

Program Evaluation of Casa de Zulma: a supportive housing program in Los Angeles for transgender women (TGW)



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL
of PUBLIC HEALTH

Melissa Davey-Rothwell, PhD, MPH

Karin Tobin, PhD, MHS

*Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Department of Health, Behavior & Society*

Health Disparities among TGW



- ▶ Transgender people experience extreme health disparities in violence, mental health, substance use and housing
- ▶ 2021 was one of the deadliest years with 57 transgender and non-conforming people being killed through violent means
- ▶ Transgender people of color experience disparities through the intersection of gender discrimination and racism
- ▶ Transgender women (TGW) experience structural barriers to health that are exacerbated by unstable housing.



Housing among TGW

- ▶ **One in five** transgender people in the US has been **discriminated when seeking a home**
- ▶ TGW **encounter racism, stigma and discrimination** when navigating homeless services.
- ▶ TGW are consistently being **denied entrance** into women's shelters and transitional/bridge housing due to their sex assigned at birth, rather than the gender identity.
- ▶ Few housing programs address **the complex needs of TGW**.
- ▶ While there is extensive evidence associating housing interventions with improved outcomes in cisgender individuals, research is needed to **develop effective programs for transgender individuals to improve health outcomes**.



Housing as Harm Reduction

- ▶ **Harm reduction** is a set of principles and strategies that centers on the individual.
- ▶ Harm reduction goals are to reduce negative consequences.
- ▶ Recognizes the impact of poverty, racism, discrimination and associated trauma.

- ▶ Housing First was developed in the 1990 to serve chronically homeless individuals with mental health and substance use issues.
- ▶ Housing First = Housing is a human right.
- ▶ Does not require sobriety or service compliance.
- ▶ Strong evidence base on housing outcomes.





- ▶ Providing LGBTQIA+ services in Los Angeles for over 30 years
- ▶ Behavioral health
- ▶ HIV testing and counseling
- ▶ HIV case management
- ▶ Community outreach
- ▶ Leadership training
- ▶ Advocacy

Status is Sexy

**COME GET TESTED TODAY!
IT'S FREE!**

We offer:

- Confidential HIV/STI Testing
- Risk Reduction Counseling
- Culturally Appropriate Services in Spanish, Vietnamese, and English
- HIV results are ready in **20 minutes**

Project RECLAIM

FREE SERVICES

Up to \$90 Target gift cards

RECLAIM is for:
MSM 30 or older
TRANS 18 or older

Project RECLAIM aims to address the experiences that are prevalent within the LGBTQ community, resulting in substance use/abuse, mental health, and trauma.

Group-level Intervention

Individual Therapy

Support Groups

Referrals & Linkages



- ▶ Casa Zulma is short-term (90 days) trauma-informed housing program for transwomen in Los Angeles.
- ▶ 1st Bridge program for TGW which was publicly funded
- ▶ Research partnership between Casa Zulma and JHSPH
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXFVGzaXkAE>

Partnership between APAIT and Homeless Outreach Program Integrated Care System

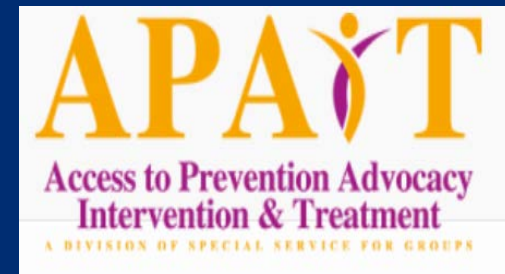


- ▶ Homeless Outreach Program Integrated Care System (HOPICS)

- ▶ Goal is to provide housing and supportive services to people who are unstably housed

- ▶ APAIT

- ▶ Goal is to provide Trauma informed approach to service delivery for LGBTQIA-2S





Infrastructure of Casa Zuma

- ▶ 16 bed house
- ▶ Staffing
 - ▶ Director
 - ▶ Mental Health Clinician
 - ▶ Housing navigator
 - ▶ Case Manager
 - ▶ Nurse
 - ▶ Security
 - ▶ Several staff members are TGW
- ▶ Residents are allowed to leave the house daily
- ▶ Residents may see Casa Zuma or outside providers



Programming



- ▶ 12 weeks of programming
 - ▶ Intensive case management
 - ▶ Substance abuse counseling
 - ▶ HIV testing, PrEP and Linkage to care
 - ▶ Individual and group psychotherapy
 - ▶ Peer Support groups
 - ▶ Community Building
 - ▶ Job training
 - ▶ Various assistance with getting an ID, GED, transportation and appointments



Inclusion and enrollment

- ▶ Chronically homeless as defined by HUD. (on the street or in a car)
- ▶ Identify as a transgender woman
- ▶ 18 years old or older
- ▶ Primarily BIPOC (Black, Latinx, Asian and Native American)
- ▶ Intake procedures:
 - ▶ Assessment of substance use and trauma
 - ▶ Coordinate with HOPICS intake
 - ▶ Review rules and expectations

Program Retention



| | FY 19-20 | FY 20-21 | FY 21-22 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|
| Total Clients Enrolled | 42 | 38 | 70 |
| Total Discharged | 25 | ** | 54 |
| Total Permanently Housed | 15 (36%) | 10 (26%) | 22 (31%) |
| Total Prematurely Exited (Based on 180 day stay) | 31 (74%) | 31 (82%) | 51 (72%) |

** Incomplete data




Formative Assessment


- ▶ Understand sources, experiences, and impacts of violence
- ▶ Examine how resilience, buffers the adverse impacts of violence.

- ▶ 16 in-depth interviews with current and past residents of Casa Zulma
 - ▶ Age Range: 23-67 years
 - ▶ 75% BIPOC



“Through the Things That Have Happened to Me, They’ve Made Me Stronger”: Individual and Interpersonal Sources of Violence and Resilience Among a Diverse Sample of Transgender Women in Los Angeles

Abigail K. Winiker¹ , Sydney White¹,
Jury Candelario², Lois M. Takahashi³,
and Karin E. Tobin¹

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- ▶ Self care to cope with everyday violence
- ▶ Leisure activities
- ▶ Empathy for others
- ▶ Support from other transgender women
- ▶ Support from other social network members

I think it’s a good thing [living with other transgender women]. I mean, because we all understand each other. We all try to support each other. When something goes wrong, we try to be consoling to each other. We all understand a lot of what each other is going through, although we may be in different stages of 12 Journal of Interpersonal Violence 00(0) transition or have different ideas of what we do and don’t want to do for transition for ourselves, because not everybody’s exactly the same or has the same path from start to finish.



Qualitative Evaluation of Casa Zulma

▶ Methods

▶ Interviewed 18 clients

- Length of time as resident
- Reason for enrollment
- Experiences with staff
- Experiences with other residents
- Services and resources

▶ Document review

▶ Virtual site visit

Interviewed 6 Staff (3 HOPICS; 5 APAIT)

- Role; responsibilities
- Challenges
- Unique aspects of program
- Recommendations

Residents



- ▶ Ages 23-67
- ▶ Some residents came to Los Angeles for the trans-affirming culture and services.
- ▶ Residents were in various stages of transitioning.

Well, when I first arrived here, I didn't look like a woman at all. Like, I didn't have my hair done. I didn't have women clothes or really anything and so, I literally had to start from the ground up.- Resident



Staff Interviews

- ▶ Program Manager (APAIT) trans-gender woman of color
- ▶ Case Manager (APAIT)
- ▶ Case Manager (APAIT), Spanish speaking
- ▶ Behavioral health counselor (APAIT)
- ▶ Manager of Operations (HOPICS)
- ▶ Case Manager (HOPICS)
- ▶ Monitor (HOPICS)

Just within a little bit over a year of me getting out there, I was able to go through the program, get a really good paying job for a really good company and secure housing.

So that was, - it was a lot of strength added to myself and to-- it kind of helped me know that I'm strong enough to do, you know, anything I have to do to make sure that I'm able to live life as comfortable as possible and, you know, in the life of somebody who's transgender who's a woman ~previous resident



Affirming space

- ▶ For many residents this was the first time living with other TGW.
- ▶ Residents reported feeling of validation of identity, safety and security.
- ▶ Resident described most staff as warm and supportive.
- ▶ The location was ideal
- ▶ Source of instrumental and emotional support
- ▶ Place for adaptive coping (developing a routine)

But it was ultimately refreshing to have a place to stay and something designated for people like me. ~Resident

I would say it's a place that you can feel like you can come home to, be safe. There's a sense of community there. There's a sisterhood there ~Resident

More than just a house...



Casa Zulma

- Trauma-focused
- Low barrier housing
- Housing case management services
- Job training/employment services
- Transportation
- Assistance with vital records
- Financial literacy
- Security and monitors
- Meals

Getting mental health services, being able to see a psychiatrist, getting my hormone therapy. I am able to-- I was able to-- they were able to help me actually obtain my birth certificate and my Social Security card, my state ID, which I lost those things prior. So, they were very helpful on escorting me there, helping me apply for Social Security, explaining to me about all the many options of housing and so, it's like I feel that they've been helping me with everything ~Resident



Balancing trauma with housing goals

- ▶ Staff had differing perspectives of the expectations for the residents.
- ▶ Staff had 90 days to find housing and income for the resident but many were dealing with trauma, substance abuse and mental health issues.
- ▶ COVID-related changes added to challenges of achieving housing goals.
- ▶ Tension between allowing residents a safe place to sleep and requiring participation in programming

Casa is a low barrier program, they come in with a lot of trauma and comorbidities, they are resistant to the rules.- Staff member



Challenges of the program

- ▶ 90 day period – Section 8 housing takes a long time
 - ▶ LGBT friendly versus transfriendly
 - ▶ Conflict among the residents
 - ▶ Lack of understanding of policies and their purpose
 - ▶ Lack of Spanish speaking staff
 - ▶ Staff burnout
- ▶ *Let me seek out resources that are not only LGBT-friendly but specifically trans-friendly, like trans women-friendly," because just because someone is LGBT-friendly-- they can be gay-friendly, but that doesn't mean that they're friendly to trans women. That doesn't mean that these resources are helpful for trans women. There are still transphobic gay people, you know what I'm saying, and so a lot of times I felt like the resources that they would help us navigate with at the Casa del Zulma, they would be LGBT-friendly, but they had no trans resources, and they definitely didn't cater to black trans women- Resident*

Staff perspective: Transition to housed in 90 days?



- ▶ People are under the impression you can "stabilize a woman in 90 days".
- ▶ Some staff also believe that some of these women just cannot work (maybe due to trauma)

Some of the women just need a place to stay and are not ready for work. - Staff



Implementation Evaluation

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Reach | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A variety of sources refer residents to the program: Trans Wellness Center, lawyers, shelters, and other agencies. Many TGW travel to Los Angeles because of the region's trans-friendly culture.• Residents of Casa Zulma ubiquitously report trauma, mental health struggles, violence, and chronic homelessness. |
| Effectiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Residents reported reduced substance use and improvements in mental health and feelings of safety in Casa Zulma. |
| Adoption | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Readiness: Some clients leave early or are asked to leave |
| Implementation | <p><u>Facilitators</u> to service use includes provided transportation, in-house programming and in-house case management.</p> <p><u>Barriers</u> to service use include high levels of trauma and conflict between residents.</p> |
| Maintenance | Lack of housing inventory and lack of program requirements lead to varied success in moving to more stable housing |



Additional Findings

- ▶ Lack of shared goals
- ▶ Low barrier versus set programming
- ▶ Community about transwomen which included staffing



Recommendations

Staff

- ▶ More structured schedules
- ▶ Required resident attendance to programs
- ▶ On-site recovery services
- ▶ More trans-affirming resources
- ▶ Programming on budget planning, time management

Residents

- ▶ Transparency in policies
- ▶ Flexible schedules for meals/Opportunities to cook
- ▶ Schedules for chores
- ▶ Longer program
- ▶ More trans-affirming resources



Future directions

- ▶ R01 proposal of a trauma-informed integrated intervention to improve HIV care and PrEP cascades employs a Housing first model.
- ▶ Seeking funding for a larger evaluation to assess how Casa Zulma residency changes substance use and violence



Contact information

- ▶ Melissa Davey-Rothwell
- ▶ Karin Tobin
- ▶ mdavey1@jhu.edu
- ▶ ktobin2@jhu.edu
- ▶ Twitter: @MDaveyRothwell

