January 2020, the mayors identified four issues for their 2020 cooperation agenda: consolidation of jails, human trafficking ordinances, vaping ordinances, and Census participation. CFGB and the Jefferson County Mayors Association co-funded a PARCA study on jail consolidation; they are currently working together to advance recommendations in that study. At the May 2021 'deep dive', the Mayors identified improved ambulance service and consolidated trash/recycling services as priorities, leading to further expansion of the Cahaba Solid Waste Authority to seven member municipalities. The Mayors Association has adopted the concept of an annual deep dive to set cooperation priorities and, since 2021, has initiated that process on its own.

More recently, CFGB has had opportunities to partner with a group of city councilors on regional cooperation. In 2020, Jefferson County Commissioner Steve Ammons and the Jefferson Co. Councilors Coalition, an emerging cooperative group of city councilors from cities across the county, invited CFGB to help them grow the coalition and plan. Over the next year and a half, CFGB worked with the Coalition to formalize its mission, vision, and values, coordinate with the Mayors Association, expand to 13 member cities, and hold its own deep dive session. In December 2021, with facilitation by CFGB, the Coalition identified trails expansion and transportation (including expanding microtransit) as its two priorities for collaborative action.

Inclusive Economic Growth

As Economic Opportunity for All was emerging as one of our five strategic priorities, the Foundation began stepping up to leadership roles in this space. Over the past five years, our work has centered on three interrelated efforts:

- In 2017, CFGB co-commissioned a study by Burning Glass Technologies that analyzed workforce readiness and current and potential employment sectors, leading to a data-driven regional workforce alignment strategy launched in 2019 by a broad coalition of partners.
- In 2019, the City of Birmingham engaged the Brookings Institution to research a set of goals and strategies that would move Birmingham beyond its stagnant economic growth and extreme racial disparities. In January 2020, Brookings and the city asked CFGB to facilitate the design phase of the inclusive economic growth strategy, called Prosper Birmingham. CFGB made a \$100,000 grant from Catalyst Funds to support this work. Later in 2020, CFGB took a lead in facilitating planning for the Job Access leg of this work, and President Chris Nanni joined the Prosper Board to help guide Prosper as it completed its multi-pronged strategy and prepared for implementation.
- In 2019, a group of Catalyst Fellows began working with CFGB staff to explore the potential for a fund that would provide patient, flexible capital and technical assistance to meet the needs of small, minority-owned businesses. CFGB engaged Rockefeller Philanthropy Partners as a consultant in early 2020 to conduct research and interviews and begin to shape a plan to advance this idea. In late 2020, based on the final plan and proposal, the Catalyst Fund donors recommended and the Board approved an unprecedented \$1.5 million allocation to establish the Small Business Impact Fund. In early 2021, CFGB convened an Impact Advisory Committee of local and regional leaders (including four CFGB Board members) to flesh out the parameters of a Small Business Impact Grant (SBIG) program that would help CDFIs and other community lenders fill gaps for small, underserved businesses with innovative capital and technical assistance. In Summer 2021, six lending organizations received a total of \$1.155 million in SBIG grants. As of January 2022, we were already seeing positive impacts on small business supports and the businesses themselves. For example, Sabre Finance was able to use the SBIG grant to leverage \$2.5M in Small Business Administration capital and has made 10 loans totaling over \$300K since the grant was awarded.

Mental Health

According to the CDC, Alabama and all but one of the Birmingham metro counties have higher rates of suicide and poor mental health than the nation as a whole. In the local Community Health Improvement Plan process, mental health consistently ranks among the top public health priorities. In 2015, recognizing mental health as a crisis-level issue, the Foundation made a commitment to play strong leadership role in this space. Our work since then has focused on two major legs of the initiative:

- Building Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: In 2015, CFGB became the backbone organization for the Health Action Partnership's Mental Health Priority Group, which aims to expand access to mental health services. Over the course of two years, the group researched children's mental health systems, engaged a national expert in school mental health, and

worked with four local school districts (Tarrant City, Blount County, Homewood City, and Pell City) to develop a collaborative plan around mental health supports for students. In 2018, all this preparation and planning culminated in the launch of this unprecedented partnership between four school districts to address student mental health needs through enhanced training, assessment and mental health services. The first full school year evaluation was completed in Fall 2019, with strong results. In 2020, we engaged three additional districts (Birmingham, Fairfield, and Alabaster City Schools) to explore how to expand the model beyond the pilot. The 2020 COVID crisis disrupted both the program's implementation and most aspects of education and student support in these districts. We have since been working with school systems and mental health providers to help pivot and meet the growing and changing mental health needs during the crisis, while continuing to work on long-term structural changes locally and statewide to improve support for children's mental health. This includes revisiting some earlier work on establishing school-based health centers with a mental health component.

- St. Vincent's Collaborative Care Clinic: Since 2015, CFGB has partnered with St. Vincent's Health System to implement an integrated care model (linking mental health and primary care) at two local primary care clinics. This model is associated with improved mental health outcomes and lower mean health care costs. A 2018 review of this pilot project was promising, finding that over 2/3 of patients showed significant improvement in depression and/or anxiety. St. Vincent's has faced challenges making the model self-sustaining due to limits on both public and private mental health insurance coverage for adults in Alabama. CFGB provided small grants in 2019 and 2020 for St. Vincent's to engage a national expert to help troubleshoot these issues. St. Vincent's has since made some major steps forward in addressing insurance reimbursement structures and implementing sustainability strategies.
- Evolving Needs, New Opportunities: In Summer 2021, with support from several local funders, CFGB hired Robin Sparks as a part-time Mental Health Initiative Director. Robin previously served as Executive Director of the Anne B. LaRussa Foundation of Hope, where she was involved in launching major mental health initiatives like the Psychiatric Intake Response Center (PIRC) at Children's Hospital. Since her hire, Robin has been working with mental health partners through the Mental Health Priority Group and Mental Health Roundtable to assess evolving mental health needs in the community and new areas for collaborative action. She is working on an updated mental health plan, to be completed February 2022. Since she started at CFGB, Robin also helped shepherd the process of bringing a Mental Health Crisis Diversion Center and over \$6M in state funding to Birmingham. CFGB provided a lead matching grant for this application and helped support a strong proposal and advocacy effort for the center to be placed in Birmingham, expanding access locally to crisis mental health resources.

Summer Adventures in Learning (SAIL)

Summer learning loss (the 'summer slide') is the primary cause of the cumulative academic performance gap for low-income students. CFGB is part of the SAIL funder collaborative that supports summer learning opportunities in the Birmingham region. Since 2014, CFGB has focused all its SAIL funding in the summer program in Tarrant, an urban school system northeast of Birmingham where 95.4% of the students receive free/reduced meals. This small system has allowed us to pursue a longitudinal analysis



of how summer programming impacts a child’s readiness for the next school year. The data over the past five years has shown that: students that started at the lowest performance level showed the most gains; students that participate in two or more programs (summer or afterschool) show greater gains; student scores have trended upward as the program has matured. Relative to the highest performing SAIL programs, the Tarrant program’s outcomes have been inconsistent; therefore, Tarrant shifted in 2018 to the tested Power Scholars curriculum, resulting in solid gains in both reading and math. In 2019, we expanded our focus to encompass three other high-performing programs and commissioned a study to look more closely at factors contributing to SAIL program success. The results of that study have informed our subsequent investments, continuing with a broader set of grantees and building a peer learning community between programs. In 2022, we are evaluating our approach to SAIL and whether to continue it as an initiative or transition to more of an ongoing component of our grantmaking.

Recently Completed Initiatives

Census Complete Count

The U.S. Constitution requires a national Census - a count of our country’s population and households – every ten years. The resulting data is essential to ensure a fair distribution of over \$675 billion in federal funds, the assignment of congressional seats, legislative redistricting and allocation of resources. The funds that power vital programs impacting housing, education, transportation, employment, health care and public policy depend on this process. In 2010, Alabama failed to count over 100,000 households. Alabama has had a low census response rate historically and was at risk of an undercount in 2020 that could translate into losing a congressional seat and up to \$1.6 billion federal dollars.

In November 2018, the Census Equity Fund released a Request for Proposals for grants to support outreach and education initiatives aimed at counting *Hard-to-Count* (HTC) populations (African Americans, low-income families, Latinos, families with children under the age of 5, renters, and foreign-born individuals) in prioritized states, including Alabama. CFGB took a lead role along with Alabama Giving and jHICA! to convene a group of organizations across the state to develop the *Alabama Count Collaborative Plan*. This core group - including The Black Belt Community Foundation, Voices for Alabama’s Children, Alabama Community Action Agencies, Greater Birmingham Ministries, and ACIJ - formed the Collaborative and is coordinating with state and local Complete Count Committees to enhance their efforts. The focus of this effort was to develop culturally specific messaging to reach the HTC communities and to ensure that HTC households, particularly communities of color, low-income families, immigrants, children under 5, and renters in Alabama are counted in the 2020 Census. In December 2018, the Collaborative submitted a proposal requesting \$250,000 from the Census Equity Fund, which requires a 1-to-1 match of local funds. In January 2019, the Collaborative received notification that the proposal was approved for \$200,000 in funding. The Community Foundation committed \$105,000 in matching funds; other Alabama funders have to date committed another \$350,000. Throughout 2019 and the 2020 Census year, the Collaborative made strong headway in carrying out its plan; the Foundation has provided strategic support and leadership in this effort, helping to adjust strategy as conditions on the ground and parallel state funding have come into play.



Thanks in large part to the efforts of the HTC Collaborative, Alabama improved on its 2010 count of hard-to-count populations, and Alabama's had a strong Census count as a whole. The state was able to beat the odds and retain all seven congressional seats and avoid losing substantial federal funding over the next ten years.

Payday Lending Reform

In 2003, the Alabama legislature carved out a special exception to the Small Loan Act for certain types of loans. As a result, today Alabama has the second highest concentration per capita of payday lending businesses in the nation. In Alabama, payday lenders are allowed to charge 456% interest APR on loans up to \$500, and auto title lenders can charge 300% APR on loans secured by the borrower's car. Predatory lenders are disproportionately concentrated in low-income communities that lack access to traditional financial services, and offer quick sources of cash as a way to seemingly bridge a short-term cash crunch. However, studies show that customers often take out repeated loans and get trapped in a prolonged cycle of debt as they try to pay off the original loan and its high fees. The average borrower remains indebted for 212 days, renewing the loan 8 times.

Since 2015, CFGB has been involved in advocating for payday lending reform at the legislative level through a statewide, bipartisan, grass-roots coalition and substantial proactive funding. The coalition made some progress in the legislative process each year, but ultimately all efforts have been stymied by strong, well-funded response from the payday loan lobby. In 2019, CFGB and partners pursued a legislative strategy focused on changing the minimum repayment period to 30 days, effectively halving the annual interest rate. The bill passed the Senate and had strong momentum going into the House, but was stalled when it was not brought up by the committee chair for a public hearing. Due to COVID-19, the 2020 session was abbreviated and only a limited number of bills and budgets were passed, which hampered efforts at advancing a payday lending reform bill. In late 2020, CFGB stepped back from an initiative-level focus on payday lending reform, but continues to be engaged with the coalition and is open to reactivating if there is potential for meaningful change.

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