



Rural Health Report

*Creating a
Lasting Impact*

January 2024



Children'sSM
Healthcare of Atlanta



At Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, we are driven by our commitment to create the best possible outcomes for sick and injured children, while helping children stay healthy through our prevention and advocacy programs across all Georgia communities.

Our caring people, our medical expertise and our unique environment created just for kids are what allow us to provide top pediatric care to children from all 120 rural counties in our state. And at Children's, we know that being a leader in pediatric care means breaking down barriers to care. We have been supporting Mercer University School of Medicine (MUSM) and the Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center (GRHIC) as they establish pilot programs with rural hospitals and pediatricians with the aim of improving access to pediatric care closer to home.

As part of this affiliation, Children's proudly funds scholarships through a program at MUSC for medical students specializing in pediatrics who commit to serving in rural Georgia for at least four years after residency. These medical students will fill a need in rural communities and will make a tremendous impact on the families who are seeking care from a pediatrician close to home. The 10 students awarded scholarships in 2023 have strong ties to rural communities and understand the healthcare needs of underserved areas of our state. We look forward to seeing them work in these communities and lead in their role as rural pediatricians.

In the past few years, we have seen new challenges affecting kids and their providers across the state. Through our collaboration with MUSM and GRHIC, we are providing training to hospitals in rural communities to improve pediatric care closer to home. Specifically, Children's is taking the lead on breaking barriers to accessing pediatric mental health care—one of the biggest crises kids face today.

Through this report, we are excited to share more information about how we continue to support the needs of our rural communities.

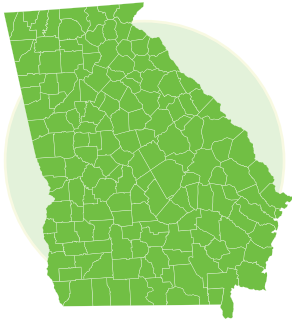
Sincerely,

Donna Hyland
CEO, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

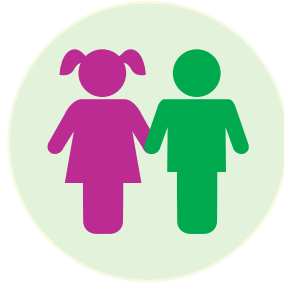


Children's and Mercer University School of Medicine proudly announced their affiliation to address pediatric healthcare access in rural Georgia at the Georgia State Capitol in February 2023.

Our rural health impact by the numbers:



Children's cared for patients from all
patients from all
159
counties in Georgia,
including all
120
rural counties in 2023.



Children's served
28,500+
individual kids from rural
counties for a total of
68,000+
patient visits from January to
October 2023.



Children's provided
\$20.2 million
in unreimbursed Medicaid
and charity care to patients
from rural Georgia,
addressing the majority
of the rural patients
we served in 2022.



Children's is the only healthcare system in Georgia solely dedicated to kids.

Our Medicaid payor mix of **57%** is one of the largest of any hospital system in the state.

Our Medicaid payor mix in rural Georgia is more than **58%**.

Our investment in rural health in 2023

Children's has established a dedicated and long-term sustainable fund of

\$200 million

to support pediatric rural healthcare.

Children's is supporting

Mercer University School of Medicine (MUSM)
and the **Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center (GRHIC)**

as they establish pilot programs with rural hospitals and pediatricians with the aim of improving access to pediatric care closer to home.



"At Mercer University School of Medicine and the Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center, we spend our time trying to find sustainable solutions to improve and increase healthcare in rural Georgia. Our goal with this important initiative is to support those who are providing pediatric care, expand the pediatric workforce and enable families to get care closer to home by building stronger alliances within the state. This initiative wouldn't happen without Children's and I'm so excited because I think it will transform Georgia."

— Dr. Jean R. Sumner, Dean, Mercer University School of Medicine

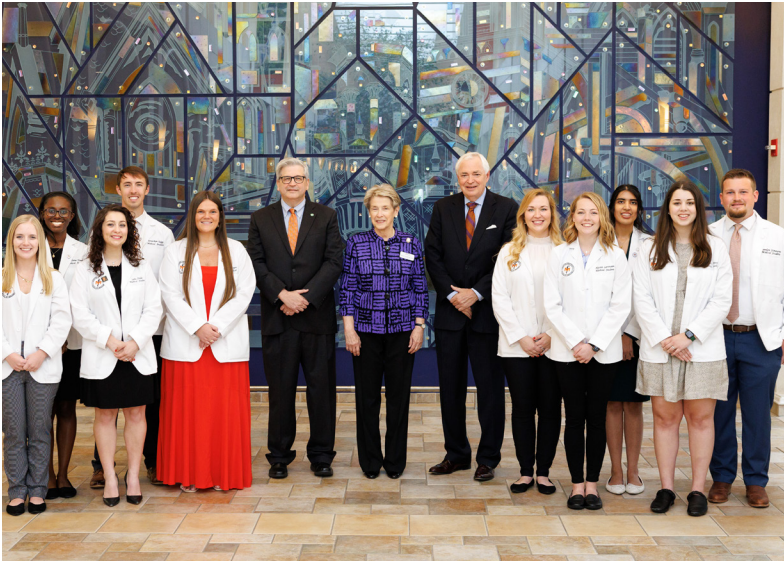
Children's has made a significant financial pledge commitment to

Atlanta Ronald McDonald House Charities to allow them to

further their mission of nurturing the health and well-being of children and families and providing a home away from home for those who must travel to Atlanta for healthcare.

Rural Pediatrician Pipeline Support

Given the identified need for more pediatricians throughout Georgia, Children’s has committed to funding scholarships through a program at Mercer University School of Medicine for medical students specializing in pediatrics who commit to serving in rural Georgia for at least four years after residency.



Children’s funded **10 full-tuition scholarships** in 2023.



FEATURED SCHOLAR

Meet Nelliena Young, MD

Hailing from Albany, with family and friends who have had to drive 30 minutes to an hour to visit a doctor, Nelliena Young, MD, understands the importance of having a pediatrician in a rural community.

Dr. Young graduated from Mercer University School of Medicine in May 2023 and is currently completing her three-year residency at Morehouse School of Medicine. Upon completion, she will return to southwest Georgia to practice as an outpatient general pediatrician. “I know, from experience, the impact that a pediatrician can have not only on the health of a child, but on the family as a whole. This is especially true for new parents, who are looking for guidance,” Dr. Young says.

Strengthening pediatrics in rural hospitals

Children's is supporting MUSM and the GRHC as they establish pilot programs with rural hospitals and pediatricians with the aim of improving access to pediatric care closer to home.

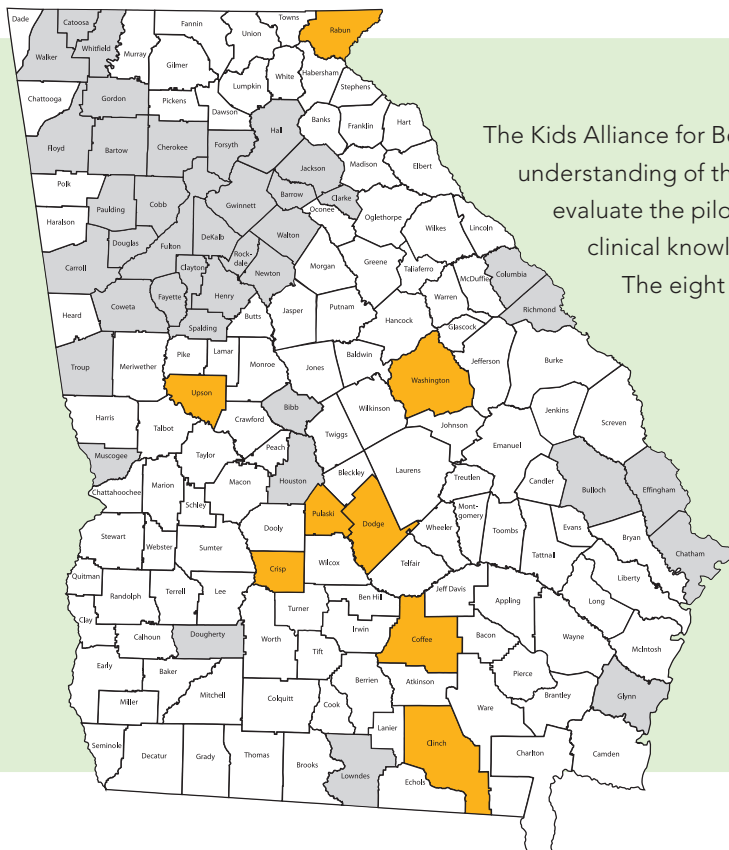
Rural Hospital Support

Rural hospitals currently face a challenge in their ability to treat and keep pediatric patients in their communities. Through the Kids Alliance for Better Care (Kids ABC), rural hospitals receive the training and support needed to better respond to pediatric patients in their emergency departments. Participating sites undergo a process that includes an initial assessment of staff competency, facility readiness and the presence of pediatric-focused clinical guidelines. In the pilot's inaugural year, the project included eight rural hospitals.



"Clinch County has never had a pediatrician. The nearest pediatrician's office is over 40 miles away. This initiative allows our emergency room providers direct access to the physicians at Children's who address pediatric emergencies on a daily basis. Accessing such experienced pediatric physicians is almost unheard of in a rural, critical access hospital. The trainings and resources made available have already improved the emergency room staff's confidence to handle any pediatric emergency."

— Angela P. Ammons, BSN RN, CEO, Clinch Memorial Hospital



The Kids Alliance for Better Care allows MUSM to leverage its demonstrated understanding of the healthcare needs of rural communities to conduct and evaluate the pilot programs. Children's provides the specialized pediatric clinical knowledge needed to launch and sustain those programs.

The eight hospitals participating in this project are:

- Clinch Memorial Hospital, Clinch County
- Coffee Regional Medical Center, Coffee County
- Crisp Regional Hospital, Crisp County
- Dodge County Hospital, Dodge County
- Mountain Lakes Medical Center, Rabun County
- Taylor Regional Hospital, Pulaski County
- Upson Regional Medical Center, Upson County
- Washington County Regional Medical Center, Washington County

Rural Pediatrician Support

Rural pediatricians are often isolated with little access to subspecialty support, after-hours support and regular clinical updates. This initiative provides physician-to-physician telehealth support and offers provider training. MUSM conducts an assessment to determine core training needs. This project initially involves five rural pediatricians:

- Dr. Grace Davis, Worth County
- Dr. Leah Helton, Laurens County
- Dr. Brittany Lord, Dodge County
- Dr. Jennifer Stroud, Coffee County
- Dr. Jennifer Tarbuton, Washington County

Children’s clinicians have prepared more than 550 educational handouts with helpful resources in more than 20 specialties. These are available online and accessible to rural pediatricians to share with their patients and families.



Behavioral and Mental Health Support

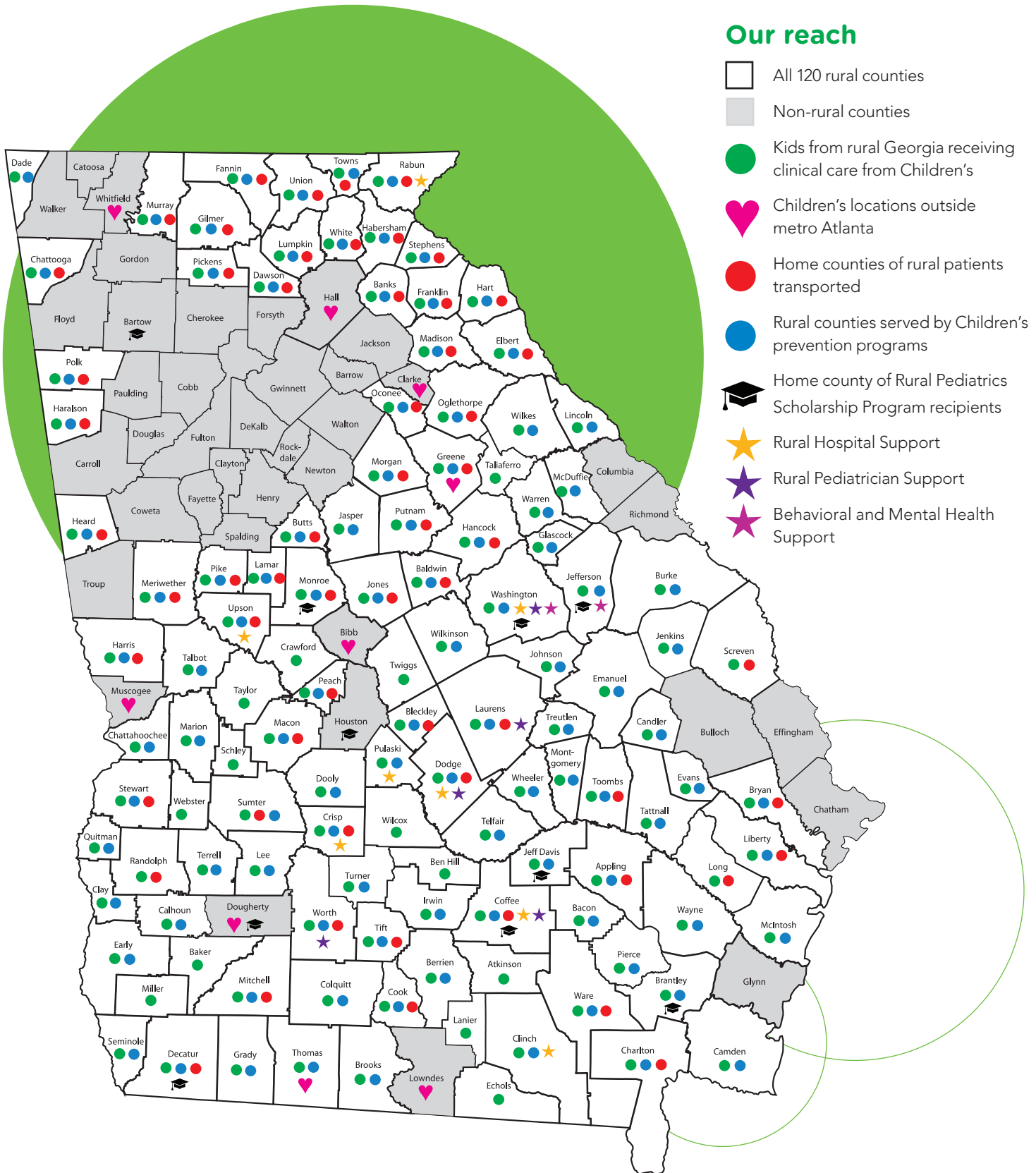
Behavioral and mental health support continues to be identified as an urgent need across the country, with a specific need to create access points for rural providers and schools to connect to mental health professionals. MUSM and Children’s work with schools, pediatricians and hospitals to develop a comprehensive approach to pediatric mental health, initially in two communities with virtual mental health services and a focus on suicide awareness and prevention.

Rural Access Line Pilot

In 2023, Children’s implemented a direct line for rural providers participating in the Kids ABC to seek consultative support from Children’s pediatric specialists. From January to October 2023, our teams received 24 calls to the Rural Access Line as part of this pilot program.



Our reach in rural Georgia



Data from 2022.
 Rural counties in Georgia are defined by the State Office of Rural Health, a division of the Georgia Department of Community Health, as those with total populations of less than 50,000 people.

Treating kids from every county in Georgia

Our reach

- From January to October 2023, Children's served more than **28,500** individual kids from rural counties for a total of more than **68,000** patient visits.
- Rural patients sought care for emergencies, surgeries, cardiology, neurology, orthopedics, hematology/oncology, transplant and a variety of other treatments.
- Most kids only need primary care. Typically only 1 in 5 children requires hospitalization or specialty care.

Children's Cardiology

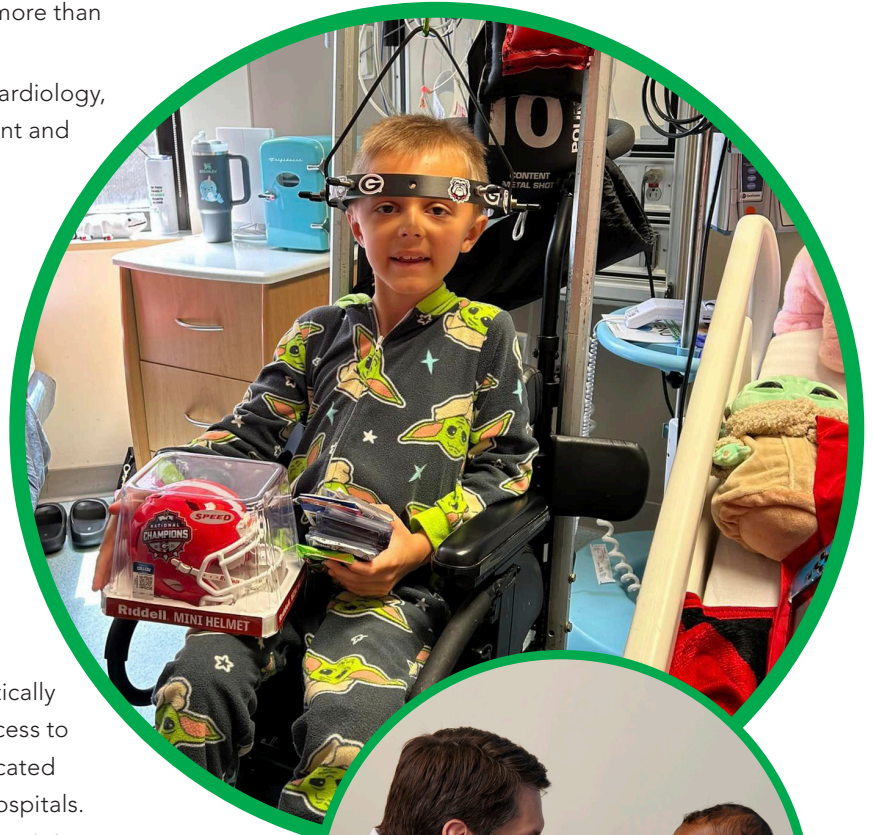
- There are **23** Children's Cardiology clinics throughout Georgia.
- Children's Cardiology saw more than **8,700** patients from **119** rural counties in 2023.
- In 2023, Children's Cardiology treated on average **3,900** individual patients per month, for an average of **8,300** monthly patient visits.

Children's Critical Care Transport Team

- Children's pediatric-trained transport team provides critically ill infants, children and teens from rural Georgia with access to specialized hospital care and treatment at our two dedicated pediatric trauma centers—Egleston and Scottish Rite Hospitals. Egleston is the only Level 1 pediatric trauma center in the state.
- On average, we transport more than **24** patients per month from rural counties via helicopter or vehicle to Children's. From January to October 2023, we transported **245** patients from **59** rural counties.

404-785-DOCS

- Children's offers a physician-to-physician advice service through 404-785-DOCS that is available across the state.
- On average, **1,200** calls were made monthly to 785-DOCS seeking support for local patients from January to October 2023.



Top photo: Alex, from Franklin County, received specialized care at Children's.

Bottom photo: Kids and teens with cardiac conditions receive care at 23 clinics throughout Georgia.

Collin was transported via helicopter from Columbus and is one of the many kids we transport from across Georgia.

Impacting the children of 103 rural counties with our prevention programs

School Health Services

- Children’s serves as a resource for school health services across Georgia. The Children’s regional school nurse coordinator serves as a contact for school health professionals and further collaborates with the Georgia Department of Education, the Georgia Association of School Nurses, the Georgia Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to provide training, education, technical assistance and communication on clinical pediatric topics.
 - Children’s reached on average **38** school health professionals per month, from **72** rural counties in 2023.

Children’s and Safe Kids Georgia

- Children’s is the lead agency for Safe Kids Georgia, working and advocating to keep kids safe at home, on the road and at play through family education and awareness.
 - Safe Kids Georgia currently supports coalitions that serve **28** rural counties and nearly **32,000** kids.



Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta’s Strong4Life

Through Strong4Life, the prevention arm of Children’s, we provide training and resources to local schools, early care centers and community organizations focused on impacting kids across Georgia.

- **Strong4Life.com** was developed by our team of specialists as a free, easy-to-access resource to help Georgia’s families raise healthy, safe, resilient kids.
- **Early Care and Education Centers Programs** offer trainings for early care professionals on various pediatric topics such as: Building Intentional Play, Raising Healthy Eaters and Building Resilience in Early Care.
 - Early care and education programs reached **65** early care professionals in **22** centers, providing care to more than **2,000** kids in **21** rural counties in 2023.
- **Provider Programs** offer five trainings for primary care pediatricians and other providers on Motivational Interviewing, Raising Healthy Eaters and Building Resilience.
 - Strong4Life provider programs reached an estimated **520** kids via **8** clinicians in rural Georgia.
- **School Nutrition Program** provides schools in Georgia with the tools they need to encourage kids to make smart choices in the cafeteria.
 - In 2023, Strong4Life worked with **4** schools reaching more than **2,500** children in rural counties.

Marcus Autism Center’s School Consultation Program

- Through Marcus Autism Center, Children’s provides consultation, trainings and professional development for school systems to effectively serve students with educational needs and behavioral challenges, especially those diagnosed with autism and other behavioral health related disorders. All school consultants are Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs).
 - Marcus Autism Center school consultation program is active in **15** rural Georgia counties.



Children’s Project S.A.V.E.

- Created in 2004, Project S.A.V.E. (Sudden cardiac arrest, Awareness, Vision for prevention, Education) is a Children’s-led program designed with the mission of preventing sudden cardiac arrest in children, teens and young adults throughout Georgia.
 - In 2023, Project S.A.V.E. hosted professional CPR/AED trainings in **13** rural counties, helping to protect more than **31,500** kids.

Fiona's Story



Fiona, now 8, an Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorders Center patient from Pickens County

“

“Fiona’s early diagnosis, combined with protocols brought about by lifesaving research, has allowed us to be proactive at every turn.”

”

In the precious moments of holding their newborn for the first time, Fiona’s parents knew something was not quite right. The right side of her body was larger than the left, and her face was asymmetrical. Her pediatrician ultimately led them to a diagnosis of hemihyperplasia, a rare condition in which one side of the body grows faster than the other as a result of bone or soft tissue that doesn’t stop growing.

Devastatingly, they soon learned the diagnosis carries a high risk for childhood cancer. As a tiny infant, Fiona began seeing the team within the Cancer Predisposition Program in our Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorders Center. At just 3 months old, she started undergoing regular scans. By 9 months old, an MRI showed pre-cancerous lesions in both of her kidneys. Fiona began 53 weeks of chemotherapy for bilateral diffuse hyperplastic perilobar nephroblastomatosis. Just three months after completing that grueling protocol, a new tumor appeared.

On her second birthday, Fiona underwent surgery to remove the tumor and immediately started 36 more weeks of chemotherapy. By her third birthday, she’d grown and lost all of her hair—twice.

At age 3.5, another tumor appeared that required surgical removal and more chemotherapy. For eight months, weekly chemotherapy infusions left her sick for several days at a time.

By her fourth birthday, Fiona had spent more than half of her life on chemotherapy and undergone two surgeries that left her with 75% of her left kidney and 90% of her right kidney.

“What Fiona has experienced is something you wouldn’t wish on your worst enemy, but our cancer journey has been as good as one could possibly be,” said her mom, Justine. “Fiona’s early diagnosis, combined with protocols brought about by lifesaving research, has allowed us to be proactive at every turn.”

Fiona completed her last round of chemotherapy in June 2019. Today, her family makes quarterly trips down I-575 for preventive scans and visits with the Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorders Center team.

Fiona, now 8 years old, is a bubbly, outgoing girl whose kindergarten teacher described as “pure sunshine.” She loves drawing, cooking, baking, playing in creeks, reading and being a Girl Scout. Most days, you’ll find her tending to her beloved younger siblings and a growing roster of animals on her family’s farm in **Pickens County**. The lone reminder of her hard-earned status as a medical warrior? One foot that’s a half size larger than the other.



Mission

To make kids better today and healthier tomorrow

Vision

To be a unified pediatric system that does *Everything Possible* to make *Anything Possible* for kids



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