



# OUR VOICE

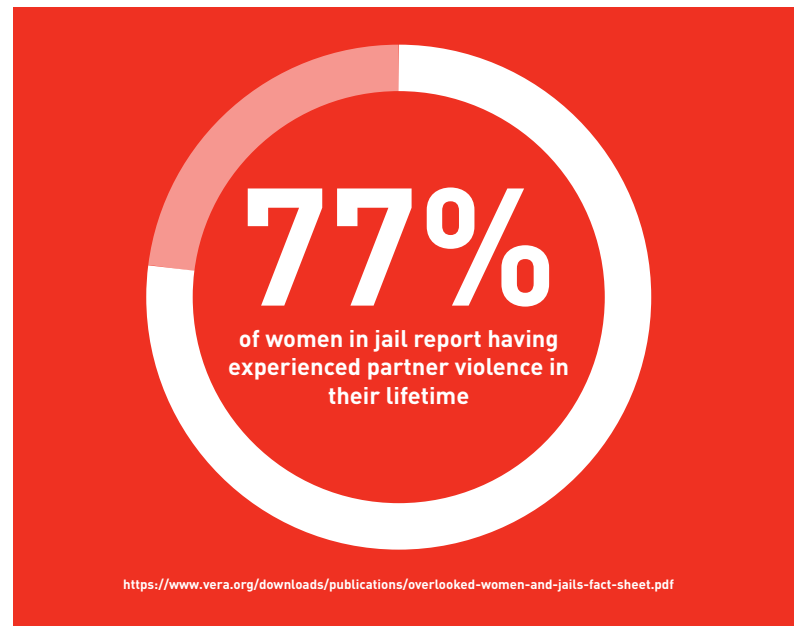
SPRING 2020

## La Casa Brings the 40-hour Training to State Prison

In January, La Casa de las Madres participated in a first-of-its-kind training, offering our 40-hour Domestic Violence Advocate training to individuals at the Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) in Chowchilla, California.

We were proud to bring this in-depth training on domestic violence to 35 female inmates. The 40-hour training is designed to prepare employees and volunteers to work with survivors, and ensure that advocates can hold confidential communications. The training was provided to women who were currently facilitators for CCWF's LOVE (Living Outside of Violence Everyday) groups with the hope that these individuals would be better equipped to support their peers, many of whom had experienced or were experiencing domestic violence. Our goal for the training was two-fold: 1) to help inmates learn more about domestic violence and develop peer counseling skills, and 2) to use this training as career development, should they be interested in pursuing employment in the anti-domestic violence field upon their release from CCWF.

Our training covered topics including the history of the anti-DV movement, civil and criminal law, peer counseling, housing, public assistance, community resources, and societal attitudes toward domestic violence. Yet, it was important to also take into account both the experience and circumstances of the individuals in the room. Nearly all of the participants had witnessed or experienced domestic violence as children or adults. Many also cited, while taking full responsibility for their actions, that domestic violence had led them to commit the crime for which they were serving time.



Participants shared the high rates of domestic violence within the prison itself, prompting us to shift our own training materials to better account for the context participants lived in. For example, much of our 40-hour training at La Casa focuses on action, safety planning and finding resources for survivors. Limited exposure to current technology and an older understanding of community systems and laws made it challenging for participants to safety plan for the clients in our role plays, who were based on what we see when providing services in San Francisco. While the first part of the training covered the basics -- what domestic violence is, how to be a peer counselor, and how to safety plan -- we realized that it would be more helpful for participants to brainstorm their own role-plays and practice peer counseling and crisis intervention in their community. At the end of our first weekend, we asked participants to come back the following week with a plan for a day of action at CCWF, where

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# LETTER FROM THE Executive Director



**Dear Friends of La Casa,**

When we opened our doors 44 years ago, La Casa made a promise that there would always be a safe place for survivors of domestic violence in San

Francisco. Never has the importance of this commitment been more clear than in our ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While social distancing may protect against the spread of disease, staying at home with a dangerous partner can expose survivors to an increased chance of abuse.

To combat this challenge, La Casa has adopted a range of robust measures to ensure we continue to maintain our essential services during the crisis including our emergency shelter, permanent supportive housing sites, two 24-hour crisis hotlines, and our text line. In response to the Shelter-In-Place Order, La Casa indefinitely extended the 8-week stay period at our shelter and did not require any resident to exit for the duration of the Order. We also decided to double staff many positions at our shelter to ensure potential sick days did not leave a hole in our service infrastructure. At the organizational level, La Casa earned a designation as an "Essential Business" from the city government and secured a travel letter for our direct-service employees so they can continue to provide our life-saving intervention services. Additionally, through the help of a generous donor, we were able to compile 150 weekly food boxes (with enough fare for 5 full days) that we distributed to the formerly homeless women staying at the Hotel Verona and the Mary Elizabeth Inn. At every stage, La Casa followed the guidelines from the CDC and the San Francisco Department of Public Health to ensure the health and safety of La Casa's clients, volunteers, and employees.

But our response to COVID-19 is only one aspect of our recent work. Notwithstanding the current challenges, we cannot forget that La Casa is coming off a historic 2019—which hit its peak when December 19th, 2019 was officially declared "La Casa de las Madres Day" in the City of San Francisco. On this special Thursday, La Casa hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony for our new

Drop-In Counseling Center with Mayor London Breed to celebrate this historic achievement. An incredible array of community members gathered for the occasion. Mayor Breed attended alongside Interim District Attorney Suzy Loftus, and Joaquín Torres, Director of the Office of Economic and Workforce Development. "We are proud to support this acquisition that enables La Casa to stay rooted in the community they serve," Torres said explaining why his office gave La Casa a \$1 million grant to help buy the new building. The ceremony was featured on the front page of the Chronicle's "Local Section" and was also covered by the SFist, SF Examiner, and other local news outlets. In the emotional peak of the ceremony, survivor Cassandra Poggi shared her story, "La Casa is a bright light in the darkness. This beautiful new building—their new home—is a bright light." We are truly humbled by the inspiring community support that let us invest in this new building—which will be a symbol of safety in San Francisco for generations to come.

Despite all the excitement of 2019, we must remind ourselves the core pillars of La Casa's program remain consistent. Beyond the coronavirus, over the past year, we've seen some particularly interesting trends—specifically among mothers and children. Overall, from 2018 to 2019, our total number of clients increased by over 25%. The number of children jumped by over 160%, and additionally 67% of our clients in 2019 were mothers. Among this group, there were 63 pregnancies, more than double the amount of pregnancies in 2018. Additionally, 47% of the adult residents at shelter last year were pregnant or parenting mothers, and 17% of total shelter clients were very young children (ages 0–3). These statistics only underline the necessity of keeping our crisis-response services open for vulnerable mothers and children fleeing violent homes during the Shelter-In-Place Order. Across all our endeavors, the common thread is a commitment to build a future where safety is guaranteed for every child, mother, and family. No matter how large the challenge or crisis, La Casa's door will always be open.

Thank you for your dedicated support in our mission to end domestic violence. The passion, kindness, and courage we bring to our work every day comes directly from the community around us.

Sincerely,



**Kathy Black**  
Executive Director

# Volunteer Spotlight

In 2019, La Casa's volunteers gave over 3000 hours of their time to support survivors. We want to introduce you to one of them.

**Meet Ellie:** a San Francisco local, student at the University of San Francisco, and one of our incredible crisis line volunteers.



## Why did you start volunteering with La Casa?

I started volunteering at La Casa because I wanted to help women who were going through a difficult time. I know someone who has been through domestic violence, and know how much it can impact someone's life. Throughout my time volunteering, I've felt emotional fulfillment knowing that I've been able to lift people's hope up, even if it was only through a phone call.

## What are you currently reading or what are you currently watching?

I am currently reading **In a House of Dreams and Glass: Becoming a Psychiatrist**. I would love to become a psychiatrist one day, so I picked out this book so to get some insight as to what it would be like. So far everything the author has talked about has really intrigued me and has made me excited to pursue this career. I would love to help people struggling with their mental health and to get them on a path to recovery.

## What is one goal you have for 2020?

One goal I have is to graduate college with the highest honors. This December I will be receiving my Bachelors degree, and I could not be any more excited. I will be graduating one semester early—which is a little nerve wracking, but at the same time I'm ready to see what the future holds for me.

## If you could travel to any place in the world, where would you go?

I am Mexican but have never been to Mexico. I would love to first visit all of my family and then see the beautiful beaches and historic sites. I also want to taste the food in Mexico because I hear that it's amazing, especially the tacos.

Interested in joining our community of volunteers? Visit [lacasa.org/individual](https://lacasa.org/individual) to download an application & get started!





Photo by Alex Grodkiewicz on Unsplash

## Safe Housing for Survivors on the Horizon

In 2018, La Casa's community was struck by a troubling trend. Across the previous year, we observed a striking increase in the average length of stay at our shelter.

Families were forced to stay longer due to the lack of affordable housing options in the Bay Area. While many organizations talk about housing, La Casa took action. To respond to this acute community need, we partnered with Hamilton Families to launch our new Housing First Program in January 2019 to provide housing assistance to survivors of domestic violence. The program offers housing-focused case management to survivors looking to secure permanent lodging for their families. Through this project, we also provide financial assistance to help cover security deposits, rental subsidies, and basic home furnishings. During the first year of the project, we provided 10 families with rental assistance and expect to support 10 more families in 2020.

The Housing First Program is just one arm of La Casa's multi-pronged strategy for improving the housing stability of our clients. Our Safe Housing Project co-locates two case managers at the San Francisco Housing Authority (SFHA) to advocate for survivors' rights within the system, including

affordable rental options and emergency transfers. Our advocates facilitate training sessions to help SFHA staff and on-site managers respond effectively to incidents of abuse. We also provide ongoing consultation to SFHA property management to ensure all professionals involved in the Housing Authority system understand the dynamics of domestic violence. Additionally, we're glad to report the Safe Housing Project has nearly reached its annual client goal only 7 months into the year.

At Shelter, La Casa's case managers have also put increased emphasis on housing stability—and we're already seeing the results. In the last 6 months alone, 102 families have exited shelter, 53 have moved into permanent housing, and 20 have moved into stable transitional housing. Just as important, over 50% of these clients have continued seeking support services through La Casa.

These heartening numbers are a testament to our community's power to come together and find solutions to even the most intractable problems.

This Mother's Day,



Mother's Day is a special holiday at La Casa.

It is a time to celebrate our super-powered mothers and remember our proud 44-year history of helping moms in need.

That's why each May—to honor the (s)heroes and heroes who helped us prosper—we recommit to our mission of providing impassioned support to victims of domestic violence. **But such a commitment cannot be made alone.**

We ask you to join us in empowering survivors of domestic violence. Who is your (s)hero? Honor your mother—or another special caregiver—by making a donation to La Casa to help another. We will mail your honoree a special Mother's Day card.

[lacasa.org/shero](http://lacasa.org/shero)

## LA CASA DE LAS MADRES' DONOR LIST

The Board of Directors would like to thank all of our generous contributors for making La Casa's work possible. The following list reflects pledges made and gifts received between **July 1 - December 31, 2019**. Please excuse any inadvertent errors or omissions. United Way & Corporate Campaign donors: please note that La Casa makes every effort to acknowledge support as soon as we are notified of a donation. External processing time may create a delay of several months but your support is vital and appreciated. Our United Way designation number is 44026.

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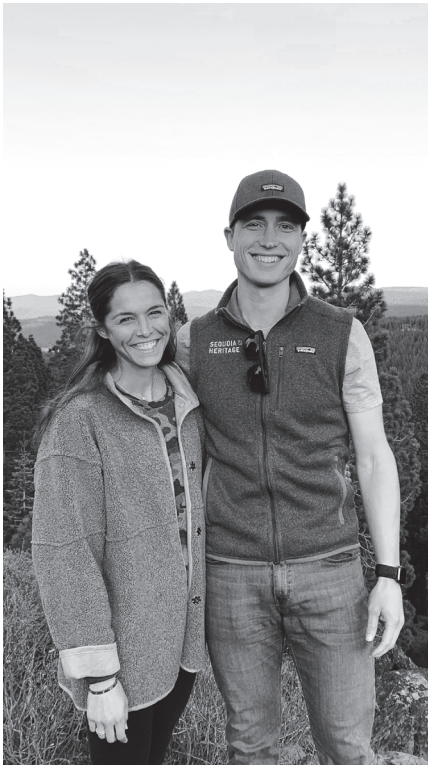
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# A Time of Celebration & A Time of Support

## Donor Spotlight: Elizabeth & Andrew Reed

In September of 2019, Elizabeth and Andrew Reed married in Truckee, CA. While many newlyweds register for household goods, Elizabeth and Andrew took a different approach. In honor of their wedding, instead of physical gifts, they asked guests to make a contribution to La Casa.

“Andrew and I care deeply about La Casa’s mission to not only provide support for victims of domestic violence, but to fundamentally shift the paradigm in building a community where this violence is never tolerated. We are incredibly grateful to be able to support such an esteemed institution like La Casa and the women, teens and children that La Casa support,” said Elizabeth.

Their guests kindly donated over \$40,000 to La Casa. Not only did their actions help bring in new supporters of our work, but it also provided funds to support an entire year of safety and shelter for a woman and her family leaving a violent situation. We are so grateful for Elizabeth and Andrew’s decision to begin their new life together by giving back to their community and making a difference in the lives of survivors in San Francisco.

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## La Casa Brings the 40-hour Training to State Prison

*continued from page one*

internal and external groups would come together to share information and shine a light on domestic violence.

The following weekend, 10 groups presented prison-based peer counseling and crisis intervention role plays and explained how to safety plan with a peer in prison. The participants also built a Domestic Violence Awareness Day Program that included informational presentations, performance, resources, and guides for how to support someone in an unsafe or unhealthy relationship.

Many of the groups also came up with their own awareness campaigns. Other groups did a deep dive into the state of domestic violence in the prison by administering a survey to 70 fellow inmates. 93% of individuals reported experiencing emotional, verbal, physical, or mental abuse while incarcerated, yet only 8% of those individuals had reported the abuse to staff. 98% of individuals had witnessed abuse while incarcerated, but only 9% had reported what they’d seen to staff. When asked why they didn’t report, respondents share they felt “fear of retaliation from abuser or staff,” and “not wanting to be associated with trouble.” 73% of respondents stated that they would “feel safer if there was a program available that allowed you to disclose

information of abuse to a peer instead of staff in full confidentiality.”

As a group, we finished our training on a hopeful note. We discussed the evolution of the anti-domestic violence movement over the last 50 years and what each of us could do today to build a stronger culture to support survivors of domestic violence. While many of the participants will remain at CCWF for several more years, we are hopeful this training has equipped them with more skills to advocate for survivors within their community.

La Casa is proud to have brought this training and to women at CCWF. We look forward to building bridges and bringing more domestic violence education to places like CCWF and other areas where there are high rates of domestic violence, yet limited tools and resources to manage and cope with these experiences. As one participant noted in an evaluation: “This training shows us effective ways to communicate and listen, to not hold judgement, and to support fellow survivors with empathy and compassion.” We are inspired by the journeys of these women as survivors, advocates, teachers, and allies.



**A Refuge.  
An Advocate.  
A Strong Voice  
Against Domestic  
Violence.**

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**To describe my mother would be to write about a hurricane in its perfect power. Or the climbing, falling colors of a rainbow.**

—Maya Angelou

## La Casa de las Madres

**A Refuge. An Advocate. A Strong Voice Against Domestic Violence.**

The mission of La Casa de las Madres is to respond to calls for help from domestic violence victims, of all ages, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We give survivors the tools to transform their lives. We seek to prevent future violence by educating the community and by redefining public perceptions about domestic violence.

## La Casa de las Madres

**Un Refugio. Un Consejero. Una Voz Fuerte en Contra de la Violencia Doméstica.**

La Casa de las Madres ofrece amparo a mujeres que han sido víctimas de la violencia doméstica, y a sus hijos e hijas. Nosotros nos esforczamos en ayudar tanto a las mujeres como a los niños a descubrir su fuerza interior, manejar los riesgos que se les presentan y tener más control sobre sus propias vidas. Nuestro objetivo es restaurar la dignidad de nuestras clientes, fomentar su esperanza, evocar su valor y ayudarles a desarrollar su mayor potencial.

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