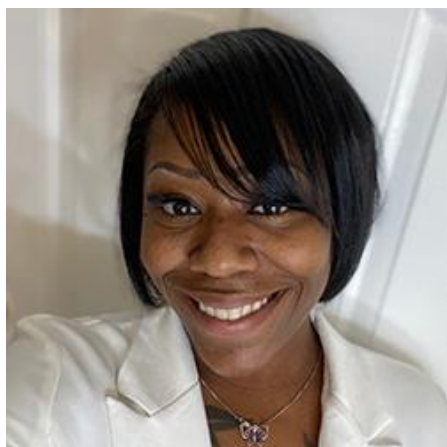


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Parent Ally Program Supports Prevention and Prepetition Efforts



Iesha is LSNJ's first "parent ally," the first position of its kind in New Jersey. In this role, she works with LSNJ's Family Representation Project to prevent child removals resulting from poverty-induced circumstances. In New Jersey and across the country, many removals occur as a result of housing instability and other manifestations of multigenerational poverty, leading to devastating, yet preventable, trauma for children and families. To address this problem, LSNJ introduced a new project in 2018 in conjunction with the NJ Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP). Receiving client referrals directly from DCPP allows us to quickly identify and assist with critical legal issues, and help prevent the loss of housing—thereby preventing unnecessary removals and ultimately keeping families together.

Since accepting this position as parent ally in 2018, Iesha has assisted LSNJ in 20 prevention cases. She speaks with parents and families and uses her perspective and experience to provide support. As someone who experienced the child welfare system as both a child, and as a mother, she possesses a dual perspective that has driven her to feel passionately about helping other struggling parents.

Iesha's experience with her own children came after a break-up with her children's father, while she had a restraining order against him. An incident resulted in a fight, Iesha was arrested, and the DCPP removed her children and placed them in foster care. Though she was only incarcerated for five days, it took nearly four years to regain custody of her

children. She often felt overwhelmed by the programs and services she was required to complete, and twice faced the possibility of termination of parental rights.

Despite these challenges, Iesha never gave up on herself and gradually found her voice. She saved money for an EMT course, and, although it was not easy to balance school, work, and the demands of her DCPP case, she achieved her goal of receiving an EMT certification. She also started to take agency over her role as a mother and was overjoyed when her children finally came home. Utilizing her story to empower others, Iesha encourages parents to believe in themselves and find their voices just as she found hers.

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