

A Strong Mother and Her Story

By Alexandra Samargia

Running free with siblings and friends in Argentina, going to carnivals with mugs filled with water, surrounded by a big family with two brothers and six sisters, “it was a beautiful time in my life.” That is Antoliana Caceres’ recollections. A woman who believes her story needs to be told.

Having been, in some ways, through hell and back, she manages to talk about her family and future with a smile and optimism. Sitting in the house that finally feels like home, she is now 42 and making her way in the world as a hairstylist and as a mother of two boys, 19 and 16. She is a domestic abuse survivor. An overcomer. Called “strong” and “brave” by those who know her, Caceres is proof and a testament to the power of how organizations like Sarah’s Inn, a domestic violence agency, can help save lives. This is their story.

Caceres came to the U.S., specifically Chicago, in 1998, she says, for her father to be able to come into the U.S. from Canada. Shortly after moving to Chicago, she started her career as a hairstylist and has been striving in that career for 20 years.

Caceres says that she and her children endured abuse by her then-husband and the father of her children.

“During this time my oldest son was unfortunately diagnosed with brain cancer. So, I went through that traumatic moment in my life and in my son’s life,” Caceres said. “After my son’s surgery, the abuse continued.”

In between times of violence against Antoliana and her children, she says, he was stealing her money, and reporting things to the police about her that were not true. He started telling law enforcement that she was abusing him, so he was able to attain his own legal status in the U.S.

“As a mother, it got to a point where I realized I needed to do what I needed to do. I was already being so damaged psychologically and emotionally. Being exposed to this, I knew I needed to do something to give my children a better life,” Caceres said.

She decided to bring herself and her children to Sarah’s Inn in 2014, a domestic violence organization. “I felt welcome, at home and in the family with everything I was going through. I also felt support with what I was going through with my son as well,” Caceres said.

However, in 2014 Caceres’ ex-husband came to the location where she would meet with Sarah’s Inn. So, to act for not only her safety but the other client’s safety as well, they offered her the option of going elsewhere for services. However, three years later another incident happened that brought her back to Sarah’s Inn and she has been with their organization ever since.

In 2019, Antoliana was diagnosed with uterine cancer and had to undergo a hysterectomy and go through radiation. During that time, the Sarah’s Inn community was there to provide support and checked in regularly to make sure she was all right.

Sarah’s Inn focuses on giving support, counseling, advocacy, and a safe space for survivors of domestic violence. “I attend regular support groups and was provided support through the legal process,” Caceres said. “I was accompanied to court and was given that support through contacting my attorney as well. They have helped me just move forward in life.” She feels very grateful for this organization because she has the support that she needs in every possible way.

Caceres’ advocate through Sarah’s Inn, Liz Figueroa-Serrano expressed deep admiration for her.

“Antoliana is one of the strongest women I have ever encountered, and I am honored to have worked with them,” Figueroa-Serrano said. “I think she minimizes how much she has accomplished in life throughout this difficult journey that she has lived.”

Through not receiving financial support from her husband, Caceres said she is working two jobs to make ends meet and has been able to help with her son’s college and give him a car so he can easily get to and from school. As an adult, he is still dealing with abuse from his father, so Caceres is still fighting for peace for her family.

One in 4 women experience domestic violence according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), 1 in 15 children are exposed to domestic violence, with 90% of these children being eyewitnesses to the violence. Unfortunately, these statistics have remained relatively similar through recent years. In situations like Antoliana’s, it is challenging for survivors to leave the environment where the abuse is occurring.

“She is a go-getter, and she never quits. She has been so supportive of the other women in the group as well. Every time she shares part of what she has been through and how she has been able to accomplish living a life of abuse, and she continues through the emotional, psychological, and financial abuse, she finds a way to still live her life,” Figueroa-Serrano said.

Caceres' future goals are just to be happy and healthy, help others, never give up, reminding herself that life goes on and that she is capable.

“I would give my younger self the advice of staying strong and allowing things to happen. If I was born again, I would be a different person,” Caceres said.

“She’s come a long way and I am so proud of her, and the things she has accomplished,” Figueroa-Serrano said. Caceres can finally know peace with her family as she has a house where her children can spend as much time as they’d like, the opportunities to go on outings and grow their bond as a family, and the communication to keep love and trust.

National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).

SARAH'S INN STATS

2110

high school youth

received violence prevention education

5836

middle school students

received cyber-safety and anti-bullying training

1166

Survivors

of domestic violence received free advocacy and counseling services

238

children and teens

of domestic violence were assisted by our legal advocates with an over 90% success rate.

665

survivors

of domestic violence were assisted by our legal advocates with an over 90% success rate.

15840

Hours of Service

were contributed by volunteer advocates and interns who received training at Sarah's Inn, providing valuable support to all program areas.

6164

individuals

were provided with domestic violence education and training