

# Domestic Violence Evidence Project

*A project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence*

## Program and Practice Profiles

### *Casa Vida*

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## *Overview of the DV Evidence Project*

Increasingly, domestic violence programs are being asked to learn more about, contribute to, and describe how they are engaging in evidence-based and evidence-informed practices. Funders, policymakers, researchers, and advocates themselves are more interested today in what evidence exists that a particular intervention or prevention strategy is making a positive difference for survivors, or is meeting the outcomes it was designed to achieve. With this information, domestic violence programs can better secure continued support for proven programs and practices, and can more easily identify, develop, and/or adapt innovative or exemplary approaches from other communities.

To respond to this new emphasis on evidence-based and evidence-informed practice, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV), with support and direction from the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, engaged in a two-pronged approach. First, evidence was collected and synthesized from published, empirical research studies.

Second, in recognition that controlled research studies are not the only form of evidence to consider in determining program effectiveness (Puddy & Wilkins, 2011; Schorr & Farrow, 2011), the project also identified where emerging and promising evidence exists that specific programs and practices are effectively addressing complex social problems in community settings.

The community practices and programs profiled have been identified by at least one peer as being innovative and noteworthy and have gathered some level of field evidence to examine their effectiveness. What these program evaluations may lack in traditional methodological rigor they more than make up for with “ecological validity”, or the extent to which their findings accurately reflect real-world concerns and successes.

The overall goal of the NRCDV’s [DV Evidence Project](#) is to combine what we know from research, evaluation, practice and theory to inform critical decision-making by domestic violence programs and allied organizations. This Program and Practice Profile should be viewed as one important piece of information to consider, but its inclusion in the registry does not necessarily reflect an endorsement by either the NRCDV or the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provided funding for this project. Further, there are many innovative and exciting programs occurring throughout the country. The project website ([www.dvevidenceproject.org](http://www.dvevidenceproject.org)) provides a sample, but not an exhaustive list, of these practices and programs, as well as related conceptual frameworks, research summaries and other tools.

“In one field after another, we are learning that so much of the most promising work in addressing the most intractable social problems is complex, multifaceted, and evolving.”

*Schorr & Farrow, 2011; p. 22*

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## **PROGRAM PROFILE: CASA VIDA**

**Brief Description:** The Latina Domestic Violence Project (LDVP) specifically focuses on serving Latina survivors of intimate partner violence. An innovative aspect of this project is Casa Vida. Casa Vida is a residential program designed to meet the needs of survivors of intimate partner violence who face additional cultural and/or immigration challenges such as trying to obtain a visa or American citizenship. This short-term, community-based residential program promotes the autonomy and self-sufficiency of residents. In this program, women are able to get help with the unique barriers associated with being an immigrant survivor in the United States. Bilingual caseworkers visit the home about 4 to 5 times a week to assist women.

### **Program Description**

<b>Program Goals</b>	The Latina Domestic Violence Project (LDVP) provides comprehensive domestic violence services to Latina survivors. The goal of the project is to promote freedom, connect women to community resources, and increase women's knowledge about their legal rights through advocacy and education. An innovative and important aspect of this project is a culturally-specific program called Casa Vida, or House of Life. Casa Vida is a residential program designed uniquely for women with immigration or cultural barriers who are in the process of seeking citizenship and who face barriers in their transition from a domestic violence shelter into the community. The goal of Casa Vida is to provide a safe, supportive residential home that allows women to receive services that promote self-sufficiency. Casa Vida is not an emergency shelter, but instead an independent house that provides case management services and community guidelines constructed for longer term living.
<b>Program Origins</b>	The program was initially conceptualized in 2010, but came into fruition in 2011 when a house was donated to the organization. Casa Vida developers were interested in creating a place that could continue to address the unique challenges of this specific sub-population of survivors that might have to stay at shelter longer than do other residents. The idea was that Casa Vida would be a place that women could stay for longer than 30 days, but that would not be a long-term transitional housing program.
<b>Program Components</b>	<p>Organizational staff determines women's eligibility in order to move into Casa Vida. Eligible women are attempting to obtain a visa or are applying for citizenship. Typically, women who move into Casa Vida are transitioning from the organization's emergency domestic violence shelter because they have passed the shelter time limit.</p> <p>Casa Vida was created to feel like a home for women. Casa Vida has 6 beds and can serve up to 6 women and children. The anticipated length of stay is approximately 6 to 9 months; however, there is not a specific timeline. Women receive case management services from bilingual advocates once or twice a week depending on the need of the survivor. Advocates visit the house to create timelines and collaborative work plans to help women make successful progress toward their goals. Women are encouraged to set aside emergency funds and to create savings in order to make an easier transition out of the home.</p>

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<b>Program Components</b>	<p>Advocates support women's ability to make their own decisions about the future and do not tell women what they are supposed to do. Instead, advocates individualize services and provide information to help women make decisions that are most conducive to women's own lives. The community guidelines about the house are much different than a typical shelter, and tend to mostly focus on maintaining the safety of the home (e.g. maintaining the shelter confidentiality).</p> <p>Casa Vida does not have volunteers. Instead, case managers visit the home 4 to 5 times a week for weekly appointments with residents. The organizational staff might occasionally make unannounced visits to check on the status of the house, but these visits are infrequent. Women do not have to pay rent to live in the home, but they are expected to care for the house and are responsible for providing their own necessities. For example, women are responsible for buying groceries, cooking their own meals and supplying their own laundry detergent.</p>
<b>Target Population</b>	Casa Vida is specifically focused on working with survivors with additional cultural barriers and/or who have recently immigrated and are going through the process of obtaining a visa or American citizenship.
<b>Target Setting</b>	Casa Vida is a residential program that should be located in a safe neighborhood close to public transportation, schools, grocery stores and other amenities that would enhance quality of life for residents.

## Practice Evidence

<b>Evaluation Methods</b>	This program has not been formally evaluated, but the organization has plans to do so in the near future. Residents are currently given monthly surveys to report on their experiences with case management services while at Casa Vida. In these surveys, women are asked whether they: (a) increased their understanding of safety and legal options; (b) increased their knowledge of domestic violence; (c) increased their knowledge about legal rights; (d) felt as if their culture was considered during service delivery; and (e) were provided with culturally-specific services in their own language.
<b>Evaluation Outcomes</b>	The organization has found that 90% of women participating in the LDVP project and receiving case management services had an increased knowledge of their legal options. Ninety percent also had an increased knowledge about their safety options.

## Organizational Readiness & Future Implementation

<b>Practice Cost</b>	The specific cost for Casa Vida depends on amount of resources already available through the organization. The total annual cost of the operation at DVCAC is about \$31,000. The total operation costs are \$25,000, and additional start up funds totaled approximately \$6,100. Costs to purchase the home are not included in this total because it was donated. The organization pays for the utilities and maintenance of the house, which will vary across programs depending on the size and condition of the home. Residents pay for the other necessities such as food and hygiene products. However, women can receive donations and support from the organization when in need.
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<b>Practice Cost</b>	There is not a specific grant that supports Casa Vida; instead, donations to the larger organization help sustain this program. The Latina DV project has an advisory board that also provides donations and solicits donors.
<b>Preferred Language</b>	At this organization, Spanish-speaking, immigrant women typically utilize Casa Vida services. The service could be provided in any language.
<b>Training Requirements</b>	All advocates working with immigrant women should be proficient and well versed in the barriers that affect this population. This type of training is typically obtained by webinars in the field. General case management training would also be important in the training and implementation of this program.
<b>Planning Requirements/ Readiness Considerations</b>	An organization interested in adopting this program should think specifically about their financial commitment. In order to successfully implement Casa Vida, the organization needs a livable house and has to obtain homeowner's insurance. Organizations should also spend considerable time thinking about the guidelines and level of staff commitment to provide case management services in a different location outside of their offices. The level of connection the organization has with the larger community is vital. This relationship helps residents of the home become more fully integrated and supported by the neighborhood. Organizations should also be aware that although women might be Spanish speaking, there is still diversity within Latina populations. The Spanish-speaking advocates who work with women should reflect this cultural diversity.
<b>Caveats/ Cautions</b>	Since the space for the home is limited and women stay for an extended period, few women move through the program annually. The level of organizational commitment compared to the annual amount of women served can seem uneven, but organizations should consider the depth of services provided to women, rather than the breadth. Women reside at Casa Vida until they feel self-sufficient.
<b>Training Tools</b>	There are not additional training materials for this program.

## Contact Information:

Vanessa Rivera  
Domestic Violence and  
Child Advocacy Center  
P.O. Box 5466, Cleveland, OH 44101  
Phone: 216.229.2420  
Fax: 216-651-8575  
Email: [vrivera@dvccac.org](mailto:vrivera@dvccac.org)  
Website: <http://www.dvcac.org>

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