

PROYECTO AURORA

Building a Community of Women

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Sometimes I get nervous when they [pre-natal care nurses] are examining me, I tighten and it hurts. I told one of them, and she said, "That's for playing with Kens instead of with Barbies." I thought that was humiliating.

—Thirteen-year-old woman in her eighth month of pregnancy

Proyecto Aurora is a young community project whose mission is to develop and implement educational, support, and research programs that benefit primarily low-income women in Puerto Rico. The project was born in Camuy, a small rural town in the northwestern coast of the island. Since its conception (a little more than a year ago), the project has devoted its work to young pregnant women and young mothers. We are in the process of developing a pregnancy prevention program and a support group for victims of domestic violence.

Our philosophical framework is that given a constellation of conditions and historical processes, low-income women in Puerto Rico tend to find themselves in an oppressive situation vis-à-vis their social reality. We understand that the kind of situations that they often confront—such as domestic violence and adolescent pregnancy¹—are reflections of cultural, social, economic, and historical processes that have consistently denied them the opportunity to fully develop as women and human beings. We understand that there is an imperative need to develop and implement programs that contribute to the strengthening and development of low-income women in Puerto Rico so that they will be able to reach a more dignified and just social position. We strongly believe that this change will come in part as low-income women recognize the strength that is embedded within them as a community: a community that shares individual and collective experiences; one that shares emotional and economic needs; one that has the power to envision, demand, and create a different reality for them and their children.

This article describes the development of Proyecto Aurora. In the first part, I discuss the history and setting of Proyecto Aurora. In the second part, I present short portraits of some of the women with whom we have had the privilege of working; essentially, I composed these portraits from the data generated through the qualitative research that I have been conducting as part of our work. I conclude with a few remarks about the rewards, promises, frustrations, and challenges of working toward building this community of women and furthering their educational experiences and opportunities. This program is a resource for educational change by defining a model of community-based, culturally responsive strategies for teenage pregnancy. Its strong cultural base empowers the young women, which may have led to their reconnecting with the educational system to complete their schooling.

THE HISTORY AND SETTING OF PROYECTO AURORA

Proyecto Aurora was born at the beginning of 1996 in Camuy, a small rural town in the northwestern coast of Puerto Rico. Camuy has an area of 46.4 square miles and an estimated population of 28,917. According to the 1990 census, 65.93% of the residents of Camuy live under the national poverty level. The unemployment rate is 22.49%. Major industries include small dairy farms and multinational factories.

During the last few months of 1995, being a relatively new resident of the area, I began researching the kinds of educational programs available to support young pregnant women in the area. What I found was that although these women make up a significant population (Fernós, 1996), there were no programs available for them. It was this absence of available resources and my commitment to gender and social educational equity that moved me to design and implement a summer program for pregnant adolescents with the hope that it would become the seed for more long-term support programs. Along the way, I was very fortunate and was able to identify a small group of students and professionals who shared a similar vision and commitment and who joined me—wholeheartedly—in this effort. All of them were born and raised in Camuy. Since very early in our work together, we felt that we were becoming a community—a group of individuals working collaboratively toward goals generated from our common vision and commitment—a community whose work, it was hoped, would become the seed for a larger and more inclusive community.²

As a *colectivo de trabajo* (work collective), we try to collaborate with each other as a way of honoring our community-building ideas. Some of our collaborative strategies include the following: We make our decisions based on consensus, we share and consult with the other members of the colectivo about our individual tasks, and we support each other in our responsibilities and do all that is possible to work in coordination with each other.

In the process of designing and implementing the summer program for pregnant adolescents, it soon became clear that we needed an official identity to present ourselves to agencies whose collaboration we needed, such as the System of Public Health, public schools, potential funding sources, and so on. We thus became Proyecto Aurora, Inc. in February 1996, when we incorporated ourselves as a nonprofit organization under the laws of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. During that spring, we engaged ourselves in two simultaneous processes—that of raising the necessary financial resources for the program and that of conceptually designing its contents. By early May, we had managed to raise enough financial resources³ and had designed a 3-week program for a group of 18 young women. It was time to invite the young women to participate. The strategy that worked best was visiting the town's public health center on Tuesday mornings, as it is on that day of the week that the gynecologist comes and the young women attend their prenatal visits. The health center's staff—from administrators to nurses—were extremely cooperative with us. They granted us a special permit to access part of the patients' records to identify potential candidates for the program. The process was a very personal one; after identifying potential participants,⁴ I would take note of their next appointment and make sure to be there that morning to talk to them about the program and to invite them to be part of it. Although we were able to invite most of the 16 young women who participated in the summer program through this process, we also wanted to open ourselves to others who might be receiving prenatal care in another setting or not receiving any prenatal care. We thus contacted schools and put up flyers in a few strategic places, such as the WIC office and local stores.

We provided transportation to the participants by hiring the services of don Alberto López, a very respectful and hard-working bus driver. Don Alberto's daily trip around Camuy to pick up and then take back the participants would take more than an hour, as it entailed going all the way up to the highest points of the town, which are well inland, and all the way down to the lower coastal area. We arranged with the Department of Education to provide lunch to the participants, and we also collaborated with the Consorcio del Norte, the local office in charge of distributing Job Training Partnership

Act-Title II-B federal funds, so that the young women were given a stipend for their participation in the program.

The program was held on the grounds of a house that is rented by the municipal administration. The house itself was not an ideal space as, unexpectedly, we had to share it with another summer group and thus had little privacy. Nevertheless, blessed by ideal weather conditions, we made the best out of the situation and by the second day, we had reaped some pretty old but very useful wooden tables and some chairs. From then on, we held our workshops outdoors under the generous shade of a huge mango tree.

Don Alberto would bring the young women to the site every day from Monday to Friday for 3 weeks. By 8:30, all of us—staff and the participants—were ready to begin our morning. The participants were organized in two groups according to the chronological stage of their pregnancy. Roughly, those who were in their first and second trimester formed a group, and those who were in their last trimester formed the other. A typical day would begin by a collective gathering in which we reviewed the activities for the day and, after some physical exercises (and some resistance to these, we need to confess), we shared a good morning breakfast (no resistance to this part, though). We would then split for three 45-minute block activities, which included legal, educational, social, and health counseling; workshops about infant care; group reflections; and arts and crafts. In this last activity, the participants made—with impressive devotion and joy—some bibs and swaddling cloths for their babies, which together with their artwork, composed an exhibition that we held during the last week.

From very early in the program, friendships started growing, and a sense of caring for each other developed. Very early and very often, I remember being asked, What will happen after the 3 weeks are over? What will we do to keep seeing each other? Although I had no definite response at that moment, I remember feeling that their desire and need to continue meeting was an essential dimension of what we needed for the project as a community to keep growing. Their questions somehow became a new challenge and responsibility.

By the end of the 3 weeks, as was evidenced by the participants' and the staff evaluation of the program, it was clear that we had just begun our work, that we all wanted to continue. At that point, members of our colectivo engaged ourselves again in the processes of raising the necessary funds to continue and of conceptualizing the nature of our future work. In the meantime, we kept in touch with the young women through informal visits and phone calls, particularly to announce births.

In the process of defining the nature of our future work, it soon became clear that to continue and grow, we needed a space of our own. In mid-March

1997, we inaugurated Casa Aurora, a small house that we rented in Barrio Zanja, one of the 13 *barrios* (neighborhoods) of Camuy, to become the physical center of our work. The inauguration was a meeting of all of us who were part of the summer program and the newborn children. It was a social gathering in which labor stories and infant pictures were shared. This activity provided the opportunity to invite the young women to a new workshop that we designed for young mothers. The young mothers' workshop is running parallel to another one for young pregnant women. The purposes of these workshops—which will run once a week for 2 months—are to support the young women during their pregnancies and early motherhood by providing them with a structured and safe place in which to share their thoughts and feelings; to be an educational experience regarding the health and social well-being of the young women and their children; and to identify and follow up on special needs that they might have regarding schooling, legal issues, or housing. In each of the workshops, as in the summer program, the young women will be working on an arts and crafts project. Aside from these workshops, we are holding singing lessons for junior high school students with the purpose of building relationships with young people in the community and of providing them with a healthy space in which to develop their talents and channel their energy.

In the future, we hope to keep strengthening our services to young pregnant women and to young mothers. We are preparing ourselves to provide educational services to young people on preventing unwanted pregnancies and to organize a support group for victims of domestic violence. Also, we are organizing other creative activities for young people, such as drama and art lessons.

PORTRAITS OF YOUNG WOMEN

In the following pages, I present three of the young women with whom we have had the privilege of working, from whom we have been learning, since the summer of 1996.⁵ I created these portraits from the data generated by the qualitative research project that I am currently conducting as part of our work. The purpose of the research is to explore adolescents' perceptions about their social condition as women, as pregnant, and as mothers. I have collected most of the data through two semistructured interviews with each of the eight participants of the study. The first of each of the interviews was held when the participants were pregnant (except for one of the young women who had a miscarriage).

The purpose of presenting these portraits is to include the voices and experiences of these young women, as they are an essential dimension of the history of Proyecto Aurora. Moreover, their voices and experiences convey some of their common needs and strengths, which have been crucial to the process of community building among them.

In the portraits, I have tried to capture glimpses of who these young women are and of their individual histories. As the portraits reflect, there are salient differences among the three young women; however, there are also common threads in their lives.

WALESKA

Waleska is a 16-year-old woman born in Brooklyn, New York. She had her first baby when she was 14. She told me that at that time, she wanted to get pregnant as a way of freeing herself from the very poor relationship she had with her stepfather: "Yeah, I wanted to look for a house and get out of that one, to make my own life." At that time, she would often stay at friends' houses; other times, she would stay with men she hardly knew and, for a couple of nights, "exchange" room and board for sexual favors. Her baby, Christian, died when he was 3 months old. When he was a month old, Waleska left her mother's and stepfather's house; some nights, she was unable to find a place to stay. When Christian got very sick, she took him to the hospital. Waleska recalls the life and death of Christian with much emotion—sadness and guilt:

When he died, the doctors said that he had died of pneumonia, but no, I know he died because he was hungry, because he was cold. . . . When he died, I had him one whole day in his small coffin, and that day I was like a river of tears. . . . And I know that I did it wrong also because I was hanging out with him all the time and that's what got him sick.

At the time Waleska was telling me her story, she was 8 months pregnant and somewhat afraid that she would not be able to help her second baby survive: "I know I'll be touching him all the time to see if he's breathing. At least until he's 3 months old."

Waleska's life has been very unstable and difficult. Her parents, although both were born in Puerto Rico, met and married in New York. For most of Waleska's life, her father has been in jail for drug-related charges; her mother was also, for most of Waleska's childhood, a drug addict. She is the oldest of her mother's five children. Her mother gave birth to Waleska when she was 14 years old. When Waleska was 6, she moved to Puerto Rico to live

with her grandmother. There, school authorities moved her back to kindergarten, when she had already finished first grade in New York, because she did not speak fluent Spanish. Beginning in junior high, Waleska started skipping school: "I would be cutting classes all the time, I would go and play pool. If there was an exam, I would go to the teacher 'Mr., is there an exam today?' I would take it and leave." Waleska maintains that her resistance to be in school was partly because she felt so much older, taller, and physically developed than her classmates: "It was that I was always so tall and pretty, and I was with all those tiny children. . . . It was like traumatic for me."

From very early in her life, Waleska has been responsible for her own financial support. Among the responsibilities that she has assumed since her early adolescence to earn her living have been cleaning houses and caring for other people's children.

I have been unable to contact Waleska since she gave birth. Through some other of the young women who participated in the summer program, I know that she moved out of town with the father of her baby. I found out that she gave birth to a beautiful and healthy girl. By now, Waleska has been able to help her daughter live beyond her third month of life. Her baby must already be about 8 months old. I wonder if Waleska has learned by now to trust herself enough to know that her child will keep breathing.

NORMA

Norma is the seventh of eight siblings. Three of her siblings are from her father's side and four from her mother's. She is the only one that her mother and father have in common. Norma is 15 years old and left school at the beginning of 10th grade. Following her parents reconciliation after a temporary separation (within which her father conceived his fourth child with another woman), Norma decided to leave her home and moved in with her 17-year-old boyfriend.

Since her early childhood, Norma has resented her father's conduct when he gets drunk:

He comes and yells, starts breaking things, once he even tried to rape my older sister. My mother threw him out of the house then, and he was homeless for 2 or 3 days, but then she took him back.

[When he was drunk] he would hit me real hard. With closed fists. I would hit him back and he would then hit me even harder. Once he hit me here [touching her chest]. I was in so much pain.

To avoid her father and to resist his authority over her—"he didn't want me to go anywhere"—Norma would go out at nights and come back many hours later: "I would leave and get home very late at night." One of those nights, in fact, the last one before she decided to move in with her boyfriend, Norma returned home the next morning. When she arrived, her parents and police officials (who had come in response to her parents call) were waiting for her. As soon as she walked in the house, her father started hitting her as he had done so many other times. I asked her about the policemen's reaction to that scene: "Oh, they just stood there. I felt that they thought he [the father] was doing what he should."

Norma told me that she has never been too interested in academics and that she would really like to go to a vocational school to become a car mechanic. Nevertheless, she never received any support from school counselors in this respect. Moreover, she is very much aware that the profession is not considered appropriate for women: "I like mechanics, mechanics and construction. But mami [her mother] says no, that's not for women; and Rafi [her boyfriend] says that's a man's thing." Some silence followed and, somewhat uncharacteristically timidly, she asked, "Do *you* think I can?"

Norma was taking contraceptive pills while living with her boyfriend. At some point, her boyfriend wanted to have a child, and she agreed. She stopped taking the pills, and soon after, she was pregnant. When I met Norma in the summer of 1996, she thought that she was 3 months pregnant. One day during the summer program, Norma was not feeling well and was bleeding vaginally. Zaida, the project's nurse, and I started exploring the situation with Norma. We called the doctors that had been seeing her to get more information and asked for advice, but nobody seemed to take any responsibility for her. As we tentatively concluded after trying to reconstruct Norma's health during her pregnancy, and as we were able to confirm a couple of days later, Norma had miscarried a month before. The current bleeding was her first menstruation after her miscarriage. She had been bleeding the previous month and had gone to the hospital, where a sonogram was ordered. When she went to pick up the sonogram results a few days later, she was told that they were not ready. She never went back for them. Nobody called her to tell her the results or to follow up on her.

Late in December 1996, I received a collect call from New York. It was Norma. It was close to what would have been her due date had her pregnancy continued, she reminded me. "It made me think about you and so I called," she said. "I'm kind of glad I'm not having the baby now, though" she added. She told me that in a few days, she would be returning to Puerto Rico, that she had broken up with her boyfriend and would be living with an aunt. Moreover, and encouraged and helped by Olga, the project's social worker,

she had decided to go back to school and pursue her goal to become a car mechanic.

ANABEL

Anabel is a 20-year-old young woman who is now the mother of a 6-month-old girl, Keysha Marie. She lives with her mother, stepfather, younger brother, and her daughter in the geographically highest part of Camuy. The father of her baby, Héctor, is essentially absent from her life, except for "now and then" when he gives her between \$35 and \$40 to buy diapers and baby food for their child.

Anabel's mother gave birth to her when she was 18 years old and married to Anabel's father, whom she divorced 10 years later, due to his problem with alcohol consumption. Anabel recalls her childhood as a sad and scary time in which she would often find herself in the way of her father, trying to protect her mother from his violent physical attacks. While talking with me regarding how she wishes her daughter's childhood to be similar or different from hers, Anabel explained,

No, I don't want her childhood to be like mine. I was always in the middle of so many fights. My father would always be drunk. He would hit my mother and I would get in the middle so he wouldn't. . . . I want her [Keysha Marie] to be a happy child. I was a sad girl.

She would also like her daughter's life to differ from hers in relation to schooling. Anabel was held back in second grade, and she stopped attending school in fourth: "I left because I didn't like it, I wasn't learning much." But for Anabel, it is now very important that her daughter develops a positive relationship with school so that she might have a better future, with financial and professional opportunities that Anabel understands are now closed to her:

I hope that she studies, that she becomes a professional, not like me who quit school too early because I didn't like it. I have to talk to her, tell her that it's important, tell her not to do like me.

Anabel started her relationship with Héctor, Keysha's father, when she was 15 years old and he was almost 30. Of the 4 years that they were "together" before she conceived their child, he spent 3 in jail for drug-related charges. During that period, she would visit him in jail every week, and they would make plans to become a family once he would come out. Things didn't

turn out as she expected or hoped. Soon after he came out of jail, she became pregnant. This somewhat surprised her, as she had an ovarian cyst that she thought would make it impossible for her to conceive. But she never considered an abortion and was in fact happy to be expecting. So was Héctor, who wanted to have a daughter because he already had a son from a previous relationship. But soon after, he became very "irresponsible" toward her, which meant in part that he stopped giving her money that she needed for her prenatal care.

At the time of our first interview, Anabel was 6 months pregnant and, although evidently things were not good with Héctor, she was still hopeful that he would change and become more responsible toward her and the baby. She said that she was very much in love with him and would be willing to marry him. However, by the time of our second interview, the picture had changed dramatically. Anabel's daughter was then 5 months old, she had lost her hopes with Héctor, and she had fallen out of love. She was no longer counting on Héctor financially or emotionally. She manages to make ends meet with the food stamps and WIC checks that she receives. She hopes that once her daughter is a little older, she will be able to find a job in a clothing store or in one of the local factories. Emotionally, she feels that being with Keysha is very fulfilling. In fact, being Keysha's mother is the one thing Anabel says she would not change about her past, present, or future life. Moreover, if she ever gets romantically involved with another man, Anabel firmly declared, her priority would still be her daughter:

[In the future], I sometimes see myself with a good man, the most important thing is that he loves my daughter. First, I'll see how he treats her, and then. . . . He would have a steady job, and not be involved with drugs. He would have to love me. Yeah . . . that's important.

REFLECTIONS ON THE YOUNG WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

Three common threads that I was able to identify in the stories of these young women are the impact of poverty and violence in their lives, their negative school experiences, and their pregnancies as a way of affirming themselves within an oppressive social context.

The impact of poverty and violence in their lives is clear. Waljka has been supporting herself financially since her early adolescence cleaning houses and caring for other people's children. Her early sexual activity with older men in exchange for room and board and her first pregnancy (when she was 14 years old) were part of her response to the poverty in which she lived.

This behavior is consistent with Kristin Luker's (1996) assertion that although affluent women are postponing their childbearing years, this "revolution" has not been part of the lives of poorer women, who have held to traditional patterns of childbearing: Luker emphasized, "Although it is true that young mothers tend to be poor women, it is much more meaningful to say that poor women tend to become young mothers" (p. 12). Ironically for Waleska, her response engendered more poverty as reflected in the death of her first child: "He died because he was hungry, because he was cold." Anabel described her childhood as sad and scary, essentially attributing this sadness and fear to often finding herself trying to protect her mother from her alcoholic father's violent physical attacks. In this way, since very early, Anabel's life was marked by the violence that characterizes the life of so many Puerto Rican families, against the common mythology that tends to portray family life as a "safe, healthy, and happy place" (Silva Bonilla, Rodríguez, Cáceres, Martínez, & Torres, 1990, pp. 22-23). Norma's lack of access to quality health care, a reflection of the poverty that characterizes her life, led her to be ignorant for a whole month regarding her miscarriage.

All of them—Waleska, Anabel, and Norma, like so many other women who become pregnant during their adolescence—had had negative school experiences prior to their pregnancies: "the kinds of young people who get pregnant are usually the kinds of young people who are floundering in school long before a pregnancy occurs" (Luker, 1996, p. 9). Anabel and Waleska were both held back in early grades. Having been held back in a grade is, besides poverty and other problems, one correlate of early pregnancy (Luker, 1996). Norma confronted oppressive educational gender roles that did not allow her to flourish at school, an oppression that documented the American Association of University Women's (1992) report, *How Schools Short-change Girls*.

For the three girls, their pregnancies represented an experience that—at least at some level—made them feel liberated from oppressive situations. For Norma and Waleska, becoming pregnant was part of their respective processes of escaping oppressive situations at home, both situations embodied by male figures (Waleska's stepfather and Norma's father). For Anabel, even though she was surprised to have conceived a child, her daughter became, from very early in her pregnancy, the one thing that she would not change about her past, present, or future life. In many ways, the portraits of Waleska, Anabel, and Norma transcend their individual stories and reflect the stories of many other young women who also become pregnant when they are very young. Luker's (1996) descriptions of the "typical" young mother echoes their lives:

They were born poor and grew up in poor neighborhoods. Their early lives were often scarred by violence and disorder, including sexual abuse. They attended rundown, underequipped schools in which teachers struggled to discipline and motivate the students, and they were typically not among the lucky and clever few who managed to obtain a little extra attention from their teachers, coaches, or adult neighbors. They were born into families that were at the end of the social and economic queue, and their life experiences rarely moved them any closer to the front. By having babies, such women are manifesting an almost poignant hope—the hope that a better future lies ahead, for their children if not for themselves. (p. 180)

A FINAL WORD

The process of building a community of women through Proyecto Aurora has been very rewarding and, I believe, promising. The meaning of community within the context of our project has been defining and redefining itself as we evolve. At this moment, I define our community as a group of women who, through shared and empowering experiences, have come to feel a sense of belonging toward each other; who have developed a sense of solidarity toward each others' needs; who are counting on each other and the project as a source of helpful information and emotional support; and who are reaching out toward other women who might also benefit from becoming part of this community. I recognized the growth of this community when, of the 16 young women who participated in the summer program, 13 participated in the new workshop for young mothers. Moreover, quite a few of them have invited their women friends to come along. In the evaluation of the summer program, the young women talked about the educational and social benefits of having participated, which included learning about how to care for their babies; considering breast-feeding their infants, making new friends, learning to make specific crafts, and knowing what to do in case of being abused by their partners. Zaira, one of the young women, emphasized how learning about her baby and herself transformed her attitude toward her pregnancy: "Before, I would feel very bitter every time I thought about the baby. But not anymore. Now that I know what happens with the baby, it never makes me bitter to think about him." In terms of knowing about the changes in her body, Maricely, another of the young women, appreciated very much that she was finally given information about the process of being pregnant. She explained that when she would go to the doctor for prenatal visits, she would always ask questions that he would never answer. Whereas unanswered questions during her prenatal visits left her feeling powerless in relation to the changes she was experiencing as a pregnant woman, having access to basic information about

her pregnancy was a self-affirming and empowering experience that she explicitly appreciated.

In relation to the future of the project, Damaris suggested that it should continue and that maybe they, the participants, could eventually organize workshops for other young pregnant women. Working toward building a community of women is an encouraging experience when I received Norma's telephone call, and she shared her decision to challenge social norms and follow her dream to become a car mechanic.

Some local institutions, like the junior high school nearby, have been very receptive and respectful of our work. The junior high school director and school counselor have both gone out of their way to collaborate with us in helping identify participants for our various activities. Parents are also expressing their support and their joy that we are creating alternatives for their children. For example, now that we are reaching out to local youth for singing lessons, I have received a few calls from parents whose daughters are enrolled in classes to offer their help and to explicitly express their gratitude.

Trying to build a community of women has also been very challenging and even frustrating at times. One pregnant young woman whom we invited to participate in the current workshop was very excited to be part of it, but let us know that the meeting time—Thursday afternoons from 3:30 to 5:30—conflicted with her schedule at her factory job, which is every weekday from 3:00 to 11:00 p.m. Cautioning us not to communicate in any way that she wanted to work fewer hours or to say anything that would jeopardize her much needed income, she allowed us to contact her supervisor to inquire about the possibility of making an adjustment in her schedule that would enable her to benefit from the program. With a carefully written letter (which included a paragraph about the potential individual and social benefits of the young woman's participation in the program) signed by me and the project's social worker, with much faith and, I know realize, with much ingenuity, I went to the factory and tried to talk about the possibility with the human resources manager. He greeted me very cordially and kept a polite smile on his face until I mentioned the words "adjustments in an employee schedule." At that point, the smile faded. He started moving his head mechanically from left to right. "That's not possible," he managed to say. He had stopped listening. He had affirmed his power over me and over the young woman, part of whose life he seems to rejoice in arbitrarily controlling.

Another barrier that we have faced a few times is that young women who want to participate in the project understand that they need their partners' "permission" to participate in the project's activities, and the partners, in a somewhat similar fashion to the manager at the factory, deny them the required permission. These moments feel like both a loss and a challenge.

The stories of the manager and the partner embody the oppressive situation traditionally confronted in Puerto Rico by low-income women, a situation characterized by gender inequities. These two examples reflect the cultural, social, economic, and historical processes that have consistently denied these women the opportunity to fully develop as women and human beings. I believe that part of our mission as a project is to build a strong community of women who will feel empowered to begin challenging such oppression, in order to envision, demand, and create a different reality for themselves and their children. It is a difficult journey, but I feel that we have begun. I feel that we have begun when I remember a colleague, Brendaliz, asking how much rent we pay for Casa Aurora and inquiring about the source of our funding. I remember Brendaliz looking at me and recognizing some worry in my face—which probably reflects my constant preoccupation with the need to raise enough money to operate. She said,

Don't worry, Gladys. If it comes that one month we don't have the money to pay, each of us will bring a little bit, and together, we'll collect enough money to keep the house. We need it.

NOTES

1. The victims of 91% of all cases of domestic violence reported in 1994 to the Police of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico were women (information obtained from the Police of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico). In 1991, 19.1% of all the births in Puerto Rico were to adolescent mothers (Fernós, 1996).
2. Zaida Irizarry López, one of the members of this group, is a colleague of mine at the University of Puerto Rico, Colegio de Arecibo, where she specializes in Public Health at the Nursing Department. She is responsible for developing the project's curriculum on women's and infants' health. For several years, she worked in marginal areas of the Dominican Republic as a volunteer health professional. Olga López Quiñones is a social worker who has dedicated her professional life to working in projects directed toward strengthening the family. She currently works as a social worker in a secondary school in Camuy. Among her responsibilities in the project is to assess and follow up on the needs of the young women regarding schooling, housing, and family relationships. Rosa Crespo Hernández and Keyla Pellot Colón are both advanced students at the Department of Education of the University of Puerto Rico, Colegio de Arecibo. They were outstanding students in some of the courses I was teaching, and I recognized in them a commitment toward educational equity and women's issues. I told them about the project and, enthusiastically, they became an integral part of it. Among their primary responsibilities is facilitating workshops on a day-to-day basis.
3. I would like to recognize the significant contribution granted to us at that stage of our work and through the present by the Commission for Women's Issues, Office of the Governor—in particular, the consistent ideological and financial support of its current executive director.

Enid M. Gavilán. I would also like to recognize a generous contribution that was also granted to us by the University of Puerto Rico, through the intervention of Vice President Dr. Blanca Silvestrini. The University of Puerto Rico has continued supporting the research component of the project.

4. Criteria consisted basically of age and expected day of delivery. Participants had to be under 21 years old and their expected due date not prior to or during the duration of the program.

5. I have changed the names of all participants in the project to protect their identities. I have also translated their words from Spanish to English.

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