

From the Desk of our First Lady

Life in Georgia is full of promise. My travels have provided me with the opportunity to meet remarkable and inspiring people in every corner of our state. I'm excited about the future we're building for our families, communities, and especially our young people. Our children can look to successful Georgians as an example in any almost career path they choose or dream they wish to pursue.

Three of these Georgians have used their talents, gifts and influence to give back to others. Their generosity and leadership make them role models to all of us, but to young people in particular. These Georgians are musician Usher Raymond V, Zac Brown Band member Coy Bowles, and University of Georgia football star Malcolm Mitchell. Each of these young men have developed programs or tools to encourage young people to discover their talents, work hard to achieve their goals and to "pay it forward" to others along the way.

Usher is the founder of New Look, a non-profit organization which aims to empower young people all over the world through education and real-life experiences. Studies have shown that students who are engaged in areas of interest to them are more likely to stay in school. New Look's programs, which have experienced such success that some are being implemented in Georgia schools, help young people identify areas of interest and develop the skills necessary to become successful in those fields. I met one such example recently at a New Look awards luncheon, which celebrated the foundation's 16th anniversary and honored "ignitors" of youth empowerment. Rebecca Williams, who, through training she received through New Look, was able to realize her dream and found her own charity, Books IV Bonding. Through her organization, Williams is providing students in places like Detroit and Kenya with books that promote leadership and community involvement.

As a former teacher, recognizing the individuality of students and celebrating their unique personalities and differences was one of the most important parts of my job. As First Lady, instilling the joys of reading in children has been among my primary focuses. Coy Bowles, a member of the Georgia-based Zac Brown Band, is promoting literacy while encouraging self-confidence with his book "Amy Giggles—Laugh Out Loud." Bowles' message to young people is acceptance of self and of others and recognition of how we can all contribute to our communities. Bowles is working on his second book, "Will Powers," which stresses the importance of setting personal goals and working proactively to successfully reach them.

Malcolm Mitchell set and worked diligently towards his goals as a football player at the University of Georgia. He applied the same diligence and commitment in obtaining his degree as he did in athletics. Mitchell became an avid reader, joined a book club and sought advice from others in his chosen area of study. He encouraged students to do the same by visiting schools, where he'd speak on his love of football, the importance of attending college, and the transformative power of reading. He took that advice and incorporated it into children's book, "The Magician's Hat," which focuses on recognizing your gifts, working hard to develop those skills and reaching personal goals.