



NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: LaDora Watkins, Executive Assistant
Phone: (901) 563-5921
E-mail: ladora@first8memphis.org

February 20, 2020

First 8 Memphis Hires Permanent Executive Director

Dr. Kandace Thomas Continues Early Childhood Career in Memphis

MEMPHIS, Tennessee – At its Feb. 20 public meeting, The First 8 Memphis Board of Directors named Kandace Thomas, MPP, PhD as its permanent Executive Director, concluding a nationwide search. Thomas brings over 15 years of early childhood leadership to her new role at First 8.

“Dr. Thomas is a career advocate for communities with the essential experience to move our mission forward,” said Kathy Buckman Gibson, First 8’s Board Chair. “She has a track record of turning today’s challenges into tomorrow’s opportunities, and we are very excited that she has joined our team.”

Thomas will help meet First 8’s strategic goals by administering the distribution of early childhood funds, the delivery of services, and the fulfillment of outcomes. She will also manage the alignment of home visitation, childcare, pre-K, and K-3rd programs provided by First 8’s partner agencies.

“This role comes with great responsibility, and Dr. Thomas brings the operational skills to continue the alignment of Shelby County’s early childhood continuum to reach our goals of working with families to prepare our children for kindergarten and to read at grade level by third grade,” said Alex Smith, a First 8 Board member and Search Committee Chair. “She also brings the personal skills to engage our stakeholders at every level — from families to donors to policymakers.”

A native New Yorker, Thomas is a skilled and talented educator, speaker, organizer and fundraiser who most recently served as a senior program officer at the Irving Harris Foundation in Chicago. In that role, she managed over \$4 million in grants to early childhood, reproductive health and justice, and domestic violence organizations. She also formed strategic alliances to support best practices in early childhood and adverse childhood experiences.

“Over the course of my career, I’ve experienced how strong partnerships and relationships can transform life outcomes for children, families and communities,” said Thomas. “I look forward to working with First 8 to help build a brighter future in Shelby County.”

In addition to her career success in the early childhood field, Thomas has advanced equity, diversity and inclusivity in both her personal and professional efforts. She launched the Diversity-Informed Tenets for Work with Infants, Children and Families, a set of strategies and tools to strengthen the capacity and commitment of professionals, organizations and systems that serve infants, children and families. She is

also a founder of Camp Sojourner Girls' Leadership Camp, the only affordable, overnight, sleep-away camp for Philadelphia girls, and visits camp every summer.

First 8's mission is to support families with comprehensive programs that prepare children for kindergarten readiness and third grade literacy. Its vision is for 90 percent of children to be kindergarten ready and 90 percent of 3rd grade children to be reading on grade-level by 2025. The First 8 Board was established to ensure transparency and accountability to the public. For more information, visit first8memphis.org, call (901) 614-3672 or email ladora@first8memphis.org

About First 8 Memphis

First 8 Memphis is a 501c3 devoted to serving Shelby County children 0-8 and their families through high-quality early childhood programs. Through comprehensive Pre-K, Home Visitation, Childcare and K-3rd grade programs, First 8 successfully prepares children for kindergarten readiness and third-grade literacy.