

Graduate of the Year – Najiyah Shakir

The Graduate of the Year is awarded to somebody who has not only completed a Palmetto Goodwill job training program, but is also deserving of recognition for outstanding achievement in overcoming obstacles to attaining and maintaining meaningful employment.

Najiyah Shakir's story certainly isn't typical, yet she is most deserving of this honor. Growing up in New York City, Najiyah dreamed of becoming an accountant, lawyer or finding another job that could give her the financial security in life that almost everyone desires.

Before long, however, she found herself uprooted from home in the city as her family abruptly moved to South Carolina. During that period, Najiyah learned to adjust to change – a lesson she would need to call on later in life.

In the years that followed, Najiyah found herself working for an international hospitality company. For nearly 20 years she found the security that often comes with working in a 9 to 5 white-collar role. As she raised her two children, she found her job to be a perfect fit, as her employer was a family-oriented company that supported her as she worked toward completing her college education.



Then one day it happened.

Without warning, her company closed their South Carolina operations and outsourced Najiyah's job overseas. Najiyah was in denial, felt paralyzed, not knowing what to do next. What she did know was that she had a family to raise and she was running out of time and money.

Knowing she needed to act, Najiyah met with Monique Smalls, a Career Navigator at Palmetto Goodwill. With the advice of a friend, Najiyah decided to pursue a commercial driver license (CDL). Within six weeks of enrolling, Najiyah had graduated from Palmetto Goodwill's CDL certification course and was on her way to finding meaningful employment.

Spectacularly, Najiyah was offered a role with Netflix to transport production sets to various locations. Now, Najiyah owns her own truck and is in complete control of her incredible career path. "I've always loved road trips; I've driven so many miles. Now being on the highway in a semi-truck with 50,000 pounds behind you is a completely different thing, but the joy is the same. Without Goodwill I wouldn't be where I am right now."

Palmetto Goodwill is proud to recognize Najiyah Shakir as the **2019 Graduate of the Year**.