



BOY WITH A BALL

NO LOST GENERATION IN A COVID-19 REALITY

No Lost Generation

Over 1.54 billion children and youth are out of school worldwide. Even before the current crisis, young people were facing enormous challenges. The numbers are startling: Around the world, one of every five young people were already absent from education, training or employment. Here in Gwinnett, pre-pandemic, 250,000 children faced living situations receiving low to very low scores for child well being, according to the United Way. Now, with COVID-19 and the consequences of our efforts to control it, their situation is far worse.

The world cannot afford a lost generation of youth, their lives set back by COVID-19 and their voices stifled by a lack of participation. It falls to every one of us to do far more to tap their talents as we tackle the pandemic and chart a recovery that leads to a more peaceful, sustainable, and equitable future for all.¹

Significant Challenges Prior to COVID-19

Gwinnett County has grown from 72,349 mostly white residents in 1970 to 920,260 residents today speaking over 100 languages, only 39.3% of whom are white. Such rapid growth and diversification has made it difficult for teachers to be able to meet the needs of every student in their classroom. Berkmar High School, for example, has nearly 3,500 students with 51% being Latino, 31% Black, 10% Asian and 5% White.

Latino students face particularly alarming chronic underachievement in American public schools. They are more likely than any other minority group to drop out of high school and face a multitude of impediments to their educational progress including: poverty, segregation, parental education, language, documentation status, English-language learning, teacher preparedness and expectations, and lack of student engagement and social supports (Suarez- Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2009). African American youth were referred to the juvenile justice system at a rate nearly four to ten times that of white youth, a statewide statistic that is reflected in Gwinnett County's own African American population which makes up 30% of the total population.

¹ UN Secretary-General António Guterres remarks to the Security Council videoconference on “Youth, Peace and Security towards the fifth anniversary of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda: Accelerating Implementation of Resolution 2250 and 2419”, in New York on 27 April



How the Pandemic Has Exacerbated These Issues into Potential Catastrophe

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history. Closures of schools, a shift to digital learning, and the digital divide has impacted every student in our county. The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of our most vulnerable children, youth, and adults – those living in at-risk communities or in poverty – to continue their learning. Learning losses also threaten to extend beyond this generation and erase decades of progress. Worldwide, some 23.8 million additional children and youth may drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic's economic impact alone. Even here in Gwinnett reports are emerging of Berkmar High School having only 20% of its diverse population attending in person classes. With many Berkmar families not speaking English at home, digital learning from home has the potential to irreversibly inhibit student's academic progress. A report in late September 2020 has come that 55% of the classes offered in the Gwinnett County Public Schools 9th Grade Academy are being failed by its students. Preventing a learning crisis from becoming a generational catastrophe requires urgent action from all.

Love Your City at Sarah Court, Norcross, GA: A Case Study

The Sarah Court Community in a Snapshot

On the corner of Jimmy Carter Boulevard and Singleton Road in Norcross, Georgia two apartment communities sit within the same twenty-two acre property and are managed by a single office. Combined, the Rockbridge Court and JSD Apartments (together called Sarah Court by BWAB staff) include 272 units, which house a population made up mostly of immigrant families from Latin America, with the majority being Spanish speaking-only parents. These families come from a culture that leans heavily on the support of extended family, but their desire for a better future and better opportunities for their children has led them to leave behind the familiarity of language, culture, and connectedness to make a go of it in a new, foreign country.

This Community's Need

Sadly, the jump from their home countries to the US has produced unforeseen challenges that many of these families are struggling to overcome. Their children are juggling learning English in addition to their school lessons, resulting in significant, and often insurmountable challenges in coursework. Parents struggle to engage the educational system due to their limited English and lack of understanding about how the system works. Most parents are employed in low-paying, unstable jobs, resulting in families moving from apartment to apartment community as their finances fluctuate, causing more disconnect from the educational system and destroying any chance for their children being able to stay in the same school for their entire educational experience and ultimately succeed.

In this community, more than 95% of people are immigrants encountering tremendous difficulties in assimilating.



According to the United Way Child Well-Being Map, Sarah Court's zip code is red, indicating critically low child and family well-being rates. The zip code (30093) shows low birth weights - 7.7 pounds versus the regional average of 9.3 pounds, low percentage of students exceeding 3rd grade reading standards of 34.9% compared with 46% in the region, and 8th grade math standards of 31.9% compared with 33.2% in the region. The high school graduation rate is only 55.7% compared to the regional average of 85.2%. Numbers for children in poverty are twice the regional average at 45.9% and children without health insurance also are twice the regional average at 22.8%.

Within Sarah Court, fathers are engaging jobs that have them work from dawn to dusk, often seven days a week due to an inability to receive fair compensation because of their race, economic status, or immigration status. Mothers are often the glue in our community and fight passionately for their family, however due to language and cultural barriers they are under-equipped to go against the tide of their context. The short-term view that occurs in poverty can cause parents to be unavailable, contributing to disengaged youth. Historically, second-generation immigrants (which most of the kids are) learn the native language at a rate that rapidly outpaces their parents, which can add strain to an already under-pressure family, leading to more parental isolation. These young people, seeking a sense of belonging, may begin to engage in at-risk behaviors. Even if parents had the time and resources to be present and supportive, their lack of English skills keep them from being able to engage in their children's school lives and causes them to shy away from participating in their social lives.

Single moms and dads are working multiple jobs and seek alternative jobs, but their educational base is so low it is hard for them to learn. Most families support other family members in other countries which, without the use of dependable banks, can be costly and allow them to be taken advantage of by groups who perform international wire transfers.

Love Your City in Sarah Court

Boy With a Ball's **Love Your City** program combats the long list of struggles faced by immigrant families by assembling teams that will go door-to-door at first, meeting each resident in the community and introducing themselves as a faith-based non-profit organization called Boy with a Ball that helps youth and families reach their dreams. The teams then acknowledge that they are brand new in the neighborhood and that the community members are experts before asking the residents their thoughts on whether young people in the area need any help and details about their situation.

Responses from community members are logged into BWAB's online evaluation database. The BWAB groups also ask community members for their friendship as they turn to begin launching activities to help the neighborhood. Week after week, these small teams work to get to know more and more residents and then to pass by and engage conversations to better know those they have already met. Within the first year, team members and volunteers become aware of community members facing significant challenges or opportunities. These community members are then matched up with either a team member, volunteer, or another member of the community to provide a mentoring relationship that can help them navigate the situation.





As a growing number of community members are known and being mentored, individuals facing similar situations are identified and then drawn into formal small groups that lead to life-changing behavior change including women's groups, men's groups, young women's groups, young men's groups, tutoring centers, ESL groups, job skills training groups, GED classes and more.

Within three to five years, as weekly community walkthroughs, mentoring relationships, and small groups grow, emerging leaders within the community are identified and then set into a leaders' group to take responsibility for the entire program, allowing the program to scale into additional neighboring communities. Volunteers are recruited from local universities, churches, businesses, and, as the work progresses, within the community itself.

Life-changing Progress Heading into 2021

Our current work in Norcross is in its third year in the community, leading us to a moment where we have now built deep relationships with over 80% of the residents in the neighborhood. To aid the families and the educational hurdles they are facing we have launched a volunteer-run tutoring center led by GCPS teachers, we've built mentoring relationships to help guide young people in their personal and educational paths, we've provided meaningful family engagement help to navigate the school system, including launching an ESL class to help families through language barriers, and we have even worked with the schools to provide translation at parent-teacher conferences to help bridge the cultural gap. Additionally, we've built youth groups, summer reading and leadership camps, women's groups to weave the community, providing more and more support, and providing practice for acclimating to the local cultural landscape.



Three years into working in this community, we've worked with most kids in the neighborhood, seeing zero of the students that we consistently work with drop out of school, and close to zero kids drop out from the neighborhood overall. The miracle of this transformation is all the more apparent upon considering that English Language Learners in Gwinnett County typically graduate only 39% of the time. Additionally, we've seen almost all violent crime eradicated from the neighborhood, and the frequency of police involvement with juvenile delinquency essentially eliminated from the apartment communities.

This summer our tutoring center staff within Sarah Court, led by Gwinnett County Public School teachers volunteering their time, and overseen by Harvard graduate, Peter Emmet, launched a three week literacy camp called, "Read, Write to Lead," that attracted more than 50 students a day. The event was supported by nearly 30 volunteers each day with the support of Perimeter Church and their RUSH Conference. Social distancing, thermometers at sign in, and masks were used diligently in keeping with CDC guidelines. The program was a tremendous success and we were pleased to host GCPs Board member Louise Radloff for one afternoon of the event.

This community is a powerful representation of what is possible. In the children, we've seen attitudes towards learning and school soften, and grades correspondingly rise. In the parents, we've seen greater engagement with resources in schools and communities. In each home, we've seen families learn how to function within American culture, all the while maintaining the values of their home countries for their children. In the neighborhood, we've seen more open doors to each other and a growing love for each other that provides the support system every person needs to succeed. What has happened in this neighborhood can be replicated in economically disadvantaged communities across Gwinnett County.

Averting a COVID-19 Catastrophe

As we navigate the COVID-19 crisis and have now made it past the initial shock of virtual school, lack of devices, limited work for families, we are finding the issues confronting our families to be more complex than just a lack of resources. Large portions of Hispanic families are taking their cues from fear mongering news outlets which is creating a bias towards keeping kids at home and away from much-needed in-person classes. Although school districts have managed to grant the virtual resources required for students to attend class online, what's being missed by Spanish-speaking students is the continual reinforcement of conversational English, as well as the ability to learn how to thrive and succeed within American culture. Parents who struggled to navigate the traditional school system have lost their already shaky handle on their children's education. Students who already have insecurities revolving around their language capacity are opting to stay home to avoid embarrassment. Students who had been making up ground in terms of their English ability and academic success are beginning to think of dropping out of school as a viable alternative.



What we're facing during this critical juncture is the possibility of a lost generation. An already vulnerable group of immigrant students, tackling the difficult task of acculturating and integrating into an unknown school system, is now up against a pandemic that's creating a level of turbulence rocking even the well-equipped, U.S.-grown students.

In response to this, we are actively walking each family through the complexities of schooling throughout COVID. We are helping the parents grasp their options, and helping them make wise decisions regarding how to put their children in the best situation to succeed. Our students are being plugged into academic mentoring relationships that can guide them through the difficulties of education throughout the pandemic.

With the help of our passionate staff and so many courageous volunteers from different universities, churches, and businesses, we are seeing a community who has been dealt a difficult hand overcome the odds. A community of people who, through much care and support, are surviving, growing, and thriving in a moment that could have- and should have- spelled disaster. **Love Your City** in these apartment communities is creating a bridge for our underserved families to have a chance at the opportunities that education opens up for all American students.

Sarah Court is just one hurting community. There are many more in Norcross, in Gwinnett, in Georgia. With your help, **Love Your City** will continue to win this fight, transforming Sarah Court from being a weakness in our city, to being its strength. From there we can turn and help one struggling neighborhood after another do the same.

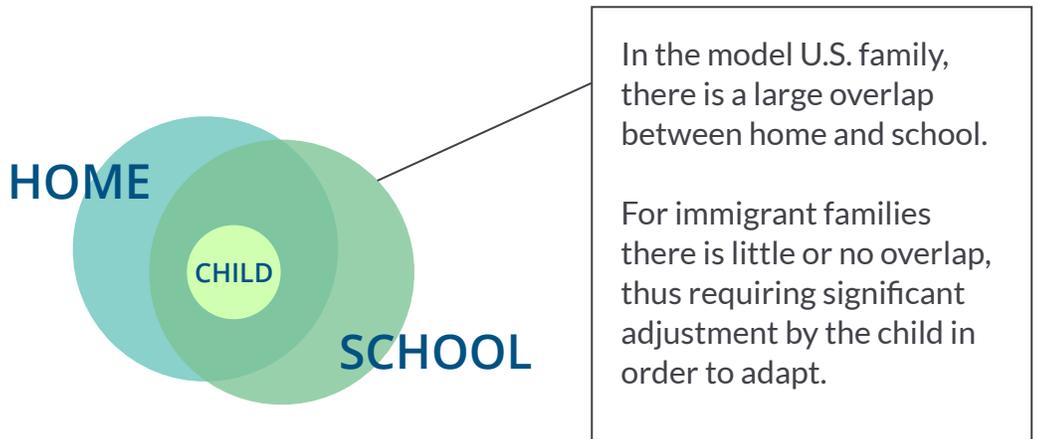
Hurting neighborhoods rising. At-risk families thriving. Vibrant cities taking action. Boy With a Ball in Gwinnett County is at a point where scaling is vital for so many good families who are being crushed by the ebbs and flows of life, particularly during this pandemic. Beyond Sarah Court, beyond scaling **Love Your City** across Gwinnett County ourselves, we are also working to equip and support other groups to implement either **Love Your City** or similar approaches in their communities.

What We Most Need in This Critical Moment: Bridging the Distance Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools

School systems, by the very nature of the concept of systems, are built around expectations of a "standard" student growing up within a "standard" family, a family whose blueprints for living are based on particular notions of achievement. Newly arrived immigrant families and African-American households often exist within cultural realities and values that differ significantly from mainstream U.S. culture. Even for families who are dedicated to their children's success, this cultural chasm can simply be too great to overcome.

² Con Respeto, Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools : an Ethnographic Portrait Guadalupe Valdés, Teachers College Press, 1996





3

With this in mind, diverse communities like Gwinnett County face significant challenges to seeing every young person graduate and flourish. Beyond the capacity of even the best performing school districts, interventions will need to be designed and implemented that build a bridge between the homes where students are living and the schools they are attending in ways that strengthen the student and their academic success, as well as the family.

If this was true pre-COVID-19, it is even more critical today. The case study above makes the situation clear:

1. We will have to connect with families, particularly those with ESL students, to hold relationship-based conversations that can provide the guidance and support they need to re-engage school successfully.
2. Culturally sensitive, relational solutions like mentoring, parent support groups, job skills and apprenticeship programs, and tutoring are vital and have success in direct correlation to their geographic and relational proximity to these households.
3. Promoting and measuring student's and their families' connectedness levels - connectedness to a positive hope for their future, to school, to their family and to their community - is key to both achieving and measuring our success.

³ García-Sellers M. (2016) Home Visiting Interventions to Promote Values That Support School Success. In: Roggman L., Cardia N. (eds) Home Visitation Programs. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-17984-1_11



Boy With a Ball's Current Work

Boy With a Ball's work was deemed "essential" by Gwinnett County at the beginning of COVID-19, allowing us to never interrupt our efforts to deepen our relationship-based work this year.

Our current efforts include:

1. *Continuing to implement **Love Your City** to fight for the 1,200 residents at Rockbridge/JSD Apartments at Sarah Court in Norcross.*
2. *Working to scale **Love Your City** into a second apartment complex in Norcross. Current target: The Cielo Apartments, 6069 S Norcross Tucker Rd, Norcross, GA 30093*
3. *Working to mobilize and equip local churches in Lawrenceville to implement **Love Your City** in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.*
4. *Scaling the Velocity Cross Age Mentoring Program beyond Berkmar HS/Berkmar MS to Central Gwinnett HS and Moore MS in Lawrenceville.*
5. *Working to establish a collective impact collaborative approach to bridging the gap between African-American and immigrant youth and their households and academic and professional success.*

What We'll Need

As the issues we face will necessitate greater effort and capacity than was required pre COVID-19, we will need to build the following things to meet the challenge:

1. **Additional Funding** - Boy With a Ball utilizes the smallest amount of staff necessary to attract, equip and mobilize the largest amount of volunteers possible. This allows us to triple the impact of every dollar raised. Still, the significance of this crisis and the expansion of our work will require growth in our individual donor base, allowing us to scale into new communities to care for more underserved families.
2. **Business Partners** - **Love Your City** weaves every element of a city together to help reach young people in economically disadvantaged communities. As a result, the entire city grows. Marketplace leaders and the businesses they lead are needed as partners who will support **LYC** through sponsorships and through active engagement in volunteering and experteering.
3. **Church Partners** - Churches have a mandate to love their neighbors. The more this happens, the better for our cities. We will need more church partners who will participate financially and mobilize their members to engage as volunteers. We are also looking to train churches to implement **Love Your City** in the hurting neighborhoods near them, allowing us to help as many young people as possible in this critical moment.
4. **Synergistic Community Partnerships** - Our cities are filled with rich resources including dynamic leaders and organizations. We will need to rise beyond insecurity and fear for our own survival and the competition that results to learn to work together, not only collaboratively but synergistically. This will allow us to avoid unnecessary redundancies while actually strengthening our efforts. It will also make it possible for the philanthropic community to give better, joining this fight that matters so much in a way that matters.

