

McIntosh Trail Early Childhood Development Council, Inc.



2025

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McIntosh Trail Early Childhood Development Council, Inc.

Community Assessment

Executive Summary

McIntosh Trail Early Childhood Development Council, Inc (MTECDC) is a center-based Head Start Preschool / Early Head Start program in the central Georgia area. The program serves seven rural counties, each of the centers is centrally located within the county to better serve the children and families in the area. The community assessment is conducted every five years to fulfill the Head Start Performance Standards requirements, annually the Community Assessment is reviewed and updates are made as needed. The information collected is then used to guide decision for the program and families in the service area. In summary data is collected and analyzed about: our geographic service and recruitment area, the demographics including: employment, housing, medical, social, and economic, language, race, population, eligible children, disabilities, other childcare options, additional relative census information, trends, strengths and needs for the counties, community resources, and collaborations, as well as the program goals.

McIntosh Trial is currently funded to serve 470 children in the designated service area. The children are selected based on the needs of the families, and community. Our eligibility criteria are based upon Head Start Performance Standards requirements including poverty level, income, disabilities, family structure, living accommodations and other criteria deemed

necessary through our finding of the CA. The program has not had any service changes; we have maintained full enrollment, and met the state and federal standards. The program has seen a rise in the number of families in our service area who need services for children birth through preschool. Through our data collection we noted that children who are enrolled tended to score low on their assessment for lack of exposure to developmentally appropriate supports we also see that in the areas there have been a great number of children who have been referred by local agencies for services. The children and families have also made strides and after attending the program by the end of the assessment period students are more school ready. This has also been confirmed with our collaboration with the local school systems. Another finding is that in the service area there is a lack of emphasis on health, mental health, and overall wellbeing. The agency puts an emphasis on the whole child approach that includes the child and all necessary family members. This is to aid in encouraging and supporting positive health and wellbeing.

Based on our collection of data from research, surveys, collaborations, local, state and federal aggregated data we conclude that there is a need for our program within the areas we serve. McIntosh Trail serves as a pillar within the community serving children and families to support their growth and development. It would be amazing if the opportunity and funds would allow for programs expansion where there is a greater need within some areas of our community.



Purpose

To provide opportunities that empower and develop self- sustainability.

Mission

McIntosh Trail promotes the school readiness of eligible children and families by supporting their growth in learning, health, and social-emotional development.

Vision

McIntosh Trail envisions leading the way in promoting and supporting high-quality programs that strengthen and uplift children and families within our communities.

McIntosh Trail Early Childhood Development Council

Community Assessment

This Community Assessment (CA) study was designed to enable McIntosh Trail ECDC Inc. to compare its existing services to the current needs of the community. The results of this study were identified through several sources such as KIDS COUNT, the agency's Family Needs Assessments, the U.S. Census, Georgia Department of Education, parent and community surveys, the Department of Labor (DOL), Georgia Early Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) and other related data. McIntosh Trail Early Childhood Development, Inc. provides Early Head Start and Head Start Preschool services in seven counties in central Georgia. The data aggregated in the Community Assessment will be used to better understand the needs of the community as well as the agency's needs to make any needed adjustment to our services provided.

GRANTEE INFORMATION AND HISTORY

Head Start began in Butts County under Upper Ocmulgee Community Action Agency in the summer of 1965. Prominent Butts County citizens were instrumental in bringing Head Start to this area. In the summer of 1965 the Head Start staff went to the University of Michigan for training to implement Head Start services. When Upper Ocmulgee CAA closed, Head Start funding was granted to the Piedmont Area Community Action Agency. In 1976 Head Start served 72 children in Butts and Newton Counties. In 1977, the Central Office was located in Jackson and was housed in an old funeral home (Haisten) building where the Post Office is today.

In May of 1981, Piedmont Area CAA lost all programs including Head Start which was the last program closed that year. The director worked to pull together a Board of Directors and applied for the grant to provide Head Start services in a five-county area. Head Start services began again in August of 1982 under the sponsorship of McIntosh Trail Early Childhood Development Council, Inc. The Central Office was on based on Third Street, two blocks east of the county Courthouse. Finance and Administration were located in a small office on Mulberry Street and then moved to Brookwood Avenue. In 1996 the Administration, Central Office, and Butts County Center moved to 565 Recreation Drive Jackson to be housed in one location.

The center in Newton County was located in the basement of Bethlehem Church and had to pack up each Wednesday and Friday afternoon for church activities and then set up the next morning for school. When the church decided they needed the space the center moved into the Washington Street Youth Center. From there Newton County moved into the Boys Scout Hut, the Armory, and then to Turner Lake Circle. The Newton County Center started with one building in the business complex and ended up occupying 2 ½ buildings. When the landowner sold the complex to the City of Covington, the program was given notice and had to vacate the buildings. The landowner offered to build a center further down on Turner Lake Circle where the center was located for several years. In October 2011, the center moved to 25 Lover's Lane.

Butts County Center was located in the Henderson Youth Center. It moved from there to a one-room open classroom with a kitchen and lunchroom on Carolina Avenue. Later space became available in a building on Dempsey Avenue behind the Central Office on Third Street

and it operated as an “open classroom”. In 1996, the center and Central Office relocated to Recreation Drive.

In 1978 Henry, Spalding, and Upson Counties were added to the agency’s service area. The Henry Center was located in Hampton in an old store. One person owned the building and someone else owned the playground behind the center. From there it moved to the kitchen of the Locust Grove Institute, a Henry County school in McDonough, the little “blue” building in Locust Grove on Ridge Street, and then to its present location on Carter Lane.

The Upson County program was home-based for several years. Then they were offered space and a room by the housing authority and became center-based. From there they moved into an OSB (old school building) on Deluxe Circle. Eventually, the center moved to a privately owned OSB (Atwater Place) where it was located for several years. In 2006, the landlord built a new facility to the program’s specifications.

The Spalding County center was originally in a closed real-estate office off Solomon Street in Griffin. The Boys Club of Griffin had offices in an OSB on Pimento Avenue. The center moved into the classrooms and gradually took over the entire building. The center moved to its present location in 2006 on Wilson Road.

Lamar County was funded in 1983 and was housed in an OSB that was then the Mill Street Recreation Complex in Barnesville. There were no windows, it was impossible to heat, and the playground was across the street. They moved to an OSB in Milner where the kitchen was in a closet. From there they moved to the present location, a building the agency owns on Zebulon Street in Barnesville, Georgia.

Pike County did not open until 1992 in an OSB owned by the city of Zebulon. The roof leaked even when it didn't rain. In 2002, the agency partnered with the City of Zebulon for a Community Development Block Grant, and a new center was built on Hall Street.

In 1993 McIntosh Trail ECDC, Inc. was the second Head Start program in the state to receive Pre-K funding in Spalding, Henry, Butts, and Upson Counties. Later Pre-K in Newton and Pike Counties was funded. In 2013, the agency was funded to serve 220 Pre-K children in five counties.

In December 2010, the agency was funded to provide Early Head Start in four counties for 80 infants, toddlers, and pregnant moms. Those counties were Butts, Henry, Spalding, and Upson. An EHS classroom opened in Newton County in 2012. The program has since expanded and serves 22 classrooms across the seven counties and serves 176 children and families.

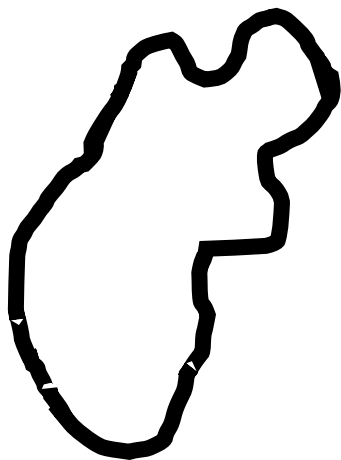
In 2005, the agency was awarded the National Program of Achievement Award. In 2008, the agency was awarded the National Program of Excellence Award which is the highest award presented by the National Head Start Association.

GEOGRAPHIC SERVICE AND RECRUITMENT AREA

Georgia is recognized as the largest state east of the Mississippi and the 24th largest of the 50 states. Although McIntosh Trail Early Childhood Development Council, Inc. (MTECDC) is considered a small program by some standards, the square miles covered in seven county services is quite extensive. Henry County is the largest county with 325 square miles. Upson

County is the next largest with 323 square miles, and Newton County falls third with 276 square miles. Pike County, a very rural county, has 218 square miles. Spalding County on the northwest side has 198 square miles. Lamar County which falls between Spalding and Pike Counties has 185 square miles. Butts County which is the most centrally located county in the program and the location of the program's central office is 187 square miles. The total number of square miles covered by McIntosh Trail ECDC is 1,712.

Each county has one center located in its largest population area. Jackson is the county seat of Butts, and the central office and center are located there. Locust Grove is not the county seat of Henry County but is one of the largest towns. The Spalding County center is located in Griffin which is the county seat and central to the population. Lamar and Pike's centers are both located in the county seat which is the main town within each county. Thomaston, which is home to the Upson County center is the county seat and much larger than Lamar or Pike's County seat.



Georgia is made of six geographic areas. McIntosh Trail ECDC is in the Piedmont area.



THE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS

SOME OF THE INFORMATION REFLECTED IN THIS COMMUNITY

ASSESSMENT INCLUDES DATA THAT WAS AVAILABLE AS OF JUNE 2025.

This profile of our organization was developed using elements from several different areas. The Community Assessment (CA) form was designed with input from the management team and governing bodies. Based upon areas identified by families, staff, or other resources the CA was modified to reflect current issues or needs. We also contacted the Area Planning Commission, and local government offices for suggestions for places to obtain new and additional information. Several websites are referenced such as Kids Count, Georgia Department of Labor, Public Health, Bright from the Start, and the Governor's offices. Center Managers supervised the collection of data in their local counties. Administrative staff contacted community agencies and the local school systems for input. The program tried to collect a comprehensive sampling from as many areas and communities as possible within the service area. Surveys played an important part in the assessment and planning process. Each year staff is asked to complete a survey listing areas that they perceive as in need of improvement as well as to make suggestions for the future of the agency. Parents are surveyed as part of this annual process. Upon completion of the several steps, the information from each of the above areas is examined to identify trends, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. It is the responsibility of the Head Start Director to convert the data into information that can be accessed by program administration, Board, and Policy Council.

Information from the CA is used to assess program effectiveness. This is done by analyzing where the seven centers are located, their hours of operation, program options, the

division of enrollment slots, and training issues for staff and parents. Every year the CA is reviewed to determine if there have been any changes in previous survey results. The program updates the CA as new information becomes available. The Strategic Plan is modified at least annually based upon several sources of information, one of which is the CA.

In recent years, there has been an increase in communities identifying drug abuse and the selling of drugs in neighborhoods as a rising problem. Also, the availability of medical and dental providers that will take the state insurances, affordable housing, and job availability with a sensible distance for the families that did not cause additional hardships. With drugs being an issue in our service area all staff participate in drug abuse training each year and the training is also made available to parents to provide support to children and families we serve. We collaborate as much as possible to support the other issues that were identified in our survey.

In June, the management team meets for 5 days for management training and planning. The management team consists of the Executive Director, Head Start Director, Comptroller, area administrators, fiscal department, and center managers. The Board of Directors and Policy Council members attend several days and assist as necessary to aid in aggregating and analyzing the data to support the program.

The CA as well as several other sources of information are studied to determine the impact on services and the program. The PIR is nearing completion by that time and it is used also. Every administrator is asked to have their most recent self-assessment available to be considered. The fiscal department reviews GABI, the annual audit, as well other types of budget analysis. During the summer planning meeting the Strategic Plan is reviewed and adjusted with input from the Board of Directors and Policy Council. The Strategic Plan is approved in a regular

scheduled meeting of the Board and Policy Council. The program's work plan is adjusted to reflect needed changes.

Major changes which are identified are discussed for suggestions. The agency calendar is revised during this meeting. We address any changes needed in the training plan as well to ensure we meet staff needs and support the families. Committees are formed to handle various projects and needs. The committees include all levels of agency employees from the central office and the various centers. The Policy Council and Board are encouraged to attend. Final changes are submitted to the Policy Council and Board for input and approval if required. If there is something that must be approved by the parents, it is brought before the parent group at the earliest parent meeting.

The comprehensive Community Assessment was completed and submitted for review in 2025 because we are in the process of completing our baseline grant. The Head Start Director formed a committee which consisted of staff, Board, Policy Council, parents, and members of the community. They will review the existing document and seek additional data and information as required by the School Readiness for Head Start Act of 2007. The results and conclusions will be used for strategic planning, and the program's needs.

OVERVIEW AND DEOMGRAPHICS OF SERVICE AND RECRUITMENT AREAS

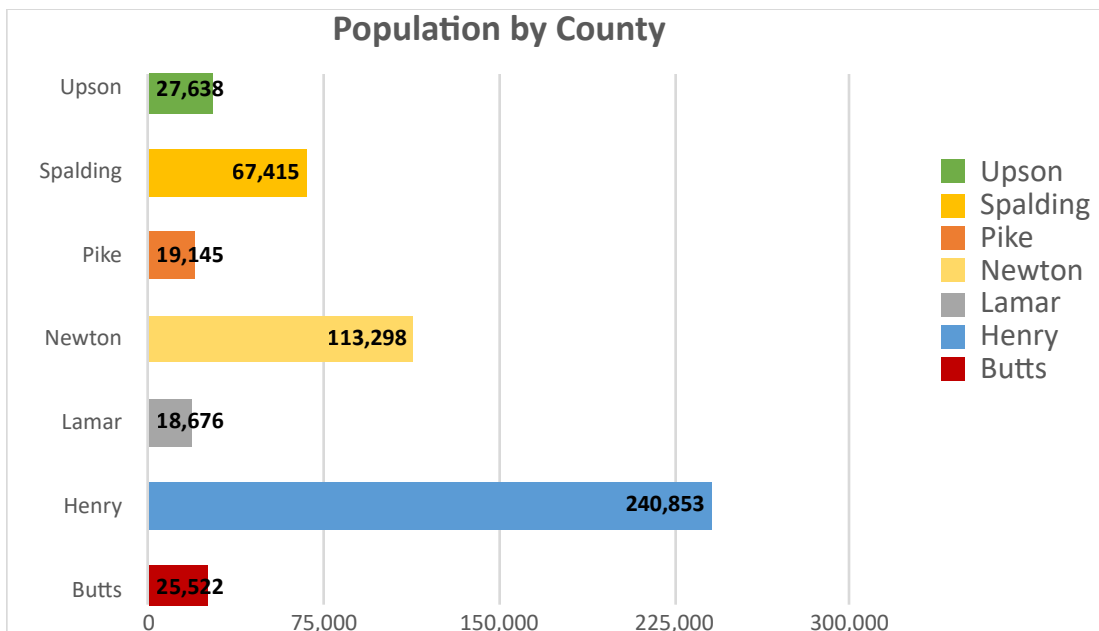
Each of our seven counties are very different, we positioned each of the centers so that we can serve the children of need in each county. Butts' county center is located within walking distance of the low/no income housing to support the families who are at the most need in the area. Henry county center is in the highly populus area of Locust Grove. That center is located in a lower income portion of the county where there are also less providers available, the higher income families live in the northern part of the county, we serve the lesser income population. Lamar's center is located near the down town and is in one of the counties who has a population that is spread out due to it being so rural. It's an area where options for work and housing are limited, it is also with walking distance of one of the housing developments for low/no income families. Newton county is a well-traveled area that is located near an area that supports lower income families. Pike's center is centrally located and is also in a rural area and has a population that is spread out, they are in an area that has little resources like Lamar. Pike is also located near The Georgia Baptist Children's Home a place that serves women and children that are displaced or in a foster situation. Spalding county center is located in an area that is surrounded by a great deal of poverty and housing that is less than adequate. Upson county center is located in the populus area of the county and is near families that are in the most need. The recruitment is done by seeking out areas that house the children and families who are in the most need. The agency collaborates with local Department of Family and Children Services, WIC and Health Departments to seek out families that need support, we also target doctors, local stores, and police/sheriff's offices to aid in recruitment. Family Service Advocates go into the service areas

and put out information in the form of flyers, handouts, and through word of mouth to gain the attention and recruitment of families who need services.

Population Demographics

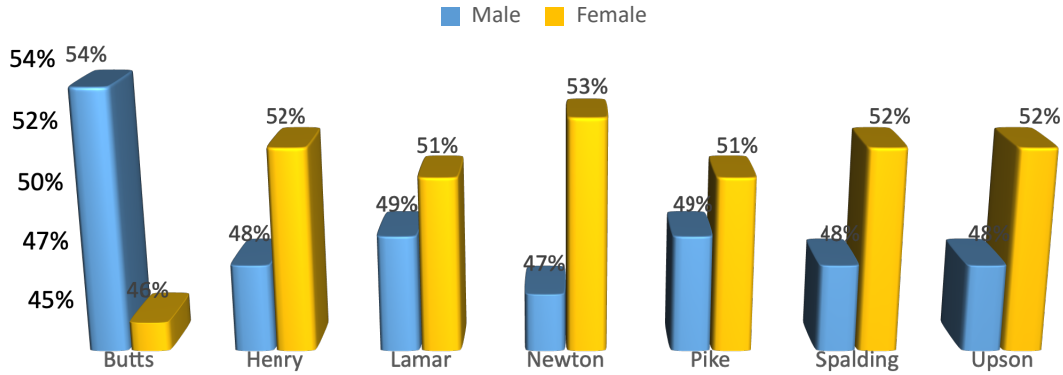
The McIntosh Trail service area while rural has had a upshift in population. Each area has seen an increase in the population by at least 4% Henry County area has seen a great influx of people over the past ten years boasting 47% of the population of the service area. While Butts, Lamar, Pike, and Upson have the smallest population they also have the most farm and agricultural land and less job opportunities. The service area overall has had a population increase of 2%, while Georgia only saw a 1% increase.

Based on data collected from the U.S. Census for Georgia from the Family Connection Partnership the total population of the seven counties in the service area are 512,547. Below the graph shows the counties by percentage.



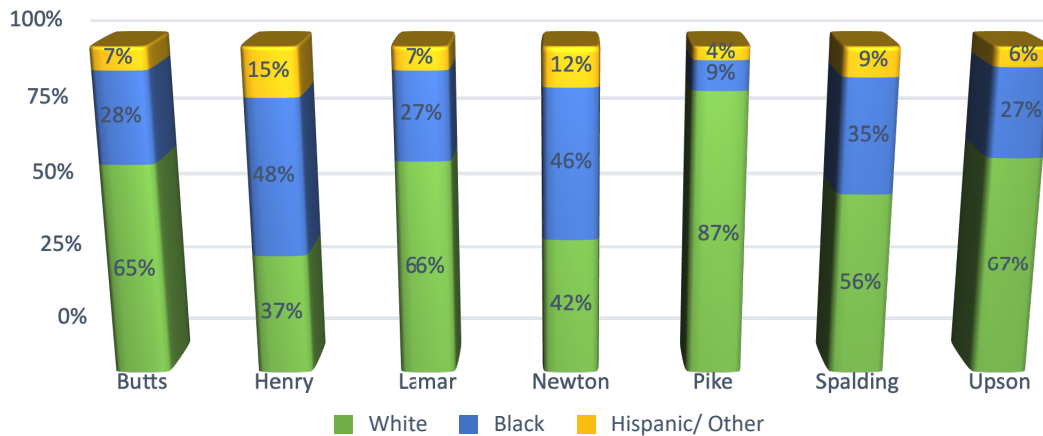
The service area by gender information provided by the area labor profile shows that in each of the seven counties there is a higher percentage of females at more than 50% except in Butts County where it was barely below at 46%.

Gender in Service Area



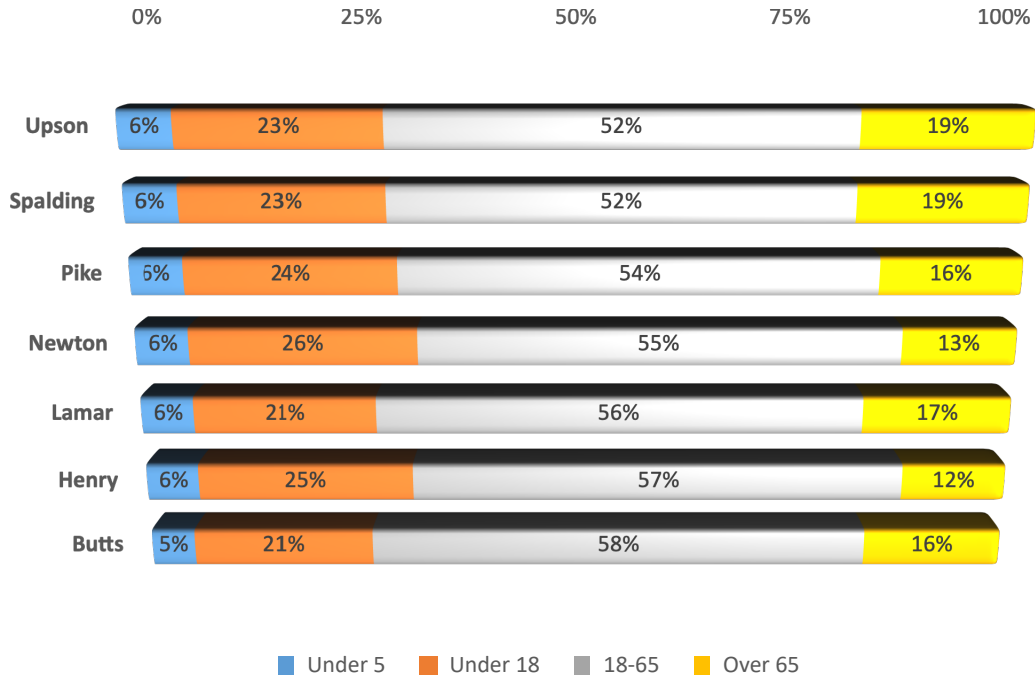
While the chart below shows the racial makeup of the seven counties served our program has a predominantly black families due to the socioeconomic makeup of the community.

Race of the Population

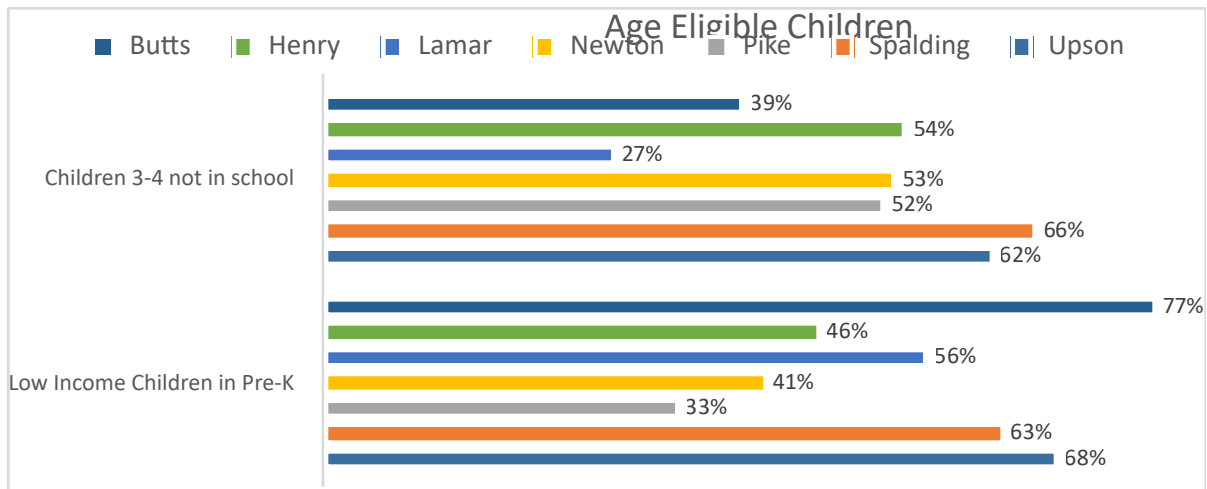


The age ranges retrieved from the Family Connection Partnership 2025 shows that in all

the seven counties the population consist of children under five was less than 10%.

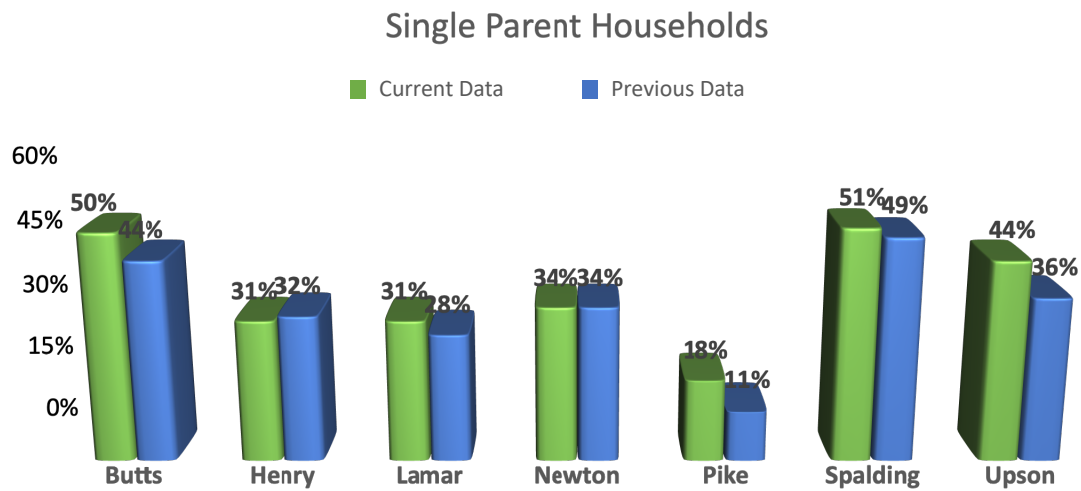


The data table below is for children under five, who are considered age eligible. Children served by Georgia Pre-K and children ages 3-4 who are not attending a preschool program.



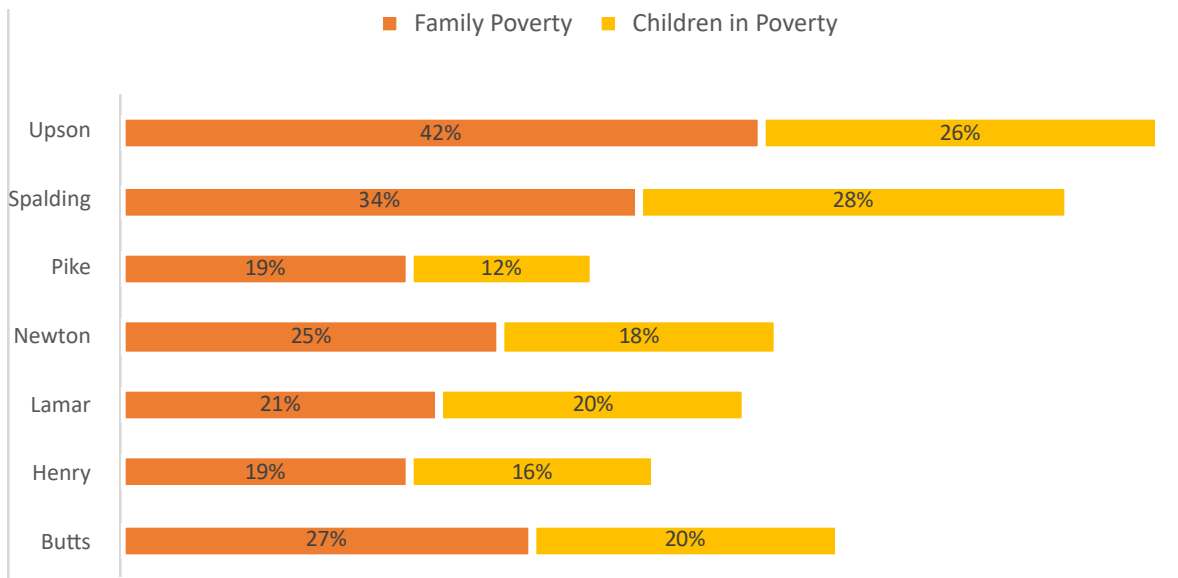
Family Structure

The family structure of the program has seen some shifts from previous years, we now see that there is more than one category of households; two parent, single parent, grandparent, and non-parent. Thirty-two percent of children in Georgia are living in single-parent families nationally the rate is only 19%, 3% live with neither parent and 9.8% live with their grandparents that number is up by 3% from previous years. In our service areas by county, the number of children living with a single parent compared to previous numbers.



As the data shows we have a high rate of single parent household in our service area which are compared to the 33% Georgia statistic (Kids Count).

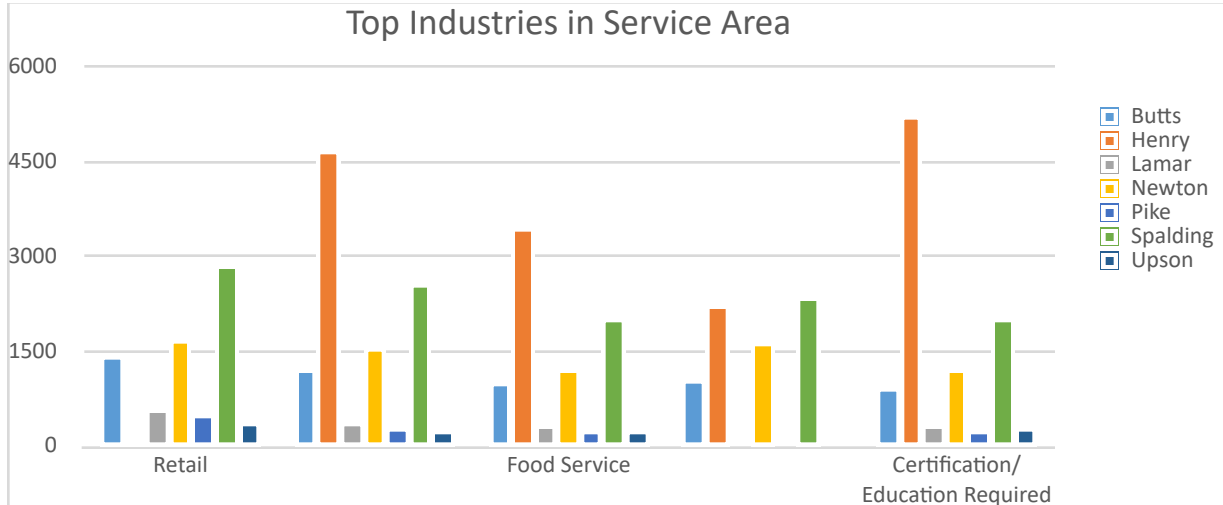
The number of families experiencing poverty in the area is shown the chart below including the number of children in poverty in the area. Some of the areas have a higher number of families experiencing poverty this is also due to the areas having less sources for employment and jobs that are available are career specific and require experience or additional education to meet the jobs requirements.



Employment

The 2025 Georgia Economic Outlook shows that while the industry in Georgia and population is on the rise there is a slowdown in the forecast. The data shows that Georgia while above the average for growth that growth increase is going to cause slowdown of available jobs and is set to see unemployment rise due to layoffs and inflation. Georgia while having a growth in industry still has not boosted the minimum wage that other states have done. The families we serve even when they work full time may still fall below the poverty level due to the lower wage paid in the state. Below is a graph that shows the employment patterns of jobs available in the service area. In some of the counties served there is not a job market, most readily available jobs available in warehouses and food service. This information was retrieved from the Georgia Department of Labor- Area Labor Profile. As depicted the chart shows the most popular jobs in the service areas with the smaller counties having less employment opportunities. Several of the major employers who have warehouses in the area such as Caterpillar, Home Depot, Dollar

General, Target, and Amazon are in one of the counties and families travel from county to county to work.

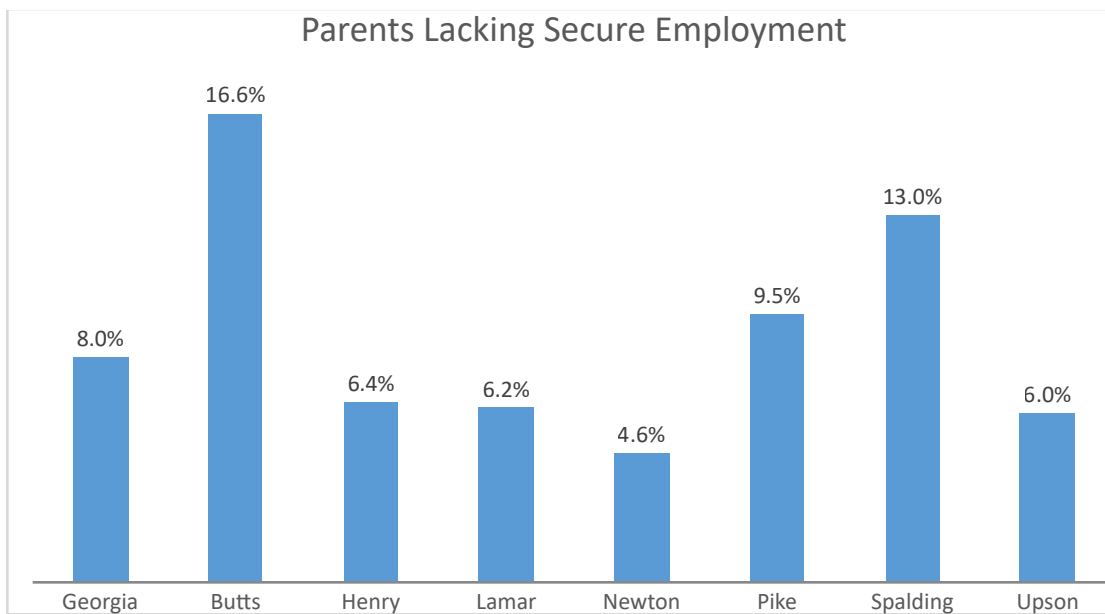


There are other opportunities for employment offered in the area including: construction, waste management, public service, and gas/oil/mineral workers. The data for those was low and would not register in the graph. Based on data collected from the agency we saw an increase in the number of families that are unemployed this data was retrieved from the Department of Labor Area Labor Profile. Each county unemployment rate is compared to the state levels.

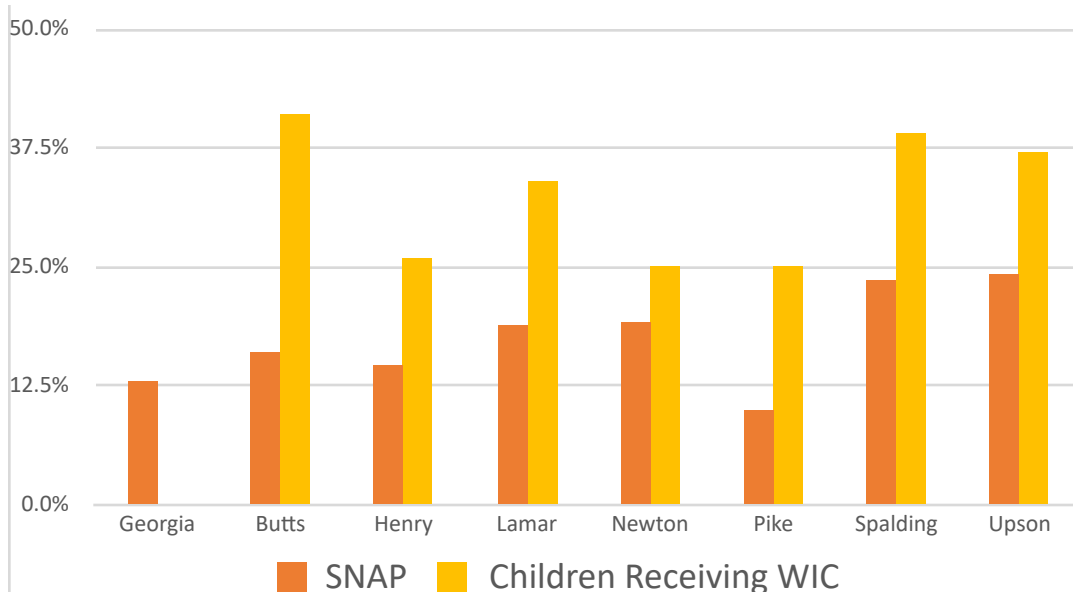


As a result of the lack of employment and issues concerning family structures the data from the State of Babies, shows that 23.2% of the children under the age of five are living in poverty in Georgia that is 4.6% higher than the national average. The trends shows that 25.2% of children live in poverty with no working parent and data reports also show that in Georgia 12.4% of children are living in what is classified as deep poverty.

The table below shows children whose parent lack employment by county:

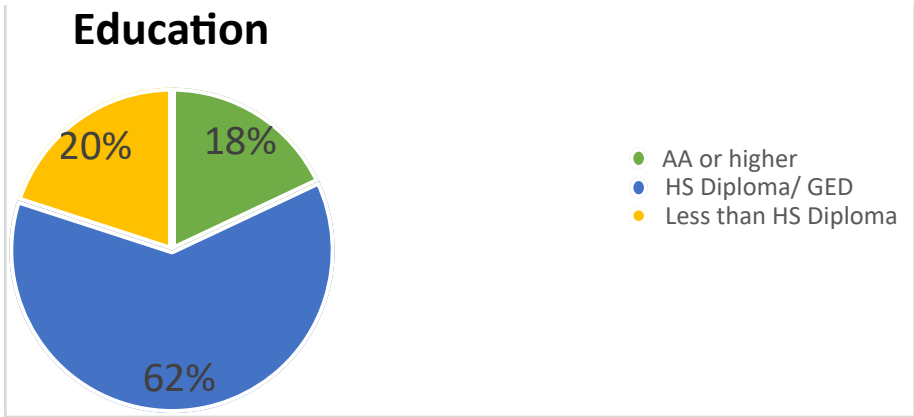


The number of families because of lack of employment and level of poverty that received SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits, and WIC (Women Infants Children) in our areas was on the rise in the 24-25 school year. The Georgia Family Connection data is below in a graph that shows the number for each county and the state levels. Based on the data six of the seven counties were higher than the states 13%.

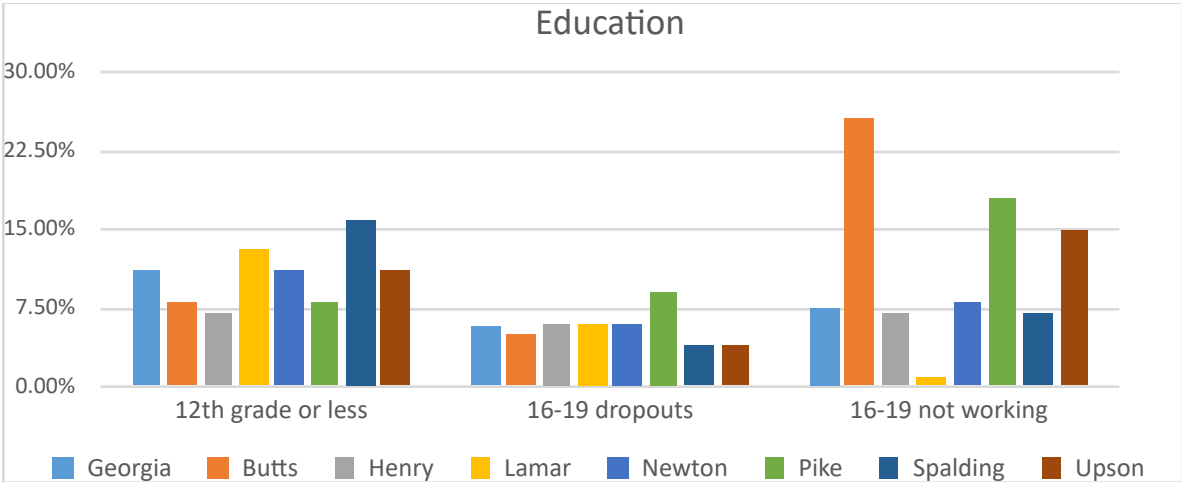


Education Statistics

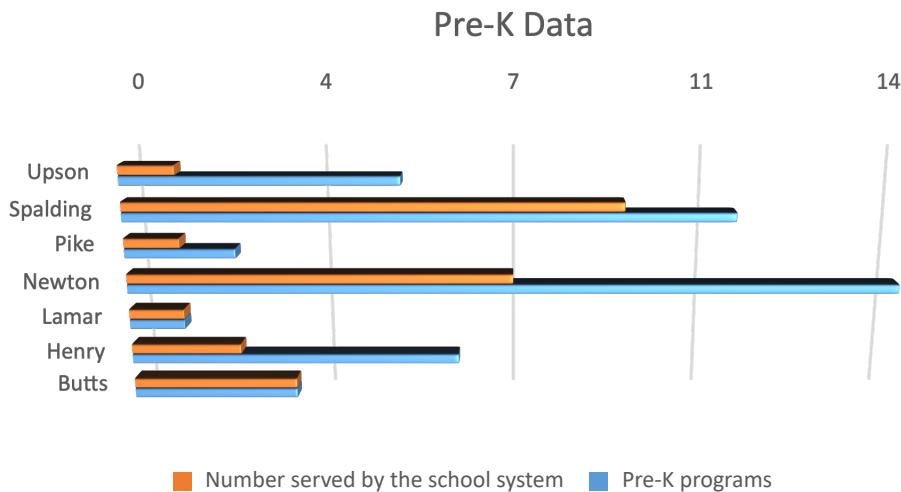
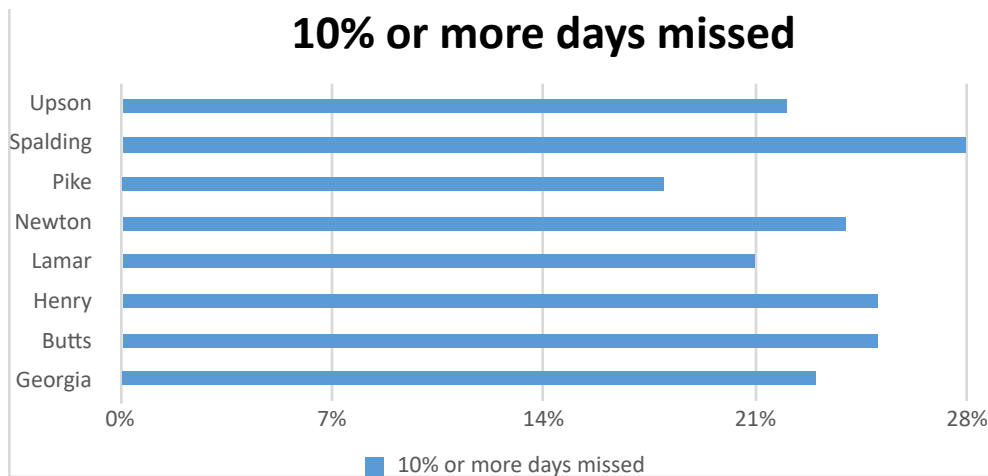
The families in the service area have a mixture of educational backgrounds we have investigated the families we serve and found that in some situations they have higher education but more than 50% have at least obtained a high school diploma or equivalent. For the families in our service area how do not have a diploma we have set goals to further their education and provided opportunities for not only partnerships with community colleges but by hiring and employing them in the centers. The data collected from our families shows that 62% of parents that have an education that meets basic requirements for employment. However, in the area the jobs that pay a wage that is considered livable or that does not require higher education and opportunities a limited by distance.



The statistics in each county for children in school is on the following chart, it lists babies born to mothers with less than a 12th grade education, teens 16-19 years old who drop out, and teens 16-19 who are not working.



Based on this chart we can see that all the counties we serve are on par with the state levels. The attendance data for the local schools also shows that in all seven counties the number of children who missed 10% or more from school was on par with the state average, in some counties the number was more

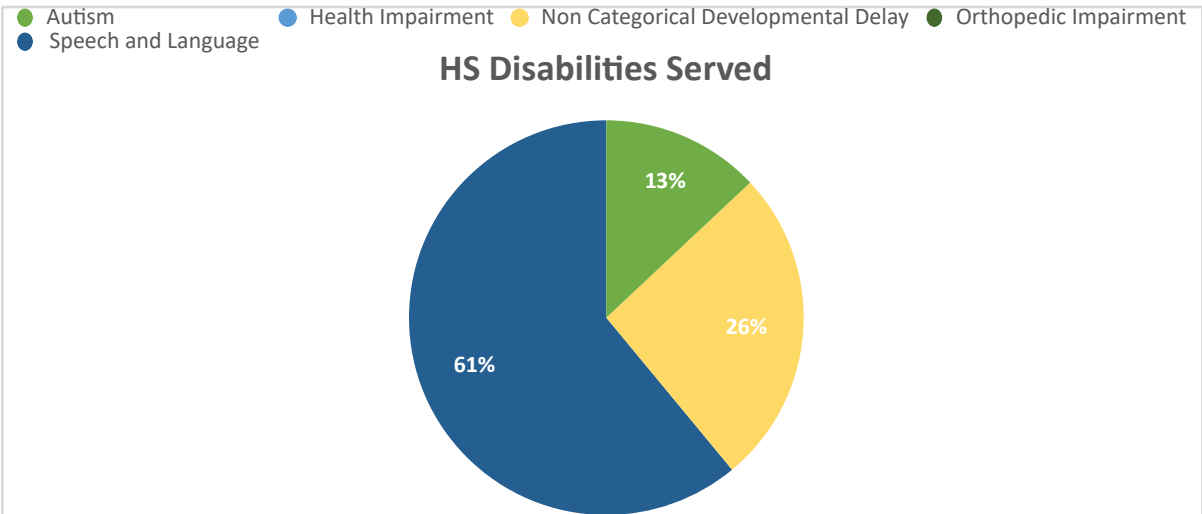
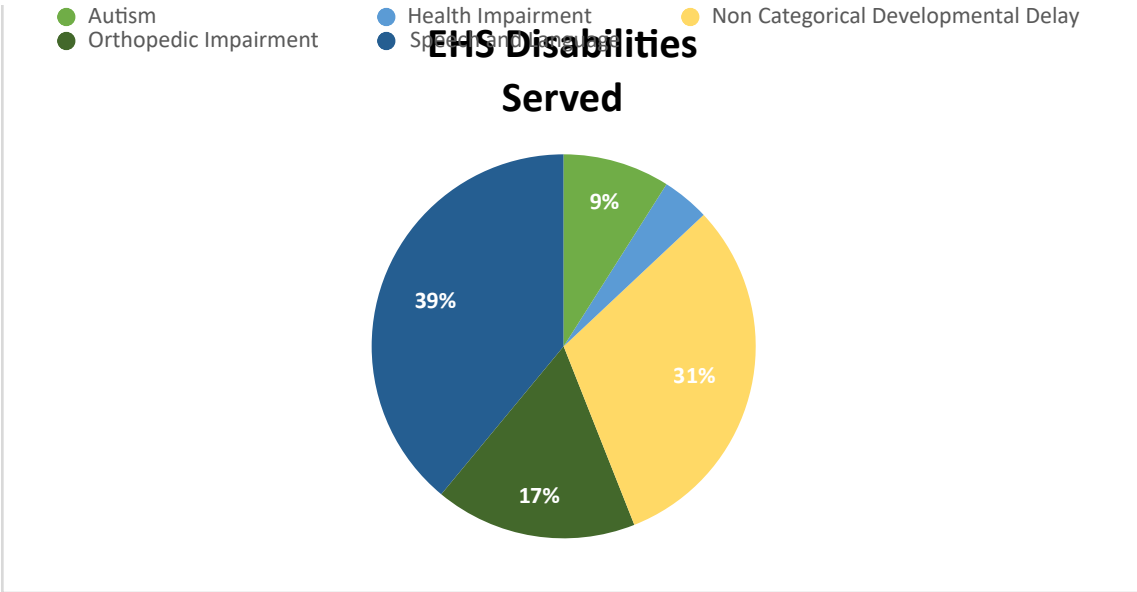


Information on Children with Disabilities

Information was gathered from several sources to complete the picture of children with disabilities and the services being provided. Very little information could be located through the Georgia Department of Education or its website. Therefore, the information came from other locations, believed to be just as valid and possibly more up-to-date.

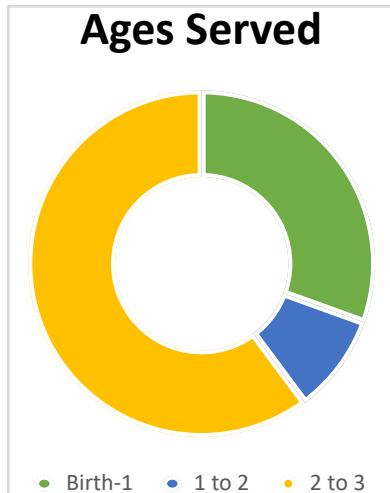
The McIntosh Trail ECDC 2024-2025 school year ChildPlus report 3501-Disabilities: data shows that we served 54 children with disabilities and had 26 referrals.

Please see the graph below for more information:



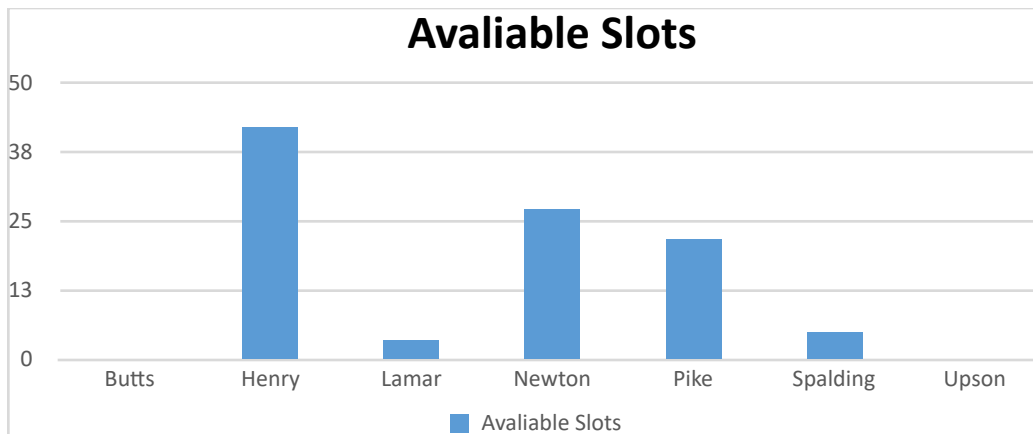
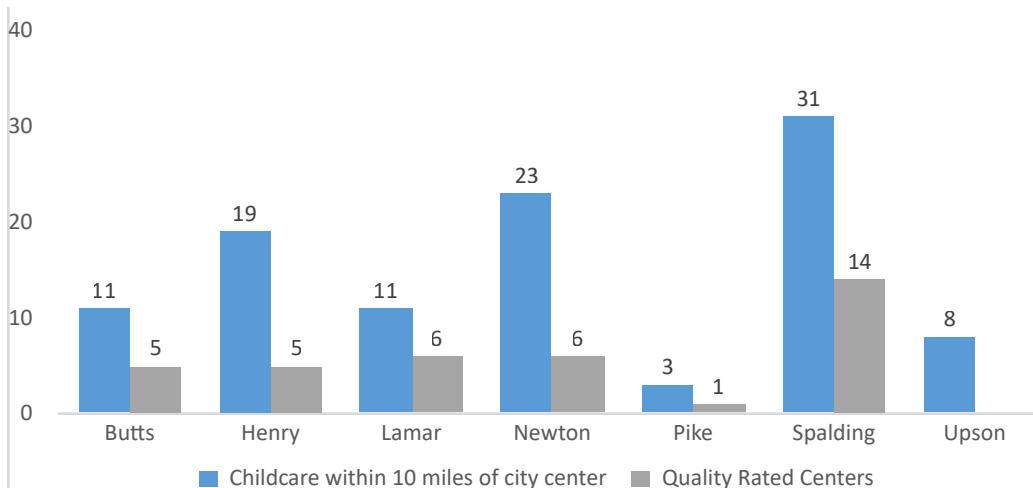
Data collected from the Georgia Department of Public Health (Babies Can't Wait) 2023-2024 Annual Report listed information on the number of children served. Babies Can't Wait is the part C service provider in our area. The table below gives information retrieved

from that report. McIntosh Trail collaborates with the coordinators in the service areas to ensure that we serve as many children as possible. Babies Can't Wait data shows that they served 17,538 children the following numbers in the chart show it by age served:



Available Childcare Services

McIntosh Trail prides its self on providing high quality educational experience for children and families. Each of the centers had a excellent standing with the state and is Quality Rated. In the first graph below it shows how many options are available within 10 miles of the center of each county including Quality Rated centers, home day care centers, and church/other options. It will also show the number who are Quality Rated. The second chart will show the number of available slots for children, and the last is number of Pre-K providers in the area and how many are in the school system.



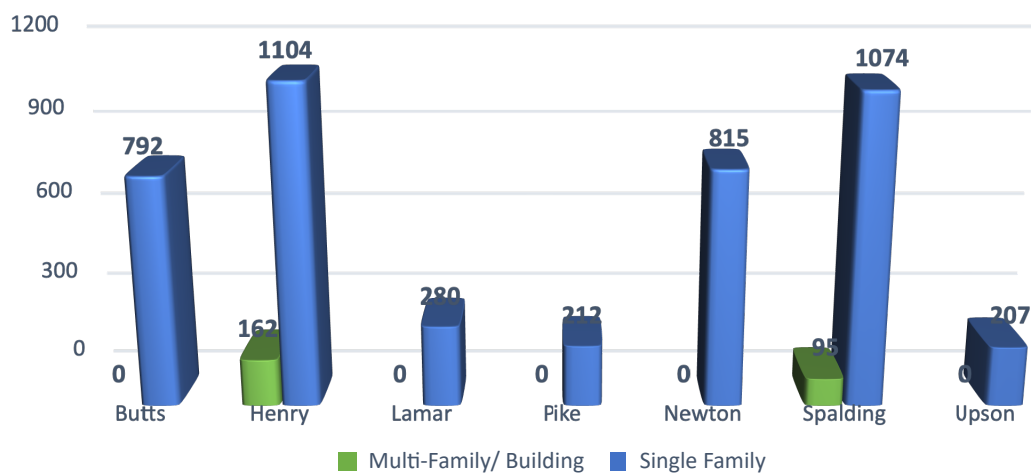
In each of the seven counties there has been a switch in the Pre-K service providers where most of the slots allotted are now provided through the school system. Below the chart shows the number of Pre-K slots and how many are in the school system.

Housing Patterns and Affordable Safe Housing

The Georgia housing market is 1 time higher than average and ranked 26th highest out of the 50 states. In the McIntosh Trail service area five of the seven counties offer government housing that allow families to have little or no cost basic livable housing, in 6 of the seven counties there are apartments that are based on the income like government housing and use a

sliding scale for fees based on a system like Head Start requirements. However, in all seven counties those opportunities are limited and each resource has a waitlist of participants. The housing patterns based on each county are in the table below. These are based on construction activity for single family and multifamily/building residences in each county.

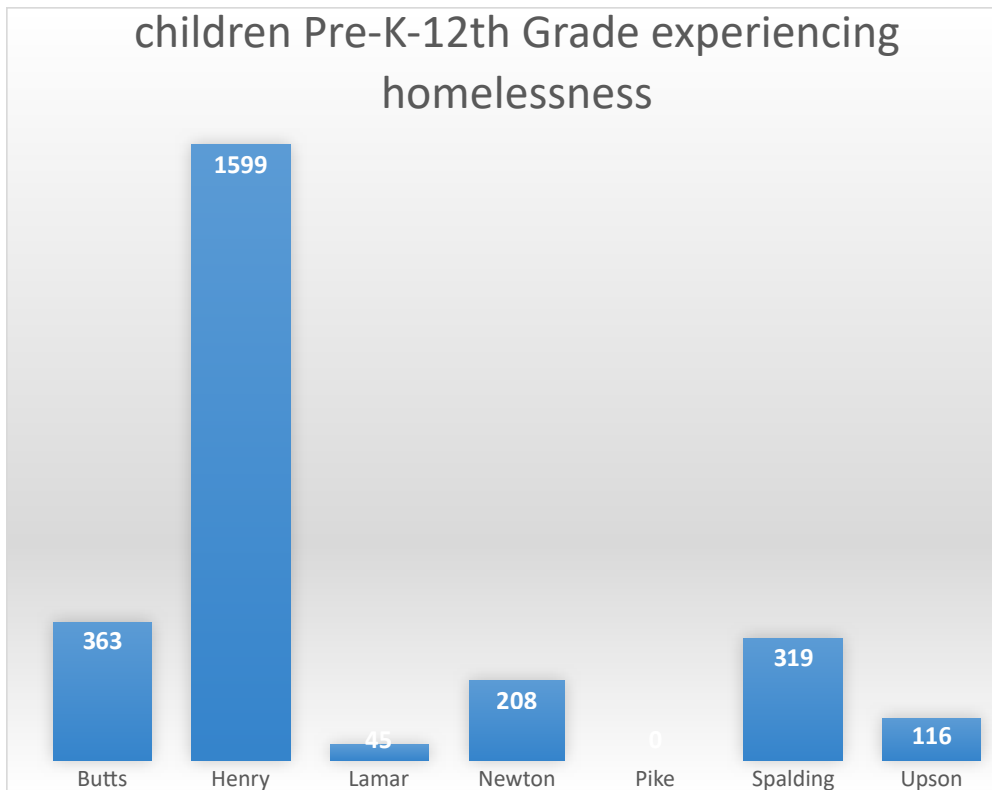
Housing

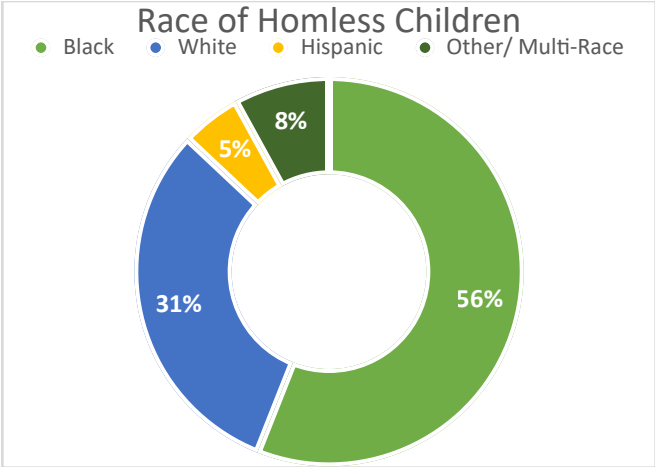
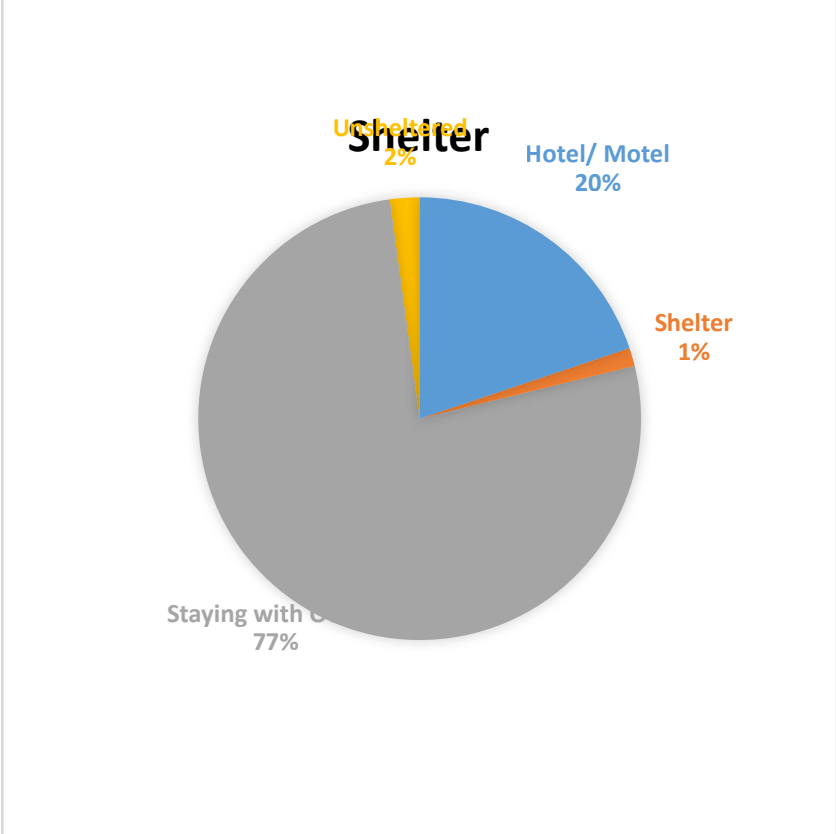


In each of the counties' served housing was questioned during the community assessment that was collected from families. The question was asked if they felt that the housing was inadequate, was the housing not affordable and was the housing was not safe. The results showed that more than half of the surveys said that the housing was inadequate, and not affordable while fewer said they felt the housing was unsafe. The Georgia State of Babies report shows that Georgia 2.6% of families felt their housing was unsafe, 3.6% said they experienced housing instability, and 11.4% were experiencing crowded housing.

Homelessness

The School/House Connection has specific data that shows children in each county experiencing homelessness from ages Pre-K through 12th grade. They also have state data on children under six and birth through three. The data collected from 2022-2023 shows that in Georgia 40,136 children ages Pre-K-12th grade had been identified as experiencing homelessness. The state data shows that children under 3 experiencing homelessness was 13,691, the total number of children six and under was 20,899. That is an alarming number of children. Below in the first chart will be the number of children in each county Pre-K to 12th grade who have experienced homelessness. The second chart will show where they sheltered when homeless. And the last chart will show the race of the children.



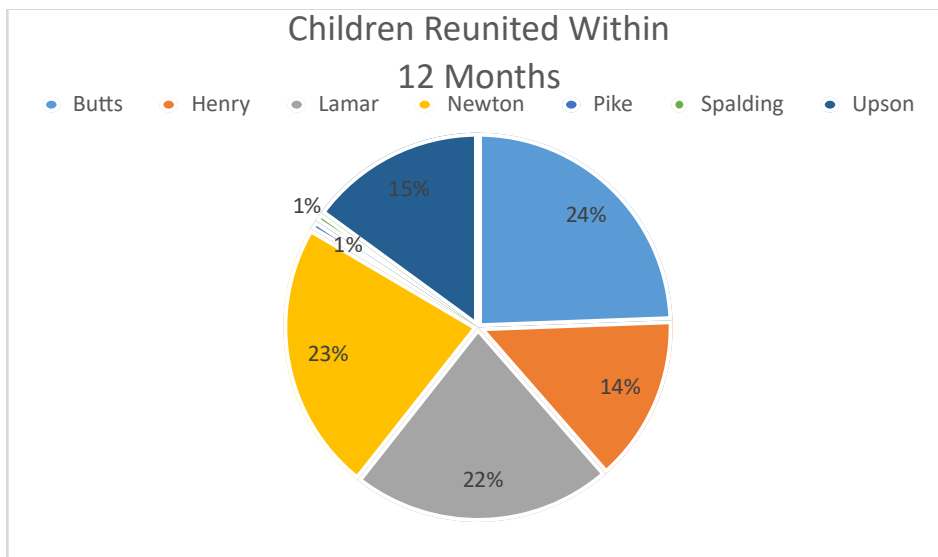


We have experienced homelessness in our service areas and have made it a priority to recruit in the areas that we see the homeless population, locations that serve homeless families. Our program in the 2024-2025 school year served children that were homeless. Of the children

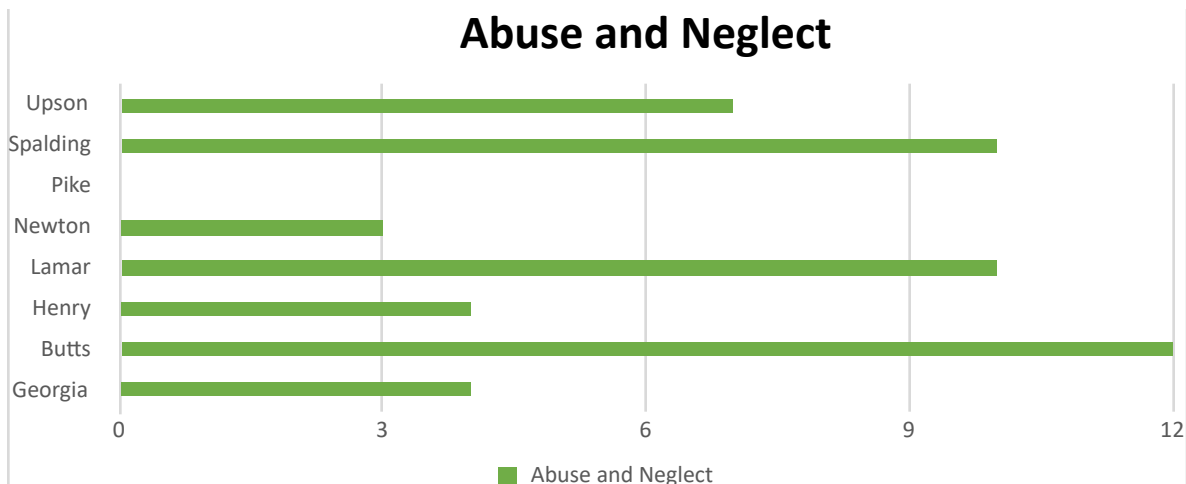
and families served they were all able to acquire more permanent housing during the school term, either with local housing or with other families.

Foster Care and Child Welfare

MTECDC collaborates with the local agencies targeting homelessness and foster children and families. Reports show the rate for children in foster care in Georgia to be 11,154, the number of children who are in foster under five is 38%. The number of children leaving foster care who are reunified/reunited with their families or placed with a relative within 12 months by county is in the chart below.



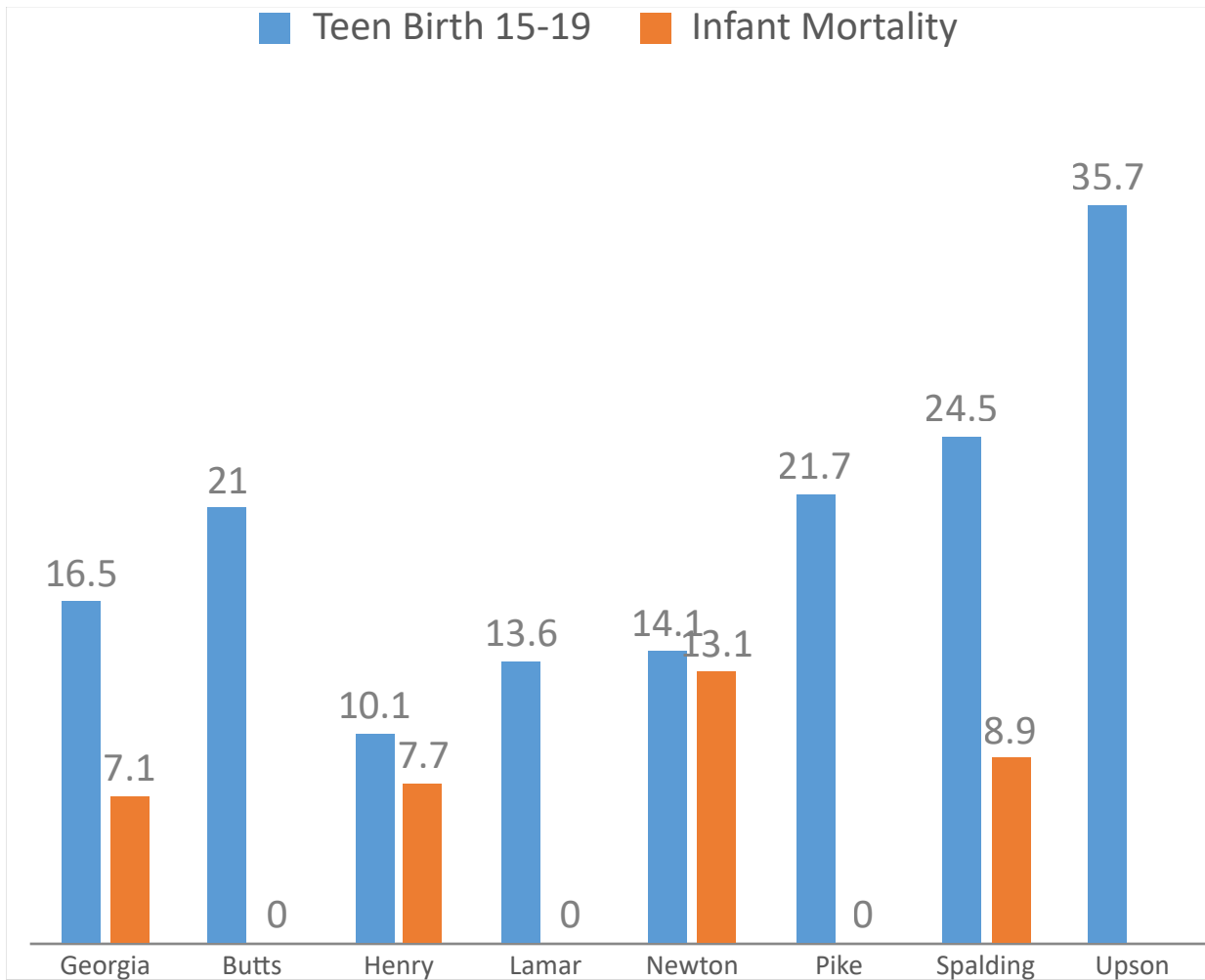
The rates of child abuse and neglect in each county per 1000 show that the rates compared to the state rates show that in areas where families are experiencing a higher number of unemployment, and are suffering from a higher percentage of poverty is high. The chart below gives a visual of the number of abuse and neglect in each county compared to the state numbers. The chart shows that in each of the seven counties except for Pike and Newton is equal to or higher than the state average.

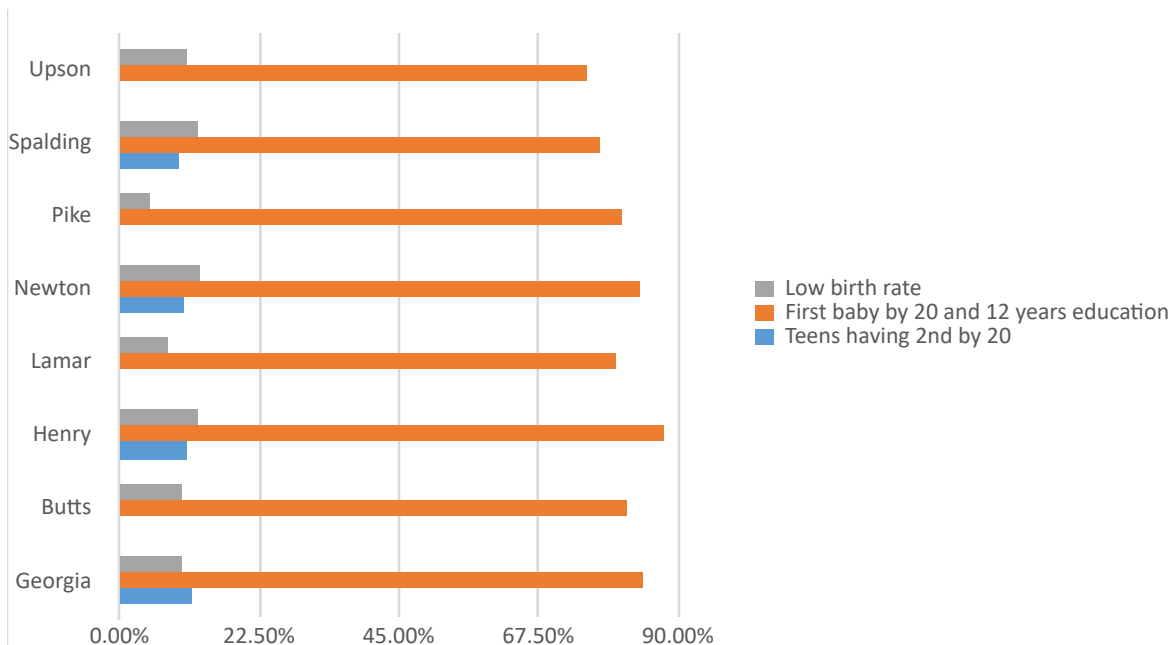


The State of Babies data shows that in Georgia 20.8% of children have had at least one adverse childhood experience while the national average is 2% less. Georgia and the national average for children who experienced 2 or more adverse childhood experiences is 7%. While the number of infants and toddlers who received maltreatment in Georgia was lower than the national average of 15% the number of children that had to be removed based on those experiences was similar. How many in each county have Georgia has some statistics for child wellbeing in the service area that is considered higher than the national average. The overall data for family resilience in state of Georgia was at 83% that was 2% less than the national average. We have had children in the program who have had experiences in both the foster care system as well as suffering from negative experiences and abuse. The agency prides itself on serving the child and family to build positive lasting relationships and experiences.

Pregnancies, Teens, Birth Rates, Low Birth Weight, and Infant Mortality

Georgia having seen an increase in population and with the population ages 18-65 at 52-58% the number of pregnancies and births in the area has risen. The program has served teen parent at a younger age than past years. We encourage the local resource agencies to refer parents to our program through collaboration within the service area. The agency aggregated data for teen pregnancies and births in our area and for the state. Below in the 1st graph it will show the number of teens giving birth 15-19 years old and infant mortality rate per 1000. The 2nd graph provides percentages of teen mothers having a 2nd baby before the age of 20, first births to mothers over 20 and 12 years of education, and babies born with low birth rates.





TRENDS

Population and Employment

Georgia has a growing population and with it comes the need for more jobs and resources to be available to the families we serve. Head Start is a pillar in the community and has been a way to provide services to children and families. In recent years we have seen an influx of Hispanics. Hispanic population account for 9.5% of the 10,403,847 people. Each of the seven counties served saw an increase in the Hispanic population, some even doubled the previous years. With the new laws and regulations, we have also seen that the population of children who are not documented in our service area has decreased.

The south side of Atlanta is experiencing great population growth. The Henry County center is in the southern part of the county and is a densely populated area. Butts, Newton, and Spalding Counties have been experiencing the spill over. In the past ten years the areas have begun to add more jobs; large factories and distribution centers have been built in some of the

counties. Population growth was affected by the employment growth. A good example is Spalding County. Their population growth rate is 4%, but the unemployment rate is 3.9%. They had a great increase in industry recently and the unemployment rate has been on a trend to increase because even though the industries are creating more job options there is also an influx of workers moving into the areas to take the available jobs.

Education

We have seen trends in our area concerning education as well. We have collaborations with the local colleges and have seen a decrease in students who are applying to further their education. We have especially seen a decrease in student who are entering the education fields as well as the medical field. There has been an increase in the number of people applying to get training certificates that allow them to enter specific job fields.

Health and Wellbeing

There are also trends concerning dental and health care, including the rates children who are without insurance, of teens and pregnancy and the number of children who have experienced food insecurity. Teen pregnancy has been an issue in our service area we have provided flyers to all the local schools and pregnancy resource centers to help get those moms some support.

Attendance

McIntosh Trail ECDC noticed at the beginning of our five-year term that attendance was an issue for the agency. Four-year-old enrollment numbers are down based on the State of Georgia offering Pre-K lottery (4-year-olds) within all seven counties that McIntosh Trail ECDC serves.

STRENGTHS AND NEEDS OF HEAD START

The strengths and needs of Head Start families vary from county to county within the service area of McIntosh Trail ECDC and often go hand-in-hand. We have seen issues with attendance in the service area and the school system data shows that it is on par with their statistics. The school system shows that overall, they have had a 23% of students miss more than 10 days of school. The program saw that we have a high rate of absenteeism due mostly to childhood illness. In an effort to have higher attendance the agency encourages parents to bring children daily. They have added boards for positive attendance; they provide information about how attendance has a lasting effect on children and their education.

The centers have seen an increase in the number of teens in the service area who are pregnant. These children often end up being high risk because of poverty, health, or special needs. The agency has collaborations with the service area to support those teens and to aid in their education on pregnancy, infancy, and the health and wellbeing of their pregnancy and their infant.

The state's substantiated incidents of child abuse and/or neglect 2023 rate is 4.5 per 1000. This statistic is particularly disturbing as children living in poverty are often represented in this group at a higher level. Although there was improvement in some of the counties from the previous year five counties were still higher than the state rate.

A community survey was conducted in the Fall of 2024. This survey was completed by families within the seven counties served by McIntosh Trail ECDC. Many of the families listed drug abuse as a problem within their community. Families expressed concerns about childcare, poor housing conditions, unemployment, and the selling of drugs. McIntosh Trail ECDC sees the

above problems in their daily work with families served. McIntosh Trail ECDC's program is funded to provide full day/full year services in seven counties, Butts, Henry, Lamar, Newton, Pike, Spalding, and Upson.

Childcare

The agency has seen the increase in the cost of childcare in our service area, and a decrease in providers who maintain state licensure. The average cost for an infant in childcare in Georgia is 13.8% of a typical family's income. In our area that means that a minimum wage worker would need to work 26 weeks at 40 hours to be able to just pay for childcare for one infant. Our program partners with local childcares to provide service when available to families who qualify. The program does this to help families and to maintain the waitlist requirements.

Housing

In our area we have relationships with local housing and low-income apartments where available, we also have information for families about housing. When families express an interest in housing we also collaborate with agencies that work with families to plan for home ownership.

Drug Abuse

The effects of drug abuse are often far reaching in the local community. Drug abuse training is provided each year for staff and parents. McIntosh Trail ECDC is a Drug-Free agency. Many of the children and staff are affected by having family members incarcerated. Still others see it in their homes, streets, and the violence associated with drug trafficking and its components. In Georgia the 2018-2019 Data from KIDS COUNT shows 10% of children had a parent who had been incarcerated.

Health and Wellness

Four of the counties within the service area are recognized as rural counties with Upson County being the most rural. Some homes even within the counties not considered as rural also have a percentage of families without “city” water. This is important because of the number of children in the community without fluoridated water. It has been the agency’s experience that many of these children enter the program in need of extensive dental work. Health officials say that good oral health is a growing concern. We believe that a higher concentration of dental disease occurs among lower income families. Oral health pays off in the future with less pain, fewer medical bills, and fewer days missed from school. In our area there is a limited number of dental providers and some do not see children under three and due to lack of transportation the families cannot access the care their child needs. As a part of surveying the community we also recognized that two of the seven do not even have a medical facility such as an urgent care or hospital. There is also a limited number of providers in the area who are serving children due to the types of insurance they are provided through the system. The families in our area are encouraged to participate in the WIC-Woman’s Infants and Children programs that provides additional food and nutrition aid for families to meet the nutritional needs of families.

Community Collaborations and Resources

A complete and up-to-date listing of resources available in each county, region and state is available to parents, families, and staff in the center and at the central office. Parents are informed that the listing is available and the family service advocates will assist as needed to research for additional resources. The further the county is situated from Atlanta, the fewer the resources or the greater distance must be traveled to access those services. Most of the major service providers see clients at least monthly or have other agencies that assist in intake for the

resource. The internet has become a convenient means of accessing information about resources as well as applications, phone numbers, and contact names. Each center has a computer with internet access that is available to the parents. The family service advocates, the center –aides, and other staff assist the parents in this endeavor.

Ethnic Composition, Culture, and Language

McIntosh Trail serves children and families who are dual language learners. We currently use available forms, newsletter, flyers, online information, and staff to communicate when we have families who are dual language. We also have Spanish as a second language and staff who can communicate with them. McIntosh Trail ECDC uses appropriate methods to ensure that staff's knowledge and awareness will reflect the families and communities served. During the summer, the enrollment lists of children for the coming fall are prepared and given to the respective center managers. They are reviewed and the management team discusses the children, needs, what accommodations might be necessary, and how to address any issues. Fiscal is often present during this discussion as well as administrative staff and center managers.

Our ERSEA system begins with the information taken from the children's applications that are totaled by race, disability/condition, and spoken home language, and family situation. Once the children's classroom roster is formed the center manager makes every effort to place teaching staff in that classroom which best fits the children needs. Staff are organized and assigned/reassigned to support the children's cultural needs. When a vacancy occurs, every effort is made to attract applicants who represent a wide variety of backgrounds reflective of the children and families we serve.

Outlets for recruiting applicants who reflect the population of enrolled children are:

- Advertising with the Department of Labor in the seven-county area
- Advertising with local colleges who offer early childhood degrees/diplomas
- Including Equal Opportunity Employer on all vacancy's notices and advertisements
- Advertising with local television cable companies and radio stations
- Vacancies are posted on the parent's bulletin boards and other locations throughout offices and centers in English and other languages of children enrolled
- Advertising in other languages such as Spanish.
- Vacancies are announced at staff meetings and parent meetings
- Information on vacancies are sent home in pay check envelopes
- Establish relationships with community organizations
- Use available internet job platform. Ex. Indeed

McIntosh Trail ECDC has staff members who are bilingual. They work not only with their home center but travel to other locations as needed. Every effort is made to purchase forms, booklets, and other materials in other languages. When this is not possible, outside consultants and volunteers have translated materials into other languages as needed. When the staff person is not available or qualified, outside consultants have been used to assist parents and staff in communicating.

All parents are encouraged to volunteer in the center and apply for job openings within the center. Several parents volunteer on a regular basis and make presentations about their heritage in all the classrooms. Our program encourages parents to assist staff in planning activities. The requirements for Head Start programs are conscientiously and consistently utilized

throughout the agency with the understanding that all children and employees come into the program with established cultures. Therefore, administrators, supervisors, teachers, and others staff are trained on acceptance and differences and how that should look in our program.

Multiculturalism is visible in each classroom. This is accomplished by the use of music, pictures, posters, books, dolls, housekeeping set up, art and science activities. Developmentally appropriate activities are implemented on a daily basis. The children especially enjoy the nutrition and cooking activities. Parents are encouraged to visit the centers and different classrooms and to bring items from home that reflect home. In order to build on the foundation that everyone is rooted in a culture, children are taught to be proud of their heritage, traditions, and diversity. Material in each classroom reflects the enrolled children and their families and other countries throughout the world.

UNMET NEED FOR HEAD START AND RELATED INFORMATION

The Community Survey from Fall 2024 identified that there are children and families in our community that are not being served. When the surveys were collected parents were asked if they had any knowledge of children and families that are qualified for services but not receiving services with Head Start/ Early Head Start. That was important for us to know; we then proceeded to give more applications to the families to pass along to friends and families.

Each of the counties served has expanded upon their Pre-K programs. Georgia now has 70,000 students participating in the 2024-2025 school year. Data collected showed that 45% of the total Pre-K program was housed in the school system. They house the Pre-K students in the school system and they provide transportation to and from the school for those children. This has led to a shortage of four-year-old's to be served at McIntosh Trail ECDC's. Each of the seven

counties served has experienced the same circumstances.

CONCLUSION

IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITIZING ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

For several years the agency has tried to locate an affordable facility in the northern portion of Henry County which includes Stockbridge and McDonough. Every year that county's center has children that attend from those areas. Presently, we are located in the lower part of the county and due to land prices and the costliness of facilities have not been able to relocate. Stockbridge is about 15 miles north of the center. Locating a facility in that area continues to be a priority. The agency is collaborating with Mercer University to build an early childhood education center which will house additional children on their McDonough campus which is centrally located in that county. This partnership is still in the infancy stage but looks very promising.

Spalding County's center was relocated in a building that is located across from the county's high school. It is surrounded by companies that employ many of the parents from that center. The process to license this facility is underway. It is a much bigger facility and has two extra classrooms. All of the centers have childcare licensing and all are Quality Rated.

With the expansion of Pre-K into the school systems, it continues to be difficult to enroll eligible four-year-old's. It must be a priority of the program to examine the issue and determine

innovative strategies. Opportunities for increasing collaboration must be sought. Family Service Advocates must receive training on recruitment and reaching a broader portion of the public. It may be necessary to consider converting some Head Start classrooms into Early Head Start classrooms because of the increasing number of pre-kindergarten classrooms in the public school's systems.

Several areas were identified by the community survey were backed up by county and state statistics. Those were:

- The poverty level is still prevalent
- Unemployment level
- The dropout rate is a serious problem in all the counties
- Child abuse and/or neglect
- Lack of medical providers
- Crime rate
- There is a great need to serve children with disabilities
- Oral Health has been identified as a significant health issue
- Type 2 Diabetes has been identified as increasing in the state
- Many services must be obtained by traveling 1- 1 ½ hours to Atlanta
- The internet is a valuable tool for resource information and locating services

These issues will be addressed by collaboration with community agencies. Training and resource materials will be provided to staff and families. Other innovative methods will be sought.