

# Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens

## The Neediest Cases Campaign Stories 2013-2014

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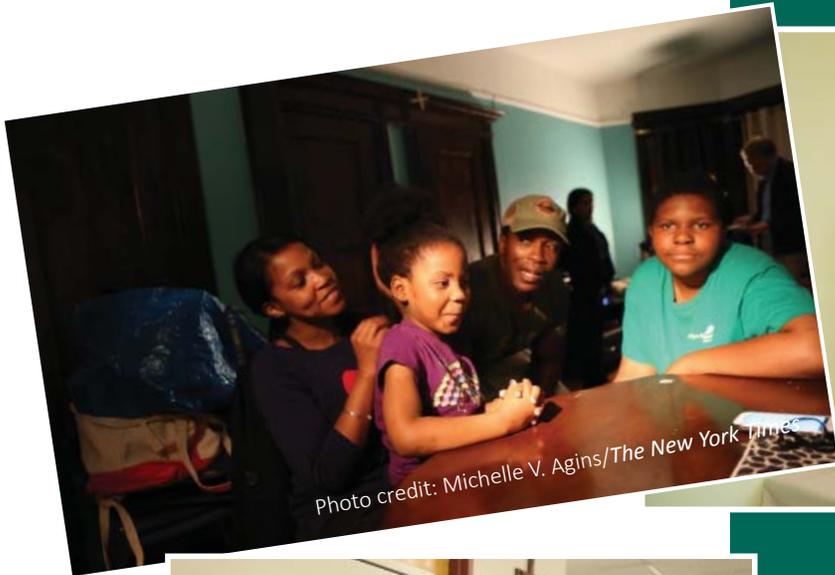


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Through our partnership with *The New York Times* Neediest Cases Campaign, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens has improved the lives of countless of our neighbors from all walks of life - turning despair into hope.

## *Raising a Sick Daughter Was Hard Enough, Then They Lost Their Jobs*

By JOHN OTIS

Published: November 13, 2013



Photo credit: Michelle V. Agins/*The New York Times*

*Natilee McSween and her husband, Andre McSween, with their two children, Megan, 7, and Avery, 14. Megan was born with a severe kidney ailment and has undergone several operations.*



When Megan McSween learned her second-grade class was scheduled to take a walk across the Brooklyn Bridge, she was ecstatic. Until her parents told her she would not be able to go.

Disappointment is not unfamiliar to Megan, who is 7. It is the cost of living with a health condition that can make seemingly simple acts of adventure a source of severe discomfort. "She understands there are certain things she can't do," said her mother, Natilee McSween. "I don't sugarcoat things with her, because if I do, she'll be more upset later on in life. So I'd rather tell her from the jump what's going on."

Megan was born with a severe case of hydronephrosis, literally "water inside the kidney," a condition caused by the obstruction of the flow of urine from the kidney. The disorder, which requires Megan to eat a special diet of organic foods and formulas, often induces fatigue and intense pain. Her parents' efforts to curb the ill effects of Megan's illness mean that she must sometimes miss out on certain kinds of fun.

"She loves to ride her scooter and her bike, but we have to limit that," Ms. McSween said. "We also tried swimming lessons, but that had to stop."

In Megan's first eight months of life, she underwent an equal number of operations. Ms. McSween said doctors told the family that her condition would improve as she got older, but it was not the case. The

entire family, including Megan's father, Andre, and her brother, Avery, now 14, have since grown accustomed to a schedule filled with doctor's appointments, lab tests and operations.

In July 2011, the McSweens had to adapt again.

Ms. McSween, an administrative assistant, was laid off from the job she had held at Brooklyn Hospital Center for four and a half years. "It was a very nerve-racking thing," she said. "I've never been unemployed, ever. I've worked since I was 14 years old."

Around the same time, the Supplemental Security Insurance payments Megan had been receiving since birth were discontinued, the result of a clerical error. The McSweens have reapplied, and the case is under review.

The family faced further adversity in March 2012, when Mr. McSween lost the catering job he had held for 10 years at the Gansevoort Hotel, because of downsizing.

With both breadwinners unemployed, the family was in financial straits.

Andre McSween said at the time that his biggest concern was not how to pay the bills, but how the new burdens would affect his daughter's health.

The couple's shared unemployment lasted only a few months. After a year out of work, Ms. McSween was hired as an administrative assistant for volunteer services at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in July 2012. Mr. McSween's current income is the \$1,544 he receives in unemployment insurance benefits each month.

This year, complications related to Megan's hydronephrosis required her to undergo surgery. Medical bills began mounting. It became a challenge for the McSweens to make their \$1,400 monthly rent payments.

With the help of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, one of the seven agencies supported by *The New York Times* Neediest Cases Fund, \$400 was used to

cover rental arrears, allowing the McSweens to remain in their Brooklyn apartment.

Mr. McSween continues to look for a new job, and said that he had been able to land some freelance catering work. "I miss that stable paycheck," he admitted. In the absence of full-time employment, his main responsibility is taking care of his daughter.

She may not be able to run and play as actively as her peers, but Megan finds plenty of joy playing with her Barbie dolls, taking care of Blu, the family cat, drawing and occasionally getting into her mother's makeup. "We try to keep her childhood as normal as possible, with her condition," Ms. McSween said.

***“She loves to ride her scooter and her bike, but we have to limit that,” Ms. McSween said. “We also tried swimming lessons, but that had to stop.”***

## Starting Over After Hurricane Sandy

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD  
Published: November 15, 2013



As Hurricane Sandy approached, Joseph Duodu, his wife and two daughters evacuated from their home on the Rockaway Peninsula and drove to a motel on Queens Boulevard. The family had packed only an overnight bag with a change of clothes because they thought they would be back home the next day. They ended up living in the motel for five months. Mr. Duodu returned to his ground-floor apartment in a two-story house the day after the storm. The house was still standing, but water had destroyed nearly everything: furniture, appliances, computers, disk drives and textbooks, which Mr. Duodu uses in his work as a teacher. He and his wife managed to salvage only some clothing and a few photographs. “We had to start from scratch,” he said.

FEMA paid for five months of rent at the apartment and for the motel stay, but it did not replace the Duodos lost belongings. They moved back home in March, after their landlord renovated the apartment. The two girls slept on a bed that was donated by their church; Mr. Duodu and his wife slept on a surviving mattress. In August, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, an organization supported by *The New York Times* Neediest Cases Fund, gave Mr. Duodu \$800 to buy a dresser and bunk beds for the girls and a \$500 Target gift card. A year later, Mr. Duodu doesn’t like to dwell on the loss. “We have a bed to sleep on, some chairs to sit on; we’re building gradually,” he said.

*Donations to The Times’s Neediest Cases Fund go to seven charities: Brooklyn Community Services; Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York; Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens; the Children’s Aid Society; the Community Service Society of New York; the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies; and the UJA-Federation of New York. To help, please send a check to: The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund, 4 Chase Metrotech Center, 7th Floor East, Lockbox 5193, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11245. Or call (800) 381-0075 and use a credit card.*



## *Mission Statement*



*Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens translates the Gospel of Jesus Christ into action by affirming the dignity and value of every person, especially the most vulnerable members of our diverse society. Catholic Charities develops effective responses to human need and joins with all people of good will in advocating for a social order which promotes justice and embraces human development.*

## *After Two Decades, a Shrinking Salary at a Job She Loved*

By JOHN OTIS

Published: November 23, 2013



Photo credit: Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times

*Nicole Bouchotte, a school bus matron, began making \$210 less per month after she and her co-workers went on a monthlong strike this year and her hours were later scaled back. Ms. Bouchotte, 61, expects to lose her job at the end of the year.*



Police cars were blocking the entrance to the bus yard in Brooklyn when Nicole Bouchotte, 61, arrived at work one day last January. It was at that moment, so early on a cold weekday morning that the sun had

yet to rise, that she learned that her union, Local 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, was on strike.

Ms. Bouchotte had been a school bus matron for Atlantic Bus Escorts Inc. for nearly 20 years. The monthlong strike during the winter of 2013 began a salary contraction that continues to impact her life today.

“Before the strike, I was always on a tight budget because I’m a single woman,” said Ms. Bouchotte, who has lived alone ever since her husband died of a heart attack six years ago.

Even worse than being out of work was hearing the harsh criticisms of her job and its duties.

“I was very angry,” she said. “It was the way people talked about bus drivers and matrons. The worst part was people minimizing what we are doing. I wish I could have stood up and said to them, ‘At 5 in the morning, I pick up your child. You don’t know me; you go by faith. This is your child. You give me your life. And now you think I’m no good? I’m not worth it? If I’m not that worth it, how come every day we have all those kids in our hands? Tell me!’ ”

Ms. Bouchotte and her co-workers picketed for several weeks, only to have their paychecks reduced once the two sides came to an agreement. She had once earned a biweekly salary of \$620. Once the company had scaled back its employees' hours, Ms. Bouchotte began making \$210 less per month.

When Atlantic filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy recently, Ms. Bouchotte grew more concerned for her future. Those fears were realized in mid-November, when she received a letter from her employer informing her that everyone in her department would be let go at the end of the year, though negotiations are pending.

The news stung; Ms. Bouchotte loved her job.

"When I am on the bus, we are not matron and driver, we are father and mother," she said. "The kids talk to you about everything."

Ms. Bouchotte entered the field in 1995, two decades after emigrating from Haiti to the United States, where she met her husband and later gave birth to their son.

Tragedies in her past drove Ms. Bouchotte to the realization that family is of the utmost importance. She has lost two brothers over the years, one to brain cancer, the other to gun violence.

"The way I am is the way everybody is behind me," she said, explaining that her mother and two sisters rely on her strength. "If I'm cheerful, everybody is O.K."

***“When I am on the bus, we are not matron and driver, we are father and mother,” she said. “The kids talk to you about everything.”***

Four years ago, one of her sisters suffered a massive heart attack. During her hospital stay, a medical procedure used to help repair her heart ended up destroying both of her kidneys; Ms. Bouchotte's sister now required dialysis three times week.

"So I am her rock," she said. "I cannot be down. I have to always be cheerful for her. But in the middle of the night, when I get to my apartment, this is where I can be myself."

She finds solace in a hobby she has had for years, a place for her to leave all her secrets.

"My best friend is my sewing machine," said Ms. Bouchotte, who sews dresses and curtains, among other items. "I talk to her.

She knows everything. This is my habit. When everything is dark, I make a pattern."

That flinty facade could not stave off a persistent landlord when Ms. Bouchotte fell behind on her rent. Unwilling to trouble her son, who she said was "living his own life," Ms. Bouchotte borrowed from friends. She then sought out Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, one of the agencies supported by *The New York Times* Neediest Cases Fund, which provided \$442 from the fund for her to clear her arrears.

"If someone told me 10 years ago I'd be going someplace for charity, I'd say 'no!' " Ms. Bouchotte said. "Look at me now."

While she remains unsure of her next move, her caseworker from Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens has been helping her explore career options. Ms. Bouchotte remains resilient.

"I'm a woman of faith," she said. "I do not let myself go crazy. I know I will survive."

## *After Caring for Her Mother, Then Her Husband, an Ailing Woman, 91, Is Alone*

By PHILIP RICHARDSON

Published: December 23, 2013



Photo credit: Michael Nagle /The New York Times

*Ida Carrano, in Brooklyn, uses a lot of electricity; she is ill and needs a humidifier and a nebulizer to be able to breathe easily.*



Ida Carrano's life is powered by electricity.

Thirteen years ago, she received her first pacemaker, a tiny device implanted in her chest to send small electrical signals to her heart, ensuring it pumps properly.

Mrs. Carrano, 91, has a long list of ailments, including congestive heart failure, chronic bronchitis and macular degeneration. She is homebound, in a tiny apartment in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, with few windows, dependent on a home health aide and a constant flow of wattage to power her lights and breathing machines.

"When my lights are out, my neighbors know I'm in the hospital," she said.

To breathe comfortably, she requires a humidifier and six daily breathing treatments with a compressed air nebulizer, administered by Maria, her home health aide. Maria lives with Mrs. Carrano three days each week, assisting with household activities, including the preparation of her meals, which often require the use of a blender, for items too tough for Mrs. Carrano to chew.

In September, Mrs. Carrano was behind on her electricity bill, and Consolidated Edison was threatening to disconnect her service. "I need electricity. The humidifier. The blender. I would die if I didn't have the inhaler. Even though I won't be around for much longer, maybe."

Mrs. Carrano is a widow who spent most of her marriage, and her savings, caring for her husband, Vincenzo, before his death in 2007.

"He said, 'I'da, no matter how sick I get, do not put me in a nursing home.' And I never did."

The Carranos were an unconventional couple for their generation. Ida grew up in the heart of Greenwich Village, sharing an apartment on Christopher Street with her mother and brothers. In her 20s, she briefly worked as a seamstress for a company that made bras and girdles in Midtown, but she left the job after World War II began.

"When the war broke out, my mother took it very bad because her two sons went over to the Pacific. I had to stay with her."

She did so for the next 20 years, before meeting Mr. Carrano, who worked in a Greenwich Village supermarket. He asked her out on a coffee date while she was doing her shopping. "He was handsome, but I assumed he was married," she said. In fact,

***"He said, 'I'da, no matter how sick I get, do not put me in a nursing home.' And I never did."***

Mr. Carrano was a widower; his first wife had died of cancer.

The couple dated for four years and married in 1966, when Ida was 44. Soon after they were married, the couple moved to Brooklyn, but Mrs. Carrano's mother fell ill again, and she returned to Greenwich Village to care for her.

"He was a bachelor for me," Mrs. Carrano said. "He was married, but not with a wife."

It was seven years before she returned to her husband, after her mother died. The couple had no children.

Since her husband's death, her own health has been in steady decline. She has been in and out of NYU Langone Medical Center for the past two years with several bouts of pneumonia and blood clots. In 2010, she had a hernia operation that required months of physical therapy before she could walk again, something she does with caution and rarely beyond the reach of her walker.

The sudden spike in her electricity use puts added pressure on an already strained income. Mrs. Carrano currently receives \$1,361 a month in Social Security benefits and \$200 in food stamps. Her monthly rent is \$1,000, her utilities average about \$60 and she also pays \$200 for a Medicare supplement through AARP.

She found help from Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, one of the seven organizations supported by *The New York Times* Neediest Cases Fund, and received \$202 toward her Con Edison bill. She was also given \$202.51 to cover the rest of the bill through the Alive in Hope Fund.

With the bill paid and so much solitary time at home, Mrs. Carrano has begun to relax, granting herself time to watch the local television news and to listen to her favorite singers: Tony Bennett, Perry Como and Frank Sinatra. "I love music, but not from your time," she said. "They scream today."

Reflecting on a life spent caring for others in her family, only to find herself in the care of strangers, she said: "I miss my people, and the friends of mine who have already died. It's terrible to be alone."

## *A Mother Faces More Travails After the Loss of a Son*

By ANDREW BORYGA

Published: January 13, 2014



*Martha Rodriguez's son, Alexander Espinal-Rodriguez, a talented dancer, died during a family visit to the Dominican Republic.*



"Active" is the word Martha Rodriguez, 55, uses to describe her son, Alexander Espinal-Rodriguez.

By age 12, Mr. Espinal-Rodriguez had studied cello, piano, karate and salsa dancing, and had joined a swim team, before stumbling on his true passion, ballet.

"He loved the challenge," his older sister, Ilusion Rodriguez, 31, said in the family's Brooklyn apartment. "He enjoyed pleasing his mentors and surpassing their expectations of him."

A collection of taped performances spliced together by a former instructor at the Abrons Arts

Center on the Lower East Side, where Mr. Espinal-Rodriguez often performed, shows a handsome, smiling young man, prancing powerfully across the stage in "Billy the Kid," "Little Shop of Horrors" and "The Nutcracker," among other productions.

"He was a shooting star," his mother said.

Ms. Rodriguez was born in Rincón de Piedras, a rural campo in the Dominican Republic two hours south of Santiago. At 20, she left for Brooklyn, where she taught herself English and raised four children on her own.

She never forgot her roots and, when finances allowed, she made annual trips back home for family reunions. Her children eagerly awaited the gatherings, particularly Mr. Espinal-Rodriguez.

"He was in love with the land," she said of her son's fondness for the small campo. "He loved the freedom and talked of building a house there one day."

In August 2011, the Rodriguez family attended a reunion in Rincón de Piedras that included mounds of food, about 500 family members and dancing late into the night.

Early the next morning, members of the family traveled to a nearby river, where Mr. Espinal-Rodriguez, eager to swim, kissed his mother on the cheek and jumped in with a younger sister and a cousin.

Not 15 minutes later, a strong current dragged him under the water. Cousins pulled him out, and family members tried without success to resuscitate him. He was rushed to three separate doctors, his lifeless body stretched across the laps of family members in the back seat of the car. One hospital was unstaffed; another simply refused to treat an American citizen.

It was four hours before he was pronounced dead, at a clinic in San José de Las Matas, a small municipality of Santiago and a two-hour drive from where he drowned. Mr. Espinal-Rodriguez was 20.

In the absence of adequate embalming facilities, the family held a rushed funeral in a Rincón

de Piedras church that same day. A coffin was hastily chosen and lined with coffee beans to mask the smell of Mr. Espinal-Rodriguez's rapidly decomposing body, so a proper wake could be held. His body was buried in a plot behind the church.

After her son's death, bureaucratic snarls and flight delays stretched a weeklong family trip to three weeks.

Ms. Rodriguez, who works as a part-time property manager for two Brooklyn housing companies, was forced to miss crucial workdays and saddled with steep, unexpected costs by the church and the hospital. "I wasn't prepared for any of it," she said of the fees.

While she was still in Rincón de Piedras, word of Ms. Rodriguez's plight reached New York, and an outpouring of money from friends, dancers and her son's former mentors made it possible for Ms. Rodriguez to cover most of the funeral costs.

When she finally returned to New York, however, a new and unexpected expense was thrust upon her: a \$337 increase in her monthly rent.

It was at this point that she turned for help to Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, one of the organizations supported by *The New York Times* Neediest Cases Fund.

Last May, through the help of the fund, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens provided Ms. Rodriguez with \$500, which she used to pay part of the \$1,262 rent on the apartment in Williamsburg that she shares with her three daughters.

With utilities, and special-needs costs for a daughter with learning disabilities, Ms. Rodriguez's monthly expenses total \$1,900. She earns \$2,000 a month.

"It's hard when you are working to look for that kind of help," said Ms. Rodriguez, who was reluctant to seek assistance at first. "You think, 'I'm working, I shouldn't be here.' "

As of January, Ms. Rodriguez is completely caught up on her rent and will begin paying the remainder of her son's funeral fees. She says the plot where he is buried will be uprooted if she does not pay \$900 within the next two and a half years.

Ms. Rodriguez acknowledges that she has been urged by friends and family to bring her son's remains back to New York, but she firmly believes that everything happens for a reason.

"If I brought Alex's body here, the process of healing would be longer," she said, pausing for a moment.

"No, he belongs there."

## *After Cancer, Tour Guide Plans Next Destination*

By JULIE TURKEWITZ

Published: January 19, 2014



Photo credit: Ozier Muhammad/The New York Times

*Edicson Valderrama has traveled the world for 26 years as a tour guide, but he fell behind on his bills while undergoing treatment for stomach cancer.*



Name a place, and Edicson Valderrama, international tour guide, will give you the story.

Manaus, Brazil: city of rose-colored dolphins, scene of a 19th-century rubber boom and site of the so-called jewel of the jungle, a giant pink opera house. Japan: Its people are "strong, noble, very smart" and always ahead of the technology game. Vienna: home of Beethoven and Mozart, and "the best place to fall in love." Andorra: a tiny nation so tight-knit that "people leave their keys in the car."

For 26 years, Mr. Valderrama has traveled the world, chaperoning fellow sojourners to Bangkok, Tokyo, Milan, Paris. He has lived in 14 countries and has visited 29.

Along the way, Mr. Valderrama, 48, a stocky man with a tempered Elvis coif, has honed his skills as a guide. "There's a song by Roberto Carlos, 'I want to have a million friends,' " he said. "I want to be like the song."

Mr. Valderrama is prone to exclamation (Arches National Park: "Monumental!" The Mojave Desert: "Unbelievable!") and has a talent for detail (eruptions of boiling water from Old Faithful reach an average of 130 feet; sequoias can grow to 300 feet tall.) "You're not a historian, where you get on the bus and just grab the microphone," he said. "You have to entertain people."

He speaks five languages and operates under one core principle: Respect everyone. "Some people in the group are very rich," he explained, "some people barely have the money. But everybody on the bus is the same."

He estimated that he has ferried at least 10,000 people to some of the world's most treasured destinations. Years ago Mr. Valderrama began calling himself Papillon – the French word for butterfly – in reference to his constant ambulations and ability to inspire wonder. The name stuck. On a tour bus, or a boat or a plane, he says to just call him "Papi."

Some years he worked 90, or even 120, days without rest.

In May, while Mr. Valderrama was living in New York, he learned he had stomach cancer. It was his second bout with the disease.

He soon began chemotherapy. "I started the radiation at 4:30 in the morning," he recalled. "Monday one shot, Wednesday one shot, and Friday three shots. Plus the pills."

The treatment lasted from June until October. Stripped of his energy, Mr. Valderrama stopped working, giving only the occasional tour of the city, and his savings quickly were depleted. Medicaid covered some, but not all, of his expenses.

"Financially, I was really down," he said. Then, in September, he contacted Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, one of the seven organizations supported by The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund. The charity secured \$500 from the fund for rental assistance for September.

"I left the office thinking, 'O.K., this is not the end. Close your eyes, feel the salty tears you have and open them again. You see the new road.'"

When that round of treatment ended, Mr. Valderrama told Catholic Charities that he wanted to return to work. (He will undergo another round of chemotherapy beginning in February.) The organization paid the \$63 for a test he had to take to renew his license as a city tour guide. He passed on Dec. 20.

The license will allow him to give tours while he pursues a larger goal: starting a school for aspiring tour guides. "I don't want to travel, at this point, again," he said. "It's a lot of responsibility when you have 50 people on a bus."

He has another goal. Mr. Valderrama has two children and has had many romantic relationships, he said. He has swooned over sunsets and mountains, and has been awed by architecture and technology. But he has never told a woman that he loves her. "I don't lose my hopes," he said. "There will be somebody there."

***“I left the office thinking, ‘O.K., this is not the end. Close your eyes, feel the salty tears you have and open them again. You see the new road.’”***

## 'No Luck' for a Growing Family

By JULIE TURKEWITZ

Published: January 19, 2014



Photo credit: Michelle V. Agins/*The New York Times*

*James Eisenhardt, a former Marine, with his wife, Rukmini Ramkumar, their child, Karina, and her two children from a previous relationship.*



It all started with small talk.

What bus was he taking?

The Q34. She was, too.

Phone numbers were exchanged, and five years later, James Eisenhardt and his wife, Rukmini

Ramkumar, whom he affectionately calls Rose, live in an unassuming apartment in Ozone Park, Queens, with their 1-year-old daughter, Karina, and Ms. Ramkumar's two children from a previous relationship. "Part of the package," Mr. Eisenhardt jokes.

Their living room is sparsely decorated, without a television set. There is a framed photograph of Mr. Eisenhardt at 17, in his Marine Corps uniform.

The same photograph hangs in the couple's bedroom.

Six years serving in the military taught Mr. Eisenhardt, 52, to face family hardships head on. "It's not about me, it's about them - that's my job," he said. "I have to be strong to make that sacrifice."

After losing his job driving for a livery cab company, Mr. Eisenhardt found seasonal work as a commercial driver for FedEx. But the hours were simply not enough. The pressure on him to maintain a stable working life was recently compounded by surprising news: Another baby is on the way, due in May.

"I had no idea," said Ms. Ramkumar, 40, placing a hand on her rounded stomach. "I thought I was going through early menopause, like my mother."

Ms. Ramkumar, with a young child of her own, can no longer seek employment as a babysitter. Her daughter Haimwatti Lall, 20, had to take out loans to attend medical technician training school; her son, Purshdev Lall, is still in high school.

Karina was born prematurely. When they brought her home from the hospital, she slept in a tiny crib that was given to the family by a friend. By that time, Mr. Eisenhardt was out of work, and his Taxi and Limousine Commission driver's license had expired. When the baby outgrew the crib, she slept in between her parents.

"We have no luxuries, everything goes to the house," said Mr. Eisenhardt, referring to the family's food and utility bills.

Mr. Eisenhardt, who has chronic depression and arrhythmia, receives a monthly Social Security disability check of \$1,444. The family's rent is \$1,500.

***“Every day I get up, and I think: ‘Well tomorrow’s another day. Got to turn this corner and see some sunlight.’”***

"We have a long way to go," he said.

For help, Mr. Eisenhardt turned to Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, one of the seven organizations supported by *The New York Times* Neediest Cases Fund. The family received a \$500 Target gift card, paid for by the fund, which they used to buy a convertible crib that turns into a bed, along with new sheets, diapers and baby wipes.

"Even I use the baby wipes," said Mr. Eisenhardt, laughing, as he wrestled with Karina, who was quietly fidgeting in his lap.

Mr. Eisenhardt was able to renew his taxi license with the help of Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Council's support services for veterans.

And three weeks ago, he found a new job driving a livery cab and was able to return to work, though he and Rose had to borrow \$100 to buy him a black suit for the job.

Despite the turnaround a return to work represents, Mr. Eisenhardt is still hoping for something that would provide his family with a more comfortable standard of living. He drives for 10 to 12 hours at a stretch, pays for gas out of his own pocket and mostly relies on his commissions.

***“It’s not about me, it’s about them — that’s my job,” he said. “I have to be strong to make that sacrifice.”***

"It's really hard to predict what your income is going to be," he said.

The family is now focused on finding a new place to live; there is a continuing legal dispute with the landlord, and the family has had problems keeping up with the rent in the past. The possibility of eviction looms.

Mr. Eisenhardt laments the move into the apartment three years ago, and says things have been going downhill ever since. "It's two steps forward, and three steps back."

Ms. Ramkumar agreed. "No luck."

Marriage and children were far from Mr. Eisenhardt's mind five years ago. Today, they are what keep him going. "Every day I get up, and I think: 'Well tomorrow's another day. Got to turn this corner and see some sunlight.'"



To learn more about *The New York Times* Neediest Cases Campaign, please speak with one of our case managers.