

November 1, 2024 - October 31, 2025

GROWTH

GROWING RELATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL WEALTH IN WEST TENNESSEE HOUSEHOLDS

Breaking Barriers

ANNUAL REPORT



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MEMPHIS

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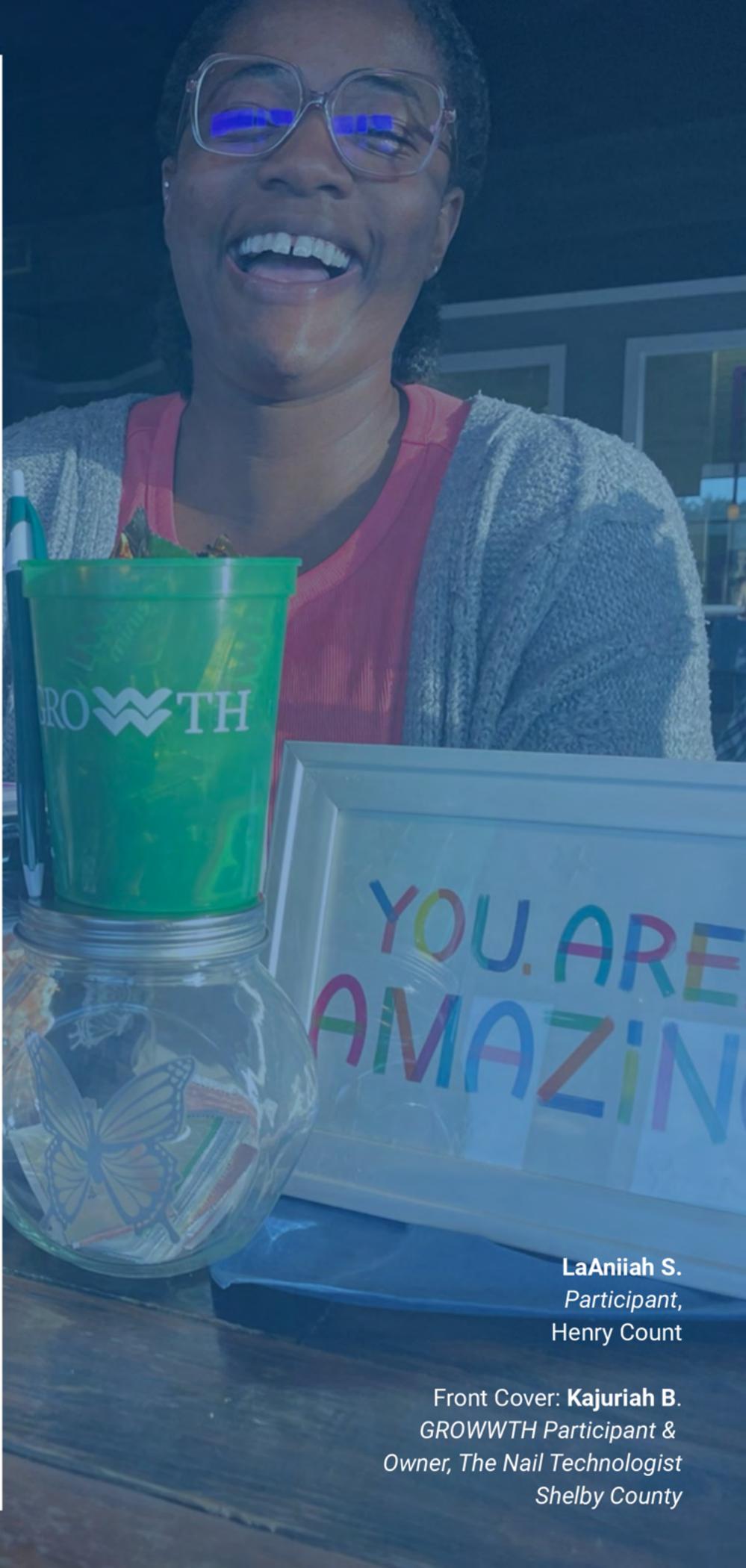
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LaAniiah S.
Participant,
Henry Count

Front Cover: **Kajuriah B.**
GROWWTH Participant &
Owner, The Nail Technologist
Shelby County

Executive Summary

Breaking Barriers



**STEPHANIE
GODWIN-CHU**

Project Director
GROWWTH

GROWWTH Serves parents in West Tennessee by providing career readiness training, foundations in soft skills for workplace success, employment resources, access to skilled credential training programs and job placement support. We address the needs of each of the families we work with holistically, understanding that the barriers preventing individuals from achieving self sufficiency are often multi-layered and complex. GROWWTH staff work together as a multi-disciplinary team to identify, address, coach and provide the resources and support necessary for our program participants to experience long-term success.

We have expanded the educational opportunities offered to program participants by increasing access to financial wellness opportunities, job coaching, mental health resources, and wellness supports. In program year 2 we saw GROWWTH families **flourish** as we embarked on **innovative strategies** to serve the region. Year 3 outcomes are the result of GROWWTH pursuing the mission in more intentional ways. The **barriers broken** in the lives of GROWWTH participants are the result of hard work, grit, and collaboration.

Gratefully,

Growing Relational and Occupational Wealth in West Tennessee Households

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Tennessee Department of Human Services TANF Opportunity Pilot Act Grant

University of Memphis / GROWWTH
EDISON ID: 76493



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GROWWTH

GROWING RELATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL WEALTH IN WEST TENNESSEE HOUSEHOLDS



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About GROWWTH

Growing Relational and Occupational Wealth in West Tennessee Households

The GROWWTH program is a regional initiative led by the University of Memphis to strengthen economic stability for low-income families across the 21 counties of West Tennessee. Through partnerships with workforce boards, community organizations, and employers, GROWWTH addresses barriers that often prevent families from achieving sustainable employment, including access to transportation, childcare, career training, and financial resources. By providing coordinated, wraparound supports, the program helps participants build the skills and stability needed to secure and maintain quality jobs.

Beyond individual outcomes, GROWWTH is designed to create lasting benefits for communities. GROWWTH aligns workforce training with local employer needs, supports family well-being, and contributes to a stronger regional economy by increasing workforce participation and reducing reliance on public assistance. By investing in families and strengthening connections between workers, employers, and community resources, GROWWTH plays a critical role in promoting long-term economic mobility and resilience across West Tennessee.

Our Mission Statement

Elevating West Tennessee families into self-sufficiency and economic mobility by respecting their voice and choice

Vision Statement

GROWWTH will leverage our collective assets and knowledge to move West Tennessee's most vulnerable households to a life of thriving.

Our Value Proposition

- Holistic ecosystem comprised of innovative education and training, workforce development expertise and community support networks
- Leveraged partner resources to alleviate barriers enabling families to achieve economic sustainability



Who We Serve

GROWWTH enrolled **948** West Tennessee Families between November 1, 2024 and October 31, 2025

163

NORTHWEST TENNESSEE

Benton, Carroll, Crockett, Dyer, Gibson, Henry, Lake, Obion, Weakley Counties

240

SOUTHWEST TENNESSEE

Madison, Hardeman, Decatur, Chester, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, McNairy Counties

545

GREATER MEMPHIS

Shelby, Fayette, Lauderdale, Tipton Counties

ENROLLMENT BY COUNTY

Benton (7)	Gibson (47)	Lauderdale (21)
Carroll (4)	Hardeman (27)	McNairy (3)
Chester (9)	Hardin (15)	Madison (117)
Crockett (7)	Haywood (21)	Obion (19)
Decatur (9)	Henry (23)	Shelby (482)
Dyer (35)	Henderson (39)	Tipton (24)
Fayette (18)	Lake (8)	Weakley (13)



By The Numbers



948

Enrolled in GROWWTH



476

Participants Enrolled
in Training Programs



922

GROWWTH
Academy Graduates



361

Participants Completed
Training Programs



99%

GROWWTH Academy
Approval Rating



234

Credentials /
Certifications Earned



421

Employment
Milestones Earned



416

Financial Wellness
Milestones Earned



\$1,902,742

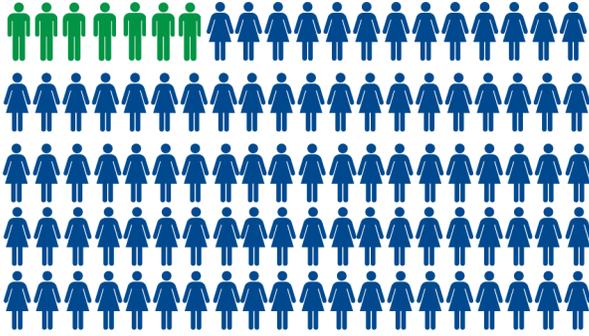
Training Tuition Paid



\$944,630

Microbusiness Funding
Disbursed

Demographics



Gender

7% Men

93% Women

Race

Black or African American: (86%)

White: (11.6%)

Other: (1.79%)

Unknown: (0.2%)

Native American/
Alaskan Native (0.1%)

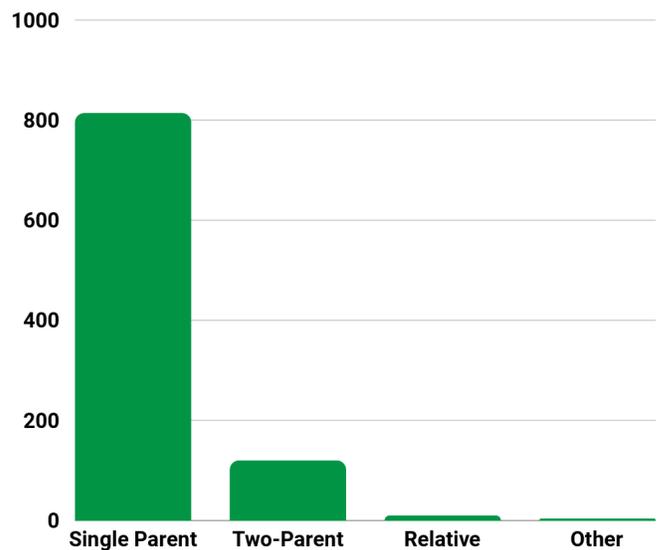
Household Status

Single Parent Home: (85.9%)

Two Parent Home: (12.7%)

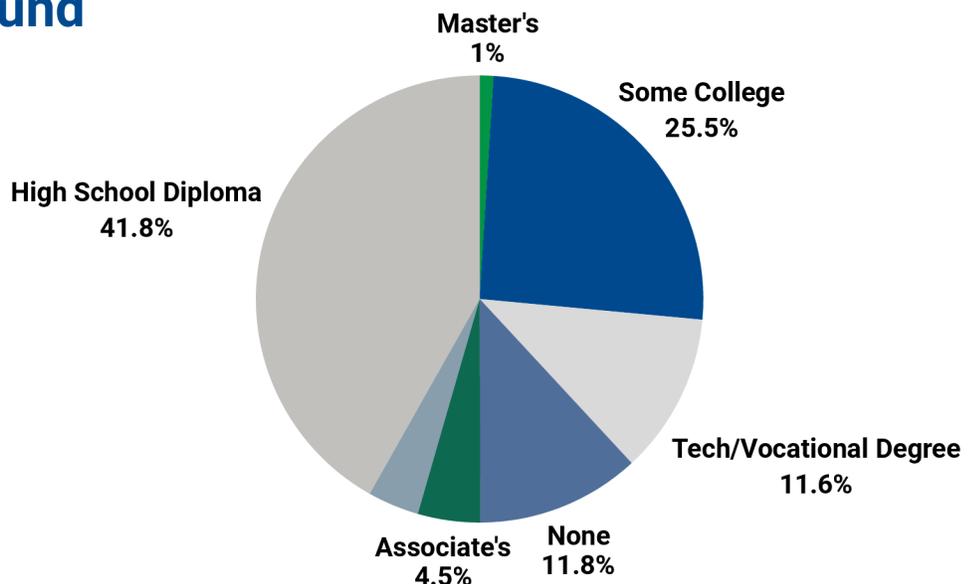
Relative Caregiver Home: (1%)

Other (.4%)



Educational Background

While 75% of GROWWTH participants enrolled in Year 3 completed the 12th grade, their highest education levels vary, with 41.8% having a diploma, 25.5% attending some college, and others pursuing vocational or higher degrees.



Self Reporting

Education and background information is self reported by participants at time of enrollment.



GROWWTH Workforce Readiness Academy

Our training specialists support families through consistent communication, including weekly updates, progress reviews, assignment reminders, guided instruction, follow-up calls, virtual sessions, and workshops. GROWWTH Training Specialists help equip participants with strategies for organization and time management, adapting instructional methods to meet each learner's unique needs. Through comprehensive orientations and workshops on résumé development, cover-letter writing, and interview preparation, parents gain the tools they need to pursue their career aspirations.

We guide parents in embracing change through a series of progressive modules. These begin with cultivating a positive mindset for navigating transitions and continue with trauma-informed insights, social-emotional learning to aid in self-regulation, effective communication skills, financial literacy, self-motivation, and personal responsibility.

Many participants are encouraged and enlightened by realizing their own abilities while completing the GROWWTH Academy course. Several of our parents go from depending on government assistance to working in high-quality careers or managing their own businesses. This exemplifies how much people can achieve and how far they can go with proper guidance and access to community resources.

“GROWWTH Academy's overall goal is to help parents identify careers aligned with their goals and interests, ultimately guiding them toward their passion and purpose.”

-Sascha Lewis
Training Specialist

Training Specialists (Left to Right): Chanise Thompson, Adrienne Turner and Sascha Lewis



Pictured: GROWWTH Participant and business owner, Kujuria, speaking with a customer during the Microbusiness Showcase | November 2025



Observing participants overcome their challenges with digital literacy and technology to ultimately complete the program with higher self-confidence and motivation to succeed at their goals, is truly inspirational to witness."

-Adrienne Turner
Training Specialist

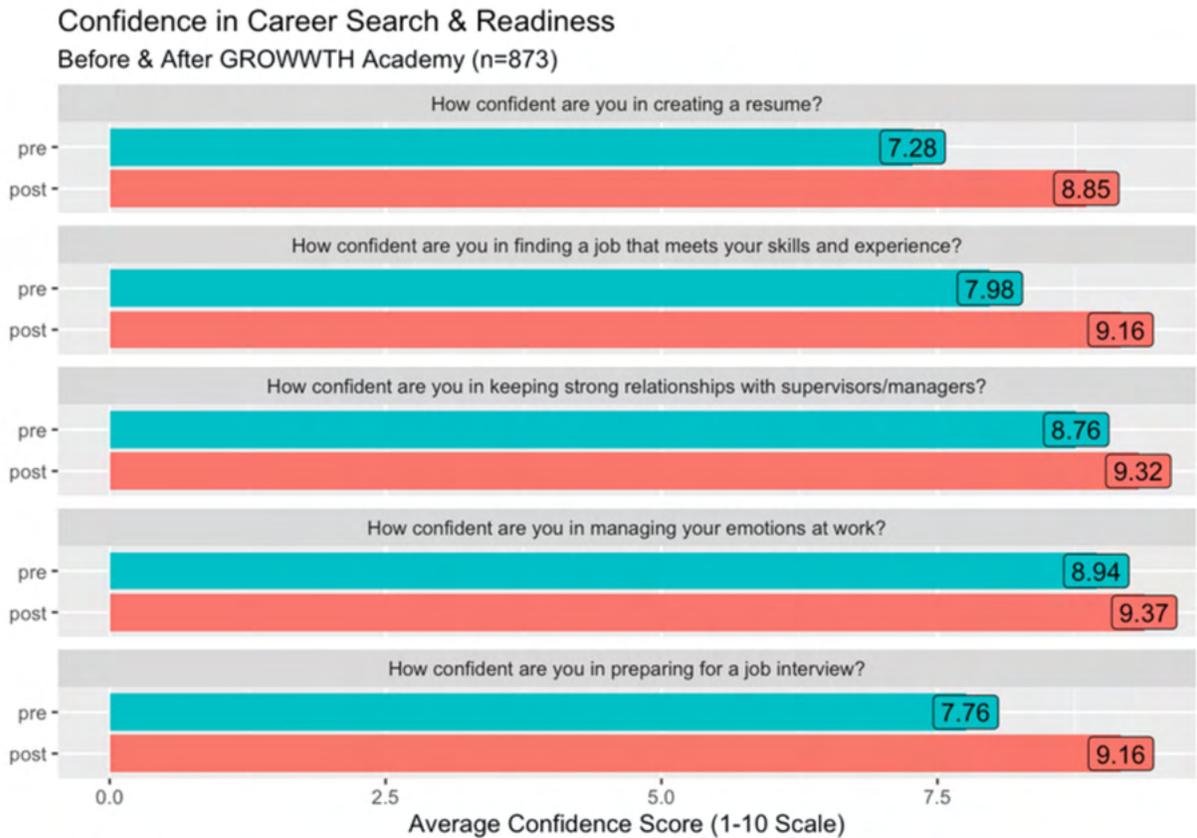
GROWWTH JOURNEY



SUPPORT:
Childcare/Transportation/Family Wellness/Emergency Assistance
=
FINANCIAL STABILITY

Confidence Score

GROWWTH Academy survey results show that **98%** of respondents report increased confidence in their workplace skills after completion of GROWWTH Academy Workforce Readiness Training. The results show confidence gains in resume skills, job search, navigating workplace culture, emotional regulation and interview skills.



The evaluation of GROWWTH Academy survey results was conducted by the University of Memphis Center for Research and Evaluation (CCRE). Findings revealed that GROWWTH Academy improves confidence in all categories of career readiness. Gains occurred mostly by exhibiting improvements from a moderate level of career readiness to a strong level of career readiness by the time of training completion.

*Data collected Summer 2023 through Spring 2025



The most valuable aspect the program had for me was more opportunities towards my career to get me started, to help me prepare."

-Diamonique B.
GROWWTH Participant
Shelby County

Pictured: GROWWTH Participants and their children attend the 2-Gen Professional Development Workshop | July 2025



Many parents attribute their ability to reach goals, once thought impossible, to the GROWWTH program. Playing a part in their personal development as their GROWWTH Training Specialist is truly rewarding.”

- Chanise Thompson
Training Specialist

Soft Skills for Long-term Success

There were **922 GROWWTH Academy graduates in grant Year 3**, over 80 percent more than the number of graduates in Year 2.

GROWWTH Readiness Academy is offered asynchronous online, in person or via a virtual classroom with a GROWWTH Training Specialist. These classes are designed to equip individuals with the skills necessary to succeed in the next phase of their journey, whether it be seeking a high-quality job, starting a credential training program and/or enrolling in Microbusiness Bootcamp. As Participants progress through GROWWTH Academy and complete each Journey, they earn milestone payments. A total of three milestone payments are issues for completion of GROWWTH Academy.

The 11 modules that make up GROWWTH Academy cover topics such as adapting to change, effective communication, financial management, resume building, accountability, trauma informed behavior, job search, interview skills and more. To accommodate the expansive growth of the workforce readiness training program, additional Training Specialists were brought on board. These three Training Specialists are able to manage large online GROWWTH Academy cohorts at one time, each holding approximately 60 active students each.



Effective and Personal Case Management

Providing services to families across 21 counties requires a dedicated team of Case Managers that care about their work and are able to build meaningful relationships with families. In Year 3, GROWWTH activated a team of 10 Case Managers to serve the Greater Memphis region, which represents the largest portion of program enrollees. Case Managers complete bi-monthly check-ins with Participants as well as facilitate referrals for Care Coordination services and Business Services.

In the Northwest and Southwest regions of Tennessee, 17 counties are covered by GROWWTH subcontract partner, Workforce Innovations. This partnership has made it possible for families across the West Tennessee region to have access to GROWWTH services through the American Job Centers of Northwest and Southwest Tennessee. These teams form a collaborative ecosystem designed to identify and address barriers that prevent individuals from achieving financial stability.



I would like to thank the entire GROWWTH community team for all that you do. This program is amazing and has wonderful benefits. I'm grateful, yet thankful to be a part of the GROWWTH family. I have gained so much knowledge. Thanks so much to everyone who plays a role in helping myself as well as other members of the GROWWTH family community!"

-Michaela A.
GROWWTH Participant
Shelby County

Pictured from Left to Right: GROWWTH Case Managers Toni Marlow, Zacaryia Bratcher, Makiyah Bowens, Mar Mata, Andrea Davis, Stephanie Turner, Nyasha Williams, Tayler Rossell, and Lead Case Manager, Jasmine Lewis

*Pictured: GROWWTH
Participants and
Case Managers
learn about self care
at a Conversations
with Case Managers
event in Memphis
| August 2025*



948

Enrolled in GROWWTH



1,004

Family Goal Plans
Completed



3,421

Individuals Impacted in
GROWWTH Households



1,268

Adults Impacted in
GROWWTH Households



2,153

Children / Youth
Impacted in GROWWTH
Households



20

GROWWTH Case
Managers and
Subcontractors Across
the Region



Wholistic Care and Support

The Care Coordination team fulfills the important role of offering **preventative and responsive support** for families in the program. Care Coordinators maintain relationships with community partners that enable them to connect participants with much-needed resources in times of uncertainty or crisis. Requests for mental health and wellness services made up the highest number of referrals in Year 3. Additionally, other requests for legal, domestic violence, education, and transportation made up the third largest category of requests.



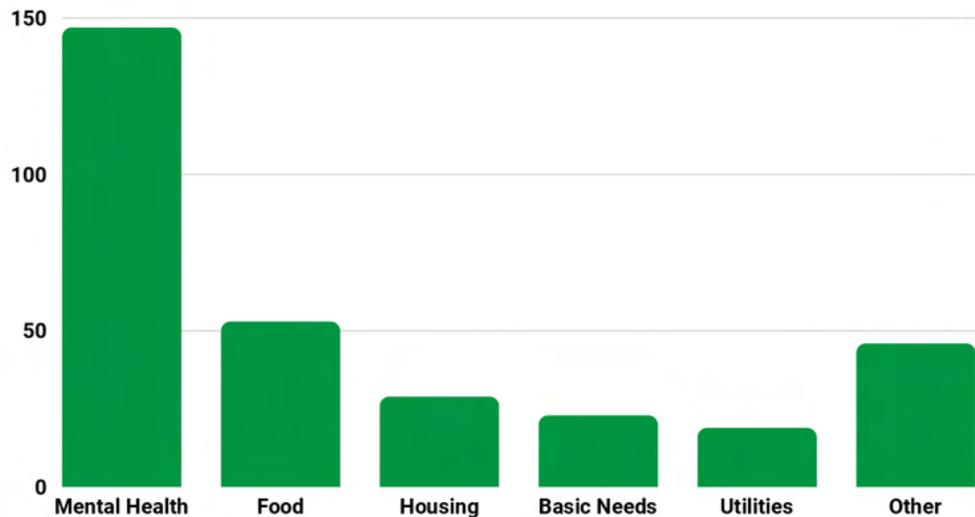
317

Care Coordination Requests



46%

Mental Health and Wellness Referrals



Pictured from Left to Right: GROWWTH Care Coordinators Cecilia Cox, Victoria Rayner, Christy Belong, Rae Finch, Pamela Lozano, Connie Stanton



Serving the Region

Upon referral, a Care Coordinator may work with the participant and their family from as little as a day or two up to a month or longer depending on the level of need. The Care Coordinators work with participants by connecting them to resources, offering coaching, and facilitating a soft hand off to qualified community partners when appropriate.

GROWWTH assists participants with mental health and wellness supports by covering the out-of-pocket cost of counseling for eligible adults and children in the household. Providing resources for parents of children with disabilities and assistance connecting with local physical health services also fit into the category of wellness supports facilitated by the program. GROWWTH has helped families gain access to support groups, grief counseling, and addiction support services.

Requests for assistance with basic needs such as personal care and hygiene items, clothing, school supplies, and baby care items such as diapers are common. The Care Coordination team responds to these requests while also creating educational opportunities for program participants to be well-informed about what is available to them in their communities.



Pictured: (Top) Christy Belong , GROWWTH Care Coordinator - Northwest TN at the Martin Housing Authority | June 2025

(Below) Participants, LaAniiah S. and Brittaney H., attending a Conversations with Case Manager event in Northwest Tennessee | August 2025



Workforce Innovations

Workforce Innovations, Inc., on behalf of the Northwest and Southwest Tennessee Workforce Boards, has seen tremendous benefits to hundreds of low-income parents in the 17-county region as a result of the GROWWTH program. Since the program began, **381** individuals have participated in GROWWTH in the nine Northwest counties, and **445** have participated in the eight Southwest counties. By incorporating GROWWTH services into the American Job Center (AJC) network throughout the region, eligible individuals can receive streamlined services from multiple programs through one staff member. This braiding of services and resources allows for a comprehensive approach to meeting customers' needs.

Additionally, this year the American Job Center in Jackson partnered with the Greater Jackson Financial Empowerment Center (GJFEC) to offer a **Mastering Your Money: Take Control of Your Financial Journey** workshop to GROWWTH participants in the Northwest and Southwest regions. The GJFEC, jointly managed by the City of Jackson and Cities for Financial Empowerment, offers no-cost, financial counseling to all West Tennessee residents. Their financial counselors help individuals plan their future, establish or improve credit, manage debt and finances, create a budget, increase savings, maximize cashflow, and connect with safe and affordable banking services.

Through the workshop, the GJFEC assisted 11 GROWWTH participants in identifying their financial goals, establishing budgets and systems for tracking expenses, and preparing for potential financial obstacles. GROWWTH participants who participated in the workshop were also awarded a milestone payment in recognition of their accomplishment.

Pictured Left to Right: Jennifer Bane, Executive Director of Workforce Innovations; Lauren Jones, Director of Special Events for Discovery Park of America; Christy Belong, GROWWTH Care Coordinator | December 2025

“

GROWWTH's innovative work-readiness academy, unique milestone payments, and wraparound supportive services not only help individuals overcome traditional barriers, like transportation, that may prevent them from entering and remaining in the workforce, but they also provide support and encouragement in other aspects of their lives, such as housing, mental health, and personal and financial resources. We are grateful to the University of Memphis and the Tennessee Department of Human Services for allowing us to serve as a partner in this wonderful program to bring these services to our region.”

-Jennifer Bane

Executive Director

Workforce Innovations, Inc.

Northwest & Southwest TN Workforce Boards

“

I absolutely love the program. It has molded me into a better person and mother in so many ways and has helped me get out of some difficult times.”

-Tasha E.

GROWWTH Participant

Henderson County



Pictured: GROWWTH Participant Sara A., and her son, attending a GROWWTH event at Discovery Park of America | December 2025



Employment Supports

GROWWTH’s Business Services team is on the front lines of employer relations and employment supports. Through GROWWTH’s internal referral process, Business Services staff work one-on-one with participants to assist them in identifying and pursuing high-quality career pathways. By connecting with Business Services, Participants gain access to individualized coaching and professional development opportunities. The Business Services team’s goal is to equip every Participant for career success.



154

High-quality Employment Milestones Disbursed



\$40,000

Earned in Professional Development Milestones



209

30-Day Employment Milestones Achieved



58

6-Month Employment Milestones Achieved



105

Participants Attended Career Development Training



80

Participants Assisted in Job Placement



173

Participants Received Employment Coaching

Pictured: (Top) Business Services Specialist, Dawn Kimble facilitating a training session in Memphis | July 2025



(Below) Business Services Specialists, James Cottrell and Anthony Scherrod teaching in Jackson, TN | August 2025



Participants may complete GROWTH Academy or a credential training program with the intent to obtain high-quality employment afterward. However, many often need additional support, coaching and tools to put what they have learned into action. That is where Business Services comes in."

- Stephanie Godwin-Chu
Project Director





Microbusiness Bootcamp

In Year 3, GROWWTH met an important milestone by achieving one of the original program metrics for small businesses. In 2022, GROWWTH set out to help develop and expand opportunities for at least 30 small businesses in West Tennessee. GROWWTH Academy graduates in good standing with the GROWWTH program had the opportunity to apply for a spot in one of four Microbusiness Development cohorts. The Microbusiness Bootcamp consists of over 30 training hours spread out over six weeks of intensive coaching and education. After completing the Microbusiness Bootcamp, eligible Participants are given an opportunity to apply for funding.

Participants in the Microbusiness Development program are given access to business development training, coaching, and mentorship as well as opportunities to showcase their businesses to the community. The businesses represented by cohort graduates cover a wide range of goods and services including food service, residential and commercial custodial services, printing, retail, beauty, cosmetology, photography, bail bonding, event services, insurance, and health and wellness to name a few.



73

Participants Completed Bootcamp



\$944,630

Microbusiness Funding Disbursed in Year 3



58

Participants Approved for Funding



56

Small Businesses Registered or Renewed in Tennessee

Pictured: (Top)
GROWWTH
Participant,
Chanielle, with
crochet handbags
during the
Microbusiness
Showcase in
Jackson, TN |
November 2025



“

“My confidence as a microbusiness participant has shifted tremendously from where I began. I used to worry about being able to purchase materials and supplies needed for my products. Now, I am beginning to see how I can build and organize my inventory, which means more opportunities for me to have a sustainable and thriving business.”



Chanielle T.
Owner, Crochet With Chanielle
Shelby County



“

The microbusiness program has influenced my growth as an entrepreneur by allowing me to learn how to run my business, connect with other people that have full time businesses and know what it's like to be a business owner. Workshops hosted by GROWWTH have been opening doors for other opportunities and customers.”



Haleigh C.
Owner, Cakdit Bakery & Catering
Shelby County



“I’ve learned a lot about the financial side of running a business, how to communicate better with my parents, and how to manage my finances as both a mother and business owner.” - Porshia

Balancing Motherhood and Entrepreneurship

Porshia was selected for the Microbusiness Development program, turning her vision into a sustainable source of income for her family. Working with children had been a long-time dream for Porshia. Her parents had four children and she has two of her own. When she enrolled in GROWWTH, her career goal was to build a childcare program in Shelby County.

“I didn’t know much about business,” Porshia explained. “I got through just winging it or figuring it out day by day. Going into GROWWTH, I was able to take classes for microbusiness. I learned so much in those six weeks. I’ve learned a lot about the financial side of running a business, how to communicate better with my parents, and how to manage my finances as both a mother and business owner. GROWWTH has been a big blessing to me. I’ve done one certification, but I have to do another one soon,” Porshia said. “It’s been a challenge finding the time. I work 12 hours a day. I’m currently operating from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. I’m working during that, also being a mom. I’m trying to find a balance of time.”

“Due to Porshia owning her own daycare, it can be sometimes difficult for her to leave her home to drop off documents or meet up,” Andrea Davis, Porshia’s GROWWTH Case Manager said. “The best part of working with Porshia is that she understands the mission of this program and utilizes resources provided to her,” Andrea added.

-Porshia R.

*Owner, Extraordinary Kids Daycare
Shelby County*

*Pictured: (Top)
GROWWTH
Participant, Brittany*

*(Bottom) GROWWTH
Participant, Karen*



Microbusiness Funds

GROWWTH Participants who complete Microbusiness Bootcamp and are approved for funding, utilize their disbursements in a variety of ways. Some Participants purchase much-needed equipment. Others use funds to expand their existing business ventures by establishing web sites, e-commerce platforms, creating marketing materials or hiring employees. In Year 3, GROWWTH assisted several small business owners by providing the capital they needed to pursue licenses and certifications.



I feel empowered and blessed to have had this opportunity."



Brittany M.
*Owner, Bee Royalti
Shelby County*



Securing business funding through GROWWTH didn't just help me buy equipment – it helped me grow as a business owner. It allowed me to operate more professionally, create a smoother customer experience, and build a strong foundation for long-term success. Every investment I made with that funding contributed to higher quality, better turn-around times, and increased credibility."



Karen W.
*Owner, KPM Printing Monogramming
Shelby County*



GROWWTH Tuition Assistance

GROWWTH participants who have completed GROWWTH Academy can enroll in approved credential training programs. GROWWTH partners with over 30 training providers that have been vetted and approved to receive tuition on behalf of eligible program participants. The partners include schools such as Dyersburg State Community College, Jackson State Community College, Southwest Community College, Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT), Professional Allied Healthcare, Class A Driving Academy, Dental Staff School of Tennessee, and Temperature Control Institute.

GROWWTH not only pays for the tuition of the approved programs of 12 months or less in length, but also provides milestone payments to the participants for completion of the courses and obtaining their certification. Many GROWWTH Participants are single parents who have limited resources and inability to afford training without this assistance. Eligible participants may also utilize assistance for training related expenses such as tools, uniforms, books, technology and other necessities.

As of the end of Year 3, 70 percent of participants who started training programs had completed. Of those who completed 63 percent had earned an industry-recognized credential or certification.

“ *People tend to get scared when trying to start something on their own, but [my Case Manager] was a sweetheart. She made me feel confident in starting a new business on my own. She let me know that she will be there every step of the way, when I need someone to help with the payments. She also showed me how I can check my enrollments.”*

Tiffany A.
GROWWTH Participant
Shelby County

Pictured: (Left) Stephanie Godwin-Chu, GROWWTH Project Director and (Right) Sherhunda Gentry, GROWWTH Engagement Coordinator with GROWWTH graduates from Professional Allied Health | August 2025

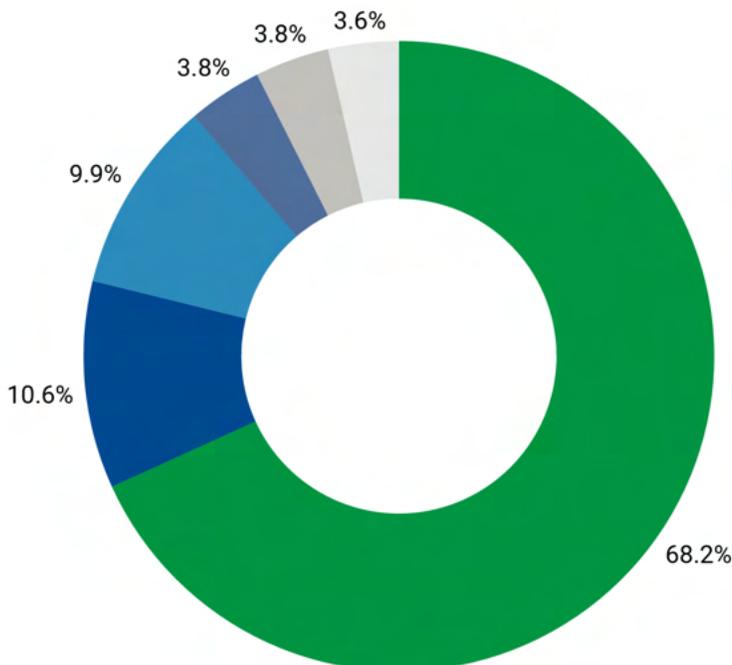
Pictured: Graduation for Health-Tech Institute of Memphis. Twelve GROWWTH Participants completed training. Photo taken with Ron Washington, HTIM Dean of Business Affairs | December 2025



HEALTHCARE

GROWWTH Participants who complete training programs and attain credentials are equipped to enter the job market in various on-demand fields. Healthcare related training programs have continued to be highly sought after pathways for career progression and achieving economic stability.

YEAR 3 TRAINING SECTORS



Healthcare (68.2%)

- Licensed Practical Nurse
- Dental Assisting
- Certified Medical Assisting
- Certified Nursing Assistant
- Medical Billing and Coding
- Patient Care Technician
- Phlebotomy

Other (10.6%)

- Culinary
- Bookkeeping

CDL Trucking (9.9%)

IT / Technology (3.8%)

Skilled Trades (3.8%)

Cosmetology (3.6%)



“GROWWTH really sticks to their mission, helping people financially and supporting their families.”

- Carl

A Veteran’s GROWWTH Journey

Carl and his wife Porsha are both GROWWTH participants in Memphis who together share five children ranging in ages from one year old to adult. The dynamics in Carl’s family changed after he became a 100% disabled U.S. Navy veteran in 2024. Soon after, Porsha lost her job and they began to seek new opportunities for their career trajectories.

“About January of 2025, my wife was laid off from her job and was looking to further her career or even a career change,” Carl said. “Through some family members, we became aware of GROWWTH Academy. She enrolled, was accepted, and a few months later I enrolled.”

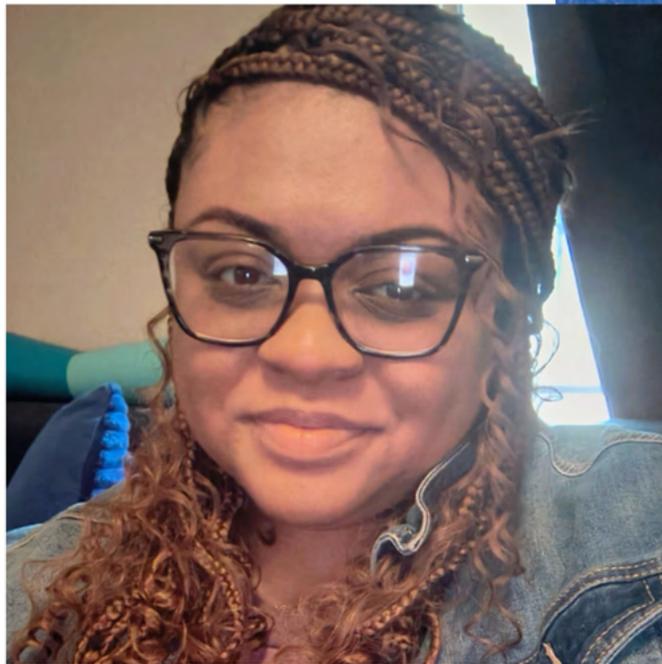
Carl’s career path after the Navy has earned him a bachelor’s degree in IT systems management from Park University; a graduate degree in operations management from the University of Arkansas; and this past November he earned his CDL certification from GROWWTH Training Partner, Class A Driving Academy.

“I have truckers in my family so, I’ve had some exposure already,” Carl said. “Also, it was a big learning opportunity for me, having never driven a commercial truck before. Class A Driving Academy is good, and they really try to help those enrolled in their program. The independence of commercial driving and having to work for a boss that is not my customer is attractive to me. The upside of trucking is seizing the right opportunities financially beneficial to my family.”

-Carl P.

Obion County

*“GROWWTH has met
all my expectations,
and I would
recommend it to
anyone who needs a
little extra help.”
-Mariah*



Champion for GROWWTH

Mariah lives in Gibson County with her four children and recently completed her program with Complete Dental in December. Years of intensive care for her grandmother inspired Mariah to pursue healthcare as a career.

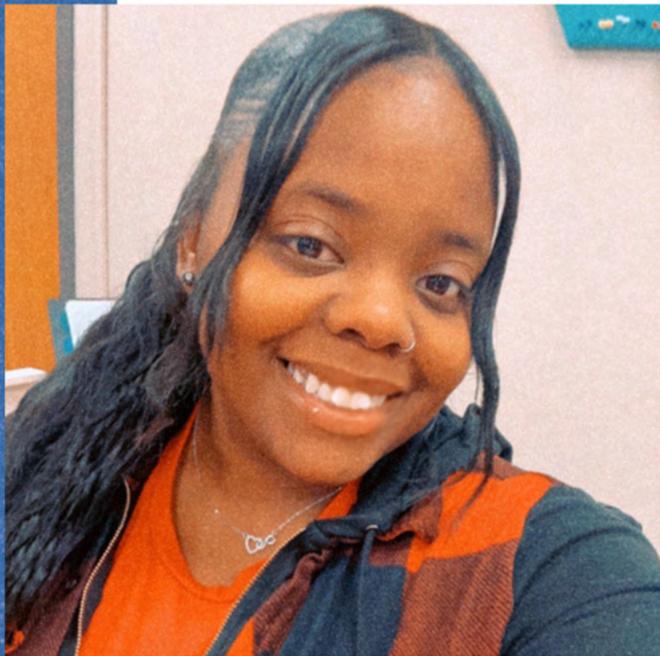
“She had Alzheimer’s and I took care of her,” Mariah said. “That really drew me into healthcare. I had my CNA license then I had a change of heart and decided to pursue dental assistance certification.”

Connecting with GROWWTH’s support network of Case Managers, Care Coordinators and Business Services Specialists was a needed surprise for Mariah. She wasn’t sure how her career could shift to a dental care focus.

“How quickly it took me to get into the program that I wanted for dental school is something I didn’t expect. GROWWTH has met all my expectations, and I would recommend it to anyone who needs a little extra help. I like the fact our Case Managers check up on us. They reach out if we have any needs. It’s really helpful. A lot of programs don’t do that.”

Mariah is taking her time now to explore more in-depth career options in patient care and enjoying the flexibility GROWWTH has provided. “I have always wanted to do nursing,” Mariah said. “Maybe down the road seeing some aspects cross over in patient care between nursing and dental care.”

-Mariah V.
Gibson County



*"This program has helped me believe in myself and stay committed to reaching my dreams."
- Brianna*

Renewed Hope

"My name is Brianna. I currently go to Jackson State Community College for Applied Health Science. Being a part of the GROWWTH Program has been such a blessing in my educational journey. They've supported me in so many ways—from helping with school supplies to milestone payments that motivated me to stay focused on my goals.

Their encouragement and resources have made it easier for me to keep pushing forward, even when things got tough. I'm truly thankful for everything they've done and continue to do. This program has helped me believe in myself and stay committed to reaching my dreams."

-Brianna L.
Gibson County

Photo Descriptions

Pg. 3 Participants Christy J. and Laterrica B. | August 2025

Pg. 4 University of Memphis Department of Health Sciences CMA graduation

Pg. 5 Participant Sierra O. and daughter Samaria W. at Dress for Success | Sept 2025

Pg. 17 Business Services Specialists (Left to Right): Anthony Scherrod, Dawn Kimble, and James Cottrell

Pg. 19 Microbusiness participants pictured with Cheryl Edwards-Gray, owner of Legacy Consulting Group attending a workshop based on the book "Mindset Matters"

“Latifah is very excited to be a success story and is appreciative of the assistance given to make it happen.”

*-Aaliyah Melton
SNAP Coordinator*



A Boost for a Bright Future

Latifah Bufford-Sanders came to the American Job Center as a SNAP Employment & Training (E&T) participant planning to enroll in the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program at TCAT Jackson.

Latifah, a single parent, was seeking tuition and transportation assistance to help her complete her training. Through coordinated support from SNAP E&T and the GROWWTH program, Latifah received the financial assistance and guidance she needed. SNAP E&T provided tuition and transportation assistance, while GROWWTH stepped in with additional support after she completed the GROWWTH Academy.

Latifah graduated from the LPN program on April 26, 2025, earning the titles of valedictorian, recipient of the Outstanding Service Award, and member of the National Technical Honor Society. She went on to complete her IV certification on May 9, 2025, and has since officially received her LPN license.

As of June 2025, Latifah is employed full-time with West Tennessee Healthcare at the Kirkland Cancer Center. SNAP Coordinator Aaliyah Melton, along with GROWWTH Coordinator Raven Harrell, supported Latifah throughout her journey. Aaliyah shared that Latifah is “very excited to be a success story and is appreciative of the assistance given to make it happen.”

-Latifah B.
Madsion County



"The GROWWTH program has opened many doors for me and my family ... improved my ability to set goals for myself, and this time have deadlines for those goals."
-Rebecca

Grateful for GROWWTH

"As a single, working mom going to school and trying to manage so many things on my own, time management and budgeting were my weakest areas. However, thanks to my case managers, the University of Memphis, and the GROWWTH program I was able to strengthen those areas and not only create a budget that benefits me and my family, but I was able to save money again, build my credit better, be emotionally available for my son, and plan for investments such as homeownership without feeling hopeless.

When I graduated from the GROWWTH Academy, it was one of the best feelings because I learned so much on top of things I already knew that it made it worth the time. I feel more confident about interviews and avoiding burnout when it comes to work. I am forever grateful for the support and growth that I have gained through this program."

-Rebecca B.
Dyer County

Photo Descriptions

Pg. 33. (Top) GROWWTH staff Veronica Allen, Kijah Blocker, Doris Moore, and Liz Buck; (Below) Business Services Specialists and Care Coordinator Victoria Rayner in Jackson, TN | June 2025

Pg. 35. (Top) Professional Allied Health Graduation in Memphis, TN; (Below) GROWWTH intake staff (from Left): Briahna Macklin and Sabrina Johnson at UT Health Science Center- Family Resource Fair at the Main Library | August 2025

"I want land, where people come and see how much more they can truly become."

-Keaira



The Business of Mind, Body and Soul

Keaira wants to find herself in The Perfect Spot, not only conditionally but the name for her developing microbusiness. Her career has wavered between healthcare and trucking most of her 20s and 30s following the footsteps of her mom and dad. Keaira's father is a truck driver.

"I was in the healthcare field for a while, then after that I started driving 18-wheelers," Keaira said. "My health kind of took a hit from being on the road and not taking good care of myself. I ended up creating a company based on mind, body and soul," said Keaira. "The Perfect Spot is a go-to for mental awareness, mental health, physical health, and most of all, the highlight, is spiritual awareness."

As a means to fund her budding business plan, she continued driving an 18-wheeler until she enrolled in GROWWTH in July 2023. After applying, Keaira was accepted into the first cohort of Microbusiness Bootcamp.

"I knew the opportunity was too good to pass up," Keaira said. "At home during this time, people in my family would get sick, and I would get these herbs to make remedies. I just listened to my spirit and poured my heart into them using herbal tea or tinctures."

-Keaira R.
Madison County



“You have so many lives in your hands. Those lives are precious. They’re a part of you. They want to see you always succeed and doing something better.”
-Richard

A Father’s Second Chance

Richard is a father of six living in Union City, Tennessee. His children have seen him in handcuffs. They have seen him go through court proceedings. His mission is to show them a better path in life moving forward. Richard enrolled in GROWWTH after a friend convinced him to give the program a chance.

“I was kind of iffy, like every other program that promises to help you excel in life,” Richard said. “I’ve tried a couple of different programs in Union City. They don’t do the things that the GROWWTH program does.” Accessibility to his GROWWTH Case Manager, Marcia Fields, was one of the first things that impressed him. He faced urgent decisions to provide for his family.

“If my wife and I had faced an issue, I could text Miss Marcia, ‘What do you think about this or that?’ She’d respond with something we didn’t even think about,” he explained. “There were jobs I couldn’t get because of my background. When my friend introduced me to the GROWWTH program, I thought I’d found a program that catered to [people like me]. My friend said, ‘It caters to your family as long as you do the program and learn.’ I thought, ‘Ok, well, let me check this out.’ I met Marcia and she would go out of her way to see if I was alright.

GROWWTH helped Richard connect with training provider partner Road Runner Driving School. His dream is to own his own trucking company. Until then, he is working toward earning his Commercial Driver’s License.

-Richard C.
Obion County

“GROWWTH helped me realize that you don’t always have to do things on your own. They motivate you to move onto the next stage of life. This program changed my life.”
-Jazmine



Finding the Right Fit

Jazmine graduated from Dental Staff School of Tennessee in November 2025. As a mom of three, she didn’t think she would complete her program. Parenting three children became a strong motivator for Jazmine to maintain sufficient income which led her to work in manufacturing.

“There’s no work-life balance in manufacturing, but it is good money,” said Jazmine. “I wanted to find something where I could take my son to his games or if he had a school ceremony. That becoming a priority two more kids later.” A friend shared about GROWWTH with Jazmine highlighting the different pathways toward economic stability.

“I researched CDL schools first, but I had to pay for my permit test first before I enrolled,” Jazmine said. “I began studying then became discouraged. I didn’t have enough support and help to study like I needed to pass. I put a hold on that and a month went by. My case manager, Marcia Fields, reached out to check in. I broke down and told her it wasn’t for me. She encouraged me to think about another option. I mentioned dental school previously and came back to it. She agreed and showed me two schools. The one that was warm and welcoming when I called convinced me.”

Support and help from GROWWTH pushed Jazmine toward the finish line and credential attainment. “People are there willing to help you succeed in life and give support,” Jazmine said.

-Jazmine R.
Gibson County



Financials

EXPENSES FOR PARTICIPANTS NOV 2024 - OCT 2025

GROWTH Academy Milestone Payments	\$844,200
Employment Milestone Payments	\$106,350
Training Stipends Awarded	\$814,500
Emergency Funds	\$265,711
Transportation	\$45,210
Family Wellness	\$380,140
Auto Repairs	\$41,155
Employment & Training Related Expenses	\$115,265
Training Program Tuition Paid	\$1,902,742
Childcare Assistance	\$33,053
Microbusiness support and funding	944,630
	Y3 Total: \$ 5,465,956



Meet Our Staff

LEADERSHIP



Tracy Robinson

*Executive Director,
Center for Regional
Economic Enrichment*



Stephanie Godwin-Chu

*Project Director,
GROWWTH*



Jasmine Lewis

*Lead Case Manager,
GROWWTH*

FINANCE

Liz Buck,
Business Officer, II
Veronica Allen,
Finance & Data Clerk

ADMIN

Kijah Blocker
Doris Moore

CARE COORDINATORS

Christy Belong
Rae Finch
Damonique Miller
Jamie Pearson
Victoria Rayner
Connie Stanton

INTAKE ASSISTANTS

Helen Armstrong
Sabrina Johnson
Briahna Macklin
Elizabeth Sloane

BUSINESS SERVICES

James Cottrell
Dawn Kimble
Anthony Scherrod

TRAINING SPECIALISTS

Matthew Ferguson
Precious Jennings
Adrienne Turner

CASE MANAGERS

Makiyah Bowens
Zacaryia Bratcher
Andrea Davis,
Adrienne Hudson
Toni Marlow
Mar Mata
Tayler Rossell
LaVon Thompson
Stephanie Turner
Nyesha Williams

SPECIALISTS

Matthew Breazeale,
Communications Coordinator
Sherhunda Gentry,
Engagement Coordinator
Bishop Wilson,
Quality Assurance Specialist

Overall Program Outcomes



Outcomes February 1, 2023 - October 31, 2025



2,419

Enrolled in GROWWTH



703

Participants Enrolled
in Training Programs



1,425

GROWWTH Academy
Graduates



495 (70%)

Participants Completed
Training Programs



581

Employment
Milestones Earned



317 (63%)

Credentials /
Certifications Earned
to Date



Acknowledgements

CONTRACT PARTNERSHIPS

- Community Lift
- Economic Opportunities
- Workforce Innovations (*American Job Centers of Northwest and Southwest Tennessee*)

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- *Church-Families and Communities Together (C-FACT)*
- *Greater Memphis Financial Empowerment Center*
- *Hopeworks*
- *Math Made Simple*
- *Memphis Child Advocacy Center*
- *Memphis and Shelby County Schools*
- *NAMI Memphis*
- *Save Our Sons & Daughters*
- *Sister Supply*
- *Tennessee Real Estate Company*
- *The SMART Center*
- *Truist Bank*

STAFF TRAINING

- *Community Alliance for the Homeless*
- *Memphis Area Women's Council*
- *UpLift Coaching and Consulting*

GROWWTH ACADEMY EVALUATION

Jonathan Bennett, Ph.D.

Center for Community Research and Evaluation (CCRE)

University of Memphis

TENNESSEE 
OPPORTUNITY PILOT INITIATIVE



Nyasha Williams, Case Manager
with **Angie J.**
Participant,
Shelby County

