



### Help today for a mother focused on the future

“I like everything about being a mom,” says Equalia Jenkins. But then she adds: “It’s really difficult for me, paying my bills. That’s the difficult part of being a mom.” When the Middletown woman found she was expecting, she says it was a wake up call for her to get into a career with a future. Equalia studied to be a certified nursing assistant and started working as a CNA just about the time her son, Jaseri, was born. It was hard to simultaneously keep up with a new baby and a new job. Nevertheless, Equalia says that she is always looking for additional hours “to make ends meet.” She’s also about to enroll at Middlesex Community College. “My goal is to be a registered nurse. I’m going to do it,” she says.

While she’s at work and school, Equalia is able send Jaseri to child care with a supply of diapers she gets through Early Head Start, a Diaper Bank partner agency. Without the help, there would be times she simply could not afford diapers, she says. Jaseri is an extremely active boy. “He’s very smart for a two-year-old,” says his proud mom. Early Head Start helps Equalia find good ways to channel Jaseri’s energy. She foresees a future for him with lots of opportunities for mental and physical workouts. “It would be good for him to be involved in sports,” she says. “And, yes, I’d definitely like to see him go to college.”

### Building a life by filling a need

Ashiya Williams, not yet 3, likes to take care of her playmates. She’ll wipe another little girl’s mouth or offer an encouraging hug at the right moment. “She takes on what I would do,” says her mother, Eboni Costin. Eboni, who is the oldest of 11 children, is a role model to many in her family. She sees them determined to finish school, find jobs and become independent, just as she did. “No matter how low you go, you will be able to make it to the top,” says Eboni.

She knows. When Ashiya was an infant, her parents were living in a New Haven shelter run by Christian Community Action. Neither was working, and they were getting by on state assistance. “It was scary,” Eboni recalls. She found out about a job at The Diaper Bank, which had gotten Recovery Act funds to do a huge distribution of diapers in the summer of 2010. The funding also covered a temporary administrative person to handle the extensive paperwork that came with the project. Eboni’s experience had been in food service and health care, but she jumped at the chance of a job. “I put my head to it,” she says. “I’m a quick learner.”

So quick, that she soon proved indispensable and was hired permanently. “I like helping others, and this is a great way to help,” says Eboni. She continues to receive diapers from TDB, as she did when she was in the shelter. But now she takes them home to the apartment she shares with her daughter and her partner, Carrington Williams, who has also found steady employment. In the past couple of years, Eboni has learned a lot about her own resiliency and about just how important her new job is. “I was surprised, really surprised by the need out there for diapers,” she says.



*Eboni Costin with her 2-year-old daughter, Ashiya Williams, and her partner, Carrington Williams*

### An Iraq veteran on a mission

Carmelo Mendez's career in the Navy came to an end in 2008, when his hand was injured in a bomb blast. After serving in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, Mendez headed home to Bridgeport ready to settle down and build a future and a family. But his injury made that difficult. Years later, Carmelo still has pain and weakness in his left hand. He lost his job in an auto parts store when he couldn't lift anything as heavy as a car battery.

He needed to get a new source of income because he'd embarked on a new mission, single parenthood. Carmelo is raising his nine-month-old son, Gabriel, alone. When Carmelo was only one, his own father left the family. He was determined to do better by Gabriel. "I love my son," he says. He quickly saw how expensive it is to keep a baby in clean diapers. "It's money that I don't have," says Carmelo. That led him to the Gary Crooks Memorial Center at the P.T. Barnum Housing Project, a Diaper Bank partner agency.

When he went in to pick up his diapers, Carmelo got to talking with one of the workers there about his situation. She suggested that he might be eligible for a number of veteran's benefits he wasn't receiving – including tuition support. Carmelo is now enrolled full-time in the University of Bridgeport and hopes to be a probation officer when he graduates.



Johanna Torres with her sons, Jeremiah, 3, and Eliezer, 2

### Keeping a growing family healthy

Jeremiah, 3, and Eliezer, 2, are fascinated by the Christmas lights strung outside their Hartford home. Their mother, Johanna Torres, is looking for help from church toy drives to get some gifts to put under the family's tree. Jeremiah's a firm believer in Santa Claus and expects Christmas morning to be a time of wonderful surprises. His mom doesn't want to disappoint him.

Johanna is a certified nursing assistant who works third shift so that she can be home with her sons during the day. Just keeping up with rent and food eats up her paycheck. Johanna is grateful that she can get diapers at Capital Region Education Council, a Diaper Bank partner agency. "It would have been hard for me to continue with diapers," says Johanna. "They would have had rashes all the time." Jeremiah is in pull ups and working on potty training. Soon he'll be attending a Head Start program. When both her children are in school, Johanna plans to go back herself to further her career in nursing.



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