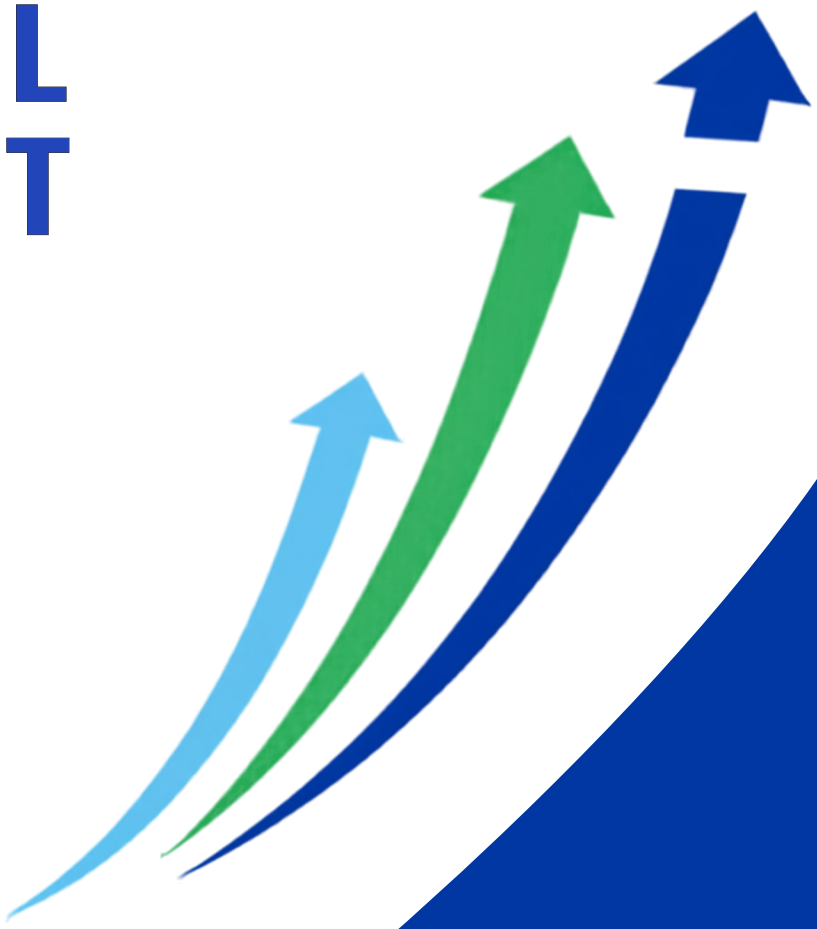
BREAKTHROUGH
MENTORING PROGRAM

AN AAUW VERO BEACH INITIATIVE

ANNUAL REPORT

2026



AAUW
empowering women since 1881
Vero Beach (FL) Branch

BREAKTHROUGH
MENTORING PROGRAM
AN AAUW VERO BEACH INITIATIVE

YEAR ONE | SEPTEMBER 2025–2026



BreakThrough began as an experiment.

Could sustained mentoring and strategically targeted resources help an ALICE woman move to greater financial security?

After one year, we know the answer is **yes**.

WHY WE STARTED BREAKTHROUGH

In Indian River County, thousands of heads of households are working hard but still struggling to achieve financial stability.

They are ALICE – Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.

30%+ Indian River Households are ALICE
--Indian River Community Foundation

Of households headed by a single mom, 79% are ALICE.
--UnitedforALICE.org

53% of Indian River County students are economically disadvantaged compared with 46% statewide.
--Indian River Community Foundation

BreakThrough Mentoring provides a mentor for each participant and up to 2 years of support, encouragement and accountability.

OUR CURRENT MENTORS


Linda Barker


Shannon Maitland


Jonnie Mae Perry


Sarah Smith

WHAT DOES A MENTOR ACTUALLY DO?

- **Listen**
- **Ask**
- **Encourage**
- **Problem-Solve**
- **Celebrate**

A BreakThrough mentor doesn't arrive with a prescription for someone else's life. She listens. She asks questions. She helps a woman clarify what her goals are and figure out the next step.

So far, mentoring has meant talking about credit scores and a budget for all participants. Sometimes it means researching a class, finding a resource, practicing assertive communication—or simply asking, "How did that go?"

And sometimes it means celebrating a victory that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Our mentors give something money can't buy:

time + attention + experience + accountability + belief

MENTORING RESOURCES

Every woman starts in a different place. We use the Self-Sufficiency Matrix to help her and her mentor see where she is now, identify where she wants to go, and measure progress along the way.

These are the greatest areas of attention for our participants so far.

FINANCES
- Credit history
- Budgeting
- Financial literacy
- Planning

WORK
- Working efficiently
- Gaining skills
- Seeking improved work situation

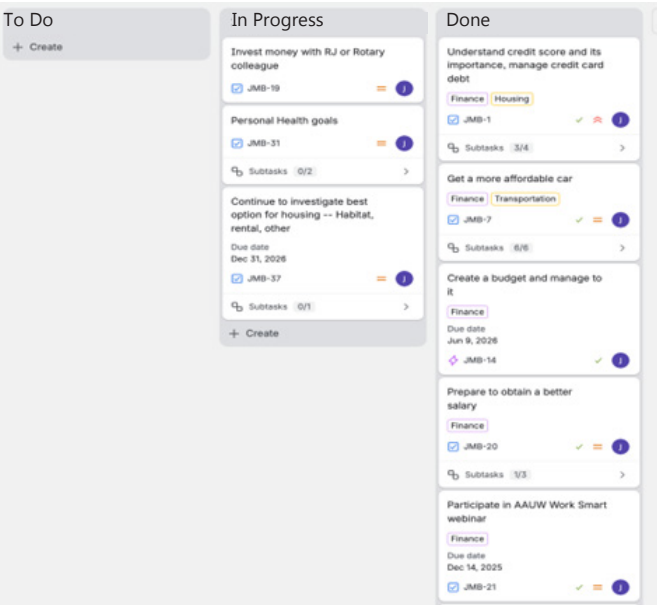
HOUSING STABILITY

TRANSPORTATION

EDUCATION
- Continuing toward a degree
- Taking credentialing courses
- Technology

MENTOR TOOLS

AAUW invested in a customized version of Jira software. Mentors input participant goals and track progress. As you can see here, a participant is still working on three goals while others have been accomplished. And we celebrate accomplishment!



IN HER OWN WORDS

Janay Hall







My BreakThrough Journey

Looking back on this year in the BreakThrough Mentoring Program, I have seen what can happen when a woman has the right person in her corner.

I entered BreakThrough during a season of rebuilding. As a newly divorced mother of four, I was focused on creating stability for my children while continuing to grow personally and professionally. I had goals, but I needed guidance to turn them into a plan.

My mentor, Linda Barker, listened, encouraged me, held me accountable, and challenged me to look differently at areas of my life that needed growth.

One of those areas was my finances. Linda helped me move from simply knowing where my money was going to intentionally planning for it. She also encouraged me to face my credit instead of avoiding it. During this journey, I watched my credit score grow from the 400s into the 600s. I am still learning, but I am proud of how far I've come. Then came some life-changing milestones.

Linda connected me with Michele and Kevin Peters with the Driving Success program, which helped me obtain reliable transportation for my family. Having a dependable vehicle means more than getting from place to place. It means independence, stability, and another step forward for my children and me.

I was also accepted into the Habitat for Humanity homebuyer program. My mother was a Habitat homeowner, so I know firsthand what stable housing can mean for a family. Now, I am working toward providing that same foundation for my four children.

BreakThrough has taught me that mentorship is not about someone doing the work for you. You still have to show up, make difficult decisions, advocate for yourself, and do the work. But having someone beside you who believes in what you are working toward can make a tremendous difference.

I am not where I want to be yet, but I am definitely not where I started.

And that is what BreakThrough has looked like for me.

IN HER OWN WORDS

VaShonte' King





When I first started BreakThrough, I was exhausted. As a single mom raising three children, ages 17, 9, and 8, I felt like the weight of the world was on my shoulders. Every day was about making sure my kids had what they needed, but I rarely stopped to think about what I needed . I was carrying stress, self-doubt, and the fear of not knowing what the future would look like for my family. I was surviving, but deep down I knew we deserved more than just surviving.

When I started BreakThrough Mentoring, I hoped to find direction and a sense of hope again. I wanted to stop feeling like I was constantly one step behind and to start building a future that my children could be proud of. More than anything, I wanted to believe in myself again. I wanted to show my kids that no matter how hard life gets, it's possible to keep moving forward and creating a better life.

I realized I was making progress when I stopped focusing on everything I didn't have and started recognizing everything I had already overcome. For the first time in a long time, I began setting goals and actually believing they were attainable. I noticed I was making decisions with confidence instead of fear. My children noticed the difference, too. Seeing them see a stronger, more hopeful version of their mom was one of the most rewarding moments of this breakthrough journey.

My mentors – Sara Smith and Jonnie Perry – have meant more to me than words can express. There were times when I felt overwhelmed, discouraged, and unsure of myself, and they reminded me of my strength when I couldn't see it on my own. They listened without judgment, celebrated my victories, and encouraged me through setbacks. As a single mom, it's easy to feel like you're carrying everything alone. Having someone genuinely believe in me and invest in my success has been life changing.

If another woman asked me about BreakThrough Mentoring, I would tell her this: You are worth investing in. So many women spend their lives taking care of everyone else and putting themselves last. BreakThrough reminded me that when I grow, my children grow, too. Don't let fear, doubt, or your current circumstances keep you from taking that first step. You are stronger than you think, and there is a community ready to support you. Joining BreakThrough was one of the best decisions I made for myself and for my children's future.

IN HER OWN WORDS

Leslie Moshman



Although I've only been working with my mentor for two months, I already feel like having that extra support has made a difference for me. When I first started BreakThrough, I had a lot going on in my life. I was working, raising my son, finishing school, and trying to figure out what I wanted my future to look like. I had goals and wanted more for myself, but sometimes it felt overwhelming trying to balance everything while also figuring out my next move.

When I joined BreakThrough, I hoped I would gain more confidence, direction, and support as I worked toward my goals. I want to continue my education and eventually pursue a career in law, so having someone who can encourage me and help me think through my decisions has been important. I started realizing I was making progress when I became more confident talking about my future and taking actual steps toward it instead of only thinking about what I wanted to do.

My mentor has been someone I can talk to without feeling like I have to have everything figured out first. Shannon has listened to me, encouraged me, and helped me look at things from a different perspective. Even though it has only been a couple of months, I appreciate having someone who can remind me of how far I have already come, especially during times when I am focused more on everything I still have left to do.

If I could tell another woman who is thinking about BreakThrough one thing, I would tell her not to be afraid to give it a chance. You do not have to be struggling or have your whole life figured out to benefit from having a mentor. Sometimes just having another person in your corner who believes in your goals, listens to you, and gives you honest advice can make a bigger difference than you expect.

MENTORING TAKES TWO

When BreakThrough began in September 2025, one participant was living in a shelter with her son. She bravely moved into an apartment and secured a better job, but the transition brought financial and time pressures. Her rent was unaffordable, food was a struggle, and she was spending more than $90 a month on fast food.

Her mentors offered temporary food assistance and budgeting guidance, but she was not yet ready to make the changes needed. Ultimately, the mentoring relationship ended.

The experience reinforced an important lesson: we can provide a mentor, encouragement, resources and a path forward—but the woman herself must be ready to take the steps.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

FINANCES



- All are using and learning from their chosen form of budgeting.
- VaShonte' and Janay have significantly increased their credit scores after learning how credit scores are used.
- Janay has experienced the difference between wanting and needing when shopping. She has stopped herself from buying things she wanted but didn't need.

TRANSPORTATION

- Janay has a "new-to-her" car from Driving Success, eliminating car payments.
- Both VaShonte' and Janay have had car problems. They ordered parts and got their cars fixed.

HOUSING STABILITY

- VaShonte' has a Habitat Home in Gifford Gardens. Occupancy December 2026.
- Janay will have a Habitat Home in Vero Lake Estates. She is still working on "sweat equity" hours. Wall Raising date TBD.

EDUCATION

- VaShonte' re-enrolled in IRSC for a Human Services degree. She has completed one class with a grade of 94 and is taking a second one.
- Janay has a BA and is taking a Digital Marketing Science Course. She will achieve three certifications in October 2026.
- Leslie will obtain a BS in Criminal Justice in the spring of 2027.

EMPLOYMENT

- VaShonte' has a new AAUW-funded laptop for college course work.
- She also has a promotion from entry-level work to case management.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Contracted for a customized instance of Jira Project Management software
- Trained AAUW mentors; established mentoring group; hold mentor meetings
- Interviewed and selected four candidates

You're Invited

To Mentor
Give an ALICE woman your time and experience. We'll train you!

To Invest
Help provide the targeted resources that remove barriers.

To Spread the Word
Help us find women, mentors and community partners.

For more information, go to AAUWVeroBeach.org and click on BreakThrough Mentoring in the top banner

BREAKTHROUGH
MENTORING PROGRAM
AN AAUW VERO BEACH INITIATIVE

Brought to Indian River County by AAUW Vero Beach
The American Association of University Women
A 501c3 Charitable Organization
PO Box 2143
Vero Beach, FL 32961

Platinum Transparency 2026
Candid.