

# New Beginnings

by Yvette Clark

I wanted to pass on some very good news from an IM4Q visit in Philadelphia County.

On Wednesday May 5th, Beulah Parker and I went out to see two men who reside in a CLA with Brian's House. The home was personalized and the bedrooms looked like rooms young men would live in with posters, a stereo, a television, some CDs, DVDs, and unmade beds.

Hakeem Barmont, one of the residents we visited can read and is studying for his driver's permit. He also helps with cooking and other household chores. He goes to the YMCA once a week and uses the treadmill, body machine and goes swimming. He also goes to see sports games, goes bowling, skating, go-carting and has a bike that he rides in his neighborhood.

During the interview, when asked about family involvement, Hakeem became extremely sad and stated he hadn't seen any family in a couple of years. He then went into his room and brought out his mother's obituary. The obituary listed a very large family, grandparents, two sisters, 14 aunts and uncles, a great aunt and a host of cousins. His mother passed in 2000 and Hakeem did attend the funeral. I recognized one of the names in the obituary and learned that it was one of his sisters. We had visited her previously and I knew she lived in an ICF, but I wasn't sure which one. Hakeem stated his sister was in a "special place". This became one of the saddest interviews I had been on. Beulah looked at the obituary and noticed a name that was familiar to her also; she worked with Hakeem's great-aunt and had spoken to her two weeks prior to the visit. Both of us were extremely saddened after leaving Hakeem. I came into the office the next day and looked in the database for Hakeem's sister's name and found she resided with Allegheny Valley School. I called AVS and spoke with her QMRP, Dawn Gordon and told her I had located Rashida's brother and that he wanted to visit with her. The QMRP stated it would be difficult for Rashida to visit her brother due to her physical limitations but that he would be welcome to visit her. I gave her Hakeem's home phone number along with the supervisor's number and I hoped for the best.



On Wednesday, May 13th I received a phone call from Joe Dutton at Brian's House thanking me for connecting Hakeem with his sister at AVS. The visit was arranged and on Tuesday, May 11<sup>th</sup>, Hakeem saw his sister again after many years (she was not able to attend their mother's funeral). Joe told me they took pictures of the reunion and Hakeem brought his sister flowers.

The visit lifted both Hakeem's spirits and those of the employees at Brian's House and Allegheny Valley School. I spoke with Dawn at AVS and she stated that Rashida doesn't connect with people, but she knew Hakeem. A photo showed that she was happy to see her brother. Dawn said she did a follow-up call with Hakeem to see how he felt about the visit. She

said he asked some very hard questions about why his sister couldn't do this or that and he also wanted to visit her every weekend, during holidays and have sleepovers. Dawn said the sleepovers would not be possible at AVS, but that she would contact Brian's House to see if Rashida could have sleepovers at Hakeem's home.

I got the feeling from both agencies that this union is very much appreciated and welcomed and I believe that both will try to keep this brother and sister involved in each other's lives.

On a personal note, I wanted to cry during the visit with Hakeem and I took those feelings home and I prayed. One week later I wanted to cry again, but this time it was from joy. We were able to make a big difference in the lives of two people who, like everyone else, needs love and family. It was amazing to me that all of this resulted from just a couple of phone calls. Their lives have become a little happier and fuller.

Both agencies stated how grateful they were for the union of Hakeem and his sister Rashida.

**WE ARE NOT IN VAIN.**

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Yvette Clark is a mother of 4, her youngest has Down Syndrome. She has been a monitor with the IM4Q team in Philadelphia since its inception 5 years ago.

**a Vision for Equality story**