



Casa de Paz

PEACE, HOPE & BRIGHTER FUTURES  
for Victims of Domestic Violence

## FROM DESPAIR TO CONFIANZA

As a victim of domestic violence who was not authorized to be living in the U.S., Emma was overwhelmed.

She was afraid of her husband, who had attacked and threatened her repeatedly, wielding a knife and destroying furniture in his fury, but she also held a deep-seated conviction that marriage was forever.

She had no confidence in the police, whom she'd called once during a violent outburst with no results other than a report.

She was fearful for her three children, who'd been missing school because of the violence and were in danger of being taken away, and for her cancer-stricken mother and siblings, whom her husband had threatened.

She saw no clear way out when she told a teacher at her children's school that her husband had threatened her again, telling her he had a gun and "he would hurt me where it hurt the most."

That one small moment of trust set Emma on a path to Casa de Paz, and ultimately to a life that she has regained control over. The teacher called police, who arrested her husband. The school paid for a hotel room for her and her children to stay in, and they referred her to a domestic-violence organization that led her to Casa de Paz. She was the second resident of the transition home.

"When I first got here, I felt like I didn't want to get up," recalls Emma (not her real name), a small woman with dark hair who speaks with quiet intensity. "I

“ Casa de Paz showed me love, protection, support...”

wanted to die. I felt like I had lost control of my life. I stayed paralyzed for weeks. I had lost myself, and it was really hard for me to have my children see me like that.”

Slowly Emma, who moved to the Cincinnati region from her native Mexico 18 years ago, began to climb out. She started taking medication to address her depression and seeing a therapist, who helped her form goals and motivation. Her children received services they needed and began to thrive within a framework of stability. Julia Figueroa-Gardner, Casa de Paz's executive director, became like a second mother to her.

“Casa de Paz showed me love, protection, support,” Emma says. “Before, I had tried to kill myself and was thinking about it again, but they showed me love here and gave me the strength to keep going on.” Again and again, as Emma is telling her story in Spanish, she returns to the word *confianza* – confidence – an element that was missing during her darkest moments but has since taken root and blossomed in her.

Today Emma lives in a house with her children and her mother, but she comes back to visit Casa de Paz regularly to offer encouragement to its newest residents. She was there on a recent weekday evening, around dinner time, chatting and laughing with two other women and listening to their stories.

“I understand what they are going through, probably the worst time they are going through,” Emma says. “But they need to open their hearts and trust the people here because if they don't, they can't help.”



# PANES Y PECES FUND DRIVE

In October, we will be soliciting funds for our operation during 2021 and into 2022, along with money for our endowment fund. The goal will be \$200,000, and we will match your donations with \$100,000 in seed money. Every dollar you donate will generate a matching dollar. This campaign will be called “Pan y Peces,” or “Loaves and Fishes.” Please take Casa de Paz into consideration for your year-end giving.



## THE LEAST OF THE LEAST

*Daniel Aerni*



Sometimes when I reflect on the mission of Casa de Paz, these words from the book of Matthew come to mind, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” And my attention is drawn especially to these words: “the least of.”

In my mind, that in a nutshell describes the people who arrive at Casa de Paz. Think about it. These women felt they had no hope in their native countries. There was no rule of law. Employment prospects were few and far between. Their communities were ruled by gangs and extortion. They had no choice but to flee.

Arriving in a colder and distant country where an unfamiliar language was spoken, they found themselves without legal status to claim employment or any services. Then, before long, their husbands abused them to a point of desperation. Again they had no choice but to flee.

Now they were truly alone. All their relatives were miles away. They were penniless and unemployed, with young children to care for. They had no place to live, even temporarily. Not only were their English language skills inadequate for employment in a 21st century North American economy, but they also had barely an elementary school education. Making matters worse, they suffered from the psychological effects of constant abuse and violence, and desperately needed counseling to help them recover.

Now we try to help them patch things together over a six-month period. “Patching together” is probably the best description of what we’re doing, for their recovery from their virtual bottomless pit is clearly a years-long process. We can only help them start on the journey.

I wish we had the resources and the organizational heft to give these women and children more help after they leave our nest. That is one of our long-term goals. For now, we help them patch things together and offer communal support and hope as they proceed out into our competitive and often uncaring society. We at Casa de Paz are at the start of a long-term journey, just like the women and children in our care. We too need communal support, and we reach out to all who read these words in hope that you can help us in our mission.

# CHILDREN'S NEED ASSESSMENT RESEARCH

In April, three professors from Xavier University presented the results of their research to the Board of Directors of Casa de Paz. Dr. Leah Dunn, Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy, Dr. Jennifer Gibson, Associate Professor of Psychology, and Dr. Diane Ceo-DiFrancesco, Professor of Spanish and Education were assisted by Xavier student researcher Mercy Torres.

In partnership with the Executive Director of Casa de Paz, this project aimed to conduct an assessment focused on understanding the needs and desires of the children and adolescents residing in the home. Emphasis was placed on understanding how to create culturally responsive supports and services. Through the project, the researchers sought to determine what an average day looks like for the children at Casa de Paz: how they spend their time, activities that they like and dislike, and their physical, social-emotional, cognitive, and occupational needs.

Xavier University's Institutional Review Board granted approval and oversight of the project. The researchers used photo interviewing, with each child taking photos of their day and then talking about 5 photos during a Zoom interview. Moms of the children were also interviewed. In total, 10 interviews were conducted with 7 children and 3 mothers, from 3 families. The children ranged in ages from preschool to pre-teens.

Daily favorite activities of the children include technology-based entertainment, movement activities, imaginative play and arts and crafts. The children play with dolls, cars (matchbox and remote control), and building toys (particularly Legos). Their play is often with other children their age in the house. They particularly like coloring and crafts with volunteers. Children are sometimes involved in household chores, like folding laundry, mopping, and sweeping the floor. During the pandemic, children attended virtual school and completed homework. Weekend activities often include time with moms, attending church services, or going to a park.

Needs that were specifically identified by the children and the moms include:

- More volunteers to interact with the children in enrichment activities on a regular basis;
- Outside play equipment: soccer balls & net, a swing set for use during breaks in school and after school;
- Activities specifically for pre-teens;
- Imaginative play toys such as puppets and a play house;
- Outings, particularly picnics at local parks.



The research team used this information, and their expertise in education, occupational therapy, and psychology to create a set of recommendations for promoting healthy development in the following domains: Physical Development, Social-Emotional Development, Cognitive Development, and Occupational Engagement.

A number of people are involved in creating an environment wherein the children can live and learn safely: Casa de Paz' Executive Director, interns and volunteers who have organized activities for the children. Casa de Paz follows a safety and training protocol for volunteers. Please contact Julia Figueroa-Gardner, the Executive Director, for more information.

Please contact Julia Figueroa-Gardner, the Executive Director at (513) 429-5154 or (513) 917-8863 or visit our website at [www.casadepez.org](http://www.casadepez.org).



## BELLARMINA PARISH

Since the opening of our residential facility in early 2020, we have been receiving food donations from a dedicated group at Bellarmine Chapel. This effort has been led by Amy Whitlatch and Becky Johnson. Parishioners have provided baked goods and essentials. At other times, the gifts have taken the form of Kroger gift cards. Their efforts have helped us to minimize our spending on food. We sincerely thank all the Bellarmine parishioners who have been so generous with their time and their gifts.





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