

Shepherd's Watch



A Part of the Catholic Charities of St. Louis Family

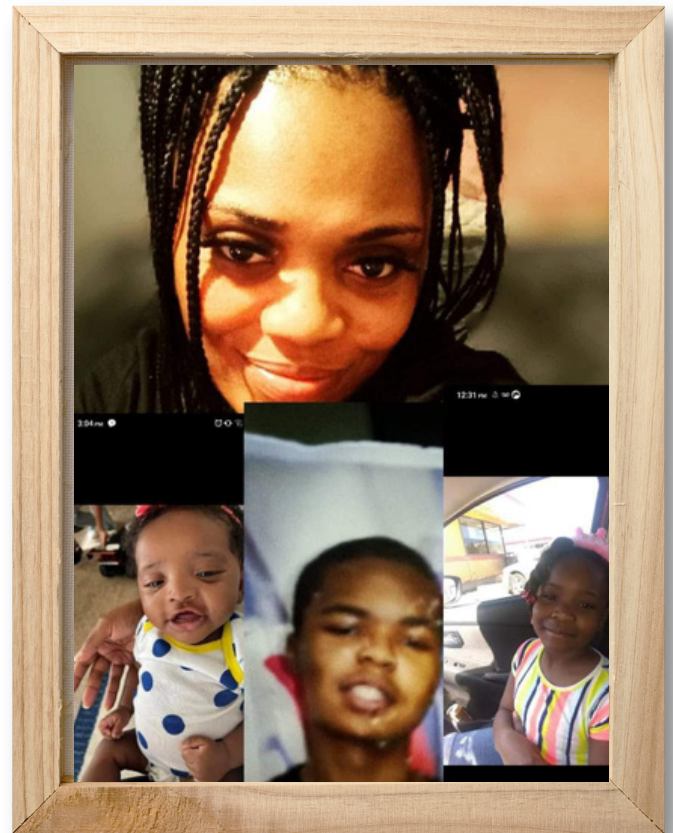
Winter 2023

Good Shepherd's Pregnancy and Parenting Support Program: **A Family Strengthened and Preserved**

At 37, twice-divorced, with a demanding job and a 15- and 10-year-old at home, Cierra found herself pregnant with her third child. Despite pressure from relatives, and even after having lived through more than her fair share of turmoil, she made the decision to keep this child. But she also knew she needed help. After talking to people at work and doing some research, she found Good Shepherd's Pregnancy & Parenting Support Program.

Cierra's first husband was abusive, and her second struggled with substance abuse. Her first two pregnancies had been fraught with anxiety as she experienced undiagnosed postpartum depression with both babies.

Cierra's early life had not been easy. Her mother died when young and left her without a strong support system during her first two pregnancies. At one point, overwhelmed with the responsibilities of working two jobs and caring for two children alone, she got into a car accident and left the scene in a moment of panic. This landed her in jail and created a cascade of issues that included losing her job and her apartment. She had reasons to doubt her ability to be successful with pregnancy and parenting a third time.



"I really want this pregnancy to be peaceful," she told Denise Ward, her Good Shepherd counselor. "Denise taught me about postpartum depression, which I didn't realize I'd had with the first two. She listened. She coached me and educated me that it was not unusual, and I could do things to keep it under control."

Cierra turned to Good Shepherd in 2022 to find support, information, and resources so she could do a better job taking care of both her child and herself. During her sessions with Denise, she learned about safe sleep, breastfeeding, immunizations, shaken baby syndrome, and both prenatal and postnatal self-care.

Cierra and Denise began meeting at a public library that was conveniently located to talk about physical and emotional health during pregnancy, including the importance of good nutrition, self-care, and avoiding substances. They also brainstormed strategies to help Cierra reduce her stress, build confidence, and improve her communication skills.

“I really wanted this baby. I decided I was going to keep her, even though I knew I might have to do it all by myself. I prayed about it and knew it was going to be ok.”

“Cierra was encouraged to take the lead in prioritizing issues most important to her,” said Denise. “She showed great progress in assertiveness and confidence, which I found admirable. She put her children’s needs first but learned to value the importance of self-care and compassion and to say no respectfully to those who tried to control her.”

Cierra gave birth to a healthy baby girl in August. She continues to work full-time for Southwest Airlines, where she has been for three years. She and her children live in a three-bedroom house in Jennings, where she says all three kids are at a different phases of life with their own unique needs, but they are working through it all together.

“Sometimes I look at my situation and can’t believe I have three kids,” she said. “People told me I should be done with being pregnant, but I knew I could do it and wanted to see how strong I was as a woman. Even the baby’s father is working on himself to create good change because of the boundaries Denise helped me set. I’ve learned how to love people from a distance



when they’re not good for you.”

She and Denise still talk, and just recently Cierra reached out because she was feeling stressed. Denise was able to give information on free diaper assistance programs and provide essentials such as baby wipes, baby bottles, infant socks, receiving blankets, a Target gift card and other small baby items like pacifiers. Together they are working on this important post-pregnancy and early parenting period of life. When Cierra talks to other women experiencing the same issues, she refers them to Good Shepherd.

“Good Shepherd gives you all the good tools and knowledge you need for pregnancy, to care for a newborn, and to take care of yourself,” she said. **“They’re there for you. They understand and don’t judge. It’s a great program. I’m so happy this time around.”**

The Good Shepherd Mission

In response to the call of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, to help those in need, we connect children with families and keep families connected.