



CHANGE

**EMBRACING
THE JOURNEY**

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

VISION

To assist in empowering Christian oriented organizations to impact the lives of youth and others through Christ, while maintaining financial growth on principal assets to ensure sustainability.

MISSION

To utilize God’s blessings to Watkins by wisely giving to Christian based organizations that are advancing His Kingdom in varying ways.

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LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

In the ever-evolving business world, survival and success hinge on the ability to adapt and change. Throughout our history—as we moved from our modest origins as a small trucking company under the visionary leadership of Bill Watkins to create the expansive network that is Watkins Associated Industries today—we’ve embraced transformation at every turn. Our family foundation, Watkins Christian Foundation (WCF), shares this commitment to accepting and enacting change.

Reflecting on what has transpired during the past year, it’s clear that change has been a steadfast reality for WCF throughout the past four years. And because we want to assist others as they engage in their change initiatives, in 2023, the WCF board committed **\$7,325,655** to organizations that resonate with our mission and vision. We are excited to present our 2023 Year in Review, which is titled **“Change: Embracing the Journey.”** This report celebrates the invaluable experiences of our grantees as they navigate organizational change. Their stories are a testament to their agility, responsiveness, and decisive leadership.

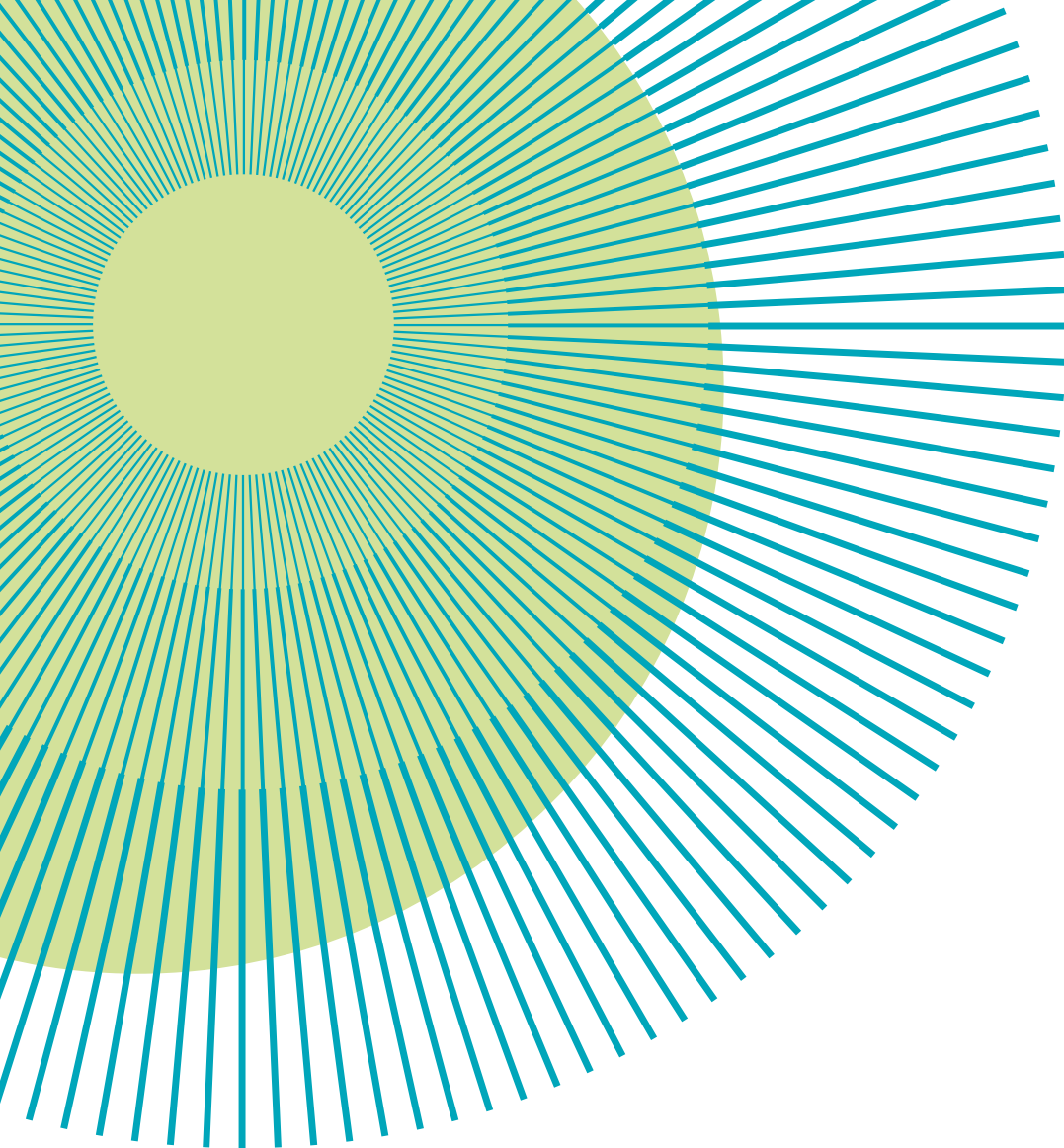
Change is not a destination; rather, it’s a continuous journey along a path to success. We invite you to explore these organizations’ experiences—and their unstoppable determination and dedication to their missions—and be inspired.



GEORGE
WATKINS
Board Chair



MICHAEL
WATKINS
President



INTRODUCTION: IGNITING MEANINGFUL CHANGE

We've all heard the saying that "change is the only constant in life." And we all know that a constructive change can have a significant impact on the successful trajectory of an organization. Imagine what would happen if we could harness the power of change to create a positive impact on the world around us.

THE JOURNEY BEHIND THE TRANSFORMATION

At Watkins Christian Foundation (WCF), our journey of change is fueled by relentless introspection and a commitment to expand His Kingdom. We continually ask ourselves: *How can we better serve our community? How can we amplify our impact?* These questions have led us to restructure our grant guidelines, streamline our processes, and embrace new technology. And to deepen our connection with our grantees, we recently held our first-ever Regional Grantee Meeting in Macon, GA.

VOICES OF RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION FROM THE FRONT LINES

In this 2023 Year in Review, I invite you to peruse the insights of 40 leaders from 36 WCF grantee organizations as they share some highlights of how they navigated their internal and external changes, doing so with resilience and innovation. Leveraging everything from the availability of financial resources to the introduction of new technologies, they are not just adapting—they are thriving. Read on to learn how change significantly impacts their daily work, enabling them to help more families, serve more meals, and mentor more youth.

FINANCIAL STORY BEHIND THE NUMBERS

Our financial overview is more than data; it's also a testament to the power of transformation. Each dollar ultimately translates into a meal that is served, a child who is educated, a life that is somehow uplifted or altered. Our financial decisions align deliberately with our change strategies, ensuring every action moves us closer to our mission.

Intrigued? Flip through the pages to see how change agents are making an amazing difference every day. Their dedication fuels our ongoing transformation, and their insights about operational and strategy changes are inspiring.

Thank you for believing in and being part of the WCF mission.



ROZITA
LA GORCE
Executive
Director



CHAPTER 1

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

“Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.” – PROVERBS 20:5

Change often significantly impacts nonprofits, ultimately prompting them to reshape their strategies and operations to achieve overall effectiveness.

This chapter highlights how some successful Watkins Christian Foundation grantees have manifested their organizational visions by being responsive to community needs and by engaging in active listening, transparent communication, and forethought. Through steps that included an adjustment of their missions, responding to external pressures, and preparing their future leaders (knowing the importance of prioritizing succession planning), these organizations paved the way for expansion. Overall, the most successful nonprofits stay attuned to community needs and adapt their strategies accordingly.



ADAPTABILITY

Nonprofits must be agile and responsive to external shifts. Changes in funding, regulations, or community needs require organizations to adjust their programs, services, and resource allocation.

NEW STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THE MISSION

Hope Academy's leadership seeks to double its physical space and admit more students despite finding itself in a turbulent time for staffing in the field of education. In addition, even with teachers leaving their profession in droves since the COVID-19 pandemic, Hope Academy is seeking to fill its new space with mission-oriented educators to teach its expanded student body.

To meet the new set of goals articulated in its mission, the school now offers high school seniors a college-credit introduction to education class that includes spending time as a teacher's aide, which allows the participants to gain practical precollege experience in the field of education. Further, the school started a Teacher Residency Program to train existing instructors from other institutions during the summer months. The instructors in training and school leaders see this as a win-win: It's a way for potential recruits to evaluate whether to apply to work at the school as teachers, and the school can evaluate potential new hires during their time in the program.

By employing these two new strategies to help implement their faith-based mission, Hope Academy is providing youth who may wish to become educators with valuable experiences that may change the trajectory of their professional lives while benefiting students in the classrooms where they are assigned. Additionally, this initiative—designed to train and recruit talent during these trying times for employers of educators—can benefit the school's teacher recruitment effort.



I've always heard that you should never be afraid to be training your replacement. I know there are some leaders...[who] actually don't want people around them [who are]...smarter, better, stronger... than they are because they actually feel threatened by those people. [But] I have found in my work that the more of those types of people you can surround yourself with, really, the more successful that you're going to be in your efforts.

KATHERINE WHITE
GREATER ATLANTA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL



We are focusing on Our Now, Our New, and Our Next. So, we're looking at change across the board, and it's a positive change for us, and is making us more aware of...where we are now, and where we plan to go.

CARLA HALL
MARY HALL FREEDOM VILLAGE



LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

When leaders retire or move on to new opportunities, nonprofits face leadership transitions. Effective succession planning ensures continuity and maintains organizational momentum. New leaders bring fresh perspectives, but they must also honor the organization's mission and values, so succession planning can make a huge difference in the success of a new phase.

SUCCESSION PLANNING TO LEAD FOR THE FUTURE

At **Eagle Ranch**, the founder announced his retirement ten years ago. The board, along with the organization's leadership, assembled and then created and implemented a plan that included how to honor the outgoing founder's steadfast leadership; seek new leadership, internally or externally; and build in a time for healthy collaboration between the departing and arriving leaders so this shift could take place in the best possible way. In retrospect, the process was, as one staff member put it, "...bathed in the Lord and bathed in our culture and trust..." Now, working with its new leader, Eagle Ranch's leadership feels prepared to meet the future with purpose.



“

I think some of the hardest change is change that is caused by influences outside of your control... And so we're having to change internally...[because outside forces] can be some of the more challenging aspects of change.

WAYNE RACZ
EPWORTH BY THE SEA



CHAPTER 2

SUPERCHARGING SUCCESSFUL CHANGE

‘Whenever we think we have final answers, progress halts [and] better understanding ceases.’¹

Embracing change means recognizing that processes and operations must evolve in order to keep an organization’s mission alive and impactful.

This chapter delves into how the highlighted Watkins Christian Foundation grantees have optimized their operations to better meet their objectives. By homing in on the “how” of change, these organizations have managed to serve more meals, increase and improve their community support programs, reduce administrative overhead, and leverage technology for greater productivity. Although the path was fraught with challenges, all grantees found their journey—often marked by resilience and including humor—ultimately rewarding in terms of the achievement of their ultimate destination: sharing their mission.

¹ The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement, Eliyahu M. Goldratt and Jeff Cox.



TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

Big operational shifts often mean rethinking everything, including how you recruit and retain employees, ways to better engage stakeholders, and when to revamp tech systems.

PEOPLE-CENTRIC INNOVATIONS

Desire Street Ministries faced a shake-up when its third-party controller left the organization. But adhering to the articulated recruitment process, the nonprofit filled the position and the new controller turned out to be a perfect fit, elevating the organization's financial management to new heights of efficiency.

Lighthouse Family Retreat created its first-ever human resources position, which revolutionized its onboarding process and showed employees they truly matter. The result? Improved levels of recruitment, retention, and morale, with employees feeling more valued and invested in the organization's success.

Kidz2Leaders experienced rapid growth, expanding in one year from 30 to more than 70 participants. This expansion necessitated process changes, including recruiting and training of additional volunteers. While this success brought challenges, it also presented opportunities for organizational growth. In its new scope, the organization is thrilled to be helping more kids.

Smoke Rise Baptist Church is now serving a community that speaks 13 different languages. Its desire to be as inclusive as possible required the church to adopt new ways of engagement in its ministry. The leadership recognized and embraced the need for intentional learning, networking, and planning to effectively serve this diverse group, and the results have more than proven the worth of its operational changes.



We have honestly thrived on change in a very healthy way, as we constantly pivot to better serve our community and serve those who are coming to City of Refuge looking for help as we've expanded and added new programs. Fortunately, a lot of our staff thrive on change. Unfortunately, a lot of funders do not thrive on change.... [The Watkins Christian Foundation] believes change is crucial, especially in the nonprofit space, where we're always pivoting to do a better job to serve those that we exist to serve.

EDWARD PHILLIPS
CITY OF REFUGE



One thing that Jesuit Tampa is mindful of is artificial intelligence and...incorporating it mindfully, ethically, and efficiently...it's such an unknown. It appears that it can do some amazing, wonderful, very helpful, useful things...but [it] also can be used in a negative manner, [so] we want to be mindful of [that].

NICK SUSZYNSKI
JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL TAMPA



Growth is always a good thing... How do we manage that growth? How do we steer and steward that growth so we can continue to be a healthy organization, even at a higher capacity?

JASON PITTMAN
PACT MINISTRY



NEW TECH, NEW TRIUMPHS, AND TRIALS

While technological upgrades often require comprehensive training and overcoming resistance from those accustomed to the old ways, the benefits can be substantial. Leaders of the two organizations included here as examples emphasized the importance of clear communication, inclusive transition strategies, and continuous training to ensure successful implementation.

TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS

Cedar Brook Outreach shifted from paper-based processes to a digital system for managing its weekly food pantries. This transition greatly enhanced its ability to track and analyze service delivery.

Young Life adopted an integrated software package to manage HR functions, payroll, scheduling, and financial tasks, revolutionizing its multi-departmental processes. It's proven to be a game changer, as integrating multiple departments into one seamless platform allows for improved levels of efficiency.



“

Change management for any technology solution is always the biggest challenge, more so than implementing the technology itself. Adoption of technology (and the change curve for that) is always one of the biggest challenges, and particularly in the nonprofit space where [technology use is] probably not as far along as [it is] in a lot of the private sector.

JAMES GADSBY
DESIRE STREET MINISTRIES

← Wesleyan College staff participants at the WCF Regional Grantee Meeting, Macon, GA



CHAPTER 3

CHANGE AND THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

3

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” – EPHESIANS 4:32

Organizations that thrive during change have one thing in common: adept leaders who engage relevant people every step of the way. From the idea stage to implementation, these visionaries use their consultative and adaptive leadership skills to make everyone feel they are important participants in the journey.

This chapter delves into how individuals within organizations embrace and adapt to change, emphasizing the pivotal role their leadership plays in the successes achieved throughout the change journey. Strong relationships, multichannel communication, and transparency form the bedrock of successful change adoption. Leaders who are guided by a vision for the future and who intentionally involve others in the process can cultivate an environment in which change not only occurs but also thrives.



COMMUNICATING CHANGE, STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONS

Within organizations, questions about who is likely to support a potential change arise quickly during the initiation of a transition. What makes some people prone to embrace change, and what leads to a prediction that certain others will resist it? How can leadership successfully navigate these dynamics and manage expectations?

One solution is for leaders to encourage adaptation through multichannel communications, including by leveraging appropriate numbers of town halls and social media announcements. Depending on the topic and/or goal, these direct and indirect conversations can be broad or strategic. Another proven strategy is to appoint informal leaders who are onboard with the initiatives to act as crucial change agents. Also, piloting planned changes with small groups—before a more global rollout—can demonstrate the positive impact of the change to the wider organization.

SUCCESS, BOLD MOVES, DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

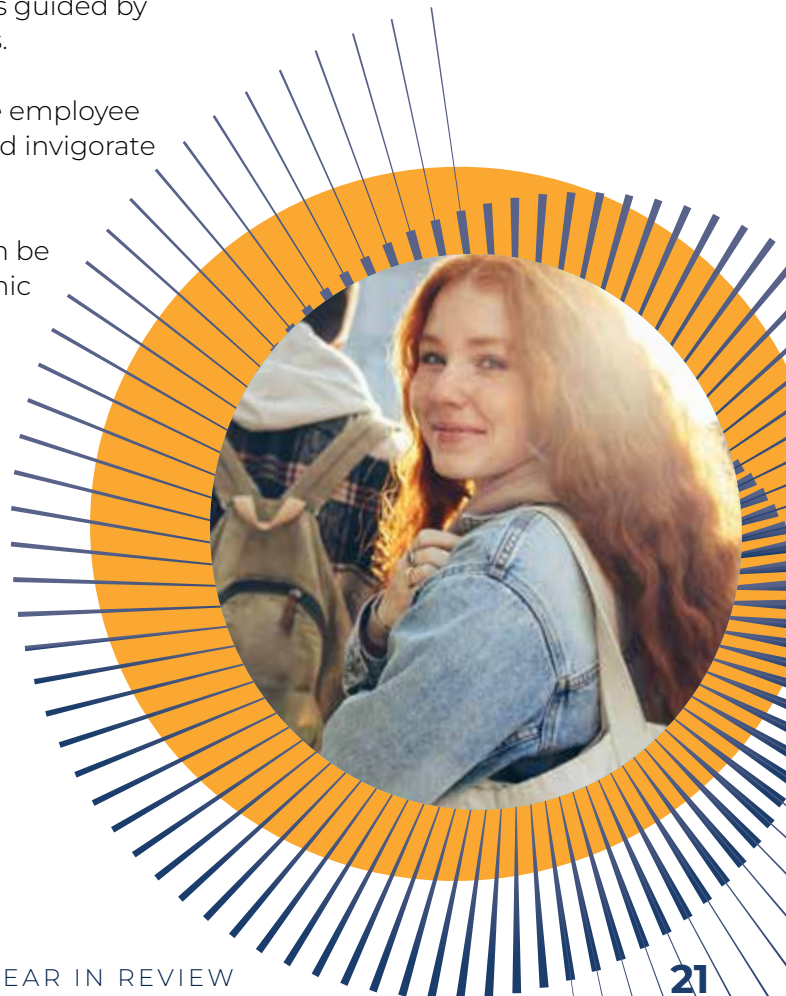
Wesleyan College attributes the successful implementation of its strategic planning innovations to a transparent, inclusive communication approach. By “communicating early and often,” Wesleyan engaged its stakeholders through town halls, ensuring a unified message and making the college community feel part of the process.

At **Cornerstone Christian Academy**, some leaders were assigned to enact bold moves that took staff members by surprise, such as being tasked to encourage personnel to assume new roles or being required to have difficult conversations about the absence of a place for someone in the future organizational structure.

Meanwhile, at **Eagle Ranch**, the new leader led a major reorganization, the positive outcome of which was guided by the discovery of hidden talents among colleagues.

Finally, at **Lighthouse Family Retreat**, a longtime employee took a sabbatical, allowing new staff to step up and invigorate that area of the college.

These experiences illustrate that while change can be daunting, it often leads to a stronger, more dynamic organization.







I think we can communicate [change] by keeping the doors open at all times, answering those questions that people may feel uncomfortable asking, but we need to make sure that we have...set that playing field to where everybody feels accepted and [is made to feel] empowered in what they are doing or what we are trying to do.

CARLA HALL
MARY HALL FREEDOM VILLAGE



I think communication is actually the most important thing in change, other than maybe planning, because how it's communicated is critical to really getting buy-in from all groups that would really be necessary or part of making that change successful.

KATHERINE WHITE
GREATER ATLANTA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

← Representatives from Atlanta Youth Academy and Vision Atlanta, participants at the WCF Regional Grantee Meeting in Macon, GA



CHAPTER 4

SUSTAINING CHANGE



4

“Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.” – PROVERBS 11:14

Sustained change requires an ongoing effort. That means not just initiating improvements but also ensuring they continue to yield positive results over time.

This chapter highlights organizations that have proactively established measures to maintain long-term change. Their actions reflect a commitment to enhancing God’s love, dedication to enduring ministry, resilience in expanding their outreach, and awareness of the power of education to brighten futures. By fostering sustained change, these organizations are well prepared to serve God’s kingdom.



ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

Conversations with these Watkins Christian Foundation grantees reveal a shared vision of enjoying a hopeful, adventurous, responsive, and transparent future. These grantees recognize the ongoing—and often substantial—challenges associated with their changes and still remain optimistic about the overall benefits for their ministries and the people they serve.

NAVIGATING CONTINUOUS CHANGE

International Leadership Institute leaders noted that change works best for dynamic and resilient organizations that are able to thrive in an ever-changing environment—ones, like theirs, that always have an eye on achieving a better future. They shared that embracing a culture that accepts change and eagerly pivoting toward “what is needed next” are two essentials of a deliberate and thoughtful journey that requires patience, persistence, and willingness to learn and grow continuously. Their institute continues to succeed by operating according to these guideposts.

Desire Street Ministries leaders shared their experience that “real” change often brings a sense of loss—whether it’s the loss of familiar practices, the loss of comfort (that comes with the acceptance of new roles), or the loss of “what was” when there are cultural shifts. The leaders found that, with change as the ever-present reality in their organization that is adeptly responding to internal and external forces, following the new path requires some practices to continue, others must be newly identified as being needed and then implemented, and some must be retired. Without leaving some practices behind, true change cannot take hold.



One word [to describe change] is 'vision,' because vision always stands in contrast to the way things are....

BOB WIEDEMANN
FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES



Any real change, at its heart, means there is loss. If there is not loss, then there is not real change. It's just cosmetic.

C. RUSSELL DAVIS
NORTH GEORGIA CAMP AND RETREAT MINISTRIES



ACKNOWLEDGING CULTURE IS KEY

Eagle Ranch revamped its board to balance fresh perspectives with experienced insights, thereby enriching its overall cultural perspective. Seasoned board members welcomed new less-experienced members, and ensured they received a comprehensive orientation to the organization. This approach will allow Eagle Ranch to reenergize its mission moving forward.

CHANGING WITH OTHERS

Smoke Rise Baptist Church leadership recognizes the need to manage change carefully and precisely. Indirectly using a reference to a slow cooker in his metaphorical explanation of their approach to innovation, a church leader emphasized the need to maintain a steady pace during the church's change journey, thereby avoiding overwhelming individuals while still ensuring progress. He noted it is essential for those who are most impacted by change to feel that change is not done "to" them, but rather "with" them, saying that slowly building the change over time with others sets the stage for true progress.



**You can't do change
just from [the] top
down.**

KATHERINE WHITE
GREATER ATLANTA CHRISTIAN
SCHOOL

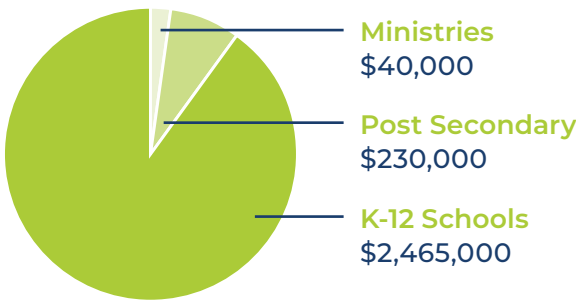
← Representatives from The Vashti Center and Metcalfe Independent Church, participants at the WCF Regional Grantee Meeting in Macon, GA

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS



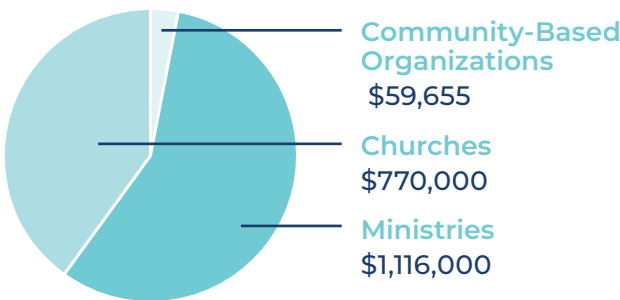
37% Education \$2,735,000

Helping children, youth and young adults grow in their knowledge and become grounded in their faith to love, lead and serve.



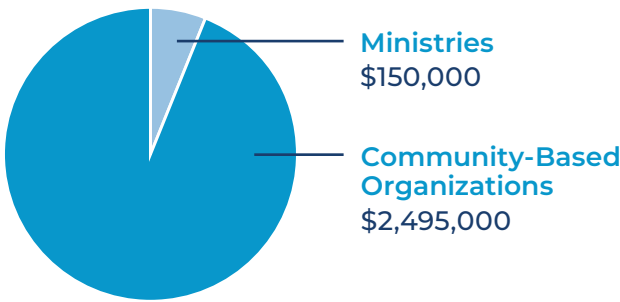
27% Faith & Ministry \$1,945,655

Drawing youth closer to Christ and nurturing their faith through genuine, faithful relationships. Mentoring and training young leaders for the church.



36% Outreach \$2,645,000

Alleviating poverty and suffering with an emphasis on homelessness, food insecurity, education, health, mental health, and family stability.







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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Watkins Christian Foundation thanks the following individuals and groups who contributed to the production of this report.

Christy Batta Fisher

Graphic Design
Christy Batta Design

Rozita La Gorcé

Watkins Christian
Foundation

Belinda Jackson

Concept Design
& Strategy
Picture it Possible

Jennifer Schauffler

Strategic Writing Services

Images and Photography

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from 2023 WCF Grantees
Eli Turner Photography

**WCF Focus Group
Participants**