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THE NEEDIEST CASES

Outfitting a Young Mother to Proudly Support Her Son

By Jennifer Mascia

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Antonio Bolfo for The New York Times

Jocelyn Morales, 21, of Brooklyn, and her son, Angel. "It wasn't until I had him that I had to be serious about everything," she said. Ms. Morales needed assistance to buy new clothing for work.

Four years ago, Jocelyn Morales's biggest concerns were cheerleading and the science club. Now she has one overriding preoccupation: being a mother.

"He likes to dance and sings just about every song on the radio," Ms. Morales, 21, said of Angel, 2 ½, as he bopped around a pizza parlor in her native Sunset Park, Brooklyn, charming patrons in his wake.

But Angel, the product of a short-lived relationship, did not come into this world easily, and he was not planned. Ms. Morales had just begun her senior year at Abraham Lincoln High School when she learned she was pregnant, and after her older boyfriend found out, he encouraged her to abort.

But "my mother didn't raise me that way," Ms. Morales said. "We're Catholic."

Without her baby's father's participation, she found herself largely alone. "When I told my friends I was pregnant," she said, "they distanced themselves from me. It was just me, my mom and my sister," who still live in the same two-bedroom apartment where Ms. Morales was raised. "They dealt with the mood swings, everything."

To this day, she said, Angel and his father have never met.

"My son has my last name," she said.

Ms. Morales, a onetime honor student, desperately wanted to continue her last year of high school, but unrelenting morning sickness made that impossible and she was forced to withdraw. "I had a choice," she said, "and I chose to be a parent."

But after the birth she sunk into a two-year depression. She never thought about the future when she was in high school, she said. "It wasn't until I had him that I had to be serious about everything."

Her despair was eventually alleviated by her mother, who steered her toward earning her G.E.D. In February, she approached [Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow](#), a job placement center and partner agency of the Community Service Society, one of the seven agencies supported by The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund. In three months she had her G.E.D. But just as important, she learned computer programs essential to office work, and in May, the placement center found her a position as a clerk at Americare, a home health service agency.

Before she could start, she needed a professional wardrobe. With a \$317 grant from the [Neediest Cases Fund](#), and aided by a personal shopping consultant from the Community Service Society, she was able to purchase two pairs of pants, two button-down shirts and two undershirts.

Now, every morning before dawn, she wakes her son and kisses him goodbye before embarking at 6 on an hour-and-a-half commute to Mill Basin, Brooklyn, via two trains and a bus, so she can get to work an hour early, "to get a head start," she said. "I choose not to fall behind."

Her mother watches Angel during the day, and will continue to watch him in January, when Ms. Morales begins an eight-month program to become a certified medical billing consultant — if she is approved for a Pell grant. The course costs \$16,000.

"If it wasn't for my mom, I think life, for me, would be five times harder than it is," Ms. Morales said.

Her 40-hour-a-week workload nets her \$1,532 a month, just enough to contribute toward the rent and bills, and to shower Angel with whatever he desires: baseballs, basketballs, soccer balls.

"I give him everything," she said. "I try to do things with him that a father and son are supposed to do, because I don't ever want him to feel that there was something missing in his life because his father wasn't around." In that vein, she does not file for child support.

"Everything he has is because of me, because I did it for him," she said proudly.

As if on cue, Angel handed his mother a bouquet of red and white carnations and, with a little prodding from his grandmother, planted a kiss on her cheek.

"I did it!" he yelled, triumphant, before scampering off.