GOLDEN STATE
OPPORTUNITY

2022

Impact Report



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friend,

"Enough. It's not enough." That's what I heard in 2022 time and time again. We have jobs and we earn income, but we can't earn enough to outpace inflation, to afford life's basic needs, to thrive.

2022 was a wakeup call year for me. Why? Because Congress let the Child Tax Credit expire, even after millions of children and families were lifted out of poverty and it was lauded as one of our most successful anti-poverty efforts in history. Cash works. Period.

And yet, too often, Congress doesn't. And too often, our local and state governments don't work effectively for low-income people either. The system is broken.

As a longtime organizer and strategist, I've seen the power of collective action and winning campaigns firsthand. I've tried to bring that spirit to our work with 37 Community Connect partners across California from as far north as Mt. Shasta to as far south as Imperial and almost everywhere in between. Uniting us all to change the system.

Every day of 2022, our Community Connect partners worked on the frontlines to help Californians on tight incomes to understand tax credits, navigate overly complicated public benefits, file taxes for free, and, many times, access thousands of dollars in cash back.

They met people where they were at–from grocery stores and laundromats to gas stations and farmers' markets. And they met them, like community organizers, with information they could use and trust.

That dedicated education and outreach made all the difference, and continues to make all the difference, for people living paycheck to paycheck because it means more cash when they need it most.

But our Community Connect partners know as well as we do that even large, annual tax refunds are not enough to lift families out of poverty for good. That's why we must bring the fight to the halls of power to do more for and give more to people living in financial crises.

It's also why we empowered community leaders like Elizabeth–who you'll read about in this report—to share their stories in the statehouse so leaders heard directly from her about what she needed. And because of their brave stories, we won.

We won a new Foster Youth Tax Credit of $1,000 to support youth ages 18-25. Youth like Elizabeth, who are aging out of the system and still need support. And after our 2021 win to include people working towards their citizenship as eligible for the CalEITC, this year we connected immigrant families with over $100 million dollars.

We did great work in 2022, but we know our fight can't and won't stop here. Because people are still living in crisis and there's still more work to be done.

So we hope you'll roll up your sleeves or open your pocketbooks to fight right alongside us. With so many people who need us and need more, the battle against poverty is one we can't afford to lose.

In solidarity,

Amy



RIGO'S STORY

"Everything counts."



Nearly one in three Californians earns less than $40,000 per year, and Rigoberto is one of them. He was born and raised in Watsonville, CA in Santa Cruz County. He works as a medical technician, and has six kids. Years ago, his wife learned that Project SCOUT, a GSO Community Connect partner, was providing free tax support, and they've visited ever since.

"When we do our taxes we want someone who knows exactly what they're doing," said Rigoberto. "We don't miss anything because everything counts nowadays." His family received a tax refund of $8,000, including tax credits like the California Earned Income Tax Credit and Young Child Tax Credit.

He felt great about his return. "Right now, we're in the process of trying to save everything to buy a home. It's the American Dream, ya know? We want something we can call our own. *Being here in California, especially Santa Cruz county, everything is so outrageously expensive. I don't know how people can afford it with one job. Like I said, everything counts."*

ELIZABETH'S STORY

"I feel powerful."



I grew up in a troubled family. At age 15, I entered the foster care system and I was institutionalized in a group home. I never got that experience of a loving home. I had my kids when I was young – Ezra is nine and Elliott is five. They're amazing. It's also made my path more challenging.

When the pandemic hit, I went back to school and took a debate class. It hit me that I should do something about foster care, extending the ages people can receive support. That's how I found the John Burton Advocates for Youth, or JBay. When I learned they work with young people, I reached out to get involved right away. That's also how I got connected to GSO, who partners with JBay.

Working with GSO staff to share my story to state lawmakers in Sacramento was a big moment for me. I attended legislative meetings & shared my story as a mom and as a foster youth. Being there in front of powerful strangers was really hard, so folks from GSO having my back was huge.

Age limits on resources are tough, since many of us are still finding our feet at age 18, especially when we've dealt with trauma. Thanks to GSO and Jbay's advocacy, this year a Foster Youth Tax Credit is going into effect that supports people like me until age 25.

The policies GSO has championed are changing my life right now. Tax credits enabled me to support my kids while going to school. They're advocating for the big changes we need to solve poverty for good.

In the system I felt invisible. But when I join with others to share my story and create change, I feel powerful.

Our Impact

Golden State Opportunity empowers communities around the state to speak up, take action, and claim what's ours. Here's our impact by the numbers in 2022.



SECURED FOR COMMUNITY

Over $7 Billion

PEOPLE SUPPORTED

Over 5.5 Million

ADVOCACY LETTERS SENT

2,480



NONPROFIT PARTNERS ACROSS CALIFORNIA

37

EXPANDED MULTILINGUAL OUTREACH TACTICS

WON THE FOSTER YOUTH TAX CREDIT



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Our donors and funders fuel our work as partners in creating a home where everyone can thrive.

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