

Nora and her daughter made it to a shelter for victims of domestic violence the night Geraldo attacked her. The shelter called Casa Cornelia the next morning. Nora's story was a familiar one.

In the early nineties Nora, together with her mother and younger sisters and brothers crossed through the mountains east of the San Ysidro port of entry and slipped secretly into the United States. This was before Operation Gatekeeper. Nora was sixteen.

Shortly thereafter, she met Jose, fell in love and became pregnant with their daughter. Jose disappeared before Shanya was born. When, five years later, she met Geraldo she believed that better times lay ahead. Unfortunately, her hopes faded with his alcoholism and abuse. Violence became an every day occurrence, culminating in an attempt to murder Nora when she was four months pregnant with their second child. A terrified Shanya called the police. Nora lost the unborn child; Geraldo was arrested and deported leaving Nora to provide for herself and the children.

Because Nora had cooperated with law enforcement in prosecuting Geraldo, she was eligible for a U Visa under provisions in the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act. Although this law authorized victims of violent crimes to immigrate legally, the Department of Homeland Security had been reluctant to issue implementing regulations. Without regulations there was no way to apply for the visa.

Finally in October of 2007, six years after the law passed, regulations were issued—good news. The bad news was that Casa Cornelia had been servicing one hundred seventy-seven of these victims and had but 180 days to perfect filings. If filings were not updated in a timely fashion, these women who had received temporary status and work permission would be subject to deportation.

Under the leadership of Roxanna Campos, the CCLC staff swung into action. Working late into the night, on weekends and holidays, they met the mid-April deadline. It was tedious and demanding work. Each client needed to submit financial records, sworn declarations from family and friends, police reports, medical records and letters of reference. Each petition also required certification from the District Attorney or law enforcement official. On average, each filing required some thirty-five pages of documentation and the total project represented hundreds of hours of work.

The weekend before the deadline, Federal Express did a land office business with Casa Cornelia Law Center. The filing deadline was met and all one hundred seventy-seven petitions are currently pending and work authorizations for these women are still being processed.

One of the pending petitions is Nora's. While she waits for her application to be adjudicated, she is legally employed, learning English, and Shanya goes to school with a light heart.



U VISA PROGRAM