Charting a New Path Forward:
Reflections on the Year Following the
Social Justice Movement, COVID-19, and
Getting Comfortable with Being
Uncomfortable
Dear friends and colleagues, I am writing to share with you that I have notified the Healthcare Georgia Foundation Board of Directors of my intent to retire as Foundation President in the spring of 2022.

Established in 1999, Healthcare Georgia Foundation has been a remarkable example of philanthropy’s contribution to the health and well-being of underserved individuals, families, and communities. Throughout Georgia thousands of individuals and organizations have been the recipient of our direct charitable activities including more than $80 million in grant support. I am especially proud of our efforts as a strategic grantmaker to be resilient during challenging economic times, insisting that results matter, celebrating the accomplishments of our health and social safety net, taking risks, and declaring health equity our north star. For more than 20 years, the Foundation has served a critical role in addressing health disparities, promoting health and preventing disease, expanding access to healthcare, and strengthening health nonprofit organizations. Therefore, I want to give the Board of Directors ample time to select the next president with the assurance the search will attract an exceptionally strong pool of candidates.

It has been a privilege to serve the Foundation's Board of Directors and to pursue our vision and mission with a stellar cast of colleagues. I am indebted to the Foundation's family for this once-in-a-lifetime leadership opportunity to create, grow, and celebrate the success of this highly effective organization. Our success has always been measured by the accomplishments of those we have served. In the pursuit of greater health equity, our accomplishments together have been many and lasting. I am humbled by the trust our partners and constituents have placed in us. I salute Georgia’s health nonprofit community.

To those the Foundation has supported, thank you for enabling, improving, and advancing the health of all Georgians. I will leave this work knowing that a Foundation grounded in science, built on partnerships, and focused on results has had and will continue to have a pivotal role in Georgia’s future.

Thank you and much continued success,

Gary D. Nelson, Ph.D.
Can you give us a quick overview of GCAPP? What are some of your main areas of focus, and what are your goals?

The Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Power & Potential (GCAPP) was founded in 1995 as a teen pregnancy prevention organization when Georgia had the nation’s highest teen birth rate. GCAPP successfully convened stakeholders from across the state—mobilizing resources and building partner capacity—and as a result, by 2012 the teen birth rate in Georgia had declined by 50%. At this point, GCAPP made the decision to expand our mission to include a more holistic approach to adolescent health and wellness through the focus areas of Youth Empowerment, Comprehensive Sex Education, Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Parent Engagement, and Physical Activity & Nutrition. Since its inception 26 years ago, the teen birth rate has fallen by nearly 72 percent, and GCAPP remains the only organization devoted to building the capacity of schools and community-based organizations to implement tested and proven adolescent health programs for youth across Georgia.

Our vision is that all young people have a safe and healthy adolescence characterized by hope, respect, and opportunity for the future. Working with more than 300 partners and organizations across the state, we convene, collaborate, train, and help communities expand evidenced-based programs that work. Since 2017, we have provided over 180,000 adolescents with health curricula and initiatives and trained over 2,000 youth-serving providers utilizing best practices for working and engaging with young people.

Guided by our Formula for Change, GCAPP has taken significant steps toward achieving our ambitious goals, outlined in our new strategic plan, Impact 2025: Advancing Adolescent Health, to impact 575,000 youth, parents and youth-serving professionals and expand our programmatic reach into 80 of Georgia’s counties by 2025.
How have your community impact methods evolved since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March of 2020? What are some ways in which you’ve shifted your usual method of operations?

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented challenges for so many families created by economic strain, social isolation, and disruptions to normal daily life. The stress, fear, and uncertainty brought on by this crisis are challenging for everyone, but adolescents may have an especially difficult time coping. Moreover, adolescents from racial and ethnic minority, rural and socially vulnerable communities are disproportionately at risk. The impact of stress, trauma, and isolation from COVID-19 on teens in these communities is more severe due to existing social inequities and health disparities.

To meet the heightened needs for youth, GCAPP effectively pivoted our program offerings and operations to remain a steadfast resource for educators, youth-serving professionals, parents, and young people across Georgia.

This includes digitizing our adolescent health training and programs and increasing our communication of critical health resources to all our stakeholders on a weekly basis. We have also leverage technology for the innovative use of google classrooms to offer virtual "office hours" to teachers in need of programmatic and technical support to implement adolescent health curricula. Our team has also become skilled users of digital tools to reach our audience. Leveraging our online platforms, we successfully launched a Webinar Wednesday series in 2020, which continues today, to provide a safe space for discussions around the coronavirus pandemic, racial justice movement, and sexual, physical and emotional well-being.

How did the social and racial justice movement of Summer 2020 affect GCAPP's approach to serving your community?

The Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Power & Potential (GCAPP) believes that all children are entitled to a safe and healthy adolescence characterized by hope, respect, and opportunity for a productive future. Every aspect of our vision — safety, health, hope, respect, opportunity — is challenged and undermined by chronic racism, abuse, and discrimination. We cannot allow these conditions to continue.

As a nation we were confronted with so much racial strife and
social injustice in 2020, and like many organizations, we acted. Because providing critical knowledge and information is the very foundation of our work as a leading youth-serving organization, GCAPP believes an important first step is to facilitate meaningful conversation with the goal to achieve understanding and find common ground. GCAPP is doing its part to elevate the issues and implement strategies that address pertinent issues of inequality:

- We launched a summer series of virtual events for open and honest dialogue on social injustice featuring young people, community leaders, parents, trusted adults, and youth advocates seeking change.

- More than ever, we are amplifying the voices of some of Georgia’s most informed young leaders — our Youth Advisory Council. We are giving them support to lead town halls from their perspective with peers across the state, thus creating opportunities for them to validate their feelings and realities.

- In partnership with U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and Community Health Solutions, we are creating a new narrative for African-American young men in a multi-dimensional project in Clayton County. The Eban Initiative connects trained, male mentors who are adept at building culturally responsive developmental relationships with boys and young men of color in a structured, supportive environment.

How does the GCAPP team “get comfortable with being uncomfortable” in regards to conversations and enhancing policies of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

GCAPP recognizes the importance of having a diverse and inclusive staff and governing board that reflects the populations which we serve. We have included a diversity objective in our Impact 2025 Strategic Plan to ensure we are equitable in our hiring process in terms of gender and race.

Further, we have implemented a robust data infrastructure to promote real time strategic learning and continuous quality improvement. To that end, in addition to specifying and measuring our outcomes of interest, we have also begun to design and implement internal reporting systems that will enable us to assess our fidelity to program models and assess the breadth and quality of our services and reach across the diverse communities we serve.

Along those same lines, how are you all navigating the ongoing COVID-19 situation with the Delta
variant? What are your methods for adapting to these ever-evolving updates?

The health, safety, and well-being of GCAPP's staff, partners, and youth served continues to be our top priority as we navigate the pandemic. We continue to leverage our now expert use of digital tools and platforms to conduct trainings, meetings, and conferences in a virtual format. Further, when gathering, we are ensuring that we maintain masking and social distancing recommendations.

What are some upcoming projects or initiatives GCAPP has coming up in late 2021/early 2022? What are you excited about for the near future?

We are excited to accelerate the momentum and success of our Youth Advisory Council into the next phase by implementing our Youth Advocacy Strategy. GCAPP's Youth Advisory Council is a youth-driven initiative, immersed in Georgia communities, to advocate for holistic health awareness for teens and young adults. Currently, the Council is comprised of 40 young people (up from 29 members in 2020) ages 14 to 24 years old, representing 16 counties across the state.

Through adolescent development research, we know that in addition to positively impacting a wide spectrum of individual health, social, emotional, and academic outcomes, engaging in activism and civic engagement can create positive community and social change. This power and potential of Georgia's youth presents a call to action for GCAPP and the foundation for our Youth Advocacy Strategy.

The Youth Advocacy Strategy will provide youth development and advocacy training to Youth Advisory Council members and other youth leaders to enable the formation of community-based Youth Action Teams. These teams will work to identify and address the health-related challenges impacting their peers in their communities and then to create and implement Youth Advocacy Plans to address their local challenges. Through this initiative, we will equip young people with the skills and tools needed to serve as advocates in their communities focusing on leadership, advocacy, and activities to address adolescent health disparities and help drive policy change.

To learn more about GCAPP, you can visit their website at www.gcapp.org
Following a year of CDFI capacity building, self-study and preparation for impact investing, in 2019, Healthcare Georgia Foundation announced its first five-year Program Related Investment to Community Health Center Capital Fund – a nationally focused Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) to provide low-cost, fixed rate, five to seven-year term loans to Georgia’s Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). This investment opportunity allowed the Foundation to explore new pathways in which to address the social determinants of health, and to pursue additional avenues towards achieving health equity for all. Based on the success and momentum gained from this venture, the Foundation continued working to identify new and exciting additional investments of this nature.

In May 2021, Healthcare Georgia Foundation completed a new round of Strategic Health Impact Investment funding that continues this pursuit of addressing “the causes of the causes” in regard to the social determinants of health and with a deeper engagement in impact investments with a health equity lens. With these recent investment opportunities, the Foundation distributed funds to the Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership Loan Fund, Carver State Bank, and Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs (ACE Loans). These awards propelled the Foundation to exceed $1.1 million in Strategic Health Impact Investments to date.

As we look to the future, the Foundation is thrilled to continue to build upon these opportunities, and to explore new ways in which the social determinants of health can be addressed through innovative funding strategies. The abundance of creative opportunities in terms of funding has reached new heights, and the future looks brighter each day as we continue to serve our communities. “In our pursuit of health equity for all Georgians, we must find new ways to align our mission with funding and financing strategies,” said Gary Nelson, President.

To learn more about the Foundation’s latest Program Related Investments, click the button below to view all press releases.
Can you share with us a bit about your background and how you started working in Evaluation?

I completed my undergraduate degree at Georgia Tech. During my sophomore year, I began working at Georgia Tech’s K-12 outreach center, CEISMC. At the time, I was a math tutor and I absolutely enjoyed my work with young people. I was able to share my passion for math and I found that I was a natural educator. It was also eye opening because I realized not only the inequities in education but the demands and expectations placed on educators. I recognized the need for individuals and organizations to complement the work of schools and families. The work at CEISMC sparked a desire to support educators, schools, and youth development organizations. I worked at CEISMC for a total of 15 years managing academic mentoring and tutoring programs. My natural desire to improve my own programs and understand how I could maximize their impact inspired me to pursue a Master’s in Public Administration and eventually my Ph.D. where I would study research and statistics and start working in evaluation.

What inspired you to co-found TRE Consulting?

I co-founded TRE because I knew I had an unique perspective and set of skills that I wanted to share with the world. While managing youth programs, I had experiences with evaluators who were completely hands-off or who did not tailor their approach to my program or my clients' needs. Those experiences shaped the kind of evaluations that TRE conducts and how we engage with our clients. While pursuing my Ph.D., I decided to establish TRE to give nonprofits an experience I did not have. We begin each client engagement with a conversation about the organization, their needs, goals, and experiences with program evaluation. We create and implement custom evaluations that examine the impact and are useful to staff at all levels.

What are some of the main goals of TRE Consulting, and of your own work in Evaluation?

I would say I have two main goals: engage clients in the work and decrease the fear and negative stigma around evaluation, data, and numbers. TRE believes in utilization-focused evaluations. It’s an evaluation approach that judges an evaluation primarily on usefulness to its intended users. We aim to use this approach not only in our program evaluations, but in all of our client engagements.
our client engagements. At the beginning of a project we take time to really understand the organization and then we work to create a project and deliverables that are of the greatest use to our clients. All of our evaluations and deliverables are tailored to the needs and aim to provide maximum benefit to clients.

Since I was a small child, math and science were my favorite subjects. I realized as a kid that there were MANY people who did not feel the same way and I also saw that as a math tutor in college. As I moved into consulting, I saw how that manifested itself with clients who sometimes saw evaluation as an obligation from a funder as opposed to a tool that could help them and their organization. That is why we use meetings and activities such as data parties to unpack and share the findings in ways that are beneficial to the entire organization.

Have you noticed an evolution or shift in your Evaluation work since the social and racial justice movement of 2020?

I wouldn't say that its shifted or evolved my work, but it has provided an opportunity to engage in conversations about how and why we do this work. My Ph.D. program was grounded in critical theory. My eyes were opened in so many ways, but mainly because it was the first time that I engaged in conversations about race, social class, and gender and how each play a role in society at large and education specifically. The social and racial justice movement of 2020 was the first time that I engaged in those same types of conversations outside of academia.

The questions we ask, the ways we engage with data, and with participants has always been informed by the education I received and the many ways of knowing and seeing the world. I am appreciative of the opportunity to share that view and engage in conversations that are sometimes uncomfortable, but a necessity if we are to improve lives in a meaningful and intentional way.

What are you looking forward to the most with TRE Consulting within the next two to three years? What are some things you have on the horizon?

We're excited to continue partnering with amazing nonprofits and educational entities and opening their eyes to the benefits of evaluation. I have found that individuals sometimes think about evaluation as a checkbox, a requirement that must be fulfilled. We see evaluation as an opportunity to better understand people, programs, and operations and to improve them. I think we have a great team and I look forward to expanding into new arenas and deepening the relationships we have with our existing clients.

What are some things you're excited to achieve with your recent partnership with the Evaluation Resource Center?

I am excited to support a greater number of health organizations. Previously, we have worked on a few health related evaluation projects that aimed to reduce the stigmas associated with
counseling and mental health, developed and implemented trauma informed programming, and provided trauma training for youth development staff. Many of the members of my team have a background in public health and I know that their expertise in community health, health education, health promotion, maternal and child health, tobacco and substance use, and health disparities will be of benefit to organizations throughout the state.

I am also excited about meeting and working with my fellow ERC partners. There truly is strength in numbers. No one organization or evaluator can solve the challenges we face in Georgia. I am excited to learn what others are doing and share what we do at TRE with the other ERC partners.

What is the best way for our readers to get in contact with TRE Consulting?

Our website, treconsulting.co is a great place to learn more about TRE Consulting and connect with me. We have a fantastic tool integrated into our Contact Us page that allows you to schedule a 20-meeting at a time that is convenient for you so that we can learn more about organization and how we can support you.

Transforming Youth, Families, And Communities

To learn more about TRE Consulting, visit www.treconsulting.co/
Nominations are now open for the 2022 Joseph D. Greene Community Service Awards!

Throughout Georgia, all communities have extraordinary individuals and organizations that are committed to improving the quality of health and healthcare of those they serve. The hard work and dedication of these heroes makes a difference in the quality of life of all Georgians. Healthcare Georgia Foundation’s Joseph D. Greene Community Service Award honors these extraordinary individuals, nonprofit health organizations, and community collaboratives. By recognizing those who inspire and lift others up, we hope that Mr. Greene's legacy of community service will continue through the work of others.

Do you have an individual or collaborate in mind that you would like to nominate? Click the button below to learn more about the nomination criteria!

Nomination Guidelines

Connections 2022 will take place March 28 – 29, 2022!

After postponing our 2020 conference and grantee convening due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Foundation's Board of Directors and staff are thrilled to bring our partners and grantee community together safely in a hybrid format to share ideas, collaborate, and learn together.

Stay tuned for more information regarding registration details, session lineup, and more!
On August 4th, 2021, the Two Georgias Initiative coalitions and management team gathered at Mercer University for a day filled with learning opportunities, collaboration, and connecting both in person and virtually via livestream.

Attendees enjoyed opening remarks from Foundation President Dr. Gary Nelson and Mercer University’s Dean Jean Sumner, MD. The program continued with presentations from Dr. Glenda Oeyang, Lisa Medellin, the Partnership for Southern Equity, the Emory Prevention Resource Center, and breakout groups in the afternoon hosted by Georgia Health Decisions.

Check out the video below to see a brief snapshot of the day, along with interviews conducted with TGI participants Erin Hernandez and Estella Bryant.
Can you tell us a little bit about MedBank and its mission? How did you all get started?

It started back in 1992 at the Health Department as a service for seniors who had Medicare, but at that time there was no part D so it really didn't make any sense. You could go to the doctor, but you had to pay for your medicine. I can remember my parents being in that situation - not really getting a huge Social Security check, but $300 a month had to come out of that for medicine.

Medbank grew because it was not only seniors that needed prescription assistance. We live in Georgia, and there is no Medicaid for people who are not pregnant or disabled. We we've got tons of free clinics, but there's no free medicine. Medbank expanded to the point where it included everyone who was uninsured, and in the last couple of years, we've even expanded to those who are insured, but the co-pays on the medication create a hardship. I work with people who have insurance, and a few years back, their insulin required $45 copays. Those copays are $245 now. When I tell people about this, and some people are knowledgeable, they'll say, well, Walmart has insulin for $25. That's not suited for every diabetic - some are long acting, some are short acting, and come from different sources.

So (insulin) may be available for some people, but across the board, that $25 insulin is not applicable to everyone. If you've got a medicine that works well for your situation, that's what you want, and if we can get it from the drug companies for free. Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca; they all have patient assistance programs, and the general public just doesn't know about it. You just have to apply. It's a lot of paperwork, a lot of documentation, a lot of proof of income, which is what our case specialists do. They can't provide every medicine, but some medicines free directly from the drug companies.

Video courtesy of MedBank Foundation
source: www.medbank.org/medbank-mission/
If we get them approved, they're approved for whole year, and they can either send a 90 day or 120 day supply, which is nice because I find sometimes with the 30 day supply people forget to get a refill. It's a hassle sometimes going back to the drug store and this provides two ways of getting their prescriptions. We can send the medicine directly to the home, which most of the pills are, but the insulin has to go to the doctor or clinic and we have eight locations. At four of those locations, we are actually in the free clinics so that when you see a provider, you immediately come see us and we sign you up for the medicine.

When I started doing this, there was a 14 day turnaround time from the application to the medicine coming to the recipient. Since COVID-19 hit, it's taking almost 30 days now to get your medicine, but we have a partnership, one of which is SIRUM. We can get medicine, even if it's just a six dollar, 90 day supply with SIRUM. If the doctor sends an e-script in three to five days, they have their medicine. Also, we partner with one of the local hospitals, St. Joseph's Candler. If you run out, the doctor can send a prescription to the St Joseph's Candler pharmacy, and we can get a 30 day supply of emergency medicine. So once you get in contact with us, either we're going to get that medicine from the hospital, or we're going to get it through SIRUM, but you're going to go home that day with medicine while we work on getting that 30 day supply from the drug company.

No one in this country should go without medicine - no one, and we have the capacity to do it. There are not thousands of MedBanks across the country, but in some other states, at least they have expanded Medicaid to cover more people. Between the hospitals, SIRUM, Walmart’s four dollar program and Publix has a $7.50 program, as well as a $2.50 program. We look at everything out there to see where we can get your medicine, preferably at no cost or at the lowest possible cost that we can find.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the work that you all do? What have some of the repercussions been on the way you serve your community?

We did not shut down, but we already had a system in place where we could take our applications are online in English and in Spanish, but everyone does not have access to the Internet. The biggest thing was less face-to-face interaction and getting people to call us over the phone. If you can't download it (the application), we can mail it to you. That takes more time and you have to mail it back. In some cases, for the people we mailed applications to, we have a slot in our door where they could put in the application and the supporting documentation. We could fax the application to the doctor because their doctor has to sign off on the script. We sent them to the drug company and that took some time down. So we never stopped providing service; we could do it online by phone, by email, by text, if we had to.

The biggest challenge for us has been, we lost some people; we don't know where they are or
what they’re doing. At the clinics, and even some private physicians, people stopped going because of COVID-19. Some doctors for a while still renewed the prescriptions. But after a while, if you don’t come in, that doctor’s not going to renew that prescription or approve that refill. We started calling people every month that we weren’t seeing to find out why they aren’t going to the doctor or we can’t get their medicine. A lot of people were just scared to go to the doctor, but you can’t do without insulin.

Doctor’s offices can do telemedicine appointments. Even if you don’t have a laptop or a tablet, we can do this over the phone, but sometimes people need help. What we found out was that they didn’t have items at home that they needed for these telemedicine visits. Healthcare Georgia Foundation gave us any emergency COVID-19 grant that gave us the resources to make sure that, if you’re a diabetic and you don’t have a glucometer and test strips at home, we’re going to make sure you have those things. When you talk to your doctor, either by computer or over the phone, they’re going to ask you for your blood sugar readings. If you’ve got high blood pressure and you don’t have a high blood pressure cuff - and those things are expensive - you can’t tell him what your readings at home. So we’re going to make sure you get one at no charge. If you called out and say you may be running a fever, but don’t have a thermometer, then you can’t tell him what your temperature is. So we put together what we called, COVID survival kits. It started out just for the people we serve, which is over 2000 people every year where you have your glucometer, test scripts, high blood pressure cuff, and thermometer.

We’re also providing masks and hand sanitizer because those things cost money. We were able to get a donation of tons and tons of hand sanitizer and masks - we had an eighteen-wheeler truck pull up so that if you need paper masks on a regular basis, we can provide those to you. In addition to our clients, we started showing up at the food banks and the drive through food giveaways. It was also a good marketing tool because people that were showing up at these places, they didn’t know about MedBank. So in addition to the people we serve, we were providing a service to the community as a whole.

2020 contained not only the COVID-19 pandemic, but also brought about a much-needed social justice movement in the summer. How did this movement impact MedBank and how you serve your community?

COVID-19 shined a glaring light on some of the inequities in our system. We have a large Hispanic, Latino population that we serve here in the Savannah community. We see them on a regular basis and we see them seasonally as they come through here during onion season to pick onions. Some of them, or most of them are undocumented, and they have no insurance. When COVID-19 came along and there was no work, they had no unemployment, and they received no stimulus checks. So I partnered with some young ladies here called SUYA – the Students of Undocumented Youth Association, some of them are Dreamers. They go to the local college here, and they started taking up donations of food, and they started getting money for rent and utility assistance.
Then, one part of my building was not being used. Now, it's a warehouse for food that's culturally appropriate because they were going to the food banks, but it wasn't always the kind of food they ate. So now we have beans, we have tortillas, we have salsa. And if you're undocumented and you only speak Spanish, or you're not comfortable with going to some of the other places, we can see you. Not only when we see you to get food and utility assistance, we're going to also encourage you to get COVID-19 testing and get a shot, because we've also partnered with the Health Department, and once a month we provide clinics that are culturally oriented. We also provide eyeglasses for free - we've partnered with a company called New Eyes. All I need is a script and our free clinics will give you an eye exam, and there are also free dental clinics.

Are there any projects you have coming up in the next few months that you're excited about?

Since we partner with the Health Department, I am really lobbying the mayor to take mobile units with the COVID vaccine to where the people are. To the beauty parlors, to the barbershop, to the ballpark. Also, in Savannah, we're right on the state line between South Carolina. South Carolina has the highest COVID infection rate in the country. We're working with some volunteers in medicine clinics over there to get across that bridge. So that, those are my two biggest things, mobile clinics, and getting across that bridge.

We couldn't do this without funding like Healthcare Georgia Foundation provides, they have been there every step of the way. I just love my buddies at SIRUM because it just kind of happened. Before I moved into this position, I was looking around to see how we could better serve our clients because we couldn't always get everything from the drug companies. I came across an article (about SIRUM) it's been a good partnership, an informal one, but it's a good one. Things just kind of seemed to fall into place. If there's something out there that we can provide for our clients in addition to just the medicine, we try to do it.

To learn more about MedBank Foundation, visit www.medbank.org