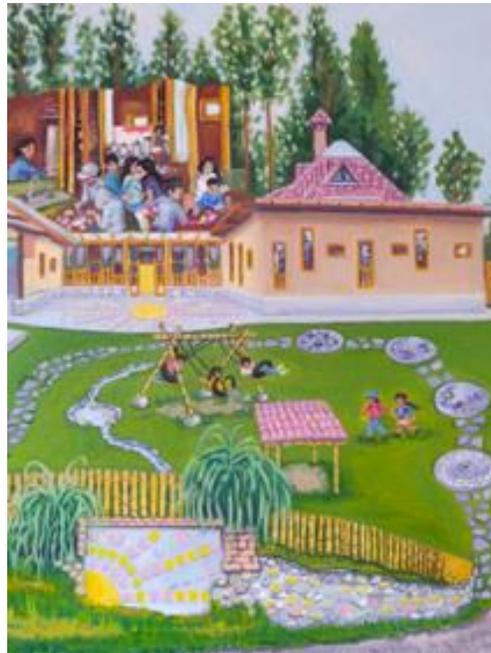




# WPI

## The Maria Amor Foundation: A Case Study on Holistic Healing



A Painting of the Nina Huasi Refuge Shelter

An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science

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## ABSTRACT

Ecuador has one of the highest domestic violence rates in Latin America, yet the quality and availability of treatment for victims is lacking. To address this gap, the Maria Amor Foundation developed a holistic treatment approach that extends beyond meeting basic short-term needs to address the multi-faceted challenges domestic abuse victims face. This project used immersive observation and interviews with management and women using the services to offer a case study of their approach. The results demonstrate the importance of a healing environment, economic independence, therapy, and social inclusion to adequately support the recovery of domestic abuse victims.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Next, we would like to acknowledge our advisors, Professors John-Michael Davis and Gary Pollice, for their continued support throughout the IQP process. They spent countless hours editing our paper and always offered us guidance. Beyond the project, they both went above and beyond to make the IQP experience the best it could be for their students.

We also want to thank Catalina Davis for helping us conduct our interviews and contributing to the narration of our videos. With her assistance, we conducted successful and thorough interviews and created videos for our sponsor.

Lastly, we want to thank the women and children of the Maria Amor Foundation. They welcomed us into their community and were willing to participate in our research project. We hope to have left as big of an impact on them as they have left on us.

## AUTHORSHIP

Brittany Bolster, Ioannis Kyriazis, Michele Philpot, and Vincent Tanguilig all contributed to the research and writing of this paper. Editing and proofreading the paper and deliverables for grammar, structure, and content was done as a team. The following describes the individual contributions from each member of the group.

Brittany Bolster drafted the Literature Review section that focused on the needs of domestic abuse survivors, the second objective of the Methodology, the management's rationale section of the Findings, and the Executive Summary. She was also responsible for drafting the infographic on how to use a dry bath and the editing of all of the posters describing the ecological cycles at Nina Huasi.

Ioannis Kyriazis was responsible for drafting the Literature Review section on the effects of domestic abuse and the fourth objective of the methodology. He completed the majority of the filming for all interviews and edited footage for video production. He created two videos: one describing Nina Huasi and the other describing the biofiltration processes.

Michele Philpot drafted the Introduction, the Literature Review sections that focused on the impacts of domestic abuse and healing approaches, the third objective of the Methodology, the first section of the Findings, and much of the Conclusion. She was also responsible for drafting the organic waste poster and for making the greenhouse and compost videos.

Vincent Tanguilig drafted the Literature Review section focused on the Maria Amor Foundation, the first objective of the Methodology, and the section regarding the perspectives of women in the Findings. He contributed to the drafting of the Conclusion as well. He was also responsible for drafting the biofilter and solar panels posters and created the solar panels video.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Within Latin America, social, economic, and educational influences have led to a patriarchal society. The “machismo” ideals present in the region encourage male superiority over women which is expressed through the high rates of domestic abuse present in this part of the world. In Ecuador, 7 out of 10 women experience domestic violence at some time in their life (Roldós & Coros, 2013). With such a high rate of domestic abuse, support programs are necessary to help these victims. The Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, the governing body of social affairs in Ecuador, depends largely on the Maria Amor Foundation to provide services for women in the city of Cuenca and the surrounding regions. After leaving a domestic abuse situation, many victims find themselves homeless, economically unstable, and physically and emotionally battered. To address these needs, the Maria Amor Foundation uses a holistic approach to target all aspects of wellness to help women recover from their trauma. Through its refuge shelter, Nina Huasi, and its city location, which encompasses both Casa María Amor and Mujeres con Éxito, the Maria Amor Foundation provides women with the tools to live successful and autonomous lives after leaving the program.

The purpose of our project was to perform a case study investigating the Maria Amor Foundation’s holistic approach and the ways in which it addresses the needs of domestic abuse victims. We then generated recommendations regarding what the organization can do to better serve the women it seeks to help and opportunities for future research with the foundation. To guide our research, we created the following objectives:

1. Observe how the Maria Amor Foundation functions using its holistic approach.
2. Identify the rationale behind the foundation’s holistic approach.
3. Understand the perspectives of the women using the foundation’s services on the holistic approach.

We expect other organizations seeking to help domestic abuse victims or implement sustainable methods will find this study of value.

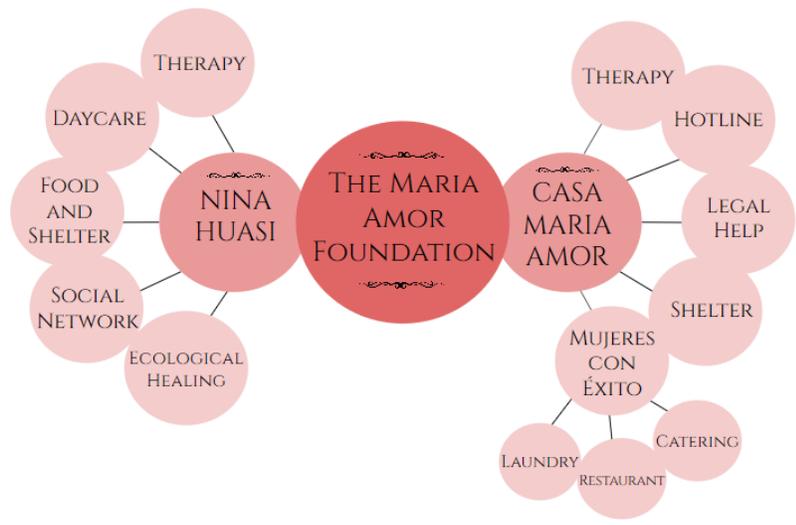
## METHODOLOGY

To address our objectives, we used observations of the foundation’s different locations and services, interviewed the management, and interviewed women using the foundation’s services. First, we used observations to make sense of the numerous locations and services that the foundation offers. Through field notes, we developed key findings regarding the foundation that helped shape our interview questions for the management and the women. Next, we interviewed three prominent members of the foundation’s management, an employee with technical knowledge on the ecological processes of the shelter, and three volunteers at the shelter to understand the rationale behind the holistic approach. Lastly, we discovered the perspectives of the women who utilize the Maria Amor Foundation’s services through semi-structured interviews with 11 out of

12 women who live at Nina Huasi and two other women who have transitioned to an independent life but still work at Mujeres con Éxito. Using field notes and audio recordings of all interviews, we were able to analyze responses to explore the foundation’s holistic approach.

## FINDINGS

Our findings represent an overview of the holistic approach, the rationale behind this approach, and how this approach is perceived by those who use it. With the combination of Casa María Amor, Mujeres con Éxito, and Nina Huasi, the foundation utilizes multiple avenues to assist in the women’s recoveries. Job training at Mujeres con Éxito encourages women to save money through employment opportunities in laundry and food services. Nina Huasi provides victims with shelter and sustenance while also catering to their emotional and social needs. At Nina Huasi, victims have the opportunity to work in the kitchen, compost, or greenhouse in their free time. Those who have children can use the daycare service that the shelter provides while they work or tend to other matters. Available legal advice and psychological healing through individual and group activities at Casa María Amor assist women on their road to recovery. The services provided by the foundation are represented in the figure below.



It is the mission of the organization to provide women with what they need to lead an autonomous life. From management’s perspective, the progression towards independence involves economic support, therapeutic healing, a strong social support system, and ecological healing. They stress the importance of job training through Mujeres con Éxito because women can get job experience and make their own money. This economic venture also instills accountability in the women for they must follow a work schedule and learn to save their funds. Individual therapy builds women’s self-esteem, and group therapy fosters support networks between the women. With this social support system, domestic abuse victims build a sense of camaraderie with other women enduring

similar situations that remain even after graduating from the program. Management also values the ecological focus of Nina Huasi for it fosters a peaceful healing environment by immersing women in nature. In addition, the sustainable processes at the shelter emphasize caring for the environment, which they believe to have a strong relationship with self-care.

Women using the foundation's services have a similar perspective to the management, believing that all services are integral to their recovery. However, women interviewed stressed the importance of the shelter and therapies, and almost all look forward to an independent life with their children after graduating from the organization. Every woman emphasized the importance of the immediate, secure shelter that Nina Huasi provides when escaping from their prior abuse situation. 10 women explained that psychological therapy is pivotal in their recovery process because it helped them to rebuild their self-esteem and reconcile with their past. A majority of women also appreciate that the services teach them independence so they can lead autonomous lives. Our findings note that the women's answers reflect the management's perspective, and many of the women could not indicate anything that the foundation could do to better support them in their recovery process. However, this may be attributed to the fact that they are wary of criticizing free services that are provided to them when being recorded. Another limitation to the research is that we were unable to interview any women who left the program. It is probable that interviews with these women would have given us more insight into any flaws within the organization. Lastly, we had trouble explaining the purpose of our interviews without a Spanish speaker present. However, when a Spanish speaker explained our purpose and translated during our last 5 interviews, we easily communicated with the interviewees and received more in-depth replies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We generated the following recommendations to help the foundation demonstrate their holistic approach to outside organizations and improve the experiences of those using its services. In addition, we proposed further research opportunities with this organization.

**Recommendations for the Foundation.** Because the ecological focus is unique to the shelter, we recommend that the foundation create ways to showcase this aspect to women, volunteers, visitors, and other organizations interested in their ecological approach. Many women, volunteers, and visitors lack the technical understanding behind each process and, for this reason, they are less likely to put effort into maintaining these processes and implementing sustainable methods into their lifestyles. Additionally, showcasing these ecological cycles would make it easier for other organizations to understand and replicate the ecological features of the shelter. Informational posters and short videos would provide information to aid the understanding of each cycle and the overall approach.

We also recommend that the foundation provides a better social orientation for incoming women. Many women mentioned that one of their biggest struggles when coming to Nina Huasi was forming connections with other women and that they were intimidated by the number of women at the shelter and their established friendships. We suggest that management facilitate a social orientation for incoming women so they can make new connections with those that already live at the shelter. These connections will not only make the transition to life at the shelter more comfortable, but it will provide them with lasting peer support throughout their recovery process.

**Recommendations for Future Research.** We recommend a more comprehensive evaluation of the foundation's holistic approach through interviews with women who have left the foundation prior to their graduation, comparison to organizations that also boast a holistic approach, and a longer period of study. Interviewing women who chose to leave before completing their program would likely uncover flaws in the organization. Comparing the foundation to other organizations with a similar mission to the Maria Amor Foundation could expose services that the foundation lacks. Performing research over a longer period would allow the researcher to see women entering and leaving the foundation and experience the women's growth over time. It would also allow for a more in depth study and a sharpened evaluation. Furthermore, one of the greatest problems that the foundation faces is lack of funding. To address this, we recommend a feasibility study on transitioning Nina Huasi into an economically self-sustaining organization so the organization can use outside money for improving their services and increasing their supportive network and area of impact.

Because a world free of violence may never exist, there is a continued necessity for support for domestic violence victims. Spreading awareness about the Maria Amor Foundation's holistic approach could influence other organizations seeking to help this population to adopt similar methods. Replication of their holistic approach, or certain aspects, would provide women escaping domestic abuse with more diverse services and better assist them in their recovery process. By providing more women with the tools to live a violence-free lifestyle, we can lessen the troubles brought about by domestic abuse worldwide.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Beaten. Battered. Bruised. The person you once loved and trusted has become your greatest source of anguish and pain. The choice is yours: endure the harrowing abuse or attempt to escape. Every day, women make the brave decision to leave their domestic abuse situation to search for a better life, one of them being Arlin<sup>1</sup>. After years of violence, Arlin chose to flee from her abuser out of fear that he was going to beat her to death. With three bags of clothes in hand and six children by her side, she left everything she had and began searching for a new life for herself and her children in Ecuador (Mujeres con Éxito, 2019).

Domestic abuse remains a serious problem throughout Ecuador. Despite having legislation against gender-based violence, rates of domestic violence are high due to the perceived inequality between men and women. In Ecuador, 70% of women experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives (Roldós & Coros, 2013), indicating a great need for domestic abuse prevention and services to treat these victims. However, due to a lack of funding, government involvement is minimal and domestic abuse survivors often look to private organizations for assistance.

When Arlin fled her domestic abuse situation, she did it to survive. With no place to stay, no source of income, and a severe detachment from society due to her long-term abuse, she was referred by a migrant care organization to the Maria Amor Foundation. With the Maria Amor Foundation, Arlin was given a place to stay, gained employment experience, rebuilt her emotional and psychological strength, and obtained legal advice. Now, at age forty-two, Arlin is the head of catering at the foundation's catering service and uses her personal experience to help other women suffering from domestic abuse. Arlin is just one of the many women the organization has helped since the foundation began in 2004. By providing services that address the multifaceted challenges that domestic abuse victims face, the foundation takes a novel approach to treating victims. One branch of the foundation, Casa María Amor, is located within the city of Cuenca and offers 24-hour assistance to families who need it, transitional housing, and employment opportunities for women in the program. At Mujeres con Éxito, located within Casa María Amor, the women run businesses such as laundry services, catering services, and a restaurant. The foundation also features a refuge shelter, Nina Huasi, which is located on the outskirts of the city and provides a proper healing environment for an effective recovery. At Nina Huasi, the available daycare looks after women's children while they work (Mujeres con Éxito, 2019).

The Maria Amor Foundation's holistic approach sets it apart from other organizations tending to the needs of domestic abuse victims by catering to their present and future needs. Through various

<sup>1</sup> To learn more about Arlin's story, go to <https://womenwithsuccess.org/stories/>.

services and locations, the foundation teaches women the skills essential for an independent life, free of violence. However, due to a lack of awareness and use of holistic approaches, most organizations only provide assistance that caters to women's superficial needs, neglecting to address the long-term effects of domestic abuse. Our goal was to perform a case study that investigates the Maria Amor Foundation's holistic approach to therapy because no case study exists on it. With this case study, we aim to spread awareness so that other organizations can implement their own version of a holistic approach to further support domestic abuse victims.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Worldwide, domestic abuse, also known as intimate partner violence, continues to be a pressing problem. While men can experience domestic abuse, it is more common for women to become victims. In Ecuador, about 7 of every 10 women have experienced some form of domestic abuse throughout their lifetime (Roldós & Coros, 2013). Studies show that violence, as well as the physical and social effects of abuse, are typically more severe for women than men (Caldwell, Swan, & Woodbrown, 2012). Because women experience higher rates and severity of domestic abuse, we turn our attention to focus only on female victims. Every victim of domestic abuse has their own experience and thus the recovery process is different for every individual. In this section, we investigate the factors that contribute to domestic abuse rates, explore the hardships of victims, piece together a holistic healing environment for survivors, and introduce the holistic approach used at the Maria Amor Foundation.

### 2.1 Impacts of Domestic Abuse in Latin America

The inability of countries to recognize and address the roots of domestic abuse is a catalyst for increasing domestic abuse rates. Varying rates of domestic abuse exist due to differences in culture and economic support. In this section, we consider how cultural norms impact women's susceptibility to experiencing domestic abuse and how in return domestic abuse can impact an economy.

**Cultural Impact.** Culture has a significant impact on domestic abuse rates. Cultures that value collectivism such as those in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa (Haj-Yahia & Sadan, 2008) tend to invalidate women's grief to maintain societal cohesion. Do, Weiss & Pollack (2013) suggest that the prevalence of Confucianism in Eastern Asia, with its emphasis on patriarchy that privileges men over women, is the largest influencer of domestic abuse rates. In this and many other traditional societies, there is a "power distance," which refers to an acceptance of unequal distribution of social power, with men given higher power over women (Do, Weiss, & Pollack, 2013). This power includes, but is not limited to, emotional, financial, and physical control over women.

Similar to these traditional societies, Latin America emphasizes male superiority over women. As Latin America has the highest rate of sexually abused women in the world (Rauls & Ziff, 2018), mistreatment of women has become a social norm due to "machismo" ideals. This concept refers to the power men have over women and that a woman should appeal to her husband or partner in every sense. Men then use women's supposed inferiority to validate their mistreatment (Wilson, 2014). "Machismo" ideals also give men priority over women in education and socio-economic status, both of which contribute to the susceptibility of women to experience abuse (Vale, 2017).

**Economic Burden.** Not only is domestic abuse a byproduct of cultural norms, but it also inflicts strain on economies. According to the first and only estimate of the economic burden of domestic abuse in Ecuador, determined by two students from Universidad San Francisco de Quito in 2013, the economic burden of domestic abuse in 2004 was estimated at \$109 million. This estimate included costs of healthcare, legal services, and loss in productivity with over 85% of the total being contributed to healthcare costs. However, with less than 8% of women seeking help after escaping their abuse, this number is an extreme underestimation. In the same year, only \$3 million was put toward domestic abuse by Ecuadorian government agencies, and only 3% of the \$1.9 billion social welfare budget allocation was put toward programs for women experiencing violence (Roldós & Corso, 2013). When comparing these numbers to the \$109 million estimate, it becomes evident that government involvement in the issue is lacking. However, these domestic abuse services remain necessary in providing victims with resources to recover from their abuse.

## 2.2 Domestic Abuse: A Difficult Road to Recovery

Few women recognize the signs of domestic abuse and many fall victim to immoral circumstances. However, upon liberation from their abuser, the freedom they yearn for is not immediately granted. A dependence on their abuser leaves them with no place to go, no way to financially support themselves, no one to turn to for help, and physical and mental pain that lasts a lifetime. The trauma they carry with them makes their road to recovery steep: an uphill battle that requires adequate support. Supporting these victims poses the challenge of effectively addressing their needs. Many programs are single-faceted and only capture the visible needs of victims. For victims suffering from many types of trauma, multi-faceted care that targets all of their needs is pertinent to a successful recovery. Through the following discussion of the effects of domestic abuse, including homelessness, economic instability, social isolation, and physical and mental trauma, we touch upon what is needed to adequately address the needs of victims experiencing these effects.

**Homelessness.** Domestic abuse is one of the leading causes of homelessness for women in the United States (Baker, 2014), and a quarter of women are homeless because of physical violence in their homes. Victims of domestic abuse are prone to mental health issues which can lead to unstable employment. Without a steady income, it is hard to secure a place to live. In addition to struggling to pay rent, landlords have been shown to discriminate against domestic abuse victims. A study conducted by the Anti-Discrimination Center of Metro New York (2005) demonstrated this by calling housing providers and confirming the availability of 40 housing units. They then told the housing provider that they were calling on behalf of a victim of domestic abuse and found that 27.5% of housing providers refused to rent their property to domestic abuse victims and another 20% voiced concerns about renting to this population.

**Economic Instability.** Another challenge that women experience after leaving a domestic abuse situation is economic instability. Due to the aforementioned male-dominated culture in Latin American countries, many women are financially dependent on their husbands. After leaving the

abuser, much of their income and means of survival are stripped from them. With minimal work experience and lack of knowledge in handling finances, they do not have the means to be financially independent. Economic dependency influences these women to return to their abusers even though it is not a safe environment for them or their children.

Ensuring economic stability is already a challenge due to the complex nature and history of the female workforce in which women are not seen as equals to men (Conner, 2013). Within the workforce, women continue to face unequal pay and inferiority due to gender norms and stereotypes. Domestic abuse victims also find it uncomfortable to work under males in a position of authority, which often occurs in the Latin American workforce. In addition, being in the public eye could pose a threat to women whose abusers are local. Often, government support or other forms of assistance are needed for women to gain financial independence and support their family.

**Social Isolation.** Domestic abuse victims often experience forced isolation by their partner as another form of control. Putting restrictions on a partner's freedom by monitoring the people with whom they interact contributes to the social isolation that a domestic abuse victim may face. Social isolation makes victims closed off from and timid within society. Many victims report that they found it easier to sever all connections with friends and family rather than deal with the consequences they would face from their abuser by maintaining these relationships. The same victims also report that social isolation triggered further physical and mental issues even after leaving their abusers. Victims tend to resist rekindling old relationships to avoid judgment and blame from those who may not understand or believe their stories (Reach Beyond Domestic Violence, 2016). The negative aftermath of social isolation also hinders their ability to stabilize themselves mentally and financially due to the lack of support and reassurance from their peers.

**Physical and Mental Trauma.** One of the most prominent effects of domestic abuse is physical trauma. In the United States, nonfatal injuries are most commonly attributed to domestic abuse (Bhandari et al, 2006). Physical abuse gives the abuser a sense of dominance over the victim and sometimes causes the victim to blame themselves for their situation. Common symptoms include bruises, chronic fatigue, involuntary shaking, sexual dysfunction, fertility issues, headaches, and back pain (Joyful Heart Foundation, 2019). Many of these symptoms are temporary health issues that can disappear after the person is removed from the situation, however some can remain and take a toll on their lifelong wellbeing. Additionally, the physical state of the person can directly affect their mental image, conveying the correlation between physical and mental abuse.

Domestic abuse has a serious adverse relationship to mental health. Women who experience domestic violence are more likely to suffer from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and attempted suicides (Dutton et al, 2006). Golding (1999) examined the rates of depression, PTSD, substance abuse and attempted suicides for two populations, one being female victims of domestic abuse and the other being the general female population. Golding used 18 studies to calculate a weighted mean of 47.6% for the depression rate for the first

population. He found the depression rate for the second population to be between 10.2% and 21.3%. A more updated depression rate amongst women who are not victims of domestic abuse is 10.9% (Ko, Farr, Dietz, & Robbins, 2012). The depression rate among battered women is more than four times as high as the updated rate of depression among a general population of women. Rates that Golding computes for abused women who experience PTSD, substance abuse, and attempted suicide are all greater than the rates among the general population of women. In light of these statistics, there is a strong necessity for services to alleviate a victim's mental struggles and help them work towards a healthier future.

**Targeting the Effects.** Together, the effects of domestic abuse entail a treacherous road to recovery for these victims. Because the effects that victims experience are complex, a multi-faceted healing method is imperative to relieve all aspects of their trauma. As the most prevalent sources of healing for domestic abuse victims, physical and psychological therapy aim to address the physical and mental needs of victims. While these areas of focus are crucial to rehabilitation, more complex needs such as social support and economic independence are not fulfilled. Effective recoveries are those in which all aspects of an area of focus are taken into account. A holistic approach takes on this duty with its overarching goal of addressing all effects of domestic abuse. In the following section, we look at the drawbacks of traditional healing methods and determine the benefits of implementing a holistic approach for recovering survivors of domestic abuse.

### 2.3 Comparing Approaches to the Recovery Process

Although only a small percentage of women reach out for help after escaping their domestic abuse situation, it is imperative that proper support be readily available. Women who have experienced domestic abuse of lesser severity over a short amount of time can recover quickly (Sax, 2012), but survivors of domestic abuse rarely overcome their situation without assistance that provides them and their families with the necessities they lack. Common approaches to healing are simple and address the immediate needs of victims. However, many victims face adversity that will extend into the future. For this reason, a deeper evaluation of each victim's situation is necessary to tailor the recovery process to better appeal to their needs. A holistic approach does this by considering the many needs of domestic abuse victims. In the following section, we discuss the shortcomings of a common approach compared to the wide range of possibilities offered through a holistic approach in addressing the needs of victims of domestic abuse.

**Common Approach.** Common approaches to helping victims of domestic abuse utilize simpler, single-faceted solutions such as domestic abuse hotlines and temporary shelters. Domestic abuse hotlines, a direct telephone line for those who need immediate support, help to diffuse a situation and offer assistance to women in a time of need. Women's shelters provide basic necessities, such as food, clothing, and a place to stay to those who need it on a temporary basis. Since these shelters provide fewer services and thus require less management, they are often cheaper to operate than those which provide more extensive resources. For this reason, it is likely that government funding

goes toward these shelters, since they can provide services for more women in less time. However, women who may require more time and resources to recover from their situation do not have the option of more extensive services or prolonged treatment. Women reach out to these traditional shelters and are provided with basic needs, such as food and a place to stay, a solution that is too simple for such a complex problem. One study showed that these “shelter-based interventions” frequently do not provide enough support for the women to sufficiently reconstruct their social and personal identity (Allen & Wozniak, 2011).

**Holistic Approach.** Extensive services that address deeper aspects of women’s lives would do more to alleviate the effects of domestic abuse and work toward living a safe, independent lifestyle. A holistic approach expands upon the common approach by offering more than basic necessities to victims. Holistic treatments stem from the belief that many different parts make up a whole and if one part of a whole is not functioning to its greatest potential, the whole is being held back (GoodTherapy, 2017). They focus on many aspects of a person’s wellbeing, such as physical, economic, mental, and emotional health, and identify areas in need of help. Frequently, shelters target women’s social activity and interaction to address these aspects by using a social environment and inclusive community to help the women feel supported. Sometimes, they provide services that deal with economic stability, educational development, or career advancement, services that may have never been offered to the women. Job search assistance, day care, and stable housing help the women to develop their ability to integrate back into society on their own.

To address more intimate aspects of women’s lives, holistic shelters often take unique avenues to implement a holistic approach. One shelter, Abby’s House in Worcester, MA operates 71 housing units and seven apartments for women and children. However, to incorporate a more holistic experience, they provide an “Advocacy” program. The shelter assigns each woman who utilizes the shelter’s housing an “Advocate” who assists the woman in pinpointing their goals and aspirations and caters to her specific needs of recovery (Abby’s House, 2019). Another shelter uses yoga and art therapy as a way to engage the women in a healing environment. It implements this approach to then encourage women to articulate a conceptualization of healing from domestic violence (Allen & Wozniak, 2011). Thus, it can be seen how different organizations use their multifaceted approaches to provide women with a more complete experience.

In other cases, shelters rely on an effective healing environment to provide the women a holistic experience. When a person recovers from their past trauma, whether this be at home or in a refuge shelter, the healing environment heavily influences the pace and success of their recovery. In 2004, the Samueli Institute developed a schema to encompass the meaning of an ideal environment for a person to heal their mind, body, and spirit, called the Optimal Healing Environment. Their operational definition of healing is “a holistic, transformative process of repair and recovery in mind, body, and spirit resulting in positive change, finding meaning, and movement towards self-realization of wholeness, regardless of the presence or absence of disease.” The ideal healing

environment, as seen in Figure 1, is comprised of internal, interpersonal, behavioral, and external environments (Sakallaris et al., 2015). The constructs within these environments apply to healing from any kind of trauma. However, they are especially applicable to domestic abuse survivors because of the multifaceted trauma that victims face. A detailed summary of the eight constructs for the four environments can be found in Appendix A.



Figure 1: Constructs of the Optimal Healing Environment (Sakallaris, et al 2015).

## 2.4 The Maria Amor Foundation

Although rare, organizations exist that have capitalized on a holistic approach. The Maria Amor Foundation in Cuenca, Ecuador adopted this approach 15 years ago and continues to enhance it based on the expressed needs of domestic abuse victims it looks to help. In this section, we map out an overview of the foundation’s holistic approach and highlight our goals in investigating this unique approach.

**Services at the Maria Amor Foundation.** The Maria Amor Foundation is one of the few organizations in the Cuenca area that provides support and a healing environment for domestic abuse victims and their families. The foundation was established in 2004 to provide a safe haven for women who feel their own life or their children’s lives are in danger. The non-profit and non-government organization provides a 24-hour emergency hotline, secluded shelter for battered women and their children, internal employment, and several other forms of care and lifestyle assistance. The foundation utilizes two properties: Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi. Casa María Amor is located in the city of Cuenca and gives women direct access to legal advice, therapies, and other support programs (Mujeres con Éxito, 2017). Furthermore, the Casa María Amor property houses a career development branch called Mujeres con Éxito, which assists women by providing job experience. The jobs include working a laundry service, a catering service, and a cafe. The second property, Nina Huasi, is a refuge shelter located on the outskirts of the city and provides housing for domestic abuse victims and their families. At any given moment, 15 separate families may be finding security at Nina Huasi. Each family has access to a safe, welcoming space as they recuperate from a traumatizing past. The women live with other families who have endured

the same or a similar hardship, engaging them socially and in a healing environment with close connections to nature through the use of Nina Huasi's environmentally sustainable facilities. Taken together, the Maria Amor Foundation utilizes both of these spaces to progress the women's recovery and place them in the best position to lead successful and independent lives.

**A Holistic Approach to Recovery.** Through the services it provides, the Maria Amor Foundation's holistic approach addresses the following aspects to aid the women in their recovery: physical, social, economic, educational, emotional, and ecological aspects. Each victim utilizes services they feel are pertinent to their recovery. Victims who have yet to arrive at the foundation can utilize the hotline to get over-the-phone help regarding legal or therapeutic problems. Upon arrival to the foundation, available shelter exists as the first service offered to those who wish to recover with the foundation. Therapy is often the next step used to identify each victim's situation and needs prior to beginning their recovery process. From here, the victims are pointed to specific services that would most benefit their recovery. Individual and group therapy remain prevalent in every victim's recovery process to address the physical, mental, and social needs of the women. Building strong social support systems with other women is important in establishing routines. Because these women live and recover together, a socially encouraging environment that allows them to build strong support systems is formed. Group activities foster intimate connections which helps the women feel that they are not alone in their experiences. As women continue their recovery, many progress into job training at Mujeres con Éxito to get a sense of economic stability to work their way to independence. The foundation offers available apartments for those who successfully graduate from the program, and social workers check in with the women to ensure a smooth transition into an independent lifestyle.

A highly emphasized aspect of the foundation is the ecological focus of Nina Huasi which is meant to encourage peaceful healing through its environmentally friendly location. Becoming immersed in an outdoor environment has a positive impact on the physical, mental, and social health of humans (Seymour, 2016). Regular exposure to nature helps the body regulate the internal alignment with day and night, called diurnal rhythms. Natural sounds and movement support the well-being of the mind and promote mental recuperation. The availability of green spaces encourages social bonds and group activities which leads to community development and individual betterment. Nina Huasi emphasizes its ecological approach as an effective contribution to the improvement of these holistic aspects. The shelter also uses the ecological approach to promote sustainable methods that women can integrate into their own lives.

Three main ecological processes at Nina Huasi give it a sustainable edge: food and waste, water, and electricity. Between these processes, essential resources circulate throughout the property. One cycle revolves around food and waste. The greenhouse produces vegetables such as broccoli, lettuce, onions, tomatoes, carrots, and several other nutritious plants. After use in the kitchen, the food scraps empty into the compost each week. Additionally, solid waste from the dry baths, combined with a dry mixture instead of running water, joins the compost. The system consists of

six separate compartments, where each week new nutrients are added to a different compartment. Over time, and with the help of earthworms, each compost compartment becomes mature, nutrient-rich soil which can then be used in the greenhouse.

The second cycle revolves around water. Runoff water from the nearby mountain collects in a water tank. This water supplies the two main buildings—offices and residences—with water for all non-potable uses such as showers, hand sinks, laundry, and kitchen use. The water from the office building enters a front biofiltration system, which consists of six levels of filtration, and the filtered water is then repurposed for toilet water. Alternatively, the used water from the residence building and laundry area flows into a water easement, then on to the back biofilter. After six levels of filtration, this water is reused for irrigation of crops.

A third sustainable process involves solar panels. Energy from the sun powers 22 solar panels located above the laundry area. This energy is then used in two ways: continuously providing electricity to the buildings for electronic use, and heating water for use in the showers. In addition, individual solar panels stand around the property, attached to lamps that activate during the night using energy collected throughout the day. The lamps need no energy other than that provided by the individual solar panels, thus no electricity is diverted from the main system.

**Outlining our Research.** The holistic approach with emphasis on the ecological aspects represents an interesting take on providing a healing environment for domestic abuse survivors. While this approach appears a viable option for recovery and proves to be more versatile than a common approach, many organizations have yet to adopt the approach. Cost of implementation may be a major factor in this, but lack of awareness of the approach may also play a role. The aim of our project was to investigate the rationale behind the Maria Amor Foundation’s implementation of a holistic approach and how this approach is perceived. Through this, we looked to understand how well the foundation addresses the needs of victims of domestic abuse. From our investigation, we aim to raise awareness about holistic approaches to help victims of domestic abuse. We strived to answer the following questions to work toward our research goal:

1. How does the Maria Amor Foundation support victims of domestic abuse?
2. What is the rationale behind the services the Maria Amor Foundation provides?
3. How is the Maria Amor Foundation’s holistic approach perceived by domestic abuse victims?
4. How can the Maria Amor Foundation showcase their foundation to allow other organizations to learn from and potentially replicate its approach?

To answer these questions, we proposed three objectives to guide our investigation. Then, we developed findings to depict the holistic approach of the foundation, and we drew conclusions of this approach based on our findings. Lastly, we generated recommendations for the foundation on how to better portray their approach and ideas for future investigation.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The Maria Amor Foundation offers a unique approach to helping survivors of domestic abuse in their recovery process. We investigated the holistic approach taken by the Maria Amor Foundation to raise awareness for their unique approach so that other support organizations might learn from and adopt some of their practices. To collect the necessary information for the project, we guided our research with the following objectives:

1. Observe how the Maria Amor Foundation functions using a holistic approach.
2. Identify the rationale behind the foundation's holistic approach.
3. Understand the perspectives on the holistic approach by women receiving help from the foundation.

### 3.1 Examining How the Maria Amor Foundation Operates

We used observations to determine how the foundation functions daily and to understand how the women utilize the shelter's resources. We noted their daily schedules, their relationships with the other women and staff, and the ways that they take advantage of the shelter and therapeutic services. We paid particular attention to the interactions of the women with each other, knowing that the social aspect of the shelter has a great impact on the healing process. Each week we spent four weekdays at Nina Huasi with the women and children, starting light conversation, and sitting with them during lunch. Gaining their trust was a challenge, since the women were initially hesitant to interact with us. However, by building relationships with their children and through frequent interaction throughout the project duration, we gained their trust. This was pivotal to the project success because women who felt more comfortable with us were more likely to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings about their experiences with the foundation in our interviews.

We also understood the technicalities behind the ecological processes at the shelter. We participated in the use of the dry baths to determine the way they are used and explored the compost, biofilter, laundry, and solar panel areas, noting the accessibility and organization of each. Through an initial tour of the shelter with one of the organization's directors, Yolanda Padilla, we learned about the operations of the property and found connections between the respective ecological elements. This step also served to generate technical questions about the shelter which then shaped several of our interview questions for the management.

### 3.2 Identifying the Management's and Volunteer's Perspectives

To understand the rationale behind the holistic approach and the reason for having an ecological focus at Nina Huasi, we conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the foundation's

management. We interviewed management (n=3), volunteers (n=3), and the groundskeeper at Nina Huasi and looked to gain insight on:

1. What the foundation does for victims of domestic abuse
2. What their rationale is for the services they offer
3. The reason for having an ecological focus at Nina Huasi

The purpose of these interviews, found in Appendix B, was to identify the key services that the holistic approach offers and the rationale behind each service provided. We also wanted to learn the reason behind the ecological focus of Nina Huasi and future goals for continuing a sustainable refuge shelter. A key focus of these questions was to understand the benefits for the women and the environment. Management gave us insight into the healing aspect of the ecological focus, however, we still lacked technical knowledge about the ecological processes. Through unstructured interviews with groundskeepers and volunteers at Nina Huasi, we learned how each ecological cycle works and what needs to be done to maintain each one. In these interviews, we also wanted to understand how important they thought the ecological components were for the women's recoveries because they were more likely to give true, rather than idealistic, responses.

Analysis of interviews with the management involved reviewing our notes and audio playbacks to identify common themes between the three interviews including highly praised services and important goals of the foundation. In analysis of our interviews with groundskeepers and volunteers about the ecological processes, we drew out the cycles to ensure a proper understanding.

### 3.3 Understanding the Women's Perspectives

With the purpose of developing insight into the women's perspectives of the foundation with emphasis on its holistic approach, we used semi-structured interviews to gather information regarding their expectations, opinions, and knowledge of the services provided to them. We interviewed 11 of the 12 women currently living at Nina Huasi and 2 women who previously lived at the shelter who currently work at Mujeres con Éxito full time. The interviews varied in location and were conducted either individually or in a group of two. The semi-structured approach of our interviews allowed us to ask follow up questions to expand beyond our original questions. With permission from the women, we recorded the interviews to allow for later referral. Interview questions for the women can be found in Appendix C.

Upon reviewing interview notes and listening to the playback of the audio recordings, we consolidated the information to create a summary of the women's responses while noting the similarities and differences between the responses of different women. Similar responses across the interviews enabled us to compile a collective perspective and understanding of the women on the foundation. Final analysis of the interviews involved comparing their outlook with the

perspective of management. After comparison, we assessed the holistic approach taken by the Maria Amor Foundation and identified the ways in which it could improve.

While conducting interviews was the most feasible way to understand perspectives regarding the organization, challenges did occur. The language barrier remained a constant challenge throughout the project. Although we could speak and understand the Spanish language at an intermediate level, we struggled to understand fluent speakers. To address this limitation, we utilized audio recordings and note-taking for analysis of responses from both the management and the women. We then transcribed and translated them into English and generated scripts as written analytical data for our own reference. Another limitation was that many women were hesitant to or did not speak with us because they did not know our purpose. However, when a native Spanish speaker was present and introduced our purpose to them, the women felt more comfortable answering our questions. Additionally, women may not have been willing to give their true perspective, for they did not want to seem ungrateful towards an organization that is helping them in a time of need. While these various factors may have affected the validity of our interviews, we still received valuable information regarding the perspectives of management and women at the foundation.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Through observations and interviews, we developed the following findings to portray the Maria Amor Foundation's holistic approach to recovery for domestic abuse victims. In what follows, we examine the services provided through this approach, analyze the management's rationale behind providing these services, and determine how the women at the foundation perceive the holistic approach.

### 4.1 The Maria Amor Foundation's Holistic Approach

The Maria Amor Foundation structures its holistic approach as a socially nurturing and environmentally conscious experience. In addition to the common approach's aspects of a hotline and a shelter, the foundation expands its scope to target social development and individual independence for women while promoting a connection with nature and care for the environment. In this way, the Maria Amor Foundation uniquely implements a holistic approach. The approach centers on the dynamic between its two locations: Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi. Casa María Amor, the branch located in the center of Cuenca, functions as the first place of contact through their 24-hour hotline. Alternatively, women may reach out to the police and consequently get referred to the foundation. Based on the severity of their situation and their personal desires, women utilize certain services that are essential to their personal recovery. Figure 2 and the following sections identify the services provided at Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi.



Figure 2: Visual representation of the services provided by the Maria Amor Foundation.

**Casa María Amor.** Casa María Amor addresses the immediate needs of women escaping domestic abuse through its external outreach and internal support programs. Casa María Amor gives women the opportunity to recover in a way that is best for them, using however many

resources they need to develop their identity and independence. The telephone hotline acts as both an external outreach service that offers outside women immediate advice and an intake service for women who need extensive help at the shelter. For those who use the hotline as a segue into the shelter, Casa María Amor provides direct support upon arrival through in-person legal and therapeutic assistance as well as food and shelter. If women continue their recovery process with the foundation, they have the opportunity to occupy one of the available apartments in the building. Casa María Amor also encompasses all the services provided by Mujeres con Éxito, a three-tier business including laundry, catering, and restaurant service. Mujeres con Éxito is its business front, fully run by women who have received help from the foundation in the past or who currently receive help. Mujeres con Éxito provides basic skills training, such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry, while fostering economic stability through weekly salaries and budgeting workshops. Each weekday, women work at Mujeres con Éxito helping to run the businesses while accumulating experience in customer service and management.

**Nina Huasi.** When women need to stay longer, the foundation directs them to its Nina Huasi refuge shelter on the outskirts of Cuenca. When women are directed to Nina Huasi, they are welcomed with no time limit on their stay. This refuge shelter appeals to all the needs of the women through the therapeutic, social, economic, and ecological benefits of its services. Individual psychological therapy sessions identify each woman's personal needs, and proper care is given in response. Group therapy sessions encourage women to connect with one another by sharing their similar experiences. Social connections arise from group therapy and through the daily activities at the shelter, such as cooking and cleaning. Helping around the shelter promotes healthy collaboration and allows women to practice their basic skills. The shelter also features a daycare where women can send their children during the workday. All the services at the refuge shelter lean on the ecological focus of the property to round out the women's experience and introduce a healthy relationship with nature.

Individual services tap into specific areas of importance in the recoveries of the women, but the broad focus of the ecological sustainability of Nina Huasi touches upon multiple areas at once. The foundation values Nina Huasi for its ecological aspects that simultaneously favor earth's resources and promote natural healing. Nina Huasi saves money through the use of its 22 solar panels, 9 that provide electricity and light, and 13 that produce hot water for the shelter. Biofilters recycle and purify water for multi-use purposes such as in the kitchen or for the dry baths. Dry baths at the shelter save water and produce waste for the composting process. The compost containers at the shelter decompose waste from the dry baths and organic scraps from the kitchen to enhance nutrients in the soil for the greenhouse. The greenhouse holds high precedence as its crop production is used in the kitchen at the refuge shelter as well as the kitchen at Casa María Amor. The individual ecological processes at Nina Huasi are complex, but volunteers and workers help the women to participate and learn about them. Weekly participation of women in the greenhouse and composting encompasses collaborative efforts, skills training, and peaceful

healing while learning about and caring for the environment. Thus, the ecological aspects of the shelter act as a cornerstone for the recuperative journey of the women and for life at Nina Huasi.

The foundation uses funding from non-profit organizations to front the cost of running the refuge shelter. Despite receiving this funding, the foundation looks to develop a fully financially sustainable shelter through higher ecological sustainability. Already, the shelter puts no funds toward electricity with the use of solar panels and pays nothing for non-potable water use—showers, cooking, liquid waste, laundry—as it utilizes runoff water from the mountain. But the shelter has no way of generating potable filtered water from the runoff and must still purchase much of their food. In the future, the foundation hopes that enough vegetables can be produced to provide for the Nina Huasi shelter and the Casa María Amor kitchen while still having a surplus of organic produce to be sold for profits.

## 4.2 Management's Rationale Behind their Holistic Approach

In understanding the rationale behind the services that Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi provide, we discovered that the goal of the Maria Amor Foundation is to properly address the needs of each woman and prepare them for successful and independent lives after leaving the foundation. Every member of management emphasized that all the services, including shelter, childcare, therapy, external outreach, and professional training, as well as the benefits that come with the foundation's experience—social interaction, connection with nature, and learning healthy habits—build off one another to provide their holistic healing experience for the women. Findings from our interviews suggested that no service is of higher importance than another, but that each service addresses a specific need of similar importance. However, we noticed that the services the foundation provides fall into two categories that build off each other: 1) supporting women throughout their healing processes through a well-developed support network, and 2) preparing them for an independent lifestyle. We also identified the motivation behind having an ecological focus at Nina Huasi, something unique to the refuge shelter. Below, we describe these three foci of the Maria Amor Foundation.

**Providing a Support Network.** The foundation provides support to help women in their recovery throughout their time at the shelter. Women are vulnerable to the outside world when leaving their situation and Marlene Villavicencio, president of the Maria Amor Foundation, believes that “women cannot leave violence alone” due to the fears they carry with them once leaving<sup>2</sup>. In Marlene's words, the available shelter at Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi provides a “valid alternative that prevents femicides for women who do not have support networks.” A support network is essential to the women's recovery because without it, they cannot feel safe enough to confront and move past their traumatic experience and find their social and personal identity. It is necessary to give a strong sense of support early on so that after developing more independence

<sup>2</sup> All quotes contained in this document have been translated from Spanish to English.

and having the ability to better help themselves, the women will not require as much support in the future.

The most immediate form of support for these women is physical support: providing a secure, violence-free space where they can live with their children. Similar to the hotline, the shelter serves as an immediate service for those fleeing violence as it gives attention to the urgent physical needs of the women. Another obvious construct targets emotional support. The management believes a crucial asset to the women's support network is the psychological and emotional support that the foundation provides through individual and group therapies which help them restore their self-esteem, build confidence in their abilities, and become reconciled with past experiences. Potentially the most important construct, yet the least evident of the services, is the social network. The management constantly interacts with the women, the therapists persistently check up on them and push their social and psychological boundaries, and other women take care of them, building friendships and providing a sense of relatability through shared experiences. Director of Mujeres con Éxito Diana Bravo adds, "A sense of fellowship is essential for women to feel that another type of life is possible. At María Amor, what we do is provide them with the support for these different processes that they need to carry out to facilitate their path to autonomy." The companionship that forms as a result of group therapy and group activities is essential to building a strong support network that the women feel long after their time at the shelter. With this web of physical, emotional, and social networks that boost the foundation's holistic approach, the women can feel confident in their journey toward independence.

**Encouraging Autonomy.** As discussed in Chapter 2.2, many domestic abuse victims are economically dependent on their partner and lack the skills necessary for employment. Career training at Mujeres con Éxito provides an avenue for women to sustain themselves and their families financially after leaving the foundation. Bravo explains:

We greatly reinforce the need to save money. [The women] put away \$20 or \$30 per month and when they decide to leave, we give them this money back. The idea of this process is that women can recognize the importance of saving money and can have a small fund that can be of support to the start of their independent life.

Holding women accountable for themselves teaches them basic practices that are paramount to becoming independent. In addition to the monetary benefit and accountability that comes from employment, working instills a renewed sense of pride and purpose in the women after realizing that their skills are useful. However, working poses a challenge for women with children because they need a place to send their kids during the workday. To address this, the foundation provides a daycare available for the women to use both during and after residence at the shelter. The daycare located at Nina Huasi takes advantage of the green indoor and outdoor spaces and provides the children with exposure to nature and ample space for growth and development. For those who are

ready to live a more independent lifestyle but are not yet ready for complete autonomy, the foundation offers four apartments in the city. Here, women can create their own schedules and manage their own money. Women typically stay in this transitional housing between six and twelve months and then move on to housing outside of the organization. However, once leaving, women still have the option of using the foundation's services such as sending their children to the daycare or receiving psychological and legal help. Social workers check-in on families to ensure they have a stable and healthy living environment, and it is stressed that the women are always welcome back to the foundation if they find themselves in need again. In this way, the foundation's holistic approach prepares women for future endeavors but still reinforces their position as a secondary relief.

**The Vision of Nina Huasi.** In the process of expanding the foundation four years ago, much deliberation went into the design of Nina Huasi. The directors noticed that children living at the city center would always draw pictures of city life but never drew mountains, butterflies, or any other aspects of nature. They realized that they needed an environment that offered sufficient space and promoted tranquility. They wanted to teach women that while it is important to care for and protect their bodies, protecting the earth and caring for the environment is equally important. The connection between environmental care and personal healing began here and has shaped Nina Huasi and its ecological focus into the shelter it is today.

The ecological focus has remained a significant aspect of Nina Huasi for years as it also addresses social and economic needs of the organization. Weekly composting involves collaboration between the women, staff, and volunteers which, in turn, reinforces the network of support they have facilitated by the shelter. Volunteers and groundskeepers at Nina Huasi who are also advocates of its ecological focus noted that women often come with their own knowledge of various ecological processes. Being able to share their own ideas with the shelter helps increase the women's self-esteem, thus the management targets this as one of the more constructive aspects of the ecological focus. For those who arrive without knowledge, the various environmentally conscious jobs such as working in the greenhouse or turning the compost provides them with useful knowledge they can keep and potentially implement into their lives after leaving the shelter.

The women's comprehension of ecological processes at Nina Huasi is one piece of evidence that the foundation uses to support the validity of their ecological healing environment. Villavicencio claims that some women move on to implement compost, home gardens, and more sustainable ways of life into their homes after leaving the foundation. Providing the women with knowledge they can later use when living an independent life allows them to value the environment they live in, something they previously may never have had the time or energy to appreciate. Introducing new prospects of life stimulates new hope for the women about experiencing a liberated life. While real world application of the ecological expertise is the only evidence provided from the management to support the merits of the ecological focus, every woman that leaves the program

to lead an autonomous life is evidence that the ecological aspect, one portion of their holistic approach, has an impact on their recovery process.

### 4.3 Perspectives of Women on the Holistic Approach

After understanding the rationale of taking a holistic approach, we moved to the women at the shelter to determine the perspective of those on the receiving end. While there is no unanimous agreement as to which service the women find most beneficial, some services held a higher importance than others. However, we realize that with a small sample size, it is difficult to explicitly state which services were most important. Even so, we gathered useful statistics that influenced our analysis. Of the 13 women we interviewed, 10 identified psychological therapy as highly beneficial. 8 women found that social interaction is inherent to their recovery. 7 women stressed the importance of the security the shelter provides to them and appreciated the ecological aspects of the shelter. When asked about plans after parting ways with the foundation, we identified two common aspirations: 1) independence and 2) building a better life for their children. These two ambitions go hand in hand when women attempt to start a new and independent life. In this section, we discuss the importance of psychological therapy, social interaction, and shelter on the women's recoveries. We also look at their outlook on the ecological focus of Nina Huasi and their goals for developing independence.

**Psychological Therapy.** The most universally accepted method of treating past trauma, psychological therapy, holds great importance at the foundation. After food and shelter, it is the most substantial tool used to help the women overcome their suffering and begin to heal. The organization provides this service at both the Casa María Amor city branch and the Nina Huasi refuge shelter, allowing for convenient access. The therapy helps to enlighten the women about their experiences and provides a safe place to express their feelings. One woman noted that her therapy sessions helped her realize the psychological abuse that she had endured, feeling brainwashed from her abusive relationship. The therapy at the Maria Amor Foundation helps to provide information about the cycle of abuse and how to break it.

**Social Interaction.** A form of support the women identified to be imperative to their experience is the support that the women provide for each other. Although not an explicitly advertised service, we categorize these inevitable social interactions between women as one of the organizations "facilitated services" because it is more an outcome of women's participation in the program and less a directly implemented service. This service helps in the healing process by increasing the women's social awareness. However, it often overwhelmed women when they entered such a socially inclusive environment. Several women mentioned that after arriving at Nina Huasi, it was intimidating to see so many other women living there. One woman shares her initial sentiments toward arriving at Nina Huasi:

When I arrived at Nina Huasi, I was accustomed to a different lifestyle. I didn't know anyone and there were people who already knew each other really well. I felt really intimidated by that, but overtime I became accustomed and learned to live together with them. We had the same attitudes living together and although we are all different, we all had to escape the violent atmosphere so we learn to live together since we all carry the same burdens.

Overcoming this intimidation and building relationships thus helps to accustom women to this new lifestyle. Additionally, seeing the success of their peers in recovering from past trauma helps them gain confidence in their own recovery process. Similar to how management identified the importance of building a strong support system through healthy relationships, the women find value in the connections they form which helps to accelerate the healing process.

**Security and Shelter.** Every single woman valued a safe environment in which to raise their children. This is most often the first service that women look for after leaving an abusive situation. One woman mentioned that when she left with her kids she reached out to the foundation, who said they would set her up in a hotel until they could work out her transition to the Nina Huasi shelter, and she was very grateful simply for a place to stay. It was clear that any difficulties with becoming accustomed to life at the shelter were overshadowed by the women's desire for a safe home with their kids.

**Ecological Benefit.** We determined that the women are all receptive to the ecological focus of Nina Huasi. However, no women mentioned the ecological aspects provided by the foundation until the interviewer brought it up. It may be that the women do not see the ecological approach as one of the concrete services provided, even though the management recognizes it as one of the foundation's services. Of the 13 women we interviewed, all valued the ecological focus of the shelter, but six claimed that it was specifically important or beneficial to their recovery. Prior to arriving at Nina Huasi, few women had experience or knowledge regarding the ecological processes the shelter provides. However, time at the shelter made them knowledgeable about these processes. We determined that the majority of them understand the ecological importance of the shelter, but few recognize its purpose in their healing.

During our interviews, almost all the women expressed their enjoyment about living in a natural home, and many of them found gardening to be relaxing and rejuvenating. Some did not find the process of emptying the dry baths pleasant because frequently when not maintained properly, it would smell. However, they could move past the unpleasantness of the process enough to use it as a bonding experience. Our interviews with the residents of Nina Huasi attest to the mental benefits of natural spaces as described in Chapter 2.3. Whereas city life is plagued with smoky exhaust and no room for active youth development besides scattered parks, the women appreciate living at the shelter for it provides them with fresh air and a space for children to play.

**Independence and Stability.** The women’s goals after leaving the foundation involved gaining independence and the ability to provide a sustainable life for their children. For many, they had a hard time formulating thoughts about the future, which can be attributed to them focusing on their families’ immediate safety. When they did arrive at an answer, three women wanted their kids to get an education, two wanted to finish their own education, one wanted to find a good partner that would help raise her children, and all thirteen wanted to find a home in which to live an independent life with their children. Because of this, five women also found it beneficial to work with Mujeres con Éxito to accumulate job training and practical life skills.

#### 4.4 Meeting the Women’s Needs

Through our investigation, we explored the extent to which the needs of the women are met at the foundation. While the management’s perspective identified all the services to be essential for the women’s experience, information the women provided pointed us to the conclusion that when leaving a place of violence and abuse, women’s expectations of a new home are at a minimum, at first wanting only the necessities and not realizing that they can utilize more forms of support. This section summarizes the foundation’s interpretation of a holistic approach, its services, and what makes it unique. It then compares the perspectives of management to the perspectives of women, exposing the underlying reasons behind the women’s inability to criticize the foundation’s approach.

**The Foundation’s Interpretation.** The Maria Amor Foundation demonstrates a unique interpretation of a holistic approach to help women and families who are affected by domestic violence. The ecological aspect of the refuge shelter, an integral part of the healing process according to management, sets the foundation apart from other organizations of its kind. Although different shelters and organizations may have a more thorough approach or disagree with the way that the foundation addresses the issue, the management believes they are providing the best opportunity for healing through every service they provide. The following table condenses the aspects of the organization that promote a positive healing experience (see Figure 3).

<b>CONSTRUCT</b>	<b>THE MARIA AMOR FOUNDATION'S QUALIFICATIONS</b>
<p data-bbox="380 348 623 380"><b>Healing Intention</b></p> <p data-bbox="363 459 639 491"><b>Personal Wholeness</b></p>	<p data-bbox="824 310 1422 369">Psychologists work with each woman to understand their situation and address their needs accordingly</p> <p data-bbox="824 405 1422 520">Green space encourages women to care for the environment while simultaneously caring for their bodies; ecological processes connect women with nature and promote healthy relationships</p>
<p data-bbox="350 596 652 627"><b>Healing Relationships</b></p> <p data-bbox="350 779 652 810"><b>Healing Organization</b></p>	<p data-bbox="824 558 1422 674">Group activities and collaboration during ecological processes makes it easy for women to build relationships with one another; Psychologist-woman relationship is a key relationship for a successful recovery</p> <p data-bbox="824 709 1422 890">Provides sufficient resources for women including lawyers, social workers, and psychologists; Provides job experience, traditional group and self-therapy, and encourages relationship building through cooking, cleaning, tending to children, and contributing to compost/greenhouse</p>
<p data-bbox="376 1024 626 1056"><b>Healthy Lifestyles</b></p> <p data-bbox="386 1171 617 1203"><b>Integrative Care</b></p>	<p data-bbox="824 987 1422 1136">Meals and snacks are balanced and utilize the production of vegetables grown in the greenhouse; Compost process and exercise classes encourage activeness; Stress reduction through therapy with psychologists and interaction with nature</p> <p data-bbox="824 1171 1422 1230">Shelter offers daycare for children, lawyers, social workers, therapists, and medical specialists</p>
<p data-bbox="396 1339 607 1371"><b>Healing Spaces</b></p> <p data-bbox="331 1486 672 1518"><b>Ecological Sustainability</b></p>	<p data-bbox="824 1302 1422 1417">Located outside the city in a green space; Women get own room and bathroom to share with their children; Spaces devoted to therapeutic, educational, and physical treatment</p> <p data-bbox="824 1453 1422 1568">Utilization of solar panels provides energy for house, biofilters recycle water, compost is used in dry baths and greenhouse, vegetables from greenhouse are used in the kitchen and scraps are composted; minimal waste</p>

*Figure 3: The Maria Amor Foundation's Optimal Healing Environment.*

**A Comparison between Perspectives.** The perspectives of the management and women were almost equivalent. This can be attributed to the fact that the shelter's management projected their perspective regarding the foundation's support system onto the women. Because the organization was assisting them during a time of need, they were unable to think critically about the organization. When asked, almost all of the women said that they were unable to think of anything that the organization could do to better support them in their recovery. Oftentimes, the only thing women look for when trying to escape a domestic abuse situation is a secure place to bring their children and appreciate any additional form of help offered to them. With the surplus of the Maria Amor Foundation's services, it was difficult for them to be critical of the ways the services are provided or suggest improvements on the quality and quantity of services. Although we cannot claim this specific holistic approach to be effective based solely on our findings, other organizations looking to reinforce their approaches can refer to the receptiveness of the women on this approach as reason to implement it.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The Maria Amor Foundation provides a novel approach to address the myriad of issues faced by women victims of domestic abuse. Its two locations, Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi, provide services targeting different needs of women escaping domestic abuse. Its services encompass a holistic approach that encourages healing in a unique way. Because no case study exists on the holistic approach of the foundation, our goal was to discover the rationale behind this approach and how well its purpose meets the needs of the women it aims to help. In this final section, we summarize our key findings from our investigation, suggest improvements and future research to progress the foundation, and discuss what is projected for the future of the Maria Amor Foundation.

### 5.1 Case Study of a Holistic Approach

The Maria Amor Foundation illustrates one way to implement a holistic approach to help victims of domestic abuse. The foundation provides services that the women use to build autonomous and violence-free lifestyles. Management of the foundation centers this approach around an end goal of independence, and the services they provide allow the women to work towards this. They take pride in their therapeutic and economic services that provide the women with a life-long support network necessary to their autonomy. They also value the ecological focus of Nina Huasi which they believe connects women with nature to provide a peaceful and natural recovery. While the management identified no particular service better than the next, the majority of women gave higher value to therapeutic services than others. Therapy helps them relieve their past trauma which is a necessary step before beginning the road to autonomy. This suggests that the most economically efficient way to help victims of domestic abuse is to only provide therapy, a more traditional approach. However, this traditional approach is a simple solution to a complex problem. Although it comes at an increased operational cost, a multifaceted approach, like a holistic approach, would provide a more sustainable solution. Nina Huasi addresses the women's social needs because the women find value in the connections they form with other women through collaborative activities, including cooking, working at Mujeres con Éxito, or participating in weekly compost. Although many women appreciate the ecological focus of Nina Huasi, few claimed to have an understanding of the benefits of this towards their recovery process. Our findings indicate minimal discrepancies between the rationale of management and the perspectives of the women in regards to the holistic approach. Management incorporates their services to instill independence in the women, and the women see these services as valuable for achieving their independence. However, it is hard for the women to be critical of the foundation because it helps them for free.

## 5.2 Possible Improvements

Through interviews, we discovered that the ecological focus of the shelter exists for two reasons: to emphasize the importance of caring for the environment and to encourage the healing process of the women by providing them with a natural healing environment. However, the organization provides little explanation for the ecological focus and no technical information regarding the processes. We also uncovered that the greatest challenge for many women was adjusting to life at the shelter. To address these findings, we recommend the following:

**We recommend that the foundation showcase the environmental focus of Nina Huasi to women, volunteers, visitors, and other organizations interested in implementing this into their approach.** Currently, the shelter lacks information regarding the ecological cycles that are key to its environmental sustainability. Women are aware that these cycles exist, but many lack the technical understanding behind each process. For this reason, they are less likely to put effort into maintaining these processes and implement them into their life after leaving the organization. Additionally, the shelter has no way of sharing its ecological approach to visitors and other organizations. Development of promotional media would aid in spreading the word about the foundation's environmental focus. Informational posters and short videos would help both the women's understanding of each process and sharing the overall ecological approach. Our versions of these posters and videos can be found in Appendices D and E.

**We recommend that the foundation provide a better social orientation for incoming women.** According to the women interviewed, one of their biggest struggles when coming to Nina Huasi was forming connections with other women. Many said they were intimidated by the number of other women at the shelter and the relationships that had already been formed amongst women that already lived there. To address this, we recommend that management create a way that allows new women to be introduced to the other women at the shelter and make social connections with them. Not only would this make the transition into the shelter more comfortable for incoming women, but it would also provide them with peer support in their recovery process.

## 5.3 Future Research

We were unable to perform a full evaluation of the organization because we collected data exclusively from women currently part of the foundation and those who completed their recovery with the foundation. In addition, the foundation is dependent on unstable government funding which can limit the quantity and quality of their services. Therefore, we suggest the following for future research to tighten the gap in our findings and progress the shelter:

**We recommend a more comprehensive evaluation of the foundation's holistic approach.** Findings from our case study were based off of interviews with women currently receiving

treatment at the foundation and women who work at the foundation while living an autonomous life. Although these interviews presented us with information on the benefits of the holistic approach, there was little said about how the foundation could improve. Interviewing women who chose to end their relationship with the organization would likely present flaws and direct the foundation toward improvements. Comparing other organizations with a similar mission to the Maria Amor Foundation could also expose services that the foundation lacks or ways in which they can improve. Lastly, the study should take place over a longer period of time to experience women coming to the organization for help, the progress made over time, and transitioning out of the shelter. Combined, these factors would make for a more comprehensive evaluation of the foundation.

**We recommend a feasibility study on transitioning Nina Huasi into an economically self-sustaining organization.** One of the greatest problems that the organization faces is funding. The amount of funding received gradually decreases, leading to problems for the foundation. To address this, we recommend that further studies evaluate whether a self-sustaining shelter is attainable in the future and what the foundation could do to work toward that goal. Currently, they don't produce enough food, lack clean drinking water, and depend on paid workers to help run the organization. If they were able to increase their food production, have drinking water on-site, and implement a more effective recruitment process for volunteers, they could use the money saved to better support the women as well as the shelter that houses them.

## 5.4 The Future of the Maria Amor Foundation

Management at the Maria Amor Foundation hopes that one day femicide and domestic abuse ends. But, because a world free of violence may never exist, there is a continued necessity for services for domestic violence victims. Drawing attention to the Maria Amor Foundation's holistic approach could influence other domestic abuse shelters to adopt a similar approach. Replication of their holistic approach, or certain aspects of their approach, would provide women escaping domestic abuse with more services and an easier recovery process. By providing more women with the tools to live without violence, we can alleviate a portion of the hardship caused by domestic abuse worldwide.

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# APPENDIX A: SAMUELI HEALING ENVIRONMENT CONSTRUCTS

**Table 2** OHE Constructs and Definitions

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT	
<b>Healing Intention</b>	A conscious and benevolent mental activity (thought) purposefully directed toward health, wellbeing, healing, or highest good for one's self or another. Healing intention is manifest in the care setting in various ways, including setting intentions, prayer, and assessing patient hopes and expectations for healing and incorporating those hopes into the plan of care.
<b>Personal Wholeness</b>	The congruence of mind, body, and spirit, experienced through relationship with self and others, resulting in completeness and wellbeing. Mind-body-spirit congruence is enhanced through mind-body practices and interventions and attending to spirituality.
INTERPERSONAL ENVIRONMENT	
<b>Healing Relationships</b>	Healing relationships are the connections between persons who hold an intention for healing to occur. The attributes that distinguish a healing relationship from other positive relationships are that the connection is intentional and covenantal in nature and the connection involves positive emotional engagement and provides mutual benefit.
<b>Healing Organizations</b>	Healing organizations are driven by a mission to promote healing and health creation. They provide appropriate structures, processes, and resources to stimulate and support healing through intention, relationships, person-centered strategic planning and shared decision-making. Healing organizations optimize the potential for wellbeing of their employees and the people they serve.
BEHAVIORAL ENVIRONMENT	
<b>Healthy Lifestyles</b>	A healthy lifestyle involves making choices in diet, activity, relaxation, stress reduction and sleep that create and maintain health. A healthy lifestyle is a way of life that optimizes potential for maximal healthy life years.
<b>Integrative Care</b>	Integrative care is team-based care that is person-focused and family-centered and incorporates multidisciplinary care providers at their highest skill level. Integrative care blends the best of complementary therapies with conventional medicine in order to enhance self-care skills and ameliorate suffering.
EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT	
<b>Healing Spaces</b>	Healing spaces incorporate evidence-based design and healing principles to optimize and improve the quality of care, outcomes, and experiences of patients and staff. Healing spaces use physical design to enhance the individual's innate healing potential.
<b>Ecological Sustainability</b>	Organizations and individuals can foster ecological sustainability by reducing their footprint and supporting the health of the planet. The chemical impact and energy use of their operations is considered. Products or practices that are resource-intensive can be replaced with more ecologically friendly, less harmful, and cruelty-free alternatives.

## APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

Nosotros estamos estudiantes de Worcester Instituto Politécnico en los Estados Unidos y estamos reuniendo información sobre la Fundación María Amor con el propósito de entender el racional del enfoque holístico de Casa Maria y Nina Huasi. Estamos solicitando su permiso para entrevistar sobre su experiencia con la fundación. Las entrevistas serán una de nuestras principales fuentes para la recopilación de datos, y nos gustaría grabarlas para futuras referencias. Si prefiere que la entrevista no se grabe, por favor especifique ahora. Cualquier información proporcionada en estas entrevistas puede ser utilizada en el proyecto final. Si desea que cualquier información se mantenga confidencial, por favor háganoslo saber. La participación dentro de estas entrevistas es completamente voluntaria y las respuestas pueden ser retiradas en cualquier momento. Si tiene alguna pregunta, no dude en ponerse en contacto con nosotros en [gr-lacasamariaamor@wpi.edu](mailto:gr-lacasamariaamor@wpi.edu). ¡Su participación es muy apreciada!

We are students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the United States and we are gathering information about the Maria Amor Foundation with the purpose of understanding the rational of the holistic approach of Casa Maria and Nina Huasi. We are asking your permission to interview you about your experience with the foundation. The interviews will be one of our main methods of compiling data, and we would like to record them for future reference. If you prefer the interview not be recorded, please specify now. Any information provided in the interviews could be used in the final project. If you wish for any information to be confidential, please let us know now. Participation in these interviews is complete voluntary and the responses can be withdrawn at any time. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us at [gr-lacasamariaamor@wpi.edu](mailto:gr-lacasamariaamor@wpi.edu). Your participation is very appreciated!

1. **¿Conoce alguna otra organización en esta área que preste servicios a las víctimas de abuso doméstico?**

*Do you know another organization in this area that provides services for victims of domestic abuse?*

2. **¿Cómo aprenden las mujeres sobre Casa María Amor y Nina Huasi?**

*How do women learn about Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi?*

3. **¿Qué servicios ofrecen Casa María Amor y Nina Huasi para las víctimas de abuso doméstico?**

*What services do Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi offer for victims of domestic abuse?*

4. **¿Por qué Casa María Amor y Nina Huasi ofrecen estos servicios?**

*Why do Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi offer these services?*

5. **¿Qué actividades específicas se realizan para ayudar a estas mujeres a recuperarse de su situación de abuso doméstico?**

*What activities help women recover from their domestic abuse situation?*

6. **¿Qué aspectos de Casa María Amor/Nina Huasi son los más importantes para el éxito del proceso de recuperación de las mujeres?**

*What aspects of Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi are most important for the success of the recoveries of the women?*

7. **¿De dónde salió la idea de un enfoque ecológico para Nina Huasi?**

*Where did the idea of the ecological focus of Nina Huasi come from?*

8. **¿Por qué se enfatiza tanto el enfoque ecológico? ¿Hay evidencia de que el enfoque ecológico ha impactado positivamente en la recuperación de las mujeres?**

*Why is the ecological focus emphasized and is there evidence that this focus has positive impacts on the recoveries of women?*

9. **¿Cuál es la meta final de Nina Huasi?**

*What is the final goal of Nina Huasi?*

10. **¿En qué se diferencia su visión final de Nina Huasi y Casa María Amor que en el estado actual?**

*How does your vision of Nina Huasi and Casa María Amor differ than how they are right now?*

11. **¿Quiénes son sus partidarios / voluntarios?**

*Who are your supporters/volunteers?*

12. **¿Cómo puede mantener la organización?**

*How do you maintain the organization?*

## APPENDIX C: QUESTIONS FOR WOMEN

Nosotros estamos estudiantes de Worcester Instituto Politécnico en los Estados Unidos y estamos reuniendo información sobre la Fundación María Amor con el propósito de entender el racional del enfoque holístico de Casa Maria y Nina Huasi. Estamos solicitando su permiso para entrevistar sobre su experiencia con la fundación. Las entrevistas serán una de nuestras principales fuentes para la recopilación de datos, y nos gustaría grabarlas para futuras referencias. Si prefiere que la entrevista no se grabe, por favor especifique ahora. Cualquier información proporcionada en estas entrevistas puede ser utilizada en el proyecto final. Si desea que cualquier información se mantenga confidencial, por favor háganoslo saber. La participación dentro de estas entrevistas es completamente voluntaria y las respuestas pueden ser retiradas en cualquier momento. Si tiene alguna pregunta, no dude en ponerse en contacto con nosotros en [gr-lacasamariaamor@wpi.edu](mailto:gr-lacasamariaamor@wpi.edu). ¡Su participación es muy apreciada!

We are students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the United States and we are gathering information about the Maria Amor Foundation with the purpose of understanding the rational of the holistic approach of Casa Maria and Nina Huasi. We are asking your permission to interview you about your experience with the foundation. The interviews will be one of our main methods of compiling data, and we would like to record them for future reference. If you prefer the interview not be recorded, please specify now. Any information provided in the interviews could be used in the final project. If you wish for any information to be confidential, please let us know now. Participation in these interviews is complete voluntary and the responses can be withdrawn at any time. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us at [gr-lacasamariaamor@wpi.edu](mailto:gr-lacasamariaamor@wpi.edu). Your participation is very appreciated!

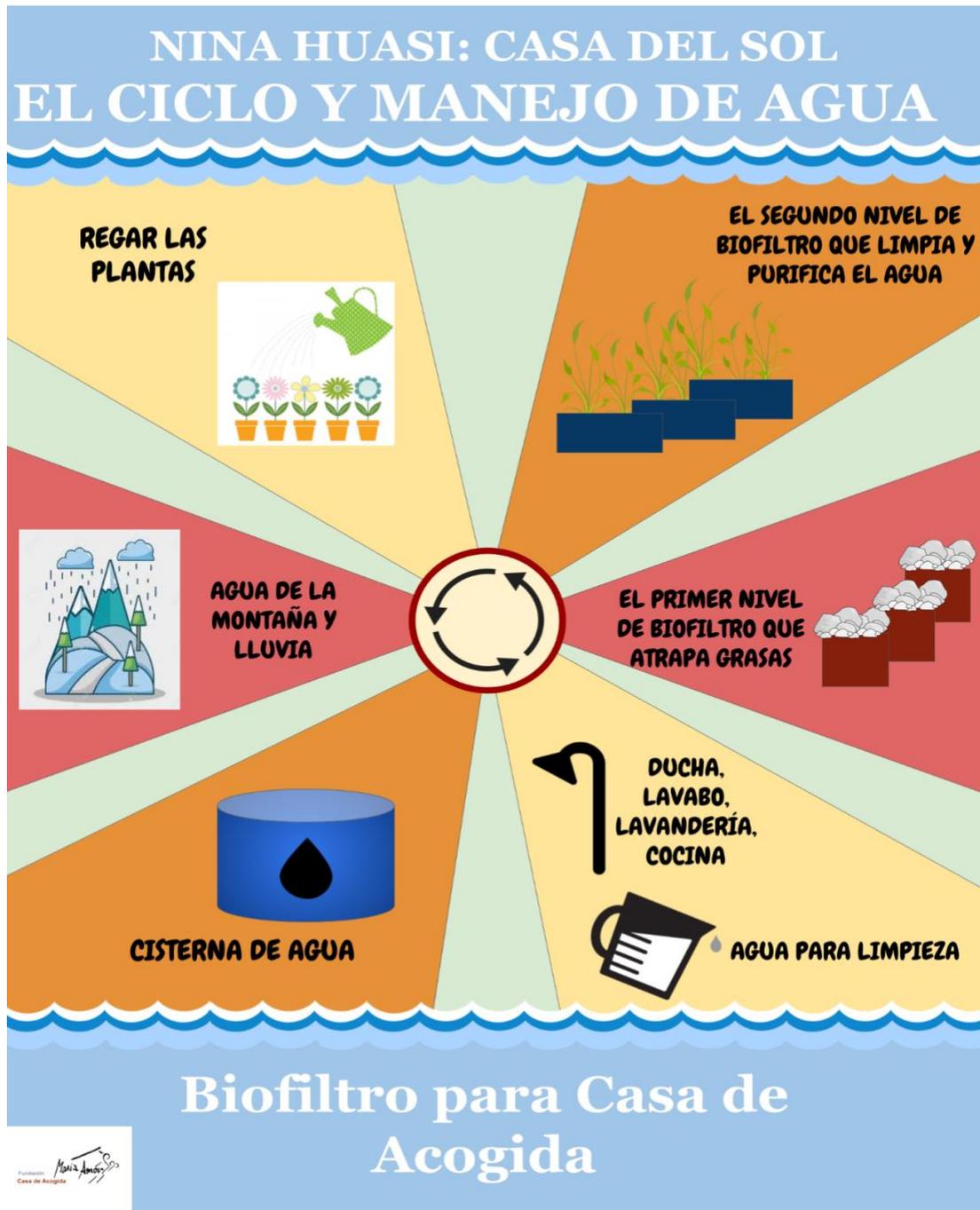
- 1. ¿Cómo Ud. aprendió sobre Casa María Amor/ Nina Huasi?**  
*How did you find Nina Huasi?*
- 2. ¿De los servicios que ofrecen Casa María Amor y Nina Huasi, ¿cuál considera más importante? ¿Por qué?**  
*Of the services offered at Casa María Amor and Nina Huasi, which do you find most important? Why?*
- 3. ¿Qué puede mejorar en Casa María Amor / Nina Huasi para ayudarle mejor en su proceso de recuperación?**  
*What can Casa María Amor/Nina Huasi do to better assist you in your recovery process?*
- 4. ¿Cómo le gusta trabajar con Mujeres con Éxito? ¿Ayuda con ser independiente o ahorrar dinero?**  
*How do you like working with Mujeres con Éxito? Does it help you to be independent or to save money?*

5. **¿Cuánto tiempo lleva viviendo en Nina Huasi?**  
*How long have you been living at Nina Huasi?*
6. **¿Qué encontró desafiante cuando llegó a Nina Huasi? ¿Qué le ayudaría al adaptarse a la vida en Nina Huasi?**  
*What did you find challenging when coming to Nina Huasi? What would have helped you when adjusting to life at Nina Huasi?*
7. **Sabe algo sobre los aspectos ecológicos del refugio? ¿Qué sabe?**  
*Do you know anything about the ecological aspects of the shelter? What do you know?*
8. **Participa en el compost cada viernes? Participa en el invernadero?**  
*Do you participate in the compost every Friday? Do you participate in the greenhouse?*
9. **Nina Huasi tiene un enfoque ecológico. ¿Piensa que los procesos ecológicos a Nina Huasi son aspectos importantes a su experiencia a Nina Huasi o no le importa a los aspectos ecológicos?**  
*Do you think the ecological aspects of Nina Huasi are important to your experience at Nina Huasi or do you not care about the ecological aspects?*
10. **¿Cuáles son Ud. planes después de dejar Nina Huasi?**  
*What are your plans after leaving Nina Huasi?*

## APPENDIX D: POSTERS OF ECOLOGICAL CYCLES



Nina Huasi's Organic Waste Cycle



Nina Huasi's Water Cycle (1)

# NINA HUASI: CASA DEL SOL EL CICLO Y MANEJO DE AGUA

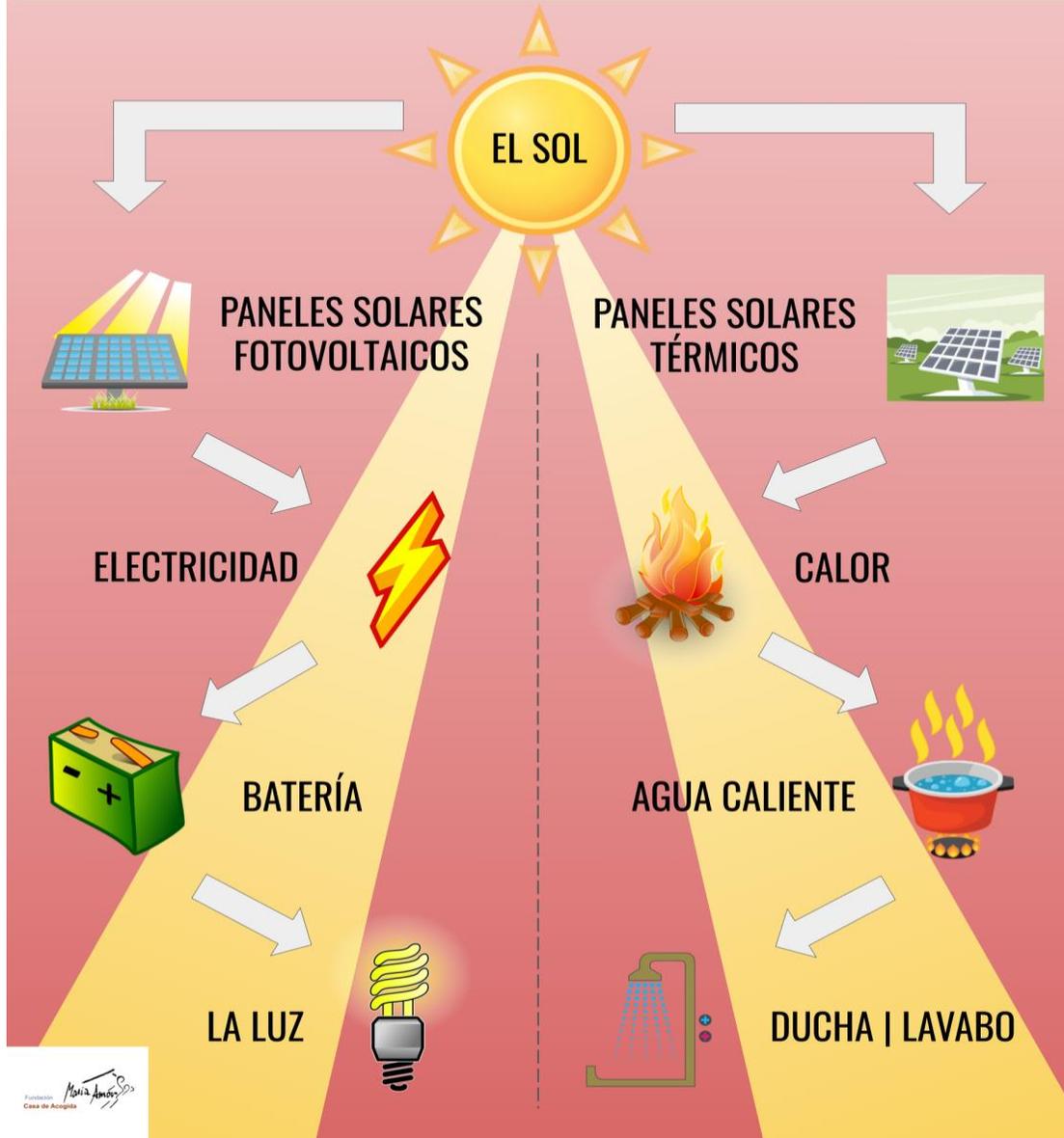


## Biofiltro para Cabañas de Administración



Nina Huasi's Water Cycle (2)

# NINA HUASI: CASA DEL SOL LOS PANELES SOLARES

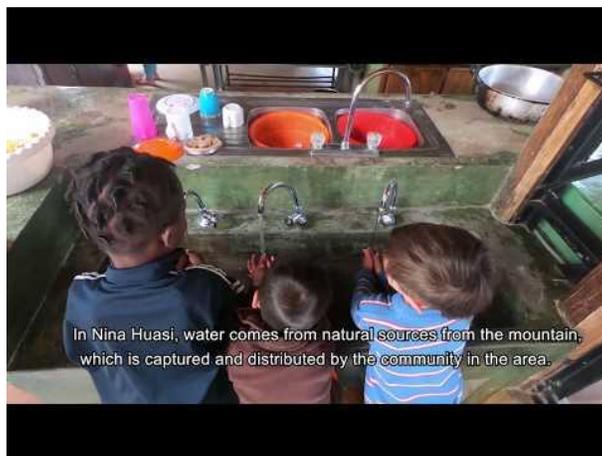


Nina Huasi's Solar Panels

## APPENDIX E: VIDEOS OF ECOLOGICAL CYCLES



This video showcases the ecological processes at Nina Huasi.



This video highlights discusses the two types of biofilters at Nina Huasi.



This video provides an overview of the compost process at Nina Huasi.



This brief video highlights the key aspects of maintaining the greenhouse at Nina Huasi.



This video describes the purpose of each type of solar panel and what they contribute to Nina Huasi.