

Buena Vida Orphanage

Mexico



IMPROVEMENT ROADMAP

September | 2023



Overview of this Children's Home

Background & Mission

Gabriel and Meche started in 2011 as directors, caring for 24 children. Upon their arrival, one of the first needs they identified was that the home did not have enough food to feed the children for a week. The home had many areas of opportunity, such as infrastructure, health, cleanliness, and care of the children, putting all their efforts into seeking resources and donations to pay for everything they needed. Not having enough support to cover this expense, Gabriel and Meche used their funds and savings from their work for more than seven months until help arrived at their home to take care of all the children's needs and the house's utilities.

As the years passed, the property owners gave them only three years to find another location for the home. Gabriel and Meche decided to use a piece of land they owned to start the construction of the orphanage. The initial funding for this work came from individual monetary donations, other foundations, Gabriel's savings, and groups of volunteers who helped with labor and work. This stage of construction took about four years, during which time other donors gradually came forward to join the cause and move in completely. Since then, they have kept up the pace of growth, improvements, and advances to consolidate the service to their children.

Buena Vida's mission is to provide comprehensive assistance to abused and neglected children. It is also to provide a safe, loving home where children are educated spiritually with a solid moral foundation and to give them the necessary tools to grow up to be good parents and responsible and productive citizens.

Ultimately, Gabriel and Meche want to form people with values that are capable of integrating into society positively by being professional, hardworking, honest, and capable of forming their own families, thus being a creation of hope for tomorrow.

Recent Accomplishments

- Buena Vida has achieved becoming Certified in the ACHF Thrive Program.
- They have purchased 4 new washing machines and have built a space for the laundry area of the home.



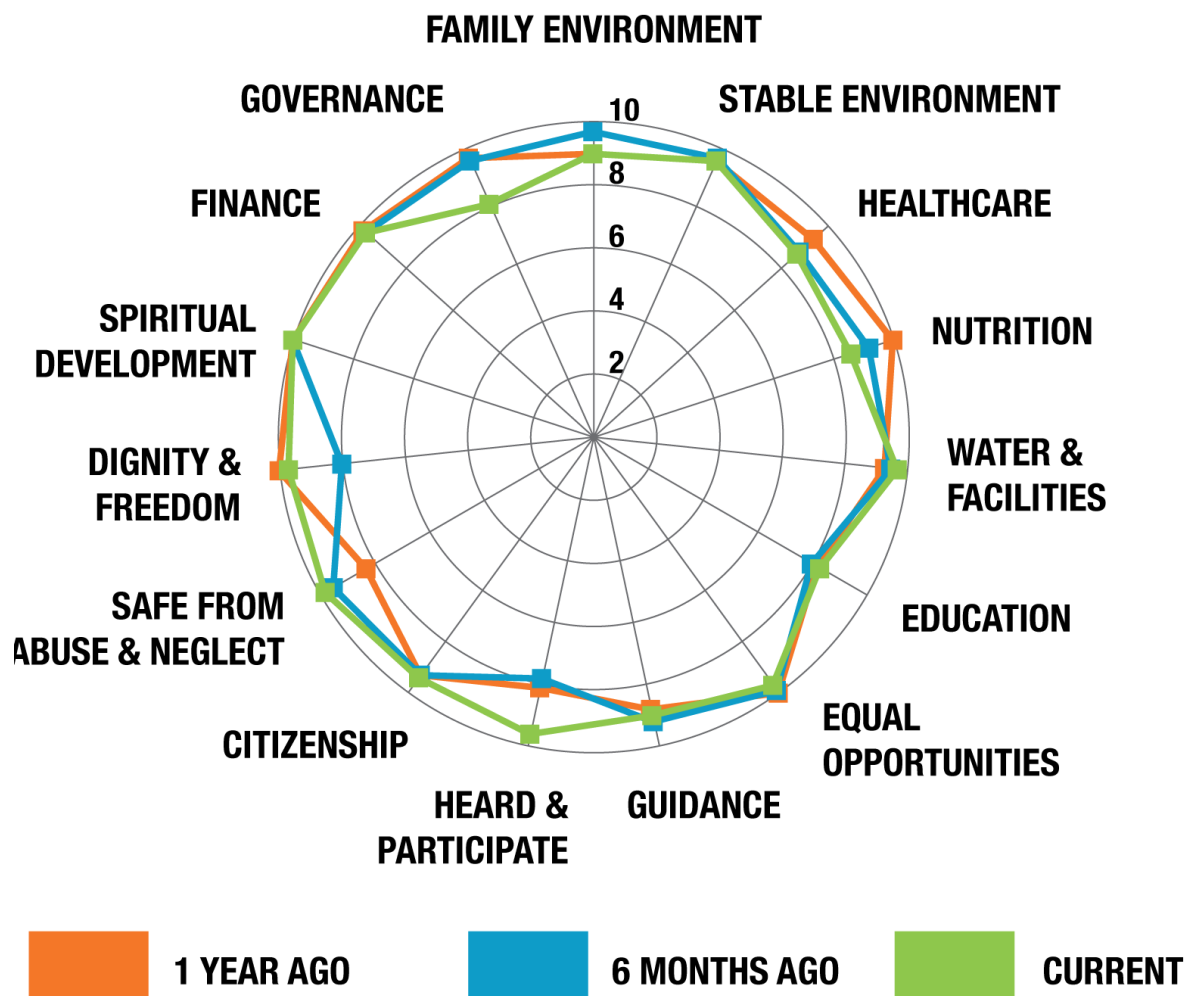
The Thrive Assessment

What is the Thrive Assessment?

In 1959, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which defines children's rights to protection, education, healthcare, shelter, nutrition and more. We have codified all 13 Rights, as well as a Finance Standard and a Governance and Human Resource Standard, resulting in a total of 15 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 with each partner home to chart the progress of each standard. Our team works with caregivers to outline next steps which are compiled into an Improvement Roadmap.

Current Thrive Scale



Strategic Initiatives

INDUSTRIAL KITCHEN REFRIGERATOR

PROJECT SUMMARY	To keep food in optimal conditions, it is necessary to have an industrial refrigerator in which meat and dairy products can be stored. Although the current refrigerator is still in very good condition, the space is not sufficient to store all the food for more than 4 days. As a result, more visits are made to supermarkets because they do not have the necessary storage capacity. Having this equipment will guarantee quality food in sufficient quantities for the children. Gabriel foresees that the purchase of this freezer will be made in the USA because it has a better price in the market. Therefore, the budget for its purchase includes the cost of importing the equipment.
INITIAL ANTICIPATED COST	\$70,095.53 MXN \$4,278 USD

INDUSTRIAL 2 DOOR FREEZER

PROJECT SUMMARY	To keep food in optimal conditions, it is necessary to have an industrial freezer in which meat and dairy products can be stored. Having this equipment will guarantee quality food in sufficient quantities for the children. Gabriel foresees that the purchase of this freezer will be made in the USA because it has a better price in the market. Therefore, the budget for its purchase includes the cost of importing the equipment.
INITIAL ANTICIPATED COST	\$87,660.37 MXN \$5,350 USD

POWER GENERATOR

PROJECT SUMMARY	When there are power outages in the area, the home has no alternative way to keep the refrigerators running. As a result, there is a risk of food spoilage, directly affecting the children's nutrition and the home's budget.
INITIAL ANTICIPATED COST	\$1,100 USD



Right to Live with Family

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at a thriving level in this category. They have a total of 25 children in the home and 2 new girls recently arrived at the home. The home encourages family visits as long as they are approved by DIF. However, family visits have decreased due to several children leaving the home and this has resulted in fewer visits. There are the same caregivers who have been at the home for more than 7 years. As a result, the groups of children feel quite stable. A couple of months ago they started the therapeutic program with the ESPERE organization on trauma care issues. However, they have not yet finished the program. Meche comments that they are very interested in resuming these training sessions. They have a psychologist to support the caregivers, with strategies to care for the children and to reinforce the training topics. The recommendations are applied to the particular situation at Buena Vida. A couple of young caregivers have joined the team to support the retirement process of a caregiver. The home has a plan for incorporating new caregivers, which is being implemented at Buena Vida. This has been a model for other homes as well. DIF has conducted staff evaluations and all have passed those evaluations. However, the evaluations are not up to date.

- ☐ Evaluate staff every three months by a psychologist on the care they are providing to the children in their care.
- ☐ Resume the training program with ESPERE.



Right to a Stable Environment

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the thriving level in this category. In this home the children are explained the rules they must follow. When there are new children, they are explained upon arrival, if time or schedule permits. Everyone is called by their preferred name. However the director is aware that in the absence of the directors or at school they call each other differently. Never by derogatory nicknames or nicknames. Play activities between caregivers and children are very infrequent. This is in the sense that the games between the children are very physical or sporty, and due to the age of the caregivers, there isn't much involvement on their end. Twice a month the caregivers meet with a specialist to discuss the children's needs. The specialist provides tools or suggestions for caring for them. The home has family traditions and Gabriel is planning to remodel the homework space to bring back family movie night, which is one of the activities that everyone enjoys the most.

- ☐ Implement actions for caregivers to participate in joint activities with the children in their care, according to their possibilities.



Right to Healthcare

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the thriving level in this category. Children have medical check-ups at least twice a year. However, most of the time these check-ups or medical visits are at the time of symptoms of an illness. The children have been vaccinated and the directors follow up with them so that they have their complete vaccination schedule. Even so, in some cases there is no history of previous vaccinations in the children. They have almost all their vaccination records and the director has already requested support from the Department of Health to have these as well. The adolescent girls have the necessary items for personal hygiene and know how to dispose of them. No routine eye examinations have been performed. Only children who show need have been attended. In dental and hearing issues, they only attend to children who require support due to some discomfort. Children have a medical record for each area of their development and these are kept on file and up to date. The home has an emergency first aid kit, a stationary first aid kit and more than 6 portable first aid kits. Also, a medical emergency fund is available for their use. There are children who are more in need of orthodontic treatment, however, for the moment they should wait to receive this treatment since they are still molting their teeth. In general the children's health is good, but they have had a series of daily accidents that have involved medical care expenses, medications and purchases of special rehabilitation devices and bandages.

- ☐ Update the medical records of children and collaborators.
- ☐ Perform routine dental, vision and hearing screenings for all children.
- ☐ Continue to take the necessary steps to have 100% of the vaccination cards.



Right to Nutrition

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the thriving level in this category. The children receive tasty and appetizing meals that are prepared in a hygienic manner. Protein is provided daily in their diet. A menu is planned on a monthly basis. It is organized in a balanced manner and offers a variety of foods to the children. They have received support from the DIF nutritionist, who has reviewed the menus on a bimonthly basis. They have received good feedback on their planning. The directors are all about providing children 2 to 3 servings of fruits and vegetables. However, this depends on the season and the prices of fruits and vegetables. The director would like to be able to include more fruits in their menu, but the budget does not allow it. Their kitchen staff has not been trained in hygienic food handling. In this regard, the director has requested support from DIF so that they can help train the staff and bring it in line with their standards. On the other hand, their food storage warehouses are clean, organized and free of pests.

- ☐ Have the support of a nutritionist to review and recommend improvements to menus.
- ☐ Train kitchen staff in hygienic food handling.



Right to Safe & Adequate Water & Facilities

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

In this category Buena Vida is at the thriving level. The home has been certified in safety issues. It has a civil protection plan validated and accepted by state authorities. Within its emergency plan, it has identified locations in the nearby community. The home can withstand the elements and weather conditions typical of the location. In the event of an emergency, the home does not have any alternative source of power or electricity generation for its refrigerators. They currently have a generator, but it is not sufficient for the installations. In addition, there are no external batteries that can be recharged by the solar panels. Their facilities are very secure and have a camera system that supports monitoring and security actions for the facilities, but especially for the children. The leadership has created a written maintenance plan. Most of the preventive and corrective maintenance needs of the facilities have been addressed. For this, it has professional support through outside vendors and the support of Lupe. He is a young man who grew up in Buena Vida, who now lives in the volunteer camp area, and who helps with some maintenance and construction.

- ☐ Having a power generator for the refrigerators and freezer, in case of an emergency.
- ☐ Rechargeable batteries for the solar panels to provide power in case of emergency.



Right to Quality Education

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at a sustaining level in this category. The home has a space available within the homework area where a library can be set up. Although they have some books, including illustrative books that the children like to read, it is not integrated in an attractive way as a library for the children. However, the director is still interested in having support from a donor to integrate and form this library.

Basic and very limited materials are available for school projects. These are kept in the warehouse so that they can be used efficiently. The school is providing aptitude testing and career counseling. Maricela, the psychologist, has also assessed the children's learning and determined their academic level. On the other hand, she has identified any lags or special education needs. They have plenty of art materials that the volunteer groups have left behind after each service trip. However, there is also not much variety and on occasion the home has used them for school projects or homework. At the moment, they do not have the necessary funds or resources to provide secondary education and housing for children after their stay at the home, once they turn 18.

- ☐ To have an adequate space for reading in the form of a library with at least 75 books of interest to children.
- ☐ Have sufficient quantity and variety of school and art supplies for all children.
- ☐ Service the 3 cars used for school transportation.

Right to Equal Opportunities

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida in this category is at a thriving level. All children are given the opportunity to take some job training according to the options available in the locality. This is done through allies of the director, in case they do not want to continue with regular school training. Some examples include: baking, beauty, jewelry, electricity, basic carpentry, and others. This is done in order for them to learn a trade or job skill in case they do not want to pursue a professional career. Gabriel implements a strategy of talking with the youth about their life plan. Even so, this process is more of an organic talk and there is nothing in writing before, during or after. In the case of the young adults who grew up in the home and still live there, it has been documented that they are part of the home's work team, or personnel. They fulfill support functions such as maintenance manager or kitchen assistant. Both have passed the suitability evaluation that is applied by DIF.

Necessary adaptations have been made for children who require them. For example, in the past, the adaptation of glasses or the use of splints for minor injuries, the use of glasses and the application of evaluations to identify learning problems have been applied. Despite this, there are no local supports identified to address the needs, other than the support of the teacher and the psychologist. The home has a transition to adulthood plan which is not documented or written for all children.

- ☐ Identify and implement coordinated work strategies between the psychologist and teacher to address learning needs.
- ☐ Have a documented transition plan in place that is applicable to children 15 years of age and older.



Right to Guidance

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the thriving level in this category. The home has a psychologist who sees the children individually and in groups at least four times a month. In addition to her therapeutic tasks, she performs psychological evaluations of the children and establishes an individualized work plan focused on the needs of each child. She also conducts staff trainings and provides individual counseling to adult caregivers and directors. This is done with the objective of working on stress and anxiety situations with them. It is very important to have a workshop or training for children from the age of 11, by a specialist in responsible sexual behavior.

The home has not developed or implemented any education or work programs for the young adults after their stay in the home. Most of the graduates have left the home, with the exception of Lupe and Karina who remain at the orphanage supporting the home's activities. There is also no written plan to support the development of life skills. There are no follow-up strategies or communication and counseling for adolescents enrolled in technical university careers. Meche, for her part, has implemented a mentoring program with baking and jewelry making classes for the boys and girls. In this class, she teaches them how to make cakes and desserts as a way to learn a skill. The idea is that those who would like to make it a business in the future can make a living as bakers.

- ☐ Conduct an educational session with children 11 years and older related to responsible sexual behavior.
- ☐ Have a written life skills development program.
- ☐ Develop a written plan for education or work with youth over 15 years of age prior to the end of their stay in the home.



Right to Be Heard and Participate in Decisions

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at a Thriving level in this category. Buena Vida has made many improvements in this area since the previous evaluation. Meche and Gabriel have implemented more strategies to involve the children in decision making, promoting their right to participation. These strategies have been involved in creating the menus of the home and with that they always know what they are going to eat, they also decide what Friday activity they want to do, also and if the budget allows it, they decide on the places for family or group outings, as well as activities and celebrations within the home. The children can decide what to do in their free time as long as it does not alter the dynamics or rules of the home. They can also choose the clothes they want to wear on a daily basis, although in the case of the younger children, they are instructed on which clothes are appropriate for the day. Meche is the one who checks the donated clothes and from there, the children choose the clothes to their liking. The home has not yet implemented a strategy of creating hope plans or any similar strategy, however there are beginnings of participation of a children's committee, but they still need to structure the strategy further.

- ☐ Implement hope plans or similar strategies for children aged 13 and older.
- ☐ Maintain the strategies implemented to promote child participation.



Right to Be Prepared for Citizenship

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the thriving level in this category. Finally, all the children have their birth certificates. Thanks to Gabriel's follow-up and management, they have been able to have all the documents for the children of Buena Vida. In the children's home, the children are taught to be respectful of each other. In addition, they are taught about the consequences of their actions and how to repair their damages. The children are assigned special chores according to their age. This helps to keep the home free of garbage or misplaced objects. Children are taught about democratic processes. Major national events are celebrated. The children participate in community support activities at least twice a year, such as delivering groceries to needy families in La Mision. A donation of rice and beans is also made to Pastor Tomas for the community church. However, this depends directly on their budget and resources. Meche on several occasions has also searched warehouses for items that will not be of use in the home in order to distribute those items in the community, an activity in which the children also participate. They have also shared at least one of their Christmas gifts with those who are less fortunate. In addition, as much as possible, the children attend school trips and special events outside the home as long as they are previously authorized by DIF.

- ☐ Maintain the good strategies implemented in this area.



Right to Safe from Abuse & Neglect

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida in this area is at the thriving level. The level of security at the home is adequate relative to the nearby community. Also, the home has private facilities for the children to bathe and change. The boys' and girls' bedrooms are separated to ensure their privacy. In terms of staff training, almost all staff have been trained in positive discipline techniques. It is also necessary to train children as young as 5 years old in strategies for identifying and reporting abuse. In order to attend to the children more effectively in the therapeutic area, when they arrive at the children's home, they undergo a psychological evaluation in order to identify and work with them on traumatic situations. It is of utmost importance that the staff maintains a constant training program for the personnel, in addition to completing the therapeutic program already started with ESPERE Therapeutic Community.

- ☐ That the team of caregivers and directors of Buena Vida complete the therapeutic program with ESPERE.
- ☐ Implement an educational, training or coaching session so that children can recognize abuse or maltreatment and know how to report it.
- ☐ Maintain an ongoing training program for staff on abuse, maltreatment, crisis and trauma issues.



Right to Dignity and Freedom

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at a thriving level in this category. Children are talked to ahead of time about the consequences of infractions of house rules. Teenagers are given the opportunity to clean up the volunteers' camp to earn some money. This is then used to repair any damage they have caused to the property or to buy themselves whatever they would like. Other than this, DIF does not allow teenagers to go out into the community to work, in order to safeguard their safety. The children have adequate bedding (sheets and blankets) that get cleaned every two weeks or when they get dirty. They now have the necessary laundry equipment to meet the need. This has been a great improvement from the previous improvement roadmap. All children have their own toothbrush and clean towel. Two of the most important needs, in terms of the children's belongings, are to have more undergarments for both boys and girls. Most of the children who are new to the children's home arrive with a great lack of these belongings. Recently they bought the kids sports shoes and school shoes that will last them at least 6 months longer.

They have a safe, age-appropriate outdoor play area in the home. However, they do not have a wide variety of age-appropriate toys and art materials, so it is necessary to restock these materials. On the other hand, the home has registered safety protocols and civil protection training for the children and employees, which have been revalidated for the next 12-month period.

- ☐ Seek donor support for more clothing and underwear for the children.
- ☐ Having a greater number and variety of age-appropriate toys and art materials available to all children.



Right to Spiritual Development

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at a thriving level in this category. Children are given the opportunity to be part of a spiritual community. Children are free to participate in daily communal prayer or other spiritual rituals. Daily, they pray for food before eating and they pray at bedtime. The children are offered service opportunities to practice their spiritual learning, such as reading biblical texts in church and listening to songs and praises. Pastor Tomas attends the home on Sundays to give a small service, which involves all the children and staff, and the children also attend church regularly. The children learn about and participate in religious celebrations, such as drama/theater shows in the church. There is a designated place for prayer and meditation. Gabriel says that prayer can be done anywhere. Spiritual and religious materials and books are available and accessible for anyone to read. Bibles have often been given to the church as donations of them come to the home in abundance.

☐ Maintaining good practices implemented in this category.



Financial Standard

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at the thriving level in this category. The home maintains a way to record their income and expenses and receipts are kept for these expenses. Gabriel personally creates his expense statements by month and these are validated by a qualified accountant. In addition, he has implemented the use of a digital application in which he keeps timely records for the last three months of his expenses and income. With this new system and if they keep under the discipline of this record, they will be able to have a better internal control of their expenses and thus be able to plan their finances in a more strategic way. They perform internal audits on their monthly finances and keep the records available for review. In this home, controls are in place and followed to minimize opportunities for misuse of funds. The leadership has well identified the best suppliers for their purchases of food and building materials. For their administration, the home does not have an annual budget as they always operate on what they have available for the month. However, they plan their expenses over \$25,000, which are generally for construction projects at the home and the director's house. Tax returns have been filed in accordance with government requirements. Buena Vida has an appropriate division of duties or tasks for internal control, in which Gabriel and Meche maintain ongoing communication of their priorities for exercising their available budgets.

- ☐ Maintain discipline in the use of their financial accounting software/application for better record keeping.
- ☐ Maintaining good practices in this category.



Governance and Human Resource Standard

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Buena Vida is at a sustaining level in this category. Caregivers and other staff have a written job description document outlining their job responsibilities. However, they have no document detailing their employment status with the home. All caregivers have attended medical and hygiene training sessions, as well as first aid and CPR on an annual basis. The property and modifications are insured so that they cannot be sold for profit. This is through a commodatum contract for the next 80 years or more between the owner of the property and the Casa Hogar. The home has all licensing, auditing, and governance requirements, as it is in the process of renewing its operating license. The organization has and complies with a vacation and annual leave policy for all staff. However, the directors do not adhere to this policy because they prioritize their staff's vacation time. There are currently 11 staff members, including the directors, and only 4 of them are provided with social security benefits. The new home caregivers follow an experienced caregiver for a minimum of one week. In particular, Meche is the one who conducts the follow-up and feedback meetings with the new collaborators. Weekly staff meetings are held to provide them with opportunities to receive support and orientation regarding their positions, almost always led by Meche. These meetings are not constant and are not managed through a calendar. Employee files that include their most important documents are kept securely and are updated at least on a monthly basis. It is very important to have an ongoing training plan for staff on topics relevant to their work activities.

- ☐ Have a written document detailing conditions of employment and a job description for all employees.
- ☐ Establish a schedule of regular meetings to discuss issues of concern and improve processes with employees.
- ☐ To have a detailed training plan for personnel on topics related to their work activities.



Current Improvement Partners



Espere Community Counseling is a center that delivers psychological therapy services to kids, adults, and survivors of trauma. They strive to increase awareness and access to mental health services so people learn there is a name for their pain, they are not alone, and they can get better. Espere partners with ACHF in Baja California to provide caregiver support through trainings, workshops, and roundtables on ways to support the mental health and wellbeing for the children in their care as well as their own selfcare. Additionally, they offer support to therapists working in our partner orphanages.

For a list of projects and opportunities to coordinate on go to
www.ACHF.org/Projects

