



GROWING HOME

2025 STAFF BIOS

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. of 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 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.

FARM STAFF

EZRA LEE | Farm and Program Manager



Ezra Lee is Growing Home's Farm and Program Manager 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 7 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 Educator



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!"

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.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STAFF

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.

JANICE ELLIS | Workforce Development Specialist



Janice is the Workforce Development Specialist at Growing Home Inc. Janice is a Chicagoan at heart; born and raised on the Southside of Chicago in Auburn Gresham. Janice also resided in Florida for 18 years before returning to Chicago in 2014.

Before joining the Growing Home family, Janice has over 20 years in healthcare in administrative work including at Ann & Robert Lurie Children's Hospital in the Department of Child Psychiatry until she started at Growing Home in August 2022.

Janice also has a love for community engagement and growth which includes working on the campaign team for a candidate for Secretary of State (May 2021-June 2022), collaborating with the 17th Ward office and Block By Block For Auburn Gresham.

Janice's hobbies include singing and music ministry, cooking, traveling, event planning and playing with her 'doggie niece' Chloe.

MARY DEVO | Information Technology Specialist

Mary Devo is Growing Home's Information Technology Specialist and Educator in our Growing Home Computer and Job Resource Center. She is an experienced database administrator of schools within the Archdiocese of Chicago. She's also an accomplished datacenter specialist who has worked with virtual systems like VMware and Dockers and is currently pursuing her AWS Cloud Foundations Badge to be an Amazon Cloud Practitioner career where her knowledge with virtualization, containers and database can be applied. Mary greatly enjoys educating adults and students in digital skills and literacy because she believes this knowledge is essential to improve our society.

CANDICE FRAZIER | Training & Development Specialist



Candice Frazier is a Chicago native currently residing on Chicago's South Side. She now serves as a Training & Development Specialist in the Employment Training Department and is excited to bring her love of community and her passion for Urban Agriculture to the Growing Home family.

Candice studied Vocal Performance and Theatre at Columbia College Chicago, and has used her creative skills and talents in many ways. Her background includes a wide breadth of experience in areas such as food service & fine dining, hospitality, travel & transportation, promotional marketing & direct sales, community development, holistic health & healing, and the entertainment arts. Candice's love of nature, along with her desire to educate and inspire others, lead her to the intersection of Workforce Development & Urban Agriculture.

In 2018, following an artist's residency, Candice became a Nature Counselor for the Chicago Park District's Harvest Garden program. As a Nature Counselor Candice grew and maintained several gardens and gave garden instruction to youth ages 5 to 12. This instruction focused on fun and creative ways to learn about and experience seed saving, planting, tending, harvesting and tasting fresh fruits, herbs, and vegetables. After which, she became a member of the Urban Growers Collective, wherein she serviced the community through a

mobile produce market. This market addressed the growing need for healthy farm fresh produce in areas with low access to quality foods.

Since then, Candice has become an avid and enthusiastic food grower and burgeoning farmer. As a Training & Development Specialist, Candice will instruct participants on Environmental Literacy, Job Readiness, and Social Emotional Wellness. She seeks to engage the greater Chicago communities by addressing the need for food access and equity, community safety and empowerment, and providing resources and education, while fostering social and cultural exchange and community enrichment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT STAFF

NATALIE ARCHIE | Controller



Natalie recently joined GH in the role of Controller. She is responsible for supporting and assisting the Executive Director, with duties as assigned, with cash flow management, policy development and implementation, and all other financial administrative aspects of the organization operations.

Prior to assuming the role of Controller with GH, her professional experience included positions held as grants administrator, finance and database associate, grant writer and property manager working in a variety of social service organizations including those focused on advocacy, mental health, and affordable housing. Most recent position was as a financial examiner, with the Illinois Department of Insurance, financial regulatory division. Natalie holds a Bachelors in Accounting, from the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay, and a Masters in Nonprofit Management, from DePaul University.

Hobbies include fashion, traveling, reading all genres of nonfiction (excluding horror), listening to music and walking along the Chicago lakefront.

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.

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.