



Where Healing Begins

For 45 Years, Human Options Has Been Orange County's Safe Place for Survivors of Relationship Violence

BY JESSICA SUSOLIK | PHOTOS BY HUMAN OPTIONS



CEO MARICELA RIOS-FAUST

She was 13 years old. The kind of girl who lit up every room. Then one afternoon, she walked into a counselor's office, and that light was gone. She lifted her shirt to reveal a back covered in bruises. She had stepped between her father and her mother the night before.

"I know what's going to happen," she said. "You're going to call social services. They're going to remove me. And I'm going to do everything I can to get back home, because if it's not me intervening, it's going to be my brothers, and I can't have them be hurt by my dad."

Maricela Rios-Faust, now CEO of Human Options, was a young social worker when she met that girl. *"It was the first time I realized just how complicated a family where there's abuse really is,"* she recalls. That moment changed her life. Twenty years later, it still drives everything she does.

Born from Listening

In 1981, four women listened to their community and discovered that many were living in terror behind closed doors. A crisis hotline was born. Then a shelter. Then a movement. Forty-five years later, Human Options has touched more than 500,000 lives as Orange County's most comprehensive domestic violence service provider: emergency shelter, transitional housing, counseling, legal advocacy, teen prevention and elder abuse services. Their 24-hour hotline, 877-854-3594, fielded over 5,530 calls last year.

“Being part of someone’s first step to safety is an incredible gift, But ensuring it’s not the only step, that they are on a path to healing, that someday they are able to thrive on their own... that’s where the real magic happens.”

What Happens When You Call

You are believed. An advocate listens without judgment. “We try to debunk the narrative the abuser has told them,” Maricela says, “which is usually, ‘No one will ever care about you.’ We show them that we are here.” From that call, everything opens: shelter with therapists, transitional housing with job training, walk-in counseling, legal advocacy. Ninety percent of graduates move toward safety. Ninety-four percent find permanent homes.

Asking the Right Question

“We’re asking the wrong question,” Maricela says of the familiar “why doesn’t she just leave?” To end it, we have to understand why he abuses.” These relationships started with love. Then came isolation, gaslighting, the erosion of self-worth. Had someone hurt you on a first date, you would have walked away. But after years of being told you are nothing, you believe it.

At last October’s Fall Luncheon at Lido House, a former client told her story. As a girl, she watched her father abuse her mother. As a teenager, she connected with Human Options. Years later, tears streaming, she told a room full of strangers that her purpose is to break the cycle and give her daughters the life they deserve. The room went silent. Then it erupted. That afternoon raised \$225,000.



When Survivors Find Their Voice

“When survivors get their voice back, their first instinct is to give back,” Maricela says. “Someone who was made to feel their voice didn’t matter becomes the biggest contributor to our mission. They are the changemakers.” She pauses. “I just feel really blessed.”



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Teaching the Next Generation

Instead of warning teens about red flags, Human Options asks: what are the green flags? Their Love Shouldn't Hurt Conference creates space for parents and teens to have life-changing conversations. Maricela recalls a father who spent years building rules around what he didn't want for his daughter. But here, he was learning to tell her what he did want. "It's not controlling anymore," she reflects. "It's coming from the heart."

How You Can Step In

The *Hoag OC Marathon* turns miles into safety: \$100 provides one night of shelter. *The Serious Fun Gala happening on May 16 at the Balboa Bay Resort* has a \$600,000 goal. Humanity in Action offers volunteer opportunities. And you don't have to be in crisis to call; parents, friends and employers have all reached out. Human Options will walk you through what to do next. humanoptions.org/get-involved/#Events

Because this work is not just about helping someone leave. It is about a mother finding her strength so her children never have to be the protectors. It is about that 13-year-old girl finally getting to just be a kid.

GET CONNECTED

24-Hour Hotline: 877-854-3594

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