

A photograph of a woman with braided hair, wearing a bright pink long-sleeved shirt, sitting on a wooden park bench. She is smiling and holding a young girl on her lap. The girl is wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt with a graphic that says "Daddy's Heart!" and blue jeans. She has white flower-shaped hair clips in her hair. The background shows a park with trees and a grassy area.

# Emerald's Story

When you're a teen mom, there are a lot of people telling you what you can't accomplish. Emerald realized that if she wanted to build the kind of life that she and her partner Dominic dreamed of for their daughter, she needed to surround herself with people who believed in her and wanted what was best for their family. She found that support through United Way.

"Because of United Way donors, I was the first one in my family as a teen mom to graduate high school. They helped me get certifications as a CNA and a phlebotomist, and most importantly, my baby had a safe environment at Early Head Start where I could spend time with her between classes while finishing my degree.

I plan to start college next fall to become a nurse. If it weren't for United Way, our lives would have turned out completely differently."

After reaching out to housing resources for Greater New Haven residents, she was able to find a stable and suitable home for her family. Shontaya achieved her goal. Now, she feels a joy when she sees her boys come home from school, excited to walk in the door—because they're walking into their home.

Alayna graduated from Early Head Start last Spring and is now in preschool. Emerald and her partner Dominic dream of one day owning a house with a yard where Alayna can play. Because of the crucial support they accessed through United Way, they are on the path towards the life they dreamed of.

**"I want to thank the donors.  
You made a real difference in our lives."**