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Student Spotlight

June 2016

Zynia Hamilton & Antwan Green

New Life Christian Academy
Troy, AL



As a young single mother, LaSonya Hamilton has faced her share of challenges in life. But instead of being defeated by her hardships, she has instead used it as fuel to create a better life for her children, Zynia Hamilton and Antwan Green. Seeing firsthand what a powerful tool education can be in determining one's future success, LaSonya was intent on finding the right learning environment for Zynia and Antwan. Scholarships from the AAA Scholarship Foundation have made that goal possible for her family, bridging financial gaps and helping her children thrive in a school that exceeds her expectations.

At just 14 years old, LaSonya became a mom when her daughter Zynia was born. As a frightened teen mom overwhelmed with the responsibility of a baby, many people expected LaSonya to drop out of school and give up. But that was not the case.

"Zynia changed my life," LaSonya says. "She pushed me to do better. She was my *reason* to do better."

LaSonya knew that she had to focus on her education if she wanted to give herself and Zynia a fighting chance for a better life. So with the help from her own mother, who took a night shift position so that she could help take care of Zynia during the day, LaSonya completed the next few years of high school. Zynia was by her mother's side through it all – homework, exams, prom, and finally graduation. With her high school diploma in hand, LaSonya set her sights on her next goal: higher education. She started college the next fall with high hopes of building a future for them both. However, during her first year of college, LaSonya became pregnant with her son, Antwan, and made the decision to move to Troy, Ala., with her mom.

LaSonya enrolled Zynia at the local public school in Troy, where she seemed to do alright the first few years. Her grades were good, but there was something missing. In class, Zynia was always quiet – shying away from actively participating in class activities and would only speak if her teachers called upon her. LaSonya was worried that the school's setting was not helping Zynia grow and feared that it would hinder her future success.

Around this time, Antwan was attending the preschool program at New Life Christian Academy, where he was getting a head start on his education. LaSonya noticed the expanded opportunities and learning experiences

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that Antwan was being exposed to at the school and began to feel like Zynia needed a similar environment to bring her out of her shell and grasp her full potential. After looking into the elementary school program at New Life, LaSonya was certain that it would be the perfect environment for Zynia. However, as a single mom who worked hard to make ends meet, affording the tuition was nearly out of reach – especially if she wanted to keep Antwan at New Life as he entered grade school.

Determined to make it work, LaSonya worked extra hours in between her own college classes, made sacrifices, and stretched finances in order to pay for the tuition. But she knew these efforts would just be a temporary solution and it became clear that she would either have to find additional financial resources to afford the tuition or she would have to pull both of her children out of the school that they loved so much, possibly disrupting their education. Just when she thought she had run out of options, she was overjoyed to learn that her application to the AAA Scholarship Foundation had been approved and both of her children would receive scholarships to attend New Life in the fall of 2015.

Zynia and Antwan have both continued to excel at New Life. Since attending the school, Zynia, who just completed 5th grade, has opened up and actively participates in her classes, and has formed positive friendships with her classmates. She loves math and continually excels in the subject, even serving as a tutor to other students. Antwan – although he only just completed Kindergarten – has become an avid reader and is developing fine penmanship skills, including cursive handwriting. Both children also participate in the school's extracurricular activities, including dance and softball.

For LaSonya, the scholarship program has helped to alleviate a great amount of stress, as she no longer has to constantly worry about how she will afford her children's tuition or taking them out of a school that is helping to foster their future success. Instead, she has been able to work on creating a better life for her family. With her children as her inspiration, LaSonya graduated in December 2015 with her bachelor's degree in criminal justice, a symbolic prize for the years of hard work and sacrifices she and her family made.

"The AAA Scholarship Foundation opened up so many doors for my family," says LaSonya. "The opportunities we have been given are not taken lightly. We are so thankful to those donors and others that give families like mine the ability to overcome financial and educational obstacles and give our children a chance for a promising future."

About AAA Scholarship Foundation

The typical AAA Scholarship student is an ethnic minority living with a struggling single parent/caregiver in a high crime community. The average household income of families accepted to receive scholarships is \$23,559 for a family of four. Many children are either below grade level, failing at their previous school or both when they receive a scholarship. Parents, who find their children in these circumstances and care about their future, look for viable options. They seek an atmosphere that challenges their child to reverse inadequate learning and/or social patterns and the potential lifelong negative impact. They wish to change their child's learning environment, acquaintances, and the unfortunate predictable outcomes associated with school failure.

AAA Scholarships are funded in Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Nevada and Pennsylvania by corporations that redirect a portion of their state tax liability to the AAA Scholarship Foundation in exchange for a tax credit (dollar for dollar in Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia and Nevada, and up to 90 percent in Pennsylvania). The AAA Scholarship Foundation is one of the only approved Scholarship 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations exclusively serving qualifying low-income, disabled and/or displaced students through these Scholarship Tax Credit programs. AAA Scholarship Foundation provides your company with the convenience and efficiency of a single-solution for participating in multiple state tax credit scholarship programs. For more information or to learn how your corporation can participate in the program, visit www.AAAScholarships.org, or contact Kerri Vaughan at kerri@aaascholarships.org or 888 707-2465 ext. 730.