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PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING against great odds," said Sister Judy Garson, leading me into a brownstone town house with bars on the windows and a steel gate on the door. The Little Sisters of the Assumption and other volunteers work out of this house, helping barrio families with food, nursing care, child care, advice. The Little Sisters have been here for 30 years.

"Believing in yourself is so important," said Sister Judy, as another nun put aside groceries for a young mother. "Often the only time a woman is praised is when she produces a beautiful baby. It's two steps forward, one back. But people *are* making it."

Luz Maldonado, 32, is one of them. "My husband left me, but I've got my feet on the ground," said Luz, a gregarious woman who drops by the Little Sisters' house regularly. She sat with her baby, Marisa, who seemed healthy and well cared for.

"Coming here, being with the Little Sisters, I know I'm not alone," Luz said, upbeat, smiling again. "I'm going to college at night." She took off her coat, put it aside, and looked lovingly at her daughter. "I'm going to make it," she said.

Women like Luz keep the barrio glued together. The percentage of households in East Harlem headed by women—48 percent—is among the highest in the U. S. While men play dominoes in the shade or drink from brown paper bags on the corner, women take care of the family. I saw them day after day, walking the kids to school in clean clothes they can be proud of, waiting for them in the afternoons, making sure they got past the dealers. Women often make the difference between a child who survives and one who dies early.

I met youths who study hard and look to the future at the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, a consolidated grade school, junior high, and high school on 116th Street. Once known as the Drug Store, for the illicit business openly conducted there, the school now attracts national attention for academic excellence. The student body is 98 percent black and Hispanic. The school's dropout rate is less than 2 percent, well below the city average of 40 percent. Some 90 percent of its students rank at or above their grade levels in reading tests, and nearly 100 percent of its graduates go on to college.

"When I came here four years ago, there was no running water in the bathrooms," says Patricia Cook, the high school principal. She explained how investments by companies such as IBM and General Electric have helped turn the school around. The corporations provide much needed equipment, and their employees tutor students, serve as role models, and give advice.

Ms. Cook leans over the table. "When you see how these kids have been wronged in life. . . ." Her voice drops off. "I want to give them the best education possible. We require four years of math and science. Next year we start Japanese." Her eyes fairly burn, this young blond educator, born in the Bronx and educated at Vassar. When the bells ring here, students hurry to class. "I want this to be one of the best prep schools in the world," she says.

Throughout Community School District No. 4, which lies entirely within the barrio, things are looking up. In 1974 the district ranked last in

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