



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING AT ADVANCE MEMPHIS

Advance Memphis began addressing unemployment among adults in the Cleaborn/Foote community in 1999. Advance's approach was simple: build relationships with unemployed or underemployed neighborhood adults, listen to their employment goals, and connect them to the marketplace. Over time, it became clear that our neighbors also needed encouragement, support, and soft skills in order to really thrive at work. So Advance began looking for a Biblically based soft skills curriculum. Advance found Job Partnership in Raleigh, but their model required that sites serve the whole city. That didn't work at Advance, where we have always focused on a single community. In Fall 2005, Jobs Partnership dropped their city-wide requirement, changed their name to Jobs for Life, and Advance Memphis became their first site under the new structure. This began a long and fruitful relationship with the Jobs for Life national office and staff which continues to this day. The JfL curriculum connected Advance's neighbors to the life-giving message that we are all made in God's image, and that work is one of the primary ways we can be His stewards in the world. While Advance has regularly modified the class as a result of reciprocal learning between neighbors, staff, and volunteers, the JfL curriculum provided an important foundation for our program for many years.

As time went on, Advance Memphis facilitators began to recognize the need, for a curriculum that more fully addressed the context of multi-generational poverty. Thus began a multiple-year process of writing (and re-writing and re-writing) what today has become *Work Life*. After working with neighbors in the community served by Advance to identify the most crucial topics for the curriculum, and creating and adapting content to meet those needs, Advance staff reached out to the Chalmers Center to help Advance improve, publish, and roll out this new curriculum. For 2 years, Chalmers staff and Advance staff worked to create a curriculum that could serve faith communities seeking to address unemployment and underemployment in multi-generational poverty contexts across North America. In 2015, Advance Memphis, Jobs for Life, and Chalmers partnered to roll out this curriculum and certify a cohort of nearly 40 facilitators in using the curriculum.

Some of *Work Life's* key strengths include:

- 1) A focus on communities struggling with multi-generational poverty
- 2) Integration with the *When Helping Hurts* relational view of poverty and robust theological integration that grounds participants' lives in the grand story of God's creation and restoration of the whole world.
- 3) An emphasis on both work and life skills, including emotional health, interpersonal communication and conflict resolution strategies, and understanding the culture of work and how to adapt to it.
- 4) Extremely participatory, including numerous case studies, workplace and conflict resolution role plays and simulations, and a trainer's guide that emphasizes best practices for how adults learn throughout.

Advance Memphis continues to be a part of the Jobs for Life network, and a partner with the Chalmers Center for Economic Development. We are excited to continue offering soft-skills job training classes, now under the *Work Life* name and with the *Work Life* curriculum. Advance also celebrates the opportunity to continue to help other churches and organizations in North America adopt *Work Life* as a powerful tool for helping unemployed and underemployed adults live into God's design for their lives in work and in life. For samples of the *Work Life* curriculum, visit <http://advancememphis.org/programs/1834-2/ministry-training-work-life-facilitator-training/>. To find out about opportunities to use *Work Life* by attending a facilitator training, check out the Chalmers Center's training schedule by visiting <https://www.chalmers.org/our-work/us-church-training/get-trained/>. To check out Jobs for Life's network and curriculum, visit www.jobsforlife.org.