

“I heard a gunshot and I thought it was my son.....I screamed so loud and ran down the steps...” Ms. Sandra Williams, West Philadelphia

Adopting a Family for the holiday season.....We realize that the holiday season is here and that our economy, friends and family members are facing a number of challenges. Often times, we must be reminded that this is a time for us to pull together and continue to be optimistic, supportive and thoughtful of others who are less fortunate. Some of us have our health and strength while others like Ms. Sandra William (“Ms. Sandra) of West Philadelphia are required to sit back and hope that she will feed and clothe her family. I met Ms. Williams through a referral from a little old lady at the front desk of Consortium, a human services agency housed at 1st District Plaza on 38th and Market Streets. Ms. Sandra called me one early morning asking me for help and as my mother says, “charity starts in the home...” so I listened to her but asked if I could meet her and the family at their home. I was somewhat ambivalent but felt comfortable through our conversations that she is a person of great pride and dedication towards her family. Later that afternoon we met; to my surprise, I was greeted by two young adolescents outside the door who said, “Go in..it’s ok, I live there.” I continued to knock on the door anyway and they appeared Ms. Sandra. I entered the home which was beautifully decorated with African artwork, statues of elephants and other energy provoking décor. The home was clean, neat and filled with positive energy.

Ms. Sandra is the mother of 8 children but raised 25 which included neighborhood children, those with parents on drugs and lost to the streets, prison or violence. She lives in a Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) house in the heart of West Philly. The area is surrounded by the usually abandoned homes, trash, drug dealers and users but Ms. Sandra was proud that her children were on the right track to greatness. She only finished the 11th grade and had her first child at 16 years old. Her mother had 10 children and was raised in the projects in West Philadelphia.

As Ms. Sandra states, “I wanted my children to know more than these red brick walls; meaning the projects. I took my children, all 8 and then some, to the zoo and parks when they were little and before I became ill. I would pack their bags with P&J sandwiches, juices, fruit and goodies the night before. Each child had their own backpack and we would take the SEPTA bus and I remember how people looked and starred at me with such disgust....I would turn around and tell them that all of the children were mine, all 8 or 10 whatever number of kids happen to their at that time. They were well mannered, very respectful and courteous so the problem was other adults, not the kids.” I had a great time with the kids but I’m tired now...when I had the energy, we went down to see the Peacemakers and the tree of lights; I sure miss that I can’t get around like I used to...”

It was obvious that Ms. Sandra as do others want more out of life and sometimes different circumstances lead you to different paths and although she has been physically and mentally abused, she raised her children in the church. The children that live in the

house hold include Gary, age 22 and is mentally challenged with an intellectual level of an 9 year old and 12 year old literacy level, Angela and aspiring RN, age 19 and mildly challenged and taking placement classes at the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), Ciara age 17 and 12th grade student at Girls High, transferred to University City, a cheerleader and prospective student at Rosemont College, Derrick age 16 is currently at St. Gabes Correctional School after a brush with the law in selling marijuana with neighborhood kids, given 9 months with weekend passes to come home, and Terrance age 12 currently in the 6th grade. The other adult children aged 32, 26 and 24 are married with their own family living in Philadelphia.

We continued to talk and I learned that regardless of the struggles in urban neighborhoods, there is always the “block mother” and the person who seems to keep everyone focused on doing good. Ms. Sandra shared that her neighbor, “Ms. Nikki” is a person who is smart, have good kids and that she always encourage the children to do the right thing. One day, Ms. Nikki approached her son Derrick about his change in behavior and disrespectfully attitude towards like. She knew that Derrick was a good child and that he started hanging with the bad kids in the neighborhood. The good part about Derrick is that he was the 1st group of children accepted into the School of the Future, an establishment build by Bill Gates of Microsoft Corp. Ms. Sandra cried for months after her son was charged with selling drugs, the same drugs that surrounded her neighborhood and infested the street of her block. She was hurt and disappointed that he wanted more than what her money could provide. Never the less, Derrick took it upon himself to start reading the bible, changed his attitude, has honor roll and is doing well in school. He asked Ms. Sandra if he could go to church when he come him and that he wants to take a leadership role in the church and youth groups! About 1 month ago, Ms. Sandra received a phone call from Ms. Nikki, who was crying and sobbing as she stated that she received a letter from Derrick apologizing for his wrongdoings; that he was sorry that he was disrespectful and asked for forgiveness.

Ms. Nikki is the mom that everyone wanted to have because she is positive and has a strong influence on the kids, as does Ms. Sandra. According to Ms. Sandra, ***“It is the strength of GOD that keeps me going and I’ve never had my children away from me- this was the first and will be the last time; I could never go through this again, it just hurts too bad.”*** We attend church at the Community Baptist Church on 40th and Spring Garden and sometimes attend a church on 52nd and Parrish.

To summarize my personal feelings of this interview and meeting, I am happy that my path crossed and that I know that I could be a resource to Ms. Sandra and her family. She only asked for support with food and clothing for the kids; not money or a hand out. I don’t believe that a child should have pants with holes between the legs or slits down the lining of the jeans and to be without food. Ms. Sandra is on disability and does not receive a lot of money from public assistance with regard to food and living expenses. To that end, ESF and the Williams family would like to ask for your help in making their dreams come true this holiday season. ESF is helping to facilitate the delivery of FOOD



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Building Cultural Connections, One Person and One Community at a Time

items or GIFT CARDS to grocery stores, clothing items or GIFT CARDS to the stores for the children. If you are able and can provide a holiday donation of items, you can contact me directly or I can provide her information.

Our goal is to deliver the items to Ms. Sandra by December 21, 2008.

Gary age 22 is 6'0", 44Wx32L, 3-4XL shirt and 12.5 shoe

Angela age 19 is 5'6", size 10, M shirt and 10 shoe

Ciara age 17, is 5'6", size 12, L shirt and 10 shoe

Derrick age 16 is 5'7", 34Wx32L, L-XL shirt and 10 shoe

Terrance age 12 is 5'8", 32Wx30L, XL shirt and 11 shoe

Ms. Sandra age 48 is 5'5", women's size 28, 3x shirt or 30-32 blouse and 12 shoe

If there is anything you can do to provide a happy and merrier holiday season for the family, please let me know. Kindly be aware that 100% of your contribution will be given to the family and no gift is too small or too large for them. ESF and the Williams family thank you and wish you a happy holiday and New Year.

God bless!

Yours truly,

Shonta D. Collins, Founder and President
ESF Team