

Changing the Way We Care in Guatemala



What's Happening in Guatemala?

In Guatemala and around the world, up to 90% of children and adolescents living in residential care institutions (sometimes referred to as “orphanages” and called “protection homes” in Guatemala) have at least one living family member¹. Many of them have been separated from their families due to poverty and lack of access to basic services. These situations, which should not be grounds for separation, could be prevented through referral to timely social services for families and children.

¹ Williamson and Greenberg. Families, not Orphanages 2010.



Photo by Karla Paz / CRS



Guatemalan Children in Residential Care

- In Guatemala, there are more than 3,800 children and adolescents living in residential care institutions and 90% of them have at least one living relative².
- Almost half of the children in residential care have been placed there due to poverty and lack of social services in health or education.
- Public investment in childhood and adolescence in Guatemala is the lowest in Northern Central America, representing only 3.7% of GDP as of September 2023.³
- More than two million Guatemalan children and adolescents were excluded from the school system due to the pandemic⁴.

Changing The Way We Care Guatemala works to make a difference

The Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC) initiative was created in 2018 to transform care systems and demonstrate sustainable change at scale in five countries: Guatemala, Kenya, Moldova, India, and Haiti. In Guatemala, CTWWC works closely with government institutions and civil society organizations that oversee child and adolescent care and protection to push for child care reform at the national and local levels, using examples and evidence from our demonstration areas in Zacapa, Huehuetenango, San Marcos, and Quetzaltenango.

CTWWC understands care reform as a comprehensive approach that includes family and community strengthening to prevent unnecessary family separation, care options based on safe and healthy family environments and transforming residential care services to family- and community-focused services.

Lessons Learned to Inform New Approaches

CTWWC is a global initiative designed to generate learning and good practices. In Guatemala, it has developed tools and processes for case management, a model of family and community strengthening at the local level, processes for prioritizing the best interests of the child, and strategies for engaging people with both people with lived experience in the protection system and faith-based organizations, to promote a comprehensive approach to care reform.

Promote strategic alliances

CTWWC believes that successful care reform requires the involvement of national and local government, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, community leaders, and families.

CTWWC works with key actors involved in care reform through multi-sectoral and inter-institutional working groups, technical assistance, and the direct implementation of actions at the national and local levels with municipalities.

2 Judicial Branch of Guatemala. 2019. Report on the Census of Children and Adolescents housed in authorized Private Protection and Shelter Homes or in the process of authorization, carried out in February and March 2019 at the national level. November 2023.

3 Central American Institute for Fiscal Studies (ICEFI). 2023. Basic indicators to know Public Investment in children and adolescents. Guatemala, September 2023.

4 Ministry of Education of Guatemala. Comprehensive plan for coronavirus (COVID-19) prevention, response and recovery. 2020



At the local level, **fifteen municipal offices have been strengthened and five policies for children have been promoted** over the last five years to mobilize resources aimed at strengthening families within municipalities, preventing unnecessary family separation through case management and service referrals.

Influence to Redirect Public and Private Resources

Prioritizing family care and social services to prevent family separation, CTWWC leverages existing public resources and seeks partners and opportunities to engage the private sector and NGOs. CTWWC also advocates for an increase in public budgets for children.

Generate Evidence to Support Actions

CTWWC believes that evidence is essential to frame care reform efforts. In collaboration with key government agencies such as local municipalities, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the National Adoption Council, and the Attorney General's Office, data has been collected and analyzed to influence positive changes for children, adolescents, and families.

OUR RESULTS 2018 - 2023



1,207 children benefited from reunification, reintegration, and prevention of unnecessary family separation.



15 MOUs with municipalities in Zacapa, Huehuetenango, San Marcos, and Quetzaltenango have been signed.



1,450 parents and caregivers have been supported with family strengthening to avoid unnecessary separation.



15 municipal Psychosocial Care Clinics have been created and strengthened for the care of children and families.



2,901,287 community members have been sensitized through media campaigns on the work of the CTWWC initiative, the importance of family care, and how the foster family system works in Guatemala.



1,346 child and adolescent direct care workers have been trained in case management and care reform procedures.



Need to know more? Contact Changing the Way We Care at info@ctwwc.org or visit changingthewaywecare.org.



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