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THE NEEDIEST CASES

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Donors Offer Money, Time and Encouragement

By Eba Hamid



Robert Stolarik for The New York Times

Fawzi Hasab and his wife, Zahra Nahim, at home in Brooklyn. Their story was among many that drew readers' support.

Natalie Jenner has a deal with herself.

"If I read an article and it moves me to tears, I think I have to do something," she said.

It happens about once a year.

In November, Ms. Jenner, who lives just outside of Toronto, read a [Neediest Cases article](#) in The New York Times about Charles Smith, a single father and chef who found out in 2008 that he had cancer and who strived to teach his young son Cie-Jay the value of giving back to the community.

Ms. Jenner, who has a young daughter and whose husband had also battled cancer, said that she related to Mr. Smith's story and that he proved to be "an outstanding role model."

"This story really got to me," she said. "I really wanted to help."

Readers like Ms. Jenner have responded in stellar numbers by donating large and small amounts to the centennial fundraising campaign of The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund. The portraits of individuals and families began on Nov. 6 and will continue daily through Feb. 10.

One hundred years after the Neediest Cases Fund began, it has continued to attract new donors like Ms. Jenner, who said, "I didn't know about the fund before." And donors who have been contributing for decades are continuing the tradition. "Please accept my 79th annual contribution," one donor wrote. "This is our 50th consecutive donation," yet another letter began, adding, "We wish we could afford a larger one." Enclosed with the letter was a \$3,000 check.

The Neediest Cases Fund works with seven multiservice agencies that serve New Yorkers of all denominations: [Brooklyn Community Services](#), [Catholic Charities 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 [UJA-Federation of New York](#). The New York Times Company covers all administrative costs.

The fund invests unrestricted contributions of \$100,000 or more from trusts and estates in an endowment. The income goes into the next year's campaign. As of Thursday, donors had contributed \$6,186,752 to the current campaign.

Over the past 100 years, donors have sent in \$250 million, said Desirée Dancy, the vice president of the Neediest Cases Fund.

This year, readers have offered beds, clothing, furniture and medical services to those profiled. They have also sent in donations for as little as \$1 and as much as \$50,000.

“We’re just always amazed at the generosity of our donors,” Ms. Dancy said. “Every year they heed the call to action.”

Articles like the [one](#) about Zahra Nahim and Fawzi Hasab, [Iraqi refugees](#) who lost two sons to sectarian violence and now live in Brooklyn, inspired one donor to offer to buy the family’s monthly groceries “for as long as I can” and another to inquire how to cover their expenses.

A [portrait](#) of Ndayishimiye Gabo, who had spent years in a refugee camp in Tanzania and was on the verge of losing his family’s Bronx apartment, moved a reader to donate more than \$6,000 so that the family could avoid eviction. Another reader sent clothing, shoes and toys to [Lynn Blue](#) and her daughter, Bianca Torres, 12, who was born with a collapsed larynx, cleft palate and dislocated legs.

Dmitriy Frenkel, [featured](#) on Jan. 2, was another recipient of readers’ generosity. Polio had left his right foot disfigured, and Mr. Frenkel needs specially molded shoes. Money from the Neediest Cases Fund helped him buy his current pair. A reader, who said his father had suffered from a similar ailment, offered to buy several pairs of the shoes for Mr. Frenkel.

Donors also sought to pay [Jonathan Ferreira](#)’s tuition and expenses at Utica College. A pet lover made arrangements to take [Marisol Santiago](#) — who worried about the health of her dog after surviving a hit-and-run accident and lung cancer and falling behind on rent — to her own veterinarian, Dr. Gene Solomon, at the Center for Veterinary Care on the Upper East Side. They also went to a dog groomer, and from there to a pet store, where Ms. Santiago’s dog, Princess, got a coat, a harness, a leash and some treats.

Ms. Jenner said that after she decided to donate, she told her young daughter of her plan to help Mr. Smith’s son Cie-Jay have the “holiday he deserves.”

Mr. Smith was unable to work because of his cancer treatments, and he was supporting himself and Cie-Jay through \$1,365 a month in [Social Security](#) disability benefits and \$360 a month in food stamps. When Cie-Jay was starting second grade in Brooklyn and needed a uniform, Mr. Smith received a grant from Brooklyn Community Services to cover the cost.

Ms. Jenner said she had asked her daughter if she was willing to give up a “big” Christmas present to help the Smiths.

“She was game,” Ms. Jenner said.

They sent a \$200 check.

“She said to me that it made her feel so warm inside, and it made her want to do that again,” Ms. Jenner said of her daughter, who still was “lucky to be visited by Santa.”

Sephora Rosario of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens said that donating spoke to a greater purpose. Sometimes people who cannot afford money send in cards or letters saying that the people profiled are in their prayers, Ms. Rosario said.

“On a basic, fundamental level,” she added, “we all want to know we’re not alone.”