



## The Context

Launched in 2018 by Springboard to Opportunities, the **Magnolia Mother's Trust is the country's longest-running guaranteed income program, having served 230 Black mothers over the course of three 1-year cohorts**.<sup>1</sup> Meeting the economic needs of one of the most vulnerable populations, MMT provides \$1,000 in unconditional guaranteed income for one year to Black mothers living in subsidized housing in Jackson, Mississippi.

Despite evidence of significant positive outcomes,<sup>2</sup> **proponents of guaranteed income continue to contend with pejorative attitudes towards poverty and harmful narratives about social welfare** which are not based on evidence but rather are rooted in anti-blackness, classism, and sexism.<sup>3</sup> As a result, some policymakers are reluctant to fully embrace guaranteed income as a solution to economic insecurity and poverty.

As the longest-running guaranteed income program, MMT is uniquely positioned to enhance the evidence for guaranteed income programs **by documenting the longer-term impacts and lifting up the voices of participants' children.**

Springboard to Opportunities partnered with Social Insights Research for this **Alumni Study**<sup>4</sup> with mothers from the past three Magnolia Mother's Trust cohorts and some of their children. The study captures a robust long-term perspective on the impacts on mothers and their children's lives within the context of current social policies.

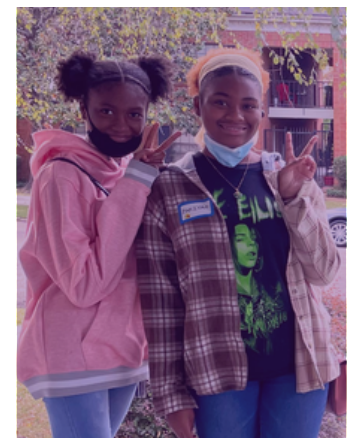
The **132 mothers** and **10 children** we heard from have been working to thrive amidst the dire realities of the prevailing economic conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, soaring inflation, and unpredictable job markets.<sup>5</sup> The conditions of low-income Black mothers are the result of historical intersecting systems of race, class, and gender and ongoing exploitation in labor, housing, and financial markets. These broader social inequalities, however, are often framed as individual-level problems. This cultural messaging is amplified by stereotypes attached to single Black mothers. **MMT moms are striving to ensure that their families have the resources they need within a societal context that seeks to diminish them rather than build them up.**

## The Children

While in the program, mothers felt great pride in being able to provide for their children more assuredly and to operate from a place of abundance rather than scarcity. The children experienced the types of fundamental changes that have life-long impacts. For example, the children were able to:

- learn and practice financial skills such as budgeting and saving, giving them a sense of financial independence;
- experience improved parent-child interactions because they got to spend more quality time with their moms;
- have richer, more varied life experiences that come with travel and extracurricular activities.

*"I think this program is a good example of [giving families resources that strengthen their agency] I think it does that for the kids as well. You can see that these [things] can change. They don't have to just stay in [the state of] not having a lot of money."  
- child of MMT program participant*



1. First 3 cohorts: 2018-2019 (n=20), 2020-2021(n =110), and 2021-2022 (n=100)

2. Neighly et al. (2022). An examination of cash transfers in the US and Canada. *Economic Security Project*. <https://economicsecurityproject.org>

3. Bhattacharya et al. (2021). Why all guaranteed income is narrative work. Best practices for centering dignity, race, and gender in cash-based programs. *Insight Center*. [https://insightcced.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/INSIGHT\\_NarrativesGI\\_brief\\_7.pdf](https://insightcced.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/INSIGHT_NarrativesGI_brief_7.pdf)

4. The full details of the study methods and the comprehensive findings are available in the *full Alumni Study Report*

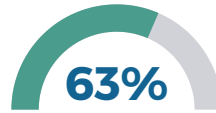
5. Desmond, M. (2023). Why Poverty Persists in America. *Washington Post*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/09/magazine/poverty-by-america-matthew-desmond.html>

MMT had a positive impact on parenting efficacy, parent-child relationships, and children's mental health.

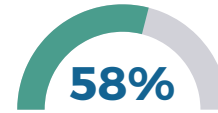
As a result of MMT...



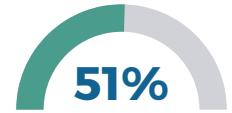
of moms reported more confidence in their parenting



reported their children noticed a positive difference in their lives



reported their children continue to experience joyful moments



reported more positive interactions with their children

## Self-Efficacy, Confidence, Mental Health

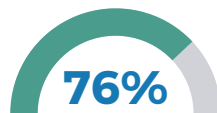
"MMT made me **believe** in myself."

**Self-efficacy is one's belief in their ability to achieve their goals and overcome obstacles to obtain success.**<sup>6</sup> Studies show that self-efficacy is a critical internal resource for Black mothers as a means of coping with and navigating against oppressive systems.<sup>7</sup> MMT positively impacted mothers' self-efficacy both during and after the program. **83% reported feeling more in control of their lives** as a result of MMT. This increased feeling of control was significantly correlated\* with their self-efficacy, suggesting an association between MMT program participation and long-term shifts in self-efficacy.

The average self-efficacy score was 4.1 on a scale of 1 to 5. Moms with higher self-efficacy were significantly\* more likely to have:

- positive perceptions of MMT's impact
- higher income
- money in savings
- stable employment
- lower mental health distress
- better parent-child relationships
- more confidence in their parenting

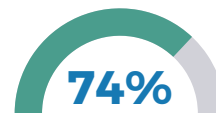
As a result of MMT...



feel more confident in themselves



feel more confident in their ability to accomplish goals



feel more hopeful about their future



feel more hopeful about their children's future

**These findings highlight the importance of intrapersonal gains in facilitating sustained impacts and disrupt the narrative that guaranteed income programs are demotivating.**

"They used to come and do meditations with us. And I had never thought about it before MMT. **Even now, 3 years later, I meditate every single day.**"

"Most single moms, we had this doubt in our minds, because we got to do this by ourselves. But being in the program, let me realize, okay, **you can do it.**"

"So it really helped me on my budgeting skills, being able to know my limits and what not to do. **It gave me hope.** It's a big push for me to be like, 'Yeah, okay, I can get out and do this.' I did end up saving and leaving [subsidized housing]."

## Long-Term Economic Mobility

Even after the program ended, many mothers continue to report changes in their lives that were seeded or launched during the program. Mothers identified Magnolia Mother's Trust as a direct reason they were motivated to go back to school or seek out additional educational opportunities. Some shared how this trickled down into talking to their children about attending college.

"I have been able to **pay off debts, pay interest off on my vehicle, pay a down payment on my house that I'm moving in the next couple of weeks.**"

"MMT helped me to gain a financial foundation. **I was able to create a savings account that I still have today.** I was also able to pay for my first arm of grad school. **I'll always be grateful.**"

6. Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>

7. Anton, M. et al. (2015). Socioeconomic status, parenting, and externalizing problems in African American single-mother homes: A person-oriented approach. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 29(3), 405. <https://psycnet.apa.org/manuscript/2015-24732-005.pdf>

\*Correlations reported are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

*"MMT was a **booster** for me. I was able to go back to school & receive a certificate in Business Management."*

At the time of Alumni Study Survey,

- **61%** reported being employed
- **42%** reported positive shifts in their jobs or careers
- **19 moms** were enrolled in an education program
- **18 moms** completed a degree or education program since MMT
- **14 moms** earned certification or a professional license since MMT
- **14 moms** started or grew their own business

**These findings disrupt the assumption that providing unrestricted guaranteed income to economically marginalized people diminishes their desire and will to work. The findings are also consistent with existing evidence that suggests guaranteed income does not negatively impact the labor force.<sup>8</sup>**

## Systemic Barriers

The progress made by the mothers while in the program was significantly impacted by systemic inequalities in the labor market, housing, opportunities for building wealth, government assistance programs, and other social mobility factors. Within the intersection of multiple oppressions, mothers persist in crafting pathways to financial well-being. For example, moms applied money management skills learned during the MMT program to budget and save even with the more limited finances after the program ended.

### Income & Employment Challenges

Despite being employed and even having multiple jobs, the mean monthly income for the mothers is **\$751 - \$1000**. Many of them reported **inconsistent work income or jobs that did not pay a living wage**.

Work income is often not enough to meet expenses or to substitute the guaranteed income they received during the program. Funds they had set aside for a "rainy day" while in MMT are often being used for day-to-day expenses. Moms' shared that their progress toward financial independence is also stifled by lack of access to affordable childcare or employers who are not sensitive to parental demands. With these barriers in place, it is not surprising that some moms are not where they would want to be financially post-MMT.

- **11%** have money in savings
- **67%** have at least one type of debt
- **65%** feel stressed about money
- **81%** can't *always* pay bills *on time*

*"Once I get [money], it's going out to bills. I'm a little relieved now because I got the opportunity to do this other job. Right now, I probably have four jobs. Just trying to juggle to keep those bills and stuff under control and eventually try to save."*

*"[My financial situation] now is nothing like it was when I was getting that money every month. Sometimes I get paid, **my whole check be gone on bills**. Then the kids have something going on in school, so I'm like, we need to borrow [money]."*

### Government Assistance

Most MMT moms have no choice but to rely on government assistance to take care of their households. **94% of moms rely of at least one type of government assistance program.**

While these programs offer support, they limit upward mobility in many ways. When asked to compare MMT to public assistance, most moms focused on the fact that MMT comes with "no strings attached," whereas government assistance programs have restrictions based on income, household size, and how you can use the funds. Some moms also remarked on the **holistic nature of MMT, which centers moms' experiences, giving them a voice and providing support that helps them reach personal goals.**

*"People feel like everybody that's on stamps don't want work, don't want to do nothing for themselves. But that's truly not the case. Some people just, **this is something they need to survive.**"*

*"In [MMT], they actually listen to us and care about the issues that we face. They don't get into your business or look down on you."*

**The biggest barriers to financial stability and upward mobility are systemic. Government assistance does not always fully meet moms' needs and punitive policies stifle their growth. Although most alumni moms are employed, the lack of livable wages and accommodations for parents in the workplace makes it difficult to progress toward financial stability.**

## Conclusion

Guaranteed income programs, such as MMT, that are grounded in trust and dignity provide a model for the necessary support that mothers trapped in poverty need to thrive. **Sustained economic mobility requires major policy changes and structural shifts.** The programmatic impact of MMT can provide a significant "springboard" for mothers. However, restructured and improved government support systems that honor those who use their resources are needed to sustain the positive momentum.

*"It also just let me know that even though struggles can come... you can always change it. You just have to strive. I do know that with the confidence that they gave me back in the program, even if I run into a bumper in the road, I can strive and try a little harder to reach that confidence again. To just don't throw the towel in.  
**That's what MMT gave me.**"*

## Recommendations

### 1. Policymakers must consider a multi-year federal guaranteed income program as a sustainable and transformative pathway to upward mobility for poor families.

A federal guaranteed income program that is not limited by time and is instead based on recipients' specific circumstances would provide the safety-net mothers living in poverty need to boost their self-efficacy and have a sustainable path towards the overall well-being of their families. In addition, it is imperative for federal and state governments to institutionalize policies such as the Child Tax Credit as a more permanent and consistent means of supporting economically marginalized families. These types of shifts would be transformative and ultimately contribute to the permanent (rather than temporary) movement out of poverty.

### 2. Government programs should prioritize policies that incorporate the voices of those they are serving.

When designing their programs, government support systems must actively engage the expertise of mothers who access their services. As experts of their own experiences, mothers who are economically marginalized are uniquely positioned to articulate their needs, rather than having their needs defined by others. This would ensure policies that center humanity and dignity and increase economic stability instead of revoking or reducing support at the first sign of or due to a temporary improvement in their economic situation.

### 3. Public benefits programs must shift towards asset- and trust-based perspectives.

Public benefits programs often approach mothers from a paternalistic and deficit-based perspective. There is an opportunity for these programs to learn from community-based organizations such as Springboard to Opportunities to take an asset-based approach that builds on mothers' self-efficacy and works in partnership with the mothers. Government benefits programs should incorporate opt-in community support groups that focus on building support networks. Programs should also provide accessible space and resources for culturally relevant self-care programming. These should not be "required" as mothers should be trusted to access the resources they need and are able to attend based on their specific circumstances.

### 4. Government programs should provide targeted financial support to those who have transitioned out of subsidized housing.

There is a need for government-instituted initiatives that offer focused assistance to families who have moved out of public housing to ease their transition, enabling them to sustain their progress and move forward without setbacks. This approach would foster self-efficacy among the families and promote sustainable outcomes.

### 5. Philanthropic institutions and the broader guaranteed income community must continue to play a role in the absence of government supports and structural changes.

In the absence of the shifts recommended for government supports, philanthropic institutions need to continue supporting organizations that are filling the gaps by implementing and generating evidence for guaranteed income programs and advocating for more widespread institutionalization of such programs.

### 6. Funders and guaranteed income programs should continue to explore dual-generational perspectives in their evidence-generation and narrative change efforts.

There is a pressing need to counter the pejorative attitudes toward cash transfer programs by disseminating stories that center the voices of the mothers and their children. Supporting research that emphasizes the humanity and dignity of all who benefit from guaranteed income program initiatives is crucial for strengthening narrative change work.