there's no place like home.
La Casa Norte is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for homeless and abandoned people, where they will benefit from a comprehensive program of education, guidance and counseling in a community setting.

I wish you could have been there the day Charles first opened the door to his room in our new Solid Ground supportive housing facility.

A huge smile broke across his face as he took in the bed, desk and other brand new furnishings. Having spent much of his life in foster homes and on the street, Charles could only have imagined such a place before. Now it will be his home for the next two years—a safe, comfortable place to sleep, study and plan his future.

The opening of Solid Ground at the end of 2006 marked the culmination of a long-held dream. More than six years ago, La Casa Norte’s founders, Keith Decker and Peter McQueen, set out to create a place where young men in need of homes—and hope—could begin to turn their lives around. With the help of countless supporters, they have done that and much more.

La Casa Norte has become a beacon of hope and opportunity for Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood. From connecting families with apartments through our Crisis Center to landing jobs for young people through our Esperanza Trabajando program, we meet our clients’ most pressing needs. We also advocate for affordable housing in the community so that no family or individual has to struggle as our clients have.

I am proud to say that La Casa Norte’s work has become a model for other programs. In fact, in 2006, Mayor Daley awarded us the City of Chicago’s first Ruby Slipper Award, recognizing our commitment to the city’s Plan to End Homelessness.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the generosity and hard work of our friends, community, government and city officials, staff and board. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for being so dedicated to La Casa Norte and the amazing people we serve. Together, we are changing the face of a community.

Sol Flores
Executive Director
youth in the Chicago metro area experience homelessness each year, yet only 212 shelter beds are available to them.

When Charles turned 18, he left the last in a string of foster homes with only a black garbage bag full of his possessions. With nowhere to go and no one to turn to, he contacted a community organization, who told him about La Casa Norte’s new Solid Ground Housing Program.

After completing the interviewing and assessment process, Charles became one of the first 16 residents of Solid Ground. Not only does he have his very own room for the first time in his life, but he is starting to heal from the pain of his past.

Through meetings with La Casa Norte’s counselors and living in a group setting with structured rules and guidelines, Charles is learning to overcome some of his challenges and interact with others in a healthy way. He is taking classes and working with our education and vocational training specialist to determine the best path for reaching his goal of becoming a computer programmer. He also takes advantage of a variety of recreational opportunities.

Most of all, he is enjoying the safety and stability of Solid Ground. In a few short months, Charles has gone from surviving day to day to envisioning a bright future.

La Casa Norte’s Solid Ground Supportive Housing program meets a desperate need in Chicago’s Humboldt Park community. The program offers a safe home and caring environment for homeless young men ages 16–21, one of the most vulnerable yet least served segments of our population.

La Casa Norte is the only program in Chicago providing shelter and programming tailored specifically to the needs of male youth. Some come from emotionally or financially troubled families. Others age out of the foster care system and are left without any means of support. Many have never known a family at all. Finding and maintaining housing and employment are their biggest challenges.

Thanks to Solid Ground, 16 young men are overcoming these challenges and working toward promising futures. They will reside with us for up to two years while they receive counseling, career guidance and other assistance toward a healthy, fulfilling life.
Case management, housing advocacy and job placement are the heart and soul of La Casa Norte. Our unique Crisis Center Program has provided these services to over 1,600 homeless and at-risk youth, families and individuals in Humboldt Park since 2002. In 2006 alone, we served 700 households, providing counseling and access to stable, affordable housing.

Free of charge, bilingual (Spanish) and culturally sensitive, La Casa Norte’s services are accessible to all. We approach our work with the belief that everyone deserves a safe home and the chance at fulfilling work. We focus on increasing housing and employment stability for our clients, while addressing their individual challenges and identifying their strengths to help them succeed.

With an eye toward the future, La Casa Norte also advocates tirelessly to increase affordability in the Humboldt Park and surrounding rental communities.

In fact…

24% of Chicago area Latino families live below the poverty line, and they spend over 59% of their income on rent.

When Martha came to La Casa Norte, she was living in a dilapidated apartment with the ceiling caving in. Then her husband lost his job and the family fell behind on rent. Soon the landlord was threatening them with eviction. Martha had heard about La Casa Norte from a neighbor, and feeling like she had nowhere to turn, she picked up the phone and gave us a call.

La Casa Norte wrote a letter in support of Martha and her family, and a judge ruled that they could remain in the apartment. Meanwhile, our housing locator worked with Martha to find a safer, more stable housing situation. They determined how much money the family had available for rent, their transportation needs, and distances from school and work. They then identified rental listings that matched those requirements. The housing locator also gave Martha tips on approaching prospective landlords, important questions to ask, and a checklist to determine the safety and adequacy of an apartment.

Soon, Martha and her husband found a place that fit their criteria and their budget. La Casa Norte conducted a housing inspection to ensure the apartment’s quality, and a short time later, Martha’s family moved into their new home.

“I was so worried we would have nowhere to live,” said Martha. “La Casa Norte has put all of our fears to rest and given me confidence about my family’s future.”

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Latino families live below the poverty line, and they spend over 59% of their income on rent.
La Casa Norte provides specialized career and educational assistance to homeless and at-risk individuals. We focus particularly on the special needs of ex-offenders, young adults and those without a high school diploma or GED. Our services are free, confidential and bilingual/bicultural.

We provide as much hands-on support as possible so candidates are prepared not only for the job search process, but the world of work in general. Long-term employment security is our ultimate goal.

Since the implementation of our Esperanza Trabajando career readiness program in 2005, over 80 people have been placed in full-time employment or educational programs.

Lewis was referred to La Casa Norte by his parole officer following a 15-year heroin addiction and time in prison on burglary charges. Having faced his demons, Lewis was committed to creating an empowering and positive future, but he had little to build upon. After meeting with the La Casa Norte placement manager and a case manager, Lewis identified career aspirations in the service industry and set about completing the action steps that would lead him to his goals.

La Casa Norte’s staff helped Lewis secure appropriate identification and a Social Security card. Eager to turn over a new leaf, Lewis immediately enrolled in our Esperanza Trabajando career readiness curriculum, where he completed his very first resume. Once Lewis received his Esperanza Trabajando certificate he hit the ground running, actively pursuing multiple job leads. His hard work and perseverance paid off when he was offered a position with Aramark as a banquet server.

Over the next several months, Lewis maximized his relationship with the La Casa Norte staff. He found a safe and affordable rental with the help of our housing locator, and continued meeting with his case manager to work through daily struggles and frustrations. Our wraparound services contributed to Lewis’ stability and his ability to perform well on the job, and within six months, his dedication was rewarded with a promotion. Today, Lewis is happily married and continues his career with Aramark. He regularly stops by our offices and has been a generous and articulate advocate for La Casa Norte.

Research shows that ex-offenders who find employment within the first three months of release are less likely to commit another crime and return to prison.

In fact...

Esperanza Trabajando provides specialized career and educational assistance to homeless and at-risk individuals. We focus particularly on the special needs of ex-offenders, young adults and those without a high school diploma or GED. Our services are free, confidential and bilingual/bicultural.

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Ruby Slipper Award

In November 2006, Mayor Richard M. Daley presented the City of Chicago’s first Ruby Slipper Award to La Casa Norte Executive Director Sol Flores. The award recognizes the exemplary commitment of an individual or organization to Chicago’s Plan to End Homelessness. The plan emphasizes the value of prevention and wraparound services.

2006 Gala

La Casa Norte’s friends and supporters turned out en masse for our Raising the Roof 4th Annual Gala at the Chicago Cultural Center in October 2006. From the festive lights of the mercado to the heartfelt dreams shared by our clients, the energy of the evening was contagious and helped make the celebration our most successful to date! It is inspiring to know how committed the community is to helping our homeless youth and families.

Solid Ground Opening

Solid Ground opened its doors and welcomed its first residents in December 2006. They are all bright young men with bold plans for the future, and we look forward to guiding them on their journey. After attending our Solid Ground ribbon-cutting ceremony on November 3, Mayor Daley is spreading the word that La Casa Norte is bringing a new and innovative solution to youth homelessness in Chicago.

Esperanza Trabajando Graduation

La Casa Norte clients and volunteers alike embraced the mock interview session in 2006 that marked the completion of our Esperanza Trabajando job readiness curriculum. Clients had a unique opportunity to practice their interviewing skills with some of Chicago’s leading professionals.

Holiday Party

Thanks to the generosity and tireless work of our friends and volunteers, our 2006 Children’s Holiday Party was a resounding success! Food and fun were had by all, and more than 100 children received gifts during the holiday season.

Fine Art and Photography Auction

In June 2006, Chicago artists came together at the Peter Jones Gallery to demonstrate their commitment to ending homelessness by generously donating their photographs and paintings in support of La Casa Norte. Proceeds from the event helped further develop our Crisis Center and Solid Ground Supportive Housing programs.
La Casa Norte recognizes and thanks the individuals, corporations and foundations that have generously invested in our organization through financial contributions during our fiscal years 2005 and 2006.
Volunteer with La Casa Norte

No matter what your skills or interest, there is a place for you at La Casa Norte! We offer a variety of volunteer opportunities, from one-on-one work with our clients to organizing invdk donations to administrative support. Choose a schedule and time commitment that works best for you. Besides helping change lives, you will meet new people and have fun in the process!

Become a Mentor

La Casa Norte is in the process of implementing a mentoring program for our youth and young adult clients. We see our volunteer mentors participating in a wide range of activities, including job shadowing, recreational and cultural outings, and tutoring. If you are interested in becoming a mentor, please contact La Casa Norte at 773.276.4900.

Make a Contribution

Join us in empowering La Casa Norte’s clients to reach their full potential. Here’s how:

- Send a check or make a pledge using the enclosed envelope.
- Charge a gift to your VISA/Mastercard.
- Make a stock gift. La Casa Norte can provide electronic transfer and broker information.
- Ask your employer to match your contribution.
- Leave a bequest to La Casa Norte, designating the organization as beneficiary of a life insurance policy or retirement plan.
- Make a gift-in-kind.

To learn about these and other donor opportunities, call La Casa Norte at 773.276.4900. Other ideas? We’d love to hear them!

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