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THE NEEDIEST CASES

## Chronicling a Life and Honing Job Skills

By [WINNIE HU](#)



Katie Orlinsky for The New York Times

Dominique Wright at the office of Year Up, a career training program, in the financial district.

A lot of people cry over their hard-luck stories. Dominique Wright wants to write about hers.

She started her first journal at 8 years old, while living with a foster mother in South Jamaica, Queens, because her own mother had turned to drugs and alcohol and could not keep her six children at that time. At 12, her father regained custody of her and a younger brother, Najee. But he was in poor health and died a few years later.

Sister and brother spent their teenage years with an aunt and two cousins in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, and Ms. Wright's journal pages overflowed with boys, shopping and Sunday dinners of ham and collard greens. In her senior year at Prospect Heights High School, she became pregnant with her daughter, Aniya Cameron.

Ms. Wright, now 23, still writes every day in a journal, one from Barnes & Noble with a peach-and-yellow cover. She will need another one soon, and this one will be packed away with 20 others in a cardboard box. A few have been lost in moves. She wants to turn them into a book about her life and family.

"We've been through a lot, and for us to come so far, I think it will be a good story to put out there," Ms. Wright said with a bright smile as she sat in the office of [Year Up](#), an intensive career training program in the financial district.

Ms. Wright completed Year Up in January after dropping out of Kingsborough Community College and working a succession of hourly wage jobs in Manhattan to support herself and her daughter. She sold popcorn and tickets at a movie theater, called taxis for a law firm and answered phones at a physical therapy office.

At Year Up, Ms. Wright learned finance skills and worked as a paid apprentice for six months at [Merrill Lynch](#) as part of the program.

But then there was no more work. She sent out four or five résumés a day and scoured [Craigslist](#) for leads. “At first, I was looking for a career job, but then I expanded it to retail and customer service,” she said.

Ms. Wright and her daughter subsisted on \$362 a month in food stamps. She borrowed from her siblings and cousins to help pay the \$398 monthly rent, including utilities, for her one-bedroom apartment at the [Edwin Gould Academy](#), a residential program in East Harlem for young adults who were once in the [foster care](#) system.

She said that she had not asked for child support from Aniya’s father, but that he helped out with clothes and shoes for the child.

Andres Gomez, a case manager at the Community Service Society, a nonprofit group that works with Year Up and is one of the seven agencies supported by The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund, helped Ms. Wright land another paid apprentice position in August at Citigroup, where she again prepares financial reports and compiles data. She earns \$490 a week, after taxes.

“She’s resilient,” Mr. Gomez said. “No matter what comes her way, she breaks down every barrier.”

Mr. Gomez went with Ms. Wright to buy a refurbished Dell desktop computer and three new business suits from Macy’s with \$443 from the [Neediest Cases](#) Fund.

“It helped a lot,” she said. “It’s a very professional environment, so the business suits were a big boost to my wardrobe.”

This fall, Ms. Wright enrolled Aniya, 4, in [preschool](#); she hopes to return to school herself next year for a bachelor’s degree. She spends her free time hanging out with Najee, now a postal worker in Washington Heights, and the rest of her large family.

Ms. Wright knows that her luck could change come January, when her position with Citigroup ends, along with the \$640-a-week paycheck.

“I get worried some days because I don’t want to go back, I want to go forward,” said Ms. Wright, who is on the hunt for a job, again.