

Parent for Healthy Homes Community Easter Egg Hunt

### **A Celebration in The Name of Advocacy**

The 49507-zip code in Grand Rapids has some of the highest numbers of children with lead poisoning in the state of Michigan. Many of the homes in that zip code were built in the 1920s, and while renovations have occurred throughout homes in the area, lead paint remains a concern in many of these homes.

Back in 2017, Shantal Ferrell's one-year-old daughter Imani tested positive for high levels of lead in her blood. At the time, she says she didn't really understand what could have gone wrong, and she felt confused as to what to do about the situation.

"With her being lead poisoned and us not having any assistance or help or anywhere to turn for someone to advocate for us with our landlord, it became an issue. I had to figure out how to address it," she says. "There was no accountability on anyone's part, except for mine."

While Shantal reached out to her landlord about implementing lead abatement strategies in the home she was renting, she says her landlord refused to do much about it.

Shantal was forced to figure out on her own how she was going to employ mitigation strategies to block off areas in the home where lead was present. Eventually Shantal moved her family to a different home; a safer home she says.

Educating members of this community around lead and the dangers of lead poisoning is what prompted resident Shantal to ask for a Grand Rapids Neighborhood Match Fund contract.

"We need to be talking about changing housing policy code so no other family has to go through that again and having requirements for lead abatements on those homes that test positive," she adds.

Through a neighborhood Easter Egg Hunt, Shantal made educating her community around lead poisoning a fun activity.

"We had a lot of volunteers who came out and showed up. We were happy for that. But we were also able to bring some awareness and attention to the Black and Brown businesses in the community and organizations as well too," she added. "Because we utilize Black and Brown vendors for the event for us for food, entertainment and things like that."

Shantal's overarching goal was to encourage residents to understand the importance of advocating around changing housing policy codes through support from the group of Parents for Healthy Homes. It's a group of local families involved in advocating for clean, healthy and lead-free homes in the 49507-zip code.

"So no other family has to go through that again, and having it a requirement where these lead abatements need to be done on these homes if they've tested positive, or not rented out again," she said.

Over 150 people received easter baskets during the event and Shantal says she hopes she gets the opportunity to host another Easter Egg Hunt for the community next year.

"We were able to put on one of the best Easter egg hunt events for the community," she says.