

advancement

fall '08

Sharing news of the Lord's work through Advance Memphis

MINISTRY FEATURES

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Dear friends,

A past graduate just sent me a great text message. It read "Good morning brother, I love ya, thanks for all you've done in helping me find life." I share that message with you knowing that although it came to me, there is a bigger picture behind the scenes, one of healing through the body of Christ.

Advance is always navigating change. The recent economic downturn has led to a decrease in donations, and a reduction in staff. At the same time, a new wave of volunteers has helped us bridge the gap. Even though the demand for our services has increased while our staff has been shrinking (most recently 67 residents signed up for orientation and we accepted 25 into our current class—the largest ever!); volunteers have made it possible for us to keep going. More and more everyday, we get to see the hope and healing that comes when brothers and sisters from across our city work together for the kingdom of God. Here are a few exciting examples:

- Advance has reduced weekly paid hours by 28 hours, but increased volunteer hours to an average of 58 a week! That's the body of Christ!
- Advance volunteers have shared their social network with us, connecting us to Mid-South Community College. MSCC is now providing two new volunteers on our Outsourcing Board of Advisors, and pursuing our grads to enroll in vocational training programs! That's the body of Christ!
- Volunteer small group leaders began leading discussions and building relationships for healing across ethnic and economic lines. This represents 38 new volunteer hours per month, and led to several new mentoring relationships. Adults from across the city are learning and growing together here in our office! That's the body of Christ!
- Several business partners have given 4 hours every quarter, allowing Advance to host a Job Fair at our office for current and past graduates. This helps connect talented and excited graduates with great companies that are looking for good employees! That's the body of Christ!
- Business partners continue to pursue Advance Memphis as a viable solution to employment needs by hiring qualified graduates from our program and allowing members of the community an opportunity to fulfill their God-given purpose of working! That's the body of Christ!

In all of this, we see the body of Christ working, as men and women, black and white, rich and poor, work together to see Christ's kingdom come in every day, practical ways through Advance Memphis. Truthfully, the graduate who sent that text message isn't the only one who is finding life and healing at Advance. Together, the staff, volunteers, and community members who meet each day in this office are experiencing the healing power of the gospel as we work together and build relationships with different parts of the body of Christ. And as that text message says, there's one more neighbor who has found life in Christ, and who will take that light back to the streets.

Steve Nash



ADVANCE MEMPHIS

Our mission is to serve adults in the Cleaborn/Foote community by helping residents acquire knowledge, resources, and skills to be economically self-sufficient through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

HOPE

KNOWLEDGE

RESOURCES

SKILLS

Helping Students Realize Their Value in Christ

“Why don’t they just get a job?” Ever heard that question? There are many reasons why the poor in our community have trouble working. It could be a lack of education or skills, or maybe a criminal record. Or it could be the broken families, broken courthouses, and broken public transportation systems that plague our community. At Advance we see all of them. But under the surface, there is often a deeper reason: the poor have bought the lie that they don’t matter. Surrounded by failure in their own community and belittled and judged by the men and women outside their community, the poor begin to believe that their lives don’t count.

When the last class arrived back in July, you could sense that many of them had bought the lie. **As I walked in on that first day, heads were down and the only conversation was in whispers.** The students were visibly nervous, and many later confessed that they never really believed that they would be able to complete the class, much less get a job and change their lives.



Simon Onak poses with his family at graduation. Simon is now working and inspired his wife Lashonda to register for class.

But the gospel changed all of that. Early in the class, we began discussing the life giving message that we are all made in the image of God, a truth that shatters the lie that “I don’t matter.” When the class caught that vision, they began to recover their identity as people who deeply matter to God. A team of 12 volunteers from across the city led five discussion groups throughout the class that began to ask students to share their lives, the choices they had made, and the hopes and dreams they had for the future. These volunteers helped reinforce the gospel message that we all have value as image bearers of God by investing their lives into the class. Soon there were smiles on faces and excited conversations before and after class, and the students began to really engage with everyone who walked through the door.

But the good news doesn’t end there. Because we are God’s image bearers, we are called to be workers in Christ’s kingdom. We have a divine job to do. It is easy for me to give the poor charity, and so hard to grant them dignity, recognizing their abilities and values! But Jesus says the kingdom work belongs to the least of these. **And so, as a class we began to discuss how to honor God through work.** Students stopped talking about needing a paycheck (we all do!) and started dreaming about owning a barber shop, working on diesel engines, or becoming a chef.



Larry Hunter chose to work in Outsourcing throughout his time in class. He is now employed.

To people who have bought the lie that they don’t matter, Jesus brings the gospel message that we are all made in His image and called to His kingdom work. And that changes lives. I know, because I watched our class boldly walk into our Job Fair to tell employers why they deserved a job. I watched them grow in relationships with one another, offering rides to work and leads on jobs to their classmates. I watched them build relationships with the discussion leaders, with classroom chats turning into three new mentor relationships. I now get to meet with several members of that class on a weekly basis to open the Word and discover what it means to be called to work in God’s kingdom. And I know because 9 of those 15 graduates had the confidence to go out and get work within two weeks of graduation.

As Christians, we must be ceaseless in our efforts to equip people with skills and education. This isn’t charity; it’s the body of Christ helping the world to recognize God’s image in all of us, and to call all of us to His kingdom work.

Michael Rhodes

Michael is serving with Advance as a seasonal Jobs for Life instructor and Employment Specialist.

Imani's Story: Saving for Reliable Transportation With an IDA

Through many years of helping graduates open Individual Development Accounts, I've had the joy of celebrating with many as we go to the bank and finalize the transaction for which they've saved. One of the most recent celebrations was with Imani Bogan, a great example of one who persevered over the long road of employment without reliable transportation and remained committed to monthly saving in his IDA.

From day one, Imani had his heart set on purchasing a Mercury Cougar. The hunt began the moment he reached his savings goal. The first one we looked at was in terrible shape. It had too many problems, and he was nearly heart broken.



Imani Bogan poses with the car he purchased with money saved and matched in an IDA account.

But, Imani was determined---and within a week, he called to let me know he had found yet another Cougar! I was wary, but he assured me this one was it. It was in good running condition and still in his price range; a much better deal than the first. This time we were ready to finalize the deal. Imani is now driving his new car to a new job at Kele Corporation. Joyful moments like these require dedication from the participant. But they also require funders who are willing to provide match dollars, and staff and volunteers who maintain frequent contact with employed graduates.

IDA Program Expands Capacity

In the third quarter, we have had many graduates eager to open IDAs. The increase of potential IDA participants comes partly from the Employment Support position which was created earlier this year. This position gave us the capacity to stay in better contact with our graduates, to know what kind of support each person needed, and to encourage those who are eligible to open their account when they are mentally and financially ready to do so.

A second factor that has allowed us to get more accounts opened is our newest hire, Mike Shaw, a recent Community Development graduate from Covenant College. Mike is "thrilled to be a part of the Advance Memphis team" and excited about the opportunity to use what he knows to serve the community here by strengthening our IDA program.

We have already witnessed fruit from his labor in the few weeks he has been with us through securing new matching funds from



Magna Bank, our newest financial partner. He has also increased our capacity by working individually with prospects in completing all required paperwork before opening the IDA. Please join us in celebrating our recent growth in the employment and IDA sectors and in welcoming Mike Shaw to the Advance Memphis team.

We also want to thank all of our current and past IDA partners in enabling us to see success stories like Imani's happen.

Ann Brainerd

Ann is Advance's Program Manager and instructor for the Financial Freedom portion of Jobs for Life.

Quarterly Update

In 2008, the Advance Memphis staff set specific, outcome based goals. As we near the end of the 3rd quarter, we're assessing our progress. To the right are some of the things we're tracking as we work to be effective stewards of the Lord's resources.

We are amazed that 32 of our graduates went to work this quarter. In a tough economy, this placement rate is obviously the work of the Lord. We are grateful to the employers who support Advance Memphis and our graduates!

2008	1Q	2Q	3Q	YTD
JFL/FF Graduates	16	32	30	78
New Employers	7	14	14	35
Graduates Employed	15	16	32	63
IDA Accounts Opened	0	2	4	6
New Team Members (Volunteers)	11	23	12	46

HOPE

KNOWLEDGE

RESOURCES

SKILLS

Got Joy?

Is there anything more fulfilling than the joy of the Lord? At Advance Memphis, we're not immune to discouragement. Friends and students struggle with childcare issues, sickness and death, dysfunctional families, and finances. Sound familiar? God didn't promise any of us an easy life. But in one of His great paradoxes, he did promise us joy. So despite watching our friends struggle to find a home, or a job, or to break out of a self-destructive lifestyle, the Lord often blesses us with great joy. When a graduate finds a job or opens an IDA account, staff members and volunteers rejoice. When a student says, "teach me more about Jesus," we share immeasurable joy.



Mr. Hodnette from MidSouth Forklift gives the keys to Kate.

Like a doting parent, God blesses us with surprises as well. A new friend of Advance recently spent time finding a used mill to donate to the Outsourcing Program. This generosity will allow us to begin hard skills training, making our students more marketable. A new corporate donor recently funded our purchase of heat-sealing equipment. This surprise donation will allow us to employ more students, and provide *more* hard skills training. Last month, MidSouth Forklift donated a forklift to the Outsourcing Program. While I do admit to being a bit of a tomboy, would I ever have dreamed that a forklift could bring me joy? Not in a million years. But that's the joy of the Lord.

If you're short on joy, drop by and see us at Advance Memphis, or check out our home page on Friday afternoons for weekly news updates.

Kate Lareau
Kate manages the Outsourcing Program, along with Clifton Covington, Outsourcing Supervisor.

**THESE THINGS I
HAVE SPOKEN TO
YOU, THAT MY JOY
MAY BE IN YOU,
AND YOUR JOY
MAY BE FULL.
JOHN 15:11**

YOUR FALL DONATION IS IMPORTANT TO US.



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