

See inside for ways you can support families.

The magazine of Buckner International | FALL 2023

# Buckner

## Today

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# Buckner Today

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**Melissa Grych**

GRAPHIC ARTIST  
**Luis Pérez**

CONTRIBUTORS  
**Jon Mark Beilue**  
**Shaie Williams**  
**Chris Cato**

## CONTACT

**EMAIL:** bucknercommunications@buckner.org

**PHONE:** 214-758-8000

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– Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls® gives 5 millionth pair of shoes. | Read more on page 30.

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## Vulnerable to the vulnerable

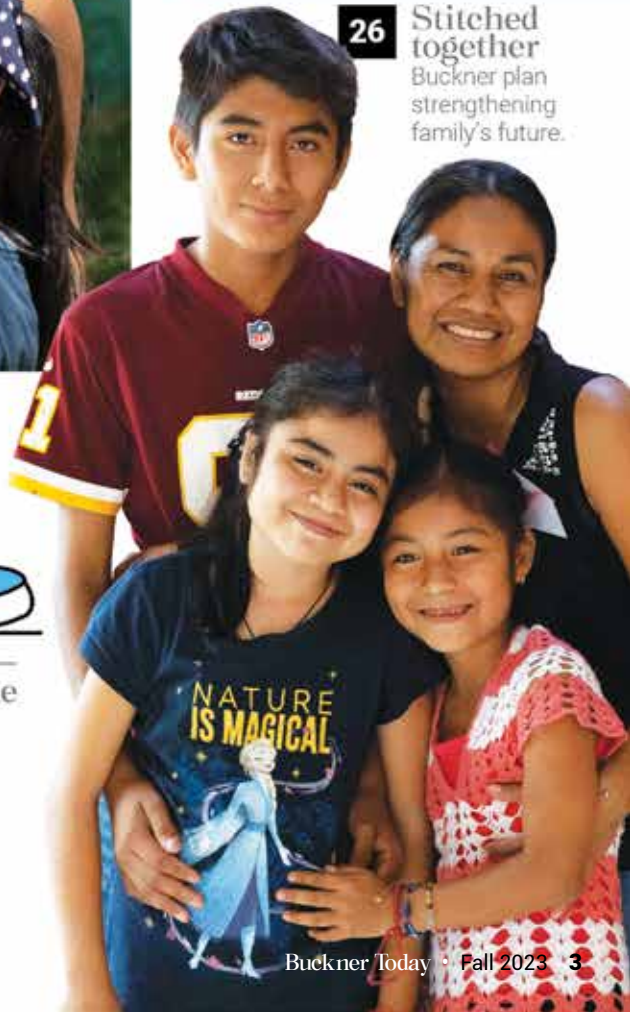
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## Never Alone: The Power of Family to Inspire Hope



*Isaac and Jacob by Jusepe de Ribera*

I walked right past it, but my son Josh called me back. I spent the next 30 minutes staring at it.

We were walking through the Louvre in Paris this past summer, absorbing some of the greatest artwork in the world when Josh beckoned me to turn back and look at Isaac and Jacob a painting by Jusepe de Ribera.

The painter captured in a single image one of the most transformative stories of the Old Testament, as Jacob, at the urging of his mother Rebecca steals the family blessing from his older brother Esau. The painting is poignant, with Ribera showing the treachery of mother and son, as Rebecca's hand pushes Jacob forward to Isaac.

I was captivated by Ribera's ability to tell the Genesis 27 story with art. But it also reminded me of the work I've been doing the past year and a half writing my third book. Each of the books I've written have connected to Buckner's work in some way, so a book about family was a natural topic for me. Our core programs connect in some way to family, from the Buckner Family Hope Center® and Buckner Family Pathways® programs, to placing children in foster families, many who adopt those children and of course, our senior living communities, which are in many ways large families for our residents and associates.

Like you, my story starts well before me. We are all products of generations of family members who went ahead of us and shaped the contours of our lives. For some of us, those contours are well defined and shape who we have become. But for many people, especially those served by Buckner International, the contours are filled with detours, potholes, and sharp curves.

The context for anything I write is the Bible. So, scripture was my starting point for this new book. I decided to examine families of the

Bible to discover the key to healthy homes. As you might know, I was disappointed. What I found was family after family in the Bible that dealt with dysfunction in multiple ways, including of course, the first family that was marked by betrayal and accusation and of course, the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**My new book, "Never Alone: The Power of Family to Inspire Hope," is due out in early 2024. We're still in the editing phase, but I wanted to give you a glimpse of the book by sharing the preface and part of the introduction in this issue of Buckner Today. Hopefully the book gives you an opportunity to reflect on your own family and the power of your family to inspire hope into your life. And I pray that you see your power to inspire hope for other families like those we serve at Buckner.**

Writing this book helps me put our work into context. I've realized with even more passion the power and importance of Buckner's mission to protect children and strengthen families. Throughout our history as a ministry, we have helped vulnerable children find hope through a strong family, whether that family is formed through adoption or a family strengthening program. There is no substitute for God's plan and family is the center of God's plan from the beginning.



**Albert Reyes, President and CEO**  
Buckner International  
Visit my blog at  
[AlbertLReyes.com](http://AlbertLReyes.com)



**An excerpt from**  
**Never Alone: The Power of Family to Inspire Hope**

**Preface and Introduction:**

This book is about family. This journey about family reflects my deep family roots, gratitude, and appreciation for all who have come before me. While “family” for some cultures points to a nuclear unit of father, mother, and a few children, my understanding of family is much broader and includes grandparents, parents, in-laws, uncles, aunts, and cousins—a panorama of linkage. I am intrigued and naturally connected to my family past, present, and future. These family connections cross cultures, nations, and geographic boundaries frame who I am today and what I do. Therefore, I wish to acknowledge my family and dedicate this work to them.

I realize I am the product of several families who have impacted my life in multiple ways. The Stevensons in Scotland and Mexico, the Garcia family in Mexico and Texas, and the Guerrero and Villanueva families in Mexico all contribute a maternal biological and familial stream of ancestry deposited in me and my family today. A rich history of Roman Catholic Christian faith and tradition flows toward me from the past. The Reyes and Rodriguez families of my father in Mexico and Texas form the other piece of my ancestral composition with a rich history of Baptist Christian faith. You have given me a place to call home, and a family to belong to. My mother’s eleven siblings and my father’s eight siblings provided me seventy first cousins, with the children of my first cousins continuing to grow our family tree.

My family story extends through my marriage to Belinda R. Alvarado Reyes. Over the last 42 years you have been an incredible friend, wife, ministry partner, and mother to our three sons: Joshua, David, and Thomas. The family I have come to know and love through my marriage have blessed me and accepted me as a brother: Rogelio (Rocky) and Michelle; and their adult children, Jacob and Rachel; and Robert and his daughter, ShyAnne. My late father-in-law, Rev. Baldemar J. Alvarado, and my mother-in-law, Elia Olivares Alvarado, accepted me as a son. The Alvarado and Olivares families have blessed me with a place to call home and a family to belong to.

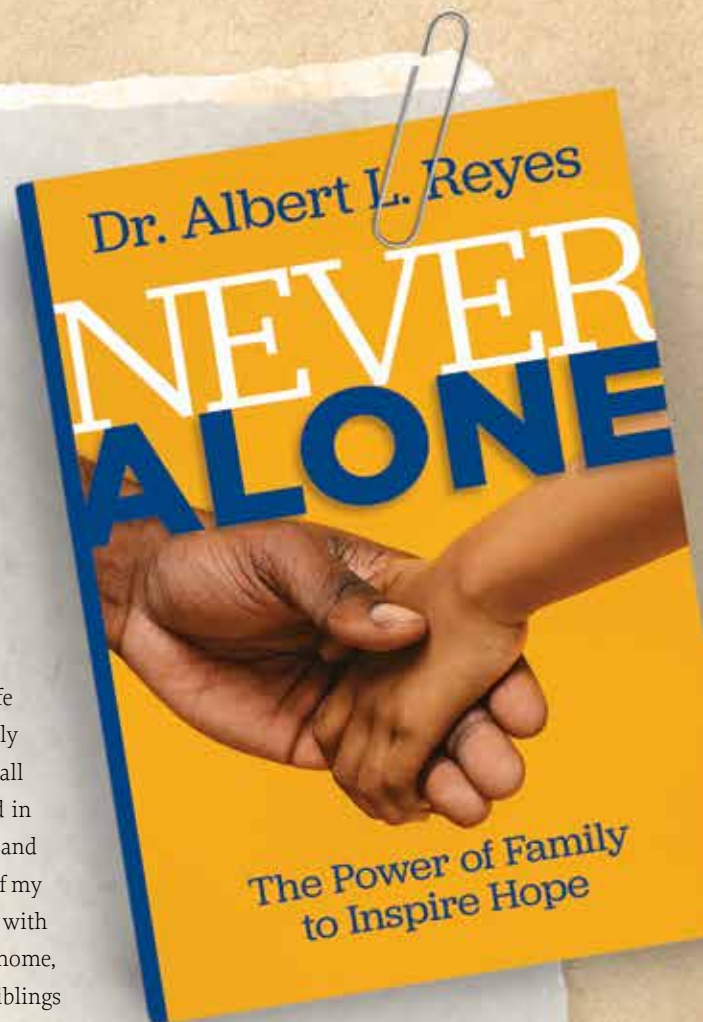
**God sets the lonely in families**

Psalm 68: 6 (NIV)

Imagine a future without a family. What would it be like? You would never attend a family reunion. You would have no one to invite to your wedding. You would have no spouse to commit your life to. You would have no children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren to enjoy. You would not gather with them for special holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, birthdays, and other special occasions.

You would have no names to write down for next of kin. You would have no one to contact in case of an emergency. You would not have grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, or cousins to visit or connect with for any of life’s experiences. No family would visit you in the hospital or attend your funeral. There would be nobody to mourn the loss of you or remember all that you were, all that you did, all that you achieved. You would have no family to list in your last will and testament, and no one to leave your belongings to. You would have no family members to serve as the executor of your estate.

You would have no need to trace your ancestry. You would be alone with no one. Your future would seem directionless since you have no family roots. You would have no sense of where you came from or where you were going. You would be alone at the center of your universe. Few things in life could be worse than having no family. What kind of future might you hope for without a family?





## Forever

I came to Buckner during a time of transition. For decades, Buckner had a major role in the placement of infant children for adoption with forever families. Most of those adoptions were considered “closed,” meaning there was no contact between the family placing the child for adoption, the family adopting the child, and the child. All records were strictly sealed and could only be seen under specific rules and guidelines, if at all.

But in the mid-1990s, when I arrived at Buckner, everything was changing. Cultural and social factors were having an impact on infant placements and the number of adoptions consummated by Buckner had fallen from a high of around 350 a year to just two or three. This change proved a conundrum for Buckner because of our strong belief in adoption as an important part of our ministry.

Buckner moved into facilitating “open adoptions,” a relationship where the birthmother and her family, along with the birthfather in many instances were involved in selecting the family to adopt their child. There was an open relationship, with the adopting family often forming a tight bond with the birth family, sharing significant moments in the child’s life.

The changes in domestic adoption placement also spurred Buckner to review our programs and services, realizing the need to support parents, especially single parents. One of the outcomes of that examination was the starting of the Buckner Family Pathways® model providing safe housing options for single parents while offering counseling and a chance to go to college.

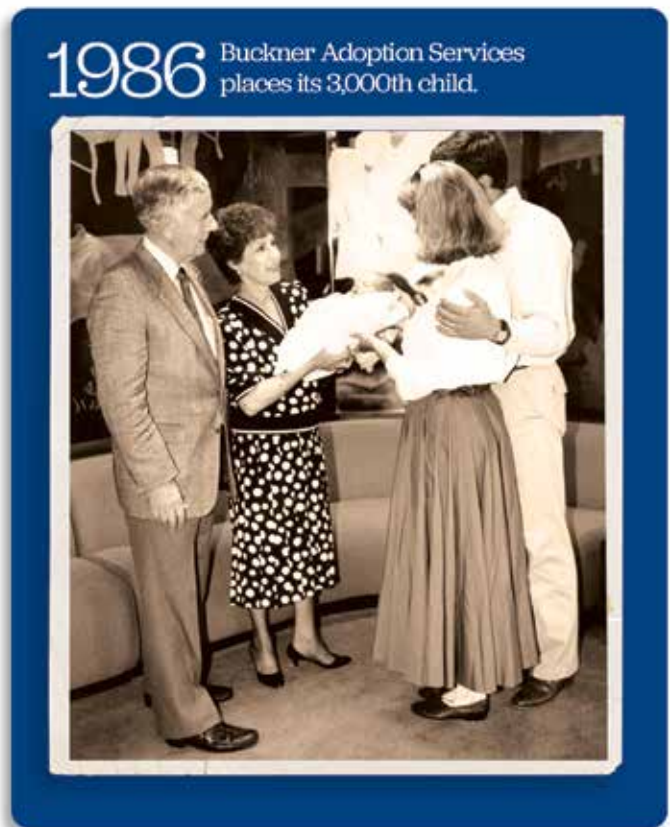
Another outcome was the move to international adoptions which started in 1995 with our first placement from Russia. In the intervening years, until Russia closed international adoption placements, Buckner facilitated more than 350 adoptions from there in addition to placements from other countries.

Over the past 30 years, as I have worked at Buckner exhibits from the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meetings to local churches, one of the most common comments or questions I get revolved around adoption. The conversations typically go like this. “My cousin was adopted through Buckner.” Or, “I was adopted through Buckner.”

While the records indicate placements from Buckner going back almost to our beginnings as an organization, it wasn’t until 1953 that Buckner became an officially licensed adoption placement agency, which was a new piece of the adoption puzzle at that time.

On a personal note, some of the first Buckner stories I wrote about 30 years ago were amazing stories of love and the power of an open adoption. I saw these extraordinary relationships blossom in many instances, with the adopting parents often becoming surrogate

aunts and uncles to the birthmother. The most extraordinary part of the entire process was seeing the common love for the child, or as Buckner’s mantra has been, “We find families for children, not children for families.”



October brought together all these elements as we celebrated 70 years since Buckner became an officially licensed adoption agency. We invited adult adopted persons, adoptive families, former staff, and others connected to our adoption ministry through the years to celebrate with us on Oct. 21. We gathered together that day with gratitude and looked back at the lives impacted by adoption through Buckner.

And now, with conviction and optimism, we look forward to how God will continue using Buckner to shine hope in the lives of vulnerable children and families. We celebrated a once-in-a-life event, but we know God’s mercies are never-ending.



*Scott Collins is Senior Vice President of Communications at Buckner International.*



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# BUCKNER *Journal*

## >> \$300,000 grant awarded to Buckner by the United States Department of Agriculture

*The grant will allow Buckner to expand its Healthy Housing program and ensure new homes continue to be built for families in the Rio Grande Valley.*



**B**uckner International was the recipient of a \$300,000 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture. The two-year grant will allow Buckner to expand its Healthy Housing program by sustaining operational overhead costs such as staff salaries, office and storage space, and administrative expenses while also ensuring at least 13 new homes are built for families in the Rio Grande Valley.

"We are thankful to USDA for investing in Healthy Housing in the Rio Grande Valley," said Diego Da Silva, director of strategic

projects at Buckner International. "Throughout our service in the Valley, we met hundreds of families who need a healthy home. This grant will allow us to help some of these families over the next two years and continue to equip and elevate them. USDA is supporting our goals of strengthening families and transforming generations."

The grant was announced early June in Peñitas at the Buckner Homeowner Celebration, a special event celebrating National Homeownership Month for many of the families who worked with Buckner to build a home and transform their lives.

The grant, called USDA Rural Development Mutual Self-Help Housing Technical Assistance Grant, is provided to qualified organizations to help them carry out local self-help housing construction projects.

As grant recipients, Buckner supervises the construction of the homes while the families participate in the construction labor.

Buckner Healthy Housing helps families have access to a safe and healthy home, leading to lasting change in the family's social and emotional well-being. The program, which includes home builds, healthy homes, bathroom builds and home repair workshops, seeks to help families move to a healthier lifestyle together but also reinforces self-esteem and improves health and hygiene basics.

**Learn more about Buckner Healthy Housing on pgs. 34-37.**

## >> Parkway Place celebrates 25 years serving seniors in Houston

**P**arkway Place residents and associates gathered in July to celebrate the senior living community's 25th anniversary in Houston. Among the residents was Ella Phipps, who moved into Parkway Place in 1998.

"Three months after they opened, I found my forever home," said Phipps. "Never once have I wished that I lived somewhere else."

Phipps was one of several people and organizations presented with certificates of appreciation for their role "Inspiring Happiness" at Parkway Place. Other recipients included Tallowood Baptist Church, Chamberlain University, and Major, a therapy dog with Faithful Paws.

An indoor mural of a gold oak tree, depicting the strength of Parkway Place's roots in Houston, was also unveiled as part of the celebration.

"Our roots in Houston are even stronger today than when we cut the ribbon on Parkway Place," explained Charlie Wilson, president of Buckner Retirement Services. His comment was met with nods of approval and even a few "amens."





## >> The Rees-Jones Foundation funds Youth Internship Program



Six interns funded by The Rees-Jones Foundation served at the Buckner Family Hope Center® at Wynnewood this past summer. The Dallas-based foundation, started in 2006 by Jan and Trevor Rees-Jones, a Texas businessman and philanthropist, committed to fund the effort through the Youth Internship Program.

Sanaia Stevens, Jermaria Ransom, DeAsia Jackson, Danquanesha Burks, Barnard Stance and J'Ron Williams served at the Family Hope Center in the South Dallas area, where all six were raised. Three of the interns attend college while the other three are finishing high school with plans to attend college.

"The Rees-Jones Foundation wanted to give an opportunity for young people who grew up in the community near Buckner's

Wynnewood programs to experience other components that will help them for the future," said Cheryl Williams, regional director of Family Hope Centers in Northeast Texas. "Our interns have been learning about life skills, social and emotional learning, how to build character and how to build wealth, as well as vocational planning. They have been engaged in various types of workshops that young people need from junior high school to junior college."

The interns participated in various opportunities from providing help in areas where the Hope Center needed support, such as cleaning and organizing building spaces, to providing the administrative support to open up a store service that had been closed for a while.

"Through the internship program, The Rees-Jones Foundation comes alongside organizations, like Buckner, to provide enriching opportunities for young men and women who are full of potential and are divinely gifted," said the foundation's president Thornton Hardie.

"The beautiful thing about this internship was that these were kids who grew up here in Wynnewood, which means we saw them at our school program, and they were part of our teens program, and now they're adults," Williams said. "It's a beautiful thing to watch."

"The Foundation was grateful to come alongside another faithful community partner to provide interns with leadership opportunities," Hardie commented. "We are grateful for nonprofit agencies we work with everyday who work so that children and youth can thrive as they achieve their goals."

## >> New Buckner Family Hope Center® opens in Rio Grande Valley area

Buckner Children and Family Services opened its second Buckner Family Hope Center® in the Rio Grande Valley Aug. 8. The new satellite is located in Donna, Texas, in collaboration with Iglesia Vino Nuevo Donna, a church located in a colonia.

"The impact that we're trying to have is making sure families have the need and support that they need," said the area director of Family Hope Center in Peñitas, Jorge Rodriguez. The new program offers classes and local services to strengthening families in an area with 43.2% of its residents living in poverty.

"Buckner builds families and families are where we believe children belong and where God intended them to be. The Family Hope Center works on three levels: engage, equip and elevate," said Buckner Family Hope Centers senior director Candace Gray. "The result is that we are teaching parents to break generational cycles of poverty and neglect. Our model emphasizes building sustainability for our families to move them from dependence to independence."

"In 2022, our Buckner Rio Grande Valley team served more than 4,000 individual children and adults in the community through our programs," said the Buckner Children and Family Services president Henry Jackson.





# As good stewards of God's grace

Julie and Brian Price took the opportunity this year to accomplish two things, **serve others and have a family.**

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISA TORRES

**T**he home of Julie and Brian Price mirrors the dreams they have together. Big and used for the service of others. A house with ample space in every area from the front door to the gate at the end of the backyard. And as big as the house might be, every room carries signs of wear and tear from the three young children Julie and Brian adopted this year.

Julie and Brian met back in college, when they started at West Texas A&M University, from then on they were inseparable and six weeks after finishing school, they got married.

Their big dreams led Julia to teaching and Brian to the military. And though those careers did not pan out for them, they both understood the careers they wanted to pursue involved serving others.

"We had considered doing foster care and adoption, but our schedules were pretty busy and we did not have the time to start the process," Julie said. And then, like it happened with many others, their lives took a turn in 2020. Right before the pandemic changed everyone's schedules, Julie was transitioning job wise. "I went from having crazy hours as a pastry chef, to suddenly having more time available," Julie recalled. On top of that, they had just closed on their new home and then six weeks later, the whole world shut down because of COVID. But while parts of their life came to a stop, other parts continued moving forward, at times without Julie and Brian's awareness.

"Around the time of spring break 2020, we had our nieces and nephew visiting us and after they left, this new house felt so empty," Julie recalled. "We saw this was clearly the time to do what we were supposed to do. Our home finally felt the way it was supposed to be, with children living in it."

In July of 2021, Julie and Brian obtained their license to adopt. Immediately after, they put their license to work, as they opened their home to offer respite care for a group of four siblings, one of which was still a baby. Each one of the siblings celebrated a birthday at the Price's home and as fun as those moments were, they eventually left.

The silence came back after those four children left the house, and with that came the grieving as well. "I never felt like I had made a

mistake, after grieving when my nieces and nephew left or when our foster children left, I also had a sense of confirmation we were doing the right thing and we needed to keep going," Julie said. Before they finalized the adoption of three siblings, the Price family fostered four children and offered respite care for nine children. And then, they met the three siblings living now in that big house.

At the end of June, right on the day of their 15th anniversary, Julie and Brian completed the adoption of their children, Justin, Nicholas, and Lexi. "The call and the process that followed it went pretty fast," Julie commented. "At the time we were the only family willing to do foster to adopt this number of siblings." The Prices were like a light of hope at that point, because of the difficulty to place groups of sibling together. Some foster parents cannot take in sibling groups, and that means more than 30 percent of sibling groups find homes with different families, away from each other.

But Julie and Brian knew they could take them in and that God had prepared them for this. "I got the first call about our kids one morning in November before Brian had even woken up," Julie shared. "Things moved so quickly, that even before Brian was up, we were receiving confirmations that the kids would be placed with us. It was all truly meant to be."

The siblings had moved from home to home so often, it took a while for them to believe they would permanently stay. But by Thanksgiving dinner last year, all three siblings were calling Brian and Julie, "daddy" and "mommy." Julie and Brian felt the incredible support from their community as well. Family members, neighbors, people from their church and Buckner staff always remained by Julie and Brian's side, in both the tough moments and the joyous ones.

"They're all finding their hobbies, they're becoming more and more into who they will be," Julie said. "We enjoy everything from playing board games to going hiking." And though they just began their lives together as a family, Julie and Brian plan on keeping the same goals they had before, respond to God's call to serve others together as a family. **BT**





*Julie (in the pink shirt) and Brian Price (in the gray shirt) loved and cared for every child they fostered during the past three years, but they grieved every time a child left their home. This year, the Prices finally had the chance to adopt three siblings and give the children a place to call home.*



# A full house

*"The most important work you will ever do, will be within the walls of your home."*

STORY BY JON MARK BEILUE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHAIIE WILLIAMS

The welcome mat on the south side of the 5,000-square-foot compound of Shawn and Mindy Moore in Pampa tells a story of what's inside: "It's basically a zoo in here." It's a message that communicates a story of love, faith, obedience, and patience. A story that was years in the making.

## **It's not always rainbows and unicorns**

"All six of my kids are the biggest reward even if I didn't get an ounce of sleep or if I slept on the bathroom floor in tears because of events that unfolded that day," Mindy said. "I wouldn't change any of it. I love each and every one of them."

To which her husband of 22 years added: "You get frustrated and you get tired," Shawn said, "but it's worth all of it. All of it."

There are nine living under the Moore roof – 11 if it extends to the chain-link front-yard fence where dogs Atlas and Sadie serve as a barking welcoming committee.

Six of the inhabitants are their children – Daisa, 25, biological brothers Ian, 15, and Owen, 14, twins Emerson and Everett, 4<sup>1/2</sup>, and of this past May, Jude, 2. All of them were from foster-to-adopt programs.

The first was completed in Georgia where the Moores once lived while Shawn was stationed at Robins Air Force Base near Macon. The others were through a private attorney and Buckner Foster Care and Adoption after the Moores moved to Pampa, Mindy's hometown in late 2011. That many foster-to-adoptions isn't unprecedented but it is rare.

"It has been our faith and commitment," Shawn said, "because let me tell you, it's not been all rainbows and unicorns."

Shawn Moore and Mindy Randall married on Aug. 18, 2001, after meeting at Dallas Baptist University. They both wanted a family, but even with fertility treatments, it never happened biologically. Adoption was not an avenue Shawn initially wanted.

"I was the resistant one," he said. "I thought I needed my own

biological children and was hard-hearted for anything outside of that. It took God breaking down my walls and changing my heart and helping me understand what the Bible says about caring for widows and orphans."

There was a grieving process for both, that having their children biologically was not what God planned. Mindy was much more open to adoption.

"I just knew I wanted children. God had put in my heart to have kids and I didn't really care how he provided that," she said. "There was initial pain that I couldn't have our own, but then it was quickly, 'Well, let's just adopt.' There was lots of praying for my heart to change actually to be OK with not being a mom."

In essence, Mindy and Shawn prayed to have the attitude of the other and accept the other's initial stance. In doing so, the process revealed itself to seek adoption.

"When God got hold of my heart and opened my eyes to be obedient, everything changed," Shawn said. "I don't know how to explain it other than I had a peace and He created a new joy in me to be a responsible father."

**"We fell in love with their philosophy. It matched up with our faith. There was no doubt this was what the Lord wanted us to do."**

## **Family begins to grow**

In 2008, the Moores thought they were fostering long-term with a newborn girl. But that was just three days. It was long enough to know they wanted to foster again.

In August 2009, Ian, almost 2, was placed with the Moores through the Georgia Department of Family and Children Services. Ian's rights were legally terminated when he was placed with the Moores with the stipulation they had to agree to take his brother when he was born.

Owen was in a hospital's NICU and in a foster home before the Moores took him at 4 months old. They were able to adopt Ian on Oct. 15, 2010, and Owen three weeks later.

In 2011, Shawn was discharged from the Air Force after 9<sup>1/2</sup> years. They moved to Pampa where he worked for as a paramedic for a



“ ”

*I just knew I wanted children. God had put in my heart to have kids and I didn't really care how he provided that. -Mindy Moore*





*Adopting was not Shawn Moore's (above wearing a green shirt) first choice, but after praying with his wife Mindy (sitting next to him), he says God created in him "a new joy to be a responsible father."*

regional EMS service. They tried adopting through private agencies for three years, but that was met with dead ends.

"God closed the door every single time on that," Shawn said.

Meanwhile, Dasia was a high school freshman in Pampa in 2013. She lived with her ailing grandmother. She also was active in the First Baptist Church youth department where the Moores taught and became close to her. A difficult situation became harder.

"We were supposed to have Daisa for six months," Shawn said, "but it took her grandma two years to recover, and by that point, she could not care for her."

Daisa wanted Shawn and Mindy to be her parents, especially during her senior year. They wanted that too. Through a private attorney, Daisa took the last name of Moore on her 18th birthday on Aug. 10, 2017.

The Moores had put adding to their family on hold after Steve Randall, Mindy's father, was diagnosed with cancer in 2014. He died in July 2017.

Later in the year, the Moores wanted to foster, and not necessarily adopt. They sought out Buckner Foster Care and Adoption since Mindy was familiar with the organization when she worked for Child Protective Services for two years.

"We fell in love with their philosophy," Mindy said. "It matched up with our faith. There was no doubt this was what the Lord wanted us to do."

Through Buckner, they fostered two young girls for nine months

before there was a reunification with their mother.

"Any child you bond with, it's hard to send them back," Mindy said. "If you're not attached to them, you're not doing your job as a foster parent. It's supposed to hurt to let them go."

At about that time, Melanie Rice with Buckner told them about twins Emerson and Everett. They were still in the NICU at Northwest Texas Hospital in Amarillo. But the question was if the Moores were interested in fostering with the intention of adopting.

That was in May 2019. On June 3, 2020, in the height of the COVID pandemic, the Moores officially adopted the twins in their living room on a Zoom call through the television.

Emerson and Everett had health issues. It was a challenge. The Moores believed they were done until a call in March 2021 from Buckner asking if they could be emergency foster parents for a baby for four weeks, six weeks maximum.

On their way to Decatur for a birthday party for Shawn's mother, they got a call. Jude was out of the NICU after 10 days. But they were going the opposite way for a party and there would be 40 people present and – now? They went to Amarillo for Jude.

A home study for another set of parents for Jude fell through and the Moores were asked if they would again adopt. Everyone knew the answer.

"We hadn't planned on it," Shawn said, "but by that time, we'd fallen in love with them."

Jude became the sixth foster child to adoption on May 31, 2023.



Sue Randall, Mindy's mother, has lived with the family since 2018, the year after her husband's death. So that's nine in a seven-bedroom house that expanded by 1,700 feet six years ago.

### Day, lives are full

Days begin early with the best intentions of ending early. Everett climbs out of bed at 4:45 a.m. to search for frogs. Soon all spring to life.

"All our kids are bonded," Mindy said, "and have a unique love for each other."

Ian and Owen are home-schooled through a co-op. The twins are in pre-K. Shawn teaches health science at Pampa High School and drives a school bus for extra money.

All have a role to play. Mindy gives baths. Shawn reads bedtime stories. Dinners are split. Clothes are laid out the night before.

First Baptist Church provides care when needed. Mindy keeps a heavily marked color-coded calendar. If it's not on the calendar, she said, it's not happening. Dates and time together are more often to Wal-Mart and United Supermarket.

"People on the outside, even at church, expect normal children," Shawn said, "and sometimes they don't fit that mold. How do you explain to them what they really don't know?"

"Part of that is we got most of them as babies, and it's "Oh, you got them as babies, you rescued them from a tough life," Mindy said. "They endured more trauma in utero than I have in my entire life. From Asperger's to sensory issues to ADHD that can get hard."

Yet they willingly take it all in the name of love and obedience to God's calling. All of it.

"When I prayed for children, I prayed for one," said Mindy, an only child. "That's all I wanted was one. Give me one and I'll do whatever you want me to do. God gave me six."

One wall of the living room is covered with quotations, inspirational decorative words that fill not just the walls, but the spirits of everyone. In the middle is the biggest one given to them by a biological great-grandmother on the adoption date of Emerson and Everett:

The most important work you will ever do, will be within the walls of your home. **BT**



# A lifetime with Buckner

Alicia Howell **comes full circle** from adopted to trustee

STORY BY EMILY AHRENS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM MILLER

## **Chosen. Special. Loved.**

These words have been spoken over Alicia Howell for as long as she remembers. When she walks into a room, it's like you can see those words in the flesh. Her demeanor is poised, welcoming and genuine. Alicia is a reminder that the words we speak have power.

Born in Dallas on April 9, 1967, Alicia was only three days old when she left the hospital for her forever home with Drs. Don and Joyce Ellis through adoption with Buckner.

Her parents also adopted her sister through Buckner in 1965, as well as her younger twin brothers in 1970. From the beginning, they were always honest with their children about how they became a part of the Ellis family.

Alicia celebrated her arrival to her family in school and always told others she was “specially selected.” This confident air surrounded Alicia then as it does now.

“My parents wanted to make sure I knew that I was a gift from God to them, that I wasn't an accident and that they were praying for me to arrive,” she shared.

These spoken truths empowered Alicia to live a childhood full of self-assurance. But as she says, for adopted children, there's always a curiosity about where they came from and why they were placed for adoption. Questions and insecurities crept into her mind throughout adolescence and even into adulthood.

“Sometimes the word ‘abandon’ would come into my mind,” she said. “Although my parents are my biggest cheerleaders, I've struggled with self-confidence at times. I think it's just an innate thing as an adopted child that you're going to have questions.”

While Alicia felt those insecurities lurking inside, her exterior confidence became essential in accounting teams and board rooms as her career progressed.

## **The innate desire to know more**

Throughout her early 20s, Alicia often told others she had no desire to meet her birth mother because she “had the best parents.” But when her daughter Abigail was born, she couldn't deny the curiosity.

When she gazed into her daughter's eyes, she saw herself looking back.

“When I saw her, it was unbelievably fascinating. She looked like me, she talked like me – and she's the only blood relative I knew at the time,” Alicia said. “There's nurture – but nature and genetics can't be denied.”

Becoming a mother sparked something in her to investigate her past. Buckner offers counseling for adult adoptees before beginning the process of searching for birth parents. And for Alicia, she believes that counseling program was monumental in preparing her for what she did next: she wrote a letter to her birth mother.

With tears in her eyes, Alicia recounted the letter she received back. It could've been “devastating without the preparation I did through counseling.”

“I'm so thankful counseling is available through Buckner for adult adoptees because it can go great, or it may not go so well,” she said. “In my case, a letter came back, but because of the secret way she placed me for adoption, that truth had never come out. She wasn't prepared to meet me.”

## **Buckner: A link to the past, a friend for the future**

While Alicia was adopted through Buckner more than 50 years ago, the thread between her and Buckner remains – and continues to strengthen. During her successful career in accounting, she had the opportunity to manage the financial audit of Buckner International in 2001.

Alicia and her husband were planning to retire in the early 2020s and began to cultivate a relationship with the development team at Buckner.

When Alicia's father Don died, her family dedicated a gift in his honor to Buckner Family Pathways®, a ministry close to Alicia's heart as she was a single mother for five years before remarrying. But still, she wanted a way to give her time to this organization that has been a part of her story for decades.

“My career has taken me on a path where I've had some very top positions. Before retiring, I was senior vice president and chief accounting officer at 7-Eleven, Inc. and led a team of 500,” she shared.

In 2022, Alicia joined the Buckner event committee for the 70th



Anniversary Adoption celebration and is on the Buckner Development Committee as an ad hoc member. She joins the Buckner International Board of Trustees in 2024.

Her radiant smile grows just thinking about the future opportunities God has in the works for her. While some might shy away from the boardroom setting, Alicia thrives there.

“God has given me an awesome opportunity to serve Buckner. I’m getting back into the boardroom where I feel most comfortable – where I can contribute,” she said.

“I feel like this is a full circle moment. I’m grateful every day God has brought me to this point, and I’m excited about what’s going to happen next as I follow God’s calling in my next chapter.”

### **Life as an adult adopted person**

While Alicia may not have had the opportunity to meet her birth mother, she recognizes that her birth mother’s choice to place her for adoption is a gift.

“I believe God led my birth mother to place me with my adoptive parents to benefit both our lives,” she said. “I’m thankful she chose to give me life.”

The breath in her lungs is a daily reminder Alicia is chosen, special and loved.

But Alicia knows walking through life as an adult adoptee has its unique challenges. There’s value in finding others walking similar journeys and fostering connection.

“I keep gravitating to Buckner because I feel like it’s a connection to my past, and I think the opportunity to meet other adult adoptees is going to be amazing. To connect, share backgrounds and similar stories, struggles and insecurities,” Alicia said. “Wouldn’t it be great to hear someone else’s story you can identify with – or even just learn from?”

Life as an adult adoptee can have its challenges. But Alicia rests in the truth that her life is a gift and serves a special purpose ordained by God. **BT**



*Alicia Howell, a proud adult adoptee, is thankful for the parents who raised her and the mother who gave her life. Throughout her successful career, she has found ways to stay connected to Buckner.*

# Because **We Care**

## The Buckner Senior Care and Assistance Fund

**Our mission** is serving people – from the beginning to the ending of life.

But sometimes seniors living at one of our six Buckner senior living communities run into financial struggles. Many live longer than their resources.

When that happens, we provide help through the **Buckner Senior Care and Assistance Fund**. We believe, you can outlive your finances, but you can't outlive the care we have for you.

Because God promises to never leave us during our time of need, we are committed to keeping that promise to Buckner residents.

You can help us keep that promise by giving to the Buckner Senior Care and Assistance Fund. **Because you care.**

**Give today: [buckner.org/hope-for-seniors](https://buckner.org/hope-for-seniors)**







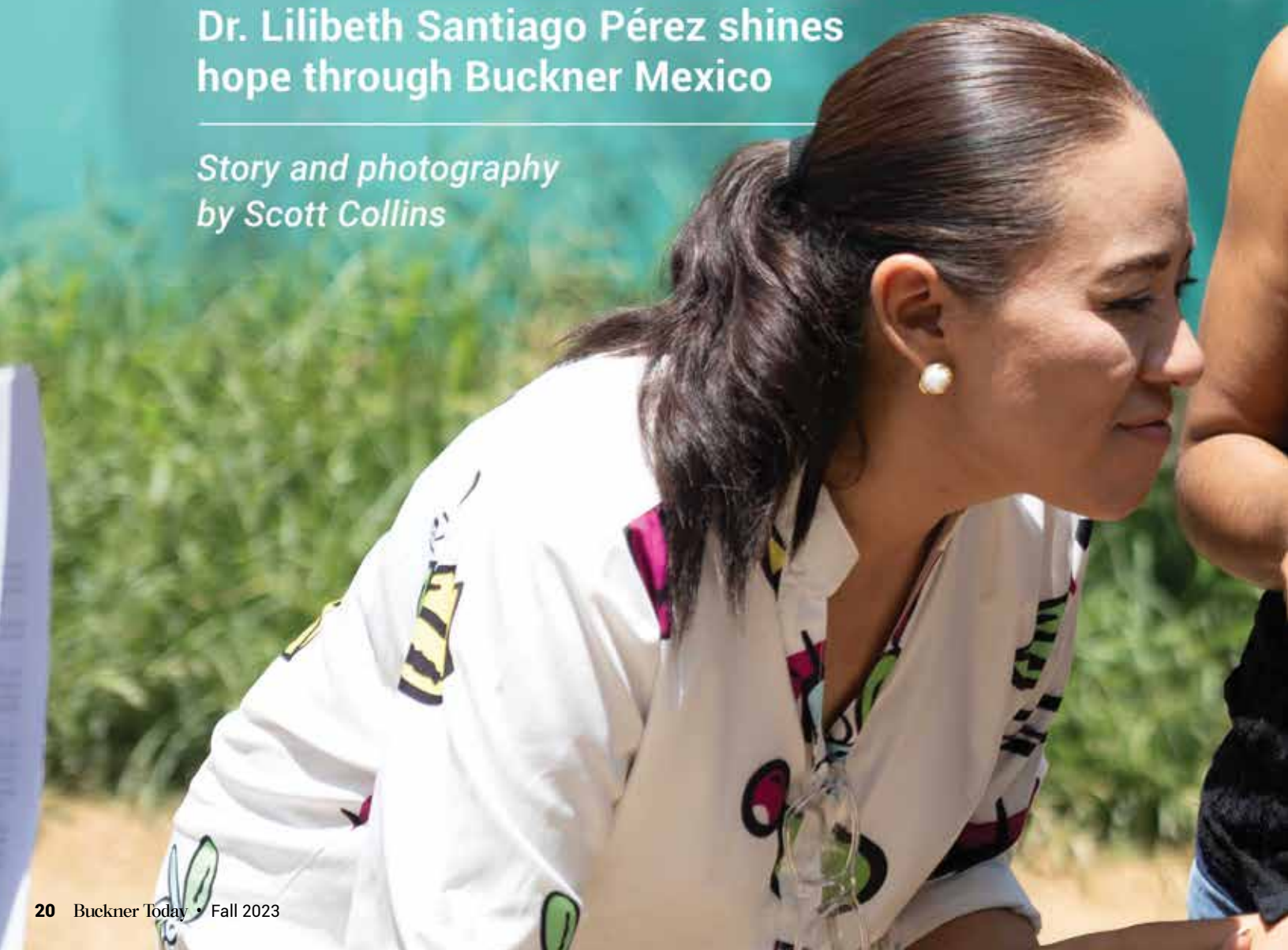


# Vulnerable

## to the vulnerable

Dr. Lilibeth Santiago Pérez shines  
hope through Buckner Mexico

*Story and photography  
by Scott Collins*





# erabile



**D**r. Lilibeth Santiago Pérez isn't finished learning. She already has more degrees than a thermometer on a hot Texas day, including her medical degree. But in December she graduates with a doctoral degree in public health and management of institutions because, as the new executive director of the Buckner Mexico NGO (Nongovernmental Organization), there is more she wants to learn.

But today, her classroom is the home of people served by the Buckner Family Hope Center® in the Xoxocotlán colonia on the outskirts of Oaxaca City, Mexico. Like any medical doctor, she looks for solutions to every situation, analyzing the best remedies for families facing diseases like poverty, family dysfunction, and spiritual emptiness.

In many ways, Buckner is the perfect “hospital” for her work and the Family Hope Center is a field clinic where she applies her methodical and analytical skills. But her greatest superpower is her bedside manner. She cares, and it's obvious with every facial expression, whether it's a tender smile or a frown of concern.



“I sometimes feel a little vulnerable too, because of their vulnerability,” she says. “I feel that there are many things that can be solved, that there is a great need in these families, in the children, also in those who are passing by on the street.”

Dr. Santiago was named executive director of Buckner Mexico the same week Buckner celebrated its 15th anniversary. In Latin culture, the 15th birthday is celebrated with a quinceañera and marks the passage from childhood to adulthood.

While Buckner’s programs in Mexico have matured in the past 15 years, Dr. Santiago’s leadership marks a transition for the ministry, as Buckner looks for growth opportunities beyond the state of Oaxaca. A map in the conference room of the team’s offices shows the entire country of Mexico, symbolizing the goal of eventually expanding programs into all 32 states.

“Mexico is a country that has different circumstances perhaps compared to other countries, but something that is similar is the state of vulnerability in everything that girls, boys, adolescents, and families need,” she said. “It is a place that we could reach through Buckner’s methodology.”

For now, the team’s focus is on the Family Hope Center model

and as part of the 15th anniversary celebrations they cut the ribbon on a new Hope Center in San Augustin Etna, another municipality adjacent to Oaxaca City. Under Dr. Santiago’s leadership, the goal is being very prescriptive and strategic with the Family Hope Centers, having detailed plans for what the team wants to accomplish.

“It is important to have a clear analysis of the locality, of the families that are participating and are coming to events and to be able to determine where we are headed,” she said. “And all this is done only with a clear diagnosis and also an established work plan that includes several people who agree with the methodology we are using.”

And while that may sound technical, Dr. Santiago and her team approach their work from the heart. As she visits Hope Center families in their own homes, she sees the needs firsthand and along with the family coaches, gets to know them personally.

“When I see the families in their communities, I feel a lot of motivation, desire, and passion to do more,” she said. “But I also feel committed to seeing how results can go further. Being able to participate with them and being able to learn with them is very important. It is a matter of learning from both sides so we can figure out why that family does not have that social protection factors



they need. Or understanding what is needed so that we can reach an agreement and be able to work on a plan.”

The results of that planning and working alongside the families as they form family transformation plans are what keep Dr. Santiago and her team going. Because they get to know the families personally, there is a lifelong bond formed as successes are celebrated.

“When I see the families that have already advanced, that have already gone through the process of the family transformation plan, I really feel satisfaction,” she said. “I feel very happy. I feel that the effort of the family coaches and that of the team behind them has been worthwhile. We know that there is still a long way to go to improve many areas or many factors of social protection, but I am very happy to see how progress has been made and how their situation has improved.”

For their 15th anniversary celebration gala Aug. 23, the Buckner team in Mexico chose the theme “Even Stronger.” It was an acknowledgement that with 15 years down and the future ahead of them, they are determined to move forward with confidence found in doing God’s work.

“I am confident that God gives us the strength,” Dr. Santiago said. “Only God. I can do many things, but I will never achieve his strength or his hope, or his vision. I am very clear where it comes from and I believe that this is despite tiring and long workdays.”

“If I do not recharge myself in God and if I do not rest in God, that strength will not be there. I think that is something I am secure in and know that my team also believes. We as a team at Buckner Mexico know that this is the only hope that keeps us going.” **BT**

## Dr. Lilibeth Santiago

### Executive Director Buckner Mexico NGO

#### Education:

- Doctor of medicine and surgery.
- Doctorate in public health and management of institutions\*.
- Master's in public health.
- Master's in business administration and management.
- Specialty in protection of social and cultural human rights.
- Specialty in epidemiology.
- Specialty in nutrition and clinical bariatrics.

#### Previous Buckner Role:

- Subdirector,  
*Buckner Mexico.*

#### Superpower:

“My superpower is serving others with pleasure, especially in times of need.”

*\*Graduating in December*





Guillermina Santos Ventura and husband Zeferino Cruz Gaspar with their children outside the store Buckner Mexico helped them start.

# Little by Little

**Family stores up treasures**

*Story and photography  
by Scott Collins*

# It was a chance encounter but no accident when the team from Buckner Mexico met Guillermina Santos Ventura.

She was sweeping dirt outside her meager home not far from the Buckner Family Hope Center® in the Xoxocotlán community of Oaxaca, Mexico. That's when her oldest son came out asking if they were going to have breakfast. With the door ajar, the Buckner staff noticed the precarious conditions the family was living in and moved by what they saw, the team knew they could help.

After meeting with the family and getting to know them, the Buckner staff knew there was more to the story than just the poverty of the family. Guillermina had grown up in an authoritarian situation and carried low self-esteem. That led to shyness and a fear of socializing.

The answer was building a family transformation plan



focusing on the family's desire to improve their economic situation through financial empowerment. The result is a small grocery store attached to the one room where the family lives. Along with providing income for the family to supplement husband Zeferino Cruz Gaspar's salary as a dump truck driver, the store allows Guillermina to work close to home as the couple raises their two small boys. The store also allows the family to save money weekly, something they could have never accomplished prior to meeting the Buckner team.

"I feel motivated," Guillermina says. "I have realized that with Buckner's support I have been able to achieve goals I never imagined before."

Watching the stream of customers at the store on a recent Saturday, it's easy to tell the plan for the family is working and Guillermina's goals are being achieved. For families like the Cruz Santos, Buckner is helping find solutions for the issues threatening vulnerable families. Family transformation plans and other programs offered at Family Hope Centers are the thread sewing up gaps and strengthening families, giving children stability and a future.

Zeferino says the family's work with Buckner taught them ways to save money and "grow and make progress. Before Buckner we didn't have the

store. Thanks to the fact that we saved and began to know how to invest our money, we decided to open a little store. And thanks to that, little by little, here we are."

Because the Buckner approach to family strengthening is holistic, the plan for the Cruz Santos family not only involves financial planning and saving, but parenting classes and spiritual development. As a result, Zeferino and Guillermina see glimpses of hope going forward for their two sons. While Zeferino is cautious about predicting where the boys will someday end up, he is optimistic they have opportunities he didn't have.

"We're focused on how Buckner has supported us," Zeferino says. "We are very grateful. We started from the bottom with very little in the store, but we continue on. We don't ask for much, but with Buckner's help, creating opportunities to save, offering a spiritual aspect and the workshops, we're doing well thanks to Buckner."

"And in the future, perhaps we can make the store bigger with more assortments," he added.

And in case you're wondering, the store's best-selling items are Coke and Sabritas (potato chips). **BT**



The Cruz Santos family started a small store serving their neighborhood after attending classes at the Buckner Family Hope Center®, where they learned financial planning and parenting skills. Customers consistently visit and shop at the store, allowing Guillermina to work while staying close to her children.







# Stitched *together*

Buckner plan strengthening  
family's future

*Story and photography  
by Scott Collins*



**C**laudia Pérez Ramirez's neighbor told her about Buckner. But she had to see for herself to believe it was true. So, she attended a Buckner informational program at a nearby elementary school in Xoxocotlán, a municipality of Oaxaca, Mexico, which led her to approach a Buckner Mexico family coach, which led to a family transformation plan and ultimately a new hope for the family of five.

"I was between yes and no," she said about her decision to visit the Buckner Family Hope Center® in Xoxocotlán. "I made up my mind to go and went to see what all the talk was about. There are times when they can tell you something, but you just have to see for yourself. So, I went and thank God, they greeted me well."

That was two years ago and at the end of 2023 Claudia and her family are graduating from the Buckner program that has strengthened their family and given them a new vision for the future. In the process, Claudia has overcome her shyness and become one of the most active people at the Family Hope Center.

Today, the small home where the family lives is filled with knitted and embroidered clothes, napkins, and other items Claudia makes as a way to supplement the family's income from her husband Leodegario's work. It's not enough, so outside in an area next to the home, ducks quack and turkeys gobble and strut around in the dirt.

Claudia's mom, who lives with them, raises the birds, a delicacy in this part of the world, and sells them.

Since attending classes at Buckner, Leodegario has started finding more steady work and Claudia said financial planning classes through Buckner have helped them stabilize their economic situation.

"We learned to compare pricing costs and to save more from day to day," she said. "Buckner has helped us come out ahead and to try different ways to make ends meet. Thank God we are doing well and we have not run out of food and we are up to date with our finances."

It's obvious watching Claudia with her three children that they enjoy being together. Older brother Brian Jesús, while a teenager, gives undivided attention to his sisters, spending time with them. With Cintya Yamilet sitting on his lap, Brian shows her the finer points of an electronic game. He patiently plays with her and answers her every question.

Nahomi, 15 and the middle of the three children, struggles with diabetes, a disease she was diagnosed with 13 years ago. Her care has been difficult for the family and at times, Nahomi is forced to spend long periods in the hospital. The added expenses for insulin and test strips stretch the family's finances. But Claudia says that since a two-month stay in the hospital a few years ago, Nahomi is doing well.

The stress of Nahomi's diabetes adds another dimension to Claudia's

*After first connecting with Buckner in 2021, Claudia Pérez Ramirez says she has received the confidence and strength to persevere. Since starting her knitting and embroidery small business, Claudia uses her skills at home to grow her business and still spend valuable time with her three children.*





## Vision for the future

Claudia Pérez Ramirez and her family found a new path forward at the Buckner Family Hope Center®.







parenting skills. During times when she needs medications, she says Buckner has given her the confidence and strength to persevere.

“With Buckner, my life has changed,” she said. “Whenever I need medication or things like that, I have more confidence to go to different places to look for it. If it’s not at this door, I’ll go to another door, and if it’s not there I’ll go somewhere else until I find it.”

Today, Buckner is providing the much-needed test strips for Nahomi and supplementing the family with medicines when needed.

“Buckner has taught me to believe in myself and has helped strengthen my family,” Claudia said. “Before we would just pass each other in our house, but now we are more united.

“Buckner has transformed me to be happy with my family and to also be aware of those who need help. There are times when someone knocks on our door needing something and we should not deny them if we can help. I learned that from Buckner.”

“Before we met Buckner we had many problems,” Claudia said. “I was very insecure, especially with my daughter’s problem. But now, having learned from the teachings on values and learning from the Bible more than anything, it has helped us understand what one goes through.”

Nahomi’s doctors tell the family the diabetes is not going away and to prepare for more issues as time passes. “Sooner or later, as the doctor has said, we have to come to terms with it because it’s here to stay.

“As a mother that is hard to accept, but with God’s word, we can do it. At first, I was very depressed, but now I’m comfortable putting one foot in front of me. We are not going back but instead going forward. It’s what we want until God says we have arrived.” **BT**







Taking a

# Big Step

Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls® gives 5 millionth pair of shoes

— Story and photography by Scott Collins —

**It's about 1,100 miles from Shoe Drive in Dallas to the Buckner Family Hope Center® in Xoxocotlán, just outside Oaxaca City, Mexico.**

Fortunately for Rodrigo Correón Martínez, the little 8-year-old boy who received the 5 millionth pair of new shoes given by Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls® since 1999, he didn't have to walk to Dallas to get them.

But had Rodrigo made the trek on foot, those 5 million pairs of shoes, or 10 million individual shoes, laid toe to heel would have

provided a good path for him and could have led him straight to the Buckner Center for Humanitarian Aid.

Five million pairs shoes, using the average size for a child Rodrigo's age of 7<sup>1/2</sup> inches is 75 million inches, 6.2 million feet, and you guessed it, about 1,100 miles.

All Rodrigo had to do was walk the short distance from his



modest home near the Family Hope Center and watch as Dr. Lilibeth Santiago, the new executive director of Buckner Mexico, placed the bright red Under Armor sneakers on his feet. No doubt the worse part for the shy youngster was all the attention showered on him during what looked like a professional athlete inking a major contract with a shoe manufacturer.

The young man handled the attention in stride, so to speak, and warmed up to his starring role, finding his smile as he posed for cameras and admired his new kicks. Even his swollen ankle, sprained while playing soccer a few days before the big event, didn't seem to bother him as Dr. Santiago placed the shoes on his feet and tied the laces.

And then there is his mom, Blanca, who was just glad her growing son had new shoes for school. Rodrigo's dad, Omar, works as a moto-taxi driver in the community and his income depends on his working hours and the number of fares he can get. So a new pair of shoes, even a ceremonial pair like those representing such a milestone, mean Rodrigo can walk safely to school without cutting his feet on rocks and glass littering the dirt streets in his neighborhood.



Rodrigo was joined Aug. 22 by about 150 other children and their families gathered in the courtyard of the Family Hope Center for the distribution. Buckner staff and volunteers, including President/CEO Albert Reyes, ceremonially cleaned the children's feet before placing a new pair of shoes, selected specifically for each child, on them. The event was one of two shoe distributions in Mexico in conjunction with the 15th anniversary celebration of Buckner Mexico as an official nongovernmental organization (NGO).



Shawn Spurrier, director of Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls, was among Buckner leaders present at this milestone. "We have reached an amazing milestone," he said. "For many of us, the importance of new shoes is an afterthought, but they can be the catalyst to transformation in the lives of children. They help kids attend school, protect them against disease and injury, and give them hope. This pair represents 5 million opportunities to express to children throughout the world that they are loved, cared for, and not forgotten."

As for Rodrigo, Buckner staff in Mexico describe him as a respectful child who loves to learn and seeks to bring cheer to everyone he encounters. He has been enrolled in the Buckner "Homework Club" at the Family Hope Center. The center gives Rodrigo space to do his homework and help from the staff since the home where his family lives isn't adequate for his after-school needs. According to the caseworkers, Rodrigo's participation is "always outstanding. He is such a respectful child with strong values and a great sense of belonging." **BT**

# BUCKNER SHOES

## FOR ORPHAN SOULS®

### Continuing the mission



**B**uckner Shoes for Orphan Souls® first began when KCBI Radio, a Christian radio station in Dallas, contacted Buckner International in 1998 suggesting they take over an on-air program the station had since 1993. The name of the program was called Shoes for Russian Souls. Listeners of the program would start sending shoes starting at the end of the year, until February of the following year. Then, the station traveled to Russia and delivered the shoes to children. After talking to Buckner, KCBI delivered the last shipment of shoes in Russia in 1999.

The endeavor became even bigger than first expected. Buckner celebrated the donation of the 5 millionth pair of shoes this year and the following year, Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls will celebrate its 25th anniversary.

Changes started happening since Buckner held the first shoe collection. The Texas Legislature had just passed for the first time a tax-free holiday for families buying back-to-school items and it happened on the same dates of the Buckner shoe collection. With this great opportunity, Buckner sent the invitation to families in Texas, “go buy a pair of shoes for your child, and while you’re at it, buy a pair of shoes for a child in need.” The shoes collected that first year by Buckner reached double the number KCBI normally collected every year, reaching ten thousand pairs of shoes in Dallas alone.

Everything kept increasing the following years, from the number of participants to the number of donations. The program kept its name

during the first two years, but soon it came up against an issue, Shoes for Russian Souls was collecting more shoes than it could transport and give away in Russia, so the name and the mission changed to portray the broader focus. Buckner learned right away it had a tiger by the tail.

Thanks to individuals, churches and partner ministries, pairs of shoes from every state of the country have reached the feet of millions of children. The collection of the shoes comes as the first step of the process, then the shoes must be prepared for shipment and finally, the shoes are given to the children who will wear them. The process is simple and everybody gets it. While people of means wear shoes and hardly think about them, shoes are a luxury item for children in many other parts of the world.

Buckner has now sent shoes to close to 90 countries and to many more communities in the U.S. Besides reaching millions of children and their families, Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls also serves as the calling card for other ministries of Buckner. Many families have connected to programs like Buckner Family Hope Center® after receiving a pair of shoes. It also serves as a door opener for Buckner to get involved in other locations, which has been the case for the work Buckner now does in some countries.

The celebration of the five millionth pair this year and the 25th anniversary next year are important celebrations, but the mission of giving as many pairs of shoes to as many children as possible is still ongoing. **BT**



# It's more than a pair of shoes ... it's the first step toward transformation.

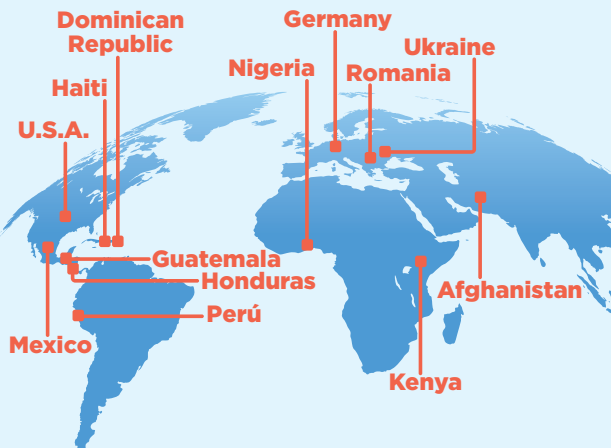


**Where new shoes GO**

**80% INTERNATIONAL**

**20% UNITED STATES**

## Countries that have received new shoes for vulnerable children



## Ages of children receiving shoes:

**0-18**



Greatest need for new shoes:  
**Boys 14 to 18 years old**

## Why shoes?

- Helps prevent health issues
- Improves school attendance
- Increases self-confidence

## Why "new" shoes?

New shoes last longer and give children living in poverty something that is theirs.

## New shoes collected for vulnerable children since 1999:

**5 million**

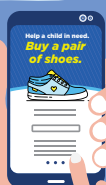


## How do vulnerable children get connected to new shoes?

- Those receiving a service through one or more Buckner program(s)
- Community outreach events
- School and/or government collaborations

## Ways to give shoes?

Online



[buckner.org/shoes](http://buckner.org/shoes)

Traditional in-person shoe drive



Average cost of new shoes (shoes, socks, shipping and programs):

**\$15**

Average cost of shipping container (international):

**UP TO \$10K**



**BUCKNER SHOES**  
FOR ORPHAN SOULS®  
Hope shines here.®



# Shelter from the storm

Partially built Buckner Healthy Housing home provides Rio Grande Valley family safety

STORY BY EMILY AHRENS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BUCKNER STAFF

**Devastating winds and hail descended upon the Rio Grande Valley with little warning, uprooting trees and stripping the roofs from many of the region's homes. As the straight-line winds exceeded 80 miles per hour and debris whirled about, the Sanchez-Herrera family no longer felt safe in their trailer home.**

The family arrived home at the onset of the May storm, said Maria Sanchez. They sat in their car for half an hour hoping to wait out the

dangerous weather, but the storm only grew in strength and so did the mother's fear for her children. They had to make a run for it.

Next to the trailer stood the unfinished house the Sanchez-Herrera family was building with the support of Buckner. It had walls and a roof, but not much else. Sanchez decided the best way to reach the trailer would be to cut through the construction site and exit out the back to reduce exposure to the elements.

"We waited for a few minutes in the home y'all built, and those minutes turned to hours," Sanchez shared. "Even if it's not finished, we felt safe."

Though still lacking plumbing, electricity and the aesthetic



touches homeowners often obsess over, it had everything the Sanchez-Herrera family needed.

Their journey to becoming homeowners began five years earlier when Maria and her husband, Juan, first came to the Buckner Family Hope Center® at Peñitas. Their neighbor kept talking about Buckner until they finally decided to see for themselves.

Through the Family Hope Center and its curriculum of classes and coaching, the couple qualified to participate in the Buckner Healthy Housing program where they received assistance to build a house of their own.

A new home is typically a six-month process, and by all accounts, the Sanchez-Herrera house should not have been as far along as it was

when the storm came – but God had a plan.

Two months earlier, congregation members with Stonebriar Church in Frisco, Texas, north of Dallas, framed the house in their church parking lot. The result of a remote build through Buckner, the house was disassembled and shipped down to Peñitas.

Over spring break, volunteers with the church worked alongside the Sanchez-Herrera family to reassemble the house and “dry it in.” Their dedication and hard work meant Maria, Juan, and their children were protected during a storm that flooded their trailer and left more than 10,000 families in the Valley without power and clean water.

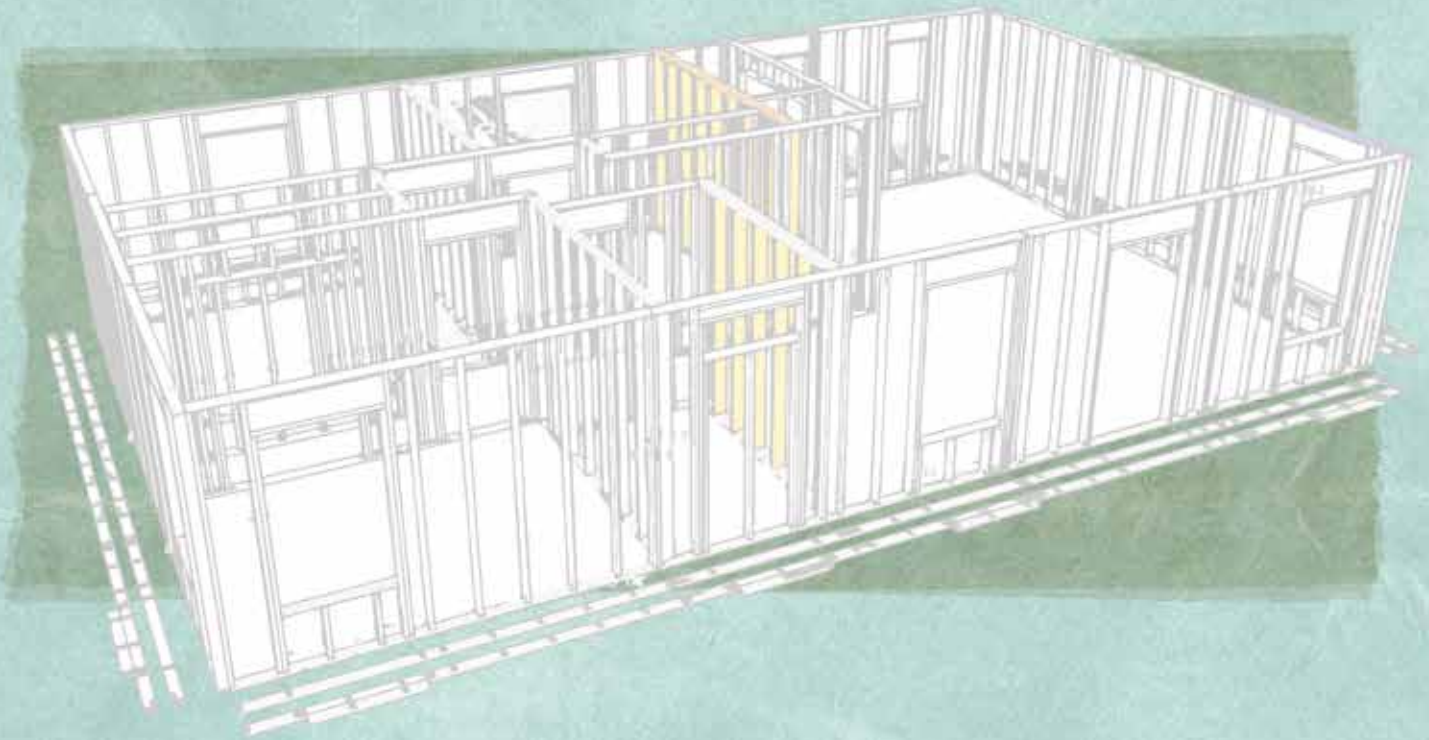
None of that mattered as the family hugged each other inside the safety of their home. **BT**

*More than 10,000 families in the Rio Grande Valley experienced devastating winds and hail in May. But thanks to the home built at Stonebriar Church through Buckner Healthy Housing, the Sanchez-Herrera family (their children pictured below during Easter) found safety from the storm in their new home.*



# The keys to a healthy home

BY CHRIS CATO  
DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS



## What do engineers, construction professionals, 6th grade girls and church pastors have in common?

No, that's not a punchline to a joke. The answer is they have all been equipped by Buckner International's Missions team to build homes for vulnerable families in South Texas.

When Buckner started this journey 15 years ago to address one of the most basic needs for families, the idea of building the house hundreds of miles away was not in the plan. However, churches and other groups are adopting a new "remote" method of constructing the pier-and-beam foundation and walls locally, then shipping the structure to South Texas for reassembly.

Rather than sending teams to South Texas, the remote option engages more than 150 people from each church in the process, at the property of their own church facility. Developed in collaboration with several engineers, this plan breaks the construction down into steps anyone can follow.

## So, how does that work, and what does it take? Here's a breakdown on how a team from a church, a business or some friends can be a part of Healthy Housing:

**Step 1: Recruit a construction leadership team.** Find two or three people who are handy. This means they understand how to use tools, how to use a tape measure, cut lumber and fasten it together.

**Step 2: Get help.** Buckner Missions will pair you with a mentor, someone who has done this before and will walk with you from start to finish.

**Step 3: Procure tools and order materials.** We have lists informing you exactly what you need.

**Step 4: Recruit and organize volunteers.** Host one big build-day or stretch it out over 6-8 shorter sessions on Friday evenings or Saturday mornings.



**Step 5: Build it.** Host a celebration and invite participants to write scripture/encouragement on the framing.

**Step 6: Disassemble, stack onto a truck, and ship it.** Buckner can help arrange the truck for pick-up.

**Step 7: Send a team to South Texas** to meet the family, and work alongside them to re-assemble.

From laying the first foundation board to the last coat of paint, the total construction cost of a home is \$45,000. Add another \$5,000 to cover the cost of the family's 18-month journey through the family hope center and that's it. It is a road to self-sufficiency, a path to a Healthy Home environment where children are loved and encouraged, and where parents have the resources they need to become what God intended them to be.

Buckner Missions works with churches and groups of all sizes. Some who take on a whole house, and others whom we pair together to pool resources. Learn more at [Buckner.org/missions](http://Buckner.org/missions) or email us at [missions@buckner.org](mailto:missions@buckner.org) and we will equip you to impact a family for generations to come.

### The purpose and impact of Healthy Housing

At Buckner, we are all about empowering families to become all that God designed them to be. And through our many services we provide support and coaching to help them break through to the next level.

Healthy Housing seeks to provide physical support to families, as a supplement to the socio/emotional/behavioral work done with family coaches through the Family Hope Center® in Peñitas, Texas. Once a family is selected, the Hope Center staff works with the family to identify an action plan that includes maintaining any behavioral changes within the family. Family coaches with the family, helping them achieve milestones designed to strengthen them and give children the protection they need to thrive.

Volunteer teams are equipped to join the family and Buckner staff to complete either construction or physical renovations to the home.

### The Need

In many cases, it takes 15 years or more for families living in a Texas

colonias to build a home. Family buying land from local landowners often pay as much as 15% interest on loans to purchase the property, putting them at risk financially and creating great vulnerability.

Families use whatever resources are available, from hollowed out buses to galvanized metal, to provide shelter and a home for their children. However, these structures are unable to provide the safety and security a family needs. With the help of the Buckner Healthy Housing program, this process of home ownership can be accomplished in just a few months.

When a family is ready, they can apply for the housing program where we connect churches and groups with families to construct a new home together. It provides access to a safe and healthy home, leading to lasting change in the family's social and emotional well-being.

## Here are some facts about Buckner Missions Healthy Housing:

- Homes are typically designed as a three bedroom and one bathroom house.
- The size of the designed house is 960 sq. ft.
- There are a total of 13 wall sections in each home.
- It takes 17 foundation sections for each house.
- The cost the homes we build is a third of the price of the median house in the Mission McAllen market.
- It can take between four and six months for a house to be built from start to completion.
- The fastest home in 2023 was completed in 28 days.
- We have built 150 homes along with the collaboration of the families living in them.



# *Because of your generosity, lives are being* **TRANSFORMED**

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