

# Creating Pathways for Positive Development: The Ronald Phillips Story



This story was commissioned by the United Nations Children's Fund in collaboration with the Government of Belize. UNICEF gratefully recognizes the work of the Center for Social Well-Being and Development at the Milken Institute School of Public Health, The George Washington University (GWU), for producing this narrative.

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## One Story, Two Paths

This story shows how the well-being of children and women in Belize is the result of a process. The process of child development is like the growth of a tree, or the building of a house. It takes time, and depends on many interconnected factors at each stage of growth. It is also cumulative – what happens at one stage affects later stages. If you deprive a young tree of nutrients, its growth will be hampered. If you build a house with a weak foundation, or with poor quality materials, that house may experience leaks and problems, and may be the first to blow down in a storm.

The same is true for children. If a child doesn't receive adequate nutrition as an infant, this may impair brain development or physical growth, which can hurt school performance and affect the child's ability to pay attention in school. When older, this can affect his or her ability to find good employment and support a family. Lack of good nutrition as a child also can lead to long-term emotional or health problems as an adult.

Here is the basic message: There are many connections involved in how a child develops and learns over time. At each stage, there are many factors that can support or hinder a child's development at many levels. Some factors may be individual, others may have to do with the community, and others may be connected to broader societal issues (for example, poverty and discrimination). Lack of adequate nutrition for a child may be the result of poverty, which may be the result of limited access to employment for his or her parents. Or it may be due to a lack of infant and child nutrition education or support programs. If the child has difficulty in school, these problems may continue if there is no one at the school trained to recognize the root of these problems and intervene as early as possible.

There also are special development issues related to girls and young women. If a young girl drops out of school early, it may be due to gender role issues. For example, she may be pressured to take on traditional female roles that don't depend on education. In contrast, boys may drop out of school because they look ahead and see no reason to continue if there are few jobs available that require the skills learned in school.

Recognizing that development is a process, with many factors involved at each stage, is a good start towards taking action that promotes successful well-being and development. While starting early is important, providing support along the developmental path is equally important to maintain progress and to ensure that all Belizean children have the best possible chance to thrive.

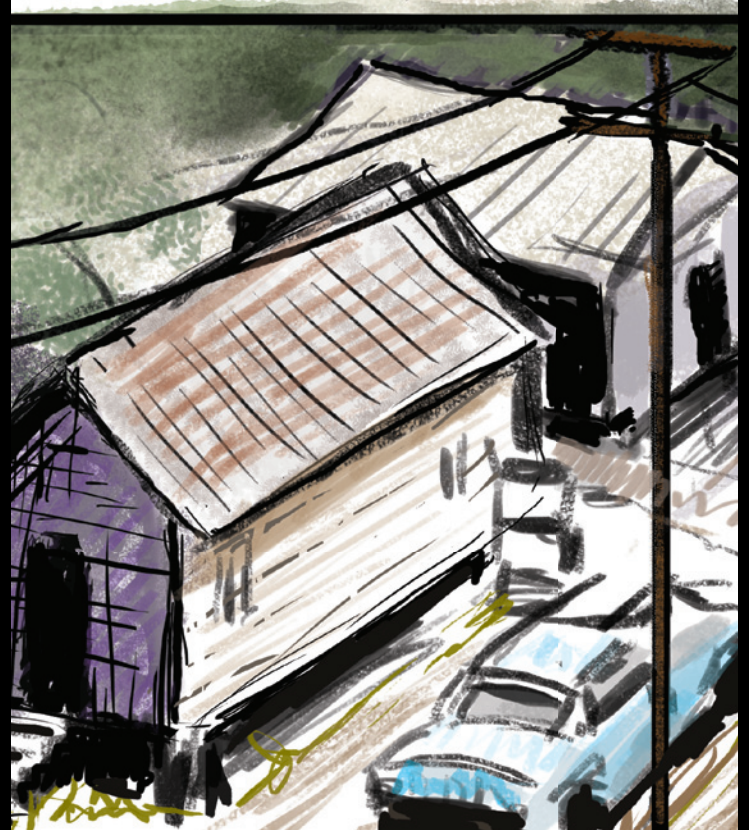
This story presents two possible paths for a young man named Ronald who lives in Southside Belize City. One path reveals circumstances faced by Ronald that are not addressed and lead to negative outcomes. The second path shows life-cycle support points at different levels, and how these altered Ronald's situation in a positive direction.



## Path One: How Ronald Ended Up in Juvenile Detention

This is a story of Ronald's path to being arrested, when there are few if any supports available throughout his life cycle. As you read, think about the supports that could have changed Ronald's and his family's situation at different points.

Ronald Phillips was the second son born to Mattie Phillips in a neighborhood called Water Street in Southside Belize City. Mattie was in a difficult situation. She drank a little too much, and couldn't keep a job, especially after she became pregnant. She had dropped out of school at age 15 and didn't have many job skills.



When Ronald was born at Karl Heusner Hospital, Mattie was asked why she did not have any prenatal visits or counseling. She didn't know about those services, and didn't know that her drinking could cause harm to Ronald even before he was born.

Mattie didn't have an easy time with baby Ronald. She was staying at a friend's house, and did not have much money for food or to help pay rent. Ronald's father, Charles, came by once in a while with money, but it wasn't enough. As an infant, Ronald was often irritable, though he also could be curious and playful. Often, he was hungry. He may have suffered some fetal damage from Mattie's drinking, contributing to his irritability.





When Ronald was five, his father, Charles, was shot and killed in a gambling argument. There would be no more money from him. Now, Mattie had to depend on herself, because even her mother was angry at her and wouldn't give her much help. Mattie had trouble finding work, and there was no training program in Water Street to learn new job skills. She had to do what she could for money, including selling sex. All these troubles made Ronald distracted when he was at school. And Ronald got angry when he thought about what happened to his father.

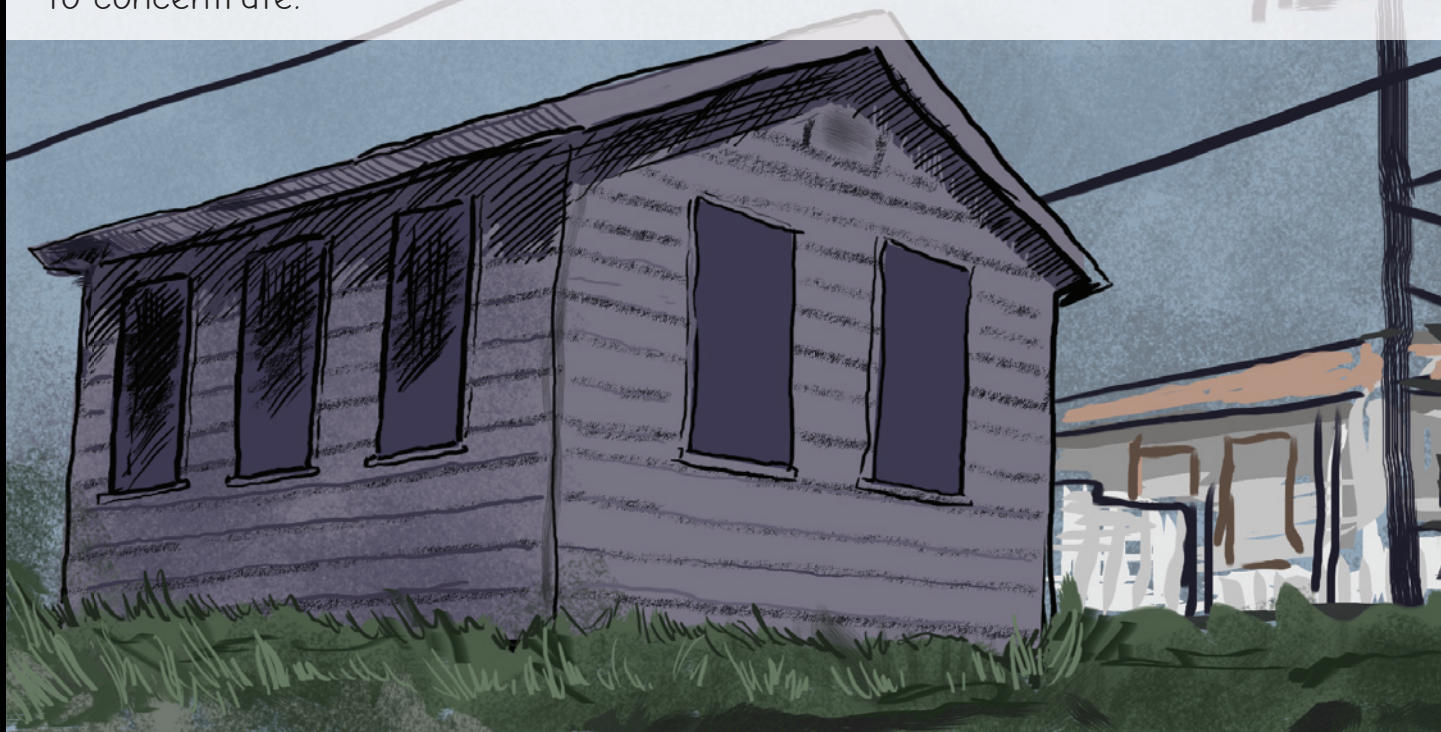
When Ronald was 11 years old, his mother, Mattie, began to disappear from their house for days at a time. She looked weak and thin, and people whispered that she had AIDS. She was ashamed and did not know what to do.

One day, Mattie just left, nowhere to be found. At age 12, Ronald had to go live with his grandmother.





His grandmother's house was full of holes and leaked water. She couldn't always pay the electricity bill, so at night it was hard for Ronald to do homework without light. And it was always crowded. There were just too many people in there to find a space to concentrate.

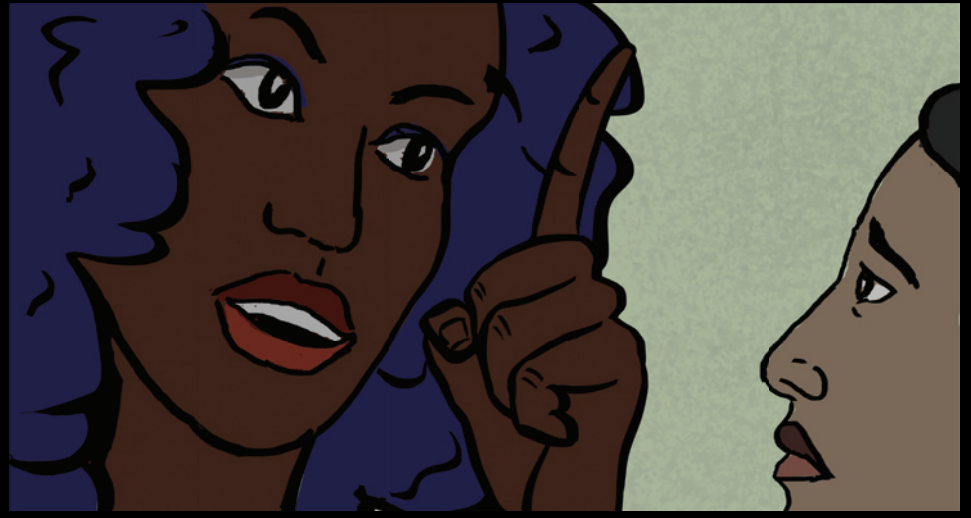
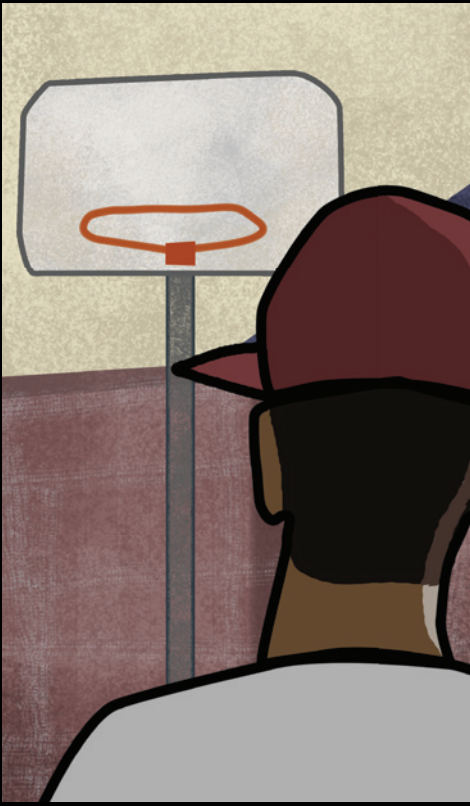


To help pay for things, Ronald began taking on odd jobs where he could find them. The only businesses in his neighborhood were a bar, a small carryout restaurant, a hair weave salon, and a small market. He made a little cash by delivering carryout food on his bicycle.

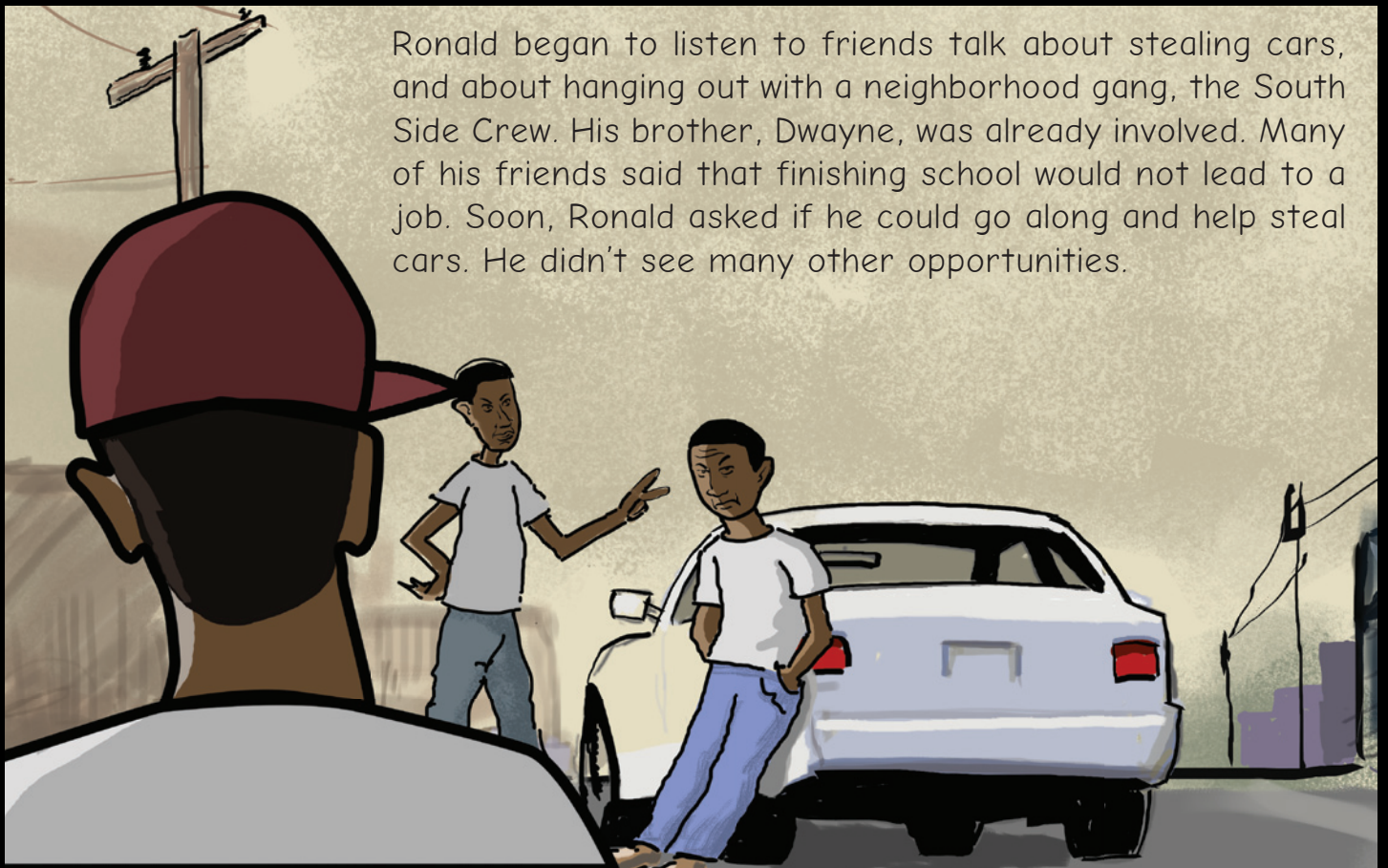




Without much money, Ronald's grandmother couldn't pay his school fees, so he began to skip school. When he did attend, he was criticized for not being prepared and for wearing a dirty uniform. But who was around to help him prepare?

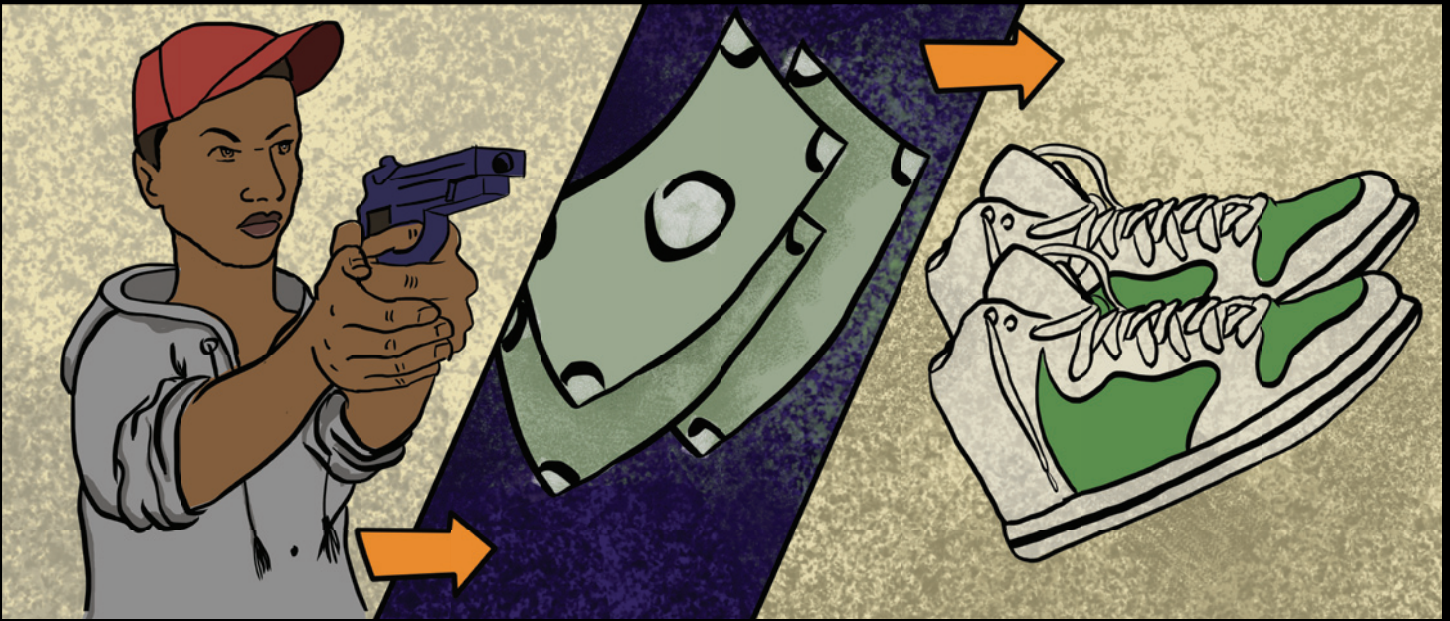


After school, there was nothing to do in the neighborhood. Once, there was a basketball program at the small, local Episcopal school, but without funding, it closed. The basketball court was overgrown with weeds, and people used it for drug deals until they put a chain-link fence around it.



Ronald began to listen to friends talk about stealing cars, and about hanging out with a neighborhood gang, the South Side Crew. His brother, Dwayne, was already involved. Many of his friends said that finishing school would not lead to a job. Soon, Ronald asked if he could go along and help steal cars. He didn't see many other opportunities.





Before long, Ronald was getting involved in more than stealing cars. He carried a gun during a robbery. For doing that, other young men involved in the robbery gave him \$100BZ. With this money, Ronald bought himself his first ever new pair of shoes. Then he just stopped going to school. Life on the street made more sense.

Ronald met a 15-year-old girl from the neighborhood. She became pregnant and dropped out of school like him. Ronald's grandmother used to complain when he started getting involved with the local gang and crime. Now he brings home at least \$100BZ a week and she doesn't complain any more. With no positive supports at home or school, he is now entrenched in the street life.

The shock came when, one morning, the police came looking for Ronald. They pushed him up against the wall and handcuffed him. An hour later, he was in a juvenile facility, locked up. As he stared at the wall, Ronald wondered, "How did I get here?"



## Path Two: How Ronald Succeeded in Avoiding Juvenile Detention





As you know, Ronald Phillips was the second son born to Mattie Phillips in a neighborhood called Water Street in Southside Belize City. By the time she was pregnant with Ronald, Mattie's situation was already difficult in the ways described earlier.



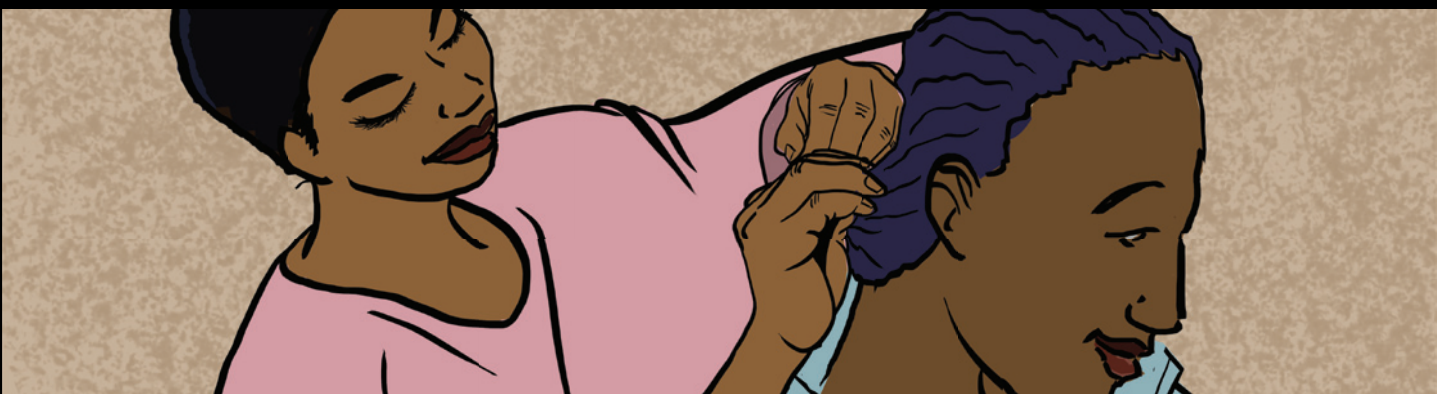
But there was a helping hand. Matron Roberts Clinic had a prenatal care outreach program. One day, Mattie talked to one of their staff when they were in the neighborhood. The Clinic's staff let her know about the importance of prenatal care, and screened her for health risks, which showed that she had a drinking problem. Because of this, Mattie was able to begin a counseling program for alcohol abuse. So, when Ronald was born at Karl Heusner Hospital, the staff was pleased to see that she had completed most of her prenatal care visits. Ronald was born a healthy baby. He did not display signs of irritability.







Mattie didn't have an easy time providing for baby Ronald. She was staying at a friend's house, and did not have much money for food or to help pay rent. Ronald's father, Charles, came by once in a while with money, but it wasn't enough. Mattie began to think of any way she could make a little money, including going to bars and seeing if there were men who would pay her for sex. She had done that before when there was no other way to get money, but she hated the idea that she would have to do it again.



Once again, there was a helping hand. One day at the grocery store, Mattie saw a poster about a training program to get a hair braiding and cosmetology license. A high school degree was not required. She always felt she had some good ideas when it came to hair and style, and this was a chance to make some money with her talents. Although Mattie was not sure she could do it, she attended the first session which went well.

In three months, Mattie completed the program, got her certificate, and in another few weeks began working at a style shop. It was enough money to put food on the table and cover basic bills, and to pay for some of the pre-school and primary school fees for Ronald. Best of all, she was home at night and could keep an eye on Ronald and his older brother.

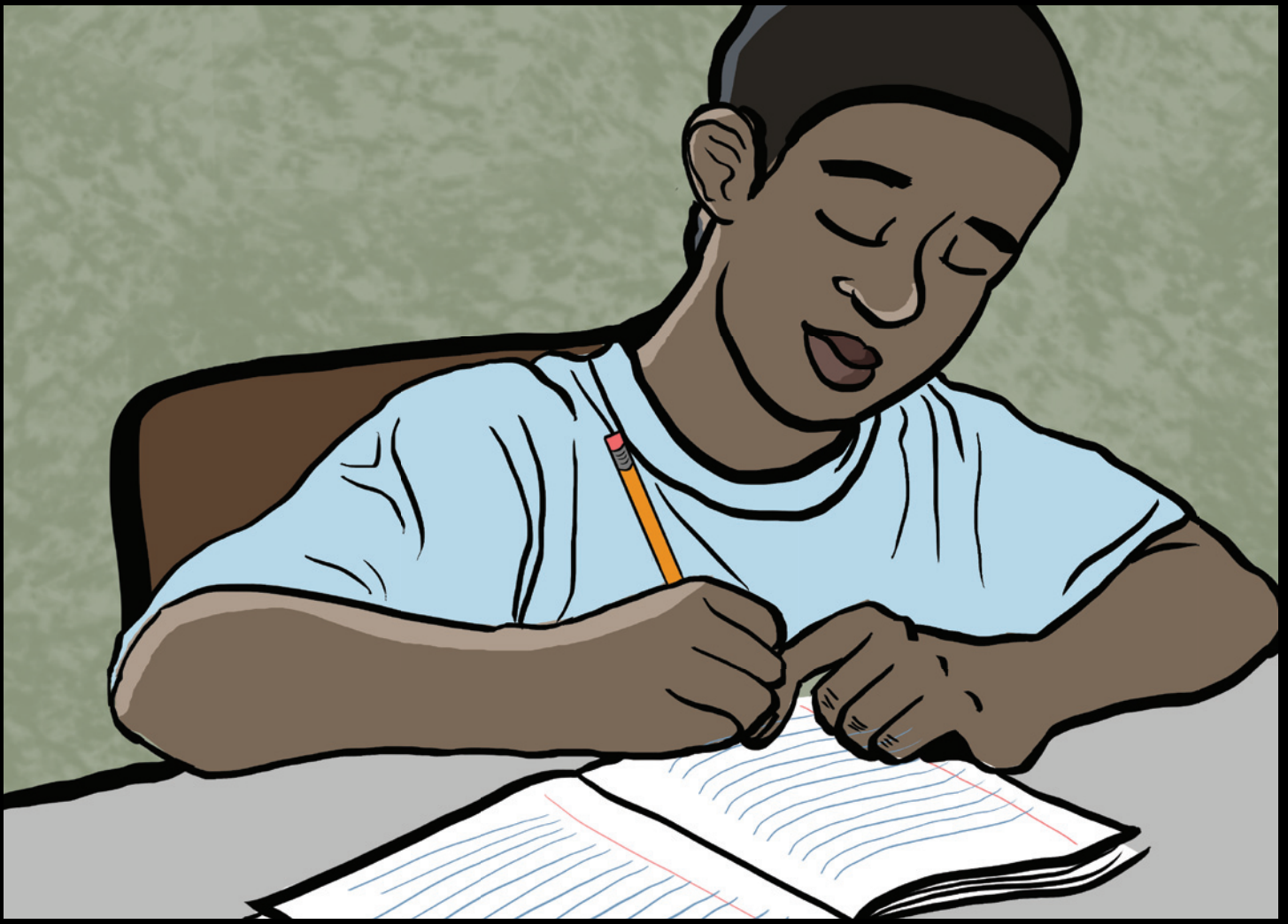
A few years later, though, Mattie began to feel ill off and on. She was worried. She had heard about AIDS, and was ashamed to even think about it. But she also knew that she could have been exposed. One evening, she heard an HIV/AIDS outreach worker talking to people in the neighborhood. The outreach worker said that there was no shame in being HIV-infected, that it could happen to anyone. He also said that the Hand in Hand Ministry had a program where you could be tested for HIV and get needed medicine.



"We all have to work together to stop this thing. And think of it this way, if you come in and get help, you are helping a lot of other people in the process by setting an example, a good example."

Mattie thought about what the outreach worker said. The next day, she went to get tested. Though she was HIV-positive, she was put on an anti-retroviral therapy program that improved her condition a lot. Mattie told her sons that she was on medication, but that she would be alright. For Ronald, this meant he still had his mother at home.





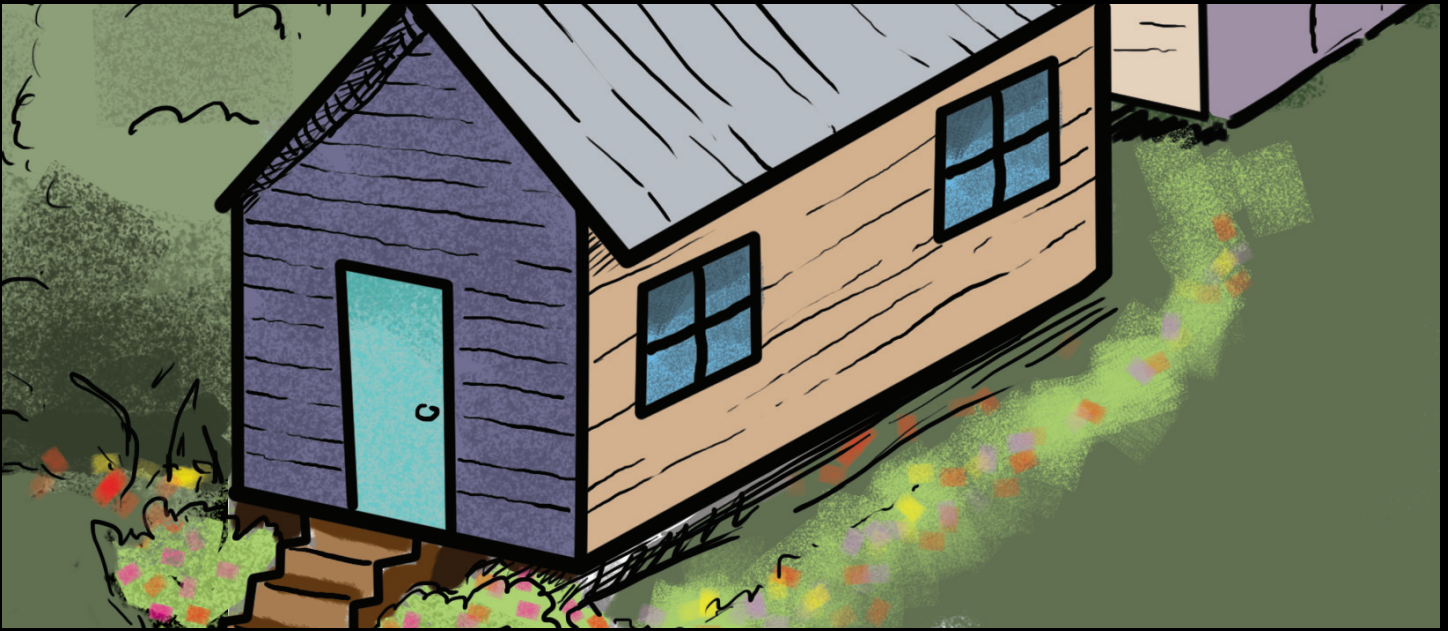
Ronald was beginning to do well in school, but he – and other youth his age – faced a tough situation every day. There was nothing to do after school. The neighborhood basketball court was fenced and overgrown. Some of Ronald's friends were selling drugs or stealing. He knew it when they showed him money. It was very tempting. Ronald also could see that the kids who had some money got respect.





But sometimes, if there are good opportunities available in the community, selling drugs does not look so attractive. A few of these kinds of opportunities were beginning to appear in Water Street. When the Neighborhood Institute for Excellence (an after-school program) began to offer music and recreation programs to youth, with adults supervising, Ronald took notice.

He asked his mother if he could join and she said yes. The program staff even convinced Ronald's mother to attend literacy classes. He made new friends at the Institute. The more Ronald participated in these programs, the less time he spent hanging out where there were gangs and drug-dealing.



At home, Ronald, his brother, Dwayne, and their mother, Mattie, continue to talk about the situations they face. Mattie remains determined to keep her sons away from gangs, as difficult as that may be. But when they talk, all of them agree that something is going on, that there is help available, and that Water Street is changing.

At age 15, Ronald is still in school, doing well, and he is not involved in gangs or other serious risks that he might have confronted without the help he received.



# How Support Over the Life Cycle Changed Ronald Phillips' Path

Ronald's mother receives prenatal care and counseling. Ronald is born a healthy baby.



**Prenatal outreach program**

Ronald's mother completes a cosmetology training program and begins work at a style shop.



**Second chance education opportunities**

Ronald's mother receives HIV/AIDS counseling and treatment.



**HIV outreach, education, increased access to services & medicines**

Ronald participates in music and recreation programs. His mother starts literacy classes.



**After school programs with adult supervision**

Ronald's mother continues to try to keep her children safe and comfortable. Ronald performs well in school and remains uninvolved in gangs or crime.

