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SPECIAL RIO GRANDE VALLEY EDITION

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Today

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ChatwiththeExecutiveDirector

**Out with the old,
In with the new**

For Buckner Rio Grande Valley, 2019 was both a blessing and a challenge. Our blessings included developing new collaborations, providing services to more children and families in all programs, an increase in financial support and funding, and new programs and strategies. As we end one year and start anew, one new strategy is the implementation of National Family Support Network (NFSN). NFSN seeks to provide positive outcomes for all children, families and communities by providing quality Family Support and Strengthening policies and practices.



Monica Salinas
Executive Director
Buckner Rio Grande Valley

Since 2017, seven employees across the state are now certified trainers and they have trained over 200 individuals in this approach to strengthening families. **This approach focuses on building the following 5 Protective Factors with families:**

- Parental Resilience
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

(continued on inside cover)

ALSO INSIDE:

- A New Home Provides Peace of Mind
- Volunteer opportunities

**Creating the full home
they had always dreamed of**
One couple welcomes sibling group
of three daughters with open arms

When Veronica Esquivel left home at 15, it shaped her in many ways. One of the biggest desires it placed in her heart was to help other children in similar positions.

"I wanted to give someone else a home, stability, maybe a kid who just needs someone to be there for them," shared Veronica.

From the time Veronica was in her teens, she knew she wanted to adopt. When she left home, she stayed in contact with her aunt and uncle, but focused on being a live-in babysitter for a local family. She speaks highly of this family: "They helped raise me."

Being a member of a big family felt like home to Veronica. There was always someone to talk to and play with. For Veronica and her husband, the dream of fostering to adopt was mutual. He was raised by a single mom who passed away when he was young and was also raised by his aunt and uncle. They

both saw the joy in having a home full of kids – whether biological or adopted.

The couple was licensed to adopt in 2015, receiving few placement calls as

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Out with the old, In with the new

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- Social Connections
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children
- Concrete Support in Times of Need.

This idea of family support is based on the belief that the primary responsibility for the development and well-being of children lies within the family, and that communities must support families as they raise their children.

As Buckner has embraced this concept in our programming, our STAR program has implemented a plan to deliver activities focused on two of the 17 quality standards. The first is Family Strengthening Standard in which our program recognizes families as significant resources for their own members and each other. STAR program is planning to host several Family Fun Days to teach and encourage families to come together to spend time with their children and play; play without distractions, without stress and worries of day-to-day problems, without judgment. We will help families focus on their strengths, their gifts and their resources for becoming a stronger family. Another goal of Family Fun Days is to engage multiple families so they can learn from one another, support one another and become resources to help one another in times of need.

The second standard is Embracing Diversity, enhancing the ability of families and staff to participate in a diverse society and to navigate the dynamics of difference. Our program has hosted several events we are calling Convivio Informativo (Parent Workshops). Speakers present information on topics such as diversity in parenting, teen suicide and depression, developing healthy relationships and bullying. Over 80 parents have participated in these workshops thus far and are asking for more. The workshops offer an intimate setting where parents can participate in discussions regarding critical matters that affect their families. Parents have requested more Convivios (Workshops) as they recognize that parenting and raising families is no easy task; they are eager and willing to learn to be stronger families and we are here to help them. ■

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they requested long-term, adoption-driven placements. They also strongly believed in the adoption of sibling groups, knowing the large need in that specific area. In late 2017, the Esquivels' current placement reunited with their biological family, creating a gaping hole in the home and in the family.

"They were in our home over a year, and it was hard to let go. So when we received a call about three sisters in December, we were still too heartbroken," Veronica said.

The Esquivels had met the girls in October and declined the placement twice before realizing God had a big plan with this sibling group. For Veronica, she laughs as she remembers how many times she and her husband attempted to get in God's way. This would be their sixth placement.

In January 2018, Veronica found out only the oldest sister needed a placement but felt called to offer to take all three. Keeping

siblings together was always a priority for the Esquivels. By February, all three girls were in their home.

"When they walked into our home, we knew they were our kids," shared Veronica. "God was like, 'these are your children!'"

On Aug. 8, 2019, the three sisters became Esquivels. Their home is full of love and laughter and what Veronica has always dreamed of – support and stability. They currently have Veronica's 16-year-old brother, their three daughters ages 10, 6 and 5, and their 4-year-old son. The family loves to spend time together and had the opportunity to attend Camp Buckner in the summer – creating a lifetime of memories over a special trip.

For Veronica, offering someone the chance to feel safe and loved in a stable home is invaluable. "If you can provide a loving home, we've always thought why not?" ■



A New Home Provides Peace of Mind

For the Geronimo family, this home build not only gave them hope but safety and peace of mind.

"Our family coach kept telling me to apply for the home build, but I kept saying that there are other people that need it more," explained Vianey Morales Geronimo. "But about a year ago, we had our refrigerator plugged in and it caught fire. It was contained, but the fridge and microwave had caught fire because of the electrical outlets."

For Vianey, the reality that her children were in danger caused her to think about applying for the home build through Buckner Domestic Missions. The looming thought of a house fire continued to plague Vianey as a neighbor and her son recently passed away due to the same issue.

The Geronimos qualified for a home build by taking classes at the Buckner Family Hope Center and achieving goals set with their family coach. When families earn enough points as they work toward self-sufficiency, Buckner Missions partners with missions teams to build them new homes.

This family has been a part of the Buckner community for over five years. Xylina Rotramel, missions and case coordinator in Mission, Texas, has developed a relationship with Vianey and her family through their commitment to volunteering.

"In the last three years, she has become a leader in the volunteer group at the Family Hope Center. She helps with events whenever they provide child care – but any opportunity she has to volunteer at the Hope Center, she volunteers," explained Rotramel. "Their whole family helps with shoe drives, markets and more."

Buckner has been an integral part of the Geronimo family through many different seasons.

"I learned about finances and learned how to save and budget," Vianey said. "In 2017, I found out I had Bell's Palsy. We had enough budgeted for that emergency we were able to pay the medical bills and for physical therapy," she shared.

"It affected my face, hand and all the way down my leg. We were able to afford the things to help me get better, faster, because of the budgeting I learned at Buckner."

The home Buckner has given this family, and many others like it, is so much more than just a house. For Vianey, Agustin and their daughters, it is a step toward safety, growth and continuing to learn about God.

"I recommend Buckner to friends, neighbors, anyone I know – I want everyone to have the same opportunity and to be blessed by Buckner." ■

Buckner Volunteer Opportunities

During this season of uncertainty, many of our volunteer events and opportunities are on hold or have been canceled to maintain healthy social distance to stop the spread of the coronavirus. However, there are still ways you can support Buckner safely from your home, and more coming soon!

Here are a few examples of ways you can support Buckner in this new season:

- Write an encouraging note to a senior adult or a foster family. We are accepting letters both digitally and through email. For information on where to send your note, check out our volunteer page on the Buckner website.
- Pray for the vulnerable children, families and seniors in your community. Pray for health, safety and protection.
- If you are passionate about helping families struggling due to implications of COVID-19, we are accepting financial gifts to support them in this season.

As the situation progresses, we are continuing to update our website with ways you can volunteer and serve throughout this time. To check out the most up-to-date ways we are continuing to serve our Buckner families (and how you can help), **visit [buckner.org/volunteer](https://www.buckner.org/volunteer).**

