

# MOM ASHUNTI

**Mom, wife, homeowner, project manager. Looking at the educated, accomplished, confident woman Ashunti is today makes it a little difficult to imagine her as a 19-year-old girl grappling with a surprise pregnancy.**

Ashunti took the pregnancy test in the Wal-Mart bathroom and stared at the faint line. “I wasn’t sure what I was seeing, so I called my boyfriend – we weren’t married yet – and said, ‘Do you see what I see?’ He saw it,” she remembers. “I called the doctor the next day. We had planned to have a baby some day but not then. I was still figuring out how to become an adult!”

At 19, Ashunti was going to school at Georgia Military College, living with her mother in Centerville, Georgia, and working when she learned she was pregnant. Her cousin told her about Nurse-Family Partnership® (NFP) at the Houston County Health Department and encouraged her to check it out. “My cousin did the program, and my sister told me ‘They’ll teach you all the things you need to know. They’ll come to you,’” said Ashunti. “I didn’t want someone coming into our house, but I wanted to



Ashunti (shown right) worked with her Nurse-Family Partnership nurse, TeQuiera, to be the best mom she could be. Her son, Juston (shown left), is now 4-years old and thriving. (Photo Credit: 5Visions Photography)

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make sure I had all the information I could possibly get before I had the baby.”

TeQuiera was assigned to be Ashunti’s nurse. While it took Ashunti a little time to warm up, they formed a strong relationship that helped Ashunti through her pregnancy and the early years of motherhood.

“When I first met Ashunti, she and her boyfriend were both nervous about having a kid. She was trying to balance school. We needed to get them on the same page with parenting,” TeQuiera said. “People are nervous and scared when I meet them. I tell them, ‘You know what’s best for your life. I’m going to support you and help you be the best you that you can be.’”

## **Working for a Healthy Pregnancy**

Throughout Ashunti’s pregnancy, nurse TeQuiera encouraged her to take care of herself and to make healthy choices. They would spend some of their visits walking at the local school track, and TeQuiera taught her about nutrition. It was TeQuiera who noticed unusual swelling in Ashunti’s feet and legs and encouraged her to call her doctor, and then she continued to monitor the swelling and her blood pressure through the rest of the pregnancy.

“I worked with her to get her blood pressure down and made sure she knew the signs to watch for. I was worried about preeclampsia,” TeQuiera said.

Fortunately, Ashunti didn’t develop preeclampsia but she did go into labor early, and Juston arrived

on July 8, 2016. He was a healthy little boy and did not have to spend extra time in the hospital.

“NFP made sure that I had a safe and healthy pregnancy. Without it, I probably would not have made it as far as I did,” she said. “Diet, light exercise really helped me, and I wouldn’t have done it on my own. Having someone come into your home and see what goes on and encourage you versus a 30-minute doctor’s appointment creates accountability.”

### **Life as a New Mom**

After Juston’s arrival, Ashunti dove in “trying to be superwoman,” she says. She was still going to school and trying to be a good student, partner and mom despite a schedule that had her working all day, spending a couple hours with Juston and then heading to class in the evening. It wasn’t working.

“One of the things TeQuiera pointed out to me was that postpartum depression looks different for different people,” Ashunti said. “I was trying to do it all myself and thought that’s what it meant to be a good mom – that I had to take care of everything Juston needed all the time. TeQuiera let me know it’s okay not to do everything by yourself. She encouraged me when I felt like I wasn’t good enough. She helped me improve my mental health so I could focus on my goals and do what I needed to do for our future.”

Armed with the confidence that she could get through those early months of motherhood, Ashunti was encouraged to remember to keep setting goals for herself.

“I had dreams and things I wanted to accomplish, but I had trouble setting goals and working toward them. She would push me to set the goal and then help me plan,” Ashunti said. “She helped hold me accountable.”

### **Celebrating Life Today**

When Juston turned two in July 2018, Ashunti graduated from NFP.

Ashunti and Juston’s dad married and bought their first home. Ashunti not only finished her bachelor’s



Ashunti (show left) and nurse TeQuiera (shown right) meet with Chairwoman Sharon Cooper (shown center), after testifying to the Georgia House Study Committee on the importance of preventing maternal mortality in December of 2019.

degree, but she went on to complete a master’s degree in project management and now works at Robins Air Force Base. And, when Juston’s sister Ashlynn arrived, Ashunti used what she learned from nurse TeQuiera. She went into pre-term labor, but thanks to the signs and symptoms TeQuiera taught her to watch for, she identified what was happening and was able to seek medical attention that stopped the labor.

Today TeQuiera marvels at what Ashunti has accomplished. “She has motivation to provide better for her kids than what she had. I tell the moms I work with that it doesn’t matter if you have a kid young, you don’t have to give up on your dreams. Ashunti didn’t give up. She had a detour, but she used it as motivation to finish school, get a good job and provide for her kids.”

Ashunti is proud of what she’s accomplished, but she’s holds one thing dearest of all.

“I’m proud of my ability to be a great mom. Growing up I wasn’t one to play with dolls or to want to be around kids. I’m amazed at how much love and support I’m able to give my kids. The house, the degrees, all that is nice, but having that bond with your kids is amazing.”