

An Ailing Father, and a Daughter Who Needs Extra Care for Emotional Disorders

By THOMAS J. LUECK

As the single parent of a 12-year-old girl, Rodney McEachern has a complaint easily understood by overburdened single parents everywhere.

"I need a vacation," he said recently with a sigh.



The
Neediest
Cases

He was scurrying between visitors in the living room and a dinner of turkey wings, Brussels sprouts and rice for his daughter, Mariah, on the stove of their neatly kept Brooklyn apartment. "Give me a break."

But Mr. McEachern, 47, is not a typical single parent. Nor is Mariah a typical girl. With severe emotional disorders that have been diagnosed as attention deficit hyperactive disorder, bipolar disorder and oppositional defiant disorder, Mariah poses challenges that would tax the most caring and affluent of families.

And Mr. McEachern's own poor health has made matters worse. A 1990 leg injury that left him walking with a cane, arthritis, chronic chest pains and bouts with depression, combined with the unremitting need to watch over Mariah, have made steady employment all but impossible.

Without help, most notably from the Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service, and a small contribution from The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund, the strains could be crushing. "I don't know what I'd do, or where we would be," said Mr. McEachern, who faced the prospect of eviction last month because he owed back rent of \$360.

The father-daughter journey began in 1995, when Mariah was 2 and Mr. McEachern gained sole custody. Mariah's troubled mother, whom she rarely sees, had four other children who have since been placed in foster care.

Mariah's emotional problems began to emerge by the time she was 4; she was found to have attention deficit disorder and began receiving psychiatric care. Despite that initial treatment, her behavior worsened,



Robert Stolarik for The New York Times

Rodney McEachern with his daughter, Mariah, 12, who has severe emotional disorders, at their apartment in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn.

she did poorly in school and she frequently fought with other children.

Prone to hallucinations and violent outbursts, she reached a low point in August, when she was hospitalized after threatening to kill her father.

At that point, the Brooklyn Bureau, a beneficiary agency of the Neediest Cases, stepped in, providing a homemaker, Joyce Maybry, who is trained to work with the mentally ill. She spends five hours every afternoon in the McEachern apartment.

Mariah "is like one of my grandchildren," said Ms. Maybry. Her role has little to do with what most people consider homemaking, as Mr. McEachern is an accomplished cook and careful housekeeper. Rather, Ms. Maybry helps Mariah organize her day and complete her homework, mediates disputes between father and daughter, and cares for her so Mr. McEachern can leave for medical appointments and other obligations.

To an outsider, Mariah's problems can be hard to discern. Polite and engaging, if somewhat shy, she seemed happy to discuss school, saying that she enjoyed math and science and was making friends.

She seemed most excited about

her after-school activity as flag dancer with the Steppers Marching Band, a group of young performers trained by the Brooklyn Music and Arts Program and sponsored by Medgar Evers College. The program takes in children at no charge and,

Previously recorded	\$6,399,378.18
Recorded on Thursday	5,370.53
Total	\$6,434,748.71
Last year to date	\$6,789,574.78

besides musical training, offers them academic tutoring and counseling, said Tyrone Brown, the program's executive director.

And the relationship between father and daughter appeared unshaken by their recent struggles. As she looked on with a smile from the couch, Mr. McEachern showed off photographs of Mariah at school graduations and other keepsakes. There was the "most improved" certificate from one of her school classes and her first place award from a bowling tournament.

Still, their lives are daunting. Prone to outbursts, Mariah some-

times breaks things, adding to the family's financial strains.

They get by on a monthly income of \$600 in Social Security, \$41.50 in public assistance and \$211 in food stamps. Although Mr. McEachern receives rent subsidies for their two-bedroom apartment in Prospect Heights, a recent \$40 monthly reduction in those subsidies led to the threat of eviction, and underscored the fragility of the family's finances.

Unaware of the reduction, Mr. McEachern had let the rent fall \$360 in arrears. To prevent eviction, the Brooklyn Bureau turned to the Neediest Cases Fund, which paid the back rent.

"It's hard," Mr. McEachern said. "We are just scraping by."