



## The transformation process of Casa Eudes of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico



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# Acronyms

<b>UNHCR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>COESPO</b>	State Population Council
<b>CTWWC</b>	<i>Changing the Way We Care</i>
<b>OLCGS</b>	Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund

## Background

**Casa Eudes is located in** Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and has provided residential care to girls that come from vulnerable situations. Since its inception fifty years ago, the programs have served more than 5000 girls through the residential care program in the different houses in different locations in Mexico.

Beginning in 2007, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity and the Congregation of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, began a process of canonical unification from their headquarters in Rome, to unite both Congregations, considering that the congregations had a common origin and complemented each other.

This process had a consensus among 97% of the Sisters, giving way to the process of global unification of the Congregations. This process culminated in June 2014, officially becoming a single congregation and in June 2016, after the visit of the Sisters of Rome, the specific process of unification of the two provincial congregations in Mexico began.

Starting in 2020, the congregation in Mexico began a process of discernment to change their mission in the work at Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua; specifically in their residential care facility, Casa Eudes.

### Casa Eudes in Ciudad Juárez

Casa Eudes in Ciudad Juárez has an extensive property located in an urban area and surrounded by commercial area and upper middle-class housing. The property has, three apartments, a community area, large gardens, and a large multipurpose room for events. These facilities were utilized to provide residential care to girls and adolescents in groups of five to ten. At the beginning of the transition process, they had 33 girls under their care distributed by age in three houses (apartments) in groups of ten to twelve per house. The Sisters who cared for the girls were very committed, although the girls kept in touch with their families through constant visits and spent weekends and holidays with the family or guardians. Aside from the new guidelines that influenced the decision to transform, Casa Eudes had struggled with their finances needed to maintain the residential program.



# Phase 1: Learning and Advocacy

With the merger of the congregations and a new guideline to provide other services outside of residential care for girls, Casa Eudes began a discernment process to identify the steps to take on the transition process and a new model for providing services to the community. These needs were intensified by the COVID 19 Pandemic.

## Preparation of the Strategic Plan

At the beginning of 2018, the Sisters of the province began to build a strategic plan that would be the guide to the transition they sought to undertake. After a time of prayer to discern a new way to serve the most vulnerable, the Sisters decided that they would work with women who were victims of violence. With a new strategic plan, they sought to make a full transition over a five-year period and began looking for a specific methodology to find and help the women they wanted to serve. For several months, they looked for opportunities to implement this new vision, yet they could not find a way to reach women who were victims of violence.

## A Strategic Alliance

In May of 2021, the congregation sought help with other organizations that could help guide them in the implementation of a new working model. The Jesuits were important guides in their preparation, and on that journey, they found Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC), an initiative with experience in transitioning services that was willing to support with technical assistance. With the support of CTWWC, the Sisters were able to learn more from other organizations with transition experiences and principles of a transition of services. In addition, this alliance aimed at supporting them in the processes of monitoring the transition and measuring the impact of change.

## A Divine Intervention

Sister Cecilia, the leader (or *Animadora* as she is referred to in Spanish) of Casa Eudes, Ciudad Juárez, says that after a moment of prayer asking for a light or some sign from God, this answer with a knock on her door. That same day (August 31, 2021), a group of individuals representing various organizations arrived, among them a Franciscan nun and Enrique Valenzuela, a representative of COESPO, (State Population Council). They arrived at Casa Eudes to share the urgent need in Ciudad Juárez to care for the migrant population, since the

“The need literally came  
to our door”

– SISTER CECILIA

shelters were overwhelmed and overrun. There were people sleeping in the parks and under bridges. This group of individuals trusted that Casa Eudes could be the answer to this overwhelming need.

After this spontaneous visit, the Sisters and some lay collaborators made visits to the different shelters to learn about the dynamics and the population that was being served. Seeing the number of people care for in the shelters, the overcrowded conditions they were living in, and seeing the number of people staying on the streets was impactful. The Sisters became aware of a reality they had not previously considered or understood serving a population of migrants. They learned about how these women and their children had been displaced and were fleeing situations of violence; they were much more likely to continue suffering without a comprehensive intervention.

## Clarity of Vision

In a process of discernment regarding the need that was presented to them in Casa Eudes, they realized that they could attend to these vulnerable populations in a comprehensive way based on a methodology of family strengthening. Specifically with women and their children in migration situations. Casa Eudes had the physical space to house this population.

As a result of the discernment process, the decision was made to accompany adult migrant women traveling with their young children up to the age of eight. These women and their children are among the most vulnerable populations living or transiting in Ciudad Juárez and are exposed to greater risks of sexual and armed violence, human trafficking, based-gender discrimination, ethnicity, social class, and immigration status.

## Learning from Others

Due to the nature of the transformation, Casa Eudes' leadership found opportunities to learn from others who came from more experienced organizations. In September of 2021, the Sisters were able to learn about the experience of a project that the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd has in Iquique, Chile. This project began in 2017 and has functional programs and an effective team of professionals.



Figure 1: A meeting of Sisters and staff takes place outside.

A few weeks later, (September 27, 2021), the Sisters learned from the experience of the congregation OLCGS in Cúcuta, Colombia in an area bordering Venezuela. This project had a lot of experience work with migrant women and shared their learnings to help in the formation of the programs at Casa Eudes.

Another important step to learn from others which paved the way for the design of an operational plan was the contact with the Jesuits. Father Leonel, María Elena, Maritza, and others were contacted to provide guidance and help with technical support to design the specific programs that would work at Casa Eudes. The Jesuits had an analysis of the reality of Ciudad Juárez and the complex issue of migration. They openly shared the methodologies they used to develop a new model of care based on their understanding of the situation.

The Sisters did not have to invent everything, because they positioned themselves to learn from others and adapt their experience to the care of the migrant population, especially the dead and their children who are the most vulnerable population and at risk of violations.

## Phase 2: Preparing for the transition

### Reunification of the Children

Within the Provincial strategic plan, the need to reunify girls had to precede the new area of attention towards women victims of violence and migration. This process of reuniting the girls with their families was accelerated by the pandemic since all the girls went out with their families as Casa Eudes was unable to meet all the requirements for the girls to remain in residential care. When they reached this juncture brought on by the pandemic, they decided to send the girls to their families.

### Change of Mindset

Throughout the transition, the Sisters changed their mindset from waiting for the girls to eventually return to going out and visiting the girls and their families in their homes. Many families did not find many services during the pandemic so residential care was transformed into outpatient care due to the needs of each family. Meanwhile, the Sisters took the time to clarify the new vision, in parallel providing care and resources to families in the community.

### Presentation of the New Model

Having confirmed the call that God had made to the Sisters to serve women in situations of violence, and now with those women on the move, on August 31 this decision was communicated to the leader of the Province, provincial Sister Teresa, and to the coordinator of the mission, Sister Celia.

On September 13, 2021, the Sisters began having conversations with María Elena and Maritza who shared with the community of Casa Eudes the analysis of the reality providing services related to migration in Ciudad Juárez. In these conversations, they were able to become familiar with the guiding



Figure 2: Women and child migrants.

documents and have more clarity about the reality of Ciudad Juárez and the most appropriate way to move forward.

Thanks to the contribution and progress made by the Jesuit Migrant Services and Jesuit Refugee Services teams, and the clarity that the community had to provide care to women and children who are migrating, they began to design the operations manual.

In October of the same year, the Sisters shared the progress of the new project with all the Sisters of the province. In this meeting they emphasized the Congregational and Provincial essence, projecting their model as a viable response to the





Figure 3: The sisters come together to discuss, pray, and reflect.

congregational guidelines and the strategic plan of the entire province. The new model had a launch date of November 25, 2021 and the strategic plan provided the guidelines to make this a reality. In parallel, progress was made in the consolidation of the operations manual, and they began to seek out financing for their new services.

## Emotional Effect of Change

During the transition, the Sisters had space to share their experiences and to process their emotions and fears. Some Sisters still have great difficulty in embracing this new reality, but over time the pain of change has subsided. About ten percent of the employees had a hard time accepting the change of model, but ninety percent have been fully supportive of the change.

The Sisters also received psychological counseling to be able to work through grief and cope with the emotional process of change.

Once the new non-residential care model was presented to the Sisters of the province, there was a variety of reactions since many of them were very committed to the previous model. Everyone involved was engaged with the girls residing at Casa Eudes and it was an emotional transition to get to the point of embracing the new reality with a new way of serving.



## Phase 3: Full Transition

The community of Ciudad Juárez has transformed its programs and now operates according to the strategic plan of the province. This change has come despite important challenges such as the development of protocols and procedures on the admission of women and the care they receive. Casa Eudes has aligned with congregational guidelines and now provides services to women who are victims of violence and their children. Lessons continue to be learned as there is much to discover about an effective methodology considering the dynamic nature of migration. Leaving the residential care of girls in the past, they managed to implement new services based on the family and the community.

### Monitoring and Follow-up of Reunified Girls

As part of the transition, it was important to provide follow up with the girls who previously resided at Casa Eudes. The reunification process was abrupt due to the COVID-19 pandemic and pressure to deinstitutionalize however, the Sisters were able to verify that most of the girls were well cared for and safe in their families.

Considering that the program's new services for women and their children do not include care for families in the community, the Sisters used the time during the pandemic (before opening the program for migrant women) to help the reunified girls, providing psychological therapy, medical and psychiatric support. In general, the Sisters saw that the girls were adapting well to life with their families.



Figure 4: Activities with children at Casa Eudes.

### Population of People in Transit

Considering that Mexico is a territory of origin, transit, and also a destination for displaced peoples, the migratory flow is mainly made up of people from Central America, especially from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. It is worth mentioning that in recent months many women who have arrived at home Eudes were internally displaced (from the south and center of Mexico). A substantial part of this population has fled from the systemic violence of their places of origin. To specialize their model of care aimed at migrant women and their children, it was important to carry out a comprehensive preparation process through case management. It is likely that most mothers with their children will never return to their countries of origin, so they must develop skills to find opportunities that support their families, whether they cross the border to the United States or not.

The girls and adolescents lived in residential care but managed to transition into their families with a little support and accompaniment. They adapted easily, which offered them hope that a transition could be successful.

## Phase 4: New Services with Positive Results

**With all the experience** of working with vulnerable populations in the context of residential care, the Sisters now focus their efforts on providing a dignified, welcoming, and safe space for women with their children. With the new model of care, they have the capacity to accommodate 75 women and children, divided into three departments, each with a capacity for 25 people. Under Sister Cecilia's leadership, there are three Sisters who work full-time with the help of other volunteers, a social worker, and a part-time volunteer psychologist.

According to the operational manual, everyone has a specific function with an important role in the execution of the programs. Work has with certain intake filters due to the specific profile they deal with. At first, they were quite afraid to receive these women and their children due to the complexity around the migratory phenomenon and their lack of experience of working in this field. However, with the operational manual and a strong conviction to serve this vulnerable population, the first woman was welcomed into care in the last week of November 2021.

### Comprehensive Care

Now with the new services, Casa Eudes seeks to welcome migrant women along with their children to receive food, lodging and care. In addition, the Sisters seek to promote the physical and mental health of the women with their children through psychological therapy, and access to medical services. As part of congregational values, women



Figure 5: Art projects provide respite for children who have been on the migratory journey.

and their children also have the opportunity to receive spiritual guidance, participate in times of prayer, and receive counsel.

In addition to comprehensive care such as psychological and medical services, the Sisters of Casa Eudes now seek to equip and empower women through workshops and vocational classes. The workshops include topics such as baking and jewelry making which seek to equip the women to provide for their families.

### Legal Guidance

As part of the comprehensive accompaniment of women and their families, the program seeks the regularization of the migratory status of women in transit, providing information that is objective, timely and helpful.

This support is provided through a network that is made up of other organizations in the area. Upon

In a world of so much misinformation, the women at Casa Eudes receive comprehensive and adequate legal support.



arriving at Casa Eudes, a connection is made with one of the partners who provides immigration accompaniment and ensures a transparent and legal process.

## The Importance of Relationship

Naturally, the sisters of the Congregation create emotional bonds with the women who pass through Casa Eudes. Many of them have graduated and communicate with the sisters through messages and calls even when they have crossed the border. Some women maintain contact despite the being far away and removed from care. This type of follow-up is important as it provides stability through supportive relationships. Although their immigration status implies uncertainty and certain mobility restrictions, the sisters have the opportunity to stay in touch and be part of a support network that will be important for a successful adaptation and help develop family resilience.

## Dynamic Population

Before the transition, the girls stayed in Casa Eudes for years, however, now the women and their children are there for one to three weeks. This movement is constant with women and children arriving and leaving almost every day. As part of the inter-border program, women are provided with the necessary support to cross the border, and, on one occasion 28 people left care in a single day. That same day 10 more arrived to fill the spaces they had left.

Currently, women stay in the program for one to three weeks, depending on their legal situation. One woman who came to receive help at Casa Eudes was being persecuted because she decided to flee violence in her community in another state

of Mexico. Her family was being extorted and they even kidnapped her son. This small family arrived at Casa Eudes in a state of emergency fleeing the violence and extortion that almost took their son's life. This confirms that the choice of the new model is the right one, because it helps people who are exposed to violence of any kind and the Sisters welcome them with love and patience to help them feel safe and overcome their fears.

## Pilot Program

There is a pilot program that the government of the United States is supporting to favor some women to be able to cross the border in a safe way. This proposal came to Casa Eudes due to its positioning and reliability in the work they have been doing with the women in their care. Thanks to the support of UNICEF, COESPO and the government of the United States, they have already seen the first groups of women in the pilot program successfully cross the border, far removed from the dangers that normally accompany the process. At first, there were fears that women would be left unprotected along the way, but they saw that the accompaniment from UNICEF, COESPO and the United States government has been reliable and that women are receiving the necessary support

## Support Networks

Although the direct and daily work is done by the sisters and volunteers who work at Casa Eudes, there is a very valuable network of support for the Sisters. UNICEF and COESPO visit constantly offering support to the sisters working on the project. Apart from providing technical assistance, this network also supports by obtaining donations for the operation of the care programs. Now the sisters are content

Casa Eudes has the possibility to help more women because of the trusting relationship they have built with the government and other organizations.

and embrace the model with much enthusiasm. The sisters who live in Casa Eudes are not alone as they are constantly receiving trainings and workshops.

## Future Plans

In the future, the sisters seek to formalize and implement a globalized methodology for working with women and their children. When the sisters cared for the girls in the residential care model, there was no formal follow-up after their reunification, and they did not have any reintegration processes. This situation has completely changed and now they see the need to accompany women beyond the walls of Casa Eudes.

Considering that all the women and their children leave Casa Eudes to seek to cross the border and enter the United States, the sisters wish to establish a network between Mexico, Central America, and the United States. They have come up with several ideas and proposals to follow up on the women who have crossed the border after being at Casa Eudes. This idea is to coordinate with other congregations to provide more lasting support and efficient monitoring. The bishop of El Paso, TX in the United States is very supportive of the Casa Eudes project and there is a community of the same congregation in that city that could be a source of support for families.

Casa Eudes transformed from providing residential care for some girls to impacting generations through the comprehensive protection of women with their children.



# Conclusions

**For many years,** Casa Eudes existed to provide residential care for girls and adolescents who could not be with their families. Over time, congregational guidelines came to the province of Mexico, decidedly stating that residential care was not the best solution, and that charity should be expressed through non-residential care programs. In this process of incorporating the guidelines, the COVID 19 Pandemic came to streamline the processes of deinstitutionalization for many residential care facilities, as was the case of Casa Eudes. In a short time, all the girls and adolescents were reunited with their families, a situation that provided an incredible opportunity for Casa Eudes to transition.



Figure 6: A gathering of women, children, and team members of Casa Eudes.

## From Residential Care to Comprehensive Programs

Although they followed the girls and adolescents reunited in their families, the pandemic created the space for the sisters of Casa Eudes to redefine their mission. With the decision to provide services to women victims of violence, the operational manual was developed to continue the work. With a provincial alliance with COESPO and then the Jesuits, the sisters learned about the situation of

displaced women who were victims of violence; the women that had the greatest needs were coming to their city in search of shelter.

Before the transition began, Casa Eudes sheltered approximately 30 girls and adolescents and now, since November 2021, they have provided shelter and protection to more than 170 women with their young children. The programs that work in Casa Eudes today, have a much bigger impact than before and address an urgent need such as care for women who are migrating.

The implementation of the new care services for women and their children has been a learning process. The sisters highlight the importance of working as a team and seeking supportive partnerships to build their programs on the experiences and knowledge of others. Now, women and their children stay relatively little time at Casa Eudes, yet they receive all the support, care and protection they need on their journey to a safer life. This new reality at Casa Eudes is due to God's provision that has been evident in the opportunities that the sisters have had to transform their services in a comprehensive and effective way. Casa Eudes has a much broader reach than before and is positioned to continue impacting the most vulnerable populations of Ciudad Juárez. Casa Eudes is a light that continues to shine in the darkness.



**Changing The Way We Care<sup>SM</sup> (CTWWC)** is an initiative implemented by Catholic Relief Services and Maestral International, along with other global, national and local partners, working together to change the way we care for children and adolescents around the world. Our main global partners are Better Care Network, Lumos Foundation and Faith to Action. CTWWC is partially funded by a USAID Global Development Alliance, MacArthur Foundation and GHR Foundation.

For more information on Changing the Way We Care, contact us:

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