



Moms Gain Skills to Be the Best They Can Be

When you give to United Way, you are making a way better difference in the lives of families in our community. We are pleased to share highlights about one of the programs funded in part by United Way contributions: The Salvation Army's Booth Family Services.

Booth Family Services offers comprehensive services to meet basic human needs. It provides emergency and transitional housing services, prenatal and family health care services, individual and family counseling, and other educational and supportive services.

Tamika Tatum grew up in the shelter of a close knit family in Grand Rapids. Her world began to fall apart the day her father died. Tamika was only twelve years old. "My mom and dad had been together for over 30 years," she recalls. "My mom didn't know how to handle his death." Less than two years later her mother fell ill with a form of aplastic anemia, and Tamika dropped out of high school to care for her.

When Tamika's mother died just one day after her 18th birthday, Tamika was already a mother herself, to seven-month-old Taveyon, and for the first time was on her own. Tamika arrived at the Booth Family Services Teen Living Center months later and out of options.

"This was my last resort," she said. But when she moved into the center for homeless pregnant and parenting teens, she was for a time, home again.

"While they're here, our job is to help them be the best moms they can be," said Betty Zylstra, director of Booth Family Services center. "We help them take care of themselves if they are pregnant, stay in school or get back into school, and we help them identify where they are going to live when they move out."

Tamika now has a job and lives on her own with Taveyon and regularly returns to encourage the moms in the program. "I say this from the bottom of my heart: If I had not come here, I don't know where I would be now. I love my life now, I may be stressed sometimes, but I'm happy."