



Georgia Division of Family and
Children Services

Great Start Georgia

The Early Years Last a Lifetime

Great Start Georgia (GSG) is Georgia's Maternal and Early Childhood System, and represents a milestone in the development and implementation of comprehensive, community-based systems for expectant parents, children birth to age five, and their families. The **approach** characterized by **GSG** reflects the best thinking of many Georgia child and family-focused state agencies, community organizations, and leaders in the fields of health, social services, early childhood education, family economic self-sufficiency, and community economic development. **Great Start Georgia** is first and foremost a **vision** for how communities will provide a welcome to every child, make available natural supports for all expectant families, children birth to five, and their families, provide basic parenting information and resources, and link families with more intensive services when needed. At its heart, **GSG** creates a community culture of caring, encouragement, and support for all families before and after the birth of a child.

Great Start Georgia is an **approach**, which requires service providers to build collaborative partnerships that support families in a systematic and coordinated way. It is also an **initiative** that is unfolding in various stages across Georgia. Currently, seven counties have received federal funding from the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services to embed evidence-based home visiting in their local **GSG** systems. This funding affords Georgia the opportunity to create a statewide home visiting infrastructure to expand and improve existing home visiting services, to more effectively replicate evidence-based home visiting models, and to link home visiting to other community efforts focused on promoting optimal early childhood health and development. Other communities in Georgia are using existing resources to develop the system one step at a time.

Attached is the **GSG** framework, reflecting the basic activities necessary to support families in communities: 1) First Steps/Central Intake functions of universal identification, referral, screening, parent education, and linkage to services, 2) Data systems for collecting, storing, processing, and communicating information, 3) Community programs and services, and 4) Care coordination among providers, particularly for families with higher needs. State partners are working together to support the framework. The Department of Public Health manages the **GSG** Information and Referral Center (IRC), which is available through a toll-free number (1-855-707-8277) to assist communities in screening and linking families to local supports and services. In addition, the Center for Family Research at the University of Georgia maintains the **GSG** website (www.greatstartgeorgia.org) where families and service providers can access information about resources in their communities.

If you're still wondering ... "but what IS **Great Start Georgia**?" we can offer a simple answer. **Great Start Georgia** is you. It is me. It is all of us who want to work together to make Georgia a place where, simply put, children can get a **great start**. We invite you to join the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services and the **GSG** Leadership Team in supporting this initiative in your work with children and families and becoming a partner in its success. Please contact Carol Wilson at carolcwilson@gmail.com or by phone at 404-969-2815 if you have questions.