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## A psychologist at the service of victims of domestic violence

The only daughter of Victor and Yolanda Rodriguez serves as counselor of programs that provide safe housing for survivors of domestic abuse

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Yaly Arenas-Rodríguez. Photo by Amy Wolf / The New York Community Trust

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**Y**uly Arenas-Rodriguez was barely eight years old when his parents decided to move from Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, to New York to ensure a better future. His father, Victor Rodriguez, resigned a position in the brewery Bavaria and with his mother Yolanda, they began a new life.

They settled in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, and Yuly attended public schools until graduating from Fort Hamilton High School and Psychology at The City College of New York.

Its relationship with the protection of victims of domestic violence began in 2008 with the Project Safe Home project of the organization New Destiny Housing, which was founded 22 years ago and aims to provide safe housing for families or people in vulnerable situations.

Two years later, she moved to another organization called the Neighborhood Trust, where she served as a financial advisor for low-income communities with a focus on housing. In 2014 she took a maternity leave, a facet of great accomplishment with her husband Sergio Arenas.

Yuly returned to working life two years later as director of the Housing Opportunities Made Easy (HOME) project, an innovative collaboration that brings together the resources of the Family Justice Centers of the New York Mayor's Office against Domestic Violence and New Corporation Destiny.

The HOME project has secured \$ 300,000 in funding from the Department of Justice Office of Violence against Women for a three-year support period; This includes the payment of the first month of income for the beneficiary families.

Other planned funding sources include Oak Foundation, New York Community Trust, Mizuho USA Foundation, The Avon Foundation, The Fifth & Pacific Foundation, GS Bank USA, TD Bank and Capital One.

Yuly's role is to identify safe housing options for people who are leaving everything behind to separate them from abuse situations. Of the cases she attends, 95% are women and 5% men "of all race, origin, sexual identity ... we focus on cases of intimate and domestic violence, for example when violence is between parents and children," he claimed.

Survivors of domestic violence must go through a process to access safe housing; This includes verifying their income and ability to pay in accordance with the parameters established by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Applicants are also referred to entities such as Neighborhood Trust that help them address past legal problems, especially related to credit and housing. "So, when we go before the tenants, we present a family with a face, with history, not a case ... so they value giving them a chance."

In the course of her work she has seen certain changes in the culture of respect for women's rights. "As a Latina I can see that we are changing and being more open and we are making progress on the protection of rights. Also in Colombia there are many campaigns that promote values and respect," he added.

In May the HOME Project met the three-year goal of placing 40 survivors and their families in affordable, permanent and secure housing; All have remained stable in their new places of residence and some are approaching the second year of renewal of their contracts.

Work entails satisfactions and challenges. "My greatest satisfaction is to see how survivors and their children through housing can end the cycle of domestic violence.

Studies have shown that when basic needs (food, shelter) are obtained the potential of human beings arises. For many people this is only a building for our customers is the possibility of a decent future," he said.

As for the challenges, the greatest is empowering survivors to see beyond the crisis. "Taking the step out of domestic violence / gender is a long process. It requires a lot of support. There are times when the triumphs are immediate and there are cases in which not. It is a struggle that we can not finish until we finish this cycle," he said.

## Profile

Yuly Arenas-Rodríguez

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