

## Street Lives are Growing

By Leo Munasinghe

All younger than 6, Lydia, Matt, and Alex lived in heir mom's old Subaru hatchback during the blazing hot summer of 2001. Going out to eat and getting fun toys for the kids were out of the picture for their mom, Michelle Kennedy because the \$2.12 an hour plus tips she made at a local restaurant was barely enough to keep up with her family's basic needs. Michelle Kennedy was a "typical" middle-class housewife a year before, but after leaving her husband with three kids she had nowhere to go. One thing that could have helped Michelle was getting a higher salary.

The minimum wage has increased throughout the years, but wages for waiters, bartenders, and others who earn tips have increased by nothing. "Federal law lets businesses pay \$2.13 an hour to waiters, bartenders and others who get tips, so long as the total of tips and wages meets the federal minimum."<sup>1</sup> A single parent with two kids usually has to make \$18.36 to provide basic needs for their children<sup>2</sup>. On a slow day, bartenders and waiters can earn close to nothing.

Unlike employees that don't earn tips, tip earners' wages can vary each week because of factors beyond their control<sup>3</sup>. For example, if you are scheduled to work on a slow or fast day, the amount of money you take home that week can change based on other weeks. Even taking a sick day can also affect a waiter or bartender's salary that week, so some of them still have the urge to go to work. "Kirsti Esch, a waitress in New York City, says she can't afford to take a day off, even if she is ill."<sup>4</sup>

I am a very fortunate kid. I have a place to call home and parents who have full-time jobs, with benefits and more. Not everybody has these advantages. Some people wonder if they will get enough money that week to pay for their basic needs. It is up to me, and many others, who are willing, to fight for change. To create a change about raising the federal wage for tipped employees is to send letters to your senators about the "Raise the Wage Act" bill. Convince them that tipped employees need a sustainable income, instead of them depending only on their tips. If this bill is put into law, it can help parents that are in the same situation as Michelle.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Minimum Wage is Rising, but These Workers are Being Left Behind.* 9 Jan. 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/01/09/us/minimum-wage-tips-au-pair.html?searchResultPosition=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/09/us/minimum-wage-tips-au-pair.html?searchResultPosition=1). Accessed 29 Jan. 2020.

<sup>2</sup>"Low-Wage Work." *NCCP*, 2016, [www.nccp.org/topics/lowwagework.html](http://www.nccp.org/topics/lowwagework.html).

<sup>3</sup>Nova, Annie. "When You Make \$2.13 an Hour, Tips Really, Really Matter." *CNBC*, *CNBC*, 29 Aug. 2019, [www.cnbc.com/2018/04/14/minimum-wages-for-these-workers-havent-gone-up-since-1996-thats-a-problem.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/14/minimum-wages-for-these-workers-havent-gone-up-since-1996-thats-a-problem.html).

<sup>4</sup>Nova, Annie. "When You Make \$2.13 an Hour, Tips Really, Really Matter." *CNBC*, *CNBC*, 29 Aug. 2019, [www.cnbc.com/2018/04/14/minimum-wages-for-these-workers-havent-gone-up-since-1996-thats-a-problem.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/14/minimum-wages-for-these-workers-havent-gone-up-since-1996-thats-a-problem.html).