

# Drama Mamas

## At Palladia's domestic violence shelter, drama therapy helps survivors take on new roles.

Every Monday, women seeking refuge from their violent partners at Palladia's Aegis shelter engage in a non-traditional form of therapy. Instead of talking one-on-one about their past as victims of domestic violence, they discuss poems, write plays and become actresses in dramas about motherhood, suffering and hope.

When they first come to Drama Mamas, a weekly therapy group led by professional actresses and therapists from Creative Alternatives New York (CANY), some of the women at Aegis sit with their arms crossed and eyes downcast. Because of the trauma they've experienced, domestic violence survivors often find it difficult to trust anyone. But over time, they become more comfortable and allow themselves to actively participate in the plays, sharing both tears and laughter with other survivors of violence.

"I don't think that the traditional way of dealing with domestic violence works for everybody," said Christine Rodriguez, the director of Aegis, a 90-day

residential facility, where women receive help with housing, drug addiction and legal issues. "Drama Mamas provides tools, a forum to speak for people who would not initially speak."

Instead of facing the real life traumas directly, participants at Drama Mamas create fictional stories that contain real life experiences.

"It's a lot better than being yourself. You get to be someone else. It's Halloween every week!" said Erica, who has attended two sessions.

By playing different roles, such as an artist, a grandmother or a wise friend, these women who were used to defining themselves as victims can start regaining control of their lives.

"By inhabiting the ego of a character that has strength and vision, you internalize it as a role that you can play out in your life," said Lucy McLellan, a registered drama therapist who has been leading Drama Mamas groups for two and a half years at Aegis. "The whole idea of drama therapy is that you expand the people's role repertoire."

For women who were isolated at home with a violent partner, Drama Mamas is also an opportunity to connect with others who have experienced similar violence and humiliation.

"I never talked with people before," says Irene, who emigrated from Brazil several years ago. "Since I am in this country, I never had friends, never go out. I don't have family, just my husband. When I go to Drama Mamas, I get to talk, share, listen...I like it!"

Maria, who has stayed in the shelter for several weeks, never missed a Drama Mamas session. She starts to smile as she describes her involvement in the group. "I love it," she said. "Before, I considered myself a victim, now I feel like I am a survivor."

**"Before, I thought there was just one type of counseling, where you sat and talked in a small room...Drama Mamas offers other ways to share with people,"**

ERICA, CLIENT AT AEGIS