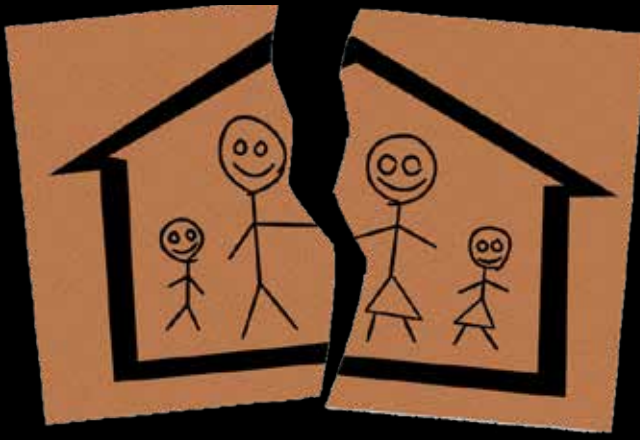


I FOUGHT HARD FOR MY KIDS...



Meet Sagrario Rodrigues of Dominican and Puerto Rican parents from the Bronx, NY, who became pregnant with her first of 8 children at age 16. She married the father of all her children when she was 19 and went on to suffer years of horrific domestic violence. In 2019 her life came tumbling down as her children were taken away and placed in foster care. This has undoubtedly been a rough road for this courageous and determined mother, and we at SOS Children's Villages are appreciative of her opening up and allowing us to share her experience with others.



SOS: *First of all, thank you for sharing your story. It is important for people to understand your struggle and the struggle of so many others*

who have been faced with having their children placed in foster care.

SR: I don't mind telling my story. I think people need to understand and not judge people like me who have gone through what I have. The judgement I experienced was hard as there were many people who had opinions about my kids being taken away from me. I tried to ignore them and focus on getting my kids back.

SOS: *Can you tell me what happened?*

SR: *There was always domestic violence in my relationship from the beginning, but it got worse in 2015 when my husband began to use drugs and forced me to do the same. He was very controlling and made me do things I did not want to do. In 2019 I tested positive for cocaine when my youngest son was born. They removed all my children from our home, and they went to SOS. My baby Ace was taken from the hospital to SOS when he was only 3 days old. During this same time, the kids father was sentenced to prison for 2 years for domestic violence. He is out now and there is a restraining order in place.*

SOS: *Wow...clearly this was a low point and took a lot of strength to get through. How did you manage?*



SR: I felt that I had lost everything. I knew I needed to get it together to get my family back. Within 2 weeks of having the kids taken away, I started undergoing treatment for drug abuse, attended NA classes, and began counseling. I realized that my kids needed me more than anything in this world and I need them.

SOS: *Many of us recall when all 8 of your children arrived at SOS. Everyone always remarked on how well-mannered*

they were. It was obvious that you spent time shaping them to become wonderful people! How did you all manage as a family while they were with us?

SR: The hardest part was taking the bus to the Village to see them and then having to leave. They would cry and I would have to wait another whole week to see them again. I had a lot of support from my parents who had weekend visitation with my children. This really helped keep the family together. Ms. Phyllis, one of the SOS foster parents was the best... she took care of my four youngest kids and showed them a lot of love. Even now we keep in contact over the phone and recently I took them to the Village to visit her. The SOS Case Manager pushed things along through the system so I could be reunified quicker.

SOS: *Whenever we go through a life changing experience – we typically walk away with a new lesson, more knowledge, or greater insight into ourselves.*



What was your takeaway?

SR: You are so right! Having my kids removed allowed me to get away from a very bad relationship and find confidence in myself. I learned that there WAS help out there and that I did not have to suffer. It created a better opportunity and life for my kids. I grew up with my father and thought that no matter what, I wanted the same for my family. It took a lot for me to realize that it was better for all of us to live without them being exposed to domestic violence.

SOS: *Sagrario your strength is wonderful, and we all wish you the very best. What's next for everyone?*

SR: One day I want to own my own home so that there will always be a place for my kids. I want them to graduate from high school and attend college and be whatever they want in life. I have a flooring business which I want to see grow so I have the money to take care of everyone and help them meet their dreams.