



# Mujeres Poderosas Amorosas (MPA)

*Cultivating networks of Latina immigrants to build individual and community resilience and mitigate the risk of domestic violence.*

[cultivalasalud.org/projects/mujeres-poderosas-amorosas/](http://cultivalasalud.org/projects/mujeres-poderosas-amorosas/)  
[www.facebook.com/MujerPoderAmor/](https://www.facebook.com/MujerPoderAmor/)

## LEAD AGENCY

### Cultiva La Salud

Cultiva La Salud's mission is to engage, inform and inspire residents in the San Joaquin Valley who experience poverty and live in disadvantaged places to become actively involved in promoting their personal health, the health of their families and broader community. Cultiva La Salud celebrated their Quinceañera as an organization in June 2023.

Founder and Executive Director, Genoveva "Veva" Islas, was selected by Assemblymember Dr. Joaquin Arambula as the 2023 Woman of the Year for the 31st California Assembly District.

## DV PREVENTION APPROACH

The overarching strategy of MPA is to harness the potential power of the large number of Latina immigrants throughout Fresno County and establish networks to build individual and community resilience and mitigate the risk of domestic violence. This approach also seeks to counter the common immigrant experience of isolation.

*"People may not be able to understand building resilience, but when you break the factors down that are causing the vulnerability, it's easier for people to understand that yes, economic opportunity is a part of domestic violence prevention."*

– Genoveva Islas, Cultiva la Salud ED<sup>1</sup>

MPA focuses its work on three pillars:

- 1. PEOPLE: Mental health and empowerment for Latina immigrant women and their families through building self-love and self-worth.**  
The collaborative provides opportunities for women to invest in their autonomy, academic achievement, and ability to provide for themselves. This pillar also seeks to strengthen social networks, leadership, and collective organizing power.
- 2. PLACE: Housing rights and access to safe parks and neighborhoods to create safe places where Latina immigrants live in Fresno County.**  
Housing impacts the ability of women escaping abusive relationships to find affordable places to live on their own. Advocacy areas include affordable housing and housing policies such as rent control and anti-eviction work as well as individual financial education.

<sup>1</sup>From a Cycle of Violence to a Culture of Safety and Equity: Culture-Change as a Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy in Fresno County, California. [https://www.preventconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GIslas\\_SUMMARY-012720.pdf](https://www.preventconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GIslas_SUMMARY-012720.pdf)

**ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS**

Kitchen Cabinet Member organizations who form the core collaborative team include:

[Cultiva La Salud](#)

[Fresno Building Healthy Communities](#)

[Dolores Huerta Foundation](#)

Additional collaborative members and partners include:

[Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability](#)

[Familias en Acción](#)

[City of Fresno](#)

[Martin Park](#)

[Lowell Community Development Corporation](#)

[Self Help Credit Union](#)

[Citrus Middle School \(Orange Cove\)](#)

- 3. **EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES: Advancing policies that create equitable opportunities for Latina immigrants** such as educational and entrepreneurship opportunities for women and improving the quality of school lunches. When children do not eat school lunches this can lead to food insecurity for the family. This added stress in the household can [increase the risk for violence](#).

**COLLABORATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS & BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

**Building collaborative capacity**

Cultiva La Salud and the Kitchen Cabinet partners conducted a [community assessment process](#) during the first year of their involvement in the [Safety Through Connection](#) learning community. After conducting the community assessment, the collaborative decided to form Mujeres Poderosas Amorasas to build community power, strengthen resilience factors related to people, place and equitable opportunities, and challenge structural and community conditions that devalue and exploit Latina immigrant women and tolerate the use of violence against them. The work of MPA is by and for Latina immigrant women, giving them the opportunity to define for themselves how they would like to address domestic violence in Fresno County. They are able to have culturally specific and sensitive conversations about DV by and for the community in a way that people outside of the community would not be able to do.

- MPA established a private WhatsApp group which has grown steadily and now counts 150 members and continues to grow. This online community offers emotional wellness, resource sharing, capacity building, community organizing, and building influence and power. During the pandemic shelter-in-place, this group shared resources on education, school services, anti-eviction and housing, food distribution, and COVID testing. (people, place, equitable opportunities)
- On November 30, 2022 the MPA Program Coordinator [was interviewed by the Mexican consulate](#) which increased visibility of the network. Following the interview, the phone immediately started ringing with women reaching out to learn more about MPA and to join the WhatsApp network. (people)
- MPA hosts weekly platicas (in-person gatherings) which alternate between urban meetings in downtown Fresno neighborhoods and rural meetings in surrounding small towns. Cultiva La Salud staff lead MPA members in group activities, informative discussions and sharing of community resources.

### GEOGRAPHIC AREA

Fresno, CA

### COMMUNITY OF FOCUS

Immigrant Latina women who share common struggles and experiences of arriving in Fresno County. Members are from a variety of Hispanic countries and are very connected to the traditions of their regions. A strength of this community is their focus on service to family and community. Approximately 200 Latina immigrants of all ages participate in MPA.

This is also a way for the MPA Kitchen Cabinet to learn of network needs. While MPA focuses on empowering women to prevent further incidences of DV, they also bring in DV service providers who can help women who are currently experiencing violence. (people, place, equitable opportunities)

One member shared:

*“Me encanta porque es un grupo de mujeres donde me siento desahogada y liberada. Aunque nos conocemos bien existe el respeto. No me siento juzgada.”*

*(“I love it because it is a group of women where I feel relieved and liberated. Although we know each other well, there is respect. I don’t feel judged.”)*

- MPA is collecting the personal stories of Latina women in the network to highlight their experience of coming to this country and the positive impact they have had on their community. The network nominates ladies and then votes on finalists. A communications specialist then interviews the women and produces the stories which are shared on the Cultiva website, WhatsApp group, and the MPA Facebook page. Printed posters can be displayed during outreach events.
- The Cultiva La Salud Executive Director published an op-ed in the Fresno Bee newspaper highlighting the increase in domestic violence incidence during California’s shelter-in-place orders. Subsequently, MPA has been a strong advocate in Fresno County to increase resources for culturally relevant support services for DV survivors, while also advocating for strategies that address the underlying factors that contribute to DV.

### Community engagement and power building

- In 2023, the Cultiva La Salud Founder and Director was elected to President of the Fresno Unified School District governing board which provides an opportunity to further nutrition policy and investigate the experiences of immigrant Latinas in schools. For example, the school board will be supporting a bill moving through the California state legislature that would extend school nutrition opportunities to siblings of enrolled students. (equitable opportunities)

## MUJERES PODEROSAS AMOROSAS (MPA)

- In 2022, with support from the MPA Project Coordinator, over 20 women applied for \$5,000 California developing business owner [SEED grants](#) administered by [Immigrants Rising](#). Additionally, the [Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation](#) helped women apply to Lendistry for grants for new entrepreneurs. In total about 20 women have received grants from these opportunities to start new or grow existing small business. One woman used the funds to apply for licenses and permits to cater the Cultiva Quenceñara and is now an established caterer in the Fresno area. Another member created her own business selling Venezuelan food as a mobile vendor. At the 2022 end of year celebration, Cultiva awarded six mini-grants of \$500 each to MPA members to use for their business or their education. One woman used the money to purchase needed tools for her jewelry business. Thus, through the efforts of MPA, over \$100,000 are now in the hands of women who are historically marginalized. (people, opportunities)
- In 2022 MPA established the Club de Lecture, a weekly book club held over Zoom which is open to all MPA members. The club is another opportunity for Latina immigrants to build relationships as well as gain confidence sharing their ideas and experiences with others. Books discussed typically promote self-esteem, healthy relationships, and bolster communication skills. (people)
- MPA invited a local therapist to conduct a workshop for the women on mental health including topics of breaking the stigma of mental health in the Latino community, DV prevention, and challenges to accessing mental health resources. A network member interviewed with Radio Bilingue and shared how the MPA network has supported her mentally. (people)
- During the COVID-19 pandemic the network of women provided needed food and personal hygiene products to hundreds of Latinas over the age of 65 through the [Save the Señoras](#). As of June 2022, they distributed 4,800 boxes. (equitable opportunities)

### Policy and funding shifts

- **Housing:** MPA participated with community partners in the Rally in the City of Fresno Housing for All. Eight women attended a housing event (Las Llaves de tu Casa) which discussed pathways to home ownership for Latina immigrants. In 2023 MPA plans to meet with the City of Fresno and Fresno County to discuss resources to help keep families housed as well as to create opportunities for increased home ownership. (place)

- **Healthy school meals:** MPA women meet bi-weekly to discuss new opportunities, plans, and strategies to improve the health of school lunches. Some have joined school wellness committees, taking policy advocacy to the local level. In 2023 MPA plans to engage with federal, state, county, city, and school leaders to increase eligibility for supplemental nutrition programs and increase offerings of healthier school meals. During the pandemic, MPA advocated for school districts to adopt waivers so they could continue to feed children while schools were closed. A recent advocacy success is the availability of school meals to younger siblings who are not yet of school age. (equitable opportunities)
- **Community safety:** MPA continues to meet with local parks and infrastructure leaders to support community safety. MPA has successfully advocated for the unlocking of school gates in park-poor neighborhoods. As a result, more children have safer places to play. They remain in conversation with the city of Fresno to stress the importance of not only creating new parks but also improving the safety of existing parks. (place)
- **State policy advocacy efforts:** MPA members participated in [ENACT Advocacy Day](#), an event organized by Prevention Institute and its partners to support healthy community environments and inform decisionmakers why they should invest in health and equity. Some of the women attended the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund's [Equity at the Mall](#) event in Sacramento where community leaders, nonprofit leaders, and elected representatives discuss issues of importance to valley residents.