

The problem was we lived in a house that was too much—between rent, water, lights, phone, taking the bus, taking the clothes out to wash, it was just too much. The cost of living is high and I only make \$7.85 working at Wendy’s. I’ve worked there for three years—the whole time we were in the shelter I kept working.

I’ve known how to budget, but I slacked. I made bad, bad choices—not drugs, but bad choices with my money. See, I had a daughter that passed away of SIDS. I just started spending the money the wrong kind of ways, like, go out to eat if I felt like it...buy things... I was just going downhill and I didn’t care. I didn’t care anymore.

Sara [St. Stephen’s Housing Case Manager] really listened when I said our next apartment had to be something we could afford. I don’t want to get in trouble again being behind on bills. I could not find a place to afford, but then Sara found this place. We’ve been here six months and kept up on bills and I’m really proud of myself. I’ve been doing a lot of good things. I’m saving change, budgeting, I go to the cheaper stores. I pray to God all the time: “Please make things more better for me and my kids and I will do things right.”

My kids ask why we have to save and I tell them we’ll be back in the same situation like we used to be: homeless. I’m trying to teach them how to budget, even at twelve and seven. I tell them they have choices. I say, “You can go to college or you can be in a gang, standing around on a corner or spread out on the ground by the police. Both of you are smart intelligent kids. I don’t want you to do like I am, struggling and getting paid by a little bitty job.”

It’s still hard for us. We’re still working it out. I’m worried that we’ll go back to homelessness and have to deal with that stress and with people making judgments about us. You just want to sometimes say to them, “I work for a living, too. I pay taxes, too.”

Tamika



*St. Stephen’s **Housing Services** helps families and single adults who are staying in shelters to find and maintain permanent housing.*



Tamika and her sons, Anthony and Javon, in their apartment.

Opposite page: Javon showing his biceps.