

# Our Success

## Overcoming Obstacles

In 2006, local parents Earl and Latoya were facing a number of overwhelming obstacles: due to issues of domestic violence and neglect they had temporarily lost custody of their five children, who had been placed in foster care. When losing their children permanently began to look like a real possibility, Latoya and Earl began addressing the issues that had plagued their family and started working with several different social service agencies to improve their situation. Resolved to change their lives, they participated in couples counseling, anger management classes and other mental health services to put their family back on the road to success.

Earl and Latoya began working with Franklin County Children Services and through their outstanding assessment and outreach services, they referred the couple to Berea Children's Home and Family Services of Central Ohio. Beginning in January 2008, the agency began providing parent mentoring services to the family on a weekly basis with the goal of strengthening the relationships between Latoya and Earl and their children. Their parent mentor, Belinda Swidecki,



recalls, "While Earl and Latoya wanted to be reunited with their children very badly, Latoya didn't want to participate in our mentoring process at first. However, she did become engaged in the process and I watched her become a better person before my eyes." Natalie Porrello, the agency's Supervisor of Mentoring Services,

adds "Latoya did everything that was asked of her, whether it was from us, Franklin County Children Services or another agency." Over the six months Latoya received parent mentoring services, she learned necessary organizational skills, moved into a larger home and became a much more skilled communicator with her husband and children.



Happily, after all the difficulties they've faced, Earl and Latoya's family is now flourishing. In June 2008, their son Earl Jr. started working with an early childhood therapist from Berea Children's Home and Family Services and the changes in him were monumental. "He started talking about his feelings," says Latoya. "We never knew he had all those feelings, but the counseling really helped the little guy get them out there." Their daughter Imani, 18, will graduate from the Cleveland Job Corps Center this spring and is planning to pursue a career as a medical assistant. "At Imani's age, I already had one child and another on the way. She's taken another path and we're all very proud of her," her mother says happily. Their other children, Keith, Ishana and Iyanla, are also doing well in school. Latoya and Earl have completed their work with Berea Children's Home and Family Services of Central Ohio, but continue to work with other agencies to make their family ties even stronger.

As a result of their success the family was awarded the Franklin County Children Services' Family Achievement Award at the Child Abuse Prevention Breakfast in April 2009. The Family Achievement Award recognizes a family who has overcome serious challenges and made significant strides to strengthen their family. When asked about the award, Latoya simply says, "I wanted my kids back. I was told what I needed to do and I did it. I did it for my kids." Natalie Porrello agrees, "They're a great family and a great example of how one family can work hard to overcome their obstacles."

