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**ON JOB:** Shanda Mosley, former welfare mom now a social services home-health aide, visits with Annie Dikes.

## 'Visions' helps baffled mom escape from welfare

By Katherine Corcoran  
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It was summer of 1987, and Shanda Mosley had just given birth to a baby boy. A Denver native, she had returned from out of state when she was eight months pregnant and couldn't get a job. So Mosley turned to welfare. Taxpayers paid for her food, rent and to deliver her son.

Mosley considered welfare a temporary solution. But after three months, she was having trouble coming up with a scenario for getting off welfare.

"When you get off and get a job, they don't cover you for medical or other benefits for six months or a year. Having that little baby, I needed the security," Mosley, now 24, recalled. "I was saying to myself, 'What am I going to do? What am I going to do?'"

The answer came in a flier slipped in with her welfare check. The Denver Department of Social Services was seeking welfare recipients to participate in a pilot program called Community Visions.

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She could go to school to learn the home health-care profession and then be placed in a job with health and child-care benefits.

All this happened at a time when welfare reform, or "workfare," was just a debate on state and national political scenes.

"It was a gift to me," she said of that slip of paper. "I knew after I had (my son) — and started paying bills off my welfare check — that even if I went back and got a minimum-wage job . . . I would have been back in the workforce. But it made it easier, going to this program."

Mosley graduated from the first Community Visions class. Earlier this week, the program sent its seventh class into the working world.

The program is aimed at helping women who raise children alone and who receive a form of welfare known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

Social services administrators estimate that more than 100 welfare recipients have been through Community Visions. About half haven't returned to welfare, while in traditional welfare programs, 75 percent of the people who go off the rolls are back within four months.

Community Visions students take a 10-week homemaker/home health aide program at Emily Griffith Opportunity School, where they learn basic nursing skills, cooking, nutrition and stress management, among other things. Then they get four months of training with social services, doing homemaking and personal care for elderly and disabled clients.

After training, they have the option of staying another 18 months as a temporary employee, or finding work with a hospital or another

home health-care provider.

Once a temporary social services employee, each woman replaces her welfare check with a pay check and Medicaid with city and county employee health benefits. The women also begin paying for subsidized day care.

Home health aides start out earning anywhere from \$950 to nearly \$1,200 a month, compared with average welfare payments of \$346 a month. And each one saves taxpayers about \$9,400 in welfare payments over three years, said Janet Washburn, Community Visions director.

Community Visions was a forerunner to other welfare reforms, such as Denver's Family Opportunity Program, a more sweeping program that began last spring with a goal of getting up to 1,000 families off welfare.

"We were building on all the developmental thinking going on nationally. It just took us less time to get (the program) up," said Kitty Pring, Denver Social Services director of adult services.

Today, the agency that once cut Mosley's welfare check is her full-time employer. She is a home health aide for 13 social services clients at Bean Towers in northeast Denver.

And Mosley is about to move from a Warren Village apartment, where she shared one bedroom with her son, to a brand-new, three-bedroom house a few blocks from her job. She found the house through Habitat for Humanity — which builds affordable housing for low-income families — for a \$1,000 down payment, plus 500 hours of volunteer work with that program.

In five years, Mosley would like to be a social services coordinator for programs designed to get women off welfare.