La Casa is Here to Help

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically altered the structure of La Casa’s services for both clients and staff.

Studies show that global and national emergencies often correlate with rises in intimate partner violence (IPV). Specifically, the pressure and proximity created by stay-at-home policies often exacerbate the risk of domestic violence. Therefore, La Casa has strived to adapt our core services to guarantee they remain available for survivors of domestic abuse across the Bay Area at this historically precarious time.

Among clients, the coronavirus has reshaped the demand for La Casa’s domestic-violence support services. During the first month of the Shelter-In-Place Order (from March 17 to April 17), our Text Line saw an incredible 33% spike in activity. Hotline calls have remained consistent throughout the pandemic, but this actually represents an increased response in lockdown conditions because survivors often cannot find the privacy to make a phone call while living at home with an abuser. Among hotline calls, we’ve also noticed a jump in the percent of clients who need shelter. While approximately a quarter of hotline callers expressed a need for emergency shelter during the last year, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we’ve found 32% of our 1,795 crisis calls mentioned a need for shelter.

At the Drop-In Counseling Center, La Casa has been faced with a range of hurdles to keep our operations running in a safe and effective manner. Adjusting our service model to the stipulations of the Shelter-In-Place Order has required us to rethink basic aspects of providing support in a socially-distanced reality. Accordingly, La Casa has pushed to adjust our service components to reach homebound and quarantined survivors. Our case managers now offer confidential phone sessions while our clinical interns pursue limited services by appointment with homebound clients including phone therapy. For equipment, La Casa has partnered with a range of allies to acquire thousands of masks, intensive cleaning supplies, and other protective gear to ensure our advocates can continue to provide direct services even in difficult circumstances. Additionally, we’re also providing onsite case management services to 135 formerly homeless, trauma-surviving women at the Mary Elizabeth Inn and Verona Hotel, which are San Francisco’s two women-only permanent supportive housing sites.

continued on page eleven
Dear Friends of La Casa,

Despite the many unexpected challenges of the last 5 months, the first word that comes to mind when I think about the La Casa community is gratitude.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has put more pressure than ever on La Casa’s safety-net infrastructure, we’ve experienced an unprecedented outburst of generosity from our community: that’s why I want to say thank you to everyone who has donated time, masks, money, or simply a kind word. Bolstered by this support, I’m proud to share that La Casa has maintained all our essential services and staff members throughout the coronavirus crisis. We could not do this without you.

For that reason, we are going to break from our typical newsletter format to focus this edition on thankfulness. I want to dedicate my letter to recognizing the incredible debt of gratitude we owe to the countless generous people, organizations, and companies who supported us across these difficult months. During this time, we’ve witnessed a period of historic change in our country from the upheaval of the pandemic to the protests for racial equality in the wake of George Floyd’s tragic murder. The national outcry for racial justice reinvigorates La Casa’s pledge to empower the brave survivors of domestic violence who seek our services every day. Fighting racism and injustice has been a pillar of La Casa’s work since our founding, as a disproportionate number of La Casa’s clients are low-income people of color. This passionate commitment has driven our work to end domestic violence for the last 44 years, and will continue to propel us decades into the future. Thank you for fueling the fight for equality.

With Gratitude,

Kathy Black
Executive Director
Throughout the Shelter-In-Place Order, La Casa’s staff continued to show up on the front lines at our office every day, offering essential services to survivors of domestic violence and their families. The pivot to serving survivors in a pandemic was not easy—but the resilience, empathy, and passion of the La Casa team ensured our services were present, day after day, to anyone calling for help.

**HOW WE HAVE RESPONDED**

**During Shelter in Place:**

- **21% increase** in hotline callers seeking shelter after the city’s order was enacted
- **Over 60 hours of volunteer support each week** in responding to messages on our Text Line
- **Advocates answered 350 hotline calls** in the first month of Shelter-In-Place
- **25 families found refuge** at our emergency shelter in the first 3 months of the pandemic

At the beginning of the pandemic, we faced a shortage of PPE, but responded by assembling masks by hand to protect our community’s health and safety. Our team made over 3,000 masks to distribute to employees, shelter residents, and supportive housing clients.

Additionally, we put together over 2,000 boxes of healthy food and snacks for our residents at the Hotel Verona and Mary Elizabeth Inn. These residents, who are formerly homeless women, had difficulties consistently finding food and groceries at the start of the Shelter-In-Place Order. To meet this demand, La Casa employees and volunteers packed, sealed, and delivered over 135 weekly food boxes to residents ensuring they had access to healthy foods without compromising their safety.

We also responded to a 33% increase in messages on our Text Line. Calling for help while sheltering with an abusive partner or living in an unsafe situation can be dangerous. Many survivors found that messaging our Text Line discreetly was the safest way to access resources, referrals, and emotional support in this challenging time.
Throughout the Shelter-In-Place Order, survivors of domestic violence have faced increased rates of violence and additional barriers to safety and healing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased our collective isolation, sparked financial and emotional strain, and caused heightened levels of stress—creating exacerbated conditions of violence which often continues without any accountability. La Casa has been at the frontlines helping survivors and their families find safety and support in this unprecedented time. We would like to share a story of hope and resilience with you as a testament to the power of survivors and mothers everywhere.

Teresa* and her daughter came to this country to reunite with her child’s father. Teresa had no other friends or family in the Bay Area, and could not work legally due to her immigration status—making her completely dependent on her partner. The physical abuse started shortly after arriving in California and rapidly increased in severity during her first month in America. As the violence escalated, Teresa grew concerned for her and her daughter’s safety, but she did not know if reaching out for help would jeopardize her documentation and ability to stay in the country. When she expressed a desire to leave the relationship, Teresa’s partner violently attacked her. While seeking medical treatment after the incident, Teresa connected with La Casa and quickly completed an intake to enter La Casa’s Emergency Shelter with her daughter.

The Stay-At-Home Order began shortly after Teresa’s entry into shelter, which made finding resources difficult. In spite of this challenge, Teresa worked closely with her case managers to identify referrals and resources to begin establishing safety and independence for her family. Due to her documentation status, Teresa was not eligible for public benefits, but La Casa case managers connected her to a cultural organization that helped provide financial aid so Teresa could open a bank account to start building long-term savings.

La Casa’s case managers helped Teresa access a variety of legal and victim support services including a restraining order and immigration support. Although the court proceedings were significantly delayed due to COVID-19 safety guidelines, Teresa and her daughter were eventually granted both civil and criminal protective orders against their abuser. Teresa also made significant progress in her immigration case and hopes to be granted a worker’s permit later this year.

During her stay at shelter, Teresa began working with La Casa advocates through phone counseling to process her experience. With crucial support from La Casa’s case management team, Teresa and her daughter secured affordable, permanent housing—a new home to live in safety and peace.

*La Casa protects the identity and confidentiality of all our clients. Names and identifying details have been changed.
We’ve been amazed and overwhelmed by the incredible giving spirit of our community in the wake of the coronavirus.

This unprecedented generosity has warmed our hearts and kept our spirits high through these trying months. We are unspeakably thankful for the huge-hearted individuals, foundations, companies, and volunteers who stepped up to donate in-kind and monetary gifts.

The outpouring of generosity has been spectacular: dozens of people reached out to donate thousands of masks and other personal protective equipment to keep our clients and staff safe. Volunteers stepped in to assemble hundreds of weekly food boxes for the vulnerable women staying at the Hotel Verona and Mary Elizabeth Inn. An inspiring array of foundations, companies, and financial institutions made significant donations to help underwrite our life-saving work for survivors across the Bay Area during this tumultuous period.

We’d like to extend a special thank you to the following foundations for their extraordinary kindness in supporting us outside their normal grant cycle: the Bella Vista Foundation, Verizon Foundation, San Francisco 49ers Foundation, George H. Sandy Foundation, Lisa & Douglas Goldman Fund, the Ray & Dagmar Dolby Fund, Justine Miner Donor-Advised Fund, and the Wells Fargo Foundation.

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 January 1 - June 30, 2020. 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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Mark Xue

“ Asking my company to donate to La Casa was important to me because I was a victim of domestic violence for many years from my ex-husband. I have a young son and refused to raise him in a toxic situation because I did not want him to think that was how you should treat a woman. I’m a strong advocate because I was silenced for a long time but last year I filed for divorce and decided to press charges after a terrible incident happened. Standing up and respecting myself was an incredibly difficult decision—but I am strong and knew it was the right thing to do. If my story could help someone else that would be amazing.

—Sarah Fendrich, Permira Advisers
Domestic violence is an issue that touched me personally growing up, and I know how important it is for victims to find the resources they need to build a new way forward. I am incredibly grateful to everyone at La Casa for putting yourselves on the line during COVID-19. You are a lifeline to many, and it’s so important for the rest of us to pitch in to ensure this work continues at such a difficult time.

—Seemay Chou, Assistant Professor of Biochemistry & Biophysics at UCSF
As the reality of the pandemic and SIP was unfolding, it was becoming clear that one of the most devastating costs of Covid-19 was the rise in domestic violence. We at BakerAvenue Wealth Management wanted to try to make some sort of difference. We also knew that others would like the opportunity as well – so we organized our #financialfeminism selfie campaign to raise money for La Casa De Las Madres. It was amazing to see people get creative and show their support for women and families."

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At our emergency shelter, La Casa instituted a range of safety protocols to ensure social distancing and limit community transmission. These measures included installing social-distancing decal stickers, closing communal rooms, offering meals in 3 shifts, and switching to disposable silverware and plates. In response to public health guidelines, clients receive a full-symptom screening every day including a temperature check, and everyone at shelter is required to wear a mask. We also disbanded group therapy starting in March to maintain social distancing. To compensate for this absence, our case managers continue to explore alternate ways to engage mothers and children in remote therapeutic activities.

We have changed our room structure to a "pod" model based on the recommendations of the San Francisco Department of Public Health. This model creates 9 individual units for women and families, with each including their own bathroom to ensure safety and social distancing for our clients. Unfortunately, many of the women and children currently staying at our emergency shelter do not have reliable lodging to move into during the Shelter-In-Place Order. Our shelter offers a temporary safe haven when need is most acute—since the risk of serious injury or death skyrockets 75% when survivors take action to separate from an abuser. In the midst of the current pandemic, it becomes especially important to ensure that our life-saving shelter services are available to those who need them.

Looking toward the months ahead, it is impossible to say what additional obstacles or trials we may need to face in the wake of the pandemic. Every day we work to adapt new policies and strategies to keep our services vital and survivors safe throughout this health crisis. Yet whatever the challenge, with your support, La Casa will be ready to fight for a safer tomorrow.

La Casa also receives funding from:
- California Department of Education:
  - Child and Adult Care Food Program
- California Office of Emergency Services:
  - Domestic Violence Assistance
  - Program Housing First For Domestic Violence
- Department of Human Services
  - DV Services to CalWORKS
- Department on the Status of Women:
  - Violence Against Women Intervention & Prevention Grants Program; Office of Violence Against Women's Grants to Encourage Arrest Program
- Marriage License Fees
- Federal Emergency Management Agency:
  - Emergency Food & Shelter Program
- The Mary Elizabeth Inn
  - Supportive Services Program
- San Francisco Mayor's Office
  - Office of Housing:
    - Emergency Solutions Grant Program
    - Nonprofit Sustainability Initiative
- UCSF ARISE Program

Every day we work to adapt new policies and strategies to keep our services vital and survivors safe throughout this health crisis.
The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.

—Coretta Scott King

La Casa de las Madres

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

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 esforzamos 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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