



**A story of transition of
the Congregation of
Our Lady of Charity
of the Good Shepherd
in Tijuana, Mexico**



August 2022

Acronyms

CNSCBP Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

CTWWC *Changing the Way We Care*

Background

Since being founded in 1975, Casa Eudes, located in the city of Tijuana, has provided residential care for vulnerable girls and youth. With more than 5,000 girls served through the residential care program over the past 50 years, Casa Eudes has a clear vision to help the most vulnerable populations and implemented residential care to achieve that goal.

Beginning in 2007, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity and the Congregation 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.

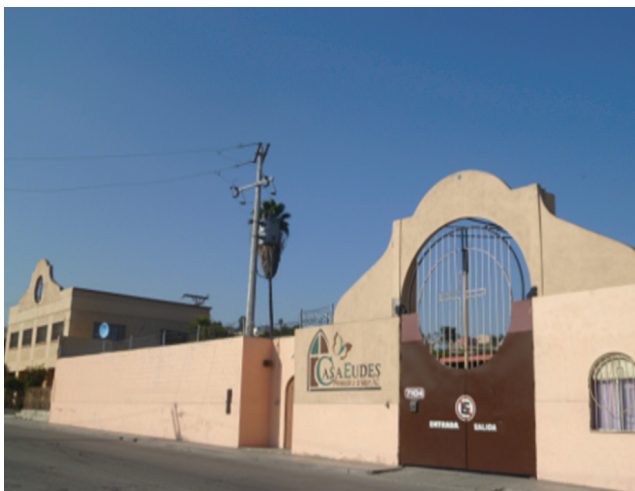


Figure 1: The Casa Eudes building in Tijuana

Time to Change

This unification process had the support of 97% of the sisters of the congregation, which gave way to the global unification process of the organizations. This process culminated in June 2014, officially becoming a single congregation (Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd) and in June 2016, after the visit of the Sister Superiors of Rome, began the process of unification of both congregations in the different provinces of Mexico.

At the same time, new guidelines on alternative care for children came out of Rome, providing a visionary focus that went beyond the provision of residential care. In 2014, Casa Eudes began to implement the changes in the face of these new congregational guidelines and accordingly launched a family reunification program for the girls in their care.

In 2019, before embarking on a process of formal transition, the residential care program at Casa Eudes was run by a community of six Sisters who provided residential care to thirty-three girls.



Phase 1: Learning and Advocacy

The global COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 brought many direct and indirect changes to the residential care program, in which the Sisters had diligently worked for over 50 years. Because of the pandemic, government authorities implemented different measures to reduce the spread of the disease, including a general directive for residential care providers to reunify their children with their families. This included the girls who resided at Casa Eudes.

These new measures coincided with the ongoing work started in 2014 to reunify the girls with their

families. It also supported what was outlined in the congregational guidelines that developed different policies around child safeguarding and a shift in the congregational positioning with a focus on human rights and child-centered approach. Coupled with increasing pressure from government authorities to reunify the girls served in the residential care program and the decision of those in leadership to respond to congregational guidelines, the transition process began to move forward.

The preventative measures that were implemented because of the COVID 19 pandemic helped speed up the reunification process. It was there that they realized that all the girls in care had a family, and that they could take care of them.

Evaluation and Planning Process

As a first step, the leadership of Casa Eudes, Tijuana, was proactive in conducting an evaluation of the residential program which allowed them to consider the best way to continue with the vision they always had of supporting the most vulnerable in their community, only now without using residential care as their main program.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the general management of Casa Eudes began to meet with members of its multidisciplinary team and all members of the religious community of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd to discern a strategy to change the model of care and continue to help the most vulnerable in the community. The Sisters had a lot of experience that helped to inform the process and position them to support children and adolescents in the context of their families.

As a result of these meetings, conversations and evaluation, a strategy was developed to transform their residential care model. As a part of this strategy, a follow-up program was set up to reunify the girls with their families while the staff dedicated time developing a work plan to prevent the separation of families and thus minimize the need for residential care in the future.

The Girls and Their Families

Due to the emotional challenges that come with a change of this magnitude, the Sisters began working with the girls and their families to process their emotions and navigate the transition to a new way of living in the community. Given the rapid nature of these reunifications, it was important to learn that all the girls in residential care had parents (most returned to a single mother) or relatives who could take care of them. The girls who lived in Casa Eudes were not orphans; the problem was that their

families lacked resources and support to provide for their daughters in a healthy and permanent way. During the reunification and monitoring processes, the girls, their mothers, and other relatives received trainings, interventions, and informative talks to learn about different ways to prioritize and care for their mental health and build resilience during the adaptation process.

Emotional Response to Change

With the departure of the girls from Casa Eudes, the Sisters were also emotionally impacted by the changes and found refuge in prayer and the community that exists among them. A transition of services implies real changes in the lives of those who receive care as well as for those who provide it. However, it was a priority to address these needs through emotional support and spiritual guidance to manage the grieving process. The Sisters were suffering a great loss that could not be eclipsed by an inspiring vision of the future. They needed to grieve for what they had lost in this step of the transition. These Sisters were giving up their method of service that they had implemented for many years, and in some cases, the Sisters believed that it was the only thing they knew how to do.¹

Following up with Reunified Families

As part of the reunification program, the Sisters pivoted from providing residential care to following up with reunified families, through tutoring, scholarships, and financial support. Through this approach and follow-up process carried out by the Sisters of Casa Eudes, they began to observe that most of the girls had adapted to the changes surprisingly well. The positive results of the reunifications with families served as evidence that the vision of caring for the most vulnerable did not require residential care but could be carried out from a family and community-based approach.

¹ For more information about the process of transition related to the transformation of service model, you can read, [Walking at the Speed of Trust](#).

Phase 2: Preparing for the transition

The congregation had been discerning the transition process and although they had experience, clear guidelines, a strategy, infrastructure, and the human resources to implement the work, an important step was missing. To meet the real needs of the most vulnerable in an effective way, they had to understand what the community needed most. Therefore, in March of 2021, a group of Sisters went out to walk the streets of the neighborhood close to Casa Eudes, under the leadership of one of the Sisters. On this journey they saw nearby schools where the children studied and witnessed that those families who were served by the school lived in situations of extreme poverty. Later, with the intention of getting to know the student's families, they walked to their houses and saw how they lived. In these visits, the Sisters came to understand the reality of poverty in *Colonia Esperanza* that most people lived in. It was on these home visits that they saw first-hand the devastating common factors that were weighing the families down such as poor access to all basic services and malnutrition.

Strategic Alliance

In May of 2021, the Congregational Office of Provincial Development identified Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC) as an initiative that coincided with the transition plans the province needed. Additionally, CTWWC had already expressed interest in providing technical assistance and the congregation believed that with CTWWC's experience and support, they could initiate a successful transition process. Following the strategy that Casa Eudes had proposed to change their model as requested by the provincial directorate,

a diagnosis was carried out to determine the real needs of the surrounding communities and generate care programs that responded to those needs. With the support of CTWWC, they proceeded to evaluate the information obtained from the community diagnosis and create a new model of care based on the actual needs of the community.



Figure 2: All families in the community were displaced and most of them lived in extreme poverty.

Community Assessment

In this assessment process, it was identified that, in *Colonia Esperanza* near Casa Eudes, the community included 500 houses and more than 1000 people residing in the area. The area does not have storm drains, access to clean drinking water, garbage extraction and, most significantly, it is in a high-risk area for landslides and other climatic phenomena as pictured in the photos at right.

In the same rapid assessment, they discovered that the population they sought to serve presented different problems ranging from extreme poverty to domestic violence. Some 50% of the families were categorized as having family violence that mainly affected women and children. Eight out of every ten families received a weekly salary of \$1,200 pesos (\$60USD) and 100% of the families within the

In order to make an effective transformation of services, it was necessary to understand the reality of the population they wished to serve.

The Sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Casa Eudes, Tijuana, agreed that residential care took all their time and attention, which did not allow them to see the reality that was only a few steps from their front door. They saw just how important it was to extend their work and mission.

target population were internally displaced from other states within Mexico. The families in this area were found to be living in precarious situations full of poverty and social risk. In addition, there were limited economic and labor opportunities due to poor access and no public transportation.

With the support and review of CTWWC, Casa Eudes' leadership documented the findings from the rapid assessment to create a solid foundation on which new care programs could be built. Having understood and seen first-hand the great needs of

the surrounding community, the Sisters converged their knowledge and previous experience with the new findings to develop a comprehensive care program for families in the community.

Interacting with Donors

Faced with the reality of change in the residential program at Casa Eudes, Tijuana, there was a lot of uncertainty in the community of Sisters, as there was no specific funding set up for the new programs. When the proposal for change was presented to the donors that had previously supported Casa Eudes



“It is not other people who should condition us as we are the ones who mark the step towards the new vision”

– SISTER ANA BERTA



with a monthly donation, the information was not well received. The donors made it clear that they had no interest in continuing to support financially if the girls were not living full time at Casa Eudes. Throughout the pandemic, funds were more difficult to attain for the programming and some support simply stopped coming in. And yet, the Sisters continued to trust in God’s provision for the new project. Interestingly, when they started with the non-residential programs, several new donors approached Casa Eudes’ leadership, with the intention of contributing economically and support the vision of supporting the community beyond the walls of Casa Eudes.

One of the biggest local donors who had supported the mission for over 50 years strongly opposed the program changes and communicated her decision to stop donating altogether. Communication with the Sisters ceased after a very tense meeting in which Sister Ana Berta shared the new vision, to which there was a lot of resistance and opposition.

When considering what steps should be taken to restore the relationship with these estranged donors, Sister Ana Berta decided to wait and give time for all parties to consider and internalize the proposed changes. After a while, the donor contacted the Sisters, informing that she would return to support financially and was excited about

the new vision. Sister Ana Berta now shares of all that was learned when faced with the risk of losing important donors. They pressed on in their planning and did not change their vision. They held their faith that the change was right. Working with what they had learned about *Colonia Esperanza*, they sought to show the donors the importance of working with families and the community, all with a focus on family strengthening and prevention of separation.



Figure 3: An activity in the outside area of Casa Eudes

Over time, many of the donors who were emotionally committed to the residential care model came to accept the changes and continued their support of Casa Eudes. With a new model of care, they focused their efforts on a community center aimed at strengthening families and preventing the unnecessary separation of children or adolescents from their family environment.

Phase 3: Full Transition

On October 26, 2021, the new model of care was formally launched; a program that was developed by the team of Sisters, staff, and collaborators of Casa Eudes to continue with the vision of helping the most vulnerable people, but now in the context of family and community. Armed with a solid understanding of current issues and intervention tools, the Sisters had built a viable response for the entire community. The target population of Casa Eudes changed from being a residential care approach for some girls, to a comprehensive provision of support for a significant number of families residing in the community of *Colonia Esperanza*.

The prevention program called “*Niños y Niñas de Corazones Sonrientes*” (Children with Smiling Hearts) now exists to respond to the urgent needs of children and their families in the community. Through this program, family-oriented services are provided while seeking that all families can remain together.

The new model has two strategic objectives: improving school performance and holistic development of children and their families. These two objectives are pursued through the different actions described below.

The Importance of Positive Parenting

In all activities carried out in the different programs, positive parenting material designed to equip parents to interact with their children with respect and love is used.

- **Educational program:** This program seeks to equip students for optimal educational performance and reduce school dropout due to a lack of support. This is done with the help of tutors that help with homework, provide follow

up and facilitate workshops where formative principles and values are taught.

- **Mental health program:** As part of the holistic care and development they seek to foster, mental health is focused on through psychological therapies for children, adolescents, and their families. Through emotional guidance and other types of interventions, the goal is to develop emotional and cognitive abilities in children so that they can make responsible decisions while developing empathy, optimism, and hope.
- **Artistic program:** This program aims to develop auditory, visual, and physical capabilities through painting with a psychological approach. In addition, singing and laughing are used therapeutically to channel emotions through artistic expression and thus promote knowledge and practice of values and principles.
- **Feeding Program:** By offering the “*Cena Segura*” (Safe Dinner in English) where the children of the program receive a complete and balanced dinner at 5:30 pm every afternoon, they seek to contribute to the physical well-being of the children and alleviate family budgets.

The difficult situations that were discovered by the Sisters on their walks through the community and the subsequent assessment now form the justification of these comprehensive programs. The work in the community is designed to specifically address the complexity of displacement, considering the difficulties that a lack of education and life in poverty add to the already complex situation. Currently, Casa Eudes uses its infrastructure to carry out different workshops, therapies and classes that are changing children's lives and positively impacting the health of entire families in the *Esperanza* Community.



A New Reality

After serving thirty-nine girls in residential care, the Sisters now support sixty-three children and adolescents and their families. In total, **the programs now reach 600 people** considering all the members of the families benefited through the family strengthening programs.

Sister Ana Berta comments that the families take charge of promoting the programs within the same community to the point that they have more people enrolled than they have resources to support. The same ones who benefit from the programs have become champions for Casa Eudes which has brought about incredibly successful and entirely organic growth.

Phase 4: New Services: Positive Results

The programs that have been established after transitioning from residential care are impacting the *Esperanza* community and strengthening families so they can provide better care for their children. In the short time that the new model has been functioning, families have been the ones to reap the benefits of the programs which have fostered a sense of unity in the community, greater interaction among citizens, and more effective communication between different families.

The Sisters that run the programs have also experienced positive results within their own congregation. With established structure and schedules to respond to the needs of children, as well as their families through the different programs, the Sisters have more time to participate in the different congregational activities which was not possible in a residential care model that required their attention 24 hours a day and 365 days a year.

A Vision for the Future

The family-centered programming has incorporated elements of monitoring and evaluation, to measure the impact of the new model, designing indicators of success of existing programs and seeking to increase the following:

- Number of children with adequate physical growth and mental health scores.
- Number of children that improve their cognitive functions and soft skills
- Number of children and their families cared for through a therapeutic process
- Number of families improving care practices with their children
- Number of children who finish the 2024 school year with the necessary knowledge and skills to advance to the next grade.



Figure 4: A design drawn by sisters in the community of Guanajuato illustrate the process of model transformation and goal. The stones and the cacti represent the challenges but then the road is filled with flowers and in the end a united family, supported and taking care of their daughters and sons.



Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the struggle of the most vulnerable people in every society and the community of *Colonia Esperanza* was not the exception. With a vulnerable population of displaced people immersed in poverty, this area has little access to necessary services, creating a dire situation that families must face with limited resources. In the middle of this difficult scene, the Congregation of Religious of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, through Casa Eudes, has responded in a way that shines in the darkness.

Having provided residential care for 50 years, the transition from residential care has been a path with many challenges and lessons learned. However, the leadership of Casa Eudes, convinced that change was necessary to continue with the vision of supporting the most vulnerable now does so with a focus on families and the community.

In the transition process, they have reunified all the girls that were previously cared for in residential

care. In addition, they continue to provide follow-up to these girls that serves to strengthen these families and prevent future separation. With a focus on education, nutrition and child development, new families in the community are benefiting through consistent and caring support. Family strengthening efforts are addressing the root causes of separation of families by providing safe and loving spaces for children to develop in an optimal and holistic way.

Although there is much work to be done in *Colonia Esperanza*, it continues to move forward towards a complete transformation. Casa Eudes has begun to incorporate different elements of monitoring and evaluation, and the specialization of the model and its programs. They have also managed to draw the attention of UNICEF and other agencies who have shown interest in supporting the transformation of services just as CTWWC continues to provide technical assistance to positively impact the entire community.

Changing The Way We CareSM (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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