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Student Spotlight September 2013

The Townsend Family

Covington, GA



Robert Townsend knows from personal experience the hardships of life, and because of that, he wants to make sure his children are equipped with a strong educational foundation to prepare them to be successful and hardworking adults. However, as Robert and his wife Tammy learned, finding an educational environment to meet the unique needs of each child be challenging. Scholarships from the AAA Scholarship Foundation have given the Townsend family expanded opportunities for their children, enabling them to break economic barriers and thrive in school and life.

Robert's life journey has not been an easy one. When he was only 13 years old, he became homeless and remained without a place to call home until he was 18 years old. Despite the dismal circumstances, he knew even then the power of education and he found a way to complete high school – all on his own. During the years since, he has faced ups and downs – including losing his arm in a tragic car accident and having to learn to write again with his opposite hand. However, his determination to provide a better life for his family has remained strong.

Robert and his wife Tammy now have a blended family of six. Robert already had a daughter, Kaylee, from a previous relationship, when he met and married Tammy several years ago. However, until this past summer, Kaylee, now 14, had lived with her mother since she was 6 years old. When Tammy and Robert met, Tammy also already had two children of her own – Colby, now 11, and Abby, now 6. Robert legally adopted Abby when she was 2 years old, and has played an active role in Colby's life as his stepfather. Tammy and Robert also have a 1-year-old son together named Asher.

With a strong belief that learning takes place both at school and home, Robert and Tammy have played an active role in their children's education. However, a few years ago, Colby, who had attended public school from the start, began acting out and struggling when he was in third grade. Robert and Tammy were desperate to get him back on track before it jeopardized his future. At the same time, the Townsends had very different concerns with Abby, who at the time was just beginning Pre-K. Thanks to the early education she received at home, Abby could already read and write – but it soon became clear that she was much more advanced than her classmates. Robert and Tammy feared that the momentum and educational gains that Abby had would be lost if she was not placed in an environment that would challenge and engage her. Their concerns prompted them to research other options and they learned about the AAA Scholarship Program, which would give them the opportunity to choose the right school for their children. The family was approved to receive the scholarships and they enrolled Abby and Colby in Peachtree Academy. Shortly after, Robert and Tammy's worries subsided as they saw the positive changes in their children.

Both Colby and Abby are now preparing to enter their third year on the scholarship program – and they have both grown leaps and bounds. Colby, who was testing in the 50th percentile when he first entered his parent-selected school, is now testing in the 75th percentile and has even won awards recognizing his academic turnaround over the last two years. He has also become an honor roll student, earned a student of the month award, and played on the elementary football team.

Given the right academic environment, Abby's true potential has shown through as well. Advanced from the start, she is now testing in the 99th percentile in the state for her grade level. She has also participated in the school's plays and other musical productions, along with Colby.

For the first year on the scholarship program, both Abby and Colby attended Peachtree Academy and the Townsends are very grateful for the educational gains and opportunities the school gave them. This past school year, however, they began attending Young Americans Christian School. The school's environment matches their family's faith while also providing a challenging curriculum to ensure they continue to reach their full potential. The Townsends also like the strong emphasis the school places on graduation and higher education, as well as service work, such as the mission trip the senior class takes every year to places like Haiti.

With his other children excelling in school, Robert received another piece of great news when he learned that his oldest daughter, Kaylee, wanted to come live with him. Kaylee is well aware of the struggles that her father faced growing up and understands the value of a good education. As a result, she has done very well in school. Kaylee was inspired by the positive changes that her younger siblings were demonstrating and felt that moving to her father's would provide her with expanded opportunities. However, as part of the court-ordered custody agreement, Robert was told that if Kaylee came to live with him, he would have to enroll her in private school to ensure that she kept up with her academic progress thus far. An AAA Scholarship made it possible for Robert to afford the tuition and meet this requirement. Kaylee moved to Robert's home this summer and will begin attending Young Americans Christian School with Colby and Abby this fall.

"I was not given the opportunity to further my education, but now, thanks to the AAA Scholarship, my children do have that chance," says Robert. "As a parent, that means the world to me and I am very grateful to those that make it all possible."

About AAA Scholarship Foundation

The typical AAA Scholarship student is an ethnic minority living with a struggling single parent/caregiver in a high crime community. The average household income of families accepted to receive scholarships is \$23,559 for a family of four. Many children are either below grade level, failing at their previous school or both when they receive a scholarship. Parents, who find their children in these circumstances and care about their future, look for viable options. They seek an atmosphere that challenges their child to reverse inadequate learning and/or social patterns and the potential lifelong negative impact. They wish to change their child's learning environment, acquaintances, and the unfortunate predictable outcomes associated with school failure.

AAA Scholarships are funded in Alabama, Arizona, Georgia and Pennsylvania by corporations that redirect a portion of their state tax liability to the AAA Scholarship Foundation in exchange for a tax credit (dollar for dollar in Alabama, Arizona and Georgia and up to 90 percent in Pennsylvania). The AAA Scholarship Foundation is the only 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and approved Scholarship Organization exclusively serving eligible, low-income children through these Scholarship Tax Credit. AAA Scholarship Foundation provides your company with the convenience and efficiency of a single-solution for participating in multiple state tax credit scholarship programs. For more information or to learn how your corporation can participate in the program, visit www.AAAScholarships.org, or contact Kerri Vaughan at kerri@aaascholarships.org or 888 707-2465 ext. 730.