

# HEROES AMONG US

Sexual violence resistance  
in rural communities



Florida Council Against Sexual Violence

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## ForeWord

The year 2020 challenged communities and sexual violence advocates to reimagine work in extraordinary ways. While we had originally envisioned this rural project publication as a fotonovela with paid Latinx actors, photographers, and web designers, the health and wellness of our communities was more important. Florida has higher rates of uninsured people (16%) than the nation overall and Florida's communities of color are experiencing disparately high rates of severe complications and death associated with COVID-19. Needless to say, we returned to the drawing board and decided to alternatively create an "Historieta / Cómic," or a drawn Latinx comic book. This allowed us to continue the work of producing a creative tool for Latinx communities in rural areas while adhering to the social distance recommendations issued by health experts.

## Special Thanks

This publication represents the daily labor of sexual violence advocates in our communities, as well as countless virtual collaborative hours between the 2018 OVW Rural Project team & artist Daniel Hooker. We extend our heartfelt thanks to survivors of sexual violence. Elements of these fictional stories come from our combined in-field and personal experiences. Last, many thanks to our extended network of colleagues, including the Resource Sharing Project (RSP), Latinx Coalition Group, & Alianza Latina Contra la Agresión Sexual (ALAS).

## Historieta

A common challenge in rural areas, is reaching communities with underdeveloped academic and technological literacy. Lack of access can be further impacted by limited English capacity and cross-cultural factors. Visual tools, like the fotonovela and historieta, offer an innovative and effective approach for reaching these populations and changing behaviors (Herner, 1979; Carillo & Thomas, 1983).

The main difference between fotonovelas and historietas is that fotonovelas consist of photographs depicting a story, while historietas are drawn. The images depicted in the story are highly illustrative of action, impact, and emotions as to convey and address important social issues. In other words, they can convey a lot of important information with minimal text. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center's street harassment fotonovela, [Porque es mi cuerpo](#) (2018), is a perfect example. Other examples are Proyecto Esperanza's [Cosechando mis Derechos](#) (2009) and the [Rural Health Women's Project](#)'s various health fotonovelas.

In addition to creating access that addresses literacy barriers, fotonovelas and historietas are culturally-specific mediums. These publications have their historical roots in originally illustrated cartoon versions of popular works of European literature that were taken to Latin America and are popular until this day (PBS, N.D.). This digitally rendered historieta will be easy to print or to access electronically. This adaptable format means it can be displayed onscreen at more formal meetings and/or copies can be printed for wide distribution in areas with lack of electricity or interrupted internet and cell phone signal.

A few suggestions of ways you can use this historieta.

## Survivors

If you are a survivor, this publication can instill hope & be a starting point for helping you think about what you'd like your healing to look like. What resources are there in your community? What makes you feel grounded? Supported? If you have disclosed your sexual violence, were you held by your community? If not, what do you need now?

## Outreach

If you are a sexual violence advocate, social service community partner, activist, etc. you can use this cómic to start conversations in your community. Read the stories during Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) meetings & discuss how your community would respond to them. This can help you identify existing gaps in resources and/or build new partnerships to address those. It can help challenge current thinking & rape culture. Where appropriate you can take the stories into schools to use as part of a consent or healthy relationships curriculum. You can distribute them at events, community spaces, & businesses. Perhaps you can collaborate with your local library/comic book store on events for Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) and free comic book day.

## Counseling

You can host group sessions to read and discuss the stories or read the stories one-on-one with survivors. You can also assign the stories as homework in between sessions. Survivors can artistically re-tell their own stories, featuring themselves as the heroes of their own stories.

# Trouble at the Factory

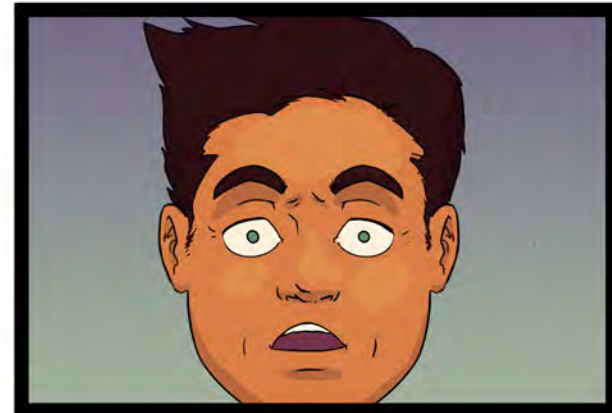
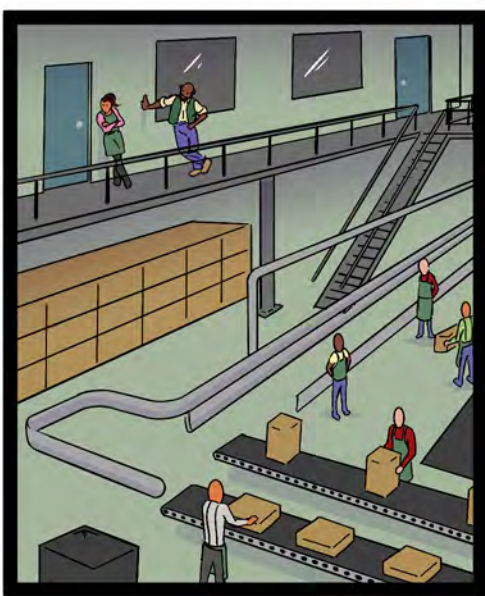


## Synopsis

Behind the hums of the factory machinery and the bustle of line workers hustling to meet the day's quotas, a darkness unfolds in plain sight. The heart of the factory, its workers, are in danger. Will the factory prove itself a safe haven?

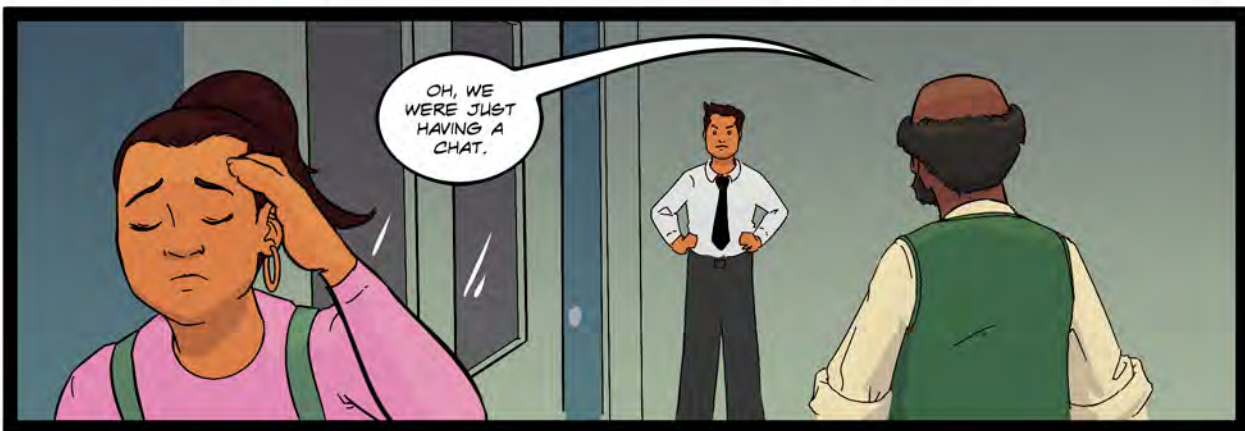
### **FACT**

25% to 85% of all American women experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in 2019 ([CWW, 2020](#)).





WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?



OH, WE WERE JUST HAVING A CHAT.



HEAD BACK TO THE LUNCH ROOM TO FINISH YOUR BREAK, MS. ESPINOSA

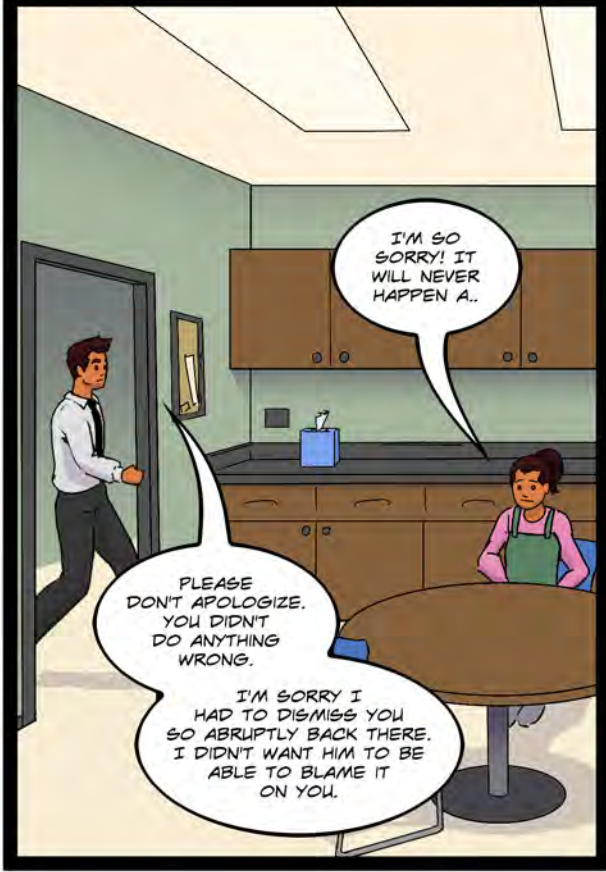


3 MONTHS AGO YOU DENIED ALLEGATIONS OF HAVING RAPED ONE OF OUR LINE WORKERS.

YOU WERE WARNED THAT WE HAVE A STRICT ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY.

PACK UP YOUR STUFF AND GO.

I WILL HAVE SOMEONE ESCORT YOU OUT.



I'M SO SORRY! IT WILL NEVER HAPPEN A..

PLEASE DON'T APOLOGIZE. YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG.

I'M SORRY I HAD TO DISMISS YOU SO ABRUPTLY BACK THERE. I DIDN'T WANT HIM TO BE ABLE TO BLAME IT ON YOU.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND. I DON'T WANT TO CAUSE ANY PROBLEMS.

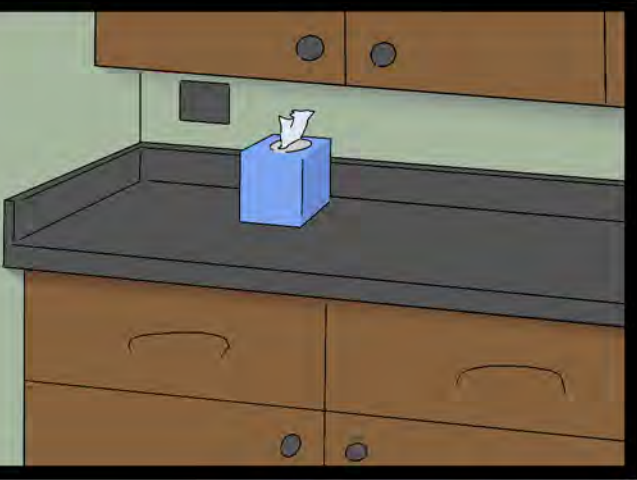
HE CAUSED THE PROBLEM, AND HE'S DONE THIS BEFORE. HE'S BEEN FIRED.

YOU DON'T NEED TO TELL ME ANYTHING. I WANT YOU TO FEEL SAFE HERE. THERE ARE CAMERAS OUTSIDE, SHOULD HE RETURN.



IF YOU WANT TO TALK TO A COUNSELOR THERE'S A FREE PROGRAM IN TOWN. THE PHONE NUMBER IS ON THE BOARD THERE.

IF THERE'S ANYTHING ELSE WE CAN DO TO MAKE IT SAFER FOR YOU HERE, PLEASE LET ME KNOW.



EXPECT RESPECT

555-837-837  
555-837-8  
555-837-8  
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555-837-8  
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## Discussion Guide

What exploitative themes does the story explore & what power dynamics do you see playing out?

What happens to the factory supervisor when he sees the foreman "talking" to the line worker?

How are people impacted by violence they witness / experience second hand?

Why does Ms. Espinoza start to apologize?

What examples of support do you see Ms. Espinoza receive?

How is safety taken into consideration?

How is justice navigated in this story?

How may the supervisor know about the services in his rural community?

Did you note any potentially harmful stereotypes in the story?

## Cheat Sheet

Important terms: Employment discrimination, workplace harassment, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, secondary survivor, trigger, flashback, colorism, stereotypes, safety planning, civil legal remedies, outreach to private businesses/chambers of commerce/, visibility of rural services, tear-off flyers, bystander intervention.

# Garden Angel



## Synopsis

Things aren't always what they seem. In a world where danger awaits even behind digital walls, there are also signs lighting different paths we can take. Those decisions can have lasting impacts on our lives as well as the lives of those we help or hurt along the way.

## FACTS

Children & youth over 18 who engage in sexual acts as a result of coercion, fraud, or force are considered victims of human trafficking under federal statute. This applies

to children & youth engaged in pornography, sexual entertainment industries, "survival sex" (trading sex to meet basic needs for food and shelter), and prostitution. This is true even when they seem to be engaging willingly in sexual acts. Survival sex and sexual exploitation are common among runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth ([NAEH, 2015](#)).

## Discussion Guide

What exploitative themes/power dynamics does the story explore?

Why might Alex not be heading home after time with their friends?

What emotional shifts do you notice from Alex throughout the story?

What risk factors did you note? Resiliency factors?

What clues are there that this may not be a safe situation for Alex?

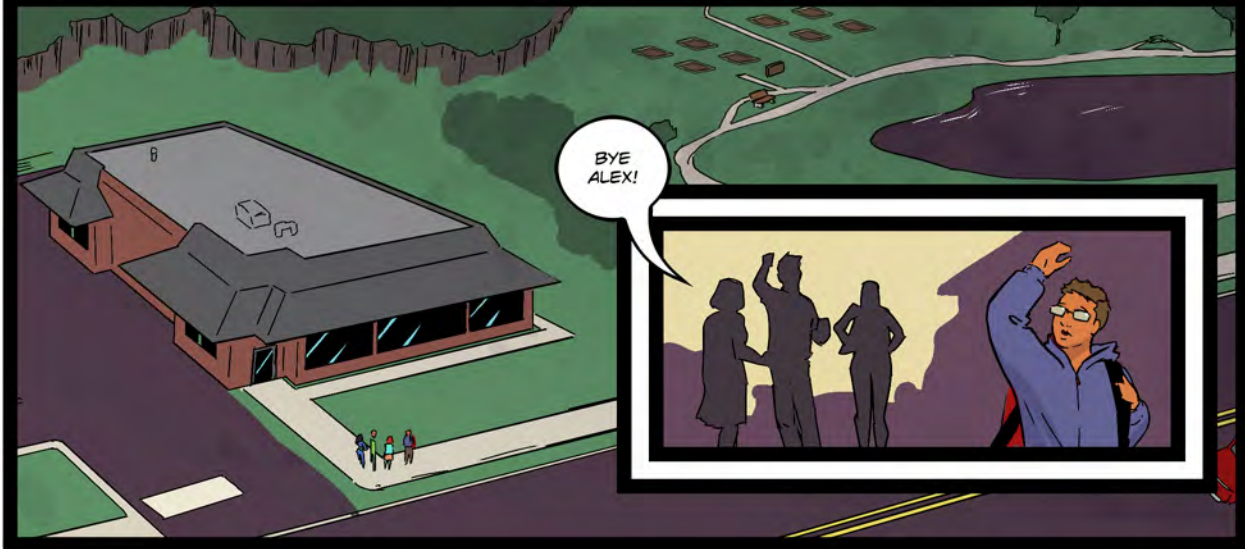
What harmful behaviors did you notice from John2Strong?

What is the possible significance/importance of the garden in this rural community?

How is Lupe's intervention empowering?

## Cheat Sheet

Important terms: youth, runaway, throwaway, unhoused/homeless, gender pronouns, misgendering, birth name/dead name, deadnaming, preferred name/chosen name, transgender, nonbinary, gender fluid, family of origin, chosen family, sexual exploitation, survival sex, online predators, statutory rape, emotional manipulation/coercion, community gardening, mutual aid, community aid, resilience.



BYE ALEX!



Hey, looks like rain tonight.

Yeah.

All your stuff is going to get ruined. Come over.

Is the couch free?

No, but my room is. Come on, you can shower, and I'll even come pick you up.

Just that, last time was a weird. Can I stay on the floor?

Chat with John2Strong



Wow, the floor? Why are you being like this?

I'm trying to help you. Where are you?

I'm gonna come pick you up.

You're lucky someone cares about you.

Washington Park, by the garden.

Hey. Let's talk instead. Call me.



HEY. IT'S JUST ALEX, REMEMBER? YEAH, NO PROBLEM.

I WAS JUST WITH SOME FRIENDS BUT I'M BY MYSELF AT THE PARK NOW.



NO, I DON'T NEED YOU TO DO THAT. REALLY.

IT'S NOT THAT. OF COURSE I TRUST YOU. I'M JUST REALLY CONFUSED RIGHT NOW AND...

WAIT. NO, DON'T COME!



I'M SO SORRY TO BOTHER YOU. I COULD USE SOME HELP WITH THAT BAG OF SOIL OVER THERE. WOULD YOU MIND HELPING ME?

SURE.

I'M LUIPE. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

IT'S ALEX.

THAT'S BEAUTIFUL. IS IT SHORT FOR SOMETHING?

IF YOU ASK MY MOTHER, ALEXANDRA. BUT IT'S JUST ALEX.

ALEX, SOME PEOPLE 'ROUND HERE STILL INSIST ON CALLING ME LUIS, ALTHOUGH I STARTED GOING BY MY MIDDLE NAME 20 YEARS AGO.



OH. WOW. SO... IS THIS YOUR GARDEN?

IT'S A COMMUNITY GARDEN FOR PEOPLE IN NEED. GARDENING HELPS ME CLEAR MY HEAD AND LIGHTEN MY HEART SO I GROW AT HOME AND VOLUNTEER HERE EVERY FRIDAY.

I COULD USE SOMETHING LIKE THAT!

WELL, I COULD USE HELP!

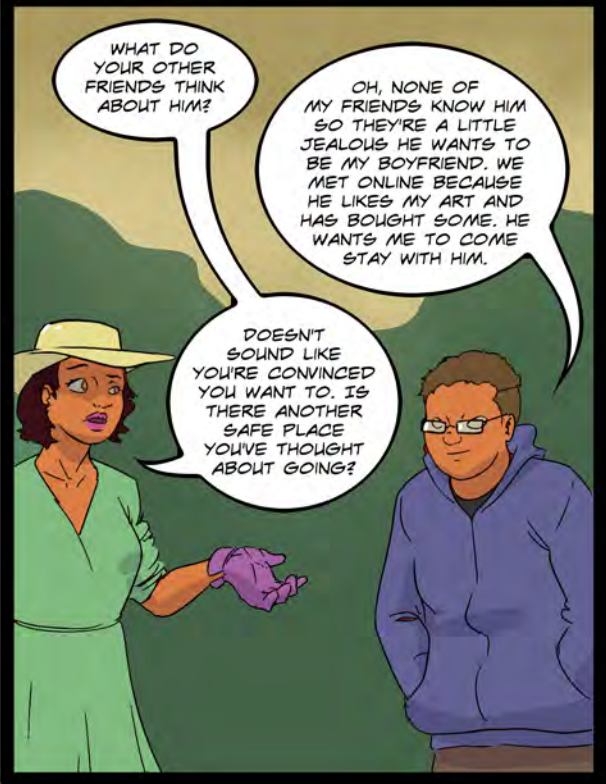


WHAT'S WEIGHING YOUR HEART, DEAR?

HOME STUFF. I'M AFRAID I MIGHT HAVE MADE A MISTAKE, INVOLVING MY FRIEND.

UH-HUH. IS THAT WHO YOU WERE TALKING TO BEFORE?

YEAH, HE'S JUST REALLY CONCERNED FOR ME. HE'S BEEN HELPING ME OUT.



WHAT DO YOUR OTHER FRIENDS THINK ABOUT HIM?

OH, NONE OF MY FRIENDS KNOW HIM SO THEY'RE A LITTLE JEALOUS HE WANTS TO BE MY BOYFRIEND. WE MET ONLINE BECAUSE HE LIKES MY ART AND HAS BOUGHT SOME. HE WANTS ME TO COME STAY WITH HIM.

DOESN'T SOUND LIKE YOU'RE CONVINCED YOU WANT TO. IS THERE ANOTHER SAFE PLACE YOU'VE THOUGHT ABOUT GOING?



MAYBE MY AUNT'S. I JUST HAVEN'T WANTED TO CALL HER.

YOU'RE A SMART KID. SOUNDS LIKE YOUR GUT IS TELLING YOU WHAT YOU NEED TO DO.

YOU'RE RIGHT. THANK YOU.



HI TIA...

# Letters of Hope

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## Synopsis

Like out of a dystopian novel, survival is punished and criminalized. Exploiting her inability to communicate, Maria's story is silenced to the benefit of those who harmed her. Scared, confused, isolated, and experiencing confinement in a foreign country, words on a page bring renewed hope of justice.

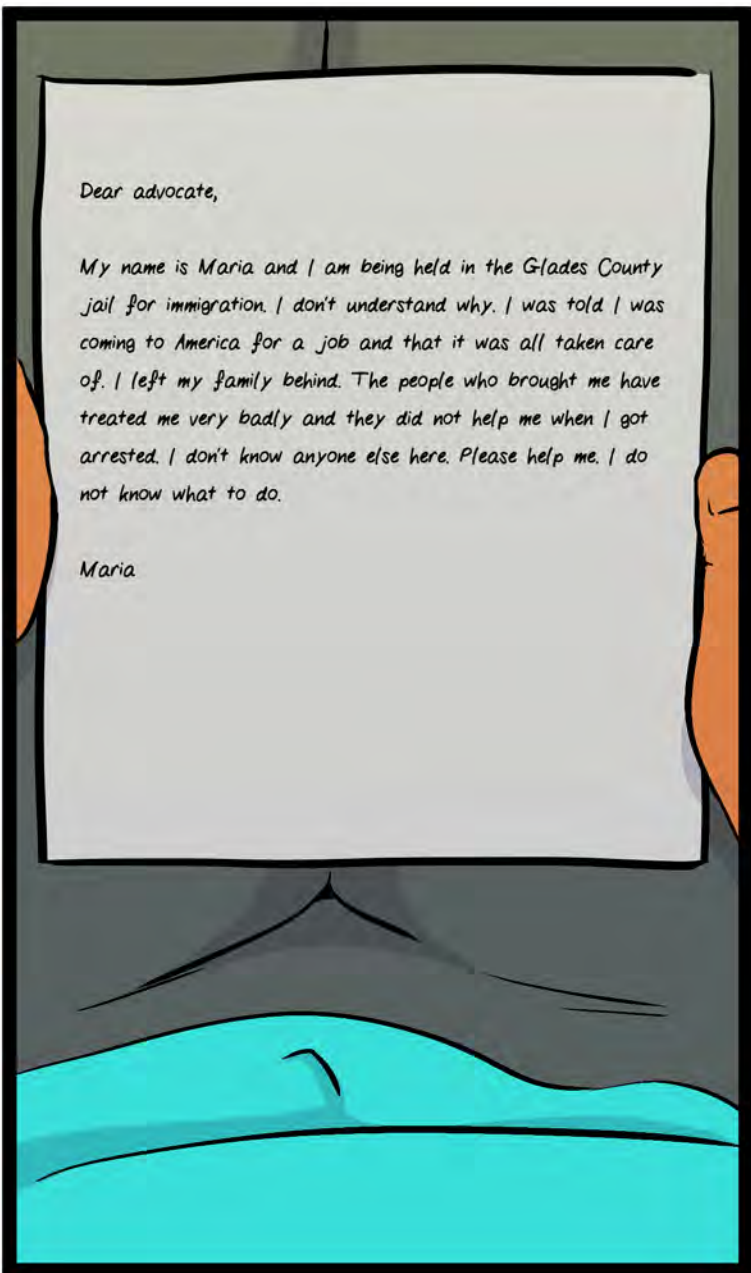
## FACTS

Incarcerated women, are overwhelmingly survivors of violence: 79% of women in federal and state prisons reported physical abuse and over 60% reported past sexual abuse have a history of physical or sexual abuse before being incarcerated ([ACLU, 2011](#)).

Letter writing is a powerful tool for decreasing isolation and creating a vehicle for disrupting abuse and promoting transformation ([Survived & Punished Letter Writing Action Center](#)).



DEAR ADVOCATE,  
MY NAME IS MARIA AND  
I AM BEING HELD IN THE  
GLADES COUNTY JAIL  
FOR IMMIGRATION.



Dear advocate,

My name is Maria and I am being held in the Glades County jail for immigration. I don't understand why. I was told I was coming to America for a job and that it was all taken care of. I left my family behind. The people who brought me have treated me very badly and they did not help me when I got arrested. I don't know anyone else here. Please help me. I do not know what to do.

Maria

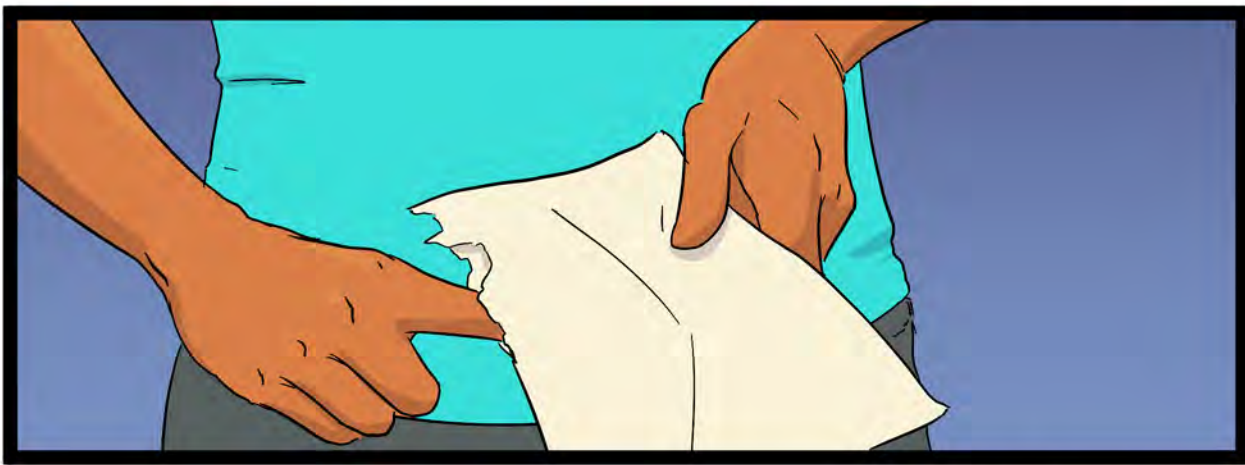




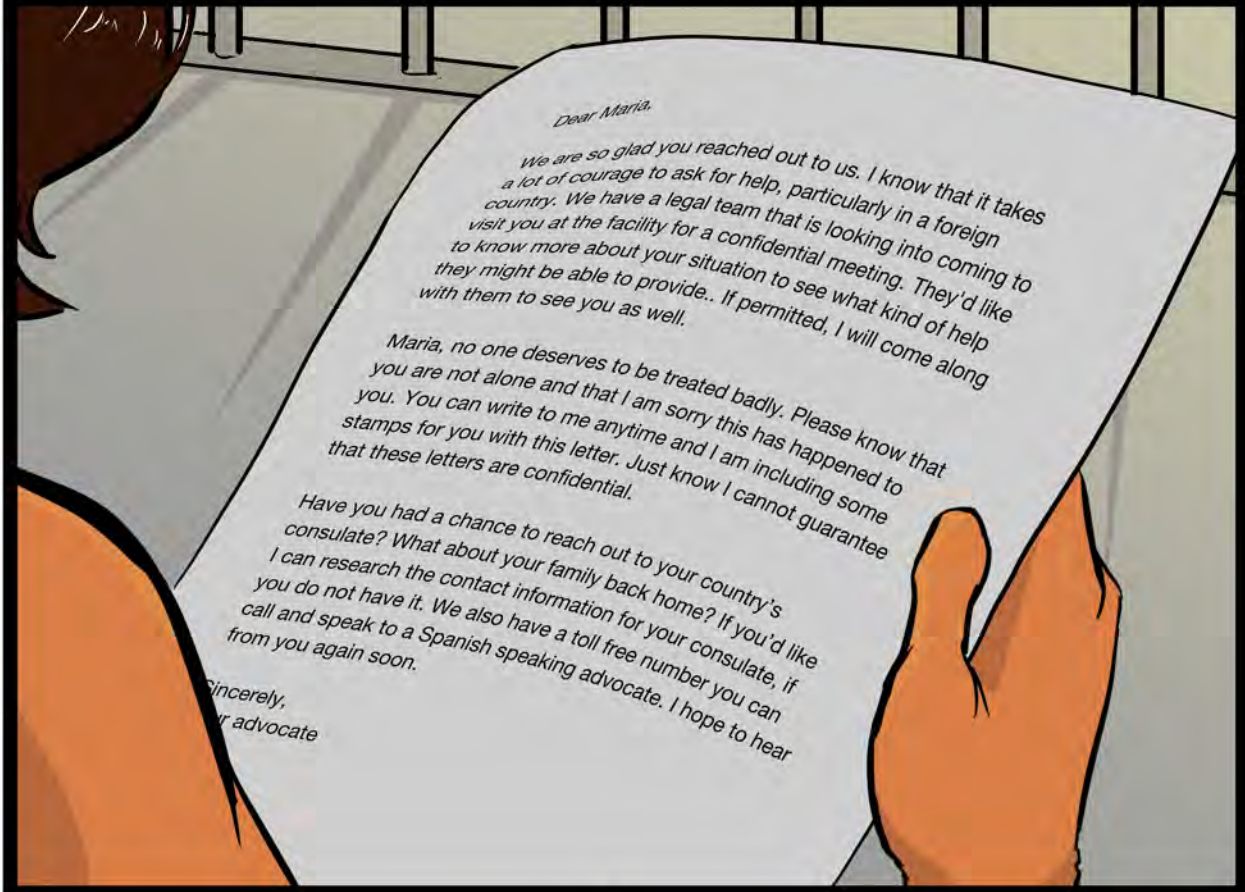
MAIL FOR MARIA DIAZ.



OH!  
RIGHT  
HERE!



DEAR MARIA,  
WE ARE SO GLAD  
YOU REACHED  
OUT TO US



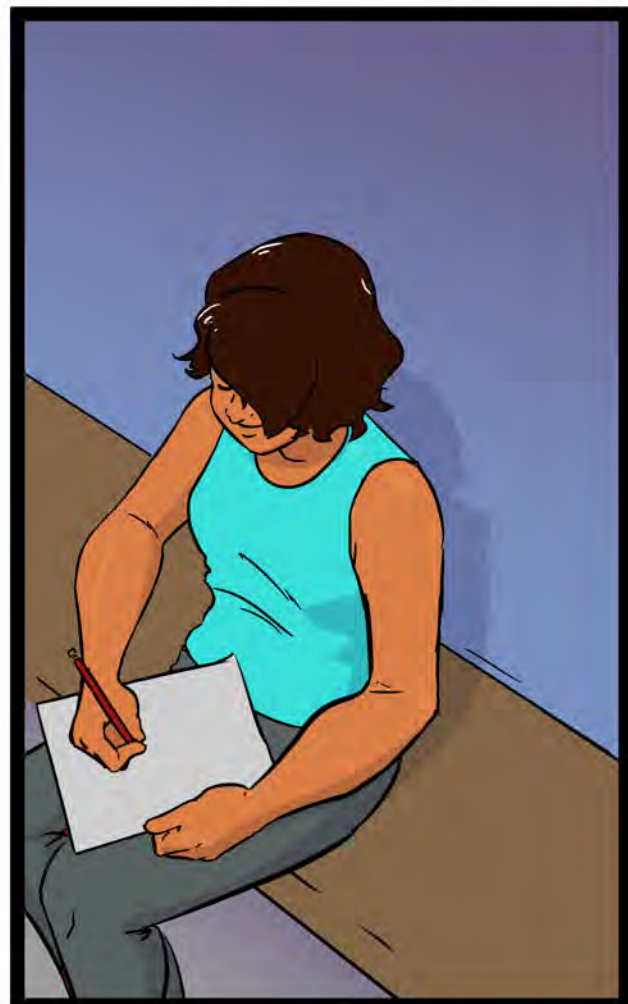
*Dear Maria,*

*We are so glad you reached out to us. I know that it takes a lot of courage to ask for help, particularly in a foreign country. We have a legal team that is looking into coming to visit you at the facility for a confidential meeting. They'd like to know more about your situation to see what kind of help they might be able to provide.. If permitted, I will come along with them to see you as well.*

*Maria, no one deserves to be treated badly. Please know that you are not alone and that I am sorry this has happened to you. You can write to me anytime and I am including some stamps for you with this letter. Just know I cannot guarantee that these letters are confidential.*

*Have you had a chance to reach out to your country's consulate? What about your family back home? If you'd like I can research the contact information for your consulate, if you do not have it. We also have a toll free number you can call and speak to a Spanish speaking advocate. I hope to hear from you again soon.*

*Sincerely,  
Your advocate*



## Discussion Guide

What themes/systemic issues does the story explore?

When Maria says that she was treated "very badly" what could that mean?

How might Maria have found out about the sexual violence services available to survivors in confinement?

Why might Maria's concerns not have been heard by the others involved in her case?

How did the sexual violence program make its services accessible?

What other services may Maria need?

What types of resourcefulness and resilience did Maria illustrate? What might have happened if she was illiterate (unable to read/write) or deaf?

## Cheat sheet

Important terms: jail/prison advocacy, limited English proficiency (LEP), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, language accessibility, bilingual advocates, immigration, sex/labor trafficking, literacy, sexual violence letter writing projects, Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), immigration remedies.

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Did you know that there are people out there who refuse to be bystanders when they see harm is being committed in their communities?

From deep in the heart of Florida's rural communities, these are three tales of resistance and transformative justice. Who are these co-conspirators in the fight against sexual violence? Find out & join the rural resistance!



[Sexual Assault Program  
Information Here](#)

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