

Maria "Lisa" Cerdena

I am nominating Maria "Lisa" Cerdena for the Mothers Hard at Work contest. I am her case manager in the Self-Sufficiency Program at HIP Housing. Here is her story:

Maria "Lisa" Cerdena grew up in the Philippines and her parents separated when she was 8 because her father was abusive. Her mother left the house but didn't take the kids because she couldn't afford to support them. Lisa and her 4 siblings were raised by her paternal grandparents and her own mother had to stay "in the background" of her life. Lisa graduated from high school, earned a Bachelor's degree, and then met her husband at 25. Like many girls raised in an abusive home, she grew up to marry an abusive man.

They have been together 14 years and have 3 children together. After many years of abuse and infidelity, her husband promised to change and the family moved to the United States three years ago for a fresh start. The family settled in a small in-law apartment at her brother-in-law's. Lisa was caring for her husband's elderly father, her own 3 children, and her husband's 2 children from another relationship. After her father-in-law passed away, Lisa got a job cleaning the church 3 times a week, and an overnight shift at Target "pulling pallet jacks, pushing flatbeds, and carrying 50 lb. boxes."

In her own words, Lisa writes: "For six months I didn't have to rely on my husband's income for my children's personal needs. He is always tight on money matters giving out many excuses... He has an abusive mouth and always uses foul language whenever there is something that displeases him... It was hard to look for a brighter future for the kids having a partner like this... I decided to take matters into my own hand... I quit my second job, retained the retail job and went back to school."

"My children have to come first. They are my top priority. Taking care of them, meeting with the teachers, attending school events, getting their regular check-ups, being involved with their lives is how I make them feel I am always there for them. I just have to be there so that they will know how important they are to me. How I cannot fail them as they look up to me."

Lisa decided to leave her abusive husband and with the help of HIP Housing she and her 3 children got their own apartment in Daly City. Lisa is finally realizing her dream of going back to school to become a Paralegal, which will help her get a higher-paying job to support her family. Lisa's husband refused to give her the keys to the family van, so she and her kids are using public transportation right now.

"The children asked not to be left behind with their father as I made the first step for a better life. Now the children are more relaxed and comfortable. We are struggling but we are okay as long as we are together. I am still pressured from my school schedule, picking up the kids in between school and work, and working at night. My own personal time is studying for two hours after work at one in the morning. We spend a lot of time on travelling since I commute to school and work by taking the BART and the bus. Looking forward, I know we are going to be okay."

This has been a wet winter and Lisa has shed tears of guilt that her kids have to walk to school in the rain. This amazing single mom sure could use a car to help her kids get to school, and to cut down on travel time from her own school and work. Please consider the gift of a vehicle for Maria "Lisa" Cerdena, a mother who is truly hard at work!