

Georgia Rural Library Initiative – Case Study

Overview and Beginnings

In 2003, an anonymous donor who attributed much of his entrepreneurial business success to his love of reading and learning approached the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. His desire was to make a positive impact on the literacy of young children in rural areas across Georgia. This donor had fond memories of reading at the library and getting books from the bookmobile in his small town. As a wise businessman, he also was intrigued by research showing better outcomes for children who are able to read at a third-grade level by third grade. The research indicates there is a demonstrated great return on investment for any community that invests in early childhood literacy. The book “The 90% Reading Goal” by Lynn Fielding, Nancy Kerr and Paul Rosier, describes how a county in the state of Washington worked collaboratively to achieve 90% of third graders reading at or above grade level. The donor wanted to enhance the availability of early childhood learning resources in rural communities primarily through existing public libraries and provide opportunities for children to have access to books at school, home and in the community, including a bookmobile, so they could be reading at or above a third-grade level by the third grade.

A Community Foundation philanthropic advisor, Phillip Rush, met with the donor to better understand his desired outcomes and intended investment. Phillip had recently worked with a nonprofit consultant on the Georgia Center for Nonprofits (GCN) affiliate list who had experience in developing strategic partnerships and who had worked with a grassroots organization whose mission is to promote early childhood literacy. The consultant facilitated collaborative meetings including the donor, the Community Foundation, literacy nonprofits, community leaders involved in childhood literacy and the library system.

All of these stakeholders collectively agreed on the primary purpose of what became the Georgia Rural Library Initiative (GRLI): to support each local partnership in coordinating existing public and private resources and explore additional resources to enhance early childhood reading in each rural Georgia county. GRLI was designed to serve children of all ages with a focus on children under third grade. The desired outcomes were for all children to be prepared to read and learn by kindergarten; for parents and community members in each county to be more involved in reading to children at an early age; for children to be reading at grade level by third grade; and for there to be enhanced reading resources at the county public library and public-school system to encourage early childhood reading and parental involvement. Each county awarded the grant would receive \$140,000 over a 10-year period, along with a \$100,000 scholarship program (see appendix A). The GRLI counties used these funds to improve their library (initially focusing on children’s and juveniles’ sections; expand the hours of operation of their library, expand and improve story time and summertime reading programs; develop small age-appropriate libraries in schools, day care centers and churches; promote and educate members of the community on the importance of childhood reading; and provide scholarships for college students interested in becoming teachers.

The First Foundation for Childhood Literacy served as the fiduciary agent for GRLI. And GRLI utilized the existing Community Action Teams (CATs) in each GRLI county to serve as ‘infrastructure’ to make local decisions and implement GRLI in their county. GRLI was able to avoid spending time and expense to develop a new local nonprofit, including the structure and infrastructure to implement the program. These CATs were comprised of local volunteers with strong interest in improving childhood literacy and education. The Community Foundation also funded a consultant to provide technical assistance in leveraging their CAT to meet their GRLI goals.

Morgan County was the first GRLI county. At the time the County Commissioners seemed to be primarily focused on economic development, including developing new roads, and wanted to reduce and possibly eliminate funding for the library. Initially funds were used for developing a child-focused children's section in the library with expanded age-appropriate books and materials, along with ongoing and regular child reading events at the library, including storytelling. GRLI also worked with an adult literacy program to teach parents the importance of reading to their children and how to do so. These activities targeting parents were conducted during the same time as the children's workshops and included a meal, to provide support for families with children at risk of falling behind in reading. In Morgan County, they also leveraged GRLI funds along with local funds to conduct a community marketing and outreach campaign to make literacy, especially early childhood literacy, a priority of policy and action in the county. Many acknowledge this effort led to a change in county leadership to commissioners whose top priority was literacy and education. The Morgan County CAT used their matching local grant funds, along with more extensive community outreach, to register nearly all children aged 0 to 5 years into the First Foundation program that delivers age-appropriate books along with parental instruction each month. The program helps support families in Morgan County to advocate for more local resources for library and literacy initiatives with their local county leadership. Morgan County community leaders also expressed their belief that this initial GRLI support led to a \$750,000 Federal Comprehensive Literacy for Striving Readers grant for school readiness work for children aged birth to 5 years. Each year after, counties were required to fill out a competitive application to be awarded the grant program, which included a commitment to the 3 to 1 local matching funding (for every \$3 from GRLI funds, the county was to match \$1.) Hancock County was awarded the grant in 2005, Butts in 2006, Putnam in 2007 and Seminole in 2008.

In all but one community, Hancock, the local community leaders were able to more than meet the 3 to 1 funding match. At the time, Hancock was one of the poorest counties in the state; the prison and government were the top provider of jobs. The economic condition was so bad that at one point both the County and Sparta City government owed the library a large sum of funds. Despite these conditions, which did not improve much during GRLI, local leaders were close to meeting the grant's matching funding obligation, keeping the library open and operating with child-friendly facilities and events, and continuing the First Foundation book program and libraries in day care centers and churches.

In addition to GRLI grant funds, an annual scholarship was also awarded to the participating GRLI communities for residents seeking an education degree to teach in a rural Georgia community. Each county CAT was given a great amount of flexibility in selecting the award amount and scholarship recipients. In our experience, with the increasing pressure on school leadership to improve testing scores, it can be challenging to introduce new programs to schools, including scholarship programs. Two counties (Hancock and Butts) did not have an adequate number of students who met the requirements. Despite these challenges, each GRLI county worked to establish a good relationship with the principal and guidance counselor in their county high school. The result was that \$303,204.60 out of the total available of \$500,000 were awarded to 78 students. Counties that were the most successful at awarding scholarships conducted regular outreach and marketing, had a well-established relationship with both the principal and guidance counselor and had someone from the school system on the local CAT.

Outcomes and Impact

During a period when libraries experienced declines in circulation and big cuts in both state and local funding, GRLI counties' overall circulation numbers did not decrease at the same rate as the rest of the state, and some experienced increased circulation. Additionally, juvenile circulation and attendance at summer programs and children's events increased during the initiative. Each librarian believes GRLI funded improvements to the children's sections, increased children's books and reading material, and children-focused events and summer programs, were the main reasons for this increased juvenile attendance and circulation. Also, during a period of declining local and state funding for libraries all GRLI counties, except Hancock realized received increases in local library and/or literacy funding. Hancock was successful in getting a good portion of the funds that both the city and county owed the library and the Uncle Remus Regional Library System. Each county also experienced an increase in distribution of library cards and participation by children at the library's events. Additional desired short-term outcomes included increased library resources, including increased children's book collection/circulation, increased child-focused programs at the libraries, achievement of the matching grant requirement, increased number of children that received Ferst Foundation child-appropriate books in their homes on a monthly basis, increased number of parents reading to their child at an early age, and, in some counties, increased number of new library cards. With cuts in state funding for libraries, all county libraries experienced decreased budget for children's books and programming. From the support of the grant, each GRLI county library was able to create a dedicated child-appropriate and -friendly space in the library and an increase in children's and juvenile collections by at least 10%. Each county was able to continue the summer reading program with increased participation and conduct at least six children's workshops per year at the library and/or other community centers (all experiencing at least 10% increase in participation in these events promoting early childhood literacy.) Often each county would include free lunch or dinner and a workshop for the parents to enhance their literacy skills and ability to read to their children; resulting in greater attendance, especially for the most at risk-families (some counties even provided transportation from HeadStart government housing). Each county was also successful in creating small libraries in the more rural parts of the community in places like public health departments, churches, preschools and pediatricians' offices. Similar to overall circulation numbers, most county libraries in the state experienced decreases in the number of new library cards distributed; however, each GRLI county experienced an increase in the new library cards. Each GRLI librarian feels these outcomes led to increases in circulation during a time when people were visiting libraries less. Through broad community outreach and partnerships with public health, each county achieved its goal of the percentage of children registered and receiving the Ferst Foundation books – on average 50.4%. In research conducted by and for the Ferst Foundation, 80% of the parents whose children received the Ferst Foundation books reported regularly reading to their child (from birth). Currently, 2,374 families are served by Ferst Foundation (and well over 5,000 were served during the grant period) so these rural households (which traditionally do not have age-appropriate books in their homes) are receiving age-appropriate books. And from research conducted for FFCL, 80% (1,878) families are regularly reading to their children at an early age.

Longer-term desired outcomes included more children ready for kindergarten, more children reading at third-grade level in the third grade, improved testing scores (CRCT was the Georgia state test when project started, now it is Georgia Milestones), an increased high school graduation rate, and scholarship recipients teaching in rural communities. Starting in 2012, Morgan County completed an additional evaluation that other GRLI counties did not to research school readiness of kindergarteners via DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). According to DIBELS scores, students ready for school increased from 65% in

2012 to 90% in 2016. The average percentage of students reading at a third-grade level in the third grade when each county started the program was 27%, with Morgan being the highest at 40%. By 2013, the average improved to 46.2%, just below the state average of 51%. The most recent data shows an average of 29.1%. Surprisingly, Hancock data shows 3.2%; and we are unable to determine why this drastic decrease after years of improvement. Taking Hancock out of the equation, the average is 35.6%. The state average is 36.4%. Average graduation rate for GRLI counties improved from 74.80% in 2009 to most current average of 91.7% (in 2017) compared to the Georgia state average of 85.8%. An additional component of GRLI was the scholarship program, for which the local CAT was given the authority to implement. The result was that \$303,204.60 out the \$500,000 total available were awarded to 78 students.

Despite the challenge of conducting the parent-dedicated workshops initially planned, several counties were successful in building parental involvement by working collaboratively with existing community events and organizations. The librarians strongly feel that at-risk and economically disadvantaged families better understand the importance of literacy and more are reading to their children and visiting the library. We were able to follow-up directly with 49 of the 79 students who received GRLI scholarships. Even though the scholarship program was more challenging than anticipated to implement, 35 these 49 students (71%) are now teachers and five are still in school. And even though recipients were not required to come back to their county to teach, most did return. Carolyn Spreight, scholarship recipient from Seminole county stated, "As a recipient of the GRLI Grant, I was able to fulfill my philosophy of education, which stated; "As a teacher, I would like to demonstrate by example that learning is a life-long process that can be an exciting adventure."

Research conducted proved these efforts combined with the additional work in preparing children for kindergarten, including Ferst Foundation, resulted in greatly improved readiness of the Morgan County children who participated, versus children who did not attend or attended a program outside of the county. The local program produced 32% more children who were ready (78% v 46%) for literacy instruction at Morgan County Primary School. GRLI efforts also led to literacy becoming a key priority in Putnam with an increase in local government funding for the library, including for extensive facilities improvement (when county leadership observed the improvements made to the children's section, they became committed to improving the entire library). Enhanced reading resources and facilities at the County Public Library and Public-School System to encourage early childhood reading and parental involvement.

Overall, by supporting and providing technical assistance to local community organizations and assets, and improved collaboration among these community assets; while infusing GRLI counties with relatively modest financial resources (and a 3-to-1 matching requirement), the desired short-term and long-term outcomes were achieved. And according to those involved and served, and limited research, GRLI was wise investment in these rural counties.

APPENDIX A: GEORGIA RURAL LIBRARY AND LITERACY INITIATIVE (GRLI) OVERVIEW

Partnership Purpose - Mission

- The primary purpose of each local partnership is to coordinate existing public and private resources and explore additional resources to enhance early childhood reading in each rural Georgia county.

Who is Served

- Children of all ages with a focus on children third grade or younger.

Desired Outcomes

- All children are prepared to read and learn by kindergarten.
- Parents and community members are more involved in reading to children in each county at an early age.
- Children are targeted to read at grade level by third grade.
- Enhanced reading resources and facilities at the County Public Library and Public School System to encourage early childhood reading and parental involvement.

Available Funds

- The GRLI funding timeline is as follows:

Year 1	\$25,000 (no matching required for the first year)
Year 2	\$20,000 (matching requirement)
Year 3	\$15,000 (matching requirement)
Year 4	\$10,000 (matching requirement)
Year 5	\$5,000 (matching requirement)
Year 6	\$5,000 (matching requirement)
Year 7	\$5,000 (matching requirement)
Year 8	\$5,000 (matching requirement)
Year 9	\$5,000 (matching requirement)
Year 10	\$5,000 (matching requirement)

- Funds may also be available for additional projects not included in the GRLI plan. Please contact The Community Foundation or Ferst Foundation for further information.
- All participants to get a copy of “The 90% Reading Goal” by Lynn Fielding, Nancy Kerr Paul Rosier, which describes how a county in Washington state worked collaboratively to achieve 90% of third graders reading at grade level.

Annual scholarship

- In addition to GRLI grant funds, an annual scholarship component is also awarded to the participating GRLI community for local residents seeking a degree in education to teach in a rural Georgia community. Details regarding the \$100,000 multi-year funding designated for the scholarship program will be provided to the awarded community.

What could the GRLI grant proceeds be used for (examples of what other counties have done):

- Library improvements to enhance children’s attendance and enjoyment: murals, posters, carpets, stuffed animals, shelving, bean bags, lighting and other incentives to visit the library.
- Early childhood reading resources: accelerated reading, early reader and juvenile books collections, read-along book and cassette tapes.
- Develop small age-appropriate libraries in day care centers, school classrooms, public offices, etc.
- Computer stations with an emphasis on childhood usage, including hardware, software, desks, internet access, etc.
- Enhancements and expansion of Storytime and Summer Reading programs, including storytellers, refreshments, incentives, transportation, etc.
- Expand hours of operation for the library, including salaries.
- Workshops to enhance parents’ education and involvement in early childhood reading
- Promotion/marketing for: library and library enhancements, scholarship program parent workshops, Ferst Foundation, the importance of early childhood reading, etc. (includes flyers, posters, ads, newsletters, etc.)
- Registration events/activities to increase Ferst Foundation penetration.

APPENDIX B OUTCOMES

Short term outcomes

County	Circulation 2013	Circulation 2014¹	Change
Morgan	62,138	21,922	
Hancock	25,717	12,997	
Butts	47,387	45,517	-3.9%
Putnam	44,268	16,273	
Seminole	39,083	42,822	9.6%
Georgia	16,637,412	15,997,816	-3.8%

Ferst Readers Outcomes and Graduation Rate

	FFCL Registration 2013	FFCL Registration 2016	FFCL Registration 2018	% of Children Served	Grad rate 2009	Grad rate 2017
Butts County	379	270	256	19%	74.80%	84.40%
Hancock County	166	135	98	24%	65.80%	95.20%
Morgan County	735	832	955	99%	79.50%	91.80%
Putnam County	567	639	846	65%	79.60%	90.70%
Seminole County	223	203	219	45%	74.30%	96.40%
Total in program	25,649		40,694	Avg= 50.4	Avg - 74.8	Avg 91.7

¹ Circulation for Morgan, Hancock and Putnam are for 6 months only, we will update these figures in July.



Appendix D: Long-Term Outcomes - Initial Starting Year and Most Recent Data

	On Level 3rd Grade Reading			High School Graduation			Improved CRCT Scores	
	Initial Year	Last Benchmark	Most Current	Initial Year	Last Benchmark	Most Current	Initial Year	Last Benchmark
Morgan	2004	2013	2017	2005-2009	2008-2012	2012-2016	2004	2013
	40%	58%	42.90%	79.50%	80%	83.40%	82%	94%
Hancock	2005	2013	2017	2005-2009	2008-2012	2012-2016	2005	2013
	27%	21%	3.20%	65.80%	74.80%	72.90%	58%	71%
Butts	2006	2013	2017	2005-2009	2008-2012	2012-2016	2006	2013
	21%	48%	29.50%	74.80%	76.20%	77.20%	84%	87%
Putnam	2007	2013	2017	2005-2009	2008-2012	2012-2016	2007	2013
	23%	55%	31.10%	79.60%	82%	84.10%	79%	91%
Seminole	2008	2013	2017	2005-2009	2008-2012	2012-2016	2008	2013
	24%	49%	38.70%	74.30%	80%	82.10%	82%	95%
Georgia	2004	2013	2017	2005-2009	2008-2012	2012-2016	2004	2013
	44%	51%	36.40%	82.90%	84.40%	85.80%	73%	88%

APPENDIX C: BEST PRACTICES

Treating the CAT as similar to a nonprofit board has been effective in many ways, including the use of several committees, use of additional volunteers not on the CAT to aid with these committees, and proactive annual recruitment to bring in new members. There appears to be success in recruiting individuals involved in education, such as teachers, principals and superintendents, along with business and other community leadership. Often the CATs put a lot of effort into recruiting high profile and/or affluent members of the community. Even though this can be helpful in fundraising, ensuring the CATs recruit those with strong passion for the cause (and willingness to work more) is more important in recruitment, especially in the beginning years of the program. After years of implementation, a combination of the two types of members is beneficial. With GRLI, the CATs are also able to recruit those supportive of the library - in a couple of the counties the Board of Advisors for the Library and the CAT are comprised of the same people/coalition.

Diversifying funding streams, including individual giving, allows a CAT to not be overly reliant on one funding source - similar to an effective, well-established nonprofit. Traditionally, CATs will put a lot of effort into getting a large grant and/or contribution. However, this is not an effective long-term strategy. Obtaining smaller amounts of funding from a lot of individuals to meet the 3 -to-1 match is more effective and these individual donors are more likely, with continued relationship building and recognition, to give annually. Several of the counties have found it easier to "sell a family" and not the organization - that is to say, donors are more likely to give \$36 to sponsor a family than to give \$36 to the Ferst Foundation. Some counties have found special events (when working with other organizations) to be effective but challenging to continue successfully year after year. Morgan County has been successful with the Ferst 50 program which is essentially an effective individual giving campaign that involves many donors and includes a special event to recognize those involved.

Partnering with organizations that either support literacy or serve at-risk families with newborns is an effective strategy. It works well, especially in outreach efforts, including registration drives and parent workshops. Conducting outreach by going to where the people are and being a part of a recognized, well-attended community event is also effective.

Utilizing quality performers for events at the library seems to make a big difference in attendance for these events. Some of the counties have used the GRLI funding to become the center of the community for families with young children.

Offering small incentives or gifts to boost attendance and/or reading, including participation in the vacation reading program seems to be effective.

APPENDIX D: ASSESSMENT SURVEY SUMMARY

Summary of survey responses of primary contacts in GRLI counties in a final assessment:

How has the library improved as a result of Georgia Rural Library Initiative (GRLI) funding and support?

- We have been able to buy books and provide storytellers to our patrons that we would not have been able to afford otherwise. These have been a big asset to our patrons.
- The Library has completely renovated the Children's Area and added hundreds of new children's books. The new children's area is welcoming and features multiple tables & desks for studying, comfortable chairs for reading, stuffed dinosaurs for snuggling and cute, kid-friendly carpeting. GRLI also allowed the Library to make the most of Summer Reading. The funds allowed us to hire a variety of performs to entertain kids and encourage them to read. Average attendance at these summer shows was 180 people. Finally, GRLI allowed the Library to bring in a professional storyteller once a month during the school year for Pre-School storytime. About 360 kids attended this show each month.
- The Georgia Rural Library Initiative has allowed our local library to reopen to its normal business hours due to budget counts and has improved the technology used by patrons.
- The library has definitely improved as a result of the GRLI.
- The library's visibility in each community is greatly enhanced as is the awareness by community leaders as to the importance of the library to their citizenship and economic well-being. Seeing that others outside of their own small towns are willing to invest large amounts of time and energy in improving literacy has led to engagement by larger teams who have worked together to grow.
- The children's section improved greatly with the addition of the GRLI. As a result of the improvement, more adults became engaged in the library as well. In the middle of the GRLI, our library was able to build a new building instead of remodeling. Now we have a completely new and improved library in our community, but I truly feel we wouldn't have received the community support for the new library had it not been for the GRLI.
- Increased the number of books in the collection, added read-along books & cassettes, combined old meeting rooms to allow more children to attend programs, created a comfortable environment to promote & encourage reading in children, additional shelving and age appropriate educational software on children's computers.

In addition to physical improvements, how else has the library benefited from GRLI (i.e. increased juvenile attendance, increased juvenile circulation, additional or new local funding, etc.)

- We have been able to increase attendance because of story time. Children have access to computers for juvenile use only. Because of the great juvenile books provided by the GRLI children have been exposed to more books for checkout, which has increased our circulation.
- The Library has benefited w/ increased attendance, particularly at the aforementioned summer reading and pre-school storytime shows. This increase in attendance has also brought more attention and local funding to the library - even post GRLI we are able to continue bringing in performers for summer reading and pre-school storytime.

- There has been an increase in the attendance of patrons using the local library.
- Juvenile Circulation increased 18% from FY 14 to FY 15. The library staff has been able to use the GRLI for many activities for the library such as Santa Claus and Easter Bunny visits as well as outstanding programs by authors.
- Our library has definitely seen an increase in attendance. Of course, I believe it has helped to secure additional funding to actually build the new library. Community outreach has improved as well.
- County Commissioners added a line item in library funding as a match to GRLI, the number of patrons utilizing the library each month has increased, children's programs are well attended and circulation continues upward.

How, if any, has the community benefited from GRLI (i.e. increased importance for early childhood education and/or literacy)?

- Because of the funds provided by GRLI local churches have been able to provide libraries for juveniles.
- The community has benefited from GRLI in several ways: Increased variety of children's books available for checkout. An easier to browse collection. More space to sit and read, study or be tutored. Fun, educational summer shows that encourage children to read during the summer months. More attention being brought to education and literacy skills.
- Fortunate that we are still receiving Ferst Foundation books to improve early childhood literacy in the community.
- The community has benefited by having a vibrant, well-maintained library which is the center piece of the community. The college scholarships have helped students and their families tremendously.
- Teams are strengthened, partnerships established, comfort levels elevated, awareness that investments pay off.
- The library has worked with the local FFCL CAT to register all children under five and issue them a library card too. The library wants to excite the parents as well as the children to visit the library often so all our children enter school ready to learn!
- Morgan County citizens have easy access to age appropriate books seven days a week and Thursday nights. Parents of newly enrolled Ferst Foundation children can pick up their book shelf at the library any day of the week.

What do you like best about GRLI - what went well?

- The biggest bang for the buck has been preschool story time. We have been able to provide preschoolers with the love of books.
- The renovation of the children's section and increased funding for children's books made the most noticeable, day-to-day difference for the library. These funds allowed us to rapidly enhance our collection and fill in missing subject areas.
- The funding opportunity. Just seeing that this money is being put to use for something positive.
- The GRLI has been wonderful in all regards. The flexibility of the grant to meet the individual libraries' needs has been a blessing. The scholarships have been like the icing on the cake. The constant communication to help set goals and monitor progress has been most helpful to stay focused.

- Its rural focus and the willingness to listen to what the real needs of the libraries were, not preconceived plan of investment.
- Actually, since I was able to work with all the GRLI communities, I liked the fact the initiative was open to the needs of each community instead of it being a cookie cutter initiative. Every community is different and those involved in GRLI understood that fact. I think this was the best part of the entire GRLI!
- This program allowed the library to obtain materials that our budget would never cover. We saw first-hand the excitement of the Morgan County children with the new books, floor cushions and educational software on the computers. GRLI served to strengthen the partnership between Ferst Foundation, the Morgan County School System, Morgan County Commissioners and the Morgan County Library.

What would you like to have seen done differently - how could the initiative have been improved?

- I cannot think of anything that I would have changed about the program.
- It would have been nice to have a broader range of things we could spend the money on. In particular money for new technology (maker's space, tablets, 3D printers) would have been nice.
- Everything should remain the same.
- I cannot think of anything that could have been done differently that would have ensured an improvement.
- The only part I was a bit disappointed in was the GRLI teaching scholarship. I don't think it was the committees or GRLI but people in some communities didn't seem interested in applying. Maybe instead of just teaching we could have opened it up to those that wanted to pursue a degree in library science as well? I think there was a drop off in interest of being a teacher around 2009 and students were searching other careers, so this scholarship didn't interest them.

Other comments

- We are so appreciative of all that the GRLI has done for the Hancock County Library and the community as a whole.
- We truly appreciate the opportunity to be a part of the GRLI. The initiative has had a profound, lasting impact on the Library and our community. Thank you!
- Great organization, glad that you target our community to provide additional support.
- The Seminole County citizens and all those with library connections deeply appreciate the vision and generosity of the philanthropist who made this opportunity to improve the library and community possible.
- I am so proud that Ferst Foundation was able to participate in this effort. I has gone on a lot longer with greater funds and commitment by TCF than I ever dreamt. So grateful to the family that funded and was involved in the program.
- It was certainly a pleasure working with all the committee members and others to implement the GRLI in several Georgia counties. It's a great feeling to know we have made a difference in those communities...and we are Growing a more literate Georgia!
- I am grateful to the family that funded GRLI for their generosity in providing GRLI to the citizens of Morgan County.

APPENDIX E: SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS CURRENT STATUS
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Total =76 scholarship recipients

Morgan County 18 recipients

1. Brandy Andreas, teaching in Morgan
2. Lori West, teaching in Morgan
3. Hillary Lowery, teaching in Morgan
4. Kaleigh Sidwel-Alcaarez, teaching in Morgan
5. James Sidwell, teaching in Morgan
6. Alex Davis, teaching in Morgan
7. Ryan Parson, teaching in Morgan
8. Halie Carver, teaching in Morgan
9. Faith Cagle, teaching in Jones
10. Ashley Cupp, student teaching, finishing in May
11. Mary Ellard, Jacksonville, FL
12. Jessica Zimmerman
13. Jessica L. Binkley
14. Lucy Richardson
15. Alexandra A. Jaskowiak
16. Makenzie B. Morris
17. Callie Moore
18. Ms. Hillary McKenzie

Hancock County (8 recipients)

1. Ms. Jessica J. Smith
2. Sara K. Ingram
3. Ms. Jessica J. Smith
4. Mr. Trevor D. Lawson
5. Ms. Dominique D. Shivers
6. Mr. Trevor D. Lawson
7. Kierra G. Barnes
8. Ms. Be'Onca R. Giles

Butts Cuntty (7 recipients)

1. Ms. Laura D. Remington

2. Ms. Nisa V. Williams
3. Ms. Hannah D. Smith
4. Mr. Derrick K. Jones
5. Mr. Joseph G. Glanton
6. Ms. McKenzie R. Smith
7. Ms. Jessica F. Norton

Putnam County (23 recipients)

1. Ashley Cobbs, teaching in Rockdale County
2. Kenly Duffey, teaching in Greene County
3. Holly Hardie, teaching in Putnam County
4. Shannon Hooks, teaching in Putnam County, now in Green County
5. Lauren Maddox, teaching in Putnam County
6. Elizabeth Jackson, teaching in Putnam County
7. Bailey Moore, teaching in Putnam County
8. Skylar Holder, teaching in Putnam County
9. Keneshia Smith, paraprofessional teaching outside of Putnam – teaching in Putnam
10. Elizabeth Moncrief, graduated an teaching in charter school serving Greene
11. Tiffani Gray, teaching in Putnam County Middle School
12. Akila Young, teaching in Newton County
13. Allison G. Bishop, taught in Putnam for short time - now left education
14. Sarah Chapman, not teaching- but Doctorate in Pharmacy
15. Justin T. Willoughby, graduated from grad school, working for GA Southern University but not teaching
16. Jessi Clark, graduated but not teaching (works at Geico)
17. Anthony E. Peters Jr., not teaching but got degree
18. Autumn Moore, not teaching, but got degree
19. Hunter Schell, graduated but working in agriculture industry
20. ; Adrienne Moore, still in school
21. Hunter Copelan, still in school
22. Katlyn Duffey, still in school
23. Shelby L. Statham

Seminole County (23 scholarships)

1. Kimberly Boswell, teaching in Seminole County Elementary School
2. Adam Burke, substitute teaching Charleston/hope to be hired next school year
3. Kelly Dekle, teacher Habersham Central High School in Demorest, GA

4. Hannah Dukes, teaching in Seminole County Elementary School
5. Levi Dunn, teaching at Bainbridge Middle School
6. Carolyn Speights, worked as a paraprofessional at Seminole County Middle/High School and now teacher in Early County Elementary as Special ED teacher for 5 years
7. Crystal Glass, teacher in Harlem High School (Harlem, GA)
8. Bethany Clair Gray, graduated and Math/science teacher
9. Bailey Atkinson, 2018 graduate of the University of Georgia, with a Bachelor Degree of Scien
10. Mr. Kyle Dekle, not sure
11. Ms. Amber Bonilla
12. Mr. Zachary Morris
13. Trevor Smith
14. Sherry Brookins
15. Charlotte H. Dukes
16. Holly Ward
17. Ms. Saiteria Moore
18. Justin Odom
19. Andrew L. Dunn
20. Sammy W. Alday
21. Jordan A. Heath
22. Wendy Bunce
23. Shy'meshia Hopkins

APPENDIX F: SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT THANK YOU LETTERS

February 1, 2018

It has been a sincere honor to be a recipient of the Georgia Rural Library Initiative Scholarship. I received this scholarship twice and each time it was truly a blessing to have it to assist my parents and myself with the expenses at college.

I would like to tell you a little about myself. When I was young everything seemed to fall right into my lap and everything came easy, but that all changed at the age of six. I had a stroke and life came to an abrupt halt as I knew it. I no longer could be on the gymnastics competition team nor could I barrel race. I'm sure all my medical expenses came as a struggle, what family would be prepared for such a change?

My family is very agriculture oriented. We live on a farm. At this time my brother was in FFA and 4-H, he showed pigs and cows. I have always loved animals, so I joined 4-H and began focusing on show pigs. I might not function as normal as the next kid, but I would not be out-done by them either. I became very competitive in every function of life. My family stood by me and behind me encouraging me with every challenge in my life. If someone told me I couldn't do something because of the limitation of the use of my left hand and leg, I proved them wrong. The Ag advisors saw my determination and told me at six years old I would one day be the president of the FFA when I got to high school and I soaked in every word of it. With all the encouragement of family and teachers, I became an Honor Graduate; President, Sentinel, and Reporter of FFA, tennis player, softball player, winner of showmanship(many times), a beauty queen (several times), and to many other accomplishments to name in this letter. All these accomplishments made me want to share this with others, letting them know "Do not let others put limits upon you! You can do anything you set your mind to do." I am an Ag Teacher. I am a 2016 Graduate of Abraham Baldwin Agriculture College, with an Associate Degree in Science. In May, I will be a 2018 Graduate of the University of Georgia, with a Bachelor Degree in Science. I hope to be working on my Masters in August. My intentions are to be part of the Colquitt County Board of Education, where I am currently performing my student teaching.

I am very thankful to have received this scholarship; it allowed me to be able to focus my full attention on my education. Because of this scholarship, I only worked part-time and I felt I didn't need to burden my parents asking for additional monies. This scholarship is such a reward for all the hard work I put forth throughout my time at Seminole County Middle/High School. It is my hope the Community Foundation will be able to continue to assist other deserving students as they did for me. Once again, "Thank you from the bottom of my heart for such a blessing."

Sincerely,
Bailey Alyssa Atkinson



February 2, 2018

As a recipient of the GRLI Grant, I am blessed to have gained a wealth of knowledge and a career in education. I was enrolled in the College of Education at Albany State University (2005-2010), pursuing a degree in Special Education (P-12) with a concentration in Middle Grades Language Arts and Social Studies. Although I did receive Federal Student Aid, sometimes balances were left and I needed financial resources to cover the cost of books and gas for travel. I was driving back and forth sometimes three times a week; during the time when gas was just short of four dollars a gallon.

As a recipient of the GRLI Grant, I was able to fulfill my philosophy of education, which stated; "As a teacher, I would like to demonstrate by example that learning is a life-long process that can be an exciting adventure." For the past five years, I have been employed at Early County Elementary School, in Blakely, Georgia, as a Special Education Resource Teacher. Our school's motto is "ECES is a place where Every Child Experiences Success." I'm pleased to say that I work with some awesome and amazing people and every day is an adventure! In my classroom, my students learn from me and I make every effort to learn from them. It is a rewarding job helping my students who struggle with sight words (reading) and place value (math), as I observe them making progress. I am grateful that I am able to share my gifts and talents with hundreds of deserving students. Thanks to the GRLI Grant that I received, I was able to make my dream a reality and teach my students to dream big, work hard, to expect success and to give back.

Gratefully yours,
Carolyn J. Speight



January 31, 2018

My daughter, Bethany Gray, received the grant from the Georgia Rural Library Initiative to become a high school science teacher. As you know, math and science teachers are in short supply in Georgia. Partnering with GRLI helped to meet this need and to allow her to graduate with less student debt. The scholarship paved the way for two years of the four-year investment.

We appreciate the money, but also the Georgia Rural Library System's recognition of the shortfall in specialty educators. Though other venues would offer her more monetarily, she feels education is where she needs to serve. My family cannot thank you enough for the support given to Bethany's future in education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sherry S. Gray".

Sherry Gray
Financial Director



Subject: Georgia Rural Library Initiative Scholarship

Thinking back to my fairly recent college days, the things I stress over are pretty different! When I was in school, I worried about finding a job, where I would live, if I would be a good teacher, and how could I make a difference in other's lives. One thing I didn't need to worry about (even though I still sometimes did) was how to pay for college. Many of my friends were having to get student loans in their names or their parents were taking out large loans to pay for their education. Our family was blessed because I saw my brother be able to go to school his four years without either of those things having to happen. But by the time I was ready to start college, it was pretty evident things were different in our family. My Dad was having lots of problems with his vision and his emotions. I was his secretary my senior year and I knew he was struggling to keep things together in the classroom and handle his responsibilities. I wondered if he couldn't keep teaching, how my parents could pay for my college expenses.

Thankfully, even though my Dad did retire fairly unexpectedly in December after I started in August at Georgia Southwestern University, money was provided. This scholarship was a tremendous gift, not once, but three times to help pay my tuition and books. I was stressed by the difficult math classes that I took and sometimes wondered if I needed to get a job to help with expenses but didn't see a way I could do that and keep my grades up. My parents never pressured me to work, they encouraged me to work hard at school and let them figure out the money part. I wanted to make sure I was as prepared as possible to be a good math teacher because I wasn't sure which part of math I would be teaching. Even though I had excellent grades, it was not easy for me and I accepted tutoring every chance I could.

Another advantage of receiving this scholarship was the ability to enjoy some relationships in college. I joined the Baptist College Ministries and even went on a mission trip with them to New York City. I made some lifelong friends that I would not have had time for if I had been required to have a job. My parents reminded me that soon I would be in the "real world", so I better enjoy college!

Thank you for your support and the money. I will not waste your investment in me. I plan to work for the rest of my career helping students achieve their goals. Hopefully, I can also help them to be better people and see how hard work can pay off in the long run. Thank you!

Sincerely,
Kelly Dekle



Subject: Georgia Rural Library Initiative Scholarship

For as long as I could remember, I wanted to go to Auburn University. With the Hope Scholarship, my parents bargained with me in high school and promised that if I would go to a school in-state, they would let me transfer to Auburn for my junior and senior year. Both my parents graduated from Auburn, my Dad in Ag. Education, and my Mom in Home Ec. Education. I wanted to be able to yell "War Eagle" too! I decided that ABAC would be a good agriculture-related starter school, near home, and I had three of my best friends going to ABAC that I could room with, so I agreed with my parents deal.

I was lucky enough to get a part-time job working at a pharmaceutical company in the afternoons to help me with my spending money, but my parents and this scholarship money kept me from having to apply for student loans. During my time at ABAC, I met a beautiful girl that I knew was special, so having money became even more of a need for going out. During my second year, I started to realize that I probably wasn't going to transfer out of state and go to Auburn, so I checked out the University of Georgia Tifton Campus. They had everything I would need to get my Ag. Education degree and I could stay in Tifton, still close to home and also close to Kaylan!

Now, I am glad I stayed in the state of Georgia to go to school. I have taught in Habersham County for seven years as one of the Ag. teachers and this past summer I got the chance to move to Perry High School where I did my student teaching. Now that I have two sons and a wife, I am blessed to be able to provide financially for them because of the education that I have gotten. I did get my Master's degree and Specialist's degree from Auburn University, so I did achieve my dream, just not the original way I had planned. Thank you for the funding of this scholarship. It made a big difference in my life and career.

Sincerely,
Kyle Dekle