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## NYer Of The Week

TOP STORY

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### Room To Grow Gives Low-Income Families Material And Emotional Support

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*The New Yorkers of the Week are trying to give support to poor families with children. NY1's Rita Nissan filed the following report.*

Astoria resident Arlene Inoa is a struggling mother, raising three toddlers and barely making ends meet. But thanks to one local charity, Arlene has the chance to better the lives of her family.

"I have someone to call and lean on if I need help," said Inoa.

Started in 1998, by former social worker Julie Burns, the non-profit Room to Grow, is a warm and inviting place where low-income families can stock up on baby supplies, all while giving parents one-on-one support from a social worker.

"For families who don't have the financial means to secure the material items and the parenting information they need, those challenges can be incredibly devastating," said Burns. "And to have the strength and the commitment and the resolve and the desire to come here is extraordinary."

Parents are admitted to the program based on financial need and their ability to commit to participating for three years. They are recommended by a pre-selected group of prenatal clinics and area hospitals.

Beginning months before the birth of their baby until the child turns 3 years old, parents meet with a social worker for counseling and training every three months.

"The beauty of our program is getting into the families' lives at this beginning stage so we can help the parents be as effective as they can possibly be and secure all the tools they need," explained Burns.

And the material need is met by participants getting free access to a store-like setting, where new or gently used clothing, books, toys, and strollers are available.

The 350 families taking part see the program as an opportunity to secure their child's future.

"I value the emotional support that I get from the program, I value that more than the material, because two of my children have autism, so the one-on-one support that I get with the staff is tremendous," added Inoa.

Room to Grow relies completely on donations from the public and from corporations. Several volunteers at Room to Grow are mothers themselves, who see this as an opportunity to give back.

"There are a lot of woman who need help regardless if it's with clothing or education," said volunteer Jennifer Cogliantry. "I think it's tough, especially being in a big city."

And so for giving low-income parents the help and support they need and giving children a good start on life, Julie Burns and the volunteers behind Room to Grow are the New Yorkers of the Week.

*-Produced by Robbie Sosa*

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