

Immigrant Survivor Success Stories

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the Violence Against Women Act is the recognition that all victims must be safe and all wrongdoers must be held accountable to protect public health and public safety.

Since its inception in 1994, VAWA has always included protections for immigrant survivors of violence. The VAWA laws have acknowledged the special vulnerabilities of immigrant women and children to abuse and exploitation, including the following dynamics:

- Practical factors (language barriers, no support network, unaware of rights/resources);
- Cultural factors (domestic violence denied/excused; fear of disgrace; fear of police based on experiences in countries of origin);
- Economic factors (dependence on abuser due to the lack of work authorization); and especially
- Legal factors (fear of deportation and losing children; abuser withholds or threatens to withdraw filings to give victim legal immigration status; very limited access to legal representation).

The VAWA protections are intended to encourage immigrant survivors without legal status, or who depend on their abusers or the perpetrators of the crimes against them for legal status, to escape violence, report crimes, and cooperate with the police, without fearing they will face automatic deportation.

As a result, victim services programs have been able to make major strides in reaching vulnerable victims, helping them access the justice system, and breaking the intergenerational cycle of violence.

The following stories represent actual experiences of immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, rape, incest, human trafficking, and child abuse. Their stories and voices document how VAWA protections have played a key role in helping them find safety for themselves and their children.

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VAWA SELF-PETITIONING: ABUSED FAMILY MEMBERS OF US CITIZENS & PERMANENT RESIDENTS

Eunice came to the U.S. after years of dating and eventually marrying her husband, who was a Korean-American citizen. She soon discovered that her husband was obsessed with controlling her and demanded absolute obedience. She would suffer serious consequences if unable to please him. He would slap Eunice regularly for failing to satisfy him and lock her in a walk-in closet. He did not allow her to study or work. Though it was difficult for her to leave, finally, she could not endure any more abuse. She obtained a protective order in court and secured permanent residency through VAWA.

Eunice is now a proud American citizen. Being a survivor of domestic violence inspired her to serve other under-privileged people. She went to law school, became a licensed attorney, and is now a community lawyer at a non-profit organization. *Asian Services In Action (Ohio)*

Sara began a long-lasting relationship with her U.S. citizen husband, which was unfortunately marked by severe physical and psychological abuse. Sara was afraid to go to the police for many years because her abusive spouse told her that she would be deported if she did. After five years, Sara learned that she could safely seek protection through the legal system. She obtained a final restraining order, which remains in effect to the present date. She also learned that she could apply for legal status under the Violence Against Women Act since her abusive citizen husband, who could have applied to adjust her immigration status, had never done so. Her application for lawful residence was recently approved.

Sara always found solace in writing poetry and has now assembled a collection of poetry based on her experiences as an immigrant survivor of domestic violence. One of her poems proudly hangs in the waiting room of the local Family Justice Center. In fact, she was asked to read that poem at the grand opening of the Family Justice Center, where she was praised by the State Attorney General and the Prosecutor for her strength and courage. She actively participates in Family Justice Center events, mentoring other survivors of domestic violence. *American Friends Service Committee (New Jersey)*

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Andrea sought protection under VAWA after her husband, who had perpetrated years of physical, emotional and verbal abuse against her, attempted to carry out his murder-suicide plan. He described to Andrea how their sons would come home from school and find him hanging from the rafters of the garage and her lying strangled in the bed. Ultimately, Andrea was able to escape from her husband during his attempted murder of her, but he did end up committing suicide. As such, it was clear her husband was not merely threatening her life - he fully intended to take both their lives that day. Andrea self-petitioned for legalization of her immigration status as a battered spouse. She was approved and later obtained her legal permanent residency.

Andrea is now a productive member of society – volunteering as a Eucharistic minister with her church and volunteering with senior citizens. Andrea has also raised two upstanding U.S. Citizen children, both of whom serve in the U.S. armed forces. Her oldest son is a corporal in the infantry of the U.S. Marine Corp and has done at least two tours of duty in Iraq. Her second son is in the U.S. Air Force and has completed two tours of duty – one in Korea and another in Afghanistan. Andrea is proud of her children and selflessly supports them in their service of this country. *Asian Pacific American Legal Center (California)*

Claire is a survivor of domestic violence at her now ex-husband's hands. On occasions too numerous to document, he raped her, beat her, and strangled her. One time, he chained Claire to the radiator, beat her with a cord, and then raped her. Her husband promised that he would help Claire bring her daughter to the United States. He never did. Claire was able to obtain her permanent residence through VAWA and, after years, she is a few months away from filing for her citizenship. Her daughter was able to come to the U.S. and is now a permanent resident.

Remarkably, Claire's daughter will obtain citizenship before her mother, since she enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces and is currently serving this country in our military with distinction. Since obtaining employment authorization and eventually permanent residency, Claire has thrived in the U.S. She has been consistently promoted in her industry, and she is now a manager at a national chain of restaurants, overseeing a staff of two dozen people.

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Mary began to suffer the verbal and physical abuse of her husband, Mark, during her pregnancy. After Mary gave birth to his first son, Mark was overjoyed. The physical abuse stopped, but Mark began to sexually abuse Mary. Mary would tell Mark that she wanted to work; she did not want to have to continuously depend on him. Mark agreed and Mary began to work at a temp agency. Mark would literally count the minutes that it took Mary to make her way to and from work. Mark began to accuse Mary of infidelity at her work place because occasionally she worked longer hours. Mary felt forced to quit her job. Mark began to physically abuse Mary. Their son began school and Mary became very involved in her child's education in an attempt to distract herself from the family's problems.

One day Mary attended a school workshop on domestic violence and recognized her own relationship in the warning signs of abuse which were explained in the presentation. After the presentation, she took a pamphlet. That night Mary and Mark began to argue and once again Mark was physically abusive. Mary called a 24 hour Crisis Hotline on the pamphlet and explained that she had spent eight years of abuse in her marriage and was desperate for help. Mary was provided with emotional support and her feelings were validated. The hotline volunteer explained to her that she had rights to protect herself, and offered Mary the option of coming to the organization.

The next time that Mark was physically abusive to Mary, she called the police. She had decided it was the right thing to do because she had noticed that her son's behavior was affected by the abuse. The police arrived at her home and arrested Mark because Mary had a bruised eye. A police report was made and she was told to go to criminal court to obtain an order of protection. Mary obtained a protective order and went to an emergency shelter. She enrolled in individual counseling and was provided a referral to look into legal remedies available to victims of violence. Mary disclosed how she had feared to seek help because her husband had threatened to have her deported if she went forward with any legal action. She was provided with information about self-petitioning under the Violence Against Women Act, and was referred to a non-profit legal organization.

Mary received her work permit through her approved VAWA and moved out of the emergency shelter into her own apartment. She enrolled in additional programs and trainings to enhance her life skills. Mary is currently taking ESL courses; she is working

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to support her child and herself; and would like to pursue higher education to increase her employment opportunities. She has signed up as a volunteer at the domestic violence organization that helped her to give back to her community and society.

Domestic Violence Program, Mujeres Latinas En Acción (Illinois)

Veronica met John at church when she was 15, fell in love with the man she believed to be her Prince Charming, and got pregnant. Her church congregation and parents told her that she needed to marry John, and if she didn't, they would no longer be welcome at the church. Veronica married John and soon discovered that he was extremely violent, controlling, jealous and very possessive. He forbade Veronica to go to church, to play sports, to go out with friends, and even to attend school. John frequently threatened her with deportation and never seeing her daughter again. Veronica, who had lived in the US since she was six years old, was terrified. With help, she finally left John and was granted a lifetime Order of Protection due to the extreme danger he posed. After she left, John found Veronica at her parent's house, put a knife to her throat, and threatened to have her and her family deported. He also tried to kidnap their daughter from daycare. John was sent to jail for three years.

Veronica was able to successfully self-petition under the VAWA and graduated from high school at the top of her class. She is studying to be a nurse and works as a crisis interventionist and a paralegal. On a daily basis, she draws on her personal experience of what she has been through to help other victims of domestic violence feel safe and understand their rights, regardless of their immigration status. *Enlace Comunitario (New Mexico)*

Luisa had just begun her first session with a domestic violence counselor when it became evident that she was in no shape to be answering even basic questions necessary to assess a need for services. Luisa trembled with fear with each mention of her husband's name and tears streamed down her face each time she tried to speak.

A divorced mother of six adult children, Luisa had met her second husband just two years earlier through a mutual friend. She was swept off her feet by this gentleman in his twilight years and was looking to settle down and enjoy the company of a well-educated, hard-working, committed man. After a year-long courtship, she clearly recalls her husband saying the very day they were married that "things will be different now." His

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public humiliation of her became excessive in the following weeks, and he began to intimidate her in private by showing her his knives, his guns and his swift ability to use them. He began to habitually demean her and would then make aggressive gestures threatening to rip her proof of temporary residency to pieces.

Luisa came to the organization just days after her husband left her with no clothing, money or transportation at the doorstep of a cousin so he could attend to business matters in another state. Luisa jumped each time her cell phone rang, wondering when he would unexpectedly return for her. Luisa described having flashbacks of the times he would grab her and hold his knife to her throat or when he attempted to cut her breast just to intimidate her. She suffered from insomnia from the fear that something would happen to her during the night. During the day, she was consumed with preoccupation, intense sadness and a demoralized sense of self. She was immediately accepted into a shelter.

Luisa was informed of her basic rights and obtained a restraining order to secure her safety. The following week she began attending individual therapy on a weekly basis. After several sessions, she decided to file for a divorce and seemed euphoric at escaping the relationship. Although obtaining the divorce played a significant role in Luisa's newfound sense of independence and overall sense of safety, it impeded her from being able to finalize her legal status in the US under the regular family-based system. Fortunately, she qualified for protection under the VAWA and was eventually granted legal authorization to reside in and work in the United States.

Luisa now works assisting the elderly. She has secured a greater level of independence by moving into her own apartment. The stability she gained through VAWA has enabled her to reestablish a sense of safety, manage her anxiety and become better equipped to manage what was initially a debilitating sense of fear. She now attends English as a Second Language classes weekly, a long-standing goal she was unable to previously achieve due to the isolation and many barriers she faced. Luisa has gained confidence and demonstrates a sense of humor and optimism few people develop over a lifetime. Luisa's success in gaining self-sufficiency and stability has enabled her to become a role model for other women in her community to create safer and healthier homes for future generations of children. *Enlace Comunitario (New Mexico)*

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Marianne sought help at a domestic violence agency for her relationship with her very abusive husband. She was too scared to make a police report. She was able to obtain her residency through VAWA. Because she was no longer undocumented, she no longer felt afraid to contact the police about the abuse.

Today, Marianne works in a school cafeteria and volunteers her time at the domestic violence shelter. Wanting to give back to the community and help other victims, Marianne became an active participant in the weekly women's support group and "graduated" to the role of community leader. Marianne developed her leadership skills and then shared what she had learned with other victims by doing presentations in the community about domestic violence. If her abusive husband, a US citizen, had been involved in the self-petition, it is unlikely that Marianne would have ever reported the abuse to the police.
Enlace Comunitario (New Mexico)

Nalya, a recent bride from Bangladesh, was physically and sexually abused by her husband with status. He also stalked her on several occasions. Nalya's uncle called the police and a police report was filed. She was lucky enough to have support from family members. She applied and was eventually granted VAWA.

Nalya now works full-time and is enrolled in a Community College. She volunteers with other women facing abuse. Under the proposed law that allows USCIS to contact the abuser, Nalya would likely be afraid to apply if it meant her husband may have information about her. *(Texas Muslim Women's Foundation, Texas)*

Gisela spent most of her childhood years in the US. She became pregnant at the age of 17 by her future husband, Jorge, who she had known for years. During the pregnancy, Jorge became physically abusive. Gisela told Jorge that she wasn't sure she wanted to keep their child. Jorge pushed her to the floor, pointed a gun at her, and then shot the window. He threatened to shoot her. Though she often wanted to leave, Gisela remained with her abuser for years. She had nowhere to go. Her own mother would not take her back in--her family opposed separation. Gisela was desperate to make things work with her children's father and endured horrible abuses in order to keep the family together. When she could take it no longer, she finally separated from him. She applied for VAWA relief, and was approved.

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Gisela is now in a stable and secure situation, having completed her high school education and works in a medical office. She now has the opportunity to provide for her children so that they can grow up in a home free of violence. (*Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Los Angeles, CA*)

Ann is a young woman from Vietnam who lived with her U.S. citizen husband and their young daughter in a small New England city. Ann's husband frequently beat her if she questioned or disobeyed him in any way. The police responded to one incident of domestic violence after a neighbor called in a report. However, Ann was reluctant to press charges because she felt economically and socially dependent upon her husband and feared that his violence would become worse if he perceived that she had betrayed him to the authorities. Ann's husband had kept her isolated since her arrival to the United States; as a result, she spoke no English and had no friends or family members in the area. Because Ann's husband had failed to help her file for permanent residency after bringing her to the United States on a fiancée visa, Ann had no stable immigration status or employment authorization. She felt unable to support herself and the couple's young child if she were to leave her husband. It was only after being assured that her husband would not be informed of her application that Ann felt comfortable filing a self-petition for status under the Violence Against Women Act. She was afraid that if her husband found out about her application, he would punish her for betraying him and bringing "shame" to his family name. Once Ann gained a measure of security and economic independence through a successful VAWA petition, she found the confidence to leave her abusive husband. *Community Legal Aid (Massachusetts)*

Elizabeth is a victim of domestic violence. The District Attorney's office told her advocate that Elizabeth's was one of the worst and most violent domestic abuse cases they had ever seen. Elizabeth has been very helpful in the investigation against her abuser and is also eligible to file for VAWA. Elizabeth is extremely fearful that her abuser will find her. She currently lives in hiding and does not give her address to anyone. People in the local community are so afraid of this man that they fear writing letters on Elizabeth's behalf. If USCIS were going to interview her husband, there is no doubt Elizabeth would have to flee. *Catholic Social Services (Massachusetts)*

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Blanca attended her green card adjustment of status interview after her VAWA self-petition had been approved. The local CIS adjudicator was not well trained in domestic violence and began asking Blanca questions about the abuse. Over counsel's objections, the adjudicator asked Blanca how she was kidnapped and put in the trunk of her husband's car. Blanca became very upset and began shaking, forced to relive the abuse. The officer said that he needed to know the "whole story." The centralized CIS victims unit, not the local offices, has the proper training to understand the complexity of abuse and the psychological damage it creates. *Immigration Attorney (Minnesota)*

Paula sought help at a domestic violence agency initially because her husband was very controlling and manipulative. He picked out her clothes and restricted her freedom to go to the store or visit family and friends. Her abuser would force her to keep her eyes pointed down and walk behind him every time they went to the store together. He would humiliate her in front of other people if she looked up. Over time, she revealed her husband was also physically and sexually abusing her. Before she left the house, he would force her to have sex with him; if she refused he would accuse her of infidelity while hitting her repeatedly in the face. Then he would rape her. Paula felt hopeless and alone; she described the sensation that she was screaming at the top of her lungs and no one could hear her.

Paula was terrified of her abuser because he always threatened to take the children away and to call immigration if she dared to press any charges or made any attempts to leave him. She did call the police several times, but later dropped the charges after her husband apologized and promised things would change for the better. When her son began to imitate the abuser's behavior, Paula knew the moment to leave had come.

During counseling Paula was able to identify her barriers and look for solutions so she could provide a healthy environment for her children and herself. She finally obtained an order of protection. Paula was also informed about legal remedies available to victims of violence. Her immediate reaction was that of hope, realizing the security that immigration status would provide her and her children. Knowing that she would not run the risk of being separated from her family enabled her to sleep better at night. Paula is currently pursuing status for abused family members of US citizens and permanent residents under the VAWA and anxiously awaiting a response. Paula shared

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that she prays every day and hopes for her VAWA petition to be approved. *Domestic Violence Program, Mujeres Latinas En Acción (Illinois)*

U VISA: CRIME VICTIMS WORKING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

Yvette was 7 years old when her older (adult) brother first sexually assaulted and raped her, and the abuse continued until she was 12. He beat her up, kicking, punching, and throwing her to the floor. While raping her, he grabbed her throat and threatened to kill her if she ever told anyone. The one time she did tell someone, her brother's wife, he beat her with a belt so badly that she could not go to school the following day. She was 8 or 9 years old at the time. One night, 12-year old Yvette went to sleep near the Christmas tree with a knife under her pillow for her protection. Her brother found the knife and used it to cut her genitals while assaulting her, and also cut her throat. Her brother's stepdaughter later confided that he was abusing her, too. When Yvette was 19 she went to law enforcement and reported the abuse. Her brother pled guilty to aggravated felonious sexual assault and was jailed. Yvette was seriously affected by the abuse and unable to function well. She needed counseling and it took over a year before she was able to put together a U visa application. Yvette is now a permanent resident. She has completed a culinary arts program and is starting a career. *International Institute (New Hampshire)*

Lorena One evening, right after Lorena had showered, Tomás attacked her with a knife, stabbed her twice, and tried to choke her. Lorena's sister walked in on the attack, and Tomás tried to stab her as well. Her sister was able to escape and was able to get someone on the street to call the police. Tomás was arrested. Both sisters were afraid to speak out because they did not have immigration status. They worked closely with the local district attorney's office, which referred them for help in applying for the U visa. Both sisters actively cooperated with the investigation and prosecution of the case against Tomás. The sisters have US citizen children and fear that, if deported, their families will be torn apart and that they will be targets of friends and family of their abuser in Brazil. Without the assurance that they would eventually be eligible for a way to stay in the United States and work to permanently care for their children, they would

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have been too afraid to take the substantial risk of testifying against Tomás. *Catholic Charities of Boston Refugee and Immigration Services (Massachusetts)*

Keisha, a thirteen year old girl, called the police after watching her father physically abuse her mother again. Keisha, undocumented, had watched her father brutally abuse her mother her entire life. The arrest led to her father's conviction, and ultimately his deportation. After her mother cooperated with the District Attorney's office, she and her daughter Keisha were ultimately granted a U visa by immigration officials. Her mother, who had been forbidden to work outside the home, was able to find work. Keisha excelled in school and now, as a senior, has been accepted to college. Keisha's dream is to go to medical school so she can help children with autism like her brother Terrence. Her high school guidance counselor wrote of Keisha: "I am confident that Keisha has only scratched the surface of what she is capable of achieving."
(Legal Aid Society, NY)

Lidia was married with 3 US citizen children with her husband. Over the course of the relationship, he became increasingly abusive. She did not leave him because she was unable to work to support herself and their daughters. The abuse escalated over time. On one occasion, her husband punched her in the face, injuring her eye. She called the police. He was arrested, and charges were brought against him. Lidia was working with the District Attorney on the prosecution when she was picked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and given a "bag and baggage" order. The District Attorney helped Lidia get a Stay of Removal while she applied for U Status and her application was adjudicated. In the meantime, Lidia's abuser was deported to their hometown. Although the abuser was deported and Lidia's testimony was no longer required, the District Attorney continued to support her U Status application because that office recognized the restorative role of U Status in helping Lidia overcome years of abuse to be a role model for her daughters. Lidia was granted U Status several years ago and will be eligible to apply for permanent residence soon. If she cannot do so, she will probably be deported immediately to her home town, where her deported husband resides. He has already made it clear to relatives that he will retaliate for her having gotten him deported. *Immigration Center for Women and Children (California)*

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Maria is a 50 year old married mother of three who was raped by a stranger. She had been married at the age of 14 to an abusive husband. After 34 years of enduring the abuse, she separated from her husband. Her husband refused to financially support the children so Maria began collecting aluminum cans from alleyways to sell to recycling sites. One day, a van pulled into the alley behind her and a man pulled her into the vehicle and raped her. Maria went to the hospital after the sexual assault, cooperated with police, and had a rape kit done. She was able to describe the van but very little else.

Maria sought help dealing with the rape because she was experiencing nightmares and flashbacks, and felt terrified walking down the street. Her anxiety levels would increase dramatically whenever she saw a white van. She was beginning to suffer migraine headaches from stress. Maria had not told her children or her family about the rape because she felt ashamed. Until Maria went to a sexual assault counselor, she had not been able to speak about the rape to anyone and the burden of carrying her secret was beginning to take an emotional and physical toll on her.

Maria attended individual counseling, completed a 15 week Educational Sexual Assault Support Group and continues to attend a support group. She has also widened her support system with other participants and no longer feels ashamed about the assault. Maria is able to talk about the impact the rape has had on her life in a safe space where she feels supported and understood.

Through her collaboration with the local police, Maria was able to apply for a U visa. Lawful status would allow her to seek a greater degree of independence and security that she could continue her recovery with the help of her support system. Maria eventually received a U visa and is seeking training as a certified nursing assistant at a nearby social service organization. Maria described how she had spent the majority of her life feeling afraid--of her husband, of being deported and separated from her family, and, finally, of this nameless stranger who raped her. Now, Maria reports, she feels she can live her life knowing that she is a much stronger person than she could have ever imagined. *Sexual Assault Program, Mujeres Latinas En Acción (Illinois)*

Yadira, an engineering degree graduate from a town on the US-Mexico border, fell in love with a US citizen, Juan. They started a relationship and after a few months moved in together. Yadira became pregnant and, soon after, Juan began to use degrading

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comments and restricted her to the house. After their daughter was born, the abuse escalated. Juan started to physically abuse Yadira. Finally, she sought help. A neighbor brought her and her daughter to a shelter. Yadira was traumatized and still covered with bruises and marks on her body. With assistance, she was able to legalize her status through a U visa. She left the shelter and has a place of her own. Yadira works in a factory and studies English. Her goal is to have her engineering degree evaluated and improve her English so that she can get a better job. *YWCA (Arizona)*

Laura, a farmworker, thought that she had found the man with whom she would live the rest of her life, the man that would father her children. She and her boyfriend worked side by side on the farm and spent all of their together. But after the initial “honeymoon” period of several months, the relationship changed. Her boyfriend started insulting her, which eventually progressed to worse treatment--shoving and kicking. This would happen two or three times a week. He always told her that it was her fault that he hit her. Laura became pregnant and the abuse escalated. Her abuser would kick her stomach, punch her, and hit her with an electrical cord. After their son was born, her boyfriend promised he would change, but it didn’t last. He started hitting her again, especially when the baby cried. Laura told a counselor “I wanted to leave him but I didn’t have anywhere to go and [...] I did love him.”

While Laura was pregnant with his second child, on one occasion her abuser began beating her and whipped the back of her legs with the electrical cord because he was angry their son was crying. When he left the room, she picked up her son, crawled out a bedroom window, and ran to a neighbor’s home. Two days later, she checked into a hospital because of she was bleeding and was told the baby was in crisis. After five days, an hour after Laura delivered a baby girl, her baby died.

Her abuser was arrested. Laura cooperated with law enforcement against him. Eventually she applied and was granted a U visa. With help from her church and advocates, Laura returned to work full-time on the farm and has her own apartment. She gives back by helping other farmworker victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

In Laura’s words (translated):

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After all of this I realized that no one has the right to put their hands on another human being. We all deserve to be treated with dignity, respect and love. For my son's sake I bore much suffering because I wanted him to be raised with his father. I want to say to all the people that are going through some similar type of abuse, to denounce that person. We have the right to happiness, security and peace.

Victim Resource Center of the Finger Lakes (New York)

Daniela was brutally beaten, burned, mutilated, raped and tortured by her boyfriend over the course of two years. The boyfriend also sexually and physically abused Daniela's young son. The County Prosecutor's Office has described the case as one of the most horrific cases of domestic violence that their office has ever seen. Daniela obtained services from a non-profit organization for victims of abuse and applied for a U visa based on her cooperation with the police and the Prosecutor's Office in the criminal investigation and prosecution of her abuser. Daniela's abuser already had an extensive criminal history but thanks to Daniela's cooperation with law enforcement, he has been sentenced to more than 20 years of prison for his crimes. *American Friends Service Committee (New Jersey)*

Marilyn was a housekeeper at a motel in Michigan, where she experienced unwelcome sexual comments, physical assaults, and attempted sexual assault by her manager while at work. When she complained about the attacks to her employer, he retaliated by firing her. She was terrified of speaking to anyone else, due to her lack of immigration status. When Marilyn finally came forward, the EEOC sued her employer for unlawful employment practices, and certified her U visa application. *National Employment Law Project (California)*

Julia is a young, married mother who came for counseling due to experiencing stranger sexual assault. She had been assaulted by two strangers that had broken into her home one night when she was home alone. They were looking for money but found none and both raped her. Julia worked with the police and eventually both rapists were arrested for aggravated sexual assault. They were convicted and sentenced to jail.

As a result of the assault, Julia became pregnant. She gave birth to twin girls and is raising them. Julia came to a sexual assault program for support as she was feeling overwhelmed. She was experiencing flashbacks and nightmares about the rapes. She also

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did not feel safe even when with others and was often fearful of noises in the night. Julia's anxiety was causing her to isolate herself from others. Julia completed individual counseling sessions, a 15-week educational group and attended an ongoing support group. She reported that she felt supported and the women in the support group had helped her tremendously. Julia no longer experiences regular nightmares or fears the night time.

Local law enforcement certified her helpfulness and she obtained a U Visa from immigration. She is currently working and has begun to make plans to live on her own with her children. Julia reports that she feels better and her children are also doing well. Her daughters are now in elementary school and Julia is taking English as a Second Language courses with the goal of obtaining her GED. *Sexual Assault Program, Mujeres Latinas En Acción (Illinois)*

Louisa was a home care worker who was physically and sexually abused by her employer. For several months, he hit her, groped her, and sexually assaulted her several times. He threatened to have Louisa deported if she reported the abuse. At first, Louisa was too afraid to come forward, but she reported the crime after she had left the job. Although it had been more than 60 days since the crime had taken place, she was able to report the crimes and gain the protection of a U visa. *National Employment Law Project (California)*

Laura was referred by the State Attorney's office to a domestic violence organization. Laura described emotional abuse by her ex-boyfriend. She had ended the relationship after a few months, and her ex-boyfriend was angry and became abusive. His abuse evolved from emotional to physical, including an attack at her place of work. Laura obtained an emergency order of protection based on her abuser's threats and intimidation, both in person and over the phone. After her ex had violated the civil protective order many times and even, as the last straw, broke into her home, Laura was granted a criminal order of protection. With assistance, Laura has been able to extend her order of protection multiple times.

When Laura was first referred for help, she was afraid for her life. She was also afraid of being arrested, deported, or losing her job because of false police reports made by her abuser. She had difficulty sleeping since her abuser had broken into her home. As her

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criminal legal case against her abuser continued, her abusive ex's new girlfriend began to file false reports to police as well. After gathering enough evidence to prove her innocence, Laura obtained a stalking order of protection against her abuser's girlfriend as well.

Laura participated in counseling and regularly attends the domestic violence ongoing support group. She was also referred for help with her legal status. Laura had cooperated extensively with law enforcement and she was approved for temporary immigration status. Laura was able to regain her confidence and courage to speak up for her rights, present her case in front of judges in civil, criminal and traffic courts, cooperate with police and detectives, defend her innocence in the face of lies by the abuser, and to achieve greater stability and safety by pursuing a very important legal remedy for victims of violence. *Domestic Violence Program, Mujeres Latinas En Acción (Illinois)*

Sandra was sexually abused and raped by her biological father from age 11 to 15 and was impregnated by her father. After the birth of her child, Sandra reported the crime to law enforcement. Child protective services were also involved in the investigation of the horrific abuse. Sandra worked with detectives and prosecutors in the investigation of the crimes. She testified in court and allowed DNA testing to be conducted on her child, to prove that she was a victim of rape and incest. Sandra was only 16 years old at the time of the investigation. After the investigation was concluded Sandra and her child were released back into the custody of her mother. As an adult, Sandra, found out about the U visa through a friend and sought assistance in filing her petition. *Immigration Center for Women and Children (California)*

Christian was sixteen years old when he entered the United States. He fled Mexico because his parents died at a young age, and his grandmother could no longer care for him. He reunited with his brother, who told him that he had to work to support himself. His brother introduced him to a bus driver, who offered him a job. Christian didn't know that the driver was a pedophile. Christian worked for the bus driver and was repeatedly raped. The driver threatened to kill him and his family if he told anyone. Eventually, the driver was arrested. Despite the threats, Christian assisted in the pedophile's prosecution and received a U visa. If he were forced to return after his U visa expires, he would likely be subject to retribution. The driver was immensely

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powerful and associated with gangs in Mexico. Also, it has taken years for Christian to heal from a history of abuse, and return to Mexico would deprive him of ongoing counseling and the immense community support that he has built over the intervening years. It would be enormously re-traumatizing.

Ramon is a 20 year old man who came to counseling after experiencing sexual abuse by a family acquaintance. He was only 16 years old at the time he was abused. Ramon went to pick up his dad at his work as a farmhand on a horse ranch. When Ramon arrived, the perpetrator invited him inside. Once Ramon was inside, the man attacked and attempted to sexually assault him. Ramon managed to fight him off, found his dad, and left. Ramon reported the sexual assault to police. The perpetrator was prosecuted and sent to jail. Three years later, Ramon was at a grocery store when he saw the perpetrator, who had been released from jail. The perpetrator threatened him and Ramon again alerted law enforcement. The police officers with whom Ramon was working told him that there was an open warrant for the perpetrator's arrest. The sexual assault had a deep impact on Ramon's emotional well-being. When he began counseling, Ramon experienced high levels of anxiety and suffered from flashbacks and disturbing memories. Ramon began individual counseling and, through his collaboration with law enforcement, learned he could seek safety and stability via the U visa. Law enforcement certified that Ramon had been helpful to them and he was able to apply. Almost a year after his application, immigration authorities granted him U status. *Sexual Assault Program, Mujeres Latinas En Acción (Illinois)*

Sarah was just 17 years old when she entered the United States. She had been abandoned by her parents and raised by a grandmother who regularly physically abused her. She fled her home only to be brought to the United States by smugglers who held her in a house in Arizona and repeatedly sexually assaulted her. They told her that she had to have sex with them in exchange for food and clothing. Eventually, she was able to escape and reunite with her father. But, in her father's house, she encountered additional abuse and neglect. After a year, she found herself living in a domestic violence shelter. Sarah was interviewed by local and federal law enforcement and provided extensive information about her abuser and the location of the house. Sarah was fearful of working with federal law enforcement, specifically Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and would not have followed up with ICE in this case if the U-visa were

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not a possibility. Her helpfulness has now been certified and she is seeking a U visa. Under HR 4970, because Sarah did not report the incident to law enforcement within sixty days, she would not qualify for a U visa. *Lutheran Social Services of New England (Massachusetts)*

Dahlia was sexually assaulted by a police officer after she was pulled over while driving home from the late shift. First, the officer threatened to have her and her children deported when he found out she was undocumented. The officer then ordered her to follow his patrol car. Dahlia followed him to a deserted parking lot where, after using threats of deportation and physical force, the police officer sexually assaulted her. He tried to rape her and then forced her to perform oral sex. He physically assaulted her so forcefully that he knocked out the fillings in her teeth. After his attack, he wrote down his phone number and gave it to Dahlia, telling her that if she did not meet him again the following night, he would have her and her children deported. The next day, Dahlia gathered her clothes, the phone number that the officer gave her, and, most importantly, her courage, and tried to report the crime at the police station. She went to a different police department than the one that her assailant worked at, but they told her she had to go to the department where he worked. After Dahlia reported the crime, other women came forward who had been attacked by the same person. Dahlia worked with police. Dahlia did not know about the U Visa at the time she reported the sexual assault, but later successfully applied for the U Visa. *Asian Pacific American Legal Center (California)*

Tonya was brutally abused by her boyfriend. During their relationship, he threatened repeatedly to kill her, raped her, and forced her to undergo an at-home abortion. When Tonya was pregnant, he attacked her using his fists and a sharp object that left cuts on her chest, hands, and arms. The police arrested both of them. Criminal proceedings were commenced against Tonya and her boyfriend and they both received stay away orders. Upon release from jail, Tonya's boyfriend sent threatening text messages. She told law enforcement and he was arrested again. In retaliation, Tonya's boyfriend falsely reported that she violated his temporary order of protection, resulting in her arrest. Tonya was arrested and brought to Rikers Island where ICE subsequently initiated removal proceedings. After several months of advocacy showing Tonya was the actual victim, all criminal charges against her were dropped. Tonya cooperated with the

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District Attorney in the prosecution of her ex-boyfriend. She ultimately received a U visa. *Legal Aid Society (New York)*

Cristina was a custodial worker who was sexually assaulted by a supervisor. He threatened her with deportation unless she complied with his demands for sex. She refused. He then forcibly sexually assaulted her at work and continued his threats of deportation. A few weeks later he drove Cristina across state lines, telling her he had another job for her, but then proceeded to take her to an apartment where he again forced her to have sex with him. After Cristina and some coworkers were terminated for complaining about not being paid, she sought legal assistance for the termination but was too ashamed to speak of the sexual assault to anyone, including her coworkers. She was devastated by what had occurred and sought counseling through a program that helps victims of abuse. A few months later, Cristina learned during counseling that she might have some legal recourse against her supervisor for the sexual assaults. As the police in her jurisdiction do not get involved in what they see as "civil" issues between an employer and employee, her legal advisor determined that there would be no benefit in filing a criminal complaint. Instead Cristina proceeded to file a claim at the EEOC. A few months ago the EEOC certified a U visa based on sexual assault and kidnapping. *National Employment Law Center (California)*

Dayana was a victim of human trafficking at age 18. She was dependent on her trafficker for everything. For several years, Dayana endured constant physical, verbal and sexual abuse. Her abuser would force her to engage in sex work, and at one point she was arrested for prostitution. Dayana was also forcibly made to consume heroin, cocaine and sleeping pills so that her abuser could both keep her subdued while simultaneously implicating her in illegal activities to maintain control of her. Eventually she became pregnant, and the abuse worsened. Dayana was rescued from the slavery in which she was being held and connected with an anti-trafficking agency. Dayana worked with law enforcement and eventually obtained a U visa. She is now preparing to testify against her abuser/trafficker. Although she is scared, Dayana is determined to endure the trial so that she can "do what is right" for her and her son. Her resilience and optimism are astounding, and she constantly looks towards the future with hope. *District Alliance for Safe Housing (Washington, DC)*

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Ana was forced to endure over 11 years of physical abuse by the father of her six U.S. citizen children. During those years, she reported several incidents of domestic violence to law enforcement including an incident where she sustained welts and bruises to her back after being struck with a power cord by her partner. She was pregnant at the time. Her abuser was arrested, prosecuted and convicted.

After some time apart, Ana's abuser convinced her that he was a changed man and wanted to be a better partner to her and a better father to their children. Ana gave him another chance, but unfortunately her partner resumed physically abusing her. Ana reported the abuse to police again which led to her abuser's arrest. Ana helped the police. As a result of her cooperation, her abuser was prosecuted, convicted, and deported.

Ana and her abuser are originally from the same small town, where there is police corruption and little protection for women and victims of domestic violence. If Ana were not allowed to remain in the U.S. as a permanent resident she would be forced to return to her small town, where her abuser resides. *Immigration Center for Women Children (California)*

Emily worked for a restaurant, where she made minimum wage and she was a hard worker. Her boss, knowing that she lacked immigration status, often would make inappropriate sexual advances. Though she told him to stop, he said she was powerless because she didn't have immigration papers. One day, he invited Emily to a workplace party and raped her. He threatened to call immigration if she told anyone. She was afraid. It took longer than sixty days for her to learn about her rights. Emily provided extensive information about the assault and assailant to local police. She also later filed a claim with the EEOC and the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination. EEOC certified her helpfulness and she later received U-visa status. Under HR 4970, Emily would not have received a U visa. She would never have reported the sexual assault to law enforcement and her boss may have continued to assault other women.

Sonia was trapped in a violent relationship with the father of her children for the better part of 20 years. She was choked and beaten and constantly verbally harassed and belittled. On one occasion her abuser physically dragged her from their home by her hair and

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forced her, and their child, to sleep in the car. Sonia did not report him because she feared being deported and separated from her children. Eventually, Sonia summoned the courage to interact with police officers who responded to one of the violent incidents. Sonia moved into a domestic violence shelter. When she started counseling with a domestic violence service provider, she was asked, how do you feel? Her response, "I feel free". Despite the initial euphoria she also struggled with symptoms of post-traumatic distress disorder, including intrusive thoughts of the violence and sleeplessness. Sonia cooperated with law enforcement and was eventually approved for a U visa. She soon set about her ultimate goal of a college education. She obtained her GED diploma and has begun studying accounting, one course at a time. Sonia has volunteered in low income tax clinics and at the public library. She has only lived free from abuse for a short time compared to the years of violence she endured. And yet, in that short time Sonia has achieved more than a life without violence. She has created a life of promise for the future for herself and her US citizen children. *Southern Arizona Legal Aid (Arizona)*

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