

Dreams Come True for Lafayette Woman!

(Lafayette-June 19, 2008) Ever since she could remember, Gloria Williams wanted to work with children. She vividly remembers sitting on Santa's knee as a nine year old girl and telling him she wanted to teach. It's a dream she's held for 20 years but couldn't fulfill because she pushed aside her wants to take care of her family's needs. At the age of 23, Gloria's mother died, and Gloria had to drop out of college to raise her two younger brothers and her own two kids.

"With the help of my husband, James William, we were raising my 9 year old and 4 year old brothers, our 3 year old daughter and our 1 year old son. I don't see it as anything remarkable. You just do what you have to do. I just feel blessed that I was able to do it, and I was old enough to raise my brothers so they didn't have to live with other relatives or be placed in the foster care system," said Gloria.

This humble woman quickly dismisses the sacrifices she's made for her family - putting aside her dream of becoming a teacher, stopping her college education, continuing to work full-time at Super Kmart to raise her family, and all the long hours, the hard work and the heartache that comes with raising children.

20 years later, Gloria would discover that dreams do come true. But instead of whispering those dreams to Santa, she turned to the Louisiana Small Business Development Center at University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

"My greatest help and inspiration came from the people at the Louisiana Small Business Development Center at ULL," praised Gloria. "After Super Kmart closed down, I became an in-home childcare provider. But two years ago, I felt in my heart that I was ready to open a day care center."

LSBDC consultants Heidi Melancon and Nathan Thornton assisted Gloria with a business plan and financial projections and helped her find capital. When Gloria was turned down for a bank loan, Thornton guided her through the process of getting a loan from the Lafayette Neighborhoods Economic Development Corporation (LNEDC), a non-profit organization which invests in small businesses that create jobs. Armed with a \$60,000 LNEDC loan and part of her life savings, Gloria with the loving support of her husband purchased a building for her daycare center - an old house with a mechanic's garage. Gloria tore down the house, gutted the cylinder-block garage and added three classrooms, 2 bathrooms, a lobby area, office and kitchen to complete the 2,300 square foot school. The finished building is as bright and sunny as her personality.

Even before Precious Heart Childcare officially opened its doors on October 23, 2007, Gloria had a waiting list of students and parents eager for "Mama Gloria's" brand of loving care. Within its first year, Precious Heart Childcare located at 2028 Moss Street in North Lafayette expanded from five employees to nine employees and currently operates at full capacity. Gloria continues to work with the LSBDC as her business grows. LSBDC provided business consulting and training to teach Gloria sound business practices

"I know how to care for children. I've been doing it all my life. But I wasn't very familiar with the financial side of running a daycare. I went back to LSBDC, and they gave me sound advice to deal with my cash flow problems. They have really prepared me to succeed," praised Gloria. "I feel like I have been waiting and saving for this all my life. I just needed a starting point, and the LSBDC gave me that edge and that direction."

Another one of Gloria dreams may soon come true. Gloria enrolled at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette this Fall to complete the final two years of her education degree she gave up some years ago.



Gloria Williams, owner of Precious Heart Childcare