THE FOUNTAIN FUND

NOLA SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

CLIENT PARTNER SPOTLIGHT – JIRRICO MCKEE

The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) is the nation's largest reentry employment provider. They prepare individuals for the workforce after incarceration, and **Jirrico McKee** is an essential part of their team. In his role as Job Coach/Retention Specialist, he's involved in job readiness training, offers transitional coaching and works alongside individuals as they step into new employment.

Client Partner Jirrico McKee shares wisdom with returning citizens.

As someone who was previously incarcerated, Jirrico knows how hard reentry can be. "A lot of us have been through so much. You get out of prison, and you think 'I'm going to go home. I'm going to do the right thing.' And then when you get out, there's so many different things coming at you - so many obligations, so many doors that get closed on you. It's discouraging."

His experience as a Reentry Instructor while behind bars created the perfect foundation for him to assist others upon their release. Since reestablishing his life in New Orleans, Jirrico has become knowledgeable about a multitude of reentry organizations, and he tries his best to point others in the right direction.

It was through an informal conversation with Meagan Jordan, Economic Opportunity Facilitator, that he learned about the Fountain Fund's lending and financial literacy offerings. One day, she urged, "If you know of anyone who might need our services, send them over." Shortly thereafter, Jirrico referred several clients, and that simple connection became new loans helping great people.

Then one day, when Jirrico's own car broke down and needed significant repairs, he found himself in a bind. The inability to get to work could jeopardize his job, and he knew he couldn't afford time off. "Yeah, the Fountain Fund really came through in a clutch!" he recalls. "Everything went through quick. Not too much red tape or delay. I was able to get my vehicle repaired without having to be out of work." Keep making the world a better place, Jirrico! We're so glad you've got reliable wheels to get you where you need to go.

NEWS FROM HEADQUARTERS – SHARING THE STAGE WITH BRYAN STEVENSON

Martize Tolbert, Bryan Stevenson and Erika Viccellio

On Friday, April 11, our agency was honored to share the stage at Monticello with criminal justice icon **Bryan Stevenson**. Guests gathered on the West Lawn to celebrate Founder's Day and award Stevenson with the **2025 Thomas Jefferson Foundation Medal in Citizen Leadership**. The ceremony also included the presentation of the **2025 Citizen Service Award** to **Martize Tolbert** on behalf of The Fountain Fund.

Stevenson is a widely acclaimed public interest lawyer who has dedicated his career to helping the poor, the incarcerated and the condemned. Through a powerful keynote address, he reminded listeners of Jefferson's deeply held belief that honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom. He eloquently shared, "We deny ourselves the beauty of justice when we refuse to tell the truth." And he thoughtfully encouraged, "We can all be citizen leaders by committing to being truthtellers, even when it's inconvenient, even when it's uncomfortable." He continued, "I believe there is something better waiting for us. Something that feels more like freedom."

For Stevenson, receiving the award, at this particular moment in time, is a call to action. "A challenge not to sit down, but to stand up. A challenge not to be quiet, but to keep speaking. A challenge to be a truthteller for the kind of just world that we all so desperately need."

PROGRAM PARTNER SPOTLIGHT – VOICE OF THE EXPERIENCED / VOTE

The Fountain Fund in New Orleans is always on the lookout for strong partners to connect with and support. One agency that deserves a huge shoutout is **Voice of the Experienced**! As shared on their website, "VOTE is a grassroots organization founded and run by formerly incarcerated people, their families and their allies. They are dedicated to restoring the full human and civil rights of those most impacted by the criminal (in)justice system." The phenomenal individuals working with VOTE have, "the experiences, expertise and power to improve public safety in Louisiana and beyond without relying on mass incarceration."

DIFFERENT LOANS FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

Individuals approach the Fountain Fund for a variety of reasons, but transportation, housing and business loans are often at the top of the list. As of February 28, New Orlean's active loan portfolio included 41 loans valued at nearly $72,284. The following stories offer a glimpse into how our loans are making a difference in people's lives.

HOUSING

As the recipient of four loans, Mr. Finney in New Orleans is an excellent example of how having access to low-interest capital - coupled with support from a caring team - is improving lives. Over the past several years, he has secured loans to help with vehicle purchases, auto repairs and, most recently, support for housing. Fountain Fund team members remark on his bubbly personality, generous heart, and for paying off his loans well in advance!

BUSINESS

Growing a small company is exciting and daunting. This is especially true for previously incarcerated individuals where barriers to traditional bank loans are so entrenched in society. So, when Mr. Johnson approached us for a $4,500 loan to upgrade his business, we were thrilled to help make that happen. Funds allowed him to purchase a new backpack blower, a lawn mower, a weed eater and more. Mr. Johnson's business is stronger than ever.

AN UNFORGETTABLE SCREENING OF "DAUGHTERS" AT NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Photo Credit: Alicia B Studios
Moderator Sarad Davenport (far left) led a robust conversation with: Angela Patton, Eddie Harris, Martize Tolbert, Dr. Cathy Ames Turner, and Earl Gladden. In addition to filming "Daughters," Ms. Patton is also CEO of ***Girls For A Change****, a national nonprofit with a bold mission: to prepare Black girls for the world—and the world for Black girls.*

In late March, the Fountain Fund co- hosted over 75 guests for an unforgettable screening of *Daughters*. This award-winning documentary follows the journey of four young girls preparing for a special Daddy-Daughter Dance with their incarcerated fathers. The movie's potent arc highlights the power of love, resilience, and second chances. Critics rave:
"This film will crack your heart wide open."
"It's rare to see a documentary so unafraid."

This community event also included an inside look at filming with Angela Patton, Co-Director and Executive Producer, and an engaging Q&A with local reentry leaders. If you haven't seen the movie, be sure to check it out! This is more than just a film — it's a movement. A conversation. A chance to uplift voices and advocate for families impacted by the criminal justice system.

CONTACT US IN NEW ORLEANS

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EXAMPLES OF LOANS

- Business Equipment
- Secure Housing
- Obtain a Driver's License
- Vehicle Repair
- Tuition
- Court Fines & Fees

Scan to learn more!

Our Mission
The Fountain Fund increases economic opportunities for formerly incarcerated people to improve their lives and remain in their communities.