

# The New York Times

THE NEEDIEST CASES FUND

## *For Parents, a Lifeline in Unemployment*

Readjusting to their households' needs, New Yorkers out of work found "there will be people who will help you."



Louis Armand and his daughter, Chiara, needed help with bills. Credit... Gabby Jones for The New York Times

By **Emma Grillo**

- Dec. 2, 2021

After living with his daughter in a studio for a few years, Louis Armand was hoping to make a change. He had been working at an event venue and wanted to move to a larger apartment so she could have more privacy.

That hope was put on hold when the pandemic hit New York and he was laid off, leaving him worried about paying for their basic needs. “It was challenging,” Mr. Armand said.

For him, though, after previous struggles with homelessness and with alcoholism, staying positive was key.

“I do the best that I can with whatever I get, and I move on,” he said.

The abrupt halt to Mr. Armand’s work in events was a setback that was difficult with his daughter, Chiara, under his care. Since she came to live with him in 2018, he had made it a priority to raise her with a positive mind-set and to help her build a solid foundation.

“Three years later, I look at my daughter and I’m like, ‘Wow,’” said Mr. Armand, 65. “Chiara is a very intelligent young lady.”

His approach came from wanting her road to adulthood to be different from his. Mr. Armand moved to New York with his family from Colombia in 1971, and in 1976 he joined the Army. After serving for three years, he was honorably discharged, and he moved back to New York and then to California.

Throughout his youth Mr. Armand struggled with alcoholism, and in California he got sober and began taking classes at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising, first at its Irvine campus, which is now closed, and then at the Los Angeles campus. He graduated with an associate degree and moved back to New York, where he worked in the fashion industry and the events business.

In 2004, Chiara was born, and Mr. Armand and Chiara’s mother separated not long after. Mr. Armand began to struggle financially, and was homeless for three years, before eventually moving to the studio apartment where he now lives with Chiara.

Since being laid off last year, Mr. Armand has made ends meet through unemployment assistance and occasional bartending shifts. In September, he applied for Social Security benefits. But it was still difficult to cover the basics. So in October, Bigs & Littles NYC Mentoring, a beneficiary agency of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New York, provided Mr. Armand with \$1,000 from The Neediest Cases Fund to help him pay for his daughter’s braces, her school clothes and utility bills.

Even though being open about financial struggles can be intimidating, Mr. Armand said that he encourages other parents to ask for assistance when they need it.

“We have to reach out and go and ask for help,” Mr. Armand said. “There will be people that will help you.”

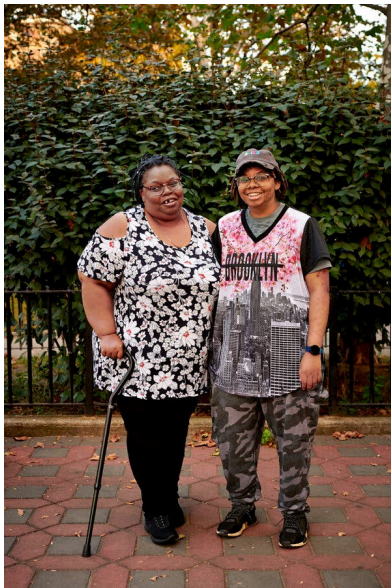
As Chiara goes through her senior year of high school, he is helping her with college applications.

“I think she is on the right path,” Mr. Armand said. “She’s looking forward.”

And Mr. Armand has begun designing his own lingerie brand, a business he has dreamed of since he was in college. He cites Kandinsky and Versace as some of his biggest influences.

“Despite my age,” he said, “I’m not done yet.”

Claudine Bradford also strives to be a role model and to support her daughter. Since she was 8, Ms. Bradford has raised her as a single parent and has taught her to strive for her goals.



Claudine Bradford suffered from health issues, including diabetes, that kept her out of the work force. She sought job training to help her daughter, Jasmine Fischer, pay for college. Credit... Gabby Jones for The New York Times

To keep the two of them going, Ms. Bradford, 47, often writes out positive affirmations that she posts around their Brooklyn home.

Ms. Bradford’s desire to support her daughter, Jasmine Fischer, now 23, was especially strong during the pandemic. To help Ms. Fischer pay for college, Ms. Bradford began taking classes through the Grace Institute, an organization in New York that helps low-income women through job training and counseling services.

“I decided to go back to work to make sure she’s OK, to make sure she can have a better future,” Ms. Bradford said.

Because of various health issues, including diabetes, Ms. Bradford hadn’t worked since 2015 and has relied on cash assistance and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. But when her daughter told her that she was struggling to pay for college last year, Ms. Bradford wanted to find a way to help.

While Ms. Bradford was taking her 10-week course, a social worker at the Grace Institute asked her about any barriers that might prevent her from completing the program. Ms. Bradford said that she was having trouble affording groceries that month, especially with Thanksgiving approaching.

The Grace Institute helped connect Ms. Bradford with Community Service Society, another of the organizations supported by The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund. In November 2020, the group provided Ms. Bradford with \$174.51 in household goods and groceries, like rice and beans. She also was able to get ingredients for a Thanksgiving meal that featured candied yams she made from a special family recipe. “It was wonderful,” Ms. Bradford said.

In December 2020, Ms. Bradford graduated from the administrative professional program. And in August, she began working part-time as an enrollment specialist at the Borough of Manhattan Community College.

Ms. Fischer is studying psychology at St. Francis College, and wants to start a nonprofit organization when she graduates. And Ms. Bradford is committed to making sure her daughter’s dreams come true.

“That’s my goal, to work for her, to make sure her organization is up and running,” Ms. Bradford said. “I’m ready.”

Donations to The Neediest Cases Fund may be [made online](#) or with [a check](#).

*Correction: Dec. 2, 2021*

*An earlier version of this article referred incompletely to how Mr. Armand received help. It was through Bigs & Littles NYC Mentoring, a beneficiary agency of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New York, not just Catholic Charities.*