

A Little Help, A Little Hope **Builds a Family's Happiness**

Eighteen months ago Contonia was struggling. An open and honest advocate for her two sons with special needs, then aged 4 and 7, she felt increasingly lonely and overwhelmed by her parental responsibilities. The family lived in a single room in her grandmother's house, and her older son, DeShawn "was a terror" at school and at home.

Diagnosed with ADHD, DeShawn's in-class time was proving unproductive; he was not able to focus on learning, would not listen to his teacher, and constantly begged to return home. After school, if he didn't like what his mom told him to do, he got what he wanted by going to his grandmother. Painful conflicts arose.

Meanwhile Contonia's second son Nysier struggled with cerebral palsy. He had trouble walking and talking, and was getting speech, physical and occupational therapy through ChildLink. Born at 7 months, Nysier lost $\frac{1}{4}$ of his birth weight within his first week. A scant 3 lbs. 1oz., Nysier had jaundice and kept getting infections. Contonia remembers; "at first they thought he'd die ... he had a feeding tube down his nose, and he took a month to suck a bottle." If he lived, "they said he'd be in a wheelchair."

But, Contonia would not give up on her children. She reached out for extra help and got it through Family Support Service's Family Partnership Program. Annie Markovits, Family Partnership's social work supervisor, assigned Lauren to be the family's caseworker in June of 2005. It was a great match. Annie says; "Lauren put a lot into that family to help get Contonia to a place where she could become independent."

Lauren showed Contonia how to budget, organize bill paying in a timely way, and start setting aside money to rent a home of her own. With her help, Contonia located, furnished and moved into an apartment just before celebrating Christmas last year. Still coping with a lean budget, Contonia was glad that Family Support Services brought a pile of holiday gifts for the family. But this year, she says, will be different. "Now we have everything we need, and ... (my children) will be able to get what they want for Christmas (from me)."

Although DeShawn was on medication for his ADHD, Contonia wanted to learn more effective ways to motivate him in school, limit television use after school, and manage at-home behavior. Lauren helped her with that too. Today, he's doing well in school, and no longer needs support services. As for Nysier, Contonia says "he's been able to walk since age two, ... has a good memory ... (and) loves to play." Nysier continues to receive therapy and now attends the Leidy Elementary school.

An excellent tenant, Contonia keeps a clean house and pays her rent two days before it's due. As a result of her hard-earned independence, Contonia's personal life also changed. She became engaged to a wonderful man who works at Ikea and helps her care for the boys. Next year, she says, "I'll be walking down the aisle."