



GROWING HOME

2022 STAFF BIOS

JANELLE ST. JOHN | Executive Director, Growing Home



Janelle St. John is the recently appointed Executive Director of Growing Home after being the Chief Fund Development and Communications Officer of Growing Home for over a year. Since her start at Growing Home, Janelle has helped form Growing Home's essential 3-year working plan that includes initiatives geared towards deepening Growing Home's commitment to the Englewood community. One of such initiatives included increasing Growing Home's food distribution in Englewood, a goal which has been achieved and surpassed in her first year by distributing 90-100% of our first harvests within our community and continuing weekly and bi-weekly fresh food deliveries throughout the year.

Prior to Growing Home, Janelle spent five years as the Chief Development and Communications Officer and later Chief Strategy Officer for Edgewater Health, a Community Mental Health Center located in Gary, IN. She is a dynamic senior level professional with over 20 years of superior performance within the nonprofit industry. She holds a master's degree in Public Service Administration from DePaul University and a bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Chicago.

On her passion for leading this unique urban farm non-profit, Janelle shares, "Growing Home, Inc. allows me the unique opportunity to make a difference in a community that I am very passionate about. I live only blocks away from Englewood and have many family and friends who are residents of the Englewood Community. Growing Home, Inc. is in a unique position to make an impact in a community that is a designated food desert with high unemployment."

ZENOBIA WILLIAMS | Director of Employment Training



Zenobia Williams is the Director of Employment Training at Growing Home. In this position she is responsible for planning and overseeing the workforce development program. She and her team concentrate their skills towards participant recruitment, classroom training, case management, job placement and retention.

Zenobia has over 20 years of experience in the workforce development arena. Her areas of expertise include program development/management, training, quality assurance, entrepreneurship development, process improvements, strategic planning, risk management, and relationship development. Prior to joining the Growing Home team, she held roles with the following organizations: OAI, Inc., CEDA, SGA Youth and Family Services and Chicago Urban League.

Zenobia has a Bachelor of Arts in Organizational and Human Resources Management. She also contributes her time and talent as a board member and volunteer for Saving Lives, Inc., a local mental health social service agency.

SHANI SETTLES | Director of Operations



Shani Settles is Growing Home's Director of Operations and has been with Growing Home since 2020. Shani is an educator, administrator, and beginning farmer. She spent three years farming full-time in the US and the UK on multiple organic farms of varying scales. Shani loves working with dairy and beef cows, driving draft horses, riding tractors, and eating fresh pea shoots off the vine. Prior to farming, Shani was a Visiting Professor of Religion at Haverford College, was the Associate Director of Employment Services with the American Academy of Religion, and spent seven years working in Academic Services as an At-Risk Advisor and Admissions Counselor. She is dedicated to serving at the intersections of food, faith, and farming. Shani is a graduate of Emory University with a MA and PH.D. in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She also holds BA's in Anthropology and Religious Studies from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She is thrilled to be part of the Growing Home family.

FARM STAFF

EZRA LEE | Farm and Program Coordinator



Ezra Lee is Growing Home's Farm and Program Coordinator where he assists in many of the operations on the farm as well as facilitating on-the-farm training for production assistants in the Employment Training Program. With over 5 years of experience growing in a range of farm establishments, Ezra has a great wealth of knowledge and commitment to finding the best ways to improve and maintain soil AND farmer health while providing healthy food.

Ezra has always worked on farms with missions aligned with organic standards and growing diverse ranges of crops and animals. Prior to Growing Home, Ezra worked at 4 farms across the Northeast, from 1 acre mixed use operations to a 40 acre high production wholesale farm with some of the best rated soils in the world (Pioneer Valley, MA). He's grateful to mentors and coworkers he's learned with and from at Laughing Earth Farm, Riverland Farm, Capital Roots Urban Farm and the farm at Bard College at Simon's Rock, his alma mater. His favorite vegetable? "At the moment, leeks!"

ANNA SUMSKA | Farm and Program Assistant



Anna is a Farm Educator at Growing Home. She's been with Growing Home since 2019, starting as a Production Assistant in Cohort 1, staying on as an intern and getting hired as a full-time Farm Educator in January 2020.

Before joining Growing Home, Anna grew at every opportunity she had: in fields, gardens, suburban and urban environments. She had a very successful garden in the city for four years, growing everything from lettuce, tomato, cucumbers and corn on mounds of soil. When she was little, Anna took care of 15 bee hives with her grandfather and continues to work with Growing Home's bee hives today.

Anna loves many aspects of her work at Growing Home: working outside; participating in organic growing; harvesting, direct seeding, transplanting and taking care of everything; having a schedule that changes day-to-day; and of course, being a teacher and mentor to current Production Assistants. As she shares, "I love to pass everything I have learned on to them, and see them work as a team and finish all these big projects where they feel accomplished and excited about what they are doing together. This is a supportive environment where you are

encouraged to grow food – and grow yourself."

Anna's favorite vegetables are kohlrabi and radishes!

JOVAN WADE | Farm Educator



Jovan Wade is a 2017 Growing Home graduate. He returned to Growing Home in June of 2021 as an intern and began working as a Farm Educator in 2022. The need for quality and local nutrition motivates him to continue his work in agriculture. Jovan has always been invested in living amongst plants! With over 20 years of experience growing houseplants, gardening in and around his home, and maintaining countless freshwater tanks for himself and others, he brings a great level of creativity and problem solving to the farm. He hopes to share his passions by educating people about urban agriculture through field work, microgreens, and small space growing.

Jovan is an avid hobbyist and his favorite way to get around the city is by bike. Whether it's his ebike or road bike, you can find him commuting, relaxing, or getting new groups of cyclists out along the lake and far beyond. At home he keeps fresh greens on hand by growing microgreens in his custom apartment set up. Jovan's most recent cooking tip: "Radish microgreens are a great hot sauce substitute on egg. They've got 20x more nutrients per gram than mature vegetables!

JUSTIN BENNETT | Farm Educator



Justin Bennett is a Farm Educator at Growing Home. He began his pursuit toward a career in sustainable agriculture as a part of Cohort 3 in 2021. Upon graduating, he eagerly sought to continue to build his skills with Growing Home. He passionately applies himself to his work on the farm and enthusiastically shares his knowledge and skills with Production Assistants. Justin has a passion for healthy and self-sufficient living and enjoys sharing those interests with others. He hopes to one day own an urban farm to further educate and inspire others toward self-sufficiency and sustainable agriculture.

SONIA GARCIA | Farm Sales Associate



Sonia is Growing Home's Farm Sales Associate – you will see her at Green City Market or dropping off delicious produce for some deliveries! Sonia is a 2016 Alumni of Growing Home, where she was hired half way through the cohort at Christy Webber Landscaping.

Even then, Sonia would stay a part of Growing Home's family, coming to Growing Home on her day off to assist with markets. She eventually took over as the Farm Sales Associate at Growing Home and has now managed Growing Home's Green City Market and former Logan Square Market for 7 seasons. Her favorite part of the market is the people and the pets – seeing familiar faces stop by our red Growing Home tent for delicious produce and conversation.

At Christy Webber Landscaping, Sonia is a foreman and crew leader, in charge of keeping the beautiful landscape and parks watered and growing in Skokie and Winnetka.

KELVIN BRIGGS | PA Farm Intern



Growing Home is grateful to have Kelvin back as a PA Farm Intern after he graduated from the Employment Training Program in 2021. Kelvin is really passionate about helping people help themselves, right in line with Growing Home's mission. One of Kelvin's favorite parts of working on the farm is clearing a bed, when you get to see all the species of bugs underneath the soil, working and cohabiting together.

Before Growing Home, Kelvin was a Certified Gang Specialist in K-12 Schools in probation and parole where he did outreach, intervention and prevention for gangs, working with students everyday that were adjudicated through the system. Kelvin also has spent countless hours in the community, facilitating classes around Jim Brown Amer I Can Program, Pre-Employment and Personal Development Training for youth and young adults.

Outside of work, Kelvin is excited about being a Great Granddad and he enjoys rollerskating, watching sports and playing sports and long walks in nature and by the lake, especially in the Fall. Kelvin's favorite vegetable is Mustard Greens.

ALVIN SANDERS | PA Farm Intern



Alvin Sanders is a current Farm Intern with Growing Home. After he was released from prison in 2018, he came to Growing Home and graduated from Cohort 2 in 2019 - and has only seen improvement in his life since. He never imagined working on a farm in Chicago as a kid or planting, cooking or eating radishes or zucchinis but he loves learning the new tasks on the farm, all the hands-on skills and appreciates the job training resources like resume-writing. He's excited to share all of this knowledge with the new Production Assistants coming in. Alvin aspires to contribute his skills to Growing Home because he loves the work being done to support people.

Prior to returning as an intern, Alvin worked at Gotham Greens for 2 years as a Production Assistant. He demonstrates hard work-ethic, and is great with his people and communication skills. When Alvin has time outside of work, he finds the most joy in taking his kids out for activities.

RAYMOND GARDENER | PA Farm Intern



Raymond Gardener graduated from Growing Home in June of 2019. He had an excellent experience during his cohort which helped lead him to focus on pursuing a career path. All of his future plans include agriculture and have led to a perpetual focus on expanding his knowledge of growing. His return to Growing Home has helped him continue to build skills and experience while making a difference in the world close to him. He's met success at many turns with the confidence that the program helped him develop. As Raymond shares, "The people at Growing Home have helped me to the fullest." He's proud to be working hard towards raising his two kids.

DEVIN SANDERS | PA Farm Intern



Devin Sanders is a PA Farm Intern with Growing Home. He has experience working for Growing Home's markets such as Green City, Englewood Village Market, Logan Square and Lincoln Square. Working at markets, he enjoys communicating with customers and teaching them how to cook our produce.

Devin is also a 2019 graduate of Growing Home's Employment Training Program. After graduating, Devin went on to do scaffolding work and enjoyed his work building and preventing hazardous situations. Due to the pandemic, he moved on to work for Gotham Greens as Production Assistant. He enjoyed his work with Gotham Greens but had a desire to work directly with soil. In 2021, Growing Home presented him with an extended opportunity, and Devin was glad to take it. Growing Home has helped Devin to understand how to work with varieties of personalities. He hopes to build his farm operation and communication skills and now contributes his growing skills and experience to markets and to training PA's. He wants to continue to work with Growing Home and with individuals to help people become productive members of society.

EMPLOYMENT TRAINING STAFF

DR. SHENIKA JACKSON | Case Management Coordinator (Case Manager II)



Dr. Jackson was born and raised in Chicago's Englewood Community and is an advocate for minority high school students, first generation college students, and young adults. In 2016, Dr. Jackson created a college-readiness project called: **My College Going Self**, a project designed to assist high school students with the transition from high school to post-secondary education. The project started as a "pilot" project that was implemented to high school students for the first time in the Englewood Community at Kelly Branch Library. In May 2017, the My College Going Self Project, became a part of **MY Foundation: Street Smarts to Great Starts Corp, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization**. MY Foundation became the recipient of the Starbuck Englewood Community Store Grant in 2021, and continues to be supported by The Pollination Project, a grant funder located in Berkeley California that awarded the My College Going Self Project a grant in 2016. MY Foundation continues to expand with a curriculum called "The College Workbook" that will be introduced in September 2022. The curriculum will be used as a guide for teens within the organization and to possibly expand to Chicago high schools. In January 2022, Dr. Jackson became an **Open Access Fellow for Project REAP** with the **Chicago Community Loan Fund (CCLF)**, focusing on community development and finance.

In June 2018, Dr. Shenika Jackson completed a PhD in Community Psychology from National Louis University. She was also the recipient of The Mohammed Megahed Scholarship, a scholarship awarded by National Louis University President Nivine Megahed. Her dissertation: *African American Males and Academic Achievement: Understanding the Challenges Transitioning From High School to Higher Education*, captures the barriers young black males face, as they navigate the educational system. Dr. Jackson holds other degrees to include a Master's of Science-Written Communications (2009), and a Master's of Arts-Psychology/Human Development (2005), from National Louis University. Dr. Jackson joined the Growing Home, Inc. team in March 2020.

JEREMY BALDWIN | Workforce Development Representative



Jeremy Baldwin is the current Workforce Development Representative for Growing Home. Always in adherence to the philosophy of "better to have and not need than to need and not have," Jeremy has worked in a multitude of industries. He has prior tenure in: manufacturing, retail sales, affirmative action, higher ed, information technology, and most recently market research. Preceding Growing Home, Jeremy attended Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) where he finished his studies in Criminology in May of 2018. As of today, Jeremy continues to strive towards his goal of being a network administrator as he is in pursuit of CompTIA+, CISSP (Certified Information Systems Security Professional), and C | EH (Certified Ethical Hacking). In addition to that, Jeremy is an avid sports fan and participant, having been involved in sports his whole life including collegiate sports. You can also catch him in his off time calling in to talk shows, playing video games, reading, or traveling.

DANIEL MACKEY | Employment Training Specialist



Daniel Mackey is the Employment Training Specialist here at Growing Home. In this role, Daniel designs, evaluates and facilitates Employment Training and Job Readiness Curriculum. He also assists with recruitment and outreach for cohorts; obtaining new employer partners; and establishing community partnerships.

Daniel has extensive experience in university admissions, recruitment and retention, community outreach and Christian Ministry. He has successfully conducted admissions and recruitment campaigns for nonprofit & for-profit, career colleges and traditional universities. He has taught at the university and the high school level as well. He believes education is an empowerment, and he has a genuine passion to help people live their best lives.

Daniel has a Masters of Divinity degree from Oral Roberts University and a B.S. in Business Administration from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. He is also a trained Conscious Ambassador for Trauma-Informed Care. Outside of work, he enjoys spending time with his wife Kelli of 14 years, reading, running, basketball, nature hikes and spending time with his extended family.

URSULA PHILLIPS-LEVI | Employment Training Specialist



Ursula is Growing Home's Program and Alumni Engagement Associate. In this position, Ursula facilitates classes including Roots of Success, TIP and Job-Readiness; conducts outreach and recruitment for cohorts; and facilitates alumni engagement from retention check-ins to panels, events and workshops.

Before Growing Home, Ursula worked at Ann and Robert Laurie Children's Hospital as a registrar. She is also a 2016 alumni of the Growing Home program and has been working with Growing Home for over 4 years. She is also a trained Conscious Ambassador for Trauma-Informed Care.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT STAFF

LAQUANDRA FAIR | Community Engagement Coordinator



LaQuandra Fair is Growing Home's Community Engagement Coordinator and resident self-taught cook! LaQuandra plans outreach efforts focusing on volunteer management, tours, workshops, events, and food access.

She is a 2016 Cohort 2 graduate of Growing Home's employment training program and was then hired as a part-time Outreach Assistant of Growing Home in April 2017. Working her way up to Community Engagement Associate, LaQuandra was then promoted to Community Engagement Coordinator in 2019. She oversaw the successful development of the Learning Garden which produced a bounty of produce for tours and donation. Prior to Growing Home, LaQuandra spent 6 years in the United States Marine Corp. LaQuandra has a long history of community service and empowering others.

MACKENZIE MICHAELS | Community Engagement Representative



MacKenzie is Growing Home's Community Engagement Associate, working closely with volunteers and visitors, and helping run other programs at GH. She's been an avid gardener since she was little, growing up just outside of Cook County. MacKenzie has always been motivated by good food and loves finding ways to share, cook, and eat with others. She went to the University of Vermont to study Environmental Science and Food Systems, so she could continue to learn about all aspects of food production and distribution and the resulting environmental impacts. She then worked several seasonal positions, ranging from environmental stewardship to volunteer management, until deciding to move back to Chicago. Now, she spends her time knitting, playing soccer, and of course, enjoying all the amazing food Chicago has to offer!

MEGAN MORRISON | Marketing & Communications Coordinator



As the Marketing and Communications Coordinator for Growing Home, Megan has a passion for sharing stories of great organizations through art, design and language. Before Growing Home, Megan lived and worked in Massachusetts, spending 2 years in Marketing and Communications with WPKZ radio station, a hometown radio station focused on local news, businesses and Boston sports. Prior to this, Megan honed her design and language skills while teaching high school Art, Design & English for 4 years and completing graduate art & design courses with the Rhode Island School of Design and Massachusetts College of Art. Megan has spent time in the Midwest though, having graduated from Carleton College in Minnesota with a B.A. in Studio Art and Spanish. Along with art and language, Megan has a love for cooking & eating, playing & coaching soccer, yoga - and has a goal to learn a great deal more about gardening and food systems!

ALEXA CARDELLO | Individual Giving Coordinator



As Growing Home's Individual Giving Coordinator, Alexa fosters relationships with donors and is closely involved in Growing Home's fundraising efforts.

Before Growing Home, Alexa lived and attended school in California where she studied Public Administration at Middlebury Institute of International Studies. She will complete her B.A./ M.A degree this May and is eager to bring this knowledge to her new role at Growing Home. Alexa is a 10 year Army veteran; during her time in the service, she earned an A.A. in Korean Studies from the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, CA. Alexa has a passion for urban farming and is thrilled to have found Growing Home to further broaden her knowledge of this industry.

Outside of Growing Home, Alexa loves spending time outdoors with her dog, Daisy. She's also involved in the real estate industry where she's actively learning all she can about affordable housing.

MAWIYAH STEWART | Executive Support Administrative Assistant



Mawiyah Stewart is Growing Home's Executive Support Administrative Assistant. Mawiyah is a Chicago North Side native. She is a 1st generation American (with immigrant parents who stem from Trinidad & Tobago). In this position, she hopes to accomplish organizing and assisting in the Administration part of the Growing Home Organization.

She has over 20 years of experience working in the Nursing Home field, and welcomes the opportunity in working and assisting in nonprofit. Some of Mawiyah's hobbies include; Cooking, Poetry Writing, Crafting, Horror films, and spending time with her family and friends.