

Diana's Story

"Diana," an undocumented woman with a six-month-old daughter, first came to Enlace Comunitario in 2006. Diana and her daughter lived in her wealthy, abusive husband's expensive home. The husband isolated Diana, locked her in rooms and in closets to make her "behave," and denied her access to money. He constantly threatened to deport Diana and to take the child away.

At Enlace, Diana found a broad range of social, legal, practical and psychological services that took into account all of her needs. First, our legal department helped her to get a restraining order which temporarily gave her primary custody of her child, along with a child support order and an order requiring that the father pay her rent for a period of six months. Enlace then referred her to a pro bono attorney who pursued permanent rulings on her custody and child support cases. A referral to Catholic Charities also helped her immigration status: as a crime victim she was eligible to apply for a "U" visa.

Diana found immediate and ongoing personal and group counseling at Enlace, and was able to connect with peers in the counseling groups who had survived similar experiences. Enlace staff helped her to identify other needs and to access services that would meet them.

Enlace staff helped Diana to understand the traumatic effects on her baby of living in an abusive household, and to know how to provide the sense of security and predictability the baby would need to grow up healthy and happy. She is now attending parenting classes at Enlace

Today, Diana is active and hopeful about her future. She has received her work authorization and a social security number. In the custody and child support case, she received primary custody of her child, and over \$700 per month in child support. She is currently working full time, has her own apartment and vehicle, and is self-sufficient.

Group Counseling Story

Manuela came to the women's support group on Wednesdays. The first time she came she looked sad and was very isolated all through the group. She continued to come a few more though she appeared to still be sad and seemed separated from the rest of the women.

She listened attentively but did not attempt to participate in the discussions. After three days that she was attending she decided to speak up and told her story. She cried and expressed all her anger and frustrations. The following Wednesday she had changed completely: she had a big smile on her face, she seemed happy. The change was noticeable by many of the women in the group who praised her changes. She also wore makeup and she changed the color of her hair. This was a completely different woman from the one that came four Wednesdays ago. Client continues coming to group and is becoming increasingly involved.



Parenting

Beckie is a mother of three children age 7, 11 and 16 had been struggling with acting out behaviors in the home. She felt she was losing control over her teenage son and the younger children were following his poor example. Beckie has been able to regain her authority in the home by applying consistent consequences to acting out behaviors and positively reinforcing when the rules are respected. Beckie states she has seen an increase in the children's self confidence and self esteem which is reflected in their attitudes and better grades in school.

Individual Therapy

Laura is a 28 year old woman who was referred to our program 1 ½ years ago. She was referred to us because of the abusive relationship with her boyfriend. They had been dating for many months and had intentions to marry. While dating, she became pregnant. She was ambivalent because it was not planned and she felt guilty about a child out of wedlock. Her boyfriend was delighted and planned to marry her and had great plans for their “hopefully” son. He soon became controlling and critical of her. He did not want her dressing as she did and he became demanding in that he isolated her from friends and put her family down. He pointed out that his family was educated and refined while her family was of a lower class. He insisted that the baby be brought up in his religion. Moreover, he wanted the baby to be brought up by his older sister who had no children. This plan was supported by his mother. Laura became frightened about the controls and demands placed on her. When she voiced any questions or doubts about this, she was essentially told she was not smart enough to make decisions, she was a poor illiterate, and that her family had nothing to offer the child. He became physically abusive by slapping, pushing, and restraining her. He would apologize, but this behavior did not change immediately. The client entered our program and began individual psychotherapy, case management, and legal representation. This young woman is intelligent, a hard and responsible employee, and her follow-through is dependable. She soon learned her rights as a victim and as a parent. She had been “bullied” by a family who hold professional jobs and who have financial means to attain things. They had her believing they had more rights than she, especially because of her immigration status.

Through therapy she came to realize her worth as a person, woman, and parent. In ad-

dition to this, she learned about the Power & Control Cycle in Domestic Violence. She saw exactly where she fit in the “wheel” and started to intervene for herself to stop specific behaviors. She became very insightful with regards to the role she took and how that had developed. In addition to this, her case manager showed her options available in community resources. She, however, was resourceful enough to not need this service like so many other clients we serve. The case manager did give her emotional and physical support each time the client had to go to court. Our staff attorney represented her well not only because she is skillful, but in orienting her and preparing her to face her former boyfriend’s adversarial attorney.

The case continues as the client’s ex-boyfriend keeps fighting for custody. He is married now and wants his wife to be a large part of his son’s life. He continues to text the client and keeps stating he has much more to offer the child especially now that he is happily

married and that his wife would be a wonderful influence on their son.

Each time the client is summoned to court, she comes to therapy to fortify what she has learned. However, she has

gained strength and has developed a sense of self that empowers her to face this continual conflict. Her symptoms of depression, anxiety, and her lack of confidence have diminished. They are no longer obstacles in pursuing the goals she is achieving through her perseverance and her belief in herself.

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Legal Advocacy (and Legal Representation)

Luisa lived in Utah with her two children, ages 1 and 4, and her abusive husband. Her husband kept her confined to the mobile home, monitored what she wore, hid the car keys from her, would not allow her to work, did not allow her any access to money, pushed and shoved her, and called her filthy names in front of the children. In addition, he was hiding assets and told her that if she ever divorced him, she would be left penniless and he would win custody of the children. He would not allow her to communicate with her family in Mexico, and he regularly accused her of having affairs with neighbors, in-laws and even her own brother.

In the late summer of 2006, the husband drove client and the children to Albuquerque and left them with his relatives. He did not support her nor the children. He returned to Utah, where he would periodically call and tell her that she had to come back, and that if she didn't, he would call the police and accuse her of kidnapping the children.

Enlace's legal department filed an interstate custody case for HH. As soon as the husband was served with the emergency custody petition, he filed for divorce in Utah. The New Mexico Court took emergency jurisdiction over the children, and awarded client temporary custody. The father was allowed weekend visits. The divorce court in Utah then took jurisdiction all issues, but adopted the New Mexico provisions regarding custody. She was granted primary custody of the children, and the father was given one weekend per month of visits.

Enlace's Legal Department located a pro bono attorney in Utah, who represented Luisa in her divorce case. She was ultimately awarded \$800 per month in child support, and a piece of land in Utah, as part of the final decree. She now lives in Albuquerque with the children and works full-time. Her net income, with the child support, is almost \$2,000 per month.
Client has her own apartment and her own car.

Crisis Intervention

Recently a client called for the first time. She had fled with her children from her abusive spouse in Tijuana, Mexico. Her abuser was a very violent member of a gang. Understanding the risk of being accused of international kidnapping, the receptionist immediately contacted our legal director who then gave the client an emergency appointment and filed an international custody petition. Now she comes to group regularly and is making friends for the first time in the United States.

Case Management

Yoli came to Enlace in March of 2006. She was a victim of sexual, physical, economic and emotional abuse. Yoli stated that she wanted to leave her abusive partner, but she was afraid to leave her husband because she had fear of him hurting and fear of not making ends meet. He had told her on several occasions that she and the children would starve to death without him. One-day client came in and stated that she was ready to leave the situation.

Case manager assisted her to fill out filled out the paper work for an order for protection and it was granted. Yolidecided to stay at the shelter for a few days while the respondent was served and removed from the home. He was removed three days later and she was able to return home. Once she went to court and the husband agreed to have the order be stipulated they granted her the custody of the children and gave him supervised visitation and ordered him to pay child support. Immediately after client found a great paying job and decided to take English classes.

Client attended all her classes and meetings at Enlace Comunitario and became self sufficient in a matter of weeks. Yoli proceeded with her divorce case on her own and successfully completed that task. She continues to attend school and is about to receive her GED and would like to continue her schooling to become a nurse.



Individual Counseling for a Child

Enlace's counselor has been working with F.D using play, sand tray, art, and talk therapy methods since his mother referred him with concerns about his hyperactive and aggressive behaviors. F.D has been reported several times at school for disrupting class, having lack of focus, kicking, biting, and punching classmates. F.D is seven years old and lives with his mother and abusive father. His mother has decided to leave the abusive relationship but F.D has witnessed his mother being emotionally, verbally, and physically abused by his father since F.D was born. F.D is an extremely creative, energetic, intelligent and thoughtful person. F.D acknowledges that he sometimes expresses his anger in unsafe ways, like throwing rocks at houses, punching walls, and hurting other kids.

These are the sorts of behaviors that have been modeled for F.D at home by his father. Counselor and F.D have been working on assertiveness and problem-solving skills in session. One day the counselor offered F.D a box of stuffed animals out of

which he could choose a soft object to take his anger out on when he's upset. F.D picked out a bright red lobster puppet. They role played together how he could hit, yell, and throw the lobster when he was angry

as long as he didn't hurt himself or others with it. F.D is able to talk more about his feelings of anxiety and anger. F.D has improved his communication skills and become safer to him and others.