



Tayunda Williams and Derrick Buckingham at JPA's offices.

Success Story: Relationships Matter

***By Derrick Buckingham,
Chief Development Director***

Tayunda Williams took time out to meet with me while she was in Chicago driving for Lyft. She's got a big personality and exudes an aura of happiness mixed with gratitude. Tayunda was eager to talk with me about how JPA has had a positive impact on her life and the well-being of her children.

Tayunda came from a family with strong religious roots. Her father was a preacher and she proudly described herself as a "PK" (preacher's kid). In high school, Tayunda was attractive and popular. She said, "I was a homecoming queen...I was a pretty girl. I used to imagine being like Whitney Houston. I just didn't go around thinking that I would become a drug addict. But I was strung out at a young age."

Tayunda was introduced to drugs and became addicted to methadone. She also abused medication used to treat high blood pressure. She said, "Derrick, I was torn up in my mind. I was really strung out." Tayunda would eventually have five children with the man who would become her husband. But her life was still spiraling out of control. Trying desperately to kick her drug habit, she joined a methadone program. However, DCFS was eventually notified of her condition and her children were taken.

Fortunately, JPA was there to help guide them. Even after they were placed with another family member, JPA continued to help them navigate their way through school. Tayunda said, "At times it felt like JPA was one of the last lifelines I had left. They helped take care of my children but I always felt part of the process. I always had trust issues, but they never left me out of the process."

Today, Tayunda's kids are grown and doing well on their own. She describes them as workaholics and productive members of society. Her oldest is 28 and the youngest is 22. She said, "If it had not been for JPA's involvement, I would have given up on my recovery as well as raising my kids. The therapy and counseling JPA provided let me know that there was hope and we would be just fine. I still keep in contact through Rochelle (Jackson)."

Tayunda is clean and sober and has been for a long time. Some members of her family still can't believe that she is the woman she is now. There are some things that have not changed. For example, even today Tayunda can't get a full night's sleep. However, she credits her faith in God for bringing her through the tough times... and JPA. She said, "JPA saw the potential in me and my children. They listened." **JPA**