



FAMILY REUNION

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GREG PINKNEY



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**Greg Pinkney wanted desperately to be a good father. But first he had to get his son back.** It had been barely five hours since 19 year-old Greg Pinkney had told his girlfriend that he wanted to break up when he got a text message from her with some startling news. “She said she was pregnant,” he recalls. “It’s a real shock to be that age and realize you’re going to be a father.”

After Gregory Jr. was born, Mr. Pinkney and his former girlfriend shared care for their child with some help from their parents and grandparents. Over time, Mr. Pinkney says, he began to take on the lion’s share of the parenting duties, as his son’s mom would come for him less and less frequently. But everything changed abruptly not long after Gregory turned one, when the mother took the child and refused to let Mr. Pinkney come near him.

Mr. Pinkney looked into hiring a lawyer to help him get his son back, but found he couldn’t both pay for a lawyer and support his son financially. Determined, he took matters into his own hands, going to the courthouse where he figured out how to file a complaint against his son’s mother. “You don’t see a lot of fathers stepping up to care for their children,” he says. “I couldn’t turn my back on my son. It was important to me to be in his life.”

Eventually Mr. Pinkney sought help from MVLS. “He enjoyed being a father and was willing to fight for it,” says MVLS volunteer Jason Ridgell, an attorney with Fishbein & Fishbein, P.A. “He was the most prepared MVLS client I’ve ever had.”

That preparation paid off when the case went to court. After hearing testimony from the child’s parents and from witnesses, the judge awarded primary physical and legal custody to Mr. Pinkney. “As soon as the words were out of the judge’s mouth it felt like the heaviest weight had been lifted,” Mr. Pinkney says. “It was a good feeling.”

Mr. Ridgell says that the one-sidedness of the decision resulted from the mother’s unwillingness to agree to any kind of compromise and from the high level of maturity with which his client handled himself in court. “The judge felt the child had a better chance in life if sole custody went to Greg,” says Mr. Ridgell. “The decision was the right one.”

To celebrate, Mr. Pinkney, who has a job with a temp agency and is taking classes at a local community college, decided to take the next day off. He spent the day playing in the yard with his son.

