



# El Refugio

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Mexico

# IMPROVEMENT ROADMAP

September | 2023





# Overview of this Children's Home

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## Background & Mission

El Refugio has been in existence to serve at-risk teen girls since 2012. Randy and Sandy have been the directors since the home was established in 2009. Their desire is to give a safe and loving environment to every child or teen that enters their home. They focus on the mental, spiritual and emotional health of their girls and give them many opportunities to flourish.

## Recent Accomplishments

- This year the home celebrated the quinceaneras of several of their girls who would otherwise not be able to have this important celebration.
- They also worked together to build several homes for the poor of their community.



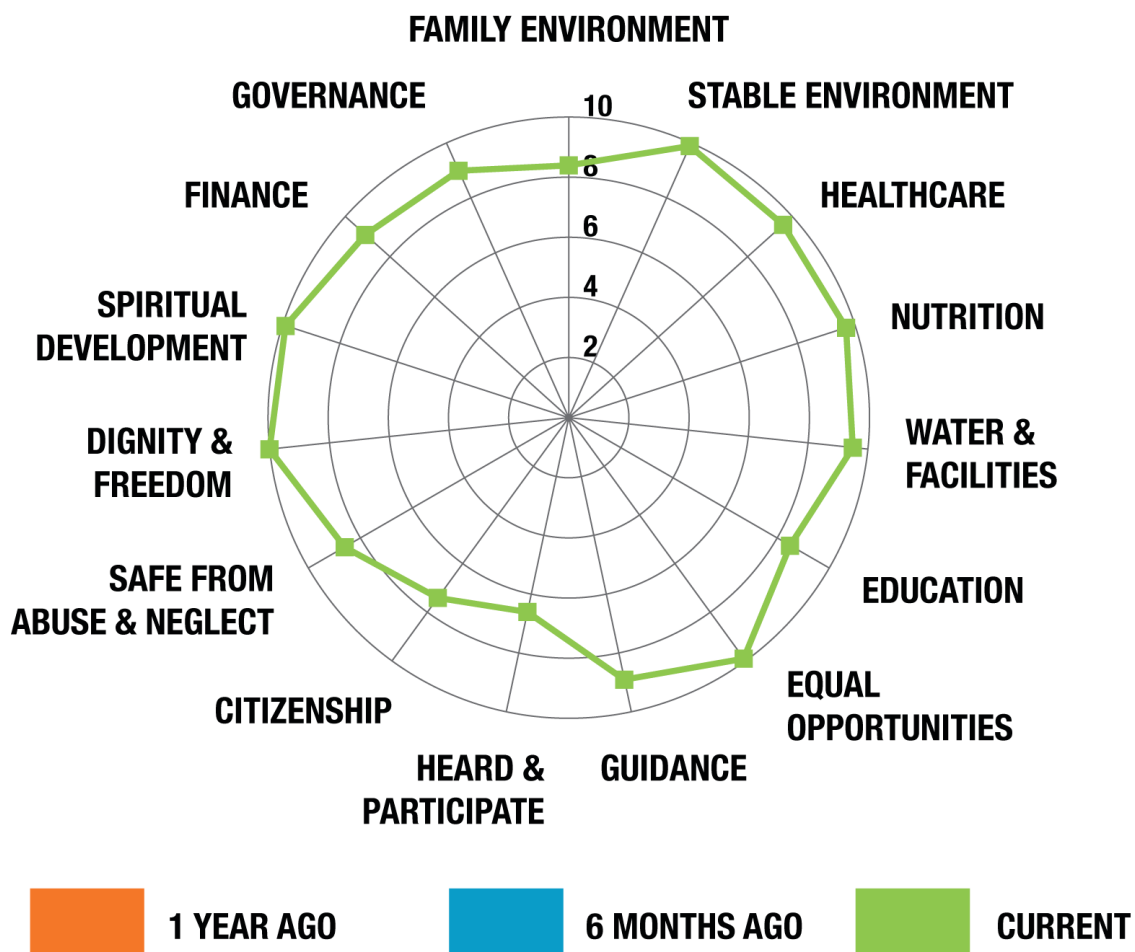
# The Thrive Assessment

## 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 then compiled into an Improvement Roadmap.

## Current Thrive Scale



# Strategic Initiatives

## SECURITY ENHANCEMENT

<b>PROJECT SUMMARY</b>	Security cameras and fencing placed around the perimeter of the facility. This can be done in stages and depending on final cost, other churches and Baja Love Outreach are likely to sponsor a portion of the cost.
<b>INITIAL ANTICIPATED COST</b>	\$1,000 - \$2,500 dollars

## SCHEDULING RESOURCE

<b>PROJECT SUMMARY</b>	This home is looking for a specialist or a program that can help them more efficiently schedule the activities of the home.
<b>INITIAL ANTICIPATED COST</b>	\$0 - \$100 dollars

## INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION/HOPE PLANS FOR EACH CHILD

<b>PROJECT SUMMARY</b>	This home desires to provide individual plans for success for each child in the home. They would like to involve an outside resource to accomplish this due to lack of time and staffing
<b>INITIAL ANTICIPATED COST</b>	\$0 - \$500 dollars



## Right to Live with Family

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

The home currently cares for an average of 12-15 children and teens, however, this number does fluctuate frequently. El Refugio's profile is for girls only, and this is to be able to provide a safe environment for all, and to obtain a high level of specialized care. The facilities include private dorm-style rooms with 2 teens per room. In the case of the younger girls, they are put together in a room with a caregiver. All childcare staff live full-time onsite in private apartments or separate dorm rooms. There are spacious living and dining areas, several outdoor spaces for gathering and onsite offices. The home also has adjoining horse barns with 4 horses that they use for equine therapy. El Refugio maintains an adequate or above average staff to child ratio. Many staff members have been present in the children's lives in a family-style setting for

nearly or more than a decade. The directors of El Refugio confirmed that they maintain records for each child who comes into their care, but expressed that there are times when they are unable to receive all pertinent information from the government and are unable to compile an adequate file. El Refugio does not complete trauma-informed care training on a quarterly basis, and expressed a desire to do so. The home desires to offer support whenever possible to sibling groups and offers outside family visitation whenever possible to promote family bonding. The home works with a DIF appointed social worker to help transition children whose case offers a possibility of familial reunification. El Refugio is excelling in many areas, but they are driven by a desire to always improve. They are continuous learners and always looking for ways to improve every area of their home and ministry.

- ☐ Set up quarterly trauma informed care trainings for staff
- ☐ Connect the home with a trained therapist to evaluate caregivers on a bi-annual basis



## Right to a Stable Environment

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

House rules are clearly explained to children and consequences are reasonable, fair and appropriate for each child in the home. Any bullying, including demeaning name calling, is strictly prohibited. Family rhythms include healthy, unstructured downtime, as well as group time that supports bonding and a shared family conscious.

Caregivers meet often to discuss effective discipline and behavioral management of the children. The directors believe they have an above average success rate with keeping long-term staff, but there are times when staff turnover rate is higher than desired, despite a well-established hiring, onboarding, training and evaluation system for oncoming staff. All staff members, with the exception of the directors, receive adequate breaks, vacation days with pay and time off when needed. The home excels in prioritizing family traditions and engaging in them on a weekly basis or more. The directors are actively seeking more staff to allow them to take more breaks.

- ☐ Setting time to train newly hired staff



## Right to Healthcare

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Each child is up to date with medical, vision, orthodontic and dental exams. The only exception would be extensive orthodontic treatment for girls who are not expected to stay long term in the home. The home keeps complete medical records of each child from the date they arrive in the home. They do wellness checks monthly, including checking for lice. They have an adequate emergency fund for medical emergencies. Whenever applicable, they take proper measures to train and teach children with special medical needs. The children have good dental and menstrual hygiene and are encouraged and taught to care for themselves well.

☐ No tangible steps identified at this time



## Right to Nutrition

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

The home meets and exceeds all requirements for healthy food consumption and preparation. They consistently serve a minimum of 2-3 servings of vegetables daily, but at times they fall under that amount for fruit. Cooking is done by the caregivers along with the teen girls. They have set up a rotating schedule to include everyone taking a turn to prepare and serve meals. Training is done in-house by the directors and food safety is discussed frequently as part of daily life. Leadership is cognizant of food safety and quality and are intentional in taking the opportunity to share that information naturally among staff and the girls. Formal training is given by leadership to every new staff member during their initial training period.

☐ Continue following their current nutrition and food safety plan with the addition of 1-2 more servings daily of fruit





## Right to Safe & Adequate Water & Facilities

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

The home is continually improving their facilities, and are meeting all basic requirements for a safe and adequate facility. They are currently waiting on inspections from electrical, fire, water, gas, the architect and civil protection for their most recent building addition. They have had several setbacks in this process due to a small fire that caused severe water damage from the fire fighters, but are expecting full clearance within the next 6 months. The home did express a strong desire to improve the safety of their home by adding perimeter cameras and safety fencing around the entire facility.

- ☐ Purchase cameras for the perimeter of the buildings
- ☐ Reinforce safety with fencing



## Right to Quality Education

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

The home is intentional to provide every available resource to each child in the home, regardless of their current educational level. Several of the children are behind current national standards, but the home does their best to use the plan they have in place to improve each child's education. The Director worked in the educational system for many years prior to becoming the Director of the home. She has identified that despite her best efforts, there is potential to improve the individualized educational plans for the children under her care. This would include specific plans for children with learning delays, as well as an initiative to improve the "launching" of the teens who graduate out. Finding help to make this a reality is one of the core needs they have identified in this category.

- ☐ Connect home with a qualified professional who specializes in Individualized Educational Plans for each child.
- ☐ Training resources for graduating teens to help them transition successfully into adulthood

## Right to Equal Opportunities

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

The home is intentional to give equal opportunities to each child. The facility adequately accommodates the children in their care. Each child is encouraged to transition into independent living regardless of family history, past challenges or potential roadblocks.

As identified in the previous section, the home is looking for ways to improve the success rate of transitioning children, but as it pertains to their part, they have done whatever is in their power to make all opportunities equal and accessible to each child

☐ No tangible action steps identified at this time



## Right to Guidance

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

The home has a plan in place to increase the likelihood of hiring quality caregivers. The leadership ensures that the caregivers are frequently evaluated and monitored to guarantee that they are modeling healthy behavior. Children are guided into responsible behavior regarding their own bodies, sexual activities, educational opportunities available to them and therapy as needed. Full-time staff member, Larissa, is a trained psychologist and often does individual therapy sessions. They also utilize DIF therapists. At this time, most, if not all, therapy sessions have been individualized. They often will do devotions and Bible studies together as a group to support the spiritual formation of the girls. The home did express that while they are doing all these things with much success, they have not documented their processes or achievements as much as they desire.

☐ Write down plans and make policies whenever possible to increase intentionality.



## Right to Be Heard and Participate in Decisions

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Children can decide what to do in their free time and are encouraged to verbalize and express their needs. Depending on the busyness of the day, the children's needs are acknowledged and respected in a timely manner. The children are encouraged to be part of the menu planning, as well as the cooking in the home. Their preferences are considered, and reasonable requests are taken into consideration for the next month's menu. The children are allowed to choose



their own clothing while taking into account modesty and appropriateness. When the need for medical attention arises, the children are informed to the best of their ability to allow them to feel prepared and mitigate any potential traumatic situations. Family values prioritize that children participate in most family activities, but in reasonable circumstances, they are allowed to opt out of nonessential activities.

The home does not have individual development plans implemented for each child. They desire to make that a priority in the next calendar year. The home provides many activities for children to take leadership roles. For example, the girls are taught and encouraged to take initiative and leadership during a house building project. In other circumstances, like around the house or in planning their future, the home desires to make improvements on this.

- ☐ Write down menu plans and assign children the responsibility of organizing the menu based on budget, available foods, dietary preferences etc.



## Right to Be Prepared for Citizenship

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

The home has birth certificates for each child in their care. In circumstances where the child did not come with proper documentation, they have used their own resources to obtain that for the child. The home believes they can improve in training their caregivers with regard to helping the children learn and practice responsibility. The children all have age-appropriate responsibilities that they are in charge of accomplishing each day such as cooking, cleaning, assisting younger children with school work or activities of daily living. The home participates in all national and local holidays, with the exception of Day of the Dead. They also prioritize special outings and participate in activities outside the home multiple times a week. They attend church weekly, go to the beach, restaurants, volunteer with area ministries, youth camps etc. The home is kept organized and free of clutter most of the time. The children are taught about ethics, current events and the governing process informally, but they have never participated in an age-appropriate course. The home expressed a desire to improve their methods of mentoring their teens aged 15+, and are looking for support to teach them basic life skills. The children of the home perform community service on average once or twice a month. For instance, they have built at least one home a year for a low-income working family in their community. They also partnered with Baja Love Outreach to assist in the installation of a playground for another orphanage in their town.

- ☐ Provide resources to mentor teens in basic life skills necessary to live on their own.



## Right to Safe from Abuse & Neglect

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

The home has adequate security based on the surrounding community, but due to the profile of the girls they serve, they would like to increase security by adding perimeter cameras and security fencing around the home. Many of the girls that are currently living with them have been rescued from sex trafficking or the cartel. Several times in the past the home has been watched or has received threats of harm to the girls from former pimps or cartel members. There are private areas for bathing, using the toilet and getting dressed. This is an all girls home, but when co-ed groups come, they ensure separate sleeping areas for men and women. The home has a child protection policy that they implement and train staff accordingly. They do not have formal training to recognize and prevent abuse. Likewise, they do not routinely discuss abuse and reporting methods with children under 5. They are open to improving this. The home has a process for checking the background of staff and frequent visitors. They have intake assessments used by a therapist to evaluate a child's need to receive counseling as needed.

- ☐ Create and implement a plan to train staff to recognise and prevent abuse
- ☐ Set intention to routinely discuss abuse and reporting methods with children under 5



## Right to Dignity and Freedom

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

This home reports the highest scores available in this section. They ensure each child has everything from their own bed, towel, undergarments and toothbrush, and they also provide guidance and opportunity for activities that encourage dignity and freedom. Free and unlimited access to art supplies is limited at times due to schedule conflicts or other necessary obligations. During these occasions, they encourage the children to engage in activities that don't require excessive cleanup. This prompted the home to give themselves a score of 3, as they believe this is a reasonable exception.

- ☐ Continue with current plan



## Right to Spiritual Development

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

Spiritual development is highly valued in this home. The children are allowed and encouraged to participate in their spiritual community, pray daily and participate in the religious holidays. Bibles and other religious material are available at all times. The girls are also given many opportunities throughout the year to practice their faith by giving back to others. For example this year the girls prepared, delivered and served food to 100 Ukrainian refugees living temporarily at a refugee camp in Tijuana.

☐ Continue current plan and rituals



## Financial Standard

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

The home maintains income and expense records and tracks them diligently. Records are maintained and available for review, and they are compliant with all government regulations regarding tax filings. The home has strict oversight from an outside source that prevents misuse of funds. Accounts are reconciled monthly with some exceptions. At times they fall behind, but only by the maximum of 30 days. The home struggles to plan or operate according to an annual budget due to the extreme fluctuations in giving.

Their mission's organization reviews their financials quarterly and an accountant validates their books annually.

☐ Connect resource: budgeting assistant





## Governance and Human Resource Standard

SURVIVING

SUSTAINING

THRIVING

The roles and responsibilities of caregivers are written down and expressed adequately. The home complies with all licensing and government requirements. Staff meetings are held frequently to provide support and guidance pertaining to their positions. Staff, however, do not receive annual training on attachment and child development. They are very open to receiving this resource. The ministry that they operate does not have a board that directly oversees them, but their financial and spiritual oversight acts as a board in those ways. Caregivers attend an annual training to care for sick children and learn how to give guidance on hygiene and preventing illness. The organization abides by a vacation policy for all staff with exception of the directors. Employee files are kept up to date.

They feel they could improve their methods of training staff in the area of child participation.

- ☐ Participate in a training on attachment and child development before January 2025



## Current Improvement Partners



### Baja Love Outreach

Baja Love Outreach is a US-based nonprofit that exists to empower orphans and orphanages in Baja California, Mexico through supplemental aid and tangible love. Learn more at [www.bajaloveoutreach.net](http://www.bajaloveoutreach.net).

For a list of projects and opportunities to coordinate on go to  
[www.ACHF.org/Projects](http://www.ACHF.org/Projects)





+ A CHILD'S  
**HOPE**  
FOUNDATION