



Buena Vida

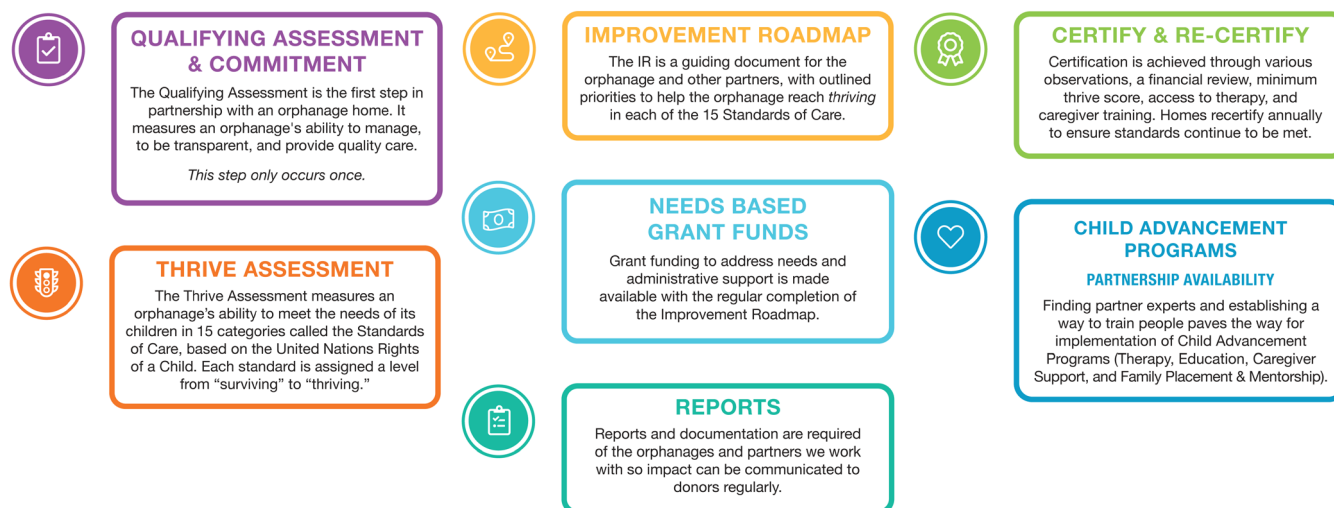
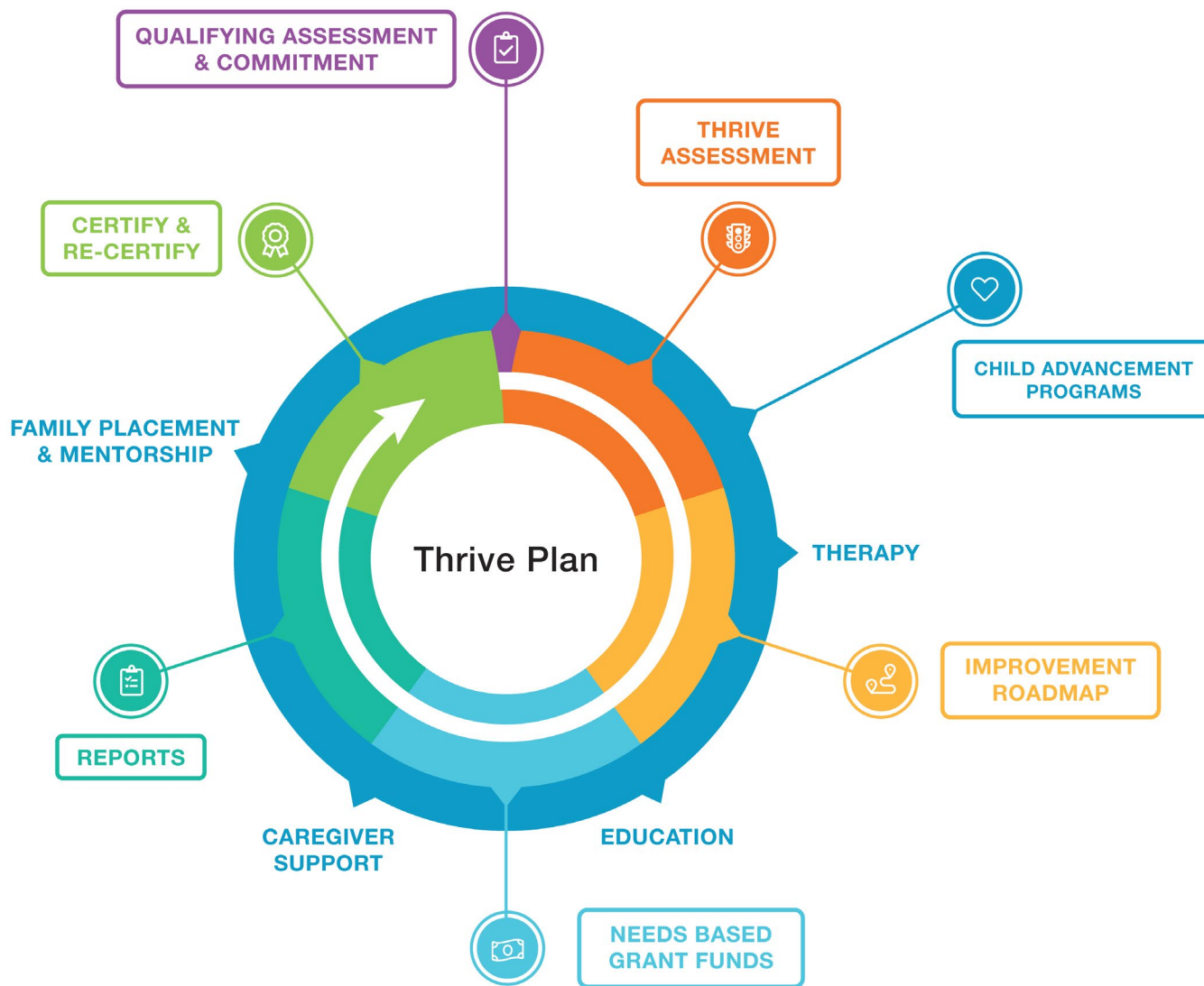
La Misión

**HOME
IMPROVEMENT
ROADMAP**

November | 2022



The Thrive Certification Program





Thrive Plan Agreement

A Child's Hope Foundation (ACHF) has a unique approach to “Lift Orphans from Surviving to Thriving.” We are dedicated to programs that offer long-term success. Through vetted relationships and clear priorities, we help connect donors to programs that are already working.

Each Improvement Roadmap (OIR) is built with the home's leadership after reviewing the results from the Thrive Assessment. In order to provide children with better outcomes, the leadership prioritizes initiatives and works with A Child's Hope Foundation (ACHF) to create a plan for the next six months and beyond. The result is a document that allows donors and other parties to clearly see how they can contribute to improving the environment that will allow orphaned children to thrive.

Achieving certification demonstrates the ability of the home's leadership to provide a place where children can thrive, heal, and be prepared for a joyful and productive life. For most homes, the certification process takes a year. ACHF is deeply committed to our orphanage partners, and we demonstrate that commitment through grants made to help achieve strategic initiatives, coordinating with a network of partners to help address needs, and building strong, ongoing relationships with the home's leadership to provide support, coaching, expertise, and advocacy.

Homes will be recertified annually, using the Thrive Assessment and building a new OIR every six months, while providing regular reports back to ACHF. ACHF then reports back to donors, sharing the home's progress towards their goals. A Child's Hope Foundation works as a partner with home's leadership to ensure that improvements are maintained and that children have the best opportunity to thrive.

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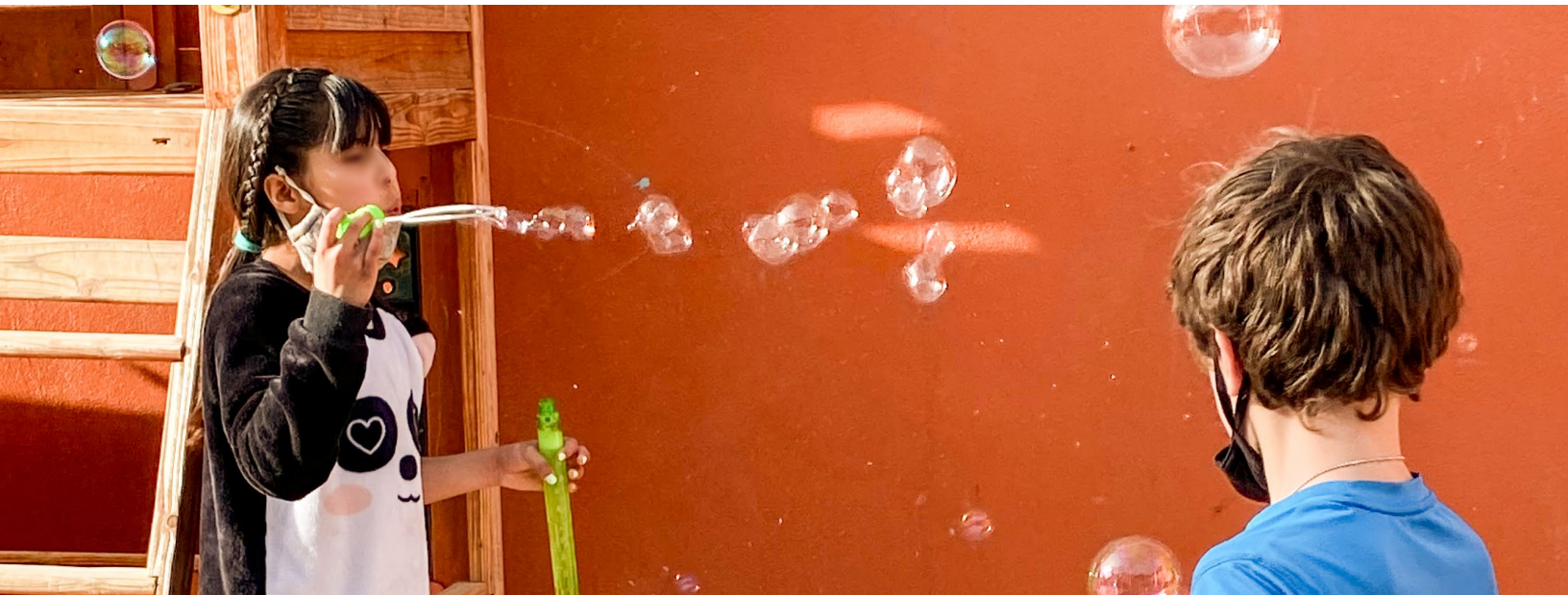
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Overview of Orphanage

Background

Gabriel and Meche started on January 6, 2011 as orphanage directors, caring for 24 children. One of the first needs they identified upon their arrival was that the house did not have enough food to feed the children for a week. The home also had many areas needing improvement, such as infrastructure, health, cleanliness, and care of the children. They began putting all their efforts into seeking resources and donations to be able to pay for everything necessary. Not receiving enough financial support to cover these needs, Gabriel and Meche used their own personal savings for more than 7 months until financial help was obtained to attend to all the needs of the children, including payment for the house's utilities.

One of their first accomplishments was purchasing new uniforms for all the children for the first time in the history of Buena Vida. This simple act brought immense joy to the children and the community who also helped support through donations for the purchase. From then on, a precedent was set in the community regarding the change in leadership at Buena Vida with the arrival of Gabriel and Meche.

With Gabriel's skills in different trades and businesses, he successfully positioned himself as a director and representative-protector of the children in different areas of the community. Consequently, the children of Buena Vida began to be treated as equals at school with respect to the other children in the community. Gabriel became an active member of the parents' council, improving the relationship within that space and initiating a positive change for the children of the orphanage and the community in general.

As the years went by, the owners of the property where the home was rented gave Gabriel and Meche only three years to find another location for the orphanage. Because of this, it was necessary to look for another living space. Together, Gabriel and Meche sought support from local and international donors and even used their resources to start the construction of what is

now Buena Vida. The couple ultimately determined to use a piece of land they owned to build the orphanage. The initial funding for this work came from individual donations, various foundations, Gabriel's savings, and groups of volunteers who helped with labor and work. Construction took about 4 years, during which other donors gradually came forward to join the cause until they could move in completely. Since then, the home has kept up the pace of growth, improvements and advances for the ultimate benefit of the children. Though it has been a long road and a lot of work, the home celebrated that they were granted the state and national operating license in March 2020. Buena Vida is now one of the few orphanages in the area to have this documentation that certifies the appropriate national security measures for vulnerable children.

Mission

Mission: To provide comprehensive assistance to abused and neglected children. To provide a safe, loving home where children are educated spiritually with a solid moral foundation and to give them the necessary tools to become responsible adults, parents, and productive citizens.

Vision: To help raise individuals with values who are capable of integrating into society positively as professionals who are honest and capable of forming their own families and thus create greater hope for tomorrow.

What Makes Orphanage Unique?

They are all one big family. They seek to help all the children that come to the home, but they especially focus on receiving sibling groups so they can grow together. Their hope is to help children break the negative cycles of their families of origin and support them in developing for the future as good parents, free from addiction, who can contribute to society.

Long-Term Vision

To become a self-sustainable space. In addition, they want the house to retain the vision of being a big family, thus maintaining the essence of the work of its founders. Long-term, they also hope to maintain a relationship with the young graduates of the home and help ensure they have the necessary tools for their independent life, such as a professional career or technical training to support themselves and their future families.



The Thrive Assessment

What is the Thrive Assessment?

The United Nations (UN), an international organization, has worked tirelessly to find ways to promote a better quality of life so that basic needs are met. In 1959, the UN adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which defines children's rights to protection, education, healthcare, shelter, and nutrition.

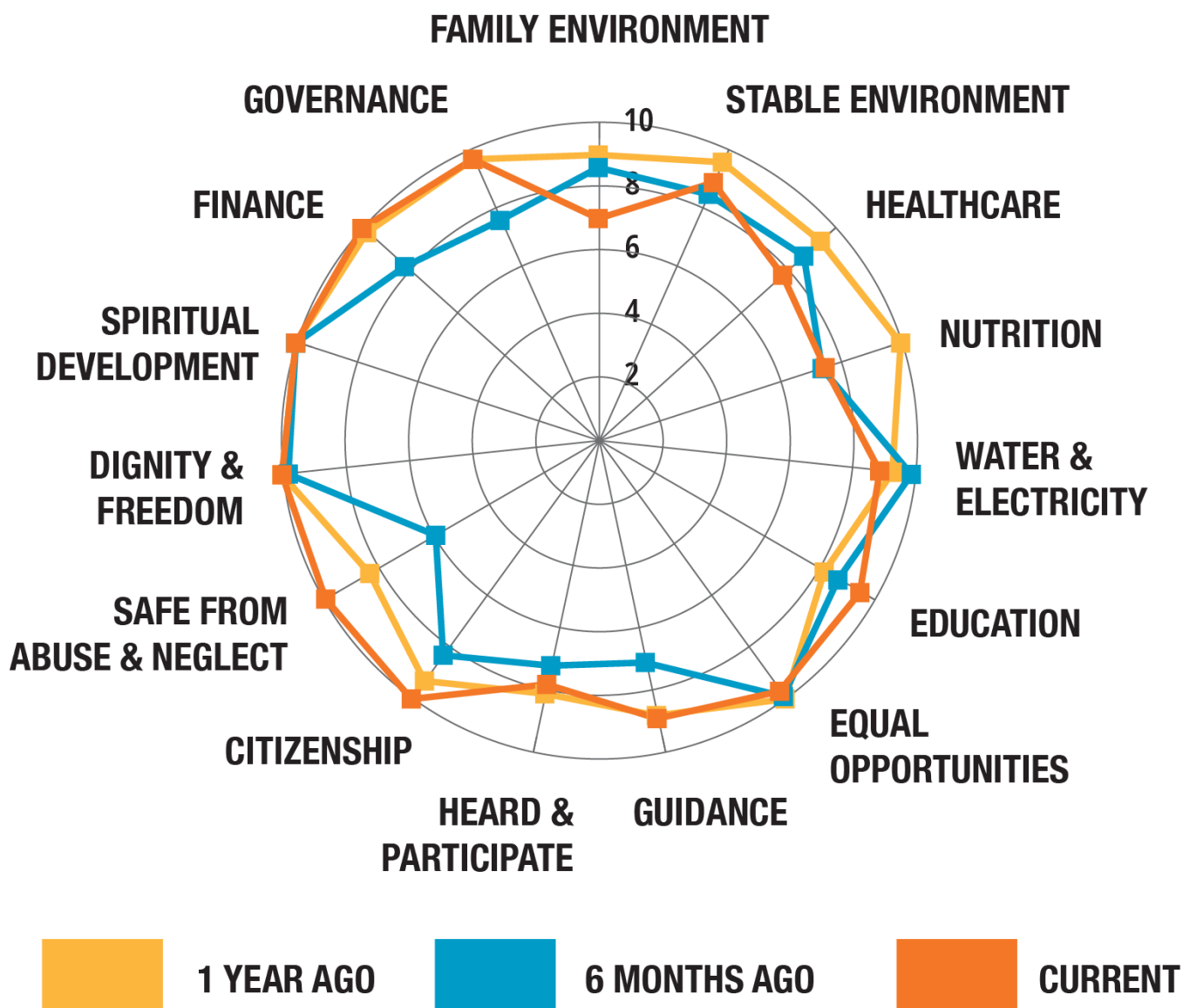
Based on the adopted declaration, The Miracle Foundation (miraclefoundation.org), a family-focused non-profit that provides resources to orphans mostly in India, codified the UN's Rights of the Child and developed a Thrive Scale, which measures how well child care facilities are able to obtain each of the rights to the children in their care. This Thrive Scale not only gives child care facility leaders a picture of how they're doing, but specific and practical steps to improve.



With permission, A Child's Hope Foundation has revised The Thrive Scale to make it adaptable for orphanages. We have codified all 12 Rights, as well as a Finance, Governance, and Human Resource standard, resulting in a total of 15 ACHF standards. These standards ensure that children receive care that truly helps them to thrive, now and in the future.

The Thrive Assessment will be administered every 6 months to chart the progress of each standard. It, along with the Orphanage Improvement Roadmap and individual Child's Hope Plans, will measure and help obtain these rights for each child.

Current Thrive Scale for Orphanage





Right to Live with Family

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

In this category, Buena Vida is at the **THRIVING** level. The dormitories have fewer than 12 children, which allows them to receive individualized attention. The home allows family visits as long as DIF has authorized them. These visits occur one Sunday a month in person in the Buena Vida courtyard. Most children have a sibling in the home as this is a focus the home has adopted so that children do not experience separation from their siblings.

The current caregivers are with the children 5 or more days a week and have been committed to their position for over 6 years. Through the Espere Program, psychologist Suraya Merlos provides training to the staff on topics such as creating a family environment in the home. The directors evaluate the caregivers with a one-month probationary period in which their responsibilities and tasks are explained to them. Still, it is also clear that it can be general work in all areas.

For Buena Vida to improve in this category, it is necessary for a certified specialist to assess caregivers every three months on the standard of care they are providing to the children.

- ☐ Obtain the support of a certified specialist to assess caregivers on the standard of care.



Right to a Stable Environment

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is currently at the **THRIVING** level in this category. House rules are age-appropriate and clearly explained to the children. The rules are first explained by the directors and then by caregivers. These expectations are even taught to newcomers by the children who have been at the home the longest. Consequences for infractions are based on positive discipline and are age-appropriate. The most common consequences are the removal of privileges. All children are called by their names by all staff and other children, never by demeaning nicknames. The children at Buena Vida are hard workers and work together as a family. They also participate in activities together, such as movie nights on Fridays.

Caregivers meet with directors to discuss behaviors and other observations of the children in order to strategize ways to effectively teach and discipline the children. In addition, caregivers receive 1-2 days off per week and 15-30 days of vacation annually. The turnover rate for caregivers is less than 20% annually since, as mentioned above, caregivers have worked in the home for over 6 years.

As a recommendation for Buena Vida to advance their score in this area, caregivers could meet with a specialist, such as a psychologist, to discuss behavioral strategies for the children to help teach and discipline them.

- ☐ Find a psychologist to help caregivers address behaviors with positive discipline.



Right to Healthcare

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the level of **THRIVING** in this category. The home has a medical fund that can be used in an emergency. All children undergo annual medical examinations such as eye exams and dental check-ups. Each child's complete file includes psychological, academic, and general medical history. The home has an identified doctor in Primo Tapia and a pediatrician in Ensenada, both of whom can be contacted in the event of an emergency. Unfortunately, documentation of the children's vaccinations is not available for 100% of the children because DIF does not provide them promptly. In the case of adolescent girls who have their menstrual cycles, they have access to sufficient feminine hygiene products and know the proper disposal methods. Meche and the caregivers are the ones who educate the girls on this topic.

Caregivers remind children to wash their hands daily after using the toilet, before eating, and whenever necessary. Soap and water stations are hygienically available near the dining area, toilets, and playground. They are also reminded to brush their teeth at least twice a day.

An opportunity for Buena Vida to improve its score in this category would be to work with DIF to obtain vaccination cards for 100% of the children.

- ☐ Work with DIF to obtain immunization records for 100% of children.



Right to Nutrition

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the **THRIVING** level in this category. The children receive the right amount of calories per day, and their food is hygienic. Meche trains and supervises the cook as the caregivers and directors eat the same food as the children. At Buena Vida, the meals are appetizing and tasty. The children are also provided protein and 2-3 servings of fruits and vegetables daily.

The kitchen, dining room, and food storage areas are free of toxic substances and pests, as a fumigation team comes to the house monthly. The cooking area is also very well ventilated with 3 windows and an extractor fan.

Buena Vida must continue its good nutrition practices to maintain this high level.

- ☐ Continue with the good practices they have established



Right to Clean Water and Electricity

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Currently, Buena Vida is at the level of **THRIVING** in this category. The facility has been inspected by a qualified person from Civil Protection. However, they will have to inspect it again once Gabriel has completed the renovations that need to be completed at the home. The home also has safe drinking water for the children or staff to drink whenever they wish. Cristapuro provides the water and maintains the storage tank and water line. Their drainage method is safe and does not contaminate the drinking water. The house has two septic tanks in the house area and one tank in the camp area. In the event of a water outage, they have water accessible for drinking, and when possible, they store water in 55-gallon drums. In the event of a blackout or power outage, they have lamps available with a capacity of up to 1 hour. The facilities are currently solar-powered, but spare batteries are needed for the panels, and Gabriel would like a generator for emergency power. The buildings were constructed mostly of cement blocks, so the material loss would be minimal in the event of a fire. The perimeter of the property is walled with cement walls at an ideal height, ensuring safety and privacy for the children. In addition, there is very good lighting throughout the property, but 4 exterior emergency lamps are needed.

As for general maintenance of the facilities, the directors have the support of Pastor Tomas and Lupe, a young adult from the home. They are currently working on replacing sinks and shower heads in the dormitories. With this work, they realized that 10 toilet bowls needed to be replaced in the home, which Gabriel noted as necessary. Gabriel mentioned that a group of American electricians taught him new techniques, which he has been able to implement in the construction of his own house and in the home's remodeling.

For Buena Vida to maintain its thriving level, it will be necessary to get spare batteries for the solar panels and the emergency power generator. The home also needs to buy 4 outdoor lamps for emergencies, and finally, they need to buy the 10 toilet bowls that need to be replaced.

- ☐ Buy spare batteries for the solar panels and a power generator
- ☐ Buy 4 outdoor lamps for emergencies
- ☐ Buy 10 new toilet bowls



Right to Quality Education

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the **SUSTAINING** level in this category. All but one child, age 7, is enrolled in school and attending classes at least 80% or more of the time. The reason this child is not enrolled is that a birth certificate was not provided upon the child's arrival. As Gabriel sought documentation, he discovered that this child was not even registered with the Civil Registration. The house has 3 wifi modems throughout the property and Chromebooks donated by ACHF. During the pandemic, the children received a lot of instruction and practice with the laptops as classes were exclusively online. The children have the support of a teacher who comes to the home in the afternoons for tutoring and homework help, and Gabriel also provides math support. When the directors receive the children's report cards, the tutor analyzes them to determine how she will work with them. Through the local schools, a diagnostic evaluation allows the teachers to determine each child's academic level and identify areas for improvement. The teachers have told Gabriel that nationally, children are behind academically because of the modalities the children had to learn during the pandemic. However, the children are relatively within their academic range.

At home, the children have access to about 50 age-appropriate books in Spanish, which the teenagers make more use of and read in their free time. Gabriel and Meche shared that they would like to set up a library area to create a reading space and add more books to the current collection.

Regarding continuing education, the home does not have a fund that allows young people to attend college or technical school. However, Meche and Gabriel have always said that they will look for ways to support students interested in studying for a college career. The young people who have taken the opportunity to study a technical career thus far, such as Karina in cosmetology and Santiago in electricity, have relied on Meche and Gabriel to pay for their expenses.

For Buena Vida to move to the next level in this category, they will need to seek the support of DIF to obtain the birth certificate for the child who is not yet enrolled in school. Also, the ACHF Baja Team will put Gabriel in contact with Brad from BLR to work together to create a reading space filled with books. Last but not least, the directors will need to create a fund or find a donor committed to supporting the expenses of students who wish to pursue studies for a career after high school.

- ☐ Obtain a birth certificate for a 7-year-old child who is not yet enrolled in school.
- ☐ Contact Brad from BLR for the library project
- ☐ Create a fund or seek support for future college students

Right to Equal Opportunities

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

In this category, Buena Vida is at the **THRIVING** level with a perfect score of 10. The children have drawers in their bedrooms to keep personal items such as letters, photos, gifts, etc. All children in the home have equal opportunities to develop their education, including those who cannot currently attend school and receive academic support at home. There is designated time for the children to participate in extracurricular activities, with some of them playing soccer in competitions. Additionally, Meche has been learning to bake cakes in a class and is teaching some of the girls what she has learned. The mentors and adults within the home also act as role models and are available to guide the children.

To remain at the level of thriving in this category, Buena Vida must continue with its good practices.

- ☐ Continue with the good practices they have established in this area



Right to Guidance

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is currently at the **THRIVING** level in this category. Although the home does not have a written job description, the directors are responsible for evaluating each candidate and verbally disclosing the job description and expectations when looking for new caregivers. Once hired, they are given a probationary period, and the directors, with help from the psychologist Suraya and DIF, determine if they are quality mentors for the children.

Gabriel and Meche talk to the preteens well in advance about the changes associated with puberty. The school also provides classes on responsible sexual behavior. The children look to Meche and Gabriel for emotional support on various personal issues because they are trusted adults. The directors also make it a point to have discussions with teens to determine what plans they have for the future or what areas of interest they have in terms of a career.

For Buena Vida to continue advancing in this category, the directors should apply for support available from ACHF to hire a dedicated psychologist to meet with children every week, as needed.

- ☐ Hire a psychologist with support from ACHF



Right to Be Heard and Participate in Decisions

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

In this category, Buena Vida is at the level of **SUSTAINING**. The children in the home decide what to do in their free time and enjoy jumping on the trampoline and playing Four Square. They can also participate in menu planning, incorporating their tastes and preferences. Some of the most requested dishes are quesadillas with carne asada, birria, and pan pizza. Weekly menus are available in the kitchen, written in a notebook where the children can see what they will be eating.

Gabriel and Meche have always approached the children with seriousness and clarity. It is important to them that the children are always aware of their family situation, DIF processes, medical procedures, and many other things. When the need arises, housekeeping and maintenance responsibilities are delegated, and specific tasks are assigned to the older children. Gabriel comments that this gives the older children greater awareness of responsibility and even a bit of leadership experience.

For Buena Vida to advance to the next level in this category, the home's leadership must implement individual development plans for each child and update them monthly.

- ☐ Create individual development plans (Child Hope Plans) for each child



Right to Be Prepared for Citizenship

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is currently at the **THRIVING** level in this category. All children have a birth certificate on file, except the one child whose situation they are working on. The home leadership instructs the children to repair any damages or wrongs. Even the children who earn money for doing small jobs have used that money to repair broken windows or pipes. All children have age-appropriate personal responsibilities in their bedrooms to clean up after themselves daily. Occasionally, they have assigned chores in the kitchen area and yard to help keep everything tidy and free of trash or debris. The home observes national and local holidays and provides holiday attire and decorations.

Gabriel and Meche ensure that the teens learn life skills such as grocery shopping, ordering food at a restaurant, and making payments on bills. The children and teens also distribute food baskets to the community to support families less fortunate than themselves. They even donated food to families affected by a fire on one occasion.

For Buena Vida to achieve a higher score in this category, it will be necessary for them to obtain the missing birth certificate for the 7-year-old who does not have one.

- ☐ Obtain a missing birth certificate for a single child.



Right to Be Safe from Abuse & Neglect

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the **SUSTAINING** level in this category. The children and staff of the home are kept safe in relation to the surrounding community, as the entire property has high cement walls. Once made of wood, these walls are now made of concrete for added protection. However, the fences will continue to be raised in the future to ensure maximum safety for the children. In addition, there are 32 security cameras installed throughout the property.

At Buena Vida, there are private facilities for children to bathe, use the bathroom, and dress. Dormitories are divided between boys and girls, according to appropriate age groups and in compliance with government regulations. The home has an established policy, which ensures that no child will be abused and stipulates that male staff who are not caregivers are not allowed to be alone with any child. Caregivers receive training every six months on identifying, preventing and avoiding abuse. The children know the protocol for reporting abuse in any form (physical, verbal, emotional, or work-related). Caregivers are instructed to remove privileges as a form of positive discipline and an alternative to corporal punishment. The home ensures that children are not hired for wages that violate local law or negatively affect their health and education. In earlier situations, the children were given the option of doing some work or service in the community solely for an apprenticeship but not for payment. Another way in which the home prevents and avoids abuse of the children is by having a set of policies for visitors, with caregivers ensuring that the rules are followed at all times.

For Buena Vida to advance to the next level in this category, it will be necessary to conduct initial psychological evaluations of each child to help them work through their trauma.

- ☐ Conduct psychological assessments upon arrival for each child to help work through their trauma



Right to Dignity & Freedom

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is currently at the **THRIVING** level in this category. The children are bathed daily and have sufficient clothing and underwear. Each of them has access to their own bed, blanket, and all their clean accessories. They all have their own bath towels and personal hygiene items.

The home's leadership encourages the children to be kind to each other and to eliminate put-downs, unkind remarks, and bullying. This also applies in children's schools with zero bullying tolerance. The children are also talked to about the consequences of infractions of internal house rules.

Generally teenagers are allowed to do extra chores or work at home to earn an allowance or privileges. This includes when there is a visiting service group at the home, the children volunteer to clean the volunteers' bedrooms to earn money. Unfortunately, DIF does not allow teenagers to work in the community, so it is a very good opportunity to do additional tasks like these to earn a little money.

For Buena Vida to maintain a perfect score in this category, the home should continue with the current practices as it has been doing so far.

☐ Continue with the good practices they have established



Right to Spiritual Development

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the **THRIVING** level in this category. The children of the home can belong to a spiritual community. Pastor Tomas also supports the home with construction and maintenance work and gives Sunday services at the home. In the community church, the children are divided into groups where they learn different religious themes and rehearse for plays and songs. The children are free to participate in community prayer daily and do so before each meal and bedtime in their dormitory rooms. The home also provides bibles and other spiritual material for children or teenagers who wish to read them.

For Buena Vida to remain at this level with the highest possible score, they should continue with the current practices they have applied.

☐ Continue with the good practices they have established



Finance Standard

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is currently at the **THRIVING** level in this category. The organization has an adequate division of duties and tasks for internal control. The director can record income and expenses, with the records available for review. Thanks to the support they have from their accountant, it has been possible to file tax returns following Mexican requirements.

The home has an external audit of its monthly finances, and its bank account is reconciled monthly. The accountant is also responsible for validating the home's accounting records.

Although the home does not operate on an annual budget, they have detailed plans for major expenses such as food, construction projects, remodeling, and maintenance, among other expenses. Currently, the home relies heavily on the funds they receive through the service groups that visit the home.

For Buena Vida to continue advancing in this category, it is recommended that they seek professional advice and alternate resources that will allow them to operate according to an annual budget.

- ☐ To seek professional advice and alternative resources that allow them to operate according to an annual budget.



Governance and Human Resource Standard

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the level of **THRIVING** in this category. The property on which Buena Vida is located is secured by a 50-year lease so that it cannot be sold for profit. The directors are renewing their operating licenses, with 80% of the remodeling completed within the children's dormitories. The home has an active board of directors that meets at least twice a year. There are also ongoing staff meetings to discuss issues of concern and improve processes.

New caregivers shadow experienced caregivers or directors during their probationary time to learn the processes and job properly before committing to the position. Although new staff members are not given a written document detailing their terms of employment, Gabriel and Meche make sure to let them know the position's responsibilities. The house keeps employee files that include an original employment application, criminal background check letter, and reference letter, among other documents. The home has and adheres to a vacation policy and annual leave regime for all staff. They can take 15 days of vacation or 30 days, where 15 days are paid, and 15 are unpaid. The directors mention that, at times, it has been very difficult to get caregivers to take their holiday as they consider the workload they would be leaving the directors to be too much. They are a great team who cares about each other. Caregivers have attended training on attachment and child development, family characteristics and values, and creating a family in a group home setting. They have also been trained on medical and hygiene issues, common illnesses and treatments, and other health-related topics.

For Buena Vida to remain at the level of thriving in this category, it is recommended that the home leadership create a written document detailing the terms of employment and job description which can be given to new staff. They will also need to have their operating license renewed.

- ☐ Create a written document detailing the terms of employment and job description to be given to new staff.
- ☐ Carry out all work for the renewal of the operating license.

Strategic Initiatives

CIVIL PROTECTION TRAINING AND FACILITY CERTIFICATION

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| PROJECT DESCRIPTION | The home must conduct Civil Protection training for caregivers and children and facility certifications to renew its Operating License. These include firefighting, use, and handling of fire extinguishers, search and rescue, and evacuation and shelter. |
| ESTIMATED FUNDING | <\$5,000 |

GENERAL MAINTENANCE AND REMODELING OF THE CASA HOGAR

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| PROJECT DESCRIPTION | Once the construction of the directors' house is 100% complete and they are living in it, Buena Vida will undergo several general renovations to adapt the old directors' apartment, make changes to the windows in the girls' dormitory, among other things to comply with local safety and civil protection regulations. |
| ESTIMATED FUNDING | <\$5,000 |

MINI SPLITS AND INSTALLATION

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| PROJECT DESCRIPTION | As a result of extreme temperature changes over the past year, the home has an urgent need for mini splits to address both heat and air conditioning needs. The cost will be approximately \$5,000 USD and will be supported by funds through A Child's Hope. |
| ESTIMATED FUNDING | <\$5,000 |

