



# GROWING HOME

## 2025 STAFF BIOS

### LEADERSHIP TEAM

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#### JANELLE ST. JOHN | Executive Director, Growing Home



Janelle St. John has been Growing Home's Executive Director since 2020 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. Such initiatives included increasing Growing Home's food distribution in Englewood to 50% or more, a goal which has been achieved and surpassed in the first years with 61% distribution in Greater Englewood last 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 23 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.

## **Melinda Craigs-Ingram | Director of Operations and External Affairs**



Melinda joined Growing Home as the Director of Operations and External Affairs. My primary objective is to support the organization by gaining a deep understanding of each team member's role. Melinda will oversee program operations and resource development for all Growing Home initiatives, ensuring effective coordination with program directors. In this new position, she will take a proactive role in strategic planning processes and lead the development of Growing Home's new site. Additionally, she will work closely with the Executive Director to keep Growing Home's Board of Directors informed about program strategies and challenges.

Prior to joining Growing Home, Melinda served as the SNAP Outreach Manager and later as the Senior Manager of Public Policy and Benefits at Northern Illinois Food Bank for four and a half years. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, she led a dedicated team of ten, tirelessly assisting neighbors across 102 counties in Illinois. The mission was to connect those in need with vital benefits and resources. Together, her team completed over 10,000 SNAP applications, making a significant impact on food security. Fueled by a lifelong commitment to helping others, she embraced an advocacy role, becoming a voice for neighbors. She raised awareness about food insecurity, whether in Washington, D.C., or

Springfield, championing key bills and advocating for a stronger farm bill. Melinda's sentiment is "it's never just about the paperwork—it's about driving meaningful, lasting change".

For eight years, Melinda served as a Certified Application Counselor at Crusader Community Health, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in Rockford, IL. In the Outreach and Enrollment Department, she worked closely with individuals at pivotal moments in their lives, providing assistance with Medicaid, Marketplace coverages, and connecting them to vital community resources. Guided by the motto, 'Teach a person to fish,' she believes in empowering others through knowledge and resources to foster self-sufficiency and resilience. Melinda's experiences have shown her the profound impact of extending grace during challenging times.

Melinda holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Human Services from Judson University and proudly considers herself a lifelong learner. In her free time, Melinda practices self-care through long walks, crafting, painting, reading, and actively participating in church events. It takes a village and this is the best place to promote self sufficiency and empowerment.

## **EZRA LEE** | Director of Urban Farms



Ezra is currently the Director of Urban Farms for Growing Home. Since joining Growing Home's farm team in 2021, they have focused on continuing and enriching the urban farm as a forum for training, education, and vegetable production. Balancing these missions has guided their practices in both the way the farm operates and the cultivation of a team that is compassionate and challenging. During Ezra's time at Growing Home, the farm has updated its growing practices to reflect high production use of the 1.75 acre farm while remaining accessible for trainees, updated infrastructure for long term success including adding retention walls and mixed irrigation, and shifted the vast majority of distribution of the 35,000 lbs of food grown annually on the site to reach people in food insecure communities and especially Englewood.

Ezra's people-first approach to urban agriculture is driven by their experiences growing food on a range of sustainable farms in upstate New York and western Massachusetts. From school gardens to family farms, nonprofits to wholesale distribution, their knowledge of regenerative agriculture both in growing and in structure spans 9 years. Because of the disparity in food access and the difficult financial

nature of small-scale agriculture, Ezra has developed an appreciation and dedication to the work that social enterprises can do to smooth these incongruities by providing material needs, supportive environments, and educational opportunities for local communities.

Ezra holds a bachelor's degree in Politics from Bard College at Simon's Rock and you may spot them rowing on the Chicago river, savoring a meal from Chicago's wealth of cuisine, or trying their own hand at baking.

## **FARM STAFF**

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### **A.S** | Farm and Program Coordinator



A.S 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, A.S 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, tomatoes, cucumbers and corn on mounds of soil. When she was little, A.S took care of 15 bee hives with her grandfather and continues to work with Growing Home's bee hives today.

A.S 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 for eggs. They've got 20x more nutrients per gram than mature vegetables!"

## **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 to our partners and community members throughout the week! 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 formerly the Logan Square Market for 9 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.

In 2024 Sonia began working full time at Growing Home to help support the growing delivery network, run the Thursday farmstand,

train production assistants on customer service, and grow produce with the rest of the farm team.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STAFF

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### DANIEL MACKEY | Workforce Development Manager



Daniel Mackey is the Workforce Development Manager 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.

### 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.