



## YEAR SIX

July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025

# PEOPLE FIRST

## IMPACT REPORT

Tidewater Gardens Transformation

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Unity Place at Kindred



# OVERVIEW

## About

Six years into the transformation, the City of Norfolk and the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority remain committed to the promise made to former Tidewater Gardens residents. Their voices continue to shape the revitalization, and they are receiving the support and resources needed to achieve long-term success.

People First, empowered by Urban Strategies, Inc. continues to customize support services in the areas of housing, employment, health and wellness and education. People First, with a \$3M annual investment from the City of Norfolk, connects residents to a wide network of services delivered by community, corporate and non-profit, partners all working to ensure residents and their families thrive.

## How It Works

It's about choice. Participation in the People First<sup>TM</sup> program is 100% voluntary and nearly all 614 original Tidewater Gardens families have engaged with the People First<sup>TM</sup> team.

The first step is a comprehensive assessment with a Family Support Specialist (FSS). This one-on-one meeting with the head of the household and each family member identifies immediate challenges and future goals. A personalized support plan is developed, and residents are connected to community and social service partners to help implement the plan.

People First services are available to residents five years after relocation. Family Support Specialists continue to check-in along the way to monitor progress, reassess needs and adjust support as needed.

From tutoring programs to dental care and engaging community events, the People First<sup>TM</sup> team continues to empower residents to reach their goals.

**Read about *People First's four pillar approach* to commitment to the Norfolk Community**

St. Paul's Transformation Project Year 6

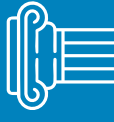
# 01



## Housing Stability

Former Tidewater Gardens families who want to return will have first preference for new housing built through the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative program. Norfolk City Council and NRHA made this guarantee in 2020. People First helps residents achieve housing stability by connecting them to the resources they need to live in the community of their choice. This wide range of support includes help with housing applications, financial coaching, and access to affordable housing options. The program also provides emergency rent assistance if necessary help resolving landlord-tenant disputes, and connecting families to supportive services like childcare and legal aid.

# 02



## Health and Wellness

People First provides the pathway to health, wellness and prevention. The scope of support includes access to healthcare services, mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment and much more. By partnering with local healthcare providers, residents receive regular health screenings, vaccinations and wellness check-ups. Mental health is a priority and People First<sup>TM</sup> delivers by organizing workshops, support groups and counseling that address trauma and other stresses residents may face. Living healthy also includes offering wellness events, nutrition education and fitness programs ensuring residents have the resources to thrive and live healthy lives.

# 03



## Education

People First supports children and youth in Tidewater Gardens with a continuum of educational services, helping them start school ready to learn, thrive inside and outside the classroom, graduate high school, and prepare for college, career, and life. To build a strong foundation for future generations, People First also prioritizes early learning and education. Strategies include expanding access to early childhood education, connecting families to early literacy resources, and identifying developmental delays early. Educational strategies also focus on improving school attendance, increasing parental involvement, reducing transportation barriers and suspensions, and helping youth develop career paths and set meaningful goals.

# 04



## Economic Mobility

Residents are climbing the ladder to economic stability and success through People First's partnerships with local businesses and organizations. Residents receive access to job training, financial literacy education and resources that support stable employment. People First also offers skills that enhance independence such as resume building, interview preparation and networking opportunities. Residents aren't just finding jobs – they're building careers. And the results speak for themselves: The average household income has climbed every year since the inception of the People First program.

# Progress Over Time Summary

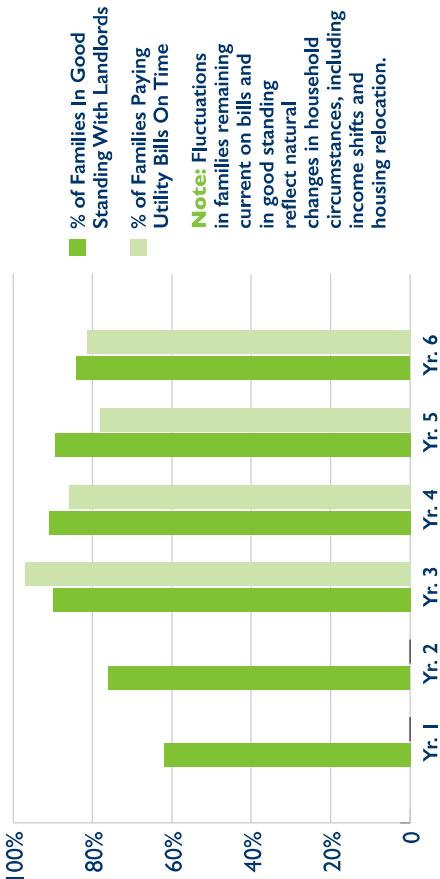
## Overview

The purpose of this section is to visually showcase the impact of the Tidewater Gardens revitalization measured within each of the four pillars over its six year duration. Four different graphs, one for each pillar, illustrate key indicators of success.

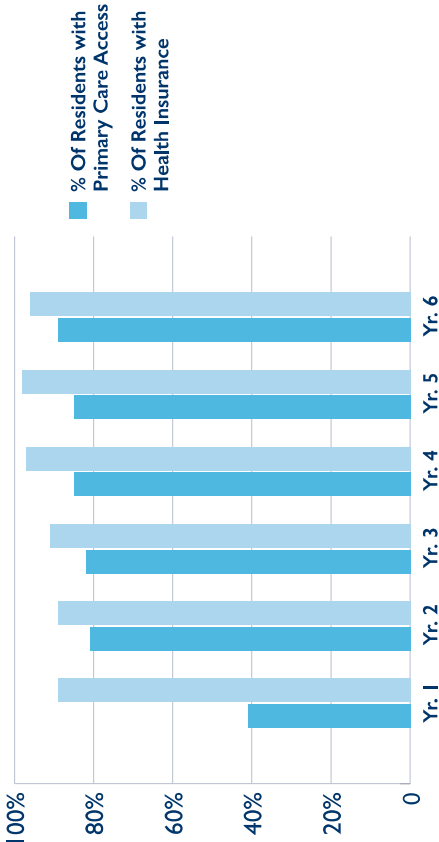
The Housing Stability graph highlights family residential retention and good landlord-tenant relationships, showing that a strong majority of households have maintained secure living arrangements throughout the transformation. The Health and Wellness graph underscores the high percentage of residents who are insured and connected to primary care providers, emphasizing People First's commitment to the well-being of residents. The Economic Mobility graph depicts the rising average annual income and the growing percentage of adult residents who hold steady employment, reflecting stronger financial footing for families. Lastly, the Education graph presents on-time graduation rates and increasing participation in early learning programs, proof that the next generation is gaining the tools needed to thrive.

| Year 1      | Year 2      | Year 3      | Year 4      | Year 5      | Year 6      |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 2019 – 2020 | 2020 – 2021 | 2021 – 2022 | 2022 – 2023 | 2023 – 2024 | 2024 – 2025 |

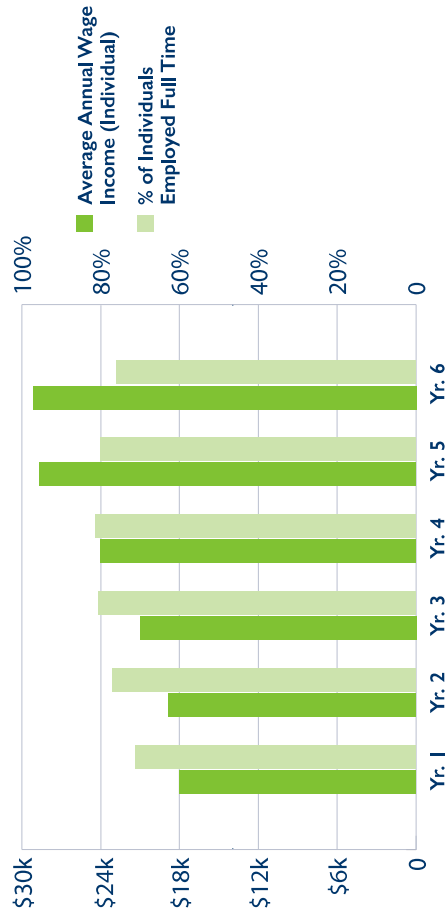
## Housing Stability Progress



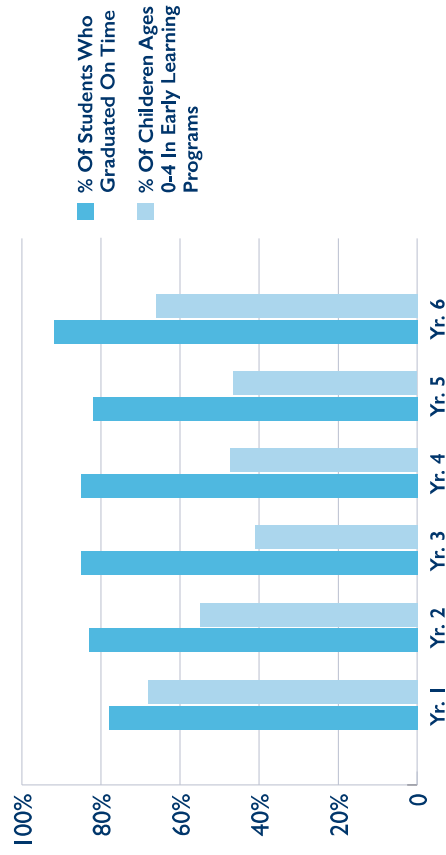
## Health and Wellness Progress



## Economic Mobility Progress



## Education Progress



02

Origin Circle at Kindred



# PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

# Pillar I Housing Stability

*“This isn’t just about handing over keys...  
It’s about helping people gain independence,  
financial security, and long-term stability.”*

## Overview

Every former Tidewater Gardens resident who desires to return to the St. Paul’s area will have first preference for new housing built through the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative program, Norfolk City Council and the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority made that guarantee in 2020. People First supports housing stability by giving residents the resources they need to live where they choose. Services include help with housing applications, financial coaching, access to affordable housing, emergency rent assistance, landlord dispute resolution, and connections to childcare, legal aid, and other supportive services.

## Impact

In Year Six, housing stability remained strong: **89%** of families stayed at the same address, and **84%** maintained good standing with property managers. More than **100** housing mediations and mobility counseling sessions helped families avoid displacement and expand housing options. As of July 2025, **70** families have reoccupied homes in the Kindred community, and **90%** of adults report feeling safe in their homes—clear signs of stability and security taking root.



### Did You Know?

The newly redeveloped Kindred community is one that advances and preserves residency by persons and families of various levels of income while protecting the right of former Tidewater Gardens residents to return to the area.

Scan the QR code to read the full policy!



HomeNet program participant joyfully rings the “Homeownership Achieved” bell celebrating her new home!

## Closing the Gap HomeNet Helps First Time Buyers Turn the Key to Homeownership

For many former Tidewater Gardens families, the dream of owning a home once felt out of reach. But thanks to HomeNet and the City of Norfolk’s Homebuyer Assistance Program, more families are achieving their dream.

HomeNet provides a full range of services—from financial counseling to post-purchase support—that helps first-time buyers prepare for, purchase and maintain a home. The program is paired with a federally funded home buyer assistance program, offering up to \$60,000 in down payment and closing cost assistance to qualifying first-time buyers in Norfolk.

“Having this kind of support closes the gap for people who simply couldn’t afford to buy,” said Jacquelyne Wiggins, Bureau Manager in the Department of Housing & Community Development. “We used to offer \$40,000, but with rising home prices, we increased the amount to keep pace with the market and average income levels.”

Since July 1, 2024, four Tidewater Gardens families have become homeowners, and six additional families are progressing through the program with homeownership in sight. Behind each success story is a team, Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority staff, housing counselors, and realtors working together to guide participants through every step, from building credit, identifying banking programs to finding the right place to call home.

The impact reaches far beyond the transaction. “This isn’t just about handing over keys,” said Wiggins. “It’s about helping people gain independence, financial security, and long-term stability.”

The City of Norfolk, which has supported the programs since 1996, continues to monitor and champion its successes as part of the city’s broader strategic plan to boost homeownership and close the racial wealth gap in minority communities.

Looking ahead, staff hope to expand as the housing market evolves and continue championing the programs at the federal level. “The outcomes matter,” Wiggins said. “And we hope the people we serve will always be at the center of future decisions.”

Wiggins shared that Norfolk is the only city in Hampton Roads offering this level of assistance to first-time home buyers. The City partners with NRHA to implement the program, and although Wiggins doesn’t work directly with home buyers, she occasionally receives photos of a new homeowner proudly holding the key to their new home.

It’s a small symbol of a life changed, and a future secured.



### Celebrating Homes, Hope, and Partnership

Behind every thriving family is a place to call home and the partners who make it possible. People First<sup>®</sup>, the City of Norfolk, and the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority came together to honor landlords who open their doors to Housing Choice Voucher holders, offering families dignity, stability, and a foundation for success. From heartfelt thanks to shared meals and well-deserved awards, this celebration is more than housing; it is a reflection of community.



Scan the QR code to experience the annual expression of gratitude.

## Year 6 Housing Stability Statistics

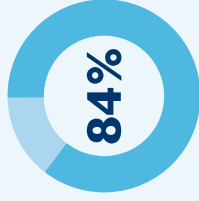
### Residents Find Lasting Stability and Security in Their Homes

#### Family Residential Stability



**514 of 577**  
families remained at  
the same address

#### Tenant Good Standing



**479 of 577**  
families remained in good  
standing with property managers



#### 101 Mediations

completed to support lease compliance and  
prevent housing displacement



#### 109 Mobility Sessions

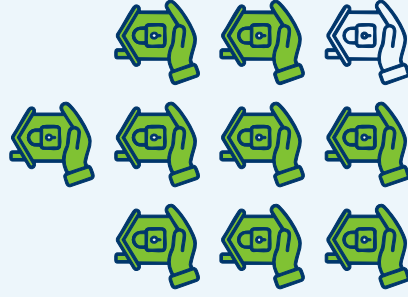
to facilitate successful moves for residents,  
with 106 individual and 3 group sessions



#### 70 Families

have re-occupied homes in the first  
phase of the Kindred community

#### 90% of Residents Feel Safe



**543 of 603**  
adult participants have reported  
feeling safe in their home

#### Pillar 2

## Health and Wellness

*"I never thought I could grow vegetables*

*without a garden... It's fun, it's fellowship,*

*and it's helping me eat healthier, too."*

#### Overview

People First provides a pathway to health and wellness by connecting residents to medical care, mental health counseling, and substance abuse treatment. Through partnerships with local providers, residents access regular check-ups, screenings, and vaccinations. People First also promotes healthy living with wellness events, nutrition education, fitness programs, and mental health support like workshops and counseling.

#### Impact

Families are experiencing stronger health outcomes. Nearly **9 in 10** residents now access primary care outside of emergency services, while **96%** maintain health insurance. For those with chronic conditions, **91%** are connected to care, and every assessed child has insurance coverage. Evidence shows residents are in a better position to manage their family's health needs and the costs associated with it.

## Seeds of Connection

### Seniors Grow More Than Vegetables in Urban Garden Program

In a quiet green space near downtown Norfolk, something special is taking root. Seniors who once lived in Tidewater Gardens are now gathering twice a week to dig into a new kind of community—one made of soil, seeds and shared stories.

The Senior Agriculture Program, the first adult program offered by Crestar Health, teaches residents how to grow fruits, vegetables and flowers in an urban setting. But more than that, it's giving them purpose, fellowship and a new outlook on what's possible.

"We knew we needed to do something for former Tidewater Gardens seniors," said Chris Belin, CEO and owner of Crestar Health. "My background is in farming—my mom was a farmer—but I never thought I'd be using that skill this way. Once People First<sup>®</sup> surveyed the seniors and we saw the interest, the program grew from there."

Participants started with seeds, learned how to transplant them into cups, and eventually into raised beds built outside the People First office. Crops like squash, spinach, lettuce and tomatoes are thriving.

"At first, they were nervous. But once they saw that first sprout, they were hooked," said Belin. "One woman came just to help with labeling—she didn't want to touch the dirt. Now, she's in there planting like everyone else. The confidence this builds is amazing."

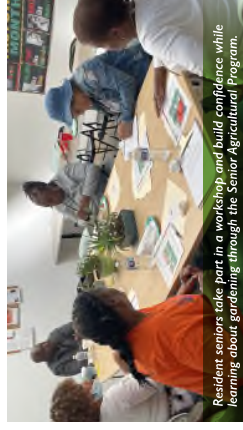
For former Tidewater Gardens seniors like Dondrell Smith, who grew up in Norfolk's Berkley neighborhood, the program has opened new doors. "I never thought I could grow vegetables without a garden," she said. "Now I know I can

do it right on the balcony of my new apartment. It's fun, it's fellowship, and it's helping me eat healthier, too."

She's also brought her organizational talents to the garden, creating neat, clear labels for every plant. "I love to write, and they let me take charge of labeling. I took the seeds and put them in the front of the label so we could see what we were planting. It felt good to contribute."

In addition to learning new gardening skills, the program gives seniors an opportunity to connect with others in therapeutic group sessions where seniors can talk through any feelings of isolation and stay mentally engaged. Belin credits partnerships with the City of Norfolk, People First<sup>®</sup>, Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Norfolk State University and Virginia Commonwealth University behavioral health interns for the success of the program.

"It's more than just growing vegetables," said Belin. "It's about transformation—growing confidence, friendships and a better mindset for the future."



Resident seniors take part in a workshop and build confidence while learning about gardening through the Senior Agricultural Program.



Learn more about the program. Scan the QR code above to witness the difference access to dental care can make.

## Something to Smile About

### Mobile Clinic Bridges Dental Care Gap in the Kindred Community

When Kindred residents expressed concerns about accessing dental care, the People First<sup>®</sup> and Hampton Roads Community Health Center teams responded with a reason to smile.

For eight weeks, every Thursday morning a beacon of hope arrived on wheels. For the first time, comprehensive dental care was readily available, right in the neighborhood. No more long bus rides or long waits to see a dentist. Every Thursday, the clinic was a one-stop shop. Cleanings, fillings, extractions—everything needed to keep smiles healthy just a few steps from home.

## Year 6 Health and Wellness Statistics

### Health Access is Strengthening Community Resilience

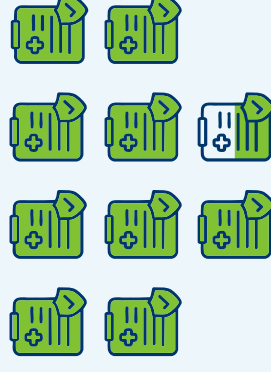
#### Primary Care Utilization



**538 of 604**

residents use primary care doctors preventatively outside of emergency rooms

#### 96% Health Insurance Enrollment



**581 of 605**

residents currently have a health insurance plan

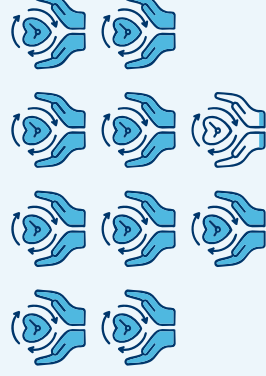
#### Pediatric Health Insurance Coverage



**688 of 688**

assessed children are currently covered by health insurance

#### 91% Chronic Care Management



**250 of 275**

residents with chronic health conditions are connected to services to manage them

## Pillar 3 Economic Mobility

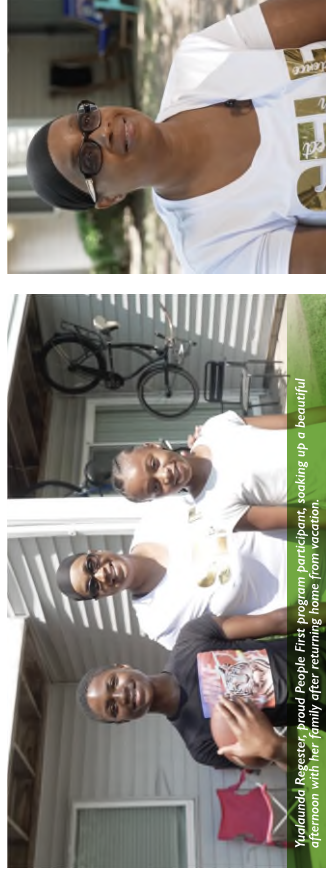
**“In Year Six, 133 residents gained jobs, 116 employment service connections were made, and the employment rate reached its highest level in six years.”**

### Overview

Through partnerships with local businesses and organizations, People First helps residents gain economic stability with access to job training, financial education, and career-building resources. People First also equips residents with skills like resume writing, interview prep, and networking to support long-term success. As a result, average household income has increased every year since People First began.

### Impact

Economic opportunity continued to grow in Year Six. Participants secured **133** jobs, and employment reached its highest rate in six years, with **75%** of adults earning wage income. Average annual income increased to **\$29,173**, reinforcing a trajectory of financial independence and upward mobility.



Yvonne Register, proud People First program participant, soaking up a beautiful afternoon with her family after returning home from vacation.

## A Family's First Vacation

### Family Dreams, A Savings Plan to Shared Memories

For years, Yvonne Register dreamed of taking her children on a family cruise to Jamaica—a goal that once felt out of reach for the single mother. With support from People First<sup>SM</sup> and Weiss Financial Consulting, she accessed free financial coaching and developed a personalized savings plan. Despite being unemployed at the time, she followed her monthly budget, cut back on extras, and steadily tracked her progress. Her discipline and determination—championed by a community committed to family-centered goals—turned small sacrifices into big milestones. The City of Norfolk continues to invest in holistic programming that promotes long-term family stability and success.



Spotify alert: The dream become reality. Want to see how? Scan the QR code to find out!

## From Crisis to Career Path

### Stability That Fuels Opportunity for Residents

When a single mother of three fell behind on rent, the situation could have spiraled into eviction. Instead, coordinated support from People First created a turning point. Through mediation, she established a manageable payment plan, reduced her debt from \$6,000 to \$250, and stabilized her housing.

But her progress didn't stop there. With stability came opportunity; she earned a Medical Office Assistant certification and is now pursuing a Billing & Coding credential, building skills for long-term employment in the healthcare field.

Her story mirrors the broader community's momentum. In Year Six, 133 residents gained jobs, 116 employment service connections were made, and the employment rate reached its highest level in six years. Just as this single mother's journey shows, economic mobility is not only about income—it's about stability, education, and the confidence to build a future.

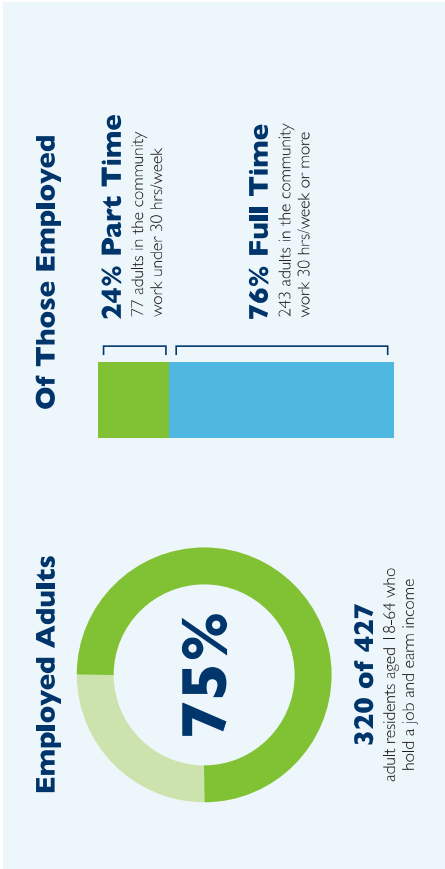
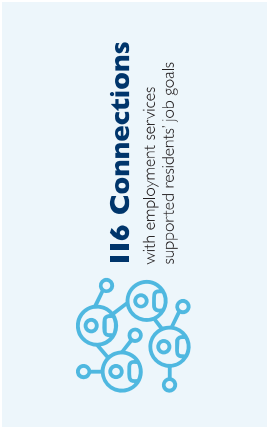
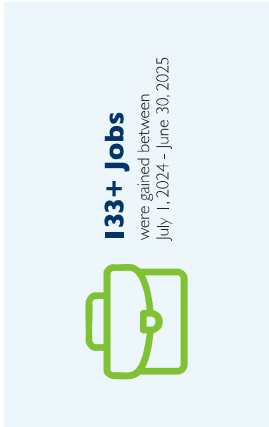
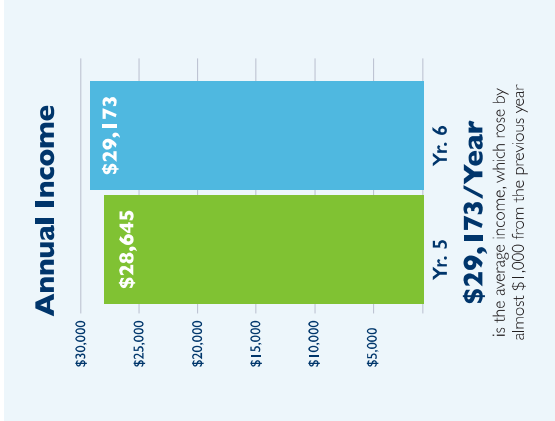


People First USI collaborates with local businesses to connect residents to career pathways that lead not just to jobs, but to stability.



# Year 6 Economic Mobility Statistics

## Families Are Moving Toward Stability and Prosperity



### Pillar 4

## Education

*"The [People First] scholarship is more than just money—it's a message that the community believes in them."*

### Overview

People First strengthens the future of Norfolk residents with job training programs that boost income and promote long-term employment through personalized support for both job seekers and workers. The initiative also prioritizes early learning by expanding access to quality education, connecting families to literacy resources, and addressing developmental delays. Additional efforts focus on improving school attendance, increasing parental involvement, and guiding youth toward career paths and meaningful goals.

### Impact

Year Six brought major gains for students and families. On-time graduation rose to **92%**, up from **74%** the previous year. Early learning enrollment climbed to **66%** for children ages 0-4, while nearly half of all in-school youth participated in enrichment programming. Parents also reported strong support systems, reinforcing a stable foundation for long-term success.



# Exciting New Chapters

## A Record-Breaking Year For High School Graduates

This year marked a major milestone for the People First program—the largest high school graduating class since the program began! A total of 32 high school seniors and two adults returning to college were honored for their accomplishments, with more students heading to college, the military, and career training programs than ever before. These young people and adult learners—all connected to the former Tidewater Gardens community—are charting paths that include Tidewater Community College, four-year universities, the Norfolk Fire Training Center, the National Guard and the Merchant Seaman Program.

Each graduate received a laptop and special gifts, but the real reward was the recognition of their resilience and

determination. Their achievements were not just about academic milestones—it was about the spirit of a community working together to build opportunity.

With support from People First<sup>®</sup>, the City of Norfolk Department of Housing and Community Development, Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Norfolk Public Schools, and local nonprofits, these graduates and adult learners are stepping into new chapters of their lives ready to succeed. Their journeys reflect the heart of the People First program: creating real opportunity through education, housing, health, and economic mobility.



### From Graduation to New Beginnings

This year marked a milestone as 32 high school graduates, the highest number yet, stepped confidently into their futures. Their success reflects the power of determination, wraparound support, and a strong community partnership led by People First<sup>®</sup>, the City of Norfolk, and dedicated partners.

This story follows two graduates as they share their journeys and inspire us all with what's possible when opportunity and perseverance come together:

## A First Step Forward

### Inaugural People First Scholarships Awarded

Thirteen students—11 graduating high school seniors and two adults returning to college—received the inaugural People First Scholarship, a **\$2,500** award created to help students reach their academic and career goals.

To apply, recipients shared powerful essays or videos about how the scholarship would help them continue their education or gain a professional certification. The result? A group of driven, inspired individuals are now taking the next step with a boost of confidence and financial support to achieve their goals.

The scholarship is more than just money—it's a message that the community believes in them. For the two adult learners, the award symbolizes a second chance. For the high school students, it's a launchpad to new beginnings. This inaugural class sets the tone for what's possible when investment meets potential.

Backed by People First, the City of Norfolk and its network of community partners, these students are proof that dreams, when nurtured, can grow into powerful change.

## Year 6 Education Statistics

### Students Are Learning, Growing, and Thriving

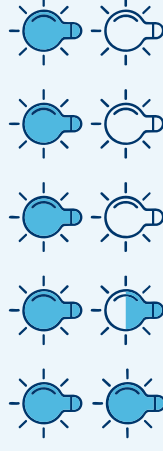
#### Youth Program Involvement



278 of 567

in-school youth participated in enrichment programs

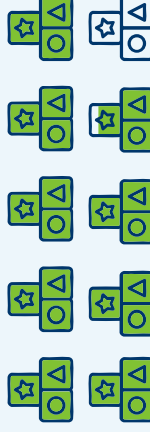
#### 66% Early Learning Enrollment



44 of 67

children ages 0–4 are enrolled in formal early learning programs

#### Developmental Screening



88% of preschool age children are screened for age-appropriate development

#### Parental Support Acknowledgement



402 of 442

parents agreed they have support with child-rearing

#### On-Time High School Graduation

Yr. 5

74%

20 of 27 high school seniors graduated on time for the 2023–2024 school year

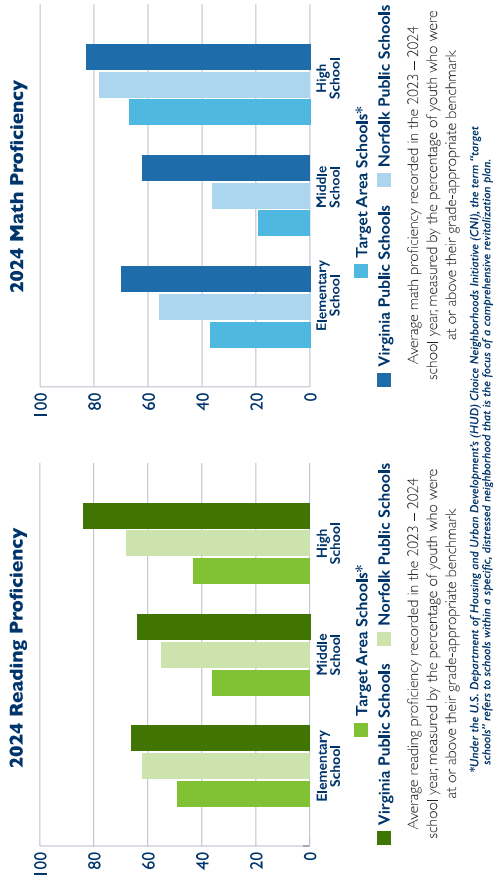
Yr. 6

92%

34 of 37 high school seniors graduated on time for the 2024–2025 school year

## Year 6 Education Statistics

### Performance in Key Subjects is on the Rise



**People First is helping families create a stronger foundation for learning by fostering confidence and connecting students with the tools for long-lasting educational success.**

#### 98% Internet Access



**559 of 570**

children have access to a computer with internet for their schoolwork

#### 245 Youth



participating in positive development programs in school

#### 366 Uniforms



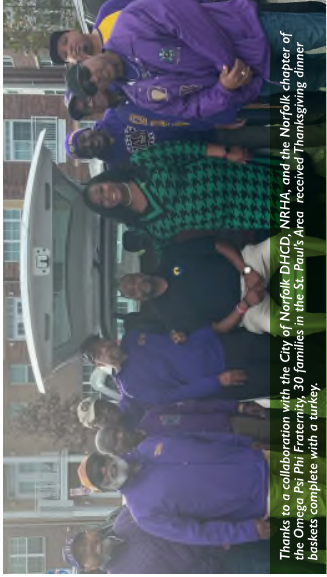
provided to 183 children to help them start the school year with confidence

Reunion at Kindred

# 03



# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT



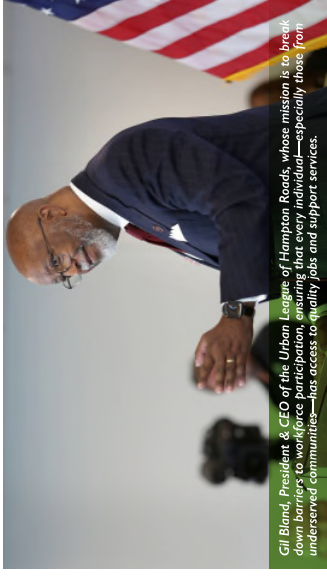
Thanks to a collaboration with the City of Norfolk DHCD, NRHA, and the Norfolk chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, 30 families in the St. Paul's Area received Thanksgiving dinner baskets complete with a turkey.



Congratulations to Norfolk Mayor Kenneth Cooper (left) and People First Initiative President, T. J. King, Jr. (right) for their leadership in the People First Initiative during its 41st Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Leaders Awards.



Luther King, Jr. Community Leaders Awards. T. J. King, Jr. (right) addresses to the group and presents the award to the People First Initiative President, T. J. King, Jr. (left). The People First Initiative is a national organization that honors local leaders who embody the vision of equality, advocacy, and service.



Gil Blund, President & CEO of the Urban League of Hampton Roads, whose mission is to break down barriers to workforce participation, ensuring that every individual—especially those from underserved communities—has access to quality jobs and support services.

# Community Partners and Champions

## Overview

A dedicated team of community partners and champions is working behind the scenes to help former Tidewater Gardens residents thrive. Whether in nonprofit and faith-based organizations or through individual leadership, many dedicate their time, paid or unpaid, to serve as the backbone of the People First program. The work of these partners and champions goes far beyond service delivery. They advocate, they listen, and they roll up their sleeves and provide hands-on support wherever it is needed most. Whether offering resources or simply standing beside residents in moments of transition, their unwavering commitment is transforming lives.

Together, they are building a stronger, more connected community – one rooted in dignity, opportunity, and hope. Their efforts are truly making a difference.

## Community Partner

## Urban League of Hampton Roads Building Career Pathways for Residents

For Patricia Gibson, director of employment and corporate partnerships at the Urban League of Hampton Roads, supporting residents is both a mission and a calling. Having started as a volunteer with the Urban League of San Diego in 2015, Gibson sought out the Hampton Roads chapter when she moved here three years ago. First as a volunteer and now on the staff, she collaborates with People First<sup>19</sup>.

"The Urban League's mission is to help people build stronger futures through education, health, and financial wellness," Gibson said. "When People First reached out about workforce development needs for former Tidewater Gardens residents, we knew we could make a difference."

Two years ago, the Urban League began partnering with People First to offer workforce development services directly to former Tidewater Gardens residents. When the Urban League's office relocated out of Norfolk, People First<sup>19</sup> offered the Urban League office space near Kindred, allowing residents to access services conveniently alongside other People First programs.

"We didn't want to create any barriers for residents to meet with us," Gibson said. "We start with an intake process to understand each person's goals—whether that's finishing school, owning a business, or finding stable employment—and develop a plan together."

Since launching two months ago, the program has helped 25 residents pursue their goals, including a young mother of two who is just one semester away from completing her business administration degree. "Financial challenges threatened to stop her," Gibson explained. "We connected her with our financial coach to create a plan and identified job opportunities in hospitality that offer tuition reimbursement and career growth."

People First continues to refer residents to the workforce development program. The Urban League works closely with partners like WorkersFirst clinic to address health barriers and offer pre-employment screenings and the Hampton Roads Workforce Council for career opportunities in the maritime industry.

People First and Urban League's partnership has opened up opportunities for residents interested in careers across all different sectors as well as soft skills training.

**"Many residents have strong resumes but need**

**help presenting themselves for the roles they**

**want," said Gibson. "We also teach professional**

**skills like managing workplace conflict and how**

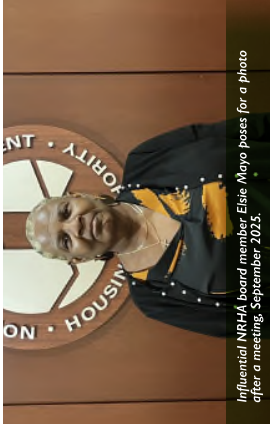
**to 'show up' for success."**

Gibson emphasized the importance of advocacy and personalized support. "These are people who want to be heard. They've faced hardships, but they keep showing up with hope. Our role is to walk alongside them, connect them to resources, and help them get back up when life knocks them down."

Looking ahead, Gibson sees the program growing through more partnerships and word of mouth. "When we help one family, they tell others. That ripple effect builds a stronger, thriving community."



The Moms on a Mission team gathered for a photo during a day of service, supporting families.



Influential NRHA board member Elsie Mayo poses for a photo after a meeting, September 2023.

### Community Champion

## Moms on a Mission Helping Families Start Fresh

What began as a heartfelt conversation between two mothers around a kitchen table has blossomed into a nonprofit uplifting families and individuals across Hampton Roads.

"We started in 2018 with just a few moms and a shelf in my garage," said Maggie Jo Kennedy, executive director and co-founder of Moms on a Mission. "We wanted our kids to understand that not everyone lives the same way—and that they have the power to make a difference."

Today, the organization supports 13 area shelters, delivering laundry baskets and thoughtfully packed kits filled with household essentials and personal care items to families and individuals starting fresh after leaving a shelter.

A referral from the Urban Renewal Center connected Moms on a Mission to Krystle Aponte, Programs Manager, with the Norfolk Department of Housing and Community Development, who is helping oversee the City's People First program. The conversation couldn't have come at a better time.

### Community Champion

## Elsie Mayo Bringing Lived Experience to the NRHA Board

Elsie Mayo, appointed to the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority board of commissioners in September 2024, brings more than just professional experience to the role. Mayo grew up in Norfolk, living in the Ghent neighborhood with her siblings, eventually moving to other NRHA communities, including the former Tidewater Gardens.

"A local restoration company had just donated 60 Welcome Home baskets, and we happened to have 30 still on our shelves," Kennedy recalled. "Krystle said, 'I have 30 families moving out of Tidewater Gardens—can you help?'"

They didn't hesitate. Within hours, Krystle and members of People First<sup>®</sup> cleared the shelves. People First<sup>®</sup> ensured the baskets overflowing with cleaning supplies, cookware, linens, and toiletries were delivered with care into the welcoming arms of residents.

"We want people to feel hopeful where they land," Kennedy said. "You shouldn't have to worry about a shower curtain when you're trying to rebuild your life."

In 2024 alone, Moms on a Mission provided 34 Welcome Home baskets, 33 cookware sets, and 38 backpacks brimming with essentials, toys, and books for kids to Tidewater Gardens families.

From a single garage shelf to citywide support, they're changing lives—one basket, one backpack, one family at a time.

### Community Champion

## St. John's African Methodist Episcopal Church Responding to a Changing Community While Staying Rooted in History

When the Rev. Christian J. Savage became pastor of St. John's African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2021, Norfolk was still in the grip of the pandemic. Many church programs had gone quiet, and the surrounding St. Paul's community was in the midst of sweeping change.

"We had to realign our mission to meet the shifting needs of a changing neighborhood," Savage said.

Founded in 1840, St. John's is woven into the fabric of Norfolk's history. It was home to the first Freedman's School, the birthplace of the Black "freedom ballot," and it narrowly escaped demolition in the 1950s when the neighborhood was razed for public housing.

Today, the church stands as a trusted partner to the city and local nonprofits, offering food, resources and support to hundreds of families. In 2024, St. John's hosted a community baby shower in collaboration with the Macon and Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences Center's Healthy Start Initiative!

Loving Steps Program for more than 140 families. That same year, the church in partnership with People First<sup>®</sup> distributed 300 turkeys to former Tidewater Gardens families in time for Thanksgiving. The church's former soup kitchen now serves as a fully stocked pantry with caring volunteers delivering groceries at Kindred's Reunion Senior Living.

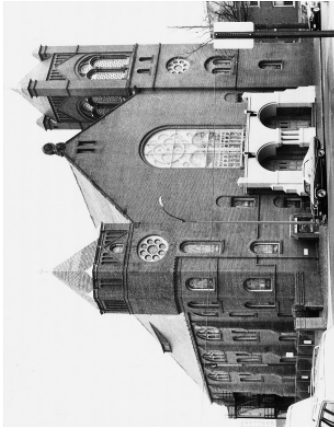
When the City needed help securing a \$5,000 donation from Toys for Tots so every former Tidewater Gardens child had a gift for Christmas, it was all hands on deck. Not only did the church store all the toys, church volunteers and People First<sup>®</sup> organized the presents by age, dressed as holiday elves, and delivered the gifts into the hands of 326 very excited children.

Pastor Savage credits his church community for helping spread holiday joy.

"We called the central church in D.C. and they got us the paperwork and we got it to Toys for Tots. We were able to prove we could be trusted with a large donation and we didn't take no for an answer," Savage said. "Our neighbors have come to count on us. We believe Christ calls us to serve—and the world needs more of that."

With its mortgage paid off, the church plans to renovate the sanctuary and expand its food pantry to offer fresh meats and vegetables.

"We're as much a neighbor as anyone in this community," Savage said. "And after nearly 200 years, we're still walking hand in hand with our city—for the good of all."



## Year Six in Photos



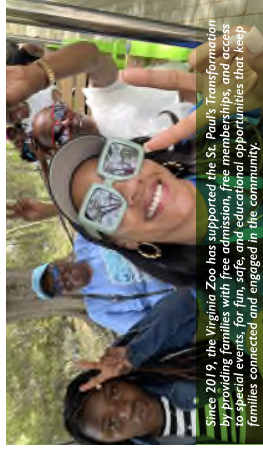
With the support of her family, Shanelle Keene, People First program participant, has written multiple children's books that inspire young readers to journey across the county—without ever leaving home.



Since 2019, the Virginia Zoo has supported the St. Paul's Transformation by providing families with free admission, free memberships, and access to special events, for fun, safe, and educational opportunities that keep families connected and engaged in the community.



NDHCD and NRHA welcomed resident ambassadors and staff from the Goldsboro, NC Housing Authority as they explore a Choice Neighborhood Initiative for their city with the goal of enhancing the neighborhood through collaboration with residents.



Since 2019, the Virginia Zoo has supported the St. Paul's Transformation by providing families with free admission, free memberships, and access to special events, for fun, safe, and educational opportunities that keep families connected and engaged in the community.



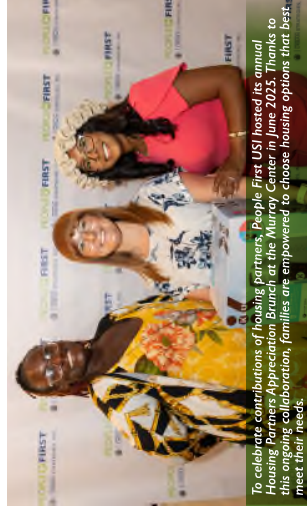
Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Here4U Campaign was introduced as a gentle reminder of People First's commitment to helping individuals and families achieve safety, stability, and thriving outcomes.



In April 2025, the transformation of St. Paul's continued with the groundbreaking of Kinship at Kindred—the first phase built on the original Tidewater Gardens footprint. The celebration was hosted by the City of Norfolk, NRHA, Brishmore Development, Bank of America CDC, and BBNM Norfolk Partners.



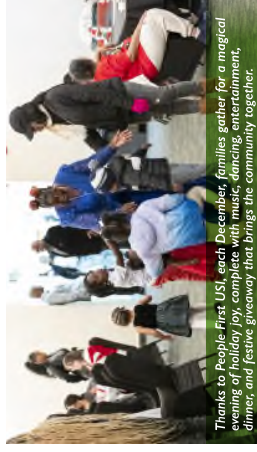
Residents graduated from the four-week pilot program "Building Community," facilitated by People First USI, which focused on embracing new environments, effective communication, self-advocacy, conflict resolution, and leadership development.



To celebrate contributions of housing partners, People First USI hosted its annual Housing Partners Appreciation Branch at the Murray Center in June 2023. Thanks to the ongoing collaboration, families are empowered to choose housing options that best meet their needs.



Unity in the Community is an annual back-to-school celebration hosted by the City of Norfolk. Pictured here is the backpack giveaway, providing grade-level appropriate school supplies to help ensure Norfolk students are prepared for the academic year.



Thanks to People First USI, each December, families gather for a magical evening of holiday joy, complete with music, dancing, entertainment, dinner, and festive giveaway that brings the community together.



The Evelyn T. Butts sign was temporarily removed for safekeeping during the St. Paul's Transformation Project. It has now been reinstalled at its original site on Church Street, continuing to honor Evelyn Thomas Butts, a pioneering civil rights activist and community organizer from Norfolk.



The Tidewater Gardens sign reminds us of the strength, history, and community spirit that shaped this neighborhood. As we move forward, we carry these stories with us—building a future that reflects the pride and resilience of the families who called Tidewater Gardens home.

# 04

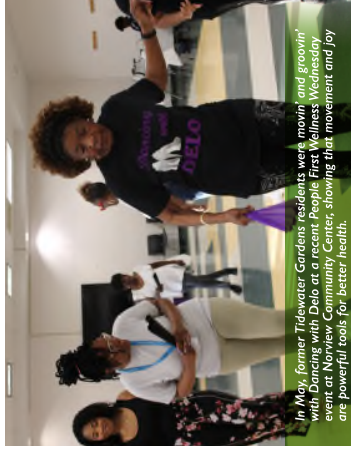
Kinship at Kindred



# LEADERSHIP



In partnership with Crestar Health, senior residents participated in a hands-on agricultural workshop, where they learned how to prepare soil, build plant domes, and better understand the stages of plant growth.



In May, former Tidewater Gardens residents were 'movin' and groovin' with Dancing with DeLo at a recent People First Wellness Wednesday event at Norview Community Center, showing that movement and joy are powerful tools for better health.



Since January 2025, People First and Crestar Health have been teaming up through the Precision Learning Program, providing career and academic support for students in the community—and the results are in every student in the program has improved their grades!



Thanks to a collaboration with the Norfolk Tides, families enjoyed a night out on the town with the Tides, featuring live music, food, and fun.



During a Black History Month collaboration with local organization Teens with a Purpose, Mrs. Caefield shared how Norfolk's Black churches provided learning spaces for students before the completion of the "high school for Negro students" in 1953.



In April, high school seniors toured Tidewater Community College's Skilled Trades Academy, exploring hands-on career opportunities beyond the classroom. Their enthusiasm and curiosity highlight the program's commitment to empowering youth to pursue futures that truly fit their goals.

## Kenneth C. Alexander, Ph.D. Mayor of the City of Norfolk, VA

### *Dear People First Partners and Community Members,*

As the People First Initiative enters its seventh year, I am proud to reflect on the progress we have made together in our shared commitment to ensuring that our former Tidewater Gardens families are safe, stable and thriving. In year six, we recognized the incredible strength of families working alongside the City to achieve their goals, both individually and collectively. Our residents' resilience and determination have guided every step forward and remains the foundation of this important work.

### *Investing in the Next Generation*

Among this year's most meaningful achievements is the Inaugural People First Scholarship. Thirteen students received awards to support their education, including eleven recent high school graduates and two returning college students. We also celebrated 34 graduates this spring, the largest class and highest number of college-bound youth since the initiative's inception. These accomplishments reflect the perseverance, ambition and emerging leadership within this community's next generation.

### *Marking the Next Phase of Renewal*

Building on this momentum, we welcomed families back home to Unity Place at Kindred, marking a significant milestone in the community's transformation. In the next phase, we broke ground on Kinship at Kindred, the first new residential development to rise on the original footprint of the former Tidewater Gardens neighborhood.

### *Gratitude for Strong Partnerships*

People First continues to grow through strong partnerships that deliver on-the-ground support for families at every stage of their journey. In year six, families benefited from increased access to essential resources and services including:

- The Hampton Roads Community Health Center's Mobile Dental Van providing critical oral healthcare.
- Crestar Health launching the Homework Tutoring Program to support student learning.
- St. John's AME Church expanding its weekly food pantry with deliveries to seniors living at Reunion at Kindred
- Weiss Financial Consulting supporting families in building financial literacy and planning for long-term goals.



These are just a few examples of the partnerships and personal stories featured in this year's People First Progress Report, which highlights the results of sustained collaboration across programs, services and community engagement.

### *Celebrating the Power of Collaboration*

I extend my sincere thanks to the St. Paul's Advisory Committee (SPAC). The leadership of its co-chairs and the dedication of every member have played a vital role in advancing the mission of the St. Paul's Transformation Project with integrity, accountability, and inclusion. Thank you for your continued support. Your partnership has helped shape Kindred into more than just housing—it's now a community where families can grow, contribute, and experience a true sense of belonging.

With appreciation,

*Kenneth C. Alexander*

**Kenneth C. Alexander, Ph.D.**  
Mayor, City of Norfolk

## Esther Shin President & CEO of Urban Strategies, Inc.

### *Dear Friends of USI,*

It has been a transformative six years since we collectively embarked on the journey of dreaming and advancing the vision of home for the former Tidewater Gardens residents, the St. Paul's Community, and the City of Norfolk. I reflect on the remarkable progress families have made towards achieving their dreams. The feelings of joy and steadiness fuel our continued efforts to support children and families in this beloved community.

### *Milestones that Matter*

Over the past six years, we have built trusted relationships and reimaged family support systems. We have co-designed strategies that meet the needs of households in a radical way and have further aligned partners to provide high quality support to former Tidewater Gardens residents. The People First<sup>SM</sup> team reflects on the milestones that have brought us joy and are worthy of celebration.

### *Honors Earned, Families Served*

We celebrate receiving the coveted "Community Leaders Award" at the 41st annual Martin Luther King Jr. Award Dinner, hosted by the Urban League. We also celebrate serving 94% of the 614 original, eligible Tidewater Gardens' families who have continued to engage with People First<sup>SM</sup> services. This underscores our dedication to the well-being of families and keeps them at the center of our collective work.

### *Building Stability Through Opportunity*

We celebrate the 130+ jobs obtained by residents just this year. Targeted economic mobility strategies have increased annual income to \$29,173, up from \$28,645 in the previous year. We also celebrate the strategic support and barrier mitigation that have resulted in 84% of 577 families reporting good standing relationships with their property manager or landlord. This resulted in 89% of the 577 enrolled families remaining stably housed at the same address. Meanwhile, 24 residents have accessed the HomeNet program to move closer to their homeownership goals.



### *United in Purpose and Progress*

Ultimately, we know we cannot do this work alone. We are grateful to the many organizational and institutional partners that share in our commitment and are appreciative of the unwavering effort by residents to ensure that their homes and community are thriving.

Your partner,

*Esther Shin*

**Esther Shin**  
President & CEO, Urban Strategies, Inc.

## Nathan Simms President of NRHA

### *Citizens of Norfolk,*

With another opportunity to reflect on the trajectory of the city and citizens of Norfolk, I am thrilled to join other partners and colleagues in expressing my delight in the strides our city has taken in the past year. Collectively, there has been an undeniable, positive impact in the realm of workforce, economics and civic action.

### *Building More Than Housing*

Specifically, at Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority (NRHA), we have built up not only infrastructure throughout Hampton Roads, but community engagement and partnerships. Leading an organization that emphasizes and prioritizes not just housing residents, but ensuring they have fair opportunity and exposure to socioeconomic staples is of utmost importance.

### *Milestones in Motion*

To that end, in a year's time NRHA has been part of groundbreaking ceremonies at the downtown Norfolk Kindred properties and launched a unit refresh initiative across its public housing family properties, at a minimum cost of \$6,000 per unit. The multi-year refresh initiative serves to bridge to the large-scale transformation efforts of NRHA. Additionally, our Authority has announced a \$1 billion redevelopment project in the historic St. Paul's Quadrant. Of note, the year 2025 marks our organization's 85th year of existence. We are celebrating this momentous occasion with spirit-filled events in our communities, recognition of employees who have reached milestone years of service and an anniversary and fundraising gala.

### *Driven by Values, United by Vision*

In all, we have approached the cusp of what makes any organization great - compassion, ingenuity and mobility. Thank you to the city of Norfolk, all of our esteemed partners and particularly our residents for your continued support. We will move steadily and strategically forward with the mindset that a strong NRHA is a strong Norfolk and a strong Norfolk is a strong America.



With highest regard and steadfast commitment,

**Nathan Simms**

President, Norfolk Redevelopment & Housing Authority

## John E. Paige and Carlos J. Clanton Co-Chairs of St. Paul's Advisory Committee

### *Dear Community Members and Partners,*

As co-chairs of the St. Paul's Advisory Committee (SPAC), we're proud to take a moment to reflect on the progress and the people powering the St. Paul's transformation. In Year 6, what remains unchanged is our shared commitment, our collaborative spirit and the strong momentum that continues to carry this work forward.

### *Putting People First in Action*

The City of Norfolk's continued investment, including a \$3 million annual commitment to the People First Initiative, is not just measured in dollars, but in the lives impacted, the voices heard and the families supported every single day. This commitment is visible in the passion of residents, the dedication of City and NRHA staff, and the ongoing efforts of our partners at Urban Strategies, Inc. Together, we form the St. Paul's Transformation Team, united in our mission to put people first.

### *Promises Kept*

From the beginning, the City of Norfolk, NRHA and the St. Paul's Advisory Committee made a promise: that all decisions would be made through a "people first" lens, and we have kept that promise. Residents who desired to return home to Kindred have done so, and many more will return as new housing units come online.

### *National Recognition for Local Impact*

We're also thrilled to share that the People First program was recently featured in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhoods Newsletter. The national spotlight shows how Norfolk's revitalization efforts are being recognized across the country because we center on people, not just buildings.



### *Working Together for What's Next*

We are honored to serve as co-chairs of a committee that reflects the best of what's possible when people work together with intention, respect and shared purpose. Thank you for your continued trust and partnership. We look forward to what we'll accomplish together in the year ahead.

With appreciation,

**Councilman John E. "JP" Paige**

Superward 7, City of Norfolk

**Councilman Carlos J. Clanton**

Ward 4, City of Norfolk

# St. Paul's Transformation Team

## People First<sup>usi</sup>

- Esther Shin**  
President & CEO
- Donovan Duncan**  
Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer
- Alicia Walter**  
Regional Vice President
- Tyronda Minter**  
Vice President, Educational Initiatives
- Nicole Brown**  
Director of Operations
- Kashira Wilson**  
Assistant Project Manager
- Kimi Smith**  
Assistant Project Manager
- Brittany Sutton**  
Data Manager
- Thomasine Norfleet**  
Support Services Specialist
- Tonya Howard**  
Mobility Specialist

- Brittney Anderson**  
Lead Mobility Specialist
- Kiara Husbands**  
Education Specialist
- Jayla Carrington**  
Family Support Specialist
- Koy Adams**  
Family Support Specialist
- Cory O'Neal**  
Family Support Specialist
- Kiara Williams**  
Family Support Specialist
- Dominique Hoskins**  
Family Support Specialist
- Nicole Harrison**  
Family Support Specialist
- Krystal Smith**  
Outreach Specialist

# St. Paul's Transformation Team

## City of Norfolk, Dept. of Housing & Community Development

- Susan L. Perry, Ph.D.**  
Director
- Krystie Aponte**  
Programs Manager
- Marcia McGill**  
Assistant Director of Housing Development
- Paige Davis**  
Management Analyst
- Ha Chau**  
Senior Project Manager

## Norfolk Redevelopment & Housing Authority

- Nathan F. Simms Jr.**  
President and CEO
- Pamela Jones-Watford**  
Vice President of Rental Assistance Programs
- Demetria Johnson**  
Chief Operating Officer
- Julius Norman**  
Vice President of Client Services
- Steve Morales**  
Vice President of Development

## Norfolk Public Schools

- Dr. Doreathea White**  
Chief Strategy, Innovation, and  
Community Engagement Officer
- Kristen McGarity**  
Senior Director, Assessment, Research,  
and Accountability
- Bruce Brady**  
Executive Director, Curriculum and Instruction
- LaEunice Featherston**  
Community Engagement Coordinator

## Community Partners

|          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>B</b> | Bank On Hampton Roads<br>Basilica of Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception<br>Boys & Girls Clubs of Southeast Virginia<br>Brinshore Development                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>C</b> | Champions<br>Children's Health Investment Program (CHIP) of South Hampton Roads<br>City of Norfolk Community Services Board<br>City of Norfolk Department of Housing and Community Development<br>City of Norfolk Department of Human Services<br>City of Norfolk Department of Parks and Recreation<br>Crestar Health LLC |
| <b>F</b> | Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>G</b> | Gethsemane Community Fellowship Church<br>Greater Hampton Roads Diaper Bank                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>H</b> | Hampton Roads Community Health Center<br>Hampton Roads Transit<br>Hampton Roads Workforce Council<br>Hunton YMCA                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>J</b> | Jaevyyshootzz LLC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>K</b> | Kaleidoscope Counseling & Case Management, LLC<br>Kroc Center Hampton Roads                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>L</b> | Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>M</b> | Maritime Institute<br>Minus 9 to 5<br>Moms On a Mission                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>N</b> | Nauticus<br>Next Steps To Success<br>Norfolk Public Health<br>Norfolk Public Library<br>Norfolk Public Schools<br>Norfolk Redevelopment & Housing Authority (NRHA)<br>Norfolk State University<br>Norfolk Tides<br>Norfolk Works/Norfolk Department of Economic Development<br>NRHA HomeNet Homeownership Center           |

## Community Partners

|          |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>P</b> | Party People Rentals LLC<br>PMI Virginia/CENTURY 21 Nachman Realty<br>Pour and Stay Full LLC<br>Prime Plus Norfolk Senior Center                                                   |
| <b>S</b> | Santa Vic and Amazing Representation<br>SevenVenues<br>Southside Boys & Girls Club<br>St. John's AME Church<br>St. Paul's Advisory Committee (SPAC)<br>STOP Inc.<br>Salvation Army |
| <b>T</b> | Taste 'N See Event Planning<br>Teens With a Purpose<br>The Franklin Group<br>The Salvation Army<br>Tidewater Community College<br>Tidewater Friends of Foster Care<br>Truist Bank  |
| <b>U</b> | United Way of South Hampton Roads<br>Urban League of South Hampton Roads<br>U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots                                                                |
| <b>V</b> | Virginia Zoo                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>W</b> | Weiss Financial Consultant<br>WIC Program/City of Norfolk Public Health                                                                                                            |
| <b>Y</b> | YMCA South Hampton Roads<br>YWCA South Hampton Roads                                                                                                                               |
| <b>#</b> | 7 Spices Caribbean Soul                                                                                                                                                            |

# PEOPLE FIRST

Empowered by  USI