

## Coping With Deafness, Blindness and Schizophrenia



Robert Stolarik for The New York Times

Kimtheresa Moore, center, with her grandson, Anthony, right, and her daughter Zuri at home in Brooklyn.

By JENNIFER 8. LEE

Kimtheresa Moore is deaf, but she can still hear voices. They whisper — sometimes softly, sometimes harshly — suggesting that she should kill herself.

She is also partly blind, but she can still see shadows. They are the grayish white and whitish blue of ghosts. She buries herself underneath the blankets when she sees them. But the shadows follow her. She swings her arms to fight them. But they are impervious to her attacks.

Only medication can quiet the voices and erase shadows that lie in the recesses of her mind. But sometimes, the voices and shadows are Ms. Moore's only company.

Her life could be documented as a long string of misunderstandings.

When she was a little girl, she was slapped because her mother thought she was ignoring her.

Eight years ago, Ms. Moore's husband left and moved to Mississippi; their arguments had been exacerbated by her condition. The family speculates that he may have been killed in Hurricane Katrina. They have not heard from him.

It is hard enough to be a single mother of four and a grandmother of one in East New York, Brooklyn. But being a deaf, schizophrenic single mother and grandmother is a herculean task.

"It was overwhelming for me," Ms. Moore said. "I had problems, and no one helped me. I didn't understand what to do."

With a referral from the city government, the Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service, a beneficiary of The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund, placed a homemaker with the family six days a week to help with housework and care for her grandson, Anthony.

Ms. Moore's 16-year-old son, Azariah, serves as a bridge to the outside world. He was born partially deaf. He, too, has been found to be schizophrenic, and he has to take pills every day to stay rooted in the world.

Azariah can speak English and use sign language, so he serves as his mother's interpreter, translating her signing for the rest of the world.

They are seldom apart. "It's hard to disconnect from him," Mrs. Moore said. "He is my baby. We never go anywhere without each other."

She cries when he leaves for summer camp.

Azariah also is unable to feel physical pain. He says that he feels touch but not the pain of a punch. Once, when he was 7 or 8, he was burned when a hot iron fell on him and he did not feel it sear his skin.

At school, classmates threw rocks at him and beat him up, to see if he was really the freak they had heard about.

What Azariah does feel, though, is emotional pain, particularly empa-



thy with his mother. "Whatever she feels, I feel," he said. "If she's upset, I'm upset, and I kick myself."

Since his father left, Azariah sees

---

|                            |                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Previously recorded</b> | <b>\$4,233,322.29</b> |
| <b>Recorded Thursday</b>   | <b>\$69,324.00</b>    |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>\$4,302,646.29</b> |
| <b>Last year to date</b>   | <b>\$4,463,517.92</b> |

---

himself as the protector of not only his mother, but also his entire family. Pointing to her son, Ms. Moore dragged her thumb up along her chest, the sign for "proud."

Azariah dropped out of school, in part, he said, because of the attacks by his classmates. He said that "without my dad, I'm struggling." He added that he was "trying to get a job."

Meanwhile, the family survives on welfare and food stamps.

The Brooklyn Bureau, however, has tried to offer more help. It recently used \$994 from the Neediest Cases to buy three twin beds, three dressers, and \$100 clothing gift certificates for the children. Before then, their clothing was stored in plastic bags and milk crates.

Ms. Moore likes the small rituals in life, like gossiping about men with her friends and praying. She feels comfort in being with her children, especially Azariah.

"Not only is she my mom, she is my best friend," he said. "I have to be here for her through thick and thin. I want to be here for her through good times and bad.

"That is my main goal in life: to support my mom and keep her happy."

In response to Azariah, Ms. Moore signed three fingers up, fingers closed in a circle, three fingers up: "Wow."

The walls of loneliness can be surmounted, but only with someone calling you out from the other side.