Shelters: Short-Term Needs*

By Marta Segovia Ashley† Founder, La Casa De Las Madres, San Francisco, California

In Memory of
SEFERINA SEGOVIA ORTEGA
Born: December 2, 1908
Died: September 28, 1947
A Victim of Marital Homicide

Marta Segovia Ashley, founder of La Casa de las Madres, received the following letter in 1975 after speaking to a group of women about rape and marital violence:

Dear Marta:

Recently I attended one of your programs here in the Bay Area discussing the topic of rape.

I attended the presentation with the intention of learning more about what is being done with regard to the rape victim.

Much to my surprise, you began to include marital abuse in your discussion.

You mentioned that wife beating is more common than rape.

You will never be able to realize how it felt to sit there looking like a well-dressed middle-class woman knowing that you were talking about me. It was the very first time I have ever heard anyone say that I wasn't wrong for being beaten!

You asked help from any woman who is subjected to this horrible form of physical abuse. You asked for anonymous case histories given to someone by the battered wife. I have no one to give a history to as there isn't anyone who knows about the situation well enough to be confided in.

I will give you my own experiences at my own hand and hope that it will be useful to you.

I am presently married to the man who beats me so I will have to remain unidentified.

* Special thanks to the following La Casa staff/residents for their contributions to this paper: Alfria Carter, Janet Gendler, Marya Grambs, Marisa Herrera Matilde Caballero Hicks, Susan Jan Hornstein, Jeanette Webb, and Jane Does 1 to 10.

† Co-Founder of La Casa De Las Madres, a San Francisco shelter for battered women. She received her B.A. in radio and television from San Francisco State University, and her M.A. in education. She has produced videotape documentaries and dramatizations of racism and sexism, and founded Femedia III, a women's media collective that honors the creativity and cultural heritage of third world women.

There is so much to say. Most has never been said before. It is very difficult.

I am in my thirties and so is my husband. I have a high school education and am presently attending a local college trying to find the education I need for support. My husband is a college graduate and a professional in his field. We are both attractive people and for the most part respected and well-liked. We have three children and live in a middle class home with all the comforts one could possibly want.

I have everything, except life without fear.

For the most part of married life I have been periodically beaten by my husband. What do I mean by "beaten"? I mean those times when parts of my body have been hit violently and repeatedly causing painful bruises, swellings, bleeding wounds, unconsciousness, or any combination of those things.

Beating should be distinguished from being hit and shoved around which I define as all other physical abuse which does not result in a beating.

And let me clarify what I mean when I refer to threats of abuse. I am not talking about a man warning me that he may lose control. I'm talking specifically about a fist shaking against my face or nose, a punching bag jabbing at my shoulder, or any gesture which threatens me with the possibility of a beating.

I have had glasses thrown at me, I have been kicked in the abdomen when I was visibly pregnant. I have been kicked off the bed and hit while laying on the floor—while I was pregnant. I have been whipped, kicked and thrown, picked up and thrown down again. I have been punched and kicked in the head, chest, face and abdomen on numerous occasions.

I have been slapped for saying something about politics, having a different view about religion, for swearing, for crying, for wanting to have intercourse.

I have been threatened when I wouldn't do something I was told to do. I have been threatened when he's had a bad day—when he's had a good day.

I have been beaten, slapped and threatened when I have stated bitterly that I didn't like what he was doing with another woman.

Each time my husband has left the house and remained gone for days.

Few people have ever seen my black and blue face or swollen lips because I have always stayed indoors feeling ashamed.

I was never able to drive after one of these beatings so I could not get myself to hospital for care. I could never have left my

young children alone and I certainly could not have left them alone even when I could have driven.

Hysteria sets in after a beating. This hysteria—the shaking and crying and mumbling—is not accepted by anyone so there has never been anyone to call.

My husband on a few occasions did call a day or so later to provide me with an excuse which I could use for returning to work, the grocery store, the dentist appointment, and so on. I used the excuses—a car accident, oral surgery, things like that.

Now the first response which I myself think of is "why didn't you seek help?"

I did. I went early in our marriage to a clergyman who after a few visits told me that my husband meant no real harm, he was just confused and felt insecure. I was to be more tolerant and understanding. Most important, I was to forgive him the beatings just as Christ had forgiven me from the cross. I did.

Things continued. I turned this time to a doctor. I was given little pills to relax me and told to take things a little easier. I was "just too nervous."

I turned to a friend and when her husband found out he accused me of either making things up or exaggerating the situation. She was told to stay away from me. (She didn't but she could no longer help.)

I turned to a professional family guidance agency. I was told there that he needed help and I should find a way to control the incidents. I couldn't control the beating—that was his decision. I was asked to defend myself against the suspicion that I wanted to be hit. I invited a beating. Good God! Did the Jews invite themselves to be slaughtered in Germany?

I did go to doctors on two occasions. One asked me what I had done to provoke him and the other asked if we had made-up yet.

I called the police one time. They not only didn't respond to the call, they called several hours later to ask if things had "settled down." I could have been dead by then!

I have nowhere to go if it happens again. No one wants a woman with three children. Even if someone is kind enough, they wouldn't want to become involved in what is commonly referred to as a "domestic situation."

Everyone I have gone to for help has somehow wanted to blame me and vindicate my husband. I can see it there between the words and at the end of sentences. The clergyman, the doctors, the counselor, the police—every one of them has found a way to vindicate my husband.

No one has to "provoke" a wife beater. He'll hit when he's ready and for whatever reason he wishes.

I may be his excuse but I have never been the reason.

I know that I do not want to be hit. I know, too, that I will be beaten again unless I can find a way out for myself and my children. I am terrified for them also.

As a married woman I have no recourse but to remain in the situation which is causing me to be painfully abused.

I have suffered physical and emotional battering and spiritual rape all because the social structure of my world says I cannot do anything about a man who wants to beat me. Society says that I must be committed to a man without any opportunity for an education and earning capacity. That my children must be subjected to the emotional battering caused when they see their mother's beaten face or hear my screams in the middle of the night.

I know that I have to get out but when you have nowhere to go you know that you go on your own and with no support. I have to be ready for that. I have to be ready to completely support myself and the children and provide a decent environment.

I pray that I can do that before I am murdered in my own home.

I've learned that no one believed me and I have only the hope that I can get away before it is too late.

I've learned also that the doctors, the police, the clergy and friends will excuse my husband for distorting my face but won't forgive me for looking bruised and broken.

The greatest tragedy is that I am still praying and there is no human person to listen. Being beaten is a terrible thing but more terrible if you are not equipped to fight back.

I recall an occasion on which I tried to defend myself. I actually tore a pair of pajamas. He produced them to a relative as proof that I had done something terribly wrong. The fact that I was sitting with several raised spots on my head hidden by hair, a swollen lip that was bleeding, and a severely damaged cheek with a blood clot which caused a dimple didn't even matter. The only thing that mattered was that I tore his pajamas. It didn't matter that I tore them in self-defense.

This is such an earthly position for a woman to find herself in. I would guess that it is incomprehensible for anyone who has not experienced a like situation. I find it difficult to believe myself.

Another point is that while a husband can beat, slap or threaten a wife, there are "good days" and this is what causes most people to wonder, why does she stay.

The good days tend to wear away the effect of the beating. They tend to cause the wife to put aside the trauma and look to the good. First, because there is nothing else to do. Second, because there is nowhere to go and no one else to turn to. Third, because the defeat is the beating and the hope is that it will not happen again.

A loving woman like myself always hopes that it will not happen again. When it does, she simply hopes again, until, it becomes obvious after a third beating that there is no hope.

That is when you turn from yourself outwardly and hope again to find an answer. You begin to plan for yourself.

The third beating may be too late. Several of the times that I have been abused I have been bewildered that I remained alive. Imagine that I have been thrown to a very hard slate floor several times, kicked in the abdomen, the head, and the chest and still remained alive.

What determines who is lucky and who isn't? I could have been dead a long time ago had I been hit the wrong way. My baby would have been dead, aborted, or deformed had I been kicked the wrong way. What has saved me?

I don't know. I know that it has happened and that each night I dread what may be the final strike which will kill me and leave my children motherless.

I believe that is why I am telling someone all that I have to relate. There is more, much more, and I have tried to keep it short but I know your program will be a strong and a much needed contribution to the community.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope that the emotion which I have revealed is not a detriment to your purpose. I have tried several times to hand compose this letter but it wouldn't come properly. The writing was shaky. The typing is not very good either, although I am a good typist.

The truth is that I am emotional about what has happened to me because it is so much more real than I can ever describe.

I have tried to give you a little of both the physical and mental abuse which comes out of a man who has not the self-orientation to combat the presence of a woman in his life.

I would like to do more but that would take a book—and there is no market because there are no ears.

Thank you,
Jane Doe

Marta's Story

Before we examine the violence that this white middle class woman endured by herself, let us consider the soil of this violence.

The soil of this cruelty, maiming, and murder is the racism of the Great White Society. This country has systematically discriminated against, humiliated, and degraded certain of its people. These battered people, the poor and powerless, the ethnic minorities, the disenfranchised are the real abused children of the white patriarchy. I am not saying that suffering is limited to minorities. Rather, I am defining a pecking order of violence that the men in our society enact. These powerless men inflict violence on women and children, the only people who are even more powerless than themselves.

I felt the oppression of the white culture in my own life from the time I was 5. At school they denied my language and their denial of my language was a denial of myself. I was forced not to speak Spanish. I did not listen to my teachers' words; I tuned into their intentions. I could feel their prejudice as they insisted it was for my own good. The contrast between my honest, demonstrative, and loving extended family (three uncles, two aunts, my grandmother, and mother) and the cold, indifferent, stoic white teachers did not make sense. The two worlds I faced daily—the first of love and tender support, the second of immense deadness—could never be reconciled.

Every day as I left my grandmother's house with her blessing and kiss on my forehead and a funny little cloth bag filled with herbs around my neck to protect me from diseases, I felt the terror of the world as the door closed behind me. Eleven years later when my mother was murdered, I had already been labeled a "psychopathic incorrigible." Words are our way of expressing ourselves and giving form to our feelings; words had been ripped out of my throat and I was left without defenses. I reacted with disobedience, hostility, and finally, with violence.

My stepfather was barely 37 years old when he stabbed my mother to death. He was very kind and gentle when I first met him. He courted my mother for a long time, and she considered carefully before she married for the third and final time. He worked in a steel warehouse. He had incentive and ambition; he wanted to better himself for our sake. He promised my mother the world, and in his heart he really meant it.

The white world slowly and insidiously defeated my stepfather. He was degraded at the warehouse. Because he was the only Mexican, he was expected to stay after the regular shift and do all the cleanup. He tried to take on more responsibility, but they always promoted whites.

It troubled him that my mother had to work. Racism and despair affected him so deeply that within 2 years a man who had enjoyed a glass of wine with dinner was a full-blown alcoholic.

My mother worked in a factory packing coffee and was the shop steward for the union. She was intelligent, sensitive, and proud. She saved all the money she could in order to send me to good schools and buy me good clothes. She did not want me to be ashamed of being poor. For herself, I remember she had her Sunday outfit: a black coat with a silver fox collar, a simple black dress, a black hat with a veil, good shoes, and one pair of silk stockings. Before she married my stepfather, our family checked him out. They could not resist him; he was very good to her and me. He obviously loved her deeply.

After working all day packing heavy cases of coffee and fighting unfair conditions in the shop, my mother came home to find her husband drunk. It was more than she could understand. She needed someone to console her and to listen. He needed her to care and understand his suffering. Neither could give each other the support he/she needed. Society afforded them no real chance, no break in the violence, no peace in their lives.

When she was 39, he stabbed her in the heart. Then, in terror, he tried to hide the act by pushing her out the window; she landed two stories below. In 3 years of arguing he had slapped her twice. This time they were arguing about me. I was 16 years old at the time. She was desperate because his drinking was getting worse. He felt shattered because she had let me visit my real father for summer vacation. For the past 5 years, he felt like he had been my "real" father. He drank heavily that night to mask his feelings of betrayal.

In that last moment, in their last angry cries, he reached for a sharp bread knife. He informed her that if she did not quit putting him down, he would kill her. She, unafraid of the knife in his hands, yelled back, "Go ahead, kill me, kill me. What difference does it make anymore?" She cried, "Go ahead, kill me, you coward."

Although I was not there, I have seen a replay of those last moments of her life many times. In a way his life also ended then; in jail he went "a little crazy." For the first time in my life I see her death as an expression of the futility of their lives together. I understand this as the final act of a racist society that propelled two people to annihilate each other.

There were no La Casas during Seferina's lifetime. Jane Doe has lived to find out that she was not alone. Her pleas, "I have nowhere to go and no one else to turn to," launched the shelter. In her letter she has eloquently summarized the inadequacy of all existing social service agencies and made it clear that wife beating is not just a few slaps or love bites. To listen to her experiences is to find an answer to the

question, "Why do we need La Casa?" "I have nowhere to go and no one else to turn to."

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the need for short-term shelters for battered women and examine how one shelter operates. We have another purpose as well. At every stage of the road the battered woman meets with hostility and incredulity. She is silent because no one believes her. She grows dumb because no one hears her. She learns to be inarticulate. In this paper we hope to give voices back to some of these "inarticulate" women and share their stories with you.

We must recognize the reason our society is willing to address the issue of marital violence now—the problem affects *white women.* Drug abuse was not identified as a problem until it entered the living rooms and playgrounds of the white middle class. Racism, as the most deadly sickness in our society today, cannot be separated from the major American crime, marital violence. Every form of violence diminishes the human spirit and destroys human life.

In the following sections we will present a large amount of data about battered women. We want you to understand that there are women behind these case studies—women with green eyes and red hair, brown eyes and black hair, women who like to sing, dance, laugh, cry. Again and again we will tell you that the battered woman is no different from any other woman. She is unlucky. She is a victim, but she is not a victim 24 hours a day. While we study her, please remember that she's a person.

History

In the fall of 1974, Marta Segovia Ashley gathered together six other women who were interested in working on the ideal of a shelter. Initially the group thought that wife beating happened only in the ghettos; they were soon to find out that this problem cut across all racial and socioeconomic lines. In the many months that followed, these women developed the ideals of La Casa by drawing from the violence in their own lives to develop a sensitive way of responding to other battered women.

The name "La Casa De Las Madres" was chosen by the four Latinas and simply means Mothers' House. Any woman, we decided, who has been beaten needs a mother's house to go to where she can find safety and grow strong again. We wanted this perfect mother who would say to you, "Come home, my house and everything in it is at your disposal. What do you need? What do you want to do with your life? *You* tell me how I can assist you." This mother would not make you feel guilty, would not accuse you of wanting to be beaten, and

would support you in any decision you made for yourself and your children, including that of returning to your mate.

As we did not want the social worker-white missionary establishment to run La Casa, we wrote into the original proposal that the residents would (hopefully by the end of the first year) become the staff at La Casa and that we "would work ourselves out of jobs." We planned to be consultants to La Casa for as long as we were needed and that eventually even that would no longer be necessary.

We felt that if we truly wanted the residents to be engaged in their own liberation then we could not serve as their role models. They must be their own examples in their struggle to be free and for those that came after them.

We also believed and supported their rights to be more fully human and that demonstrated even more clearly to us their rights to inherit and run La Casa.

Another important ideal was, "We cannot help people; we can only love them." This spiritual philosophy came from the life of Vimala Thakar whom Marta studied with in India. This meant that any approach from us to the resident must be done as a total act of love without even the expectation of gratitude, that they would or should embrace our ideals or way of living. In fact, we very carefully considered whether or not to use the word feminist in our proposal, for although we defined ourselves as such, we did not want to impose our feminism as a condition of acceptance. Their cultural, political, and social ways of being must be honored; and we had no right to impose any overt or subtle pressures on them to be like us.

What followed is our experience of "oneness" with each other. In sharing the violence in our lives, we began to see that we were equally oppressed. There would be no separation between staff and resident. And, although some of us had suffered more violence and degradation than others, it was not because we were less human, less lovable, or more deserving of it (just because the racist society in which we live had discriminated against us because of our skin color, language, race, etc.).

It is only a matter of luck that separates one who is beaten from one who is not. The same is true of rape. As at one time we believed that women were raped because they secretly wanted to be raped or because they provoked this urge in men by the way they dressed or looked, likewise with marital violence women do not secretly desire to be beaten nor do they deserve to be beaten.

The coalition began appearing in public, addressing groups on the subject of battering, and the response was overwhelming. Women from all walks of life, from all races, and all classes and circumstances told stories of domestic terror, beatings, and degradation.

question, "Why do we need La Casa?" "I have nowhere to go and no one else to turn to."

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the need for short-term shelters for battered women and examine how one shelter operates. We have another purpose as well. At every stage of the road the battered woman meets with hostility and incredulity. She is silent because no one believes her. She grows dumb because no one hears her. She learns to be inarticulate. In this paper we hope to give voices back to some of these "inarticulate" women and share their stories with you.

We must recognize the reason our society is willing to address the issue of marital violence now—the problem affects *white women.* Drug abuse was not identified as a problem until it entered the living rooms and playgrounds of the white middle class. Racism, as the most deadly sickness in our society today, cannot be separated from the major American crime, marital violence. Every form of violence diminishes the human spirit and destroys human life.

In the following sections we will present a large amount of data about battered women. We want you to understand that there are women behind these case studies—women with green eyes and red hair, brown eyes and black hair, women who like to sing, dance, laugh, cry. Again and again we will tell you that the battered woman is no different from any other woman. She is unlucky. She is a victim, but she is not a victim 24 hours a day. While we study her, please remember that she's a person.

History

In the fall of 1974, Marta Segovia Ashley gathered together six other women who were interested in working on the ideal of a shelter. Initially the group thought that wife beating happened only in the ghettos; they were soon to find out that this problem cut across all racial and socioeconomic lines. In the many months that followed, these women developed the ideals of La Casa by drawing from the violence in their own lives to develop a sensitive way of responding to other battered women.

The name "La Casa De Las Madres" was chosen by the four Latinas and simply means Mothers' House. Any woman, we decided, who has been beaten needs a mother's house to go to where she can find safety and grow strong again. We wanted this perfect mother who would say to you, "Come home, my house and everything in it is at your disposal. What do you need? What do you want to do with your life? *You* tell me how I can assist you." This mother would not make you feel guilty, would not accuse you of wanting to be beaten, and

would support you in any decision you made for yourself and your children, including that of returning to your mate.

As we did not want the social worker-white missionary establishment to run La Casa, we wrote into the original proposal that the residents would (hopefully by the end of the first year) become the staff at La Casa and that we "would work ourselves out of jobs." We planned to be consultants to La Casa for as long as we were needed and that eventually even that would no longer be necessary.

We felt that if we truly wanted the residents to be engaged in their own liberation then we could not serve as their role models. They must be their own examples in their struggle to be free and for those that came after them.

We also believed and supported their rights to be more fully human and that demonstrated even more clearly to us their rights to inherit and run La Casa.

Another important ideal was, "We cannot help people; we can only love them." This spiritual philosophy came from the life of Vimala Thakar whom Marta studied with in India. This meant that any approach from us to the resident must be done as a total act of love without even the expectation of gratitude, that they would or should embrace our ideals or way of living. In fact, we very carefully considered whether or not to use the word feminist in our proposal, for although we defined ourselves as such, we did not want to impose our feminism as a condition of acceptance. Their cultural, political, and social ways of being must be honored; and we had no right to impose any overt or subtle pressures on them to be like us.

What followed is our experience of "oneness" with each other. In sharing the violence in our lives, we began to see that we were equally oppressed. There would be no separation between staff and resident. And, although some of us had suffered more violence and degradation than others, it was not because we were less human, less lovable, or more deserving of it (just because the racist society in which we live had discriminated against us because of our skin color, language, race, etc.).

It is only a matter of luck that separates one who is beaten from one who is not. The same is true of rape. As at one time we believed that women were raped because they secretly wanted to be raped or because they provoked this urge in men by the way they dressed or looked, likewise with marital violence women do not secretly desire to be beaten nor do they deserve to be beaten.

The coalition began appearing in public, addressing groups on the subject of battering, and the response was overwhelming. Women from all walks of life, from all races, and all classes and circumstances told stories of domestic terror, beatings, and degradation.

In late 1975 San Francisco Women's Centers, a group that facilitates and supports development of women's projects, adopted the La Casa Coalition as a sponsored project. This enabled La Casa Coalition to use Women's Centers' tax exemption and benefit from the community-organizing expertise of the staff. At that time many more women (mostly white) became involved in the project: women whose mothers had been beaten, who had themselves been beaten, who had lived in families with child abuse. Women who had experienced many aspects of domestic violence in this culture now joined together for a common purpose: to provide emergency services for battered women and their children with a dedication and commitment to live by the goals heretofore presented.

In December 1975 a coalition member offered her house to rent as the La Casa shelter. It was perfect in many respects: located on a little-used, dead-end street, it was steps away from public transportation, from a park and playground, and from a hospital. It was in an accessible part of town with excellent transportation nearby. The house itself accommodated the need: a four-story Victorian with numerous kitchens and bathrooms, space for offices and 30 women and children.

The coalition moved into the building on January 15, 1976, paying half the month's rent, $350, out of their own pockets.

We were sure of the response; we knew that as soon as word got out of the availability of emergency shelter, we would be flooded with requests.

On January 16, 1976, our first resident family moved in. She was a Mexican women with three teenage sons. She spoke only Spanish, but could neither read nor write her native tongue. She had lived with a man who was violent to her for 18 years. The night before her husband had beaten her and, when she refused to sleep with him, had locked her out of the house. Her sons had helped her into their bedroom through the window, and her husband had come in and in front of them had overturned a bed on her. He had gone too far in frightening her children. She decided that evening that somehow she would leave him the next day. Her relationship with her two younger sons (aged 13 and 14) was a beautiful relationship based on mutual love and tenderness towards each other. Her 16-year-old had already begun to act out the role model his father had provided for him. He was cruel to both his brothers and his mother. She became aware of her older son's attitude and reconciled herself with the fact that at least her two younger children would not be like their father. She had many mixed emotions about her husband, but not once did she ever consider returning to him. She said one day after crying and feeling sad about

her husband, "But he will never change; there's no reason for him to change."

After 2 months she and her three sons moved to a new flat, and she had found a job where she could provide for her sons. She divorced her husband and now looked forward to a new life with someone else, someone who would not beat her.

The media attention on La Casa was overwhelming. Newspaper articles came out in the two major dailies. Both newspapers did full page coverage. Several women from the coalition whose mothers had been beaten appeared on all the television stations telling their stories and asking for help for La Casa. Money trickled in enabling the coalition to continue to pay for food and rent. Several foundations accepted our proposals, and this enabled La Casa to officially open. The foundations included: Vanguard Foundation, $5,500; Coleman Children and Youth Services, $6,000; and finally, $51,000 from the San Francisco Foundation.

The need was apparent. More women than we could take asked to come to the shelter. The phone rang constantly, from agencies with battered women who had no place to go and from women desperate for a place of safety.

We knew the money we had received would not last out the year, but at least we were open; and being open, we were determined to raise the money to stay open.

Why Does a Battered Women Stay?

Why does a woman remain with a violent man who has beaten her and will beat her again? As we listen to the voices on the other end of the telephone during a crisis call and talk with women who have left, we realize there are as many reasons for staying as there are crisis calls.

Economic necessity. Nowhere to go. Fear. Dependency. Children. These are the reasons women stay, but the words by themselves do not adequately convey the sense of immobility, powerlessness, and paralysis a woman experiences. The majority of women who come to La Casa have been hit not once but several times. These are women who have stayed with their husbands through 10 or 15 years of beatings, degradation, and constant fear. Some have thought of escape a thousand times.

They stay because:

"I've got three kids now. They need a father, a father image. . .If I leave him, I'll never find another man. . .What will happen to my children growing up in a fatherless home?"

"I've got kids and I hear that welfare doesn't pay much. . .barely enough to live on. . .I want the best for my kids; what will happen to us trying to live on such little money?"

"My husband's told me for a long time that I'm stupid and lazy. I tried not to believe him but sometimes I get this scary feeling he's right."

"I have never done anything on my own. What if I cannot make it on my own?. . .If I leave him and things go wrong, will I be able to take care of myself?"

A woman is conditioned to believe that she is not complete unless she has a man. Once she has a man, she has to keep him. It is her responsibility to hold the marriage together. When difficulties arise, she blames herself. The attitude, "You made your bed, now you lie in it," becomes logically extended to, "Accept what you get," which gets twisted to become, "You are responsible for what you get"—in this case, beatings.

Women who have grown up in violent homes are more likely than other women to accept beatings as part of marriage; female victims of child abuse often become battered wives. In this cycle, violent home begets violent home until some kind of emergency intervention breaks the pattern.

The husband who beats his wife may desperately fear that she will leave him. By isolating her from friends and relatives, treating her like a child, and making her feel extremely dependent, he ensures that she will stay.

The issue of a woman's psychological and economic dependence on a man goes to the core of our societal indoctrination about a woman's inferiority. Not all women who call or come to La Casa have been totally dependent or isolated. In fact, a segment of La Casa residents are and have been working women. That the woman who does have some degree of financial independence remains with a battering husband shows the extent to which she has been conditioned that she is a second-class citizen.

It is not uncommon for a woman to come home on Friday night and hand her entire paycheck over to her husband. If she is the only one working in their family, he may assert his "manhood" by keeping the money and doling out an allowance to her. She may be in constant jeopardy at her job. Her black eyes, swollen face, and bruised limbs are visible to all the people she works with. She can invent excuses to stay at home from work, or she can apologize for her appearance at work—"I'm so silly, I fell downstairs. . .I bumped into the wall. . .I slammed the door on myself."

The working woman may stay with her man because she can't make it alone or because he needs her or because she'll never find another man. In other words, she stays because she has little confidence and self-esteem. She does not believe she deserves a better life and a better

relationship. She thinks it is her duty to be nurturing and subservient to her husaband.

The emotional link to the batterer is one of the strongest reasons a woman stays. Once real love is gone, the only emotion left is pity, and it can be a stronger bond than love. She pities her husband because he has lost control of his life. She realizes that if she leaves him, he may fall apart completely. Because she regards his emotional needs more seriously than her physical safety, she stays in a life-threatening situation. Third world women who experience how white society oppresses their men are especially likely to act out of pity, disregarding the danger as they try to protect their mates.

Thus, we see the subtle, psychological effects of a society that trains women to be sweet, passive, and self-sacrificing. For women's oppression to end, social change must encompass both the economic and cultural spheres. Women must have access to decent jobs and child care, the opportunity to grow up thinking that they will work. From birth women deserve to be treated as independent, capable people rather than as incomplete and inferior beings.

There are many factors that keep women in violent homes. Every time we receive a woman at La Casa we recognize the courage that it took for her to leave. For us, the facile accusation "Why did she stay?" is not a relevant question. The issue is not why she stayed, but how we can help her leave and, once she has left, what does she need?

The La Casa Program

The four major components of the La Casa program are: (1) the crisis line, (2) the program for residents, (3) the community group, and (4) outreach and education. In the following section of the paper we will briefly describe the implementation and objectives of each component.

Crisis Line

La Casa currently receives approximately 220 calls a month. Our crisis line is in operation 24 hours a day. Since domestic violence often erupts in the evening or on weekends, round-the-clock availability is necessary. Volunteers and paid staff handle the phones. During each call, a crisis sheet outlining the particulars of the woman's situation is filled out.

When a woman calls and wants to come to La Casa for shelter, the staff employs several criteria. First, is she in immediate danger? Second, what are her other options? Does she have money to pay for a hotel? Is it safe for her to go to family or friends? Third, do children limit her mobility? Because the demand for shelter exceeds our capacity, we have to make distinctions and accept only those women

in the greatest need. We give priority to women who have no other options, those who have no money, those with children, those who do not speak much English. La Casa cannot accept severely disturbed women or women with alcohol or drug problems because we are not equipped to deal with their special needs. In addition, the presence of several children and the chaotic and noisy atmosphere at the house are not usually helpful for women with serious problems.

Before a woman is accepted, three staff members must give their consensus. The purpose of consensus is to provide an opportunity for more than one viewpoint and perspective. It reduces the isolation and responsibility of people's making decisions alone and enables three women to share responsibility for their decision.

Residence Programs

When the consensus has been reached to admit a new family, we arrange to meet the woman at a designated public location and bring her to the house. The location of our shelter is kept secret in order to protect the women and children who are staying there. Enraged husbands have gone to great lengths to track down their families. On two occasions husbands have set up women to call and pretend that they are battered in order to find out our location.

A volunteer or staff member welcomes the woman to the house, explains the rules and procedures, and fills out several intake forms. These forms give the staff relevant information about the residents and provide statistical data about the families that La Casa serves.

The accommodations are not luxurious; the house is crowded and noisy. Women and children sleep in bunk beds, several to a room. Chore charts are filled out at a weekly meeting. Women take responsibility for cooking dinners, cleaning the kitchens, halls, bathrooms, and dining rooms, for making their children's lunches. A staff member buys the food in accord with what the women want to cook.

House rules forbid violence between women, between mothers and children, and among children. Women are entitled to three overnights during their stay at La Casa. Drugs and alcohol are not permitted on the premises.

Occasionally, we have a resident with an ongoing drug or alcohol problem. In these cases we try to find an appropriate referral. Currently, there are no treatment programs in the Bay area that accommodate alcoholic or drug-addicted women and their children. Consequently, women with these problems are faced with the prospect of giving up their children or going untreated. We confront this lack of adequate services frequently.

La Casa offers services for both the women and their children. Certain staff members, designated as women's advocates and children's advocates, work specifically with the women and children to ensure their needs are being met. In the following section we will briefly describe the children's program, the women's advocates program, and other services.

The Children's Program: Initially, children were viewed as appendages of their mothers. We soon learned that they were more than accessories to the women who came to La Casa; they deserved an equal share of attention, energy, and concern. By the second staff hiring in 1976 almost one-third of the staff were children's advocates. The children's program is particularly crucial, since at any one time as many as two-thirds of the resident population are under 14.

The children's advocates offer a supportive and creative child-care program every weekday. Three mornings a week mothers meet with the child-care staff to discuss special needs and issues. The children's staff works with both the mother and her children to try to provide support for their relationship. Assertiveness training is integrated into contact with the mothers and their children. Child-care workers are alert for signs of child abuse and offer counseling or referral when appropriate.

The children's advocate also serves as a liaison with community agencies. She may make contact with the schools, help mothers find child care or temporary foster care, and put women in touch with single-parents resource centers or support groups. In addition, she may link mothers up with a men's collective that offers child care and "Big Brother" relationships.

The Women's Advocates Program : Each woman who comes to stay at La Casa is assigned two women's advocates as contact people. They meet with her regularly to ascertain her needs, provide support, refer her to community services, and accompany her to the welfare department, to court, to the doctor, on househunting expeditions.

Individual therapy is not provided because we feel that implies that the woman is disturbed and we must delve into her intrapsychic history to understand her predicament. Therapy also promotes a "power-over" relationship in which a passive, dependent woman looks to an "expert" to solve her problems. Problem-solving techniques, referrals, and advocacy are more appropriate services for battered women. La Casa is an instrument to help women become strong and form their own identity, rather than continue to accept one that is subordinate and inferior.

Women are also encouraged to seek support from other residents at the house. Contact with other women who have had similar experiences reduces the feelings of isolation and guilt.

Other Programs: La Casa offers a weekly assertiveness training group and a support group. These groups create an opportunity for her to enhance her self-esteem and enable her to grow more independent.

La Casa's legal services include an attorney on contract to us, a half-time, work-study student, and many volunteer law students. They check in daily to do followup on the crisis calls that require legal assistance and provide more extensive legal counseling for the residents.

The Community Group

The third component of the La Casa program consists of a weekly group that meets at a neighborhood health center. This support group serves women who call our crisis line, but continue to live in violent homes. It also includes women who have recently left violent situations and want support. The group is co-led by a La Casa staff member who was a battered wife and a Spanish-speaking staff member. Child care is provided; the group is free. Attendance fluctuates, but we feel this group offers essential support for battered women in violent homes. It reduces their isolation and provides an opportunity for them to examine their alternatives realistically.

Outreach and Community Education

La Casa staff and volunteers have always considered outreach as an integral part of our work. We must combat the pervasive myths that keep women from reporting abuse. Our program concentrates on community outreach and speaking engagements. We have two staff members who work in the black and Latino communities. We also give presentations, provide statistical information, and disseminate written material to various groups—doctors, lawyers, hospital staffs, social workers, women's groups, schools, civic organizations.

La Casa Staff

We have undergone many changes since we began as an all-volunteer staff. The following principles and commitments evolved as we worked together to develop a responsive, effective, and sensitive staff.

Affirmative Action: When La Casa made the transition to a paid staff in early 1976, most of our workers were white. We made a commitment to hire only nonwhite women in subsequent hirings until the staff could be 60 percent nonwhite.

There were many reasons for our commitment to this policy. First, we knew that many of our residents would be nonwhite, since we take in only those women with the most limited options. It is important that the staff share similar cultural experiences. Secondly, we did not want

December 1977

Business: 415/626-7859
Crisis: 415/626-9343

La Casa De Las Madres
P.O. Box 15147
San Francisco, CA 94115

Statistics on La Casa Residents June 1976 To September 1977

Following is a compilation of statistics about La Casa residents who stayed at La Casa during the period from June 1976 through September 1977. These statistics are divided into two groups: June '76–February '77, and March '77–September '77; the statistics were more completely obtained during the second period, so we decided to report them separately. These statistics may only be used with permission of La Casa; please send any written material which uses these statistics to us. Permission to use these statistics may be obtained by writing the Public Information Coordinator, at the above address.

One hundred thirty-nine women were residents at La Casa during the first period (6/76–2/77), and 146 women resided at La Casa during 3/77–9/77.

	6/76–2/77 (N=139)	3/77–9/77 (N=146)
1. Age of woman	—	99% reporting
Under 20 years of age		8%
21–25 years		31%
26–30 years		31%
31–40 years		22%
over 40 years		7%
2. Race of woman	94% reporting	99% reporting
White	52%	39%
Black	23%	17%
Latina/Chicana	15%	33%; (19% spoke
Native American	4%	5% Spanish as
Asian	—	3% primary
Other/unspecified	2%	2% language)
3. Marital status of woman	72% reporting	96% reporting
Married	51%	53%
Single	17%	20%
Separated	13%	12%
Cohabiting	11%	12%
Divorced	8%	4%
4. Race of woman's partner	79% reporting	95% reporting
White	35%	32%
Black	41%	34%
Latino/Chicano	17%	28%
Asian	4%	3%
Native American	1%	1%
Other/unspecified	2%	2%

5. Woman's financial situation			99% reporting
Welfare	24%		53%
Employed			17%
No money			4%
Other			26%
	6/76–2/77		**3/77–9/77**
6. Woman's education	67% reporting		95% reporting
8 years or less	4%		8%
8–12 years	56%		58%
12 years or more	8%		33%
7. Man's education	56% reporting		82% reporting
8 years or less	8%		15%
8–12 years	64%		51%
more than 12 years	9%		33%
8. Woman's occupation	—		88% reporting
Unemployed			76%
Unskilled			8%
Skilled			8%
Professional			6%
Student			0
Other			3%
9. Man's occupation			88% reporting
Unemployed			30%
Unskilled			49%
Skilled			15%
Professional			5%
Pimp			2%
Student			1%
10. Violence in woman's parents' home	72% reporting		90% reporting
Yes	42%		39%
No	58%		61%
11. Violence in man's parents' home	49% reporting		72% reporting
Yes	52%		58%
No	41%		42%
12. Drug/alcohol use by man	52% reporting		90% reporting
Alcohol use	43%		43%
Drug use	35%		
Heroin/methadone			2%
Marijuana			5%
Sedatives			0
Amphetamines			0
More than one			27%

13. Drug/alcohol use by women	—	88% reporting
Alcohol		15%
Sedatives		2%
Marijuana		10%
Amphetamines		0
Heroin/Methadone		0
More than one		7%
14. Abuse of children	50% reporting	92% reporting
Yes	41%	41%
No	59%	50%
Not applicable		9%
15. Number of children of women	95% reporting	100% reporting
None	26%	11%
One child	29%	35%
Two	23%	31%
Three	11%	10%
Four	8%	5%
Five	3%	3%
Six or more	1%	3%
Not in residence		3%
16. Ages of children	92% reporting	99% reporting
0–2 years	29%	25%
3–12 years	62%	61%
over 12 years	9%	9%
Not applicable		4%
17. Previous calls for assistance by woman	100% reporting	99% reporting
Police	27%	30%
Clergy	7%	6%
Counselor/therapist	9%	9%
Doctor/hospital	9%	9%
Welfare/social services	11%	14%
Friends-relatives	30%	25%
No previous calls	4%	6%
Other	3%	0
18. Previous use of institutions by woman	—	92% reporting
Hospital		23%
Emergency shelter		24%
Jail/prison		15%
Mental Institution		10%
None		28%
19. Source of referral to La Casa	68% reporting	94% reporting
Advertising	26%	27%
Friends-relatives	15%	17%
Welfare/community social svc agency		12%
Mental health agency	15%	2%
Doctor/hospital	11%	3%
Police	4%	12%
CES (welfare, probation, Juv. Hall)	7%	5%
Other/unspecified	15%	9%

20. Length of stay at La Casa	81% reporting	99% reporting
0–7 days	47%	25%
8–14 days	14%	22%
15–21 days	10%	14%
22 days–1 month	16%	15%
over 1 month	13%	23%
21. Where women went after leaving La Casa	75% reporting	85% reporting
To own living space	54%	49%
Back to partner	25%	23%
Other/unspecified	21%	25%

to have token nonwhite staff members because this is an untenable position for such a woman to be in. We wanted to break the domination of the white middle class cultural mode of operating. Thirdly, we wanted to deliberately reverse the culture's racism in terms of economic opportunities rather than perpetuate it. We did not want to become one more agency that throws up its hands and says, "Oh, but we could not find any qualified applicants."

Our struggles around affirmative action have not been easy. It has been hard for those who are white consciously to limit our jobs; it has been hard for those of us who are not white to be in a token position. We have struggled to understand our class and cultural differences. We have learned to respect our differences and become sensitive to the needs that evolve from those differences. We are still struggling, but the process enriches ourselves and strengthens our program.

Heterogeneity: Our commitment to a diverse staff does not only apply to multicultural representation. We also believe in the value of having many kinds of women on the staff. Older women who have dealt with children, gone through crises, and acquired wisdom through living can understand the experiences of our residents in a unique and valuable way. In addition, our staff has always been integrated by the presence of lesbians, who formed a core of early organizers. We also see the value in hiring mothers. Mothers are often handicapped in the job market, but they offer our programs a vital and sensitive perspective.

Nonprofessionalism: Neither social service nor mental health credentials are criteria for hiring workers. Professional degrees do not guarantee sensitivity. The record of professionals in dealing with women in general and battered women in particular has been poor.

It is important to us not to see the battered women who call or come to La Casa as "them" and the La Casa staff as "us." We are all victims of the oppression of this culture; we believe in the equality of staff and residents. Professional training is not generally conducive to this viewpoint. Rather, personal experience with domestic violence, support for our feminist principles, and a commitment to working with a diverse staff are criteria we look for in hiring.

Nonhierarchical: We believe that all jobs—child care, assertiveness training, legal assistance, fundraising, phone work, house maintenance, outreach—have equal value. Everyone receives the same rate for pay; no one job deserves more power than other jobs. All jobs are essential for the operation of the house.

All-Women Staff: La Casa maintains an all-women staff for several reasons. The fact that we are all women—plumbers, electricians, childcare workers, organizers, speakers, architects, lawyers—affirms that women can be strong and independent. Many residents have

never seen women working together accomplishing goals, being effective, and supporting one another. The presence of men on the staff would alter the dynamics and support situation. At this time in a woman's life, she often prefers not to be in the company of men.

One of the ways La Casa could effectively monitor the criminal justice system was to serve as the battered women's advocate and follow her through the process of trying to obtain justice. The battered woman is humiliated at every stage of the legal proceedings—when she calls the police; when she meets with the domestic relations bureau official, the police inspector, and the district attorney; if and when she takes her husband to court. At all times the blame and burden rest on her. It is she, not the man who beat her, who has the problem. If any or all of the officials who interview her believe she provoked her husband, they treat her as if she does not deserve to be defended. It is not an exaggeration to say that a woman's beating does not stop with her husband. She is beaten again by the lack of sympathy and outright hostility displayed by the police and the courts.

By detailing the specific of one case, we will present an overview of the legal situation. Throughout the proceedings the La Casa advocate (Ashley) took notes to document how the legal system subtly and overtly discriminates against the battered woman.

Mary O. was about 30. She had been living with John for about 3 years. This was not the first time John beat her, but it was one of the most severe beatings. She called the police in the evening immediately following the attack, and she called La Casa the next morning.

The policeman who came to Mary's house after the beating did not indicate in his report or to Mary that John had committed a felony. He did not inform Mary that she had the right to make a citizen's arrest.

Mary went to the hospital because she feared that her badly swollen face masked further internal damages. The hospital report revealed a fractured nose and a possible concussion.

Although La Casa was not officially open yet, we brought Mary to the house because she needed a safe place to stay. John had keys to her apartment. Since she was living with him rather married to him, she was not eligible for a temporary restraining order.

Mary was interviewed three times before she appeared in court. The first interview was with the domestic relations bureau of the San Francisco Police Department. The purpose of the interview was to determine if a crime had been commited. The domestic relations bureau official focused on Mary and her mistakes. Why did she wait to call the police? Where were her witnesses? Why hadn't she reported all the previous beatings? Why did she arouse her husband's aggression? Throughout the interview Mary was put on the defensive. Finally, she was informed that a police inspector would call her.

When the police inspector called to set up an appointment, Mary put down the phone and began to cry. "It's the same old runaround," she told Ashley. "They are not going to do anything." It turned out that Mary was speaking with the same inspector she had talked to a year earlier when her boyfriend had broken her cheekbones. The inspector had told her then that she had no case because she did not have witnesses. Ashley took the phone and firmly informed the inspector that they wanted an appointment in order for Mary to make a complaint against the man who beat her.

At the second appointment the interviewer again emphasized Mary's problems. On more than one occasion the inspector felt compelled to ask, "You love him, don't you?" Ashley finally commented, "It does not matter whether she loves him. This man has committed a crime against her and she is here to file a complaint." As Mary's confusion increased, she started to cry.

This inspector is considered a "nice" inspector. He believes that a woman somehow forces a man to beat her up. He regards the women's reluctance to discuss the beating as further evidence that it is her fault. He fails to comprehend that his attitude makes it more difficult for a woman to report a beating.

After the second interview, Mary was assigned a deputy district attorney who met with her alone. He believed a harsh interview would reveal whether a woman would be a good witness. If the women still loved her husband, she probably would not be "good court material." His concern for a "good case" exceeded his concern for a human being who had been beaten severely.

The deputy district attorney decided on a charge of simple battery. Ashley pointed out that the medical evidence pointed to a charge of aggravated assault or wife beating. The deputy district attorney explained, "Recently a man knifed his wife nine times. By the time she arrived at the hospital she was almost dead. Now *that man* was charged with wife beating." Ashley argued that keeping the charges light gave the batterer the feeling he could get away with wife beating and, in effect, gave him permission to continue. The deputy district attorney stuck to his guns and the charges remained simple battery.

John pled guilty and received a 6-month suspended sentence for battery and a year's probation. The law says to bring a charge of wife beating there must be "bodily injury that results in a traumatic condition." Part of the nose bone had splintered off into Mary's cheek and she was nearly blinded before the doctor performed an emergency operation. Certainly this operation was evidence of a traumatic condition. Trauma can be broken bones. Trauma can be blood. Trauma can be a serious internal injury. Although there were many elements of trauma, the court needs to see nine knife wounds before it

recognizes that trauma occurred and charges the husband with wife beating.

John never bothered Mary again. However, there is no guarantee that he wouldn't bother another woman. He was in jail for a few days. The court never seriously addressed his problem. The judge never suggested that he seek help. Although the psychiatric establishment studies a woman's victimization, they are not so concerned about the man's aggressiveness. The question is always worded, "Why did she stay?" rather than "Why did he beat her?" When a man socks his wife on the jaw, we say, "Oh, well, he overreacted. She'll be all right." These attitudes—the court's leniency and disinterest, our acceptance, the policeman's reluctance to make an arrest or even go out on a domestic disturbance call—give tacit approval to wife beating and reinforce the battered woman's isolation.

La Casa's experience acting as Mary's advocate showed us the extent of the discrimination against battered women. We saw that we needed to learn the rights of the battered women and then make others aware of those rights. We assembled all the information we had gathered. We wrote factsheets and began to prepare a legal handbook so that all women will know their legal rights.

We also set up meetings that included the district attorney's office, the chief of police, and two women police commissioners. Although the chief of police and the district attorney were responsive to the needs of battered women and the meetings were successful, the police officers themselves still need massive "consciousness raising." It is not enough to change the attitudes of the people at the top when the majority of policemen who are supposed to offer protection for the victim do not understand the problem.

When La Casa did a spot check on two new classes of male and female police officers, their ignorance about marital violence was appalling. Comments included, "Well, she's gotta be crazy to put up with that kind of treatment, but then there are women like that who really dig getting beaten," or "It's no big thing; I have neighbors who beat up on each other all the time," or "You have to look at both sides; she probably provokes her old man."

Since the police are the only 24-hour social agency we have, it is imperative that they wake up to what domestic violence really is. Unfortunately, the police training manual provides a handy index to all the pervasive myths about marital violence. Two psychologists wrote the manual as a tool to teach policeman how to mediate a domestic dispute. Rather than prepare officers for the fact that they are entering a highly charged situation, it describes a credit card dispute. By reducing the marital violence to an intellectual argument or a family fight, it intensifies the threat to the woman.

In its stress on objectivity, this manual ignores the women's distress. Although she may be in danger of losing her life, the officer is warned to "avoid implicitly passing judgment by questioning one of the parties as if he was a suspect and being supportive and friendly to the other party." The officer is told, " *Often during this stage one of the fighters (usually the wife) will demand that the officer take some immediate action ('get this bum out of here now'); it is his job to state clearly that he needs to find out what has happened. Beware of saying anything at this point which will give the wife the indication that after she tells the story, then the 'bum' will get thrown out.* " It is a cruel joke that, at a time when women are at an obvious disadvantage, the manual insists on complete equality—both women and men are consistently referred to as "combatants" or "fighters."

The manual reflects our culture's belief in the sanctity of the family and the necessity of preserving it. It tells officers that if they can, they should get the couple to agree on one thing and then, "just get out of there." In effect, it says to abandon the woman. It also instructs the officer to encourage the couple to make peace. Thus, many policemen feel like they should not leave until the fighters are ready to kiss and make up.

The police manual echoes the popular attitude that wife beating is not a real crime. Marriage laws and folk traditions both imply that a woman is a man's property. The police, who are instinctively allied with the man, do not want to interfere in another male's private business. They fail to comprehend that the woman who is a victim of marital violence needs their protection as badly as someone who has been mugged by a stranger.

It is easier for the police to fault the woman for provoking wife abuse than it is to arrest the batterer. The question of the woman's "provoking the man" is particularly insidious. Certainly, women who cannot match men in physical prowess become adept with words. However, words do not blind, maim, batter, and kill. The question of provocation distracts us from the real violence. It is easier for the police officer to say, "Why should I arrest him? She'll drop charges. In a few hours she'll want him out," than it is for him to offer her protection if she presses charges.

Sometimes a woman does drop charges. The physical beating is not always the worst thing that happens to a battered wife; she has been made to feel powerless, worthless, and helpless. She may feel defeated before she begins to tackle the legal maze. Furthermore, she is often pressured to drop charges by her husband, her family, or her concern for their children. Just as she is judged harshly for being " *the kind of woman who would let herself be beaten,"* so she is condemned for being

" *the kind of woman who would send her husband, the father of her children, to prison.* "

As Jane Doe wrote to Marta Ashley, "I have everything I want but live without fear." Fear keeps a woman from calling the police because "if he finds out that I called the police, I might as well buy the flower I want for my funeral"; and it paralyzes her after she calls them and she wants him arrested. She may be afraid to press charges because the police have told her that if they arrest him, he'll be out of jail in a few hours. "By the time he is back he may be ready to kill you."

It is at this point that the shelter is invaluable. La Casa can provide a woman with shelter so that when her husband does get out of jail, she is safe. It provides her with emotional support and legal advocates who will guide her through the judicial maze. Away from life-threatening violence she has the opportunity to begin to regain control of her own life.

Other Voices

In this section several former residents, staff, and residents who have since become staff compare what happens at La Casa on a daily basis with the rhetoric of grant proposals. They discuss their feelings when they first came into the house, their relationships with women's advocates, and the insidiousness of racism. Unfortunately, La Casa is far from free of the racism that permeates American society.

When Susan first arrived at La Casa after talking to a staff member during her crisis call, she expected to find a warm collective environment. Instead, she found a house riddled with factions pulling against each other. When she first walked in, she was shocked by the filth. The woman at the top of the stairs hollered, "You ain't seen nothing yet—wait until you come up these stairs." The staff said "Don't worry about her. She just got here and she wants to leave."

For Susan the filth was exacerbated by the unsafe conditions. As she says, "When you bring your children into a home, you expect it to be decent. The children were running wild, doing everything. There were banana peels on the stairs and there were no gates to prevent the little babes from falling down. You want your children to be protected; that's one of the reasons you left in the first place."

Susan did not find out who her women's advocate was until her third week at La Casa. Then, it turned out that she already knew the woman and had chatted with her casually. She knew her advocates were there to help her, but she didn't know them. She spent a great deal of time by herself trying to figure out her current problems and her future needs. Her relationships with the staff were not particularly trusting or supportive.

Another staff member had decided that Susan was full of anger and hostility and that she needed to cry. The staff member kept after her. "Won't you cry, just cry it out. Just cry. Cry." Susan told the staff member that she'd cry when she was ready to. Finally she did cry for her and that staff member "wasn't there."

Another ex-resident, Nancy, substantiates Susan's feelings of distrust and loneliness. She found herself talking to the bookkeeper in the basement because she was sick of her women's advocates. "When I needed help, they were never there. When you call them at home, they're not home. When you have problems, you need to talk to someone. You can't wait."

Nancy continues, "They come in and they ask you how are you, what are you planning? Are you looking for a job, have you talked to your husband, how's your kids? Then, it's, Oh, well, I really can't talk right now. I see that you're busy. I'll just go on downstairs."

Nancy first noted the racism when the staff fixed the label "no good" on a friend of hers. Because this woman was Indian and had been involved with drugs and alcohol, the staff felt that they could not help her. They claimed that she was still involved with drugs and that they couldn't trust her. Her only support came from other residents.

Maria, one of the earliest bilingual staff members, almost quit La Casa because of the staff's racism and insensitivity. They needed to hire a temporary women's advocate while they looked for someone to fill the position permanently. The women's advocates decided to give these 20 hours a week to Connie, a young bilingual-bicultural woman. However, the rest of the staff rejected their decision and insisted that the issue be "taken to the residents"—let them decide whether they would prefer to have Connie or a woman named Beth. This invitation to participate in the decisionmaking was more a delay tactic than a real commitment to democracy.

The next day it was reported that the residents had chosen the non-Spanish-speaking woman unanimously. However, the vote was far from unanimous. At that time there were only two bilingual staff members working a combined total of 40 hours a week—hardly adequate staffing for a crisis shelter that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The staff member who "took the matter to the residents" did not speak any Spanish. The Spanish-speaking residents were asked to pick between two names that didn't mean anything to them. Their point of view was completely discounted.

La Casa acts racistly when it fails to provide adequate bilingual and third world staff. It continues this racism in a different form when it assumes that minority women's advocates will take care of minority women residents. Nancy reports that she was working with a woman from the South. The rest of the staff could not communicate with her.

"They were afraid to try because she had so much hatred in her. They told me that I could talk to her since we were both black. I told them that the same skin color does not make two people the same. Gail came from a very different background than me; while she was down in the South cleaning white women's kitchens, my mother was a school teacher.

"I understand her. I understand the prejudice she faces because I am also from the South. Just because we're black doesn't mean we have the same experience. I can talk to her because she's a battered woman regardless of her color."

Susan echoes Nancy's feeling that we must all care for each other. She experienced prejudice at La Casa both as a resident and as a staff member. "They treated me like I was a backwoods nigger. . . .Of the two black women who were there while I was there, they had them both dancing the jig. One was still fighting; they had lost the other one completely. And they tried to do the same to me by forcing me to be the advocate for the black women. That way they would not have to bother with us. I told them, 'Why don't you help her? She's a woman just like you'."

Although La Casa is dedicated to feminist principles and has had an active core of lesbian staff members, we have run into trouble when the house became a battleground for radical feminist politics; we must always remember we exist to serve the residents. In the name of providing women with the opportunity to see strong effective women, we have completely excluded men from any parts of the house. It is imperative that the staff does not influence battered women against men at this very vulnerable time in their lives. Unfortunately, the lesbian staff has acted insensitively on several occasions.

One staff member insisted on discussing her sexual relationships in great detail in front of two residents. They became so distressed that they both moved out of La Casa. When a woman who realized that a staff member and her lover had stayed together during the staff member's overnight, the resident became quite upset. A children's advocate, also gay, advised this resident to confront the staff member and discuss her feelings—totally oblivious to the fact that a woman who is in an emergency shelter because she has just been battered is unlikely to seek out another confrontation. In another incident, the staff consciously played on the residents' needs and feelings of gratitude. They strongly encouraged that the residents and their children march at a rally in favor of lesbian mothers. Although the residents feared the press coverage at the event, they felt that they must appear—after all, they were indebted to La Casa.

The idea of the original La Casa Coalition came as a result of our rejecting the social service bureaucracies created by men. We wanted

to affirm a new and sensitive way of responding to other oppressed women. At La Casa everyone is supposed to be equal; in practice, certain people always seem to ascend a little higher and assume more power. So, instead of minority women being oppressed by men in the outside world, they are now oppressed by Anglo women at La Casa. Strangely enough, both use the same methods.

We have failed in not giving the battered woman and her children a safe place. Too often we have made her feel that we rescued her and that she is forever indebted to us. On too many occasions we have imbued her with the idea that she is not our equal, that she is less than us. Most important, we have failed to honor her social, political, and cultural ways of being and, thus, we have reenacted the oppression of the larger society.

What we need to do at La Casa now is to recommit ourselves to take action against the inequality, oppression, and powerlessness that women experience in the outside world and at La Casa. We need to review our overall goals and remember that the battered woman is no different from any of us. In our society all women are victimized and oppressed; it is a matter of luck who is beaten.

A group called ABLE (Asian, black, Latinas, etc.) task force, composed of third world staff and ex-residents who are now staff, has emerged from La Casa in the last several months, and they are presently developing training and inservice training proposals that will facilitate the smooth transition to have ex-residents run the house.

Additionally, ABLE is planning along with the department of labor a third world women's statewide conference on battered women and rape in May 1978. The ABLE task force is also being trained to do speaking engagements for groups and TV and to serve as consultants for La Casa.

The presence of ABLE at La Casa is the hope for the future of the permanency of La Casa, as well as being a role model for all shelters nationwide. For after all, the residents are the most likely heirs to La Casa. It is their house. They, and only they, know what role models are needed. They possess a special sensitivity to the needs of battered women and are able to communicate them.

The initial dream/goal of La Casa for the residents to become staff is in the process of becoming a reality.

This paper has shown that at every step of the way the victim of marital violence is degraded and then discounted. Even our own staff has not escaped our society's contempt for the victim. However, we have recognized our limitations and feel compelled not only to share them with you honestly, but to take action. The entire La Casa staff and volunteers will be meeting January 4 through 18 to reevaluate the program and make necessary changes.

Just as it is necessary for us to listen to the battered woman and treat her as our equal, so it is necessary for you to hear what she has to say. In the last year we have seen that statistics prove that marital violence is the largest crime in American today. We must not listen to the so-called experts to tell us what the needs of the battered woman are. **The Battered woman is your expert.**

At the end of her letter Jane Doe concluded, "I would like to do more but that would take a book—and there is no market because there are no ears."

Are you listening, America?????

*Response of Monica Erler**

Marta Segovia Ashley's description of La Casa de Las Madres brings back the feeling I had when I visited Women's Aid Shelter in Dublin last summer. So much of the life I saw in the Dublin shelter was familiar, similar in many ways to the life lived at Women's Adovcates House in St. Paul. I feel that same way about La Casa. It is amazing to me that in instance after instance women working in separate groups are making the same discoveries, but it is more than amazing: It is also strong evidence that we uncovered strength and wisdom within ourselves that has been overlaid by social custom, hidden from us for a long, long time.

Marta has given us an excellent description of the abused woman, her feelings, her needs, the community response, and the work of the shelter staff on behalf of the woman, all with sensitivity and clarity. I do not wish to repeat what she had already said so well. Instead, I will briefly describe ways in which Women's Advocates has worked with community organizations and agencies in order to secure for women the support services they need and the financial support Women's Advocates needs.

Women's Advocates began in 1971 when a consciousness raising group about to disband decided to undertake a work that would be supportive for other women. One member, an attorney, suggested setting up an information desk and telephone service in the Ramsey County Legal Assistance office because women involved in family law problems needed information, assistance, and advocacy with community agencies that attorneys did not provide. Two women, funded by VISTA, working in that office, soon discovered that a woman involved in family violence had no acceptable alternative to continuing in the relationship. Filing an assault complaint or petition for

* Founder and staff member of Women's Advocates, a St. Paul, Minn. shelter for battered women and their children. A social activist, she was an early member of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee. She received her B.A. from the University of Minnesota through the Plan for Continuing Education for Women.

dissolution of her marriage while continuing to live in the family home placed her life in great jeopardy than before. She needed more than legal help, more than information and advocacy. She needed a safe shelter in order to have the time and opportunity required to make changes in her life.

At this point Women's Advocates incorporated as a Minnesota nonprofit corporation (April 1972) and began community outreach immediately, talking about the need they saw with the men and women of St. Paul, asking for financial support. A pledge and donation system was set up, and many of our strong supporters today are "friends of a friend" of one of the women in that first small group.

Our original shelter was the apartment of Susan, one of the VISTA workers. The information and crisis telephone was tended by volunteers during the day and by an answering service at night. From the beginning we had continuous telephone service and have maintained a telephone log.[1] After a few months the landlord evicted Susan. The phone service and the shelter were relocated in the home of the second VISTA worker, Sharon. Volunteers continued to answer the phone and sometimes housed women in their own homes, all the while searching for a house and the funds to purchase it.

In 1974, the Ramsey County Mental Health Board, aware of work of Women's Advocates and the need for funds, made a grant of $35,000. A woman member of that board, with several years experience as a social worker in the county mental health program, worked very hard to get that grant for us because she was impressed with the nontreatment approach of the advocates and the effect it had on women. In her own experience as a social worker she decided that depression was the appropriate response to the situation in which most women found themselves trapped. Moreover, the tools of the treatment system were authoritarian, fostering dependence. The new model seemed to her to be a way out for women. The county mental health board renews this grant each year, but renewal is not automatic. We have to prove our need over and over again.

Once Women's Advocates received that initial grant, private foundations began to support our work. Foundation funds provided the downpayment on our house and the major part of our operating and program funds for the first 2 years after we opened Women's House. This gave us time to explore the possibilities for government funding while providing services to women and children.

[1] Attached is a copy of our telephone code and log sheet. We have found our record of phone service to be the single most reliable source we have for documentation of need in our community. Our funding sources respect the accuracy of our log statistics. We also use it to document harassment by men, and it is accepted as evidence when we file complaints.

Telephone Code

1. Attorney
- A. Divorce Referral.
- B. WA Law Clinic Referral
- C. Other
- D. Complaint

2. Discrimination

3. Divorce & Separation
- A. General Information
- B. Custody & Visitation
- C. Child Support & Alimony
- D. Property
- E. Restraining

4. Education

5. Emergency Assistance
- A. Cash
- B. Clothing or Furniture
- C. Food
- D. Housing

6. Employment/Career
- A. Counseling
- B. Job Openings

7. Health
- A. General Information
- B. Doctor/Clinic Referral
- C. Abortion
- D. Doctor Complaint
- E. Chemical Dependency

8. Juveniles/Children
- A. Legal Rights
- B. Child Care
- C. Counseling Referral
- D. Custody-Welfare or Intervention
- E. Adoption

9. Legal Information—Civil
- A. Bankruptcy
- B. Conciliation Court
- C. Credit
- D. Taxes
- E. Other
- F. Consumer Rights
- G. Gay Rights

10. Legal Information—Criminal
- A. Assault—Citizen's Arrest
- B. Corrections
- C. Other

11. Mental Health
- A. Counseling Referral
- B. Emotional Support
- C. Support Groups
- D. Commitment
- E. Legal Rights

12. Moving and/or Storage

13. Name Change

14. Physical Abuse
- A. Battered Woman
- B. Child Abuse
- C. Request for Information on Battered Women

15. Police
- A. Information
- B. Complaint
- C. Police Card

16. Sexual Assault
- A. Rape
- B. Incest
- C. Counseling
- D. Legal Process

17. Tenant & Housing Problems
- A. Evictions
- B. Complaints
- C. Half-way Houses
- D. Permanent Housing
- E. Public Housing Information

18. Transportation

19. Welfare
- A. General Information
- B. Complaint or Problem

20. Women's Advocates
- A. General Information
- B. Speakers
- C. Funding
- D. Volunteers
- E. Divorce Group
- F. Media
- G. Support Group
- H. Packet
- I. Legislation
- J. Visitors
- K. Administration

21. Women's Organizations
- A. Shelter Information

22. Followup

23. Harassment
- A. Obscene phone calls

24. Resident Business
- A. Ex-resident business

25. Self-defense

26. Staff Messages

Date _____ Page _____

AFF/Time/Caller/	Reason for call	Referred ... By ..... To/

Remember to code all calls. Be complete, code all categories of each call. If there is no subcategory a, b or c, just use the category number. Check "Legal" column on log sheet for all calls involving legal information or referral. If the call is a followup, be sure to use the followup number (5d/22) in order to avoid duplication when compiling statistics.

At present we receive most of our funding from governmental sources. We work with the county welfare department a great deal and have had almost every kind of disagreement and misunderstanding imaginable arise between us, but we have worked many things through. For example: women living in our house used to wait for weeks for an intake interview at welfare, trying to exist with no funds for personal expenses. Now a social worker at welfare makes appointments for residents a day or two after they arrive.

The county has a vendor system that pays Women's Advocates $5.50 per day room and board per woman and $2 per day per child up to 30 days. This is an emergency housing measure paid from county welfare emergency funds. The vendor system makes it possible for a resident to save her entire AFDC check for her living expense when she leaves Women's Adovcates because none of her income is needed to provide food for the shelter.

We also receive purchase-of-service funds under Title XX, for which residents qualify as persons who suffer from "neglect, abuse and exploitation." We are considered providers of counseling and advocacy services. These kinds of funding entail paperwork, but we have been able to devise reporting methods that maintain confidentiality and are not in conflict with our program. Our concern for the safety of the resident made it necessary for us to work our procedures with the welfare department that do not reveal a woman's whereabouts to anyone. Searches for fathers in child support actions and request for welfare information from other States often mark the beginning of a new siege of harassment for a woman who has just escaped. Sympathetic workers in our welfare department found ways to alter some of the most damaging and dangerous procedures used by the department, but, as in everything else, we cannot rest. The job is never done. New people join the department and we have to explain again.

Like other shelters, when we open we considered children to be the mother's responsibility and we focused on helping her. To our knowledge, we were the first agency in the area to allow a mother to bring her children with her into a room and board situation. We soon learned that the children share the mother's fear, insecurity, and lack of self-esteem. Many of them have also suffered physical and sexual abuse. We made efforts to help children as we carried on our program with mothers and gradually decided that we needed child advocates. We now have two. Planning the children's program is their responsibility. They share working overnights with the other advocates, and we set aside special time in our schedules to be with children. Our house has been designated a day-care center, which makes us eligible for funding under the Minnesota Child Care Facilities Act. We are also a group family day-care home, which

entitles us to food commodities through a U.S. Department of Agriculture program as soon as we are able to provide appropriate food storage and preparation areas and equipment.

The neighborhood school accepts children from our shelter, making special provisions for their safety and keeping in contact with mother and staff concerning the child's welfare and program at school.

We have never had funds enough to buy reliable office equipment, a motor vehicle, durable household furnishings, or linens. These needs are met by small gifts, donations, used articles, or we go without them. Securing money for capital investments is unbelievably difficult. After making the downpayment on our house, we owed $24,000. As a nonprofit corporation with no guaranteed income and not conforming to the conventional definition of family, we found that we were unable to qualify for any kind of home mortgage. We finally secured a conventional loan for $24,000, due in 2 years, interest rate about 12 percent. Our search for funds to pay off the mortgage began immediately. St. Paul HRA met with us and discovered they did not have a definition for emergency housing that would cover us. Eventually Urban League, Migrants in Action, and Women's Advocates, aided by the St. Paul Community Development Office, prepared a joint emergency housing proposal for community development block grant funds. Women's Advocates' share was $36,000. We received this money after several legal problems were solved and used it to pay off the mortgage and install a new heating system. Our house still needs substantial rehab work, and the city has included another grant for that in the current CDBG year.

Using what we have learned about CDBG regulations and the problems they present for groups such as ours, we joined with other women in requesting change in the regulations. We have been informed that the regulations which will be published in several weeks will specifically designate shelters for abused women and children as eligible to receive CDBG monies for rehab.

The Minnesota Legislature has provided the most recent addition to our funding system. In the last session it passed legislation that provided funds for four shelters for battered women and established a data collection system for the State concerning the extent of violence in families. This program is administered by the department of corrections and the department is guided in its decisions by the recommendations of a statewide task force.

Others who help us are police, paramedics, counselors and legal assistance staff members. When we opened in 1974, the police considered calls to our shelter in emergency situations to be "domestics." After a year of neglect and bad treatment, we met with the mayor and worked out a system tht is adequate. Individual police

officers react to us differently, but support for our work is growing in the department and we are now included in the police training program. A police sergeant in the city attorney's office assists women who wish to file assault complaints and a woman police officer helps us counsel both women and children who have been severely abused. At certain hours, police squads will meet us at the home of a resident, protecting her while she gathers the belongings she was forced to leave behind. Officers more and more bring women to our door for safe shelter, having learned that even when we are overcrowded and have a waiting list we cannot turn a woman away from our door. The best of the Grand Avenue foot patrolman was extended one block to include our house, and the district squad car patrols our alley frequently if alerted to the possibility that an angry man may be in the vicinity.

The paramedics have been one of our strongest supports. In medical emergencies they come immediately and assume responsibility for the care of the resident until the emergency has been resolved, many times completing treatment without removing the resident to a hospital.

Legal Assistance is overloaded and routinely delays appointments for divorce interviews for weeks and even months. However, we worked out an agreement with them. Now, if a woman who is in physical danger because of family violence calls, she is given an early appointment date. Legal Assistance is one of many groups now drafting legislation that will make changes in the Minnesota statutes governing assault. We hope that we will have some favorable change in the law when the current session ends in March.

Community Planning Organization is another dependable support. CPO financed and published a survey of the problem of family violence in St. Paul 2 years ago. They also planned and sponsored a day-long workshop for the public and interested persons when the report was released. CPO maintains a library on the subject of "battered woman." When possible they assist us in public education on the subject, and the excellent slide presentation that we have for community education was prepared by a woman on the CPO staff. Our stunning new brochure and our letterhead and notepaper were likewise designed by the staff at CPO.

Finally, we depend on the YWCA, volunteers, church, social, and professional groups for help with many parts of our program. They frequently provide recreational opportunities for both the women and children living at the shelter, a most important service.

The foregoing information is important because it demonstrates that Women's Advocates is not a treatment program, but an organization that helps a woman pull together what she needs from resources in the community. When she comes to our shelter we ask her, "What do you

want and need?" Her response often is, "I can't remember when anyone ever asked me that before." A little later she begins to talk with us about the life she wants to live, and while she lives in the house we try to help her obtain the services she needs. When she is ready to leave, we encourage her to call us and to come back anytime for support from us and for group meetings scheduled three times a week. We think this orientation to the woman's self-defined need is crucial. We believe that once a woman has decided to leave a violent situation she needs the opportunity to make more decisions about her personal life. As she makes these basic decisions we offer her information and support. Gradually she begins to see herself differently; she feels sane, capable, worthwhile. She expects to be treated decently. She can no longer be battered.

Abused women need treatment programs. They, like other women, need fair income for their labor, decent housing at an affordable price, competent legal advice, dependable child care, and other assistance with childrearing. Government policy and funding should take these needs seriously.

A last thought. All that I have said describes a Band-Aid measure. That is what our work is. The violence goes on. With Marta Ashley we say, "Don't ask why she stayed; ask why he beat her." *Why* requires attention.

END