



## Shaniqua Ballard's Story

### Helping Mothers and Children With a Families Center in Washington, D.C.

The words *Developing Family Center* top the exterior of the brick and concrete building at 801 17th St. NE in Washington. Shaniqua Ballard first came to the door in January 2001 with little money, no health insurance and a fast-approaching due date. See [Program Results Report](#) on the center.

Her home was a nearby shelter for pregnant women and, up to that point, her source of health care was a free neighborhood clinic—a facility, in her words, "full of junkies...very nasty and very unattractive."

Those unappealing conditions, however, were not what motivated her to show up at the onetime Safeway supermarket. The attraction was something more concrete, namely a \$20 incentive payment that was being offered at the time.

"That's why I initially came—for that \$20. I was low income. But because of the services, I stayed, and I've been here since 2001."

In an interview in October 2009, Ballard explained how what was to be a one-time, get-the-money-and-leave encounter turned into an ongoing relationship. Her story illustrates the holistic experience that the Developing Families Center attempts to provide to young, pregnant, disadvantaged women:

- In February 2001, with the assistance of a Birth Center midwife, Ballard delivered her daughter Mya at Howard University Hospital.
- Mya received pediatric care at the Developing Families Center and entered the facility's child development program.
- Ballard, who was 19 when she gave birth, continued going to the center for well-woman care and got help of various kinds from the Healthy Babies Project. The staff provides "whatever you need" to make pregnancy smoother and the infant more secure, she said. Ballard, in fact, at one point, worked as a receptionist for the Healthy Babies Project and had other paying jobs at the center.
- Ballard's second child, Isaiah, also got pediatric care there and, like his older sister, was enrolled in the child development program. During the interview, under his



mother's watchful eye, Isaiah, age 2, climbed on the program's playground equipment erected by volunteers in summer 2009.

(Before Isaiah's birth, Ballard was diagnosed with a high-risk condition—a brain tumor, she explained. Consequently, for that pregnancy she had all prenatal care as well as the birth itself at the Washington Hospital Center.)

At the time of the interview, Ballard was a recent cosmetology school graduate looking forward to a career in hair styling and wig making. Thinking back on her introduction to the Developing Families Center eight years earlier, she said, "It was just a welcoming atmosphere. That's what caught my attention."