

## Oolagen Community Services

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### Essence, Lynn and Arika Speak

These are the personal accounts of three young mothers dealing with life as a single parent, with little in the way of financial resources or support. Essence, Lynn, and Arika all live in Toronto and participate in the Wraparound Process at Oolagen Community Services. Wraparound is primarily a planning process. It is an opportunity for isolated individuals and families to build community supports and to use those supports to work towards achieving *their* goals and aspirations. The Wraparound Process is strength-based and client-driven. Many young mothers who have suffered significant marginalization and socio-economic disadvantage are empowered by the process; and, perhaps, for the first time are in a position where their voice *is* the loudest at the table. Essence, Lynn, and Arika are also members of the Young Moms' Committee, a place where young moms who are either participating in Wraparound or have already completed the process, can meet to support one another, share knowledge, develop skills, and do advocacy work. It was within the context of the Young Moms' Committee that this writing was generated. Lastly, it is important to note that the narratives do not encapsulate the whole of these young mothers' realities but rather only speak to one aspect of their day-to-day obstacles and joys. Indeed, the women expressed that they would need to write a book if they were to talk about all the different issues and needs of young, single parents in Toronto.

#### **The fulfilling struggle**

Being a single mother, my main struggle is providing for my boys on a day-to-day basis. We are on social assistance and there is never enough money. I just get by every month. Every day I think about groceries, two sizes of diapers,

clothes, rent, bills, and getting rid of my debt so I can go to college. My life has a very basic schedule—up at 6:00am, daycare, school, then home to clean, cook, go to the gym, nap if possible, pick up my boys at 5:00pm, dinner, play together (quality time), watch TV, and then I do my homework. This is my life everyday. I don't think there is any way to make my days easier. I say it's a struggle but I love my boys and my life. Being a mother is the most fulfilling thing that ever happened to me. I wish my boys could have a father figure but I've dealt with this situation within myself—I'm their mother and father.

—Essence

### **Everyday lives of single parenting**

My name is Lynn. I'm 25 years old and a single mom. I have three children and I go through everyday life as a struggle. I'm stressed, upset, lonely, and angry everyday. I love my children so very deeply and I made a mistake once—I pay for it every single day. It's like people don't believe that someone can change. Nobody is perfect, we all make mistakes, and some of us pay for them a little harder than others. It's like this—I got into a little trouble with the law, it wasn't too serious, but I was incarcerated and did a little time and my children were taken away from me. Now I'm struggling and fighting to get them back.

One child, my eldest, was placed with a family member and now I have a custody battle. My middle child was placed in temporary care and now I'm having problems. I don't have the money to go back into the country. They don't want to come to my country. They keep coming up with excuses on why they can't come to me. It's very stressful, tiring, upsetting, disappointing, and I'm just fed up. but I will never give up the fight. I will fight up until my last breath has been taken.

—Lynn

### **The ups and downs of no male role model**

I am writing about the positive and the negative sides of being a single mother without having a father figure for my daughter. The first negative factor of not having a father around is discipline—everyone knows mothers are nurturers and fathers are providers. Not in this day in age! More and more young mothers are having this problem throughout the world. When you have a strong-willed child, it is very hard to discipline them without breaking their spirit—whether you have a father around or not for them.

I found that talking to my child and listening to her helps me to understand her and be there when she needs me.

When it does come down to disciplining her, I get very frustrated and annoyed, which is very bad because she senses my vibes and knows she is getting to me. I just have to take a deep breath and tell myself to calm down and go to another room until she and I both calm down.

If her father was in the picture I think it would be a little easier to deal

with her temper tantrums and mood swings—because of my tiredness or whatever else. On the other hand, the positive thing about not having a male role model is the bond that we share. I do believe it would not be as strong if there was male influence in her life.

Also, the thought of ever losing my child in a custody battle would be devastating.

Another negative that I worry about for my daughter living without a father is her self-esteem and sense of worth when she is older. Her lack of communication with her father would make her wonder if he loves her or even cares about her.

—Arika