

# CASE STUDY: MISSISSIPPI'S DEVELOPING RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUALS WITH VALUABLE EDUCATION (DRIVE) PROGRAM



## KEY PARTNERS

**Mississippi Home Corporation (MHC)**: Works with the state and other partners on affordable housing to provide housing services and assistance targeted toward moderate and lower-income families and individuals

**Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT)**: Manages the public transit systems, providers, and programs throughout the state

**Central Mississippi Continuum of Care (CoC)**: Provides services to individuals experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness

**Community Development, Inc. (CDI)**: Provides supportive services to the Richton region in Mississippi

**Grace House**: Serves those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Mississippi's Jackson Metro area

**Driver Improvement Agency (DIA)**: Provides training, research, and technical assistance for drivers

Key Themes: Partnerships, DEIA, Supportive Services

## BACKGROUND

The Developing Responsible Individuals with Valuable Education (DRIVE) program began in 2020 as a collaboration between the **Mississippi Home Corporation (MHC)** and the **Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT)**. MHC found that transportation was one of the leading obstacles for people struggling with homelessness in obtaining and maintaining employment; initially the partnership focused on providing transit for this population. During the pandemic, the state faced more acute housing struggles and workforce shortages, particularly of transit operators, and MHC and MDOT expanded their goals to include job training and job placement for transit careers. The DRIVE program addresses this mutual need, with the aim of creating a long-lasting impact on individuals struggling with or at risk of homelessness.

Several partners access funding through the DRIVE program to deliver a variety of services; some provide training and/or supportive services, while others focus on job placement. Some of these organizations, like **Grace House, Inc.** and **Community Development, Inc. (CDI)**, service specific regions in Mississippi.

Check out MHC's video about DRIVE!



[View the video from MHC and more info on its DRIVE page](#)

## Funding

MHC distributes the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) from the Department of Housing and Urban Development through its CARES grant. Metropolitan cities, urban counties, and territories receiving ESG funding can subgrant the funds to private nonprofit organizations, allowing MHC to partner with other organizations to administer the DRIVE program. ESG funding can be used for street outreach, homelessness prevention, and rapid re-housing. It can also be used for emergency shelter support, which includes essential services like education, job training, and employment assistance.

In response to COVID, MHC received \$18 million in ESG-Cares, which served as the building block for the DRIVE program. Through this COVID-specific funding, DRIVE assisted those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, using these funds towards housing assistance and directly towards training services, job placement, and other supportive services. Today, with continued ESG and partner funding, DRIVE assists individuals who are homeless and in emergency shelters.

## Outreach

The **Central Mississippi Continuum of Care (CoC)** plays a critical role in the DRIVE program by reaching those in need of housing and job assistance. CoC refers individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness to MHC to receive further support through MHC programs, including DRIVE. Other partners of DRIVE, such as **Grace House**, conduct street outreach in order to get connected with those most in need.

## Training

Using ESG funding through the DRIVE program, CDI, Grace House, and the Driver Improvement Agency (DIA) provide job training for Class B, C, and D commercial driver's licenses (CDLs), which allow operation of large trucks, buses, and smaller vans, such as those used for demand-response transit. CDI is a certified location provider.

Participants at Grace House and CDI are certified by the Mississippi State Highway Patrol. CDI is certified with the Federal Transit Administration and is currently in the process of certifying an employee to become an in-house third-party tester.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Transit career pathways for the unhoused can be provided through partnerships between transit agencies and non-profits that expand access to fund training, housing assistance, job placement, and other supportive services.
- Diverse types of partnerships can also help reach a wider geographical area with more options for training and services.
- A comprehensive combination of training and services can help to overcome challenges that have often created obstacles to effective outreach to unhoused individuals, who can serve their communities as operators when given the opportunity and appropriate training and support.

## Supportive Services

Housing support is a large part of the DRIVE program. While receiving COVID-specific funds, the DRIVE team was able to assist those in emergency shelters during their sheltering and with rental assistance after they moved into more permanent housing. Currently, the program assists individuals in emergency housing, including hotel and motel placements. As part of the DRIVE program, each participant is placed with a case manager who assists them through the program and reviews any issues that arise, along with ongoing support services if needed.

Besides training and housing support, Grace House and CDI provide wraparound services to participants. DRIVE participants have access to CDI's mental health program (CDI is a certified mental health provider) and budgeting classes. In addition, since FTA requires all transit operators to take a drug test before employment, CDI provides free drug testing prior to the official FTA testing. If a participant does not pass this initial testing, they can work with a substance abuse professional to take a substance abuse class and retake the drug test. Grace House and CDI also assist participants in finding employment once their training is complete.

DRIVE has successfully helped **28 formerly unboxed individuals obtain employment** in some form of transit after receiving housing assistance and employment training.

## Job Placement

A program partner since the early stages, Grace House has been a pioneer in connecting a majority of participants to transit employment. Because CDI is also a transit provider of demand response services for the region, it has expanded this work. CDI places DRIVE participants in their own transit service jobs when they have completed their training. When CDI found that these services were not enough to provide full-time jobs for DRIVE participants, the organization reached out to school districts in the area to have their operators work mornings and afternoons as school bus drivers. In between, the operators provide typical demand-response services such as medical trips, grocery trips, and other social services.

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) Public Transit Division also supports DRIVE participants in job placement, which connected them to transit agencies around the state. JATRAM, Jackson's transit agency, serves as a significant job placement partner.

## Meeting the Challenges and Creating Opportunity

"People tend to put the population we work with in just one category and don't see them as people who can be employed, but we want to look at people beyond their current condition and see them as good employees," says Oma Hibbler, Founder and CEO of CDI.

Tamara Stewart, Vice President of Grant Management for MHC, agrees. She emphasizes that while stereotypes of unboxed individuals can be an obstacle, this program has demonstrated that, with adequate support and training opportunities, these individuals bring commitment and capabilities that can help staff and strengthen the transit workforce.

### Additional resources:

- [NCMM's blog post about DRIVE](#)
- Transit Workforce Center's [Funding Opportunities](#)
- [Other DEIA case studies](#)

### For more information:

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