CENTRO SANTA MARTA

ROXANA'S STORY

After facing forced displacement and housing insecurity, Roxana found temporary shelter and psychological support at the Santa Marta Center



IN ROXANA'S OWN WORDS.

My name is Roxana, and this is my story of how I came to know Santa Marta Center.

I practically had no home. I was experiencing forced displacement, and I had to find somewhere I could afford to spend the night.

Then I met a friend who helped me get in touch with the right people to find shelter at Santa Marta Center. That is how I first learned about the Center.

Since then, I have received support with housing, psychological care, and essential services such as water and electricity, which are necessary to live in a decent environment.

My life has changed a lot, especially in terms of my psychological well-being. I have had the opportunity to grow, develop personally, and learn, so that when my time at Santa Marta Center comes to an end, I can have the means to live a dignified life after leaving the program.

There are still certain difficulties, particularly when it comes to employment and the political situation in El Salvador. As a transgender woman, it is very difficult for me to find decent employment because of my gender identity. There is no law that protects me and ensures I have access to dignified employment.

I hope that, in the future, I might even have the opportunity to migrate to a country where I can grow and develop, in a society that allows me to enjoy the same rights as everyone else.

To all the other people in the LGBTQ+ community who are looking for opportunities, I want to tell you that you are not alone. If you find the right resources and people to reach out to, you too can have access to opportunities, including something as essential as a place to live.

Thank you very much.

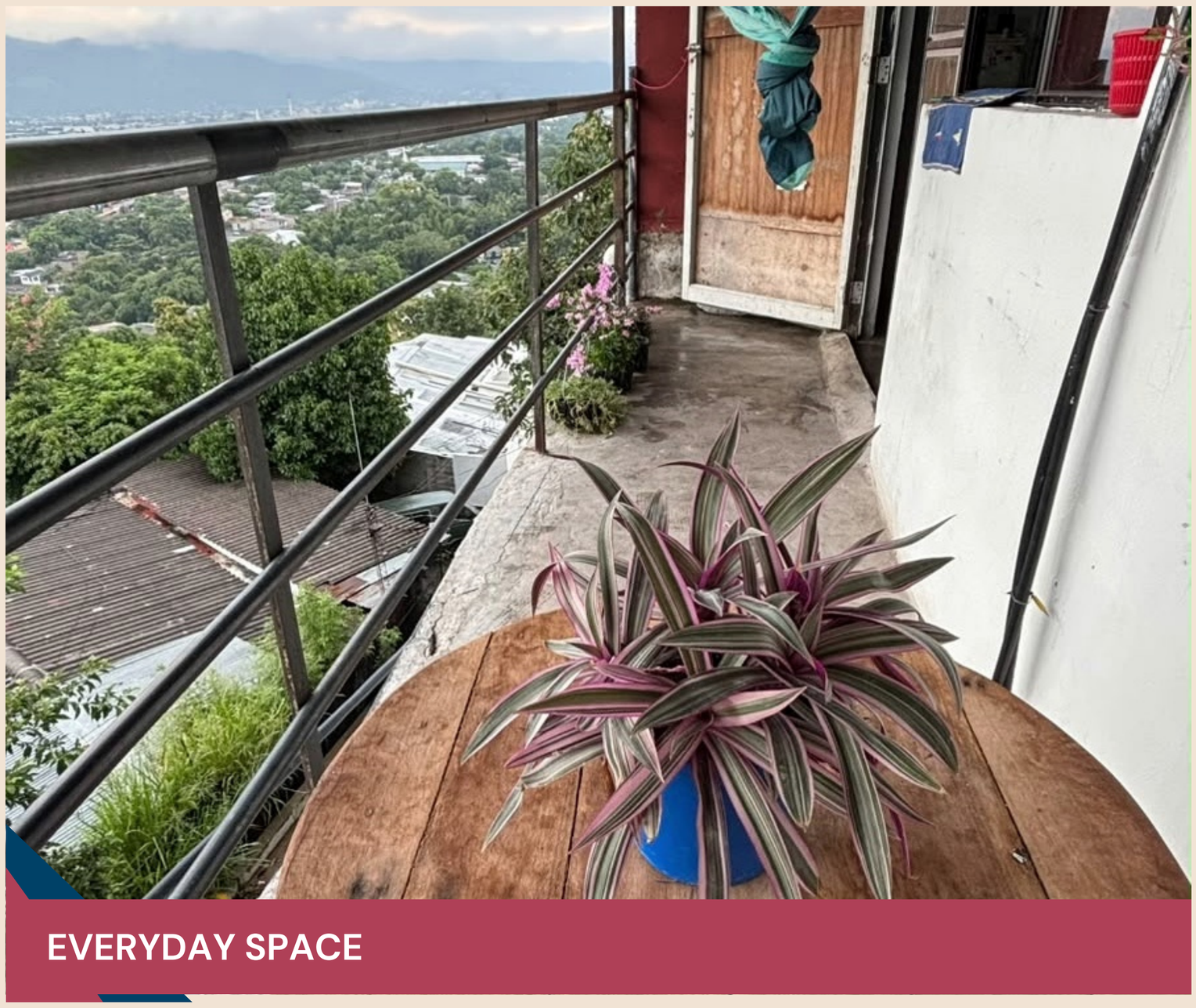
> "MY LIFE HAS CHANGED A LOT, ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF MY PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING.
>
> ROXANA - NAME CHANGED FOR PRIVACY

ROOM FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

Temporary housing, food and essential services for LGBTIQ+ people experiencing displacement or unsafe living conditions.

Santa Marta provides temporary accommodation to LGBTIQ+ people who cannot safely remain in their current living situation. Our residential spaces offer a secure environment and access to essential services.

Residents receive meals and basic living services, including water and electricity. Individual support helps them consider their next steps and work toward independent living.



EVERYDAY SPACE



FOOD & ESSENTIALS

DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHS. LOCATION REVIEW REQUIRED BEFORE PUBLICATION.

WHAT THE PROGRAM PROVIDES.

Santa Marta combines residential accommodation and essential support during periods of housing insecurity.

01

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Safe and stable housing for people experiencing displacement, homelessness or unsafe living conditions.

02

FOOD AND BASIC SERVICES

Meals, water, electricity and basic living provisions throughout the residential stay.

03

INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT

Assistance with immediate priorities, personal planning and next steps toward independent living, including referrals to education, employment and other opportunities.

RESIDENTIAL SUPPORT

AUDIT PENDING

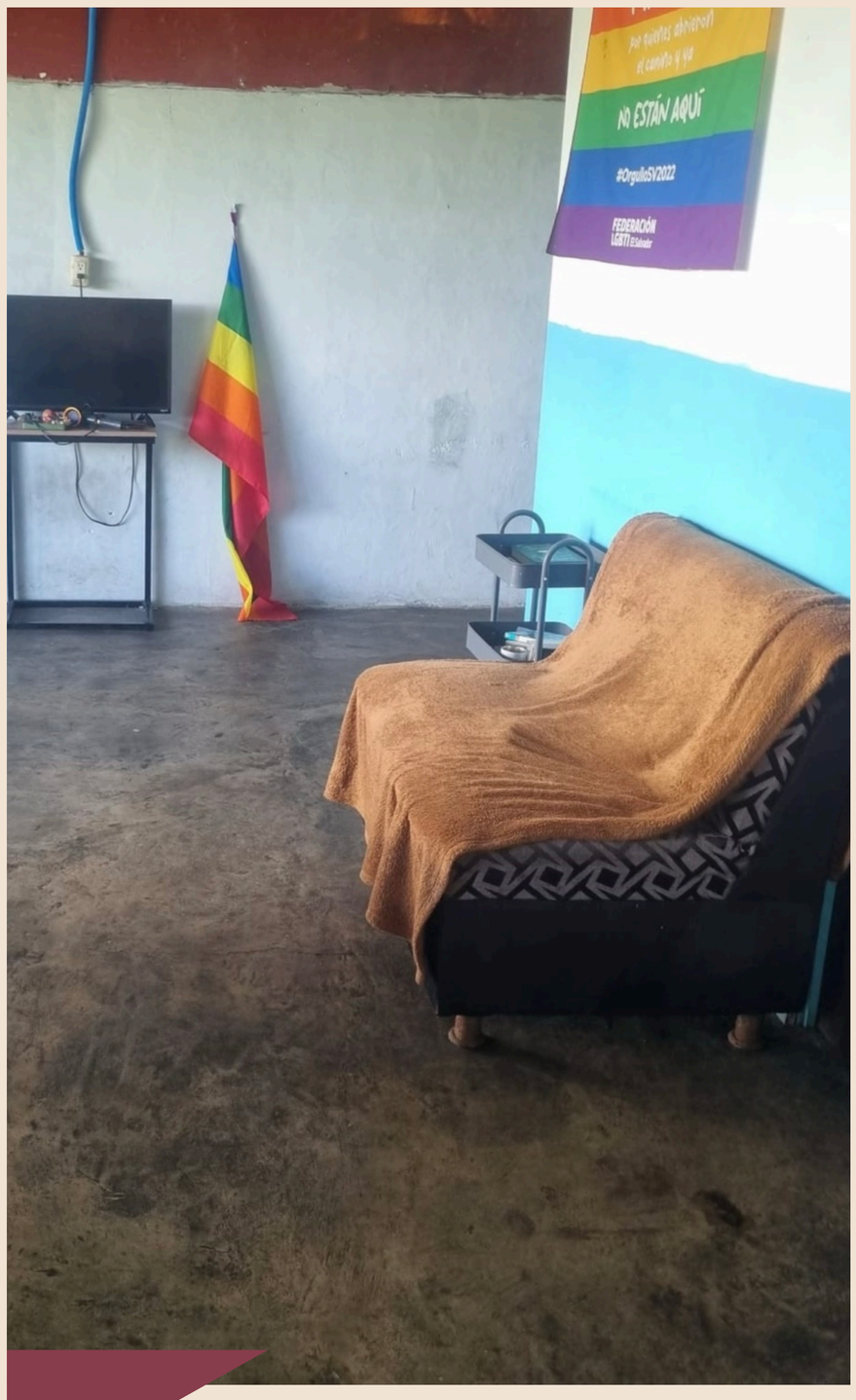
46
people attended in 2026

12,792
bed-nights

38,376
estimated meals

THE WORK OF CARE.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE AT SANTA MARTA



“I had never truly felt connected to anyone in therapy, or felt that my therapist really understood what I was going through.”

— TILDO NAME ANONYMIZED

BEYOND THE INSULTS.

Homophobia does not end with an insult or an act of discrimination. It can shape family relationships, determine whether someone has a place to call home, and affect how safe they feel in the world. Rejection, abandonment, and years of exclusion can leave profound emotional consequences.

In El Salvador, where LGBTIQ+ people face persistent discrimination and an increasingly hostile political environment, spaces where people can seek support without fear remain critically important.

Leaving an unsafe environment does not always mean leaving its effects behind. Rejection can shape how people approach new relationships, whether they feel comfortable asking for help, and how easily they can believe that acceptance will last. Even when immediate danger has passed, the expectation of being hurt again may remain.

This is why creating safety requires more than opening a door. It requires consistency, respect for personal boundaries, and relationships in which people do not have to hide parts of themselves to be accepted. Trust cannot be demanded, and it cannot be rushed. It must be built through the experience of being heard, respected, and taken seriously.

This is why psychological care is central to our work.

CARE IN NUMBERS.

12	RESIDENTS SUPPORTED
170	ESTIMATED WEEKLY SESSIONS
5	ONGOING RESIDENTIAL STAYS

THE WORK OF CARE. / CONTINUED

At Santa Marta, we understand that emotional distress cannot always be separated from the social conditions in which it develops. Drawing on the Latin American tradition of Liberation Psychology, we recognize that understanding a person's suffering also requires understanding the structures of violence, inequality, and exclusion that shape their experience.

Instead, we seek to create space for reflection, emotional understanding, and the development of personal agency.

Psychological care forms part of our broader approach to protection. Individual sessions, residential support, personalized care planning, and continued follow-up allow us to respond to different dimensions of a person's life.

We listen before interpreting. We develop goals collaboratively rather than imposing expectations of recovery. And we recognize that autonomy does not mean having to face everything alone.

OUR ROLE IS NOT TO TEACH PEOPLE TO ENDURE INJUSTICE MORE QUIETLY.

Nor is it to treat their identities as problems to be corrected.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT CHANGES

The number of psychological sessions tells us how much care we seek to provide. But meaningful change cannot be measured by attendance alone.

It can also be reflected in a person's growing ability to understand their emotions, establish boundaries, recognize their needs, maintain supportive relationships, and make decisions about their future.

These processes take time. Progress is not always linear, and no two people experience recovery in the same way.

Our commitment is to accompany each person with dignity, recognizing that psychological well-being is inseparable from the conditions in which people live.

CARE BEGINS WITH UNDERSTANDING.

OUR APPROACH TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

No two people experience suffering in the same way. Their histories, relationships, identities, and circumstances shape how they understand themselves and the world around them. Psychological care must begin by recognizing those differences.

At Santa Marta, we believe that people should have an active voice in their own therapeutic process. Our approach brings clinical knowledge into conversation with lived experience, allowing understanding, goals, and strategies to develop collaboratively.

01 / UNDERSTANDING

LISTEN BEFORE INTERPRETING.

We seek to understand what a person is experiencing before deciding what it means. Emotions and behaviors are explored within their personal and social context, rather than reduced to symptoms or predetermined explanations.

Even our clinical interpretations remain open to questions, new evidence, and the person’s own understanding of their experience.

02 / ACCOMPANIMENT

CARE SHOULD ADAPT TO PEOPLE.

Therapy should never become another expectation people must struggle to meet.

We work toward goals collaboratively, exploring tools and strategies that make sense within each person’s life. When something does not help, we reconsider it. When circumstances change, the process changes with them.

There is no obligation to recover on someone else’s timeline, or to replace difficult emotions with forced optimism.

03 / AUTONOMY

SUPPORT WITHOUT TAKING OVER.

Autonomy does not mean having to face everything alone.

We recognize the importance of emotional connection, supportive relationships, and the freedom to ask for help. Our work seeks to strengthen people’s ability to understand their needs, establish boundaries, and make decisions about their own lives.

The purpose of accompaniment is not to decide another person’s future, but to help create the conditions in which they can shape it themselves.



OUTSIDE THE SHELTER.

EMPLOYMENT, INDEPENDENCE & COMMUNITY

WYNTK

For young LGBTIQ+ people in El Salvador, family rejection, discrimination, and limited employment opportunities can make financial independence difficult. Even having a job does not always guarantee stability. Santa Marta helps young people navigate these barriers through education, employment support, documentation, and individualized planning for their future.

39%
URBAN UNDEREMPLOYMENT

20.6%
YOUTH OUT OF WORK & EDUCATION

26.77%
LGBTIQ+ JOB BARRIERS

4.7%
NATIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT

EMPLOYED. NOT SECURE.

Finding a job is difficult for many young people in El Salvador. For young LGBTIQ+ people, the obstacles can begin long before an interview.

Family rejection can interrupt education, remove financial support, and make it harder to maintain stable housing. Discrimination can create additional barriers during recruitment and in the workplace. For some, concealing their identity becomes a way to protect themselves from rejection.

Even finding employment does not always guarantee stability. Low earnings, irregular hours, and limited protections can make independent housing difficult to sustain.

At Santa Marta, we recognize that preparing for independence requires more than writing a résumé. It means accompanying people as they navigate education, employment, documentation, and the practical decisions that shape their future.

COMMUNITY AS PROTECTION.

Leaving the shelter does not have to mean losing the community.

Some people who have completed their residential stay at Santa Marta continue their journeys together, choosing to share a home and look after one another.

They understand experiences that may be difficult to explain to others. Through everyday coexistence, mutual care, and shared responsibilities, they try to build the stability that was once difficult to find.

Living together is not the opposite of independence. It can be one way of building it.

A residential stay has an end date. The relationships formed there do not necessarily end with it.

Community cannot replace decent employment, stable housing, or social protection. But it can help people face uncertainty without having to face it alone.

SOURCES: EHPM 2025 (39%, 20.6%, 4.7%). ORMUSA, LGBTIQ+ study respondents (26.77%).



QUEERING INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

EDUCATION, REFUGEE PROTECTION

& INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY

WHY WE ADVOCATE.

In El Salvador, restrictions on civil society under the Bukele administration make independent rights work harder. For Santa Marta, international advocacy helps keep community experiences connected to protection mechanisms when domestic avenues narrow. It cannot guarantee safety, but it creates opportunities to document exclusion, build alliances and demand institutional accountability.

01 / EDUCATION

EDUCATION AS PROTECTION.

In April 2025, Santa Marta submitted research to the UN Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity. Drawing on testimonies, interviews and institutional records, the contribution documented censorship of inclusive education, discrimination and barriers affecting queer and trans students in El Salvador.

FINDING **Exclusion is also institutional, not only interpersonal.**

02 / REFUGEE PROTECTION

WHEN PROTECTION FAILS IN PRACTICE.

In September 2026, Santa Marta and the Ali Forney Center submitted a joint contribution to UNHCR's refugee-law guidance revision. Eight organizations from eight national contexts contributed evidence on cumulative persecution, ineffective state protection, credibility assessment and procedural barriers to asylum.

FINDING **Protection on paper is not always protection in practice.**

03 / THE WORK AHEAD

BUILDING WHAT COMES NEXT.

We want to make international advocacy sustained work, not an occasional submission. Calls for evidence from OHCHR and the Inter-American human rights system offer ways to address access to justice, health, housing and social protection. With partners including the Ali Forney Center, we hope to coordinate further research and submissions grounded in queer communities' experiences.

QUEERING PROTECTION SYSTEMS.

KEEP THE DOOR OPEN.

THE FUTURE OF SANTA MARTA

SUSTAINING PROTECTION, CARE AND POSSIBILITY.

THE FUTURE OF SANTA MARTA

Since 2021, Santa Marta has worked to ensure that LGBTIQ+ young people facing rejection, homelessness, and violence have somewhere to turn.

But keeping a safe place available requires more than responding when someone arrives at our door. It means maintaining housing, food, psychological care, and the people who make these services possible.

WHAT WE NEED TO SUSTAIN.

HOUSING

Safe residential protection for young people facing homelessness, rejection, and violence.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE

Sustained accompaniment, mental health support, and individualized attention.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

Continued support as young people work toward stability, autonomy, and future opportunities.

Our priorities are to strengthen residential protection, expand access to psychological support, and continue accompanying young people as they work toward independent living.

We also want to invest in the organizational capacity that makes this work sustainable: trained staff, reliable resources, safer systems, and partnerships that allow us to respond responsibly as needs change.

A SAFE PLACE MUST ALSO HAVE A FUTURE.

SCAN OR CLICK
TO READ OTHER ISSUES
OF SANTA MARTA MAGAZINE

Our commitment is to remain available, not only for those who need Santa Marta today, but also for those who may need us tomorrow.

A SAFE PLACE. A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY.

CENTRO SANTA MARTA

STAND WITH SANTA MARTA.

Santa Marta began with a simple conviction: no young person should have to face rejection, violence, or homelessness without somewhere to turn.

Since 2021, people who believe in that conviction have helped us build a community of care, protection, and possibility.

YOUR COMMUNITY CAN HELP.

01 INDIVIDUALS

Make a donation or become a regular supporter.

02 FRIENDS & COMMUNITY GROUPS

Organize a gathering, fundraiser, or community initiative.

03 CHURCHES & FAITH COMMUNITIES

Mobilize your congregation to support safe housing and psychological care.

04 LOCAL BUSINESSES

Contribute resources, services, or financial support.

05 LARGER DONORS

Help sustain essential programs and strengthen our long-term capacity.

HELP US KEEP A SAFE PLACE AVAILABLE.

CLICK OR SCAN TO DONATE

Shelter · Food · Psychological care · Independent living

DONATE / CONNECT / GET INVOLVED

santamarta.lgbt