

# Independent Investigation of Niños de México

## Final Report and Recommendations

**November 12, 2025**

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## Introduction

This report presents the findings and recommendations of an independent investigation into Niños de México, initiated to address public allegations of misconduct. It provides a comprehensive overview of the organization's history, governance, and programs, followed by a detailed evaluation of specific allegations. The report also assesses Niños de México's policies, procedures, and institutional culture concerning child protection and safety, concluding with specific recommendations.

## Summary of the history of Niños de México

In 1966, Merlyn (James) and Wanda Beeman traveled to Mexico to "assess how they could best work to meet needs and evangelize the people."<sup>1</sup> Together, they decided to begin a program that would later be named "Niños de México."<sup>2</sup> Niños de México (Niños) was founded in 1967. Merlyn and Wanda Beeman moved to Mexico City in January of 1967 where they received orphaned children into their rented home while they searched for a permanent facility.<sup>3</sup> Later in 1967, a property was identified and purchased in San Vicente Chicoloapan, situated on the outskirts of the city. They moved to the new home in February 1968.<sup>4</sup> The "family" had grown to 25 individuals and there were "wall-to-wall" children in the new home.<sup>5</sup>

The children lived in Beeman's home and attended local schools. The Beemans provided for the children's basic needs, including food, clothing, and shelter. The Beemans also provided religious instruction and spiritual guidance to the children. The children lived in a communal setting. They shared meals, attended school together, and participated in religious services. Children reportedly referred to the Beemans as their parents and called them "pappy" and "mommy", or "dad" and "mom."<sup>6</sup> The Beemans also worked to raise funds for the ministry and maintained relationships with supporters in the United States.

They developed a plan to construct a larger building that would later be named "Casa Genesis."<sup>7</sup> In or around June 1975, a second property was bought in Huexotla. Jack

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<sup>1</sup> History of the work of Niños de México. Pg. 1.

<sup>2</sup> History of the work of Niños de México. Pg. 1.

<sup>3</sup> History of the work of Niños de México. Pg. 1

<sup>4</sup> History of the work of Niños de México. Pg. 1

<sup>5</sup> History of the work of Niños de México. Pg. 1

<sup>6</sup> W31 Tr. at 4.

<sup>7</sup> History of the work of Niños de México. Pg. 1

and Vicki Yarnell worked as house parents for the new home, "Casa Agape." These homes in the 1970s were run by three American couples: Merlyn and Wanda Beeman, Viola and Don Bader, and Jack and Vicki Yarnell.

## TEN YEARS AND COUNTING:

### THE STORY OF NIÑOS DE MEXICO

By Donald H. Bader

It all began several years ago when a young man from Union, Missouri, still in high school, made a trip to the Kiamichi Mountains Men's Meeting in southeastern Oklahoma. While at this meeting he met a group of young men from Mexico. During the three day meeting a very strong friendship developed. After returning home the enthusiasm and excitement of the Mexican boys and their love for the Lord continued to make an impression on the mind of this young Missouri boy. Also the need of the country of Mexico to hear more about God and the church, the poverty of the country, and the hopelessness of the children of the country continued to concern him. Finally, while still in high school, his decision was made to go, and he dedicated himself to taking the gospel to Mexico. His folks were persuaded that what he wanted to do was right, Spanish lessons were started, and he set about convincing his fiancee that this was what they should do. Niños de Mexico was born—still only in his mind, but it had begun.

Who are we talking about? The young man was Merlyn Beeman. He and that fiancee (who is now his wife Wanda) are the directors of Niños de Mexico, a home for orphaned and abandoned Mexican children. It is located in San Vicente Chicoapan, a village about 20 miles from downtown Mexico City. The home has completed its tenth year and is providing care and love for 92 children in its overall program.

Let me tell you a little more about its growth. After completing a three month internship in Mexico City under the influence of Dean Cary, the Beemans returned to the United States to complete the task of raising their livinglink support. Then they, along with their two adopted sons Terry David and Greg, returned to Mexico City in January of 1967 to bring into reality the idea that had been born several years before.

The home began in rented quarters in Mexico City. The Beemans knew this would not be the permanent location of the home but felt it wise not to invest in buildings at first. There were customs to be adjusted to, language to be learned, and proper contacts to be made. After all these obstacles had been met and dealt with, the building program was begun.

While still in the rented quarters in Mexico City, children began to be received into the home. Merlyn stated that he knew he could not raise children as he felt they should be raised in such a large metropolitan area, so a search was begun for property in a rural area. In the latter part of 1967 property was located in San Vicente Chicoapan. Arrangements were made to purchase the property and in February of 1968 the move was made from Mexico City. The family at that time numbered 25 children.

The new property did not have much in the way of buildings. In fact, there was only one small three bedroom house plus a small one room house. As Merlyn stated, "We had wall to wall children!" In fact, from the very early days of Niños de Mexico until today we have always had "wall to wall" children.

An overall plan for the building program was made and construction began. Through the years it has been frustrating at times, because the need is so great and we have not been able to



Serving Niños de Mexico are (left to right) Merlyn and Wanda Beeman, Vi and Don Bader, and Vicki and Jack Yarnell.

completely meet that need. But we made the decision to never launch into a big building program without sufficient funds available so that we would not have to burden the people in the States with a large indebtedness.

Now, after ten years we see Niños de Mexico continuing to grow. Unit I, the original home, is a large building consisting of 12 bedrooms, two apartments (one filled with boys at the present time because of the lack of space), a large dining room and kitchen area, a nursery

area with 16 children in it, and a family room, plus a complete farm program consisting of cattle, hogs, rabbits, and chickens. At Unit I we have 71 children: 47 boys and 24 girls.

In June, 1975, a second unit was opened in Huexotla, a village about ten miles from Unit I. Jack and Vicki Yarnell of Dallas, Texas, accepted the invitation to come and become parents to Mexican children. Unit II is a smaller program, as all future programs will be. At Unit II, we have a building consisting of six bedrooms, a dining and kitchen area, a family room, plus a guest house. There are 13 boys and eight girls in this home.

Looking forward to the future of Niños de Mexico, we hope to have a new home, Unit III, perhaps yet this year. Then as soon as money is available we hope to open more homes—perhaps as many as 30—circling the Mexico City area to care for over 1000 children.

Why orphanage work? Why spend so much money? (And it does take a lot of money.) Is orphanage work in a foreign country good use of the missionary dollar? Perhaps the best way to answer this is to give you an example of what is happening and will continue to happen with the children of Niños de Mexico. Our example is a young man named Lauro Jose Sarmiento. Ten years ago Lauro was a young man who had little time for God or the church, but he was a young person in need physically. Lauro became one of the first children at Niños de Mexico. He was brought into the home, fed, clothed, and sent to school. Also during this time he was told about the love of Jesus. Lauro became a very active Christian in the program of the church. He was able to complete his public school training and decided to become a school teacher. He is now married and the head of a Christian home and is witnessing to his own people. But more important, this young man, who ten years ago was not very active in the church, now preaches to his own people each week as he serves the new church in Huexotla where Unit II of Niños de Mexico is located. Lauro is a missionary to Mexico, one who does not require the support of American dollars.

If you would like a firsthand report of this fast moving missionary program, please contact Ron Cowan, Route 1, Box 310V, Washington, MO 63090. He will make arrangements for us to come by for a multi-media presentation of the work. Also for printed information on adoption programs or other information contact Mr. Cowan.

Don Bader and his wife Vi are Associate Directors of Niños de Mexico.

In 1978, an office was established in Union, Missouri, to facilitate communication with supporting churches in the United States and to manage the administrative and donor-related aspects of the expanding ministry. This early establishment of a US office underscores the significance of US-based support, encompassing financial contributions and volunteer engagement, for the organization's operations in Mexico. Over the years, Niños de México has grown to operate up to nine children's homes, conduct mobile mountain medical outreaches, and engage in church planting initiatives in and around the Mexico City area. This expansion into diverse ministries beyond traditional orphanage care indicates a broadening of the organization's scope and its commitment to various forms of community outreach.

## Vision and mission

Niños de México articulates its vision as "To be a Christian mission focused on caring for orphans (James 1:27) and encouraging growth in the local church (Acts 2:47)". The stated mission of Niños de México is: "Niños exists to share the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ with as many people as possible by raising at-risk children in Mexico to love God and grow to be mature educated Spirit-filled Christians with the ability and passion to evangelize their culture". This mission statement emphasizes the organization's evangelistic purpose, outlining its approach of raising children in a Christian environment to become active proponents of their faith within their own culture.

Ayudante Al Niño, the name by which Niños de México operates in Mexico, presents its vision as serving with excellence, being transparent and responsible towards each child and young person, and being committed to developing their physical, emotional, social, economic, academic, and spiritual capacities by offering shelter, food, medical, psychological, and educational care, thereby forming men and women with a better quality of life. This vision statement highlights a commitment to comprehensive child development and well-being within a framework of transparency and responsibility. The stated mission of Ayudante Al Niño is simply "Transforming children in Mexico". This concise mission statement encapsulates the organization's core purpose of positively impacting the lives of children in Mexico.

For the purposes of this report, Niños de México or Niños is used interchangeably to refer to both Niños de México and Ayudante Al Niño.

## Core beliefs and values

Niños de México is aligned with independent Christian Churches of the Restoration Movement, which has "no creed but Christ."<sup>8</sup> The core beliefs of Niños de México, as presented on their website, include a detailed affirmation of Christian theological doctrines, such as belief in one God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the all-powerful Father as Creator, Jesus Christ as the only Son of God and Savior, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible as God's inspired and infallible Holy Word, serving as the final authority for faith and practice. These beliefs form the fundamental Christian identity of the organization and likely guide its operational principles and program delivery. Furthermore, Niños de México outlines its core values, which include Evangelism ("Everything we do must have the ultimate purpose of glorifying God and...the same mission, we should work together"), and Quality of service ("Work to be efficient but also to be effective"). These values provide a framework for the organization's conduct and priorities in fulfilling its mission.

The core values of Ayudante Al Niño include Amor por los niños (Love for children), Excelencia (Excellence), Honestidad (Honesty), Compromiso (Commitment), Respeto (Respect), Responsabilidad (Responsibility), and Trabajo en equipo (Teamwork). These values reflect fundamental ethical principles expected of an organization dedicated to child care and development. While both Niños de México and Ayudante Al Niño share a common purpose, the slight variations in their mission and vision statements, along with the specific values emphasized, may reflect the different operational contexts and target audiences in the US and Mexico.

## Governance and administrative structure

Niños de México operates as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States, indicating its tax-exempt status and charitable mission. As of January 2025, its board of directors includes a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, and members, with Gonzalo Flores serving as an "Ex-Oficio Member." The board's composition reflects diverse professional backgrounds and a geographically distributed governance structure. In Mexico, Ayudante Al Niño is registered as an "Institución de Asistencia Privada" (I.A.P.), operating under Mexican regulatory oversight. A "Patronato" (Board of Trustees) is associated with this entity, with Gonzalo Flores serving as president.

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<sup>8</sup> "Missouri charity embroiled in child sex abuse controversy at its Mexican orphanages." St. Louis Post-Dispatch. November 5, 2023.

Key executive leadership includes Steve Ross as Executive Director, who has extensive experience with the organization, including previous roles as Field Director in Mexico and a houseparent. A Development Director is responsible for fundraising, and an Office Administrator and Office Administrative Assistant support operations, including the HUGS sponsorship program. An Intern Coordinator also assists with HUGS correspondence and mission groups. This leadership team is primarily US-based, with the Executive Director dividing time between the US and Mexico.

The administrative team for Ayudante Al Niño in Mexico is led by Steve Ross as Director Ejecutivo (Executive Director), holding this role for both the US and Mexican entities. Juan Manuel Vasquez serves as Director Administrativo (Administrative Director). The structure also includes coordinators for Human Resources, Medical, Spiritual, Educational and Homes, and Social Work areas. This specialized administrative structure, including a multidisciplinary team formed around 2021, indicates a comprehensive approach to child care and safety concerns, with a centralized leadership figure overseeing operations in both countries.

## Summary of the children's homes

Niños de México operates eight children's homes located in the Mexico City area and in Cholula, Puebla. These homes are Génesis House, situated on the east side of Mexico City and housing boys; Agape House, located in Huexotla, east of Mexico City, which is home to girls; Bethel House, in Texcoco, east of Mexico City, a girls' home with a soccer field; Esperanza House, a boys' house adjacent to Casa Génesis in Mexico City; Emanuel House, located in Texcoco, serving as a boys' home; New Beginnings, located in the center of Cholula, Puebla, providing a home for boys; Jireh House, in Texcoco, east of Mexico City, a girls' home; and New Life, a new home for girls in Puebla. Génesis House also serves as a complex with offices, housing for short-term mission groups, and apartments for support staff. Each of these homes is designed to function as a family unit, with Christian house parents, their own children in some cases, and an additional 11 to 15 children, aiming to create a loving and caring environment rooted in Christian values. The existence of multiple homes, separated by gender and distributed across different locations, signifies a substantial operational presence in the region, with a specific model of care centered on a family-like structure.

To assist the houseparents and provide additional support, homes have used a rotating team of auxiliary houseparents. These individuals served as an extra set of eyes and ears within the home, helping to supervise the children and provide assistance as needed. They also filled in for the primary houseparents when they were on their day off or on vacation.

Beyond the core caregiving staff, each home also has support personnel who come in and out to handle specific tasks. This includes cleaning staff who maintain the cleanliness of the home, laundry staff who manage the children's clothing and linens, and kitchen staff who prepare meals. These individuals play a crucial role in ensuring the smooth daily operation of the home.

These homes provide shelter, food, clothing, and comprehensive medical, psychological, and educational care to boys and girls who have been referred by DIFEM (Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia) or the Attorney General's Office of various entities. The children admitted to these homes have typically experienced difficult circumstances such as abandonment, orphanhood, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. In many instances, Niños de México extends its support to the children up to the university level. Niños de México has historically provided housing for young adults attending university. The operational structure of Niños de México is closely integrated with the Mexican child welfare system, receiving children through formal government referrals and providing long-term, comprehensive care to address their diverse needs.

The number of children has reportedly decreased from 96 to 54 since 2023. The number of houses has reportedly decreased from nine to seven, due to the merger of two houses, and in the wake of public allegations of abuse and misconduct. GRACE received reports that Niños has not been able to continue receiving children due to not obtaining recertification.

## Mobile medical outreach

Niños de México also conducts mobile medical outreaches in the mountain regions surrounding Mexico City. The primary purpose of these outreaches is to provide basic medical care to individuals in less accessible areas and to share the Gospel message. These mobile medical initiatives extend the organization's ministry beyond the confines of their children's homes, indicating a broader commitment to community engagement and

service. The integration of medical assistance with the dissemination of their religious beliefs aligns with the explicitly Christian mission of Niños de México.

## Church planting

In addition to orphan care and medical outreaches, Niños de México is involved in church planting initiatives in and around the Mexico City area. The mission of this aspect of their ministry is to establish new churches by training alumni of their children's homes and other Christian nationals who demonstrate an ability and passion for evangelizing the people of Mexico, as well as to provide support to ministers serving in full-time ministry. Furthermore, a Christian church exists in San Vicente Chicolapan, where Niños de México staff have been actively involved in teaching, preaching, and leading worship. This focus on church planting underscores the strong evangelistic component of Niños de México's overall mission, aiming to foster a lasting spiritual impact within the communities they serve, extending beyond the direct care of children in their homes.

## Short-Term mission trips and internships

Niños facilitates both short-term mission trips and longer-term internships for individuals from the United States and other English-speaking regions. The short-term mission trips typically occur during the summer months, running from late May or early June to early August. These trips involve groups of approximately 8 to 10 individuals who stay for about a week each. The primary objectives of these trips is to connect participants with the ministry and the children residing at the home, and to provide assistance with various tasks. Activities during these trips included unskilled labor such as painting, digging, and cleaning, in addition to interacting with the children. The groups are housed in dormitories on the Genesis campus, which consist of hotel-style rooms with a second-floor balcony.

In addition to the short-term trips, the organization offers longer-term internships, typically lasting around three months. These internships provide a more immersive experience, with individuals assisting in the daily operations of the children's home and local churches. Responsibilities during these internships vary widely, including organizing donated clothes, filing in the office, preparing for and cleaning up after visiting groups, assisting in the kitchen, purchasing supplies, and helping houseparents with childcare. Interns also have opportunities to engage in recreational activities with the children, such

as playing soccer and riding bikes. The daily routine during internships has been described as highly flexible, with tasks changing frequently based on the needs of the organization.

## Child sponsorship program

Niños has a sponsorship program called H.U.G.S. (Helping the Underprivileged Get Started) where individuals can sponsor children living at the organization. People who visit Niños can form connections with the children and then choose to sponsor them. The sponsorship involves a monthly contribution.

Some children have sponsors who regularly visit, write letters, and potentially bring gifts. Niños may provide cards with information about the children for potential sponsors. The sponsorship funds go to Niños.

A Niños web page details the "HUGS" sponsorship program, explaining that for a minimum of \$25 per month, sponsors receive photos, reports, and information about a specific child who has been abandoned, abused, or orphaned. It also mentions the possibility of personal correspondence with the child. To view biographies and photos of the children, individuals are instructed to call the institution's office for a password, and children in need of sponsorship are highlighted.

## Public Allegations of Misconduct

In March of 2022, a former house parent named Javier Colosia was arrested and formally charged with child sex crimes in Mexico. A local news entity published an article on April 1, 2022 regarding the arrest.<sup>9</sup>

A former intern of Ninos de Mexico contacted US board members in late 2022 or very early 2023. He expressed concerns regarding the handling of past child sexual abuse cases involving staff, alleged cover-ups, inadequate care, and warned of potential intervention by the Mexican government. He specifically requested actions including an independent investigation by professionals specializing in child abuse prevention, the removal of implicated staff, and the hiring of trauma-informed psychologists. He noted he had previously raised concerns and offered solutions directly to Steve Ross in 2018, which

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<sup>9</sup>See:<https://rcgmedia.mx/articulo/detenien-en-coahuila-a-un-pastor-que-fue-acusado-de-violacion-en-el-estado-de-mexico/>

he felt were not adequately addressed. The board sent the following response dated January 10, 2023:

The Board of Niños de Mexico is in receipt of your letter, which you had sent to Mr. Matthews and Mr. Cook, in which you express your very serious allegations and grave concerns about the state of Niños, and then lay out your recommendations for recovery from your stated allegations and concerns.

Thank you for detailing your concerns and sending them to the Board. The Board believes that you sincerely care about the children under the care of Niños de Mexico. The Board requests that you extend this same courtesy to the Board and the staff of Niños who also sincerely care about the children under Niños' care and who are already working through many of the issues you cite in your letter. The Board and Staff will review each of the cases you have presented to ensure that actions taken in the past have been effective and will also evaluate what further actions may be necessary. Where needed, outside counsel will be consulted.

The Board is praying, as a starting point, the following prayer for guidance in this situation:

Father, we come before You seeking You and Your strength, seeking Your face continually (Psalm 105:4). For these very serious concerns, we ask for Your wisdom from above that is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy (James 3:17). We come before You asking for this wisdom, in faith, without any doubting, knowing that when we do so, You give Your wisdom to us generously and without reproach (James 1:5-6).

The Board invites you to join us in this prayer.

The former intern responded on January 11, 2023:

To Steve and the Board of Niños,

I received your email. This was the kind of political non-response I was so hoping the organization would avoid, one concerned more with covering itself than with true contrition over its end upon end failure to safeguard the lives of these children.

The Bible says that "because the sentence for a crime is not handed down speedily, men's hearts are fully set on doing evil" (Ecc 8:11). The ability of the organization to successfully avoid the consequences of its failure to protect the kids in its care has clearly emboldened its continued reckless path.

You have wagered that you will continue to enjoy the luxury of being able to police your own misconduct. This bet is unwise and will lead to the further (re)victimization of more children.

I have no doubt that God will act on behalf of each little one made in His image who has been taken advantage of, abused, and intimidated within the walls of Niños. The question is what side of God's justice will you be on when that happens.

On January 22, 2023, an adult reporting victim of child abuse at Niños de Mexico posted a statement on Facebook detailing their experiences and advocating for justice. The individual expressed a desire for tangible support over empty words, especially when those offering support simultaneously harm their loved ones.

The post describes a long history of abuse—physical, psychological, and sexual—with institutions like Niños de Mexico, asserting that these issues are not recent but have been ongoing for years. The reporting victim highlighted the discrepancy between the supposed care provided by such institutions and the reality of enduring abuse. They noted the pressure to maintain a facade of happiness for photographs, even while facing a "monster" in real life, referring to an abuser who posed as a caregiver.

The reporting victim recounted how previous attempts by children to speak out were dismissed, with some being labeled as "gossipers." The reporting victim described how professionals and those believed to be allies allegedly advised silence "for the welfare of all." The post indicates that years passed before assistance arrived, and while help has since been provided, many victims remain silent due to fear or complicity among others.

Concluding with a message of hope, the reporting victim stated that their abuser is now incarcerated, despite attempts by others to minimize the abuse or claim manipulation. They directly challenged the notion of "thinking about your family" when victims were hurt, pointing out that abusers did not consider the victims' families. The post emphasized the reality of the abuse, asserting that it was not invented and that proof exists.

In January 2023, the former intern released a video on social media detailing his allegations about mishandled sexual assault claims.<sup>10</sup> On or around January 26, 2023, a former staff member published a petition on Change.org that garnered over 15,000 signatures (as of April, 2025). The petition details a decade of alleged child sexual abuse and threats at Niños. Victims reportedly suffered abuse by caregivers who, along with management, silenced complaints and mistreated those who spoke out. The petition demands immediate intervention from the Attorney General's Office of the State of Mexico to protect current residents, punish those responsible, conduct thorough investigations, and transfer children to a safe environment. It emphasizes the urgency of justice, psychological treatment for victims, and state protection for those affected.

The former intern began contacting churches and individuals supporting Niños de Mexico, sharing his concerns and urging them to press the board for an independent investigation.

In response, the Niños board sent a letter to supporting churches addressing the situation. They framed the period as a "complicated season," partly due to required restructuring of homes in Mexico. They countered the former intern's call for an independent investigation by highlighting ongoing investigations by Mexican governmental organizations (JAPEM, DIFEM, and later DIF Nacional) prompted by allegations against Javier Colocia. They stated they welcomed these "outside evaluations" and presented them as sufficient oversight, arguing against the need for a separate independent probe initiated by Niños itself. They denied a history of "systemic child abuse."

The former intern started a public blog in or around March 2023 titled What's Wrong with Ninos de Mexico?<sup>11</sup> It contained information related to the allegations, efforts by whistleblowers, and statements from reporting victims.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr7lI77D06A>

<sup>11</sup> <https://whatswrongwithninosdemexico.blogspot.com/>

Despite ongoing pressure from the former intern, reporting victims, and other supporters and former staff who shared similar concerns, the board maintained its position. In a June 12, 2023 email to the former intern, then-Board President Robert L. Wideman acknowledged the former intern's advocacy and stated the board was "acutely aware" of the abuse accusations and exploring programs for former residents. However, he explicitly stated, "At this time an independent investigation will not be part of that process."

Dear [Former Intern]

As the President of the Ninos board, I want to thank you again for bringing your concerns to the board's attention.

We are currently working through internal and external investigations to ensure the safety of the children in our care. This includes but is not limited to recommendations by DIFEM and JAPEM.

We know you have concerns about the leadership and direction of Ninos and I have no doubt that you believe you are doing what is best for the children. You must understand that the same passion for doing what is right is in the heart of each one of the staff and board members of Ninos.

To that end, while being laser focused on the children currently in our care, we are acutely aware of the accusations of the peer on peer, and other abuse in the past that you have brought to our attention. We are exploring programs to give an opportunity for closure and a way forward for the young men and women no longer in our care. At this time an additional independent investigation will not be part of that process.

Thank you for your time.

Robert L Wideman  
President of Ninos Board

In October 2023, a Facebook Page was launched titled Ayudante al Nino: Exigimos Justicia - We Demand Justice dedicated to providing "information related to the ongoing campaign for justice for the children abused in the ministry of Ninos de Mexico."

In November 2023, major news outlets published articles detailing the controversy. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch on November 5th provided a comprehensive account of the former intern's history with Niños, the specific allegations, and the board's consistent refusal (up to that point) to conduct the type of independent review the former intern sought, citing the ongoing government probes. Spanish-language outlet Siete24 also reported on denunciations of child abuse against the institution's Mexican entity, "Ayudante al Niño I.A.P." The Washington Missourian on November 17th followed up, reporting directly on the board's decision to hire outside investigators.

Faced with sustained pressure from others and public exposure culminating in critical media coverage, the Niños de Mexico board reversed its stance. In November 2023, board member Philip Myers confirmed to the Washington Missourian that the organization would hire GRACE to conduct an independent investigation into the allegations. Myers acknowledged the former intern's efforts in bringing concerns forward, though he also expressed doubt that the allegations would ultimately be substantiated while affirming Ninos' commitment to the children's well-being.

Ninos de Mexico engaged GRACE on January 26, 2024.

Public allegations have continued to surface throughout the duration of this investigation. A journalistic investigation conducted by Quinto Elemento Lab reportedly uncovered evidence of physical misconduct, sexual misconduct, and spiritual abuse occurring over a period of 30 years, from 1992 to 2022. The organization released a documentary in both Spanish and English in March 2025.<sup>12</sup> The documentary alleged that at least 20 minors were victims of these abuses. The investigation implicated a total of seven alleged abusers. According to the documentary, while the Mexico State prosecutor's office initiated more than five investigation files, only one resulted in a trial and the sentencing of Javier Colocia.

Following the publication of the Quinto Elemento Lab report, Ayudante Al Niño issued a public statement expressing regret for the events and stating their willingness to cooperate with the authorities in any investigation. The organization also assured that the allegations do not involve the current team.

On July 9, 2025, a coordinated, multi-agency operation was conducted at five facilities operated by Ayudante al Niño, I.A.P., in the municipalities of Texcoco and

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<sup>12</sup> [https://youtu.be/o7dfX8O3qaE?si=ApD-eUJek\\_GvRRf4](https://youtu.be/o7dfX8O3qaE?si=ApD-eUJek_GvRRf4)

Chicoloapan. The operation involved personnel from the System for the Integral Development of the Family (DIFEM), the Attorney General's Office of Justice, Civil Protection, the Commission for the Prevention of Sanitary Risks, the Board of Private Assistance (JAPEM), the Institute of Administrative Verification, and the Federal Attorney's Office for the Protection of Children and Adolescents, with support from the State Police and the National Guard.

According to the official informational statement released by the Government of the State of Mexico, "possible vulnerabilities of the rights of children and adolescents" were detected during the proceedings. As an immediate result, authorities secured the properties known as Jireh, Bethel, Génesis, Esperanza, and Ágape. The Public Ministry was notified, and five separate investigation files were opened. The 37 children and adolescents present in the homes at the time were placed under the care and protection of the DIF of the State of Mexico, which will provide attention from multidisciplinary specialists with the goal of restituting their rights and achieving viable family reintegration. The Human Rights Commission of the State of Mexico was also present during the operation to guarantee the rights of all individuals involved.

GRACE did not receive any additional information during the course of its investigation regarding the reasons for the operation or subsequent findings.

In the course of this investigation, GRACE became aware of a public Facebook page titled "Más que una acusación" ("More than an accusation"). The page serves as a platform for former residents, staff, and supporters to share positive testimonies about their experiences with the ministry. The content consists of written and video testimonials praising the care they received, expressing gratitude for the opportunities provided by the institution, and defending the ministry against public allegations of abuse.

GRACE has reviewed the content of this page as part of its comprehensive investigation. The testimonies reflect deeply held, positive experiences for many individuals who grew up within or have been involved with Niños de México. GRACE is aware that for many, the ministry was a source of stability, education, and spiritual guidance. Several individuals who posted supportive testimonies on this page were also interviewed by GRACE to ensure their perspectives were included in the investigative process.

From a trauma-informed investigative perspective, it is understood that individuals within the same institution can have vastly different experiences. The existence of positive testimonies does not invalidate or contradict reports of abuse and misconduct. In any residential setting, particularly one spanning decades and multiple locations, it is common

for some children to be protected from harm or to form positive relationships with caregivers, while others are simultaneously targeted for abuse or exposed to neglect. Factors such as a child's specific placement, their relationship with particular staff members, their peer group, and their individual vulnerabilities can lead to entirely different outcomes.

It is the assessment of GRACE that this situation speaks to the deeply felt experiences of many individuals whose lives have been shaped by Niños de México. The positive memories and lifelong relationships reported by some are a valid part of the institution's history, as are the painful accounts of victimization reported by others. A thorough and trauma-informed investigation requires holding space for these multiple, coexisting realities in order to form a complete and accurate understanding of the institution's impact.

## Scope and Methodology

GRACE's assessment was limited to the scope defined in the Engagement Agreement and was conducted using interviews<sup>13</sup> and content analysis of collected relevant artifacts and documents. The following section provides a summary of the scope and methodology.

### Scope

Pursuant to the Engagement Agreement, the following scope guided this investigation:

GRACE shall investigate all allegations of sexual misconduct and behavioral misconduct made by former Niños children who are currently adults, that are directly or indirectly related to Niños.

GRACE shall assess the policies, procedures, safeguarding training, environment, and culture of Niños and how such may impact matters relating to sexual and behavioral misconduct within the organization. GRACE shall also assess whether and when Niños had any knowledge of the above

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<sup>13</sup> Questions included a mix of open-ended, direct, and hypothetical prompts towards both factual and policy-oriented subject matter.

allegations and if so, how the organizational culture impacted the way Niños responded to the allegations.

The findings of GRACE's investigation were analyzed using the methodology presented in the subsequent Methodology section.

## Methodology

Because this investigation was not a judicial proceeding, GRACE did not have the power to subpoena witnesses or documents. GRACE's investigation relied upon the voluntary cooperation of individuals with relevant information. The investigative methods consisted of conducting interviews and collecting documents and other non-testimonial information.

To ensure all individuals with potentially relevant information had a secure and accessible means of communication, GRACE established a dedicated and confidential email account at the outset of the investigation. This email address was made public to allow former residents, staff, and any other parties to contact the investigative team directly. All communications received through this channel were treated with strict confidentiality. The GRACE team monitored this account and followed up with individuals who provided information to request an interview and further discuss their experiences.

Given the long history of Niños de México, the number of current adults who grew up at Niños, and a number of individuals that did not respond or chose not to participate in the investigation, this report does not represent the full range of voices that should be heard. Accordingly, the material presented in this report should not be considered a comprehensive articulation of all relevant information.

The findings and recommendations contained within this report are based solely on the information that was made available to and reviewed by the GRACE investigative team during the course of this assessment. While every effort was made to conduct a thorough and comprehensive review, the findings should not be considered an exhaustive account of every potential incident of misconduct or institutional response that may have occurred throughout the history of Niños de México. The scope of this report is necessarily limited to the specific allegations and evidence presented and reviewed.

GRACE sought to pursue and conduct each interview in a way that reflected the character of Christ, viewing each person in the process as image-bearers who are deeply

loved by God. GRACE interviewers sought to apply trauma-informed principles to each interview and exchange in order to promote safety, trustworthiness, transparency, and agency. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Recordings, transcripts, and related correspondence were stored in a secure database. Most individuals are referred to in this report using coded witness designations. In some cases, additional steps are taken to preserve witness identity and confidentiality, such as the use of multiple designations for a single witness.

## Burden of Proof

The purpose of this report is to present an assessment of the credibility of all relevant allegations, analyze existing safeguards/policies and responses, and give recommendations based on this assessment and analysis. The first step of this process requires GRACE to filter all evidence gathered through a framework to determine credibility of that evidence. This framework includes (1) identifying the applicable burden of proof and (2) resorting to informative legal and investigatory principles used to analyze evidence.

GRACE assumes a holistic approach to conducting its investigations and writing its reports and recommendations. This means that while GRACE does not consider its work purely legal-based, it does use certain fundamentals and principles of US legal theory to inform its investigations and reports. One such fundamental is the application of a "burden of proof." Under U.S. law, every actionable offense or liable action has an applicable burden of proof.

In the case of criminal offenses, the most common burden of proof is "beyond a reasonable doubt." This burden of proof imposes a high standard on the charging party (typically the local, state, or federal government in criminal actions) to prove wrongdoing and is the highest burden of proof used in U.S. jurisprudence.

Another common burden of proof used in U.S. legal proceedings is called "preponderance of the evidence" or "the greater weight of the evidence." This burden of proof imposes a much less stringent standard and requires only that the facts be proven by 51%. A common analogy for this burden is a two-sided scale. If evidence is produced to tip the scales ever so slightly in the direction of the party with the responsibility to prove the wrongdoing, this burden of proof has been met.

GRACE understands that it is not a judicial body; similarly, GRACE is not a charging party or plaintiff. However, in order to properly analyze the veracity of allegations based on the evidence collected, GRACE finds it useful to impose a burden of proof on its investigation. To that end, GRACE uses a burden of proof lying somewhere between the two standards discussed above. GRACE will closely consider all evidence collected and find credible only those allegations that are supported by evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test. Conversely, GRACE will not be so stringent as to find credible only those allegations that are proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Throughout this Report, this burden of proof may be referred to as the "GRACE burden of proof."

## Investigatory and legal principles and rules of evidence

Before a burden of proof can be applied, it is important to identify how individual pieces of evidence are analyzed for credibility. Only if evidence is determined to be credible can GRACE apply the GRACE burden of proof to establish the credibility of the allegations themselves. There are many factors that are examined and weighed in determining credibility of a witness. These factors include the consistency and specificity of their statements, any present motivation to lie or lack thereof, any complete or partial admissions of the accused, and corroboration by other witnesses or through documentation evidence.

Looking at the Federal Rules of Evidence, there are several principles that GRACE utilizes in analyzing the above factors. Generally, evidence of a person's prior bad act is not admissible to prove that, on a subsequent occasion, the person acted in that same way. This avoids the pitfall of arguing "once a \_\_\_, always a \_\_\_\_." However, a person's prior bad acts may be used to show that on a subsequent occasion there was "motive, opportunity, intent, preparation, plan, knowledge, identity, absence of mistake, or lack of accident." For instance, if a person is convicted of stealing a vehicle in 2010, that conviction cannot be used to prove that the person again stole a car in 2012, during the trial for that 2012 theft. However, the 2010 conviction could be used as evidence to rebut the defendant's argument that the 2012 theft was a mistake or accident. Another, similar, rule of evidence allows for prior acts to be used as evidence that a person acted consistently with those prior acts, if the acts amount to a "habit." This rule may seem like the opposite of the first rule discussed, above, but has an important clarifying detail: instead of showing evidence that a person acted the same way in the past, this evidence is only allowed if the person acted the same way consistently and repeatedly, such that the act could be considered a habit.

In addition to evidentiary rules concerning someone's actions there are also rules that help us determine someone's truthfulness. One such rule allows for evidence and testimony of a witness's character of truthfulness or untruthfulness. Another helpful tool to determine truthfulness is to examine a witness's prior statements. The rules of evidence allow a party to offer evidence of a witness's prior statement to show that the witness either changed or did not change their testimony. This is referred to as "prior inconsistent" or "prior consistent" statements. Of course, should evidence show that a witness's testimony is consistent with their own prior statements, this tends to prove that they are truthful. Conversely, if a witness changes their testimony, this may show that they are not being truthful. Another important aspect of prior consistent statements is how many consistent statements/acts there are and what sources are confirming them. For instance, if multiple witnesses report the same prior consistent statement or act from various different times, it lends more veracity to the claim. This concept is similar to one of the reliable arguments used to prove the veracity of the Bible. The Bible was written by 40 authors of differing backgrounds, in three different languages, on three different continents, over the course of 1,500 years. Despite this, the consistencies throughout Scripture confirm its veracity. In this way, receiving same or similar information from various sources over an extended period of time tends to prove the credibility of that information.

Another important investigatory principle that has an impact on our credibility analysis is victim delayed disclosure. In the past, delayed disclosure by victims was used as a way to discredit those victims. As is the case with many other crimes, immediate disclosure was expected. Recently, however, research has come out to show that delayed disclosure is commonplace when it comes to sexual abuse. In fact, this research shows that the average age of reporting child sexual abuse is 52; this means that despite enduring sexual abuse as a minor, victims often do not disclosure until well into their adulthood, if at all. This research shows that delayed disclosure should not be used to discredit allegations. Indeed, Child USA states that delayed disclosure of abuse is statistically a better diagnostic measure of whether abuse occurred than a medical exam. Other factors that contribute to delayed disclosures are: age (the younger the victim the longer it may take to disclose); gender (males are typically less likely to disclose quickly or fully); and a relationship with the perpetrator (a relationship with the perpetrator may lead to the victim not fully understanding the abuse and to choosing not to disclose the abuse for some time).

Lastly, one common error in investigations of sexual misconduct is an over-emphasis on inconsistencies in the memory, reactions, and demeanor of alleged victims. Often, explanations for these inconsistencies may be found in the dynamics of trauma itself, either from the immediate offense or prior victimization.

## Trauma-Informed Principles

In evaluating current policies/safeguards and its response to the allegations discussed herein, GRACE applied the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's six principles of trauma-informed response. These six principles are: Safety; Trustworthiness and Transparency; Peer Support; Collaboration and Mutuality; Empowerment, Voice and Choice; and Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues.

## Biblical Principles

Ultimately, all of the analysis in this Report and the recommendations given must be consistent with Scripture. To that end, GRACE applied biblical frameworks and principles to this matter to identify Ninos' responsibilities and suggest alterations to Ninos' practices.

## Evaluation of Allegations

The following section presents a summary of the findings of this investigation and is organized in a manner consistent with the scope of this investigation. Victim account summaries are based on reporting victim interviews, witness interviews, and documented victim accounts that were reviewed by GRACE. These accounts may include audio statements, written statements, and public testimonies. Summaries of accounts related to victims not interviewed by GRACE are based on documented victim accounts reviewed by GRACE or on testimony provided by other witnesses during interviews. For the purposes of this report, individuals whose documented accounts were reviewed but who were not formally interviewed by the investigative team are referred to as "Alleged Victims."

**Warning:** this section of the report describes explicit conduct and speech and may be activating for those who have endured abuse, harassment, or other trauma. Readers who may have difficulties reading the content should be careful and wish to speak with a professional prior to reading the report. We also encourage parents and caregivers to read the report first before allowing youth who may be interested in the report to review it.

## Wanda Beeman

Wanda Beeman, along with her husband Merlyn Beeman, co-founded Niños de México in 1967 after traveling to Mexico in 1966 to assess needs. They moved to Mexico City in January 1967, initially housing children in their rented home before acquiring a permanent facility in San Vicente Chicoloapan in 1967. They moved into this new home in February 1968, where the "family" grew to 25 children. Wanda, along with Merlyn, served as house parents, providing for the children's basic needs, religious instruction, and spiritual guidance. Children reportedly referred to her as "mommy" or "mom." Wanda Beeman is deceased.

### RV2

RV2 detailed his arrival at Niños de México in or around 1967 at approximately six or seven years old. He confirmed that the Beemans were his house parents. RV2 described his initial experience at the house as overwhelming due to the sudden availability of clothes, shoes (which he had never worn before), and plenty of food. He also mentioned that the children were asked to read the Bible.

RV2 reported witnessing and experiencing misconduct during his time at Niños. He recalled other children suggesting that "daddy" (referring to Mr. Beeman) was abusing someone and seeing them in a sexual relationship. RV2 initially dismissed these claims. However, he later stated that Alleged Victim-1, one of the older boys, confided in him about a sexual relationship Alleged Victim-1 had with Wanda Beeman.

RV2 described a specific incident of sexual abuse by Wanda Beeman when he was around 16 or 17 years old. He found Wanda Beeman crying in the kitchen after an argument with her husband, who she claimed was going to "sleep with another man." Wanda Beeman then hugged and kissed RV2, leading to a sexual encounter. RV2 stated this was the first of multiple such incidents, occurring more than 10 times, causing him to feel sad and depressed. He reported that he felt obligated to her because she provided for him, including school expenses, money, and special treatment such as extra food and use of the car. He felt he needed to "pay back" what she had given him.

RV2 sought enrollment at a Bible college in Texas as an escape from the situation, not out of a desire to become a pastor. He recounted an incident in San Antonio, Texas,

when he was around 18 years old. Wanda Beeman took him to a Best Western Hotel and bought him expensive clothes, implying "exciting plans" for his life. However, he resisted her advances at the motel and left by bus for his dormitory. That was the last time he experienced misconduct from Wanda Beeman.

RV2 revealed that he disclosed the misconduct by Wanda Beeman to a professor at the Bible college he was attending in Texas. The professor informed the president, who then called Merlyn Beeman, telling him to leave Niños or face police intervention in Mexico. RV2 was told that the Beemans fled the house that same day. He did not tell anyone else about the misconduct while at Niños.

## RV3

RV3 described to GRACE his experiences at Niños de México where he lived from the age of 10 to 19 starting in the 1970s. Initially, his experience was positive, but it changed as he witnessed disturbing events involving older children who were approximately 17 years of age.<sup>14</sup> RV3 indicated that Wanda and Merlyn Beeman committed sexual misconduct against several boys.

The environment at Niños de México was one where the children openly discussed sexual misconduct by the Beemans, which RV3 suggested was normalized. He recalled an incident where one of the boys showed him what he claimed was Wanda Beeman's pubic hair in a jar. Other witnesses also described a system of privileges afforded to certain older boys, such as better clothing and private rooms. These privileges, they said, were connected to their relationships with the Beemans.

GRACE spoke with other witnesses who grew up during this time period. W31 arrived at Ninos in or around the years 1969-1970 when he was approximately eight or nine years of age.<sup>15</sup> Like many of the children at Ninos, he had come from a broken and abusive home environment where he did not receive adequate care. W31 recalled that the first group of children included around 15 boys and girls between 10 to 16 years of age. As the ministry grew, Ninos expanded to accommodate the additional children. W31 recalled that they moved to the Genesis house where there were 30 boys staying in one room with two to three boys sharing the same bed.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> RV3 Tr. at 10.

<sup>15</sup> RV1 Tr. at 2.

<sup>16</sup> RV1 Tr. at 3.

W31 described how certain children were favored by Merlyn and Wanda Beeman. For example, some children were reportedly provided with food and water while other children had to travel to get their water.<sup>17</sup> W31 recalled that Wanda Beeman attempted to show favoritism and attention toward him, offering him special food and compliments, but he expressed his discomfort and was unreceptive to the advances. As a result, W31 reportedly experienced retaliation from Wanda Beeman and was made to work harder than the other children.

According to W31, the primary location where the Beemans committed sexual misconduct against the boys was in the Beemans' bedroom.<sup>18</sup>

W31 also indicated that he felt Wanda Beeman's behavior was not in line with the religious values that the home espoused. W31's account reveals a complex and conflicting experience with religious instruction during his time at Niños de Mexico. He described a highly religious environment where Bible readings, songs, and prayers were a daily occurrence. This consistent exposure to religious teachings instilled in him a sense of Christian values and expectations of purity, good behavior, and hard work as demanded by God. He and the other children were also encouraged to share their faith and invite others to church.

However, this seemingly devout environment was juxtaposed with the alleged misconduct of the Beemans. W31 stated that the children were aware of the alleged sexual misconduct involving the Beemans. This created a dissonance for W31, as the religious instruction emphasized purity and good behavior, while the adults in charge were suspected of engaging in activities that directly contradicted these teachings. He described this situation as "a secret in a loud voice,"<sup>19</sup> suggesting that the inappropriate behavior was widely known but not openly addressed. He told GRACE, "It was a dichotomy," and highlighted the stark contrast between the outward piety and the alleged inner misconduct.

This experience had a lasting impact on W31. He felt that the Beemans used religion as a tool to control and manipulate the children, while also engaging in behavior that undermined the very principles they espoused.

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<sup>17</sup> RV1 Interview.

<sup>18</sup> RV1 Tr. at 20.

<sup>19</sup> RV1 Tr. at 7.

RV3 detailed his transition from Niños de México to another home in Mexico City in or around 1978. This move occurred after the Beemans departed to the United States. Their departure was reportedly prompted by inquiries from Mexican authorities regarding allegations of sexual abuse occurring at the institution.

Following the Beemans' departure, several couples were brought in to manage the home. One of the initial couples, the Baders, stayed for a while and provided some assistance. However, they eventually left, and another man was put in charge. RV3 described this individual as violent and unable to manage the children. He was subsequently replaced by someone RV3 described as a kinder man whom the children liked, but for reasons RV3 did not fully understand, this man was not given the position. These transitions and the instability they created led to RV3 and some other children being moved to a different home in Mexico City.

The new home in Mexico City was run by Mariano Alquisira and his wife, Elmira.<sup>20</sup> RV3 lived with them for four years. He described their treatment as harsh and abusive, both physically and mentally.<sup>21</sup> RV3 recalled it as a dark period in his life.<sup>22</sup> He stated that the couple was part of Niños de México, indicating that the move was not entirely away from the organization but rather a relocation within it.<sup>23</sup>

This move is described in a letter dated November 30, 1978, that was sent to Ninos supporters in the United States. The letter presented the moving of the children to another home as a safeguarding measure. However, RV3 described experiences of physical and emotional misconduct from the caregivers of the home they were relocated to.

RV3 described the deep impact of these experiences on his life. He recounted the difficulty of recalling these events, indicating the emotional burden they carry. Furthermore, RV3 mentioned other forms of misconduct at Niños de México during his time there, including physical and emotional misconduct from older children, as well as the harsh treatment he and others received from Mariano and Elmira after leaving the home that was run by the Beemans.

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<sup>20</sup> RV3 Tr. at 13

<sup>21</sup> RV3 Tr. at 13.

<sup>22</sup> RV3 Tr. at 13

<sup>23</sup> RV3 Tr. at 13.

RV71 told GRACE that approximately 60 children were moved to a private home in Tlalpan run by Mariano Alquisira and his wife. According to RV71, the Alquisiras received money from the organization and were required to submit reports and photos for the Niños newsletter. RV71 stated that the Alquisiras misused the funds, buying cars and motorcycles for themselves while neglecting the children, and that there was almost no supervision from Niños leadership, with only one visit occurring in five years. RV71 described experiencing significant "psychological abuse" during her time at the home. Mariano Alquisira is reportedly deceased.

## Alleged Victim 1

According to W31, Wanda Beeman engaged in sexual misconduct against an older teenage boy [Alleged Victim 1], and then started targeting other boys after Alleged Victim 1 left the home.<sup>24</sup> W31 noticed that Wanda Beeman seemed to be "looking for somebody to replace [Alleged Victim 1]". He described her attempts to have "lonely time with guys."

According to W31, Wanda Beeman engaged in sexual misconduct against Alleged Victim 1 while Alleged Victim 1 was between 16 and 20 years of age. W31 recalled that another minor girl at Ninos at the time disclosed to him that "mommy", referring to Wanda Beeman, did not want her to be in a dating relationship with Alleged Victim 1.<sup>25</sup> This statement struck W31 as odd and, in hindsight, made him consider the possibility of a sexual relationship between Wanda Beeman and Alleged Victim 1. As time passed, W31 observed that Alleged Victim 1 received preferential treatment. Alleged Victim 1 was reportedly taken on trips and was given a bike and later a car while other children struggled to get enough food. These gifts were unusual given the limited resources at the home.

According to another witness, Alleged Victim 1 was one of the first individuals he knew of who had experienced sexual misconduct by Wanda Beeman because talk of the misconduct was circulating among the children at the time he arrived at Niños de México. He was around 10 or 11 years old when he first heard these accounts, but he did not fully comprehend the situation until later.

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<sup>24</sup> W31 Tr. at 6.

<sup>25</sup> W31 Tr. at 4.

Another witness told GRACE that Alleged Victim-1 seemingly bragged about being the "first one" to have a relationship with Wanda after the witness shared his own experiences of sexual misconduct by Wanda Beeman with Alleged Victim-1.

Alleged Victim 1 declined to be interviewed by GRACE.

## Alleged Victims 2-5

In addition to Alleged Victim 1, GRACE received accounts of an additional 4 named alleged victims of Wanda Beeman [Alleged Victims 2-5]. GRACE did not speak with these alleged victims, either because they could not be located, declined to be interviewed, or are deceased.

A witness recalled that Alleged Victim 2 experienced sexual misconduct from Wanda Beeman. The witness recalled that he used to tease Alleged Victim 2 about his involvement with Wanda Beeman.

According to a witness, Alleged Victim 3 was an older boy who was favored by the Beemans, received special privileges, and experienced sexual misconduct from Wanda Beeman. According to another witness, a child resident of Ninos in the 1970s, Alleged Victim 3 was one of the children who experienced sexual misconduct from Merlyn and Wanda Beeman.<sup>26</sup>

According to a witness, Alleged Victim 4 was an older boy at the time who experienced sexual misconduct by Wanda Beeman. Another witness who grew up at Ninos with Alleged Victim 4 also told GRACE of his knowledge that Alleged Victim 4 experienced sexual misconduct by Wanda Beeman.<sup>27</sup>

According to a witness, Alleged Victim 5 was also favored by the Beemans and received special privileges, such as better clothes and a private room. The witness recalled that Alleged Victim 5 disclosed to the witness that he was "sleeping" with Wanda Beeman. To illustrate the nature of Alleged Victim 5's interactions with Wanda Beeman, the witness recalled a disturbing incident where Alleged Victim 5 showed him what he claimed was Wanda Beeman's pubic hair in a jar. This incident served as corroboration to the witness that Alleged Victim 5 was experiencing sexual misconduct from Wanda Beeman. Another

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<sup>26</sup> W18 Tr. at 8.

<sup>27</sup> W18 Tr. at 9.

witness also recalled that Alleged Victim 5 was "telling everybody that he had a relationship with mommy or Wanda Beeman."<sup>28</sup>

Wanda Beeman is deceased. GRACE was unable to find any historical statements made by Wanda Beeman regarding the allegations.

## Merlyn Beeman

### RV1

RV1 described to GRACE a singular incident of sexual abuse by Merlyn Beeman when RV1 was around 11 or 12 years old. RV1 recalled that Merlyn Beeman touched him in his "male areas" while saying goodnight when RV1 was already in bed, alongside five other children in bunk beds. RV1 recalled that he froze and was scared, but it never happened again.

RV1 also recalled one instance where Merlyn Beeman physically abused a boy for drug involvement. RV1 noted that Merlyn Beeman was very strict against smoking, drinking, or any addictions, despite his "own private lifestyle."

## Alleged Victim 6

A witness recalled receiving a disclosure from Alleged Victim 6 that Merlyn Beeman had engaged in sexual misconduct toward him when Alleged Victim 6 was approximately 15 to 16 years of age.

Another witness recalled an incident where Merlyn Beeman came to the room where he and other boys slept and took Alleged Victim 6 away in the middle of the night. The witness was unsure whether the removal of Alleged Victim 6 in the middle of the night was continuous or a one-time event. The witness stated that Alleged Victim 6 was about 17 or 18 years old at the time of the incidents.

Merlyn Beeman declined an interview request from GRACE.

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<sup>28</sup> W31 Tr. at 10.

## Knowledge and Response to Allegations of Misconduct by Wanda and Merlyn Beeman

Testimony from reporting victims revealed significant concerns regarding favors and special privileges granted to certain older boys at Niños de México.<sup>29</sup> These privileges were directly linked to the sexual misconduct some of these boys experienced from the Beemans who operated the institution. These favored individuals reportedly received preferential treatment, which included better clothing and private rooms. These boys, who were often older, were given more respect and better living conditions compared to the other children. The awarding of these privileges created an environment of inequality and raised questions about the motivations behind such favoritism.

The system of favors and privileges contributed to a troubling atmosphere at Niños de México. A witness recalled that the boys openly discussed these sexual relationships, which seemed to be normalized within the institution. This open discussion, combined with the visible preferential treatment, further solidified the connection between the privileges and the sexual activities. The differential treatment based on these relationships was a key aspect of the culture and circumstances at Niños de México during this time period.

According to a witness, a local church pastor received a disclosure from an alleged victim that Merlyn and Wanda Beeman were sexually involved with the children. The pastor reportedly presented the allegation to Merlyn Beeman in a meeting where Merlyn Beeman denied the allegation. This denial was seemingly corroborated by an alleged victim at the time, who initially claimed to have been in a relationship with Wanda Beeman but later retracted his statement, saying he had been lying.<sup>30</sup>

According to a witness, someone associated with Ninos de Mexico reported Merlyn and Wanda Beeman to the authorities in or around 1974 and an investigation began.<sup>31</sup> According to the witness, at the time of the report Ninos had grown to approximately 80 children, had built Genesis House and Agape House, and were in the process of building Bethel House.<sup>32</sup> The residents were also involved in agricultural activities, raising livestock and growing crops. This context suggests that the alleged misconduct was occurring amidst a period of outward productivity and expansion.

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<sup>29</sup> RV1 Tr. at 13; RV5 Tr. at 10; RV9 Tr. at 12.

<sup>30</sup> RV1 Tr. at 10.

<sup>31</sup> RV1 Tr. at 19.

<sup>32</sup> RV1 Tr. at 7.

W3 worked at Ninos during the 1980s. He recalled that Merlyn Beeman went to each of the staff to inform them that there were "rumors" that he and his wife were involved sexually with the children. W3 recalled that Merlyn Beeman denied the allegations to the staff. Furthermore, when the authorities began "looking for the Beemans," Merlyn Beeman reportedly spoke to each of the boys at the home. He asked them what they would say about rumors of sexual relationships. A witness recounted telling Merlyn Beeman that he had heard such rumors from his brothers, but Merlyn Beeman denied them. The witness told GRACE that the Beemans consistently denied these allegations.

Merlyn Beeman was reportedly contacted by the *eMissourian* in 2023 as part of an article published in November of 2023 regarding allegations of sexual abuse at Ninos. According to the article, Merlyn Beeman told the *eMissourian* that allegations of child sexual abuse at Ninos were news to him, and reportedly stated: "This is a little bit on the silly side. I don't know anything about this, I'm sorry. I don't want to talk with you, I guess."<sup>33</sup>

A witness recalled that the Beemans left the home under pressure, not only from the authorities but also from church members who supported the mission. These church members reportedly informed Merlyn Beeman that he needed to leave.<sup>34</sup> This combination of legal pressure and loss of support within the religious community seems to have precipitated the Beemans' departure.

The authorities were apparently unable to locate Merlyn and Wanda Beeman. Merlyn and Wanda Beeman reportedly left for the United States, where Merlyn Beeman currently resides. When the Beemans left, they reportedly took a group of children with them to the United States. A witness estimated that this group consisted of about 12 or 13 children who had been living at Niños de México. The Beemans' decision to take these children suggests a possible attempt to maintain control or conceal information about the situation in Mexico. The suddenness of the Beemans' departure and that they reportedly relocated with a significant number of children from Niños de México further demonstrates the unusual and concerning circumstances surrounding the operation of the institution and the relationship between the Beemans and the children in their care.

The Beemans' response also reportedly included an element of pressure on the boys to support their narrative. By asking the boys what they would say to authorities,

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<sup>33</sup> Riley, Jonathan. "Union charity facing sex abuse allegations to hire outside investigators." (November 17, 2023) (Updated November 21, 2023). Pg. 9.

<sup>34</sup> RV1 Tr. at 11.

Merlyn Beeman may have been attempting to influence their testimonies and ensure they aligned with his denials.

Donald and Viola Bader became the executive directors of Niños de México after the departure of Merlyn and Wanda Beeman. They were involved in the response to allegations of sexual misconduct against the Beemans. According to a reporting victim, the Baders blamed the children for engaging in sexual activity with the Beemans and called them the "perverts of the world."<sup>35</sup>

On November 30, 1978, Donald and Viola Bader, the Executive Directors of Niños de México, issued a letter to the organization's supporters. The letter addressed a tumultuous year, 1978, which was described as one of the most difficult in the organization's twelve-year history. It began by referencing the resignation of the previous directors, Merlyn and Wanda Beeman, stating that the departures stemmed from personal reasons involving moral integrity. The Baders characterized the situation as tragic and requested prayers for the individuals involved. The letter did not name Merlyn or Wanda Beeman. Concerning the allegations against the Beemans, the letter stated:

First let me say concerning the resignation of our past directors that their resignation was a very tragic situation. I feel all that needs to be said concerning it is that they left for personal reasons that involved personal moral integrity. I don't think any more needs to be said about this except to seek your prayers for them and those involved with them, that their lives can be straightened out and that they can find peace with their Lord.<sup>36</sup>

The letter further detailed attempts made since May 1, 1978, to address behavioral issues among the children. It was determined that a significant intervention was necessary due to the children's prolonged exposure to behavioral misconduct. Consequently, on November 11, 1978, all but seven children from "Unit I" were relocated. Forty of these children were moved to a Christian home in Mexico City for psychological counseling and intensive Bible study. This relocation was described as a temporary measure expected to last four to eight months, and the Baders noted the substantial cost incurred by Niños de México. The description of this move aligns with the descriptions provided by reporting victims and witnesses regarding their relocation to the home run by the Alquisiras.

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<sup>35</sup> RV5 Tr. at 18.

<sup>36</sup> Bader, D., & Bader, V. (1978, November 30). An open and important letter to the supporters of Niños de México. Niños de México.

To restore the community's faith in the program, Jack and Vicki Yarnell and their family moved into the Unit I facilities. The Baders relayed that local townspeople and officials had expressed a desire for the organization to remain, contingent upon the issues being addressed.

Jack and Vicki Yarnell, along with their entire family have moved into the facilities at Unit I. This move was made because of the need of restoring the faith of the people of the village of San Vicente in our program. In conversation with the townspeople and officials they said **THEY WANTED US TO STAY BUT EXPECTED US TO CLEAN UP WHAT HAD HAPPENED**. This I believe can happen by bringing a strong family such as the Yarnells have into this area.<sup>37</sup>

The letter conveyed the difficulty of the decisions made and the emotional strain experienced by the staff. Despite these challenges, Niños de México aimed to have Units IV and V operational within eighteen months, with the objective of providing care for 150 children. The letter concluded with an appeal for continued support, prayers, and understanding from the community and its supporters.

OH, PLEASE don't forsake us now! NINOS DE MEXICO IS ALIVE AND WELL. We received a terrific blow this spring. It knocked us down but not out. We are back on our feet. We are again moving up. With God's help and your standing with us we again have things moving forward. We have Unit II and III ready for the children to return to. I have personally set a goal of Unit IV and Unit V to be in existence within eighteen months, with a total of 150 children under our care. Just this week we had to refuse six children a place to stay because we do not have a place for them now. .

PRAY with us daily that the decisions that we have made are right and the lives of these children can again be straightened out. PRAY with us daily that our goals can be realized, not for our glory but for the sake of these children. PRAY for our Board of Directors in the states and their willingness to stand with us in all our needs. PRAY for the continued understanding of the Federal Police here in Mexico who were ready to close us down this spring, but who have agreed to give us time to show them that we are trying to make things

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<sup>37</sup> Bader, D., & Bader, V. (1978, November 30). An open and important letter to the supporters of Niños de México. Niños de México.

better. PRAY for the people in the village that they will understand what has happened and will give us time to prove ourselves.<sup>38</sup>

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Wanda and Merlyn Beeman

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of sexual misconduct by Wanda and Merlyn Beeman, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from reporting victims and historical documents supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test without reaching "beyond a reasonable doubt," is met through the consistency, corroboration, and contextual factors present in the accounts.

Multiple reporting victims and witnesses provide consistent and mutually corroborating accounts of misconduct by Wanda Beeman. A witness described Wanda Beeman's attempts to establish "lonely time with guys" and observed preferential treatment towards Alleged Victim 1, including gifts that were unusual given the home's limited resources. This observation is significantly bolstered by another witness' recollection that talk of the misconduct was circulating among the children regarding Alleged Victim 1 and Wanda Beeman. Witness accounts further strengthen this by detailing how children openly discussed the sexual misconduct, suggesting its normalization, and by noting a system of privileges (better clothing, private rooms) afforded to certain older boys in connection with their relationships with the Beemans. The disturbing incident recalled by witnesses involving Alleged Victim 5 showing what he claimed was Wanda Beeman's pubic hair in a jar, coupled with a witness' recollection that Alleged Victim 5 was "telling everybody that he had a relationship with mommy or Wanda Beeman," provides a highly specific and consistent detail that lends considerable veracity to the claims of sexual misconduct.

The allegations against Merlyn Beeman also demonstrate credibility through corroborating testimony. A witness disclosed receiving an explicit account from Alleged Victim 6 regarding sexual misconduct by Merlyn Beeman. Another witness independently recalled Merlyn Beeman taking Alleged Victim 6 away in the middle of the night, a highly unusual action that aligns with the nature of the alleged misconduct. The consistency in

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<sup>38</sup> Bader, D., & Bader, V. (1978, November 30). An open and important letter to the supporters of Niños de México. Niños de México.

these separate accounts regarding Merlyn Beeman, particularly the timing and context described by witnesses, reinforces their credibility.

Furthermore, the institutional response and historical documents provide significant indirect corroboration for the allegations. The November 30, 1978 letter from Donald and Viola Bader, the Executive Directors of Niños de México, explicitly addresses a "tragic situation" involving the "resignation of our past directors" due to "personal reasons that involved personal moral integrity." While not naming Merlyn or Wanda Beeman, the context of the document, including the immediate need for a "significant intervention" due to children's "prolonged exposure to behavioral misconduct," and the relocation of 40 children for "psychological counseling and intensive Bible study," strongly aligns with the reported misconduct and the need for a protective response. The letter's emphasis on restoring the community's faith and the police's willingness to close the institution further underscores the gravity of the situation and the perceived validity of the concerns by external parties at the time. The Beemans' sudden departure under pressure from authorities and supporting church members, and their reported act of taking a group of children to the United States, as recounted by witnesses, also suggests an attempt to avoid accountability and control the narrative, which is consistent with the behavior of alleged perpetrators.

The Beemans' denial of the allegations, including Merlyn Beeman's statements to staff and his reported response to the *eMissourian* in 2023, while noted, does not significantly detract from the credibility of the victim accounts, particularly given the consistency of multiple disclosures over an extended period. The application of victim delayed disclosure principles is also relevant here, as initial denials or retractions, especially when stemming from pressure or fear, do not invalidate later, consistent disclosures. The children's perceived pressure to protect the Beemans, as described by a witness, aligns with patterns observed in cases of child abuse where victims may feel compelled to defend their abusers due to dependence or manipulation.

In conclusion, based on the consistent and specific accounts of multiple reporting victims, their corroboration of details concerning preferential treatment and the nature of the misconduct, combined with the admissions and actions detailed in the 1978 institutional letter—which acknowledges severe moral integrity issues and a crisis necessitating drastic measures for child protection—the allegations of sexual misconduct by Wanda and Merlyn Beeman are deemed credible under the GRACE burden of proof. The confluence of these factors, including the direct testimony, indirect corroboration from

institutional responses, and the application of established investigatory principles, supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred.

## Fidel Nunez

Fidel Nunez is a former house parent of one of Ninos homes in Mexico. He worked at Niños de México in the 1980s as a house parent of Agape House. He reportedly committed sexual misconduct against several minor girls. GRACE was unable to locate contact information for Fidel Nunez.

## Alleged Victim 7

According to a witness who spoke with GRACE, Ninos leadership removed the witness from Ninos when he was approximately 18 years of age after the witness reported suspected misconduct by Fidel Nunez against a minor girl. The witness recalled that he was approached by Alleged Victim 7, who was approximately 14 to 15 years of age at the time, and was told by Alleged Victim 7 that Fidel Nunez, a house parent, attempted to “touch” her.<sup>39</sup> The witness recalled that he reported the disclosure to Keith Bader, who was the executive director at the time, and to Gonzalo Flores, the field director at the time.<sup>40</sup> Gonzalo Flores is a current board member of Niños de México. According to the witness, Ninos conducted an internal investigation of the allegations and concluded that the witness was making up the allegations because he did not like Fidel Nunez. The witness recalled that they kicked him out of Ninos. As a result, the witness was unable to finish High School that year. After he was removed, the witness reportedly informed external authorities of the suspected abuse and Alleged Victim 7 was removed from the home along with his siblings.

According to the witness, Fidel Nunez would give the girls small gifts and favors. The witness recalled that there were approximately 20 girls in the home.<sup>41</sup> According to the witness, it was later discovered that Fidel Nunez “was abusing a few of the girls, the younger girls, young girls.”<sup>42</sup> The witness recalled that one of his minor siblings who lived in the home had received letters that Fidel Nunez had written to the girls. The girls reportedly gave those letters to Terry Stine, who was the executive director at the time the letters

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<sup>39</sup> RV5 Tr. at 19.

<sup>40</sup> RV5 Tr. at 19.

<sup>41</sup> RV5 Tr. at 19.

<sup>42</sup> RV5 Tr. at 19.

were provided, and the content of those letters resulted in Ninos separating from Fidel Nunez.<sup>43</sup> The witness recalled that the reports to Terry Stine occurred approximately two years after the witness left Ninos.<sup>44</sup> Terry Stine became the executive director of Ninos in July, 1987.<sup>45</sup> Another witness recalled that Terry Stine removed Fidel Nunez from Ninos.<sup>46</sup>

GRACE was unable to locate contact information for Alleged Victim 7.

GRACE did not receive responses from Gonzalo Flores to repeated attempts to contact him through a phone number and email address provided to GRACE by Ninos de Mexico.

## Alleged Victim 8

The following summary is based on documented victim accounts that were reviewed by GRACE. These accounts may include audio statements, written statements, and public testimonies.

According to AV8's account, Fidel Nunez engaged in sexual misconduct toward AV8 when she was about eight years old. According to AV8, Fidel Nunez was building a house in Tequesquina, and he took her there, supposedly to get materials. Instead, he led her to a bed. He then took off his pants, and AV8 saw him lowering them. She became scared and did not know what he intended to do.

Fidel Nunez reportedly managed to touch her vagina briefly, and AV8 started screaming and crying. He then reportedly stopped and did not proceed any further. AV8 states that this was the only incident of misconduct she experienced with Fidel Nunez.

## Knowledge and Response to Allegations against Fidel Nunez

Terry Stine was the Executive Director of Ninos de Mexico from 1987-2007. Terry Stine told GRACE he became aware of issues with Fidel Nunez involving "looking at" and "touching" a couple of girls. Terry Stine said his immediate response was to remove Fidel Nunez from the house and terminate his employment. An investigation was conducted by

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<sup>43</sup> RV5 Tr. at 21-22.

<sup>44</sup> RV5 Tr. at 21.

<sup>45</sup> History of the work at Niños de México.

<sup>46</sup> RV1 Tr. at 13.

the psychologist, who reported to Terry Stine that instances of misconduct had occurred. Fidel Nunez admitted that something had happened, and Terry Stine immediately escorted him out. Terry Stine stated that they had a "zero tolerance" policy for such behavior. Fidel Nunez's wife continued to work with the organization in other capacities, but Fidel Nunez was never allowed to be around the children again. Terry Stine does not remember who conducted the investigation or the specific findings beyond Fidel Nunez's admission.

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations against Fidel Nunez

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of sexual misconduct by Fidel Nunez, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from alleged victims and the institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test without reaching "beyond a reasonable doubt," is met through the consistency, corroboration, and contextual factors present in the accounts.

The accounts from multiple witnesses and the subsequent institutional response provide significant corroboration. A witness, who was reportedly removed from Niños de México after reporting suspected misconduct, explicitly stated that Alleged Victim 7 disclosed that Fidel Nunez attempted to "touch" her. The witness's immediate report to Keith Bader and Gonzalo Flores, followed by an internal investigation that allegedly dismissed the witness's claims, establishes an initial timeline of alleged misconduct and an organizational response. Critically, the witness's removal from the institution after making this report, and Alleged Victim 7's subsequent removal from the home along with her siblings after the witness informed external authorities, lends credence to the allegations and suggests an attempt by the institution to manage the situation rather than address it transparently.

Further, witness recollection that it was "later discovered that Fidel Nunez 'was abusing a few of the girls, the younger girls, young girls'" and that letters written by Fidel Nunez to the girls were given to Terry Stine (who became Executive Director in July 1987), leading to Fidel Nunez's separation from the organization, provides powerful corroboration. Terry Stine's own admission to GRACE that he became aware of issues with Fidel Nunez involving "looking at" and "touching" a couple of girls, and that his "immediate response was to remove Fidel Nunez from the house and terminate his employment," directly supports the substance of the allegations. While Stine claimed to have had a "zero

tolerance" policy, his statement that Fidel Nunez "admitted that something had happened" validates the core of the misconduct.

AV8's direct testimony significantly strengthens the credibility assessment. Her detailed account of Fidel Nunez taking her to a house, removing his pants, and briefly touching her vagina when she was approximately eight years old provides a specific, vivid, and highly credible account of sexual misconduct. The consistency between a witness's broader claims of Fidel Nunez abusing "younger girls" and AV8's specific experience as a young child aligns strongly. The fact that AV8 started screaming and crying, leading Nunez to stop, is a common response to such trauma and further bolsters the authenticity of her narrative.

While Terry Stine's inability to recall specifics beyond Fidel's admission is noted, it does not undermine the foundational fact of Fidel Nunez's removal and admission of wrongdoing. The absence of contact information for Fidel Nunez, and the lack of response from Gonzalo Flores, limits direct corroboration from those individuals, but the cumulative weight of a witness's detailed and consistent accounts, AV8's specific direct testimony, and Terry Stine's corroborating admissions regarding Fidel Nunez's removal and "something had happened" is compelling.

In conclusion, based on the consistent and specific witness and victim accounts regarding sexual misconduct by Fidel Nunez, combined with the admissions and actions taken by institutional leadership (specifically Terry Stine's confirmation of Fidel Nunez's removal due to admitted misconduct), the allegations against Fidel Nunez are deemed credible under the GRACE burden of proof. The confluence of direct victim testimony, corroborating third-party accounts, and the institutional response supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred.

## Fernando and Martha Soriano



Fernando Soriano and his wife, Martha Soriano, joined Niños de México in 1988 as house parents of Agape House. Fernando and Martha Soriano became house parents after Fidel and his wife left.

In July, 2005, Fernando and Martha Soriano retired as house parents at Agape House and began serving in the area of Alumni ministry, reaching out to the alumni teenagers and adults.

## Alleged Victim 51

The following summary is based on documented victim accounts that were reviewed by GRACE. These accounts may include audio statements, written statements, and public testimonies.

Fernando Soriano reportedly committed sexual misconduct against AV51 when she was a minor at Niños de México. AV51 stated that she and AV52 experienced something similar to, but not, rape, from Fernando Soriano. AV51 recounted several instances of sexual misconduct and abuse by Fernando Soriano, who was responsible for her care at Agape House. AV51 described how the misconduct began subtly, with Fernando Soriano giving kisses on the cheek that gradually became kisses on the mouth as she grew older. She attributed this to her vulnerability and desire for affection, given a lack of parental figures in her life.

As AV51 reached the age of twelve, the sexual misconduct escalated. She detailed how Fernando Soriano would wake her up half an hour before the other children, using this opportunity to touch her inappropriately under her pajamas and unbutton them. He also reportedly forced her to touch him. AV51 stated that while there was never penetration, these acts occurred multiple times and caused her significant distress.

Fernando Soriano would reportedly pray with AV51 at night, sometimes while helping her with homework. According to AV51, he would then engage in sexual touching, including handcuffing her. After these incidents, Fernando Soriano reportedly would tell AV51 that what they did "shouldn't be said" and that it was "just between you and me." AV51 recalled he would then make her pray with him, telling her they needed to ask God for forgiveness because what they did was "bad to God."

AV51 recounted feeling bad and crying all the time because she felt dirty and believed she had done something very wrong. She felt blamed by him and made out to be the one responsible for what had occurred.

According to AV51, she attempted to report the abuse to Terry Stine, the director at the time, but Stine allegedly dismissed her claims and sided with Fernando Soriano. AV51 also told Fernando Soriano's wife, Martha, who responded by asking AV51 what she felt

and if she liked it, rather than addressing the abuse. AV51 felt she had no support from anyone and was forced to endure the abuse.

AV51 also recounted an incident where she was wearing a dress because she had been told they were going to a party. When Martha Soriano saw her dressed up, she asked why and then made AV51 jump off the roof. AV51 injured her ankle as a result.

Later, when people were coming for the party, Martha Soriano reportedly told AV51 that she couldn't tell anyone that Martha had made her jump off the roof. Martha also told her that she couldn't tell them many things, because if she did, DIF would take her brothers to another place and separate them. AV51 said she didn't want to be separated from her brothers, so she didn't speak about what happened. When DIF arrived and asked about her foot, she told them she had twisted it while playing football.

AV51 recalled being hit with a spoon until it broke. She also described being punished with hands on her belly, which she stated are "punishments that are not for children." Additionally, she recalled Martha putting her hands on a hot stove and taking them off, although it is unclear if this was a form of punishment inflicted on AV51 directly or just witnessed by her. There were also instances of being given soap in the mouth for saying something rude and being forced to stand facing the wall for half an hour.

Later, when AV51 decided to leave the house for her own safety, she went to Terry Stine, the executive director at the time, and told him she was leaving. Terry Stine reportedly told her she could leave but would have to cut all the hair of the kids in Agape House for free for a year. AV51 said no, to which Terry Stine reportedly told her about all the things the institution had given to her. AV51 still chose to leave. However, Fernando Soriano reportedly would not provide her with the identification papers she needed to be able to get a job. When she reached back out to Fernando Soriano to tell him she needed the papers to be able to get a job, he reportedly asked her to come to the house the next day. When AV51 arrived the next day, she was surprised to find that Fernando Soriano was the only one in the house. She stated:

So, I arrived at ten o'clock, the next day, and there was no one in the house. And I went in, and Fernando, I went in to the living room. And, what Fernando did was, he started kissing me, he untied my blouse, he started touching me, and I was shaking, and I said, that's it, if I left the house so he

wouldn't abuse me, he's going to do it, because I'm alone, because there's no one.

Because he even opened the door and said, come in, your mom is in there, your mom, and [House Staff Cook]. So, I arrived, and it turns out that there was no one. So, that's how it was, of abusing me.

I remember that Fernando, when he was kissing me, he was telling me that he could rent a room, so that I could live alone. Well, he wanted me as a lover, and I told him, no, I don't like you, I don't want to be with you.

AV51 recalled that during this incident the doorbell rang and it was the house staff cook. AV51 recalled:

So, [House Staff Cook] arrived, and she saw me crying, and with my clothes, my blouse was made of buttons, and a button had come off. So, she saw me crying, and she said, what's wrong?

And I said, no, it's just that this happened, and she said, oh no, if these walls spoke, you would see everything that has happened, [AV51], in this house. So, in Genesis, it's a mess. And I said, yes, it's good that you arrived, because if not, Fernando would have raped me.

And the lady hugged me, and she said, don't worry, I'm going to be here, and I'm not leaving right now. Fernando came out with my papers, and he said, here, and he said, yes, thank you. And I left the house.

Later, Janet Ross reportedly spoke with AV51 at a café, and reportedly told AV51 she needed to forgive everything due to "resentment" in her heart. AV51 told Janet Ross she had nothing against her or Steve Ross but hoped they would handle things well.

Janet Ross stated that she and her husband were not on staff at Niños de México during the time the allegations against Fernando Soriano initially arose. However, after returning to staff in 2012, she had breakfast with AV51, who disclosed that she had been molested by Fernando Soriano over a long period of time, starting when she was young. AV51 reportedly told Janet Ross that she had disclosed the abuse to then-Executive Director Terry Stine when she was 18 years old but was not believed, which made her angry

and feel unsafe. Janet Ross recalled crying upon hearing the disclosure and wishing she and her husband had built enough of a relationship with the children during their earlier tenure for them to feel comfortable sharing such difficulties. Janet Ross understood that AV51's sister had also been a victim of Fernando Soriano.

According to AV51, Steve Ross spoke with AV51 on several occasions and told her he was trying to find a solution. AV51 said that over time a rule was implemented that required young people 18 years of age and older to move to Ninos dormitories in San Vicente.

According to AV51, Janet Ross contacted AV51 in or around 2020. Janet told AV51 that she needed to forgive everything that happened to her at Agape house. AV51 stated she would forgive what happened to her. AV51 noted that Janet already knew about the situation because "everyone knew" when Jesus Rios was made to apologize to AV51 in church. During this later conversation, AV51 told Janet that the "same mess" was still in the institution and that there had been more abuses. AV51 referenced things she had been told about recent events at the institution. AV51 told Janet Ross that if they could not control the work, they should close the institution. Janet Ross reportedly responded that it was impossible to have absolute control with the increasing number of houses they had to oversee and said, "I'm sorry."

Recently, AV51 wrote to Fernando Soriano through social media and confronted him with the misconduct she experienced from him. Fernando Soriano reportedly apologized.

## Alleged Victim 52

Fernando Soriano reportedly committed sexual misconduct against AV52 when she was a minor at Niños de México. GRACE spoke with a witness who received a disclosure from AV52 regarding misconduct AV52 experienced from Fernando Soriano. GRACE also reviewed a public statement from AV52 posted around or shortly after the death of AV52 after a long battle with illness.

Hi, I am [AV52]. Today from heaven I share my experience in the Ninos de Mexico institution. When I arrived, I was the happiest girl in the world. After my dad died, my mom took her stress out on me, beating me frequently, so I thought it would be better there than with her. After a short time, I asked for my half-siblings, [REDACTED], to come. Weeks, months and years passed

until I turned 14 years old. My smile was wiped from my face when I started to be touched and kissed by Fernando Soriano. One day before my 15th birthday, he told me I was going to start my driving class, and that was the day he abused me in the Datsun truck. I broke out sobbing. I felt dirty. I felt worthless. That day, I could not contain my tears, and Martha knew because Fernando did not hide it well. In her courage, she grabbed [REDACTED] and started to kiss him on the mouth and told him he was her favorite to use to make Fernando jealous. That's how it was until the day I was kicked out of the house. It hurt me that Terry had believed Martha, since she told me her marriage was at risk and if they didn't kick me out, they would leave and kick me out without caring if I had anywhere to go. I didn't have the nerve to tell my sister, [AV51], because I knew it would make her cry. I was left worried since Martha threatened me, saying "don't believe things will stay the same. You are leaving, but your sister is staying and she will pay for this." They never let me get close to the house, and I never knew what was happening to my sister. I thought that maybe I should have told my sister not to let them do the same to her, but it hurt too much to talk about what had happened. I realized how much my sister had suffered when she came to my house, and that's when I told her, "That evil Martha did exactly what she said she would do, and not only that, but the other pig did the same disgraceful things to you too!" We cried together and talked over what had happened to us, and I couldn't tell my sister everything because I was so overcome with tears. I am not in this life anymore today due to an illness brought on by "resentment." All of the hate, the courage, the helplessness of not being able to speak up, not being able to teach you how life should be. There are knots in my throat, and all of this pain ended with my life. I didn't get justice, and I left this life being called crazy. Today, I am in God's arms. Today, I rest in peace.

GRACE also interviewed a local minister in Mexico City who did not know much about Fernando, but he heard numerous reports about Martha from the children who attended the local ministry he ran. The children reported that Martha was verbally, physically, and psychologically abusive and would degrade them, calling them "useless" and "good for nothing."

GRACE's attempts to interview Fernando Soriano did not elicit a response.

## Knowledge and Response to Allegations against Fernando and Martha Soriano

In a public Facebook post dated July 12, 2025, a page titled *Ayundante al Niño: Exigimos Justicia - We Demand Justice* posted the following information about Terry Stine:

Today we talk about Terry Stine, who was the executive director of Helping Children for 20 years, beginning in 1987. During his leadership, he received a complaint of abuse against employee Fernando Soriano. Not only did he not report the complaint to the authorities, but he completely dismissed the victim's testimony. To this day, Terry Stine has never been held accountable for his omission.<sup>47</sup>

**ACCOMPLICE:** Terry Stine: Former Executive Director of Niños de Mexico, who received an abuse allegation against NDM employee Fernando Soriano.

Stine did not report the allegation, but dismissed the victim.

**CÓMPlice:** Terry Stine: Exdirector Ejecutivo de Ayudante al Niño, quien recibió una denuncia de abuso contra Fernando Soriano, empleado de AAN. Stine no denunció, pero desestimó a la víctima.



Terry Stine told GRACE he has no knowledge of any concerns or allegations regarding Fernando Soriano's conduct as a house parent at Agape House while Stine was there. He stated that he has seen some accusations online, but he does not recall any issues with Fernando during his tenure.

<sup>47</sup> See: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61552660141715>

When asked about a former resident's attempt to report abuse by Fernando Soriano to him, Stine stated that he did not recall such a report. He believes that if there had been a report, he would have taken care of it, but he has no memory of it. According to Stine, there were times when children would manipulate situations to get people in trouble, and these were investigated by the psychologist, with no findings. However, regarding Fernando specifically, Stine repeatedly affirmed he knew nothing of any misconduct.

Stine also explicitly denied awareness of specific allegations against Fernando Soriano, including:

- Alleged practice of giving kisses on the mouth that escalated.
- Allegations of waking girls up for inappropriate touching or forcing girls to touch him.
- Alleged action of handcuffing an alleged victim. Stine called this allegation "garbage" and stated he never heard it and that handcuffs were not in any of their homes.
- Alleged withholding of a girl's identification papers after she left the home and subsequent misconduct when she came to retrieve them.

According to Stine, his relationship with Fernando was professional, as Fernando was a staff member and a part-time minister and elder at the church Stine attended. Stine described Fernando as a "very honorable man" and stated that his relationship with Fernando was not closer than his relationships with other staff members.

## **Determination of Credibility of Allegations against Fernando and Martha Soriano**

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of sexual misconduct by Fernando Soriano, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from reporting victims and the institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test without reaching "beyond a reasonable doubt," is met through the consistency, specificity, and corroborating factors present in the accounts.

The primary and most compelling evidence comes from AV51's detailed and emotionally resonant testimony. Her account describes a pattern of escalating sexual misconduct by Fernando Soriano, beginning subtly with kisses on the cheek that

progressed to kisses on the mouth as she grew older. She then details how Soriano would wake her early to touch her inappropriately under her pajamas and force her to touch him, emphasizing that these acts occurred multiple times without penetration but caused significant distress. Her recollection of Soriano praying with her at night, sometimes while helping with homework, and then engaging in sexual touching, including handcuffing her, adds specific and disturbing details that enhance credibility. The alleged perpetrator's subsequent admonition that what they did "shouldn't be said" and that they needed to "ask God for forgiveness because what they did was 'bad to God'" highlights a manipulative tactic often used by abusers, further validating AV51's experience. AV51's stated feelings of being "dirty" and crying constantly, along with her belief that she was blamed, are consistent trauma responses.

AV51's attempt to report the abuse to then-Executive Director Terry Stine and his alleged dismissal of her claims, siding with Soriano, is a critical point. Her subsequent disclosure to Soriano's wife, Martha, who reportedly responded by asking AV51 what she felt and if she liked it, rather than addressing the abuse, further illustrates a pattern of institutional and individual failure to protect children and respond appropriately to disclosures. This pattern of dismissal and victim-blaming, as described by AV51, is a significant factor supporting her credibility, as delayed or dismissed disclosures are common in cases of child sexual abuse. The incident where Martha Soriano allegedly made AV51 jump off a roof, resulting in injury, and then coerced her to lie to DIF to prevent separation from her siblings, paints a picture of a controlling and abusive environment where children were silenced, lending further credence to AV51's fear of disclosure.

The alleged incident where Fernando Soriano withheld AV51's identification papers and then engaged in further sexual misconduct when she went to retrieve them provides a specific, coercive, and highly disturbing account. AV51's detailed description of his actions, her fear, and the timely arrival of the cook, who corroborated the general atmosphere of abuse by stating, "if these walls spoke, you would see everything that has happened... in this house," offers significant third-party corroboration to the broader abusive environment and, implicitly, to the specific incident. Fernando Soriano's reported apology to AV51 through social media after she confronted him with the abuse is a direct admission of wrongdoing and provides powerful corroboration of the allegations.

The credibility of the allegations against Fernando Soriano is substantially strengthened by the testimony of Janet Ross. She provides a direct account of a disclosure made to her in 2012 by AV51, who detailed a long history of molestation by Fernando

Soriano. This serves as a crucial corroborating outcry to a trusted adult. Critically, Janet Ross's testimony also corroborates the element of institutional failure; she confirms that AV51 reported feeling dismissed and unsafe after her initial disclosure at age 18 to then-Executive Director Terry Stine was not believed. This aligns with and validates AV51's account of a delayed and inadequate initial response from leadership, which is a key component of the overall findings.

The posthumous public statement of AV52 provides significant, specific, and emotionally resonant corroboration of the allegations against both Fernando and Martha Soriano. AV52's account details a pattern of sexual abuse by Fernando Soriano beginning when she was 14, including being touched and kissed, and a specific incident of abuse in a Datsun truck. The statement explicitly notes that Martha Soriano was aware of the abuse, stating, "Martha knew because Fernando did not hide it well." This directly supports AV51's account of a similar pattern of abuse and institutional complicity.

Furthermore, AV52's testimony describes a pattern of manipulative and retaliatory behavior from Martha Soriano. This includes Martha's alleged actions to make Fernando jealous, her role in having AV52 "kicked out of the house" to protect her marriage, and the direct threat made to AV52: "You are leaving, but your sister is staying and she will pay for this." This threat aligns with and provides a powerful motive for the subsequent abuse experienced by AV51, as recounted in AV52's realization: "That evil Martha did exactly what she said she would do, and not only that, but the other pig did the same disgraceful things to you too!" The shared experience of abuse, and the profound, lasting emotional impact that AV52 attributes to this "resentment" and helplessness, adds a layer of tragic credibility to the overall pattern of abuse and institutional failure within the Soriano household.

While Terry Stine denies any knowledge of concerns or allegations regarding Fernando Soriano's conduct, and explicitly called the handcuffing allegation "garbage," his denial is contradicted by AV51's direct testimony of reporting the abuse to him. The *Ayudante al Niño: Exigimos Justicia – We Demand Justice* Facebook post, which explicitly states that Terry Stine "received a complaint of abuse against employee Fernando Soriano" and "dismissed the victim's testimony," further challenges Stine's claim of ignorance.

While the local pastor's testimony focuses on Martha Soriano's verbal, physical, and psychological abuse, it reinforces the pervasive abusive environment within the home operated by the Sorianos, which aligns with AV51's and AV52's broader experiences of physical punishment and control.

In conclusion, based on the highly specific, consistent, and emotionally congruent direct testimony of AV51 and AV52, significantly corroborated by Fernando Soriano's alleged apology, the staff cook's implicit corroboration of a pervasive abusive environment, and the institutional failure to address reported concerns, the allegations of sexual misconduct against Fernando Soriano are deemed credible under the GRACE burden of proof. The confluence of these factors supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred.

## Jesus Rios

Jesus Rios was reportedly a relief house parent for Fernando Soriano at Agape House, and would serve as the house parents over the weekends when Fernando Soriano was off duty.

In victim accounts obtained by GRACE, AV51 detailed several instances involving Jesus Rios, who served as a relief, or substitute, house parent at Agape's house when Fernando Soriano was off duty on Fridays and Saturdays. AV51 alleges that Jesus Rios engaged in similar misconduct to Fernando Soriano, including kissing her on the mouth and touching her. She stated that these incidents with Jesus Rios began when she was 14 years old. AV51 expressed a belief that Fernando Soriano might have shared information about his own misconduct with Jesus Rios because the misconduct she experienced from Jesus Rios was very similar.

AV51 recalled that Jesus Rios would use opportunities during football games to get close to her, hug her, and kiss her. According to AV51, he also wrote her letters expressing romantic feelings and suggesting she run away with him. AV51 had three such letters from Jesus Rios, along with gifts like perfumes and money.

One specific alleged incident involved Jesus Rios kissing her when his wife was leaving. His wife reportedly saw this, told AV51 to go inside, and then confronted Jesus Rios. Later, Jesus Rios' wife mentioned to AV51 that she could "put him in jail" and told AV51 that she didn't want Jesus Rios getting close to her.

According to AV51, she reported Rios' behavior to a local pastor. As a result, Rios was made to apologize to AV51 in front of the entire church. AV51 also showed the pastor the letters and gifts Jesus Rios had given her. AV51 felt that Rios' gifts, including money,

were an attempt to silence her. AV51 was also reportedly made to apologize in front of the church.

## Knowledge and Response to Allegations Against Jesus Rios

Janet Ross recalled that the allegation against Jesus Rios occurred while she and her husband were on staff. She understood that AV51 reported to her house mother, Martha Soriano, that Jesus Rios, who was serving as a substitute house parent, had tried to kiss her. This was brought to Steve Ross's attention. Janet Ross believes Jesus Rios and his wife, Esther, were removed immediately. She was not part of the meetings but was present when Jesus Rios apologized to AV51 in the house, in the presence of Terry Stine and Fernando Soriano.

According to Terry Stine, he has no knowledge of any concerns or allegations regarding Jesus Rios' conduct as a house parent at Agape House. Stine stated he does not remember a staff member named Jesus Rios working at Ninos during his tenure. Seth Thomas, who worked at Ninos at the time, told GRACE that Jesus Rios was an elder at the church they attended but did not have any staff roles during the ten years Seth Thomas worked at Ninos. However, Seth Thomas clarified that there were times when a married couple from the church would step in to assist as substitute house parents on rare occasions when that was needed.

There would be a rare occasion where we would be short substitute house parents, and so we might invite a married couple from the church to come be substitute house parents for a day. I don't think they were part of that, but on occasion, pretty rare, but on occasion, that might've happened.

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Jesus Rios

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of sexual misconduct by Jesus Rios, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from reporting victims and the institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test without reaching "beyond a reasonable doubt," is met through the consistency, specificity, and corroborating factors present in the accounts.

The primary and most compelling evidence comes from AV51's detailed testimony. Her account describes how Jesus Rios, serving as a relief house parent when Fernando Soriano was off duty, engaged in similar misconduct to Soriano, including kissing her on the mouth and touching her, beginning when she was 14 years old. AV51's belief that Fernando Soriano might have shared information about his own misconduct with Jesus Rios due to the similarity of their actions, while speculative, is a common dynamic in abusive environments and is consistent with the pervasive issues reported at the institution.

AV51's specific recollections of Jesus Rios using opportunities during football games to get close, hug, and kiss her, as well as his writing her romantic letters and suggesting she run away with him, provide concrete details that enhance credibility. That she reportedly received three such letters, along with gifts like perfumes and money, further supports her narrative of a manipulative grooming process.

A critical corroborating incident is AV51's description of Jesus Rios kissing her when his wife was leaving, leading to his wife confronting him and then telling AV51 that she could "put him in jail" and that she didn't want Jesus Rios getting close to AV51. This direct observation and intervention by Rios's wife provides strong, independent corroboration of his inappropriate behavior and acknowledges its severity.

AV51's decision to report Jesus Rios's behavior to a local pastor, and the subsequent public apology Jesus Rios was reportedly made to give in front of the entire church, is a significant piece of evidence. That AV51 also reportedly showed the pastor the letters and gifts further substantiates her claims. While AV51 was also reportedly made to apologize, which could be seen as an institutional attempt to silence her or maintain appearances, that Jesus Rios was reportedly compelled to apologize in public indicates that his actions were recognized as problematic and required a public response, lending significant weight to the credibility of AV51's report. AV51's feeling that Jesus Rios's gifts, including money, were an attempt to silence her is a common element in grooming and abuse cases, further bolstering her credibility.

Janet Ross's testimony provides exceptionally strong corroboration for the allegation against Jesus Rios. She confirms the core details of the event: that AV51 reported an attempted kiss to her house mother, that this was immediately escalated to leadership, and that Jesus Rios was promptly removed from his position. Most significantly, Janet Ross was an eyewitness to the apology Jesus Rios made directly to AV51 in the presence of Executive Director Terry Stine and house parent Fernando Soriano. An apology in the

presence of leadership is a powerful admission of wrongdoing and serves as definitive evidence that the incident occurred and was treated as a serious matter by the institution at the time.

Terry Stine's denial of any knowledge of concerns or allegations regarding Jesus Rios's conduct and his claim of not remembering a staff member named Jesus Rios working at Niños during his tenure, directly contradicts AV51's explicit testimony about the church apology. AV51's statement that "everyone knew" about the situation when Jesus Rios was made to apologize in church further challenges Stine's asserted unawareness. This disparity between the institutional memory (or lack thereof) and AV51's detailed recollection, especially concerning a public event, favors the credibility of AV51's account.

In conclusion, based on the specific and consistent direct testimony of AV51, the reported intervention of Jesus Rios's wife, the public apology Rios was reportedly compelled to make, and the reported existence of written communications and gifts, the allegations of sexual misconduct against Jesus Rios are deemed credible under the GRACE burden of proof. The confluence of these factors supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred, despite the institution's stated lack of recollection.

## Salvador Carrizosa

In his interview with GRACE, Dr. Lawrence Banta, a former Ninos medical director, mentioned Salvador Carrizosa as a former house parent at Bethel House. According to Dr. Banta, Salvador Carrizosa was released from his duties around 1996, near the time Dr. Banta began his work there. According to Dr. Banta, this decision was made due to allegations of inappropriate touching involving some of the girls under his care. According to a witness, Salvador Carrizosa is deceased.

GRACE interviewed a witness (W27) who had previously worked at Bethel House as a helper but was unaware of any abuse at that time. W27 later learned that Salvador Carrizosa had allegedly abused a teenage girl (AV74) and a young boy, approximately four or five years old whose name W27 did not provide (AV75). W27 noted that the AV74's behavior seemed different, suggesting she might have been threatened.

W27 that AV74 later, as an adult former resident, had a sibling whose children were offered care by the organization. AV74 reportedly declined, expressing concerns about

potential mistreatment, which W27 inferred stemmed from AV74's own experiences at the home.

## Knowledge and Response to Allegations Against Salvador Carrizosa

Janet Ross, who served as a relief house parent with her husband Steve Ross around 1997, recalled an occasion when she received a disclosure of misconduct regarding Salvador Carrizosa. According to Janet Ross, a group of girls at Bethel House informed her of "inappropriate behavior" between Salvador, the house dad, and one of the girls. The disclosure was made the night before the Rosses were scheduled to leave and Carrizosa and his wife were to return. Janet Ross informed her husband, who was the field director at the time, and he subsequently communicated with the executive director, Terry Stine. According to Janet Ross, Terry Stine and two board members arrived within approximately 12 hours to meet with Steve Ross and Salvador Carrizosa. Salvador Carrizosa was subsequently relieved of his duties. Janet Ross was not privy to the details of the meetings but confirmed his removal.

According to Dr. Banta, the decision by leadership to remove Salvador Carrizosa was made due to allegations of inappropriate touching involving some of the girls under his care. Dr. Banta described the situation as "suspicious enough" to warrant Salvador's removal, even though he said the accusations from the girls were inconsistent and changed over time. He told GRACE:

...so you have these girls that are, and of course they're all adults now. Well, three of 'em are dead. But that came from really abusive, sexually abusive background. And it's not always easy to tell if there's actually something going on or they're using it for manipulation...Kids do lie. And in my own investigations with kids, I'd seen that several times where accusations were not really accurate. They kept changing, and this is what happened there. I didn't interview the kids until I took care of them later for their other abuse, but this was occurring just before I came down there. So it was something where we discussed on the phone what was going on and what had happened with what the kids were saying that he had been inappropriate with some of 'em, it was nothing really more severe than touching, which is totally not good, is what they had said. And then it kept changing, but it was suspicious enough that we said, okay, they need to go because we don't

know whether that's going on or what's going on with the kids. Let's keep them safe. Let's have them be relieved of duties.<sup>48</sup>

Dr. Banta went onto describe how children can seduce adult caregivers, which he later clarified as a statement not meant to blame victims but to illustrate the importance of training caregivers. He told GRACE:

So do you ruin somebody's life over a false accusation or do you try to vet everything out as much as possible? Do you get it right every time? I don't think so. I think it could be very fuzzy, especially with kids that have been severely abused beforehand. They use it. The kids can use it for all kinds of purposes. Foster kids make false accusations so they can get to a different home because they don't like it. And it does happen, I don't think as much as the real accusations, but I don't know. I don't know any stats. But I mean, kids do that. They lie, which want to make sure that they're safe, that they're not being victimized again, because they also tend to seduce or because they're already sexualized, tend to pull vulnerable house parents or foster parents into an inappropriate, inappropriate contact. And then it can go on from there. And that certainly happens.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the alleged changing stories, the decision was made to relieve Salvador of his duties to ensure the safety of the children. According to Dr. Banta, the government authorities were involved and the organization followed their recommended procedures. Following Salvador's departure, Dr. Noe Flores was interviewed and took over the position as house parent at Bethel.

Of course. Here is a draft determination of credibility regarding the allegations against Salvador Carrizosa, written in the professional style and structure of the investigative report.

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Salvador Carrizosa

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<sup>48</sup> Larry Banta Tr. at 8.

<sup>49</sup> Lawrence Banta Tr. at 8-9.

In assessing the credibility of the allegations of sexual misconduct by Salvador Carrizosa, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from witnesses and the institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test without reaching "beyond a reasonable doubt," is met through the corroborating accounts and the documented institutional action taken against Carrizosa.

Compelling evidence of misconduct comes from the direct testimony of Dr. Lawrence Banta, a former medical director at Niños de México. Dr. Banta stated that Salvador Carrizosa was released from his duties as a house parent at Bethel House around 1996 due to allegations of "inappropriate touching" involving some of the girls under his care. While Dr. Banta noted that the girls' stories "kept changing" and that he believed it difficult to determine veracity due to their backgrounds of sexual abuse, he confirmed that the situation was "suspicious enough that we said, okay, they need to go because we don't know whether that's going on or what's going on with the kids." This direct admission from a leadership figure at the time, confirming that allegations were made and were considered serious enough to warrant termination "to keep them safe," provides substantial corroboration for the underlying claims of misconduct.

Janet Ross's testimony provides significant, firsthand corroboration of the allegations against Salvador Carrizosa and the subsequent institutional response. As a relief house parent at Bethel House, she was the direct recipient of a contemporaneous disclosure from a group of girls who reported "inappropriate behavior" by Carrizosa. Her account confirms that a report was made by multiple victims directly to a staff member. Furthermore, her testimony substantiates the seriousness and immediacy of the institutional response, noting that upon informing the field director, the executive director and board members arrived within approximately 12 hours, leading to Carrizosa's removal.

The testimony of W27 further strengthens the credibility of the allegations. W27, who worked at Bethel House, later learned that Salvador Carrizosa had allegedly abused a teenage girl (AV74) and a young boy (AV75). W27's observation that AV74's behavior seemed "different" suggesting she might have been threatened, provides contextual support for the traumatic impact of the alleged abuse. Furthermore, AV74's later refusal, as an adult, to allow her sibling's children to receive care from the organization due to concerns about potential mistreatment, strongly implies that her own experiences at the

home were negative and harmful. This action serves as a powerful, albeit indirect, corroboration of the long-lasting impact of the alleged abuse she endured.

The institutional response, as confirmed by Dr. Banta, is a critical factor in this credibility assessment. The decision to remove Salvador Carrizosa from his position, despite the alleged inconsistencies in the children's accounts, indicates that the leadership at the time perceived a significant risk to child safety. Dr. Banta's statement that the organization "went through the government" and followed all recommended procedures in response to the allegations further underscores the seriousness with which the situation was treated. This action, in and of itself, lends significant weight to the credibility of the reports made by the children.

While Dr. Banta's comments about children lying or being manipulative due to past trauma reflect a problematic perspective that can lead to victim-blaming, his ultimate confirmation that the allegations were "suspicious enough" for termination provides the necessary corroboration. The cumulative weight of the evidence—including the direct confirmation of his termination for misconduct by a former director and the corroborating testimony from another former staff member—is sufficient to meet the GRACE burden of proof.

In conclusion, based on the direct testimony from a former medical director confirming the allegations and subsequent termination of Salvador Carrizosa for inappropriate touching, corroborated by another witness's account of specific alleged victims and the long-term impact on one of them, the allegations of sexual misconduct against Salvador Carrizosa are deemed credible.

## Israel Avalos

Israel and Dorcas Avalos joined the staff of Ninos de Mexico in January 2002, assuming the roles of house parents at the Casa Esperanza children's home. They served in this capacity for nearly five years. In December 2006, Mr. and Mrs. Avalos concluded their service with the organization to dedicate their efforts to other church ministries in Mexico. Israel Avalos is deceased.

## RV54

GRACE reviewed a public statement from an alleged victim, RV54, published on a blog in December 2023. In the statement, RV54 recounts experiencing physical, mental, and emotional abuse from Israel Avalos, who was a house parent at the time of her arrival at Niños de México.<sup>50</sup> According to RV54, Avalos developed "some kind of obsession" with her, and every time he saw her, he would hit her, making her "writhe in pain." The fear she felt was so intense that she was always afraid to come home from school. She states that Avalos hit her in "horrible ways," and when she put her hands up or fell from the pain, he would lift her by her hair to continue hitting her. RV54 notes that her head hurt a lot due to a prior injury, and to this day, the pain and scars cause her distress.

RV54 alleges there was not a day that Avalos did not hit her, often with a wooden stick "very thick like the leg of a wooden chair" on her hands and head, leaving them "purple and swollen." She recalls that after these beatings, Avalos's wife would treat her with ointments and tell her, "this is what I got for misbehaving." RV54 acknowledges she was "never an angel," but asserts she was "just a girl" and that it was their job to teach her. To hide her bruises at school, she would lie and say she had fallen. On another occasion, Avalos reportedly hit her for not finishing her homework and left her outside in the corner of the patio at night in the cold, not remembering her until 5 in the morning.

## Alleged Victim 70

According to documented victim accounts reviewed by GRACE, one former resident (AV70) alleged that Israel Avalos repeatedly beat him. The alleged victim reported that the beatings took place in Avalos's room and that Avalos would not strike his face. He stated that he would endure the beatings without crying until Avalos became tired or Avalos's wife began to cry. The alleged victim indicated he did not report the abuse at the time due to fear and a sense of loyalty to the ministry, though he later came to recognize the severity of the abuse he had endured.

## Knowledge and Response of Leadership to Allegations Against Israel Avalos

During Israel Avalos's five-year tenure, Terry Stine served as Executive Director (July 1987 - July 2007). Seth Thomas, who joined in August 2002, became Field Director in July

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<sup>50</sup>While RV54 agreed to participate in an interview and did so, she later expressed a preference that her interview statements not be included in the final report, and GRACE honored that preference.

2005, a position he held when Israel Avalos departed. Seth Thomas later succeeded Terry Stine as Executive Director in July 2007. Terry Stine is the father-in-law of Seth Thomas. Seth Thomas told GRACE:

I had a couple boys say that their house dad, this was at the Casa Esperanza, Israel Avalos, that he would get angry and that he would mistreat them, that he would hit them. And I asked for specifics, when did this happen? What was this like? And they were always guarded. They would not give me specifics. I remember talking with Israel about that, and just my gut feeling was that he was not being completely honest with me. I don't remember the timeline. I don't remember how long it took, but I eventually got to the point where I did not trust his ability to be honest with me and lead that house. And I fired him. My father-in-law was the director at the time. I was the field director, and I let he and his wife go, Israel and his wife go from our staff.<sup>51</sup>

Seth Thomas named five boys who he remembered coming to him to express concerns related to Israel's treatment of them. He recalled, "I feel like it started with a couple boys talking to me, and at some point I feel like I asked a few of the others living in the home."<sup>52</sup> Seth Thomas said he never heard details from the boys at the time other than that Israel Avalos would get angry and hit them. Steve Ross recalled that Israel Avalos joined the staff around the time Ross was leaving his role as field director in 2002, and Ross initially thought Avalos would be a "great asset." He stated that he later heard from two former residents about how physically abusive Avalos had been.

While Seth Thomas could not recall the specifics of who he spoke to at Ninos de Mexico about the concerns, he told GRACE he would have first spoken with Terry Stine and with Bryan King before taking any action. When asked about any actions taken to protect the children and how quickly he intervened, Seth Thomas told GRACE:

I'm confident that I moved on that pretty swiftly. I would say within the day, as far as the boys and where they were, they were still in the home. When I talked with Israel again, I'm pretty confident that I would've said, Hey, this has been brought to my attention. You need to watch yourself on this and don't do this. And then over the course of a few days, I would guess that I probably let him go within a week. But I'm not confident of that. I'm sorry, I'm

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<sup>51</sup> Seth Thomas Tr.

<sup>52</sup> Seth Thomas Tr.

not, I don't remember the exact details of that. I do know I moved pretty quick. In my mind, it felt pretty quick.<sup>53</sup>

Seth Thomas confirmed the boys remained in the house with Israel Avalos while Ninos took time to address the matter before firing him.

Daniel Rangel, who started working as the Field Director at Ninos in or around August 2006, told GRACE that Israel was fired for physical abuse of children shortly after Daniel's arrival. Daniel Rangel described Israel as being harsh and punishing kids for small things. He would beat them with a belt or a wooden board kept in the house. Other forms of punishment included giving them harsh work around the house, making them run around the building, or making them stand alone on the basketball court in the middle of the day.

Seth Thomas told GRACE that Israel Avalos became connected with a local church after leaving Ninos, and passed away not long after.

Bryan King, who worked at Niños de México from August 2001 to September 2008, declined an interview with GRACE. In a written statement dated July 14, 2025, Mr. King affirmed that "all such allegations should be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated" and that "anyone who has committed any crime against children should be punished to the fullest extent of the law." He noted that during his time with the organization, he did not suspect nor was he personally aware of "any sexual abuse (or abuse of any type) of Niños children by members of the staff." He stated he was unaware of any failure to report incidents to the authorities.

Mr. King served under two executive directors, Terry Stine and Seth Thomas, and recalled that they "demanded a lot from the staff and held us to a no nonsense, high standard." He stated, "They were not always liked because of this but they knew the importance of the task in front of us in providing a safe place for the children."

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Israel Avalos

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of physical abuse by Israel Avalos, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from victim accounts and the institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence

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<sup>53</sup> Seth Thomas Tr.

sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test, is met through the consistency, specificity, and corroborating factors present in the multiple accounts of abuse.

The primary and most compelling evidence comes from the public statement of RV54, who provides a detailed and emotionally impactful testimony of sustained and severe physical abuse. RV54 recounts that Israel Avalos, her house parent, had "some kind of obsession" with her and would hit her daily, causing her to "writhe in pain." Her specific recollections—of being lifted by her hair to continue beatings, being hit on the hands and head with a wooden stick "very thick like the leg of a wooden chair" until they were "purple and swollen," and being left outside in the cold overnight—provide highly specific details that lend significant veracity to her account. The physical evidence of her abuse, which she had to hide at school by claiming she had fallen, further corroborates a pattern of severe physical mistreatment.

The documented account of an alleged victim (AV70) provides significant, independent corroboration. AV70's revelation that Israel repeatedly beat him in his room, never in the face, and that he endured it until Avalos tired himself out or his wife cried, aligns with RV54's account of sustained and severe beatings. AV70's stated reasons for not reporting the abuse (fear and loyalty to the ministry) are common in such cases and bolster the credibility of his delayed disclosure.

The institutional response, as described by former leadership, further supports the credibility of the allegations. Seth Thomas, who was the Field Director at the time, explicitly stated that he received reports from "a couple boys" that Israel Avalos "would get angry and that he would mistreat them, that he would hit them." While the boys were "guarded" and did not give specifics, Seth Thomas's "gut feeling" that Avalos "was not being completely honest" and his subsequent decision to fire him due to a lack of trust in his ability to lead, serve as a direct admission of serious concerns within leadership. Seth Thomas's acknowledgement that he let Avalos and his wife go from the staff because he did not trust Avalos's ability to be honest with him, indicates that the concerns were serious enough to warrant termination.

Daniel Rangel, who became Field Director shortly after Avalos's departure, independently corroborates the reason for the termination, stating that Israel "was fired for physical abuse of children." Rangel's description of Avalos being "harsh" and punishing kids for "small things," using a "belt or a wooden board," and other forms of punishment

like "harsh work around the house," aligns with and strengthens the victims' accounts of excessive and disproportionate discipline.

While Bryan King, a staff member during that period, stated in a written response that he was not personally aware of any abuse, this lack of direct observation does not negate the multiple, consistent reports from victims and the explicit statements from leadership confirming the reason for Avalos's termination.

In conclusion, based on the consistent, specific, and emotionally congruent direct testimony of RV54, significantly corroborated by the account of AV70, and further supported by the direct admissions and actions of institutional leadership (specifically Seth Thomas's decision to fire Israel Avalos due to concerns of mistreatment and Daniel Rangel's confirmation of the reason for termination), the allegations of physical abuse against Israel Avalos are deemed credible under the GRACE burden of proof. The confluence of these factors supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred.

## Santiago Garcia Carvajal

Santiago Garcia Carvajal is a former house parent of Niños de México. Santiago reportedly worked in Esperanza House from approximately 2007 through 2011 and replaced Israel Avalos as a houseparent. Santiago is reportedly deceased.

## RV56

In a public statement reviewed by GRACE, RV56 recounted an experience of sexual misconduct by Santiago García Carvajal, who became a house parent after Israel Avalos departed.<sup>54</sup> RV56 stated that Carvajal initially treated her well, "like a father towards his daughter," but something about his behavior made his wife become "very jealous" and treat RV56 badly.

According to RV56, one evening while she was working on a school experiment, Carvajal told her that some materials she needed might be upstairs where the girls' and house parents's bedrooms were located. RV56 went upstairs and realized Carvajal was following her. Near the entrance to the rooms, he allegedly "started touching my chest, my legs, and my genitals and he started masturbating with me." RV56 stated that when she

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<sup>54</sup> While RV54 agreed to participate in an interview and did so, she later expressed a preference that her interview statements not be included in the final report, and GRACE honored that preference.

realized he was going to penetrate her, she began to cry. Carvajal reportedly quieted her, telling her not to cry and that "he thought I liked him just as he liked me." He then pushed her, left her alone, and went away.

RV56 reported that Carvajal treated her badly after the incident, "calling me ugly and things like that." She stated that she immediately disclosed the abuse to another girl in the house, who she considered a mother figure. The next day, this girl spoke with Dr. Noé Flores, the medical director, who then met with RV56 to ask what had happened. RV56 told him everything, and he asked if she wanted to report it. She declined, stating she did not want to "destroy a family" because Carvajal had a son. She expressed regret over this decision, and noted that the incident was "never spoken of again."

## Knowledge and Response to Allegations Against Santiago Garcia Carvajal

A Ninos newsletter published in Fall 2011 states the following in regards to the departure of Santiago and his wife:

We recently made a few changes at Niños de México. House parents Guadalupe and Santiago Garcia left the institution. We were happy to have had them serving with us over these last few years. Stepping into their place at Esperanza were Marilú and Ignacio Bernal.

Seth Thomas told GRACE that he was not aware of any allegations against Santiago at the time and did not know the reasons Santiago left Ninos de Mexico, but believes it was related to finding a better paying job elsewhere. However, this conflicts with accounts with two employees at the time, one being the field director and another an intern, who each told GRACE that Santiago was fired for misconduct.

Daniel Rangel stated that Santiago was a house parent at the Esperanza house at Ninos de Mexico along with his wife. Daniel Rangel told GRACE that Santiago was fired due to intense physical discipline of some of the children, to the point where it was considered abusive. This incident occurred during Daniel Rangel's time at Ninos, specifically when he was the field director.

Regarding the physical misconduct, Daniel Rangel was not sure if Santiago used a belt, but he recalled that each house had wooden boards, about two inches thick, which

might have been used. Daniel Rangel did not know which specific children were subjected to the beating.

Daniel Rangel stated that the executive director made a strong statement to all staff, especially house parents, that physical beating of children was not permitted, unless it was a last resort for extreme behavior and had been discussed with either the field director or the executive director. Daniel Rangel believed that Dr. Noe Flores shared the information about Santiago's actions with Mexican officials who oversaw orphanages and children's homes in the state of Mexico. Daniel, however, was not certain how official the report was made.

A former intern who lived at Esperanza House in 2011, told GRACE that Santiago was "let go" a few days after he arrived as an intern at Esperanza House in or around June of 2011.

## **Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Santiago Garcia Carvajal**

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of sexual and physical abuse by Santiago Garcia Carvajal, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from victim accounts and the institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test, is met through the consistency, specificity, and corroborating factors present in the accounts.

The primary evidence comes from RV56's detailed public testimony. She recounts that Santiago Garcia Carvajal, her house parent, followed her upstairs and sexually assaulted her, detailing that he "started touching my chest, my legs, and my genitals and he started masturbating with me." Her account includes specific details, such as his attempt to quiet her crying by saying "he thought I liked him just as he liked me," which are emotionally congruent with grooming and abuse dynamics. Critically, RV56 states that she immediately disclosed the abuse to another girl in the house, who then spoke with Dr. Noé Flores the next day. Her subsequent disclosure to Dr. Flores, where she recounted everything and was asked if she wanted to report it, provides strong evidence of a contemporaneous report within the institution, even though she declined to press charges at the time to avoid "destroying a family." This immediate disclosure and the reason for not

pursuing a formal complaint are consistent with victim behavior and lend significant veracity to her account.

The institutional response, though inconsistent across leadership, provides powerful corroboration for Carvajal's termination due to misconduct. Daniel Rangel, the Field Director at the time, explicitly stated to GRACE that Carvajal was "fired due to intense physical discipline of some of the children, to the point where it was considered abusive." He recalled that the executive director made a "strong statement to all staff... that physical beating of children was not permitted" and believed that Dr. Noe Flores shared information about Carvajal's actions with Mexican officials. An intern who was present at the time also independently corroborated that Carvajal was "let go" shortly after the intern's arrival in June 2011.

While Seth Thomas, another leader, stated he was unaware of any allegations and believed Carvajal left for a better-paying job, his account is directly contradicted by two other individuals who were present and in leadership roles at the time. This discrepancy suggests a lack of transparency within the organization's leadership. The Fall 2011 Niños newsletter, which simply states that Carvajal and his wife "left the institution," appears to be a sanitized public statement that omits the true, problematic reasons for his departure, a common practice in organizations seeking to manage their public image in the wake of misconduct.

In conclusion, based on the highly specific, consistent, and emotionally congruent direct testimony of RV56 regarding sexual misconduct, which includes an immediate contemporaneous disclosure to another resident and to Dr. Noe Flores, coupled with the explicit corroboration from Field Director Daniel Rangel regarding Carvajal's termination for physical abuse, the allegations of sexual and physical abuse against Santiago Garcia Carvajal are deemed credible under the GRACE burden of proof. The confluence of direct victim testimony and corroborating statements from multiple staff members supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred.

## Daniel Rangel

Daniel Rangel was a former field director at Ninos. He worked as the field director from approximately 2010 to 2012. During his time as the field director, Daniel Rangel admittedly committed sexual misconduct against two young adult women at Ninos, one of whom was reportedly a resident of the home Daniel Rangel was a house parent at. Daniel

Rangel had also worked at Ninos as a school teacher starting in or around 2006, where he reportedly first became acquainted with the alleged victims.<sup>55</sup>

## Alleged Victim 47

Daniel Rangel disclosed to GRACE that he engaged in an inappropriate sexual relationship with AV47. According to Daniel, AV47 was an adult woman who was residing in the Ninos de Mexico dorms and finishing high school. At the time of the incident, Daniel was serving as the administrative director, a role that involved overseeing house parents, managing financial and facility issues, addressing children's behaviors, and handling human resources. He also held a part-time pastoral role at Iglesia de Cristo in San Vicente, Chico Luapan. Concurrently, Daniel was serving as interim house parent for the Genesis home, where AV47 resided. This interim house parent role was not official but assumed as an emergency to cover for a lack of permanent house parents. The Winter 2012 publication of the Ninos Newsletter contains the following description of Daniel Rangel's transition to the position of houseparent at the Genesis House:

This Christmas season brought a time of change for the Genesis Home. The house parents, [REDACTED], made the difficult decision to leave our team and move to northwestern Mexico . . . Daniel and [REDACTED] and their children came to join the Genesis family in lieu of their coming absence.

According to Daniel Rangel, the sexual misconduct with AV47 occurred in 2012. He described the relationship as initially a close friendship that escalated into flirtatious behavior. The sexual encounter took place late at night in Daniel's office when AV47 arrived at the office after he had been working late. According to Daniel, he initially resisted opening the door to AV47 but eventually did, leading to kissing and subsequent sexual activity, including intercourse.

The misconduct was reportedly exposed when AV47 informed Daniel of her intention to speak with Saul Flores, a pastor and son of Dr. Noe Flores, the ministry's doctor. Upon hearing this, Daniel told GRACE that he immediately confessed to his wife and then to the entire staff, including Steve Ross, who had recently arrived to take over as executive director. Daniel submitted his resignation immediately after confessing. He was

<sup>55</sup> A Fall 2006 Ninos newsletter states: "Meanwhile, back at Niños school is in full session. [REDACTED] and Daniel Rangel are adjusting well to their new roles as supervisors in the primary and secondary classrooms."

not allowed back into his office except to retrieve his belongings but remained at Ninos for a few days to assist with the transition. His wife took their children and left for the States, and Daniel followed a couple of weeks later. He stated that he did not confess about any other relationships at that time, including the sexual misconduct with AV46.

## Alleged Victim 46

Alleged Victim 46 was a minor resident at Ninos who moved to the United States after graduating High School to pursue her studies. GRACE interviewed the spouse of AV46 who told GRACE that AV46 disclosed that while she was studying in the United States and feeling isolated, Daniel Rangel began messaging her online. She had previously been close with Daniel's family while a resident at Ninos so she initially did not find the contact unusual. Over time, the messages became inappropriate, and AV46 reportedly attempted to cut off communication with Daniel Rangel.

However, when AV46 returned to Mexico for breaks and vacations, Daniel Rangel allegedly continued to pursue her, further isolating her and taking advantage of her vulnerability until "things crossed the line." AV46's spouse said that AV46, being 19 at the time and legally an adult, blamed herself for the situation. AV46's spouse, however, viewed Daniel Rangel as an authority figure who preyed on an isolated individual.

Daniel Rangel disclosed to GRACE that he had a sexual relationship with AV46, a former resident of Ninos de Mexico. This relationship primarily involved communication through Facebook and included sexual encounters. The sexual encounters occurred in Mexico City, outside of the Ninos de Mexico homes, and took place after Daniel had already resigned from his position at Ninos. He believed AV46 was 22 years old at the time of the sexual encounter.

Daniel said he had known AV46 since she was younger, as she had lived in the homes at Ninos de Mexico. Daniel also described how AV46 was close to his family. Daniel described the environment at the homes as communal and friendly, leading to close interactions with many residents, including AV46.

According to Daniel Rangel, the communication with AV46 began before the incident with AV47, also in 2012, when AV46 was attending college in the United States and visited Mexico City that summer. Daniel did not disclose his relationship with AV46 to his wife or

the Ninos staff at the time he confessed about AV47. He only told his then-wife about AV46 after they had moved to the United States.

Daniel Rangel told GRACE that contact with AV46 ended after Daniel came to the United States and was experiencing personal and family turmoil. He said he informed AV46 that he needed to end their contact.

## Knowledge and Response to Allegations Against Daniel Rangel

Seth Thomas told GRACE that he left Ninos de Mexico at the end of May, 2012, and was returning to the States in early June, 2012, when he received a call from Steve Ross on or about June 10-11, 2012. Seth Thomas recalled that Steve Ross told him "that they had just found out that Daniel Rangel had been having inappropriate relations with a few of our young adult women," that they knew about one and "there was concern there might've been a second." Seth Thomas recalled that Steve Ross told him they had terminated Daniel Rangel. Seth Thomas told GRACE that he did not become aware of or have knowledge of any allegations concerning Daniel Rangel while Seth Thomas was the executive director.

A former board member who interviewed with GRACE recalled the case of Daniel Rangel was discussed at board meetings in 2013 or 2014. The former board member understanding at the time was that Daniel Rangel had engaged in sexual relations with two female residents who were over the age of 18. The former board member was concerned that the board's reaction was more focused on Daniel than the two young women. The former board member argued that despite their age, the power dynamic made the situation inappropriate, but they felt the other board members did not understand.

A former staff member recalled learning in 2015 that Daniel Rangel was no longer with the organization. According to this staff member, Steve and Janet Ross disclosed that Daniel Rangel's departure was due to his sexual involvement with two girls at the institution. When the staff member asked why Rangel was not in jail, the Rosses reportedly stated that the girls were 16 years old at the time.

In a later conversation, Janet Ross allegedly identified one of the girls involved as AV46. According to the staff member, Janet Ross also stated that AV46 was not permitted to work at the organization because of "her sin" and "what she did with Daniel," implying AV46 was culpable. The staff member strongly disagreed with this assessment, asserting that

AV46 was a child and Daniel Rangel was an adult in a position of authority. Janet Ross reportedly confirmed that Daniel Rangel was fired but not prosecuted.

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Daniel Rangel

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of sexual misconduct by Daniel Rangel, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from reporting victims and the institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test without reaching "beyond a reasonable doubt," is met through the consistency, specificity, and corroborating factors present in the accounts.

The primary and most compelling evidence comes from Daniel Rangel's own admissions to GRACE regarding his sexual relationships with AV47 and AV46.

Regarding AV47, Daniel Rangel disclosed that he engaged in an "inappropriate sexual relationship" with her in 2012. He detailed the progression from a close friendship to flirtatious behavior, culminating in a sexual encounter in his office. His explicit statement about ejaculating outside her body to avoid pregnancy and their mutual acknowledgment that "the act was wrong and would lead to trouble" are highly specific admissions of guilt and awareness of impropriety. The fact that he immediately confessed to his wife and then to the entire staff, including Steve Ross (the new executive director), and promptly submitted his resignation after AV47 informed him of her intention to speak with a pastor (Saul Flores), provides strong, direct corroboration of the misconduct and the institutional recognition of its seriousness.

Regarding AV46, Daniel Rangel also disclosed to GRACE that he had a "sexual relationship" with her, which involved "communication through Facebook and included sexual encounters." While he stated these encounters occurred in Mexico City after his resignation and believed AV46 was 22 at the time, testimony from AV46's spouse frames the relationship as Daniel preying on AV46's vulnerability when she was feeling isolated, highlighting the inherent power dynamic. Daniel's admission that he did not disclose this relationship to his wife or Niños staff at the time he confessed about AV47, only telling his wife after they moved to the U.S., suggests an attempt to conceal further misconduct, which, while common, does not undermine the veracity of the admitted relationship.

Further corroboration comes from additional multiple sources. A witness recalled that Daniel Rangel was "in a relationship with" AV46 and AV47, was "let go" by Niños, and

then reportedly left for the US. This aligns with and reinforces Daniel's own admissions and the timeline of events.

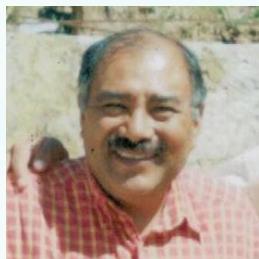
Seth Thomas, who was transitioning out of his role as Executive Director, recalled receiving a call from Steve Ross on or about June 10-11, 2012, informing him that "they had just found out that Daniel Rangel had been having inappropriate relations with a few of our young adult women," specifically mentioning "one" and concern about "a second." This directly corroborates the institutional discovery of Daniel's misconduct with multiple individuals and his subsequent termination.

A former board member recalled the Daniel Rangel case being discussed at board meetings in 2013 or 2014, specifically that he "had engaged in sexual relations with two female residents who were over the age of 18." The former board member's concern about the power dynamic, despite their age, further acknowledges the inappropriateness of the relationships.

A former staff member's conversations with Steve and Janet Ross confirmed that Daniel was "no longer working there because he was sexually involved with two girls at the institution." Janet Ross further revealed that one of the girls was AV46 and that Daniel was fired but not prosecuted. While there are age discrepancies in the former staff member's account, the core fact of Daniel's termination for sexual involvement with female residents is consistently corroborated. Janet Ross's implication that AV46 was culpable, which W6 strongly disagreed with, highlights the victim-blaming mentality that often accompanies such institutional responses but does not diminish the credibility of the underlying allegations.

In conclusion, based on Daniel Rangel's direct admissions of sexual contact with AV47 and AV46, combined with consistent and detailed corroboration from multiple former staff and board members regarding his termination for inappropriate sexual conduct with female residents, the allegations of sexual misconduct against Daniel Rangel are deemed credible under the GRACE burden of proof. The confluence of these factors supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred.

## Noe Flores Floriano



Noe Flores is a first-generation alumnus of Ninos, having been a part of the first group of children to arrive at Ninos in the 1960s. Noe Flores went on to get a medical degree and returned to serve Ninos for 15

years as a medical doctor, and was known as "Dr. Noe." According to Dr. Larry Banta, a former medical director, Noe Flores took over as house parent at Bethel after Salvador Carrizosa was released due to allegations of misconduct.

According to Steve Ross, Noe Flores was hired as the medical director of Ninos around 2000 or 2001, a role he continued in until 2016. His responsibilities included researching potential children for Ninos and possibly making decisions about their admission. A reporting victim told GRACE that Dr. Noe hand-picked children at DIF to go live at Ninos.<sup>56</sup> Steve Ross noted that the protocol for Noe Flores seeing and treating children required a house parent to be present in the room.

## RV36

RV36 recounted an experience of sexual misconduct involving a medical exam conducted by Dr. Noe that left her feeling deeply uncomfortable and violated.<sup>57</sup> She noted that Dr. Noe had approached her on several occasions when she was alone to give unsolicited medical help, which RV36 viewed at the time as acts of kindness.<sup>58</sup> Prior to the exam, RV36 had not been informed of its nature or purpose, nor was she provided with a chaperone or any explanation of what to expect.<sup>59</sup> The exam itself involved procedures that RV36 found to be highly inappropriate and unnecessary, particularly given the lack of explanation or consent.<sup>60</sup>

RV36 described feeling trapped and unable to voice her discomfort during the exam.<sup>61</sup> She felt that Dr. Noe held a position of authority that she could not challenge, and the power dynamic left her feeling powerless.<sup>62</sup> The experience caused her significant emotional distress, and she later sought support from a friend who validated her feelings and encouraged her to document the incident.<sup>63</sup> RV36 reportedly disclosed the experience to Steve Ross's wife, Janet Ross, in or around July or August of 2016.<sup>64</sup> RV36 expressed that

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<sup>56</sup> RV54 Interview notes.

<sup>57</sup> RV36 Tr. at 14.

<sup>58</sup> RV36 Tr. at 14.

<sup>59</sup> RV36 Tr. at 14-15.

<sup>60</sup> RV36 Tr. at 15.

<sup>61</sup> RV36 Tr. at 15.

<sup>62</sup> RV36 Tr. at 15.

<sup>63</sup> RV36 Tr. at 15.

<sup>64</sup> RV36 Tr. at 15.

the experience was traumatic and left her feeling vulnerable and violated.<sup>65</sup> She also noted that she later learned about similar experiences other individuals had with Dr. Noe.<sup>66</sup>

## Alleged Victim 37

According to testimony from a former staff member, Noe Flores was essentially forced into retirement sometime after May 2015 and before the Summer of 2016.<sup>67</sup> Steve Ross reportedly explained to the former staff member that Dr. Noe had been meeting with children without adults present, violating protocol.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, there were reports of "odd behavior" such as Dr. Noe licking and sucking on the children's faces.<sup>69</sup> One house parent was particularly vocal and protective, reporting that she was excluded from her children's medical exams.<sup>70</sup> The house parent insisted she should be present during these exams.<sup>71</sup> The former staff member recalled one child, AV37, being mentioned in connection with these incidents.<sup>72</sup>

Steve Ross told the former staff member that they addressed the situation with Dr. Noe Flores, informing him that he could not be alone with children and must have an adult present.<sup>73</sup> However, they later discovered that he continued to violate this protocol, leading to his retirement.<sup>74</sup> Although Steve Ross later denied this conversation took place, the former staff member maintains that she remembers it clearly.<sup>75</sup> The former staff member also noted that there was a publication sent out in 2015 asking for funding to help Dr. Noe retire, which she found strange as he later took a job at another orphanage.<sup>76</sup>

Following Dr. Noe Flores' retirement, the former staff member was concerned that he was still being utilized by the organization.<sup>77</sup> Specifically, the former staff member noted that Dr. Noe Flores would still visit and was even included on mission trips to villages in

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<sup>65</sup> RV36 Tr. at 15.

<sup>66</sup> RV36 Tr. at 15.

<sup>67</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 15.

<sup>68</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 15.

<sup>69</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 15.

<sup>70</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 15.

<sup>71</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 15.

<sup>72</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 15.

<sup>73</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 15.

<sup>74</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 15.

<sup>75</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 15.

<sup>76</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 15.

<sup>77</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16.

Puebla.<sup>78</sup> The former staff member recalled one mission trip in the fall of 2018 where Dr. Noe Flores was present and still acted as the doctor.<sup>79</sup> This concerned the former staff member because she knew about the previous allegations and the reason for his retirement.<sup>80</sup>

The former staff member confronted Steve Ross about this issue, questioning why they were still using Dr. Noe Flores, especially given the vulnerability of the populations they were serving in Puebla.<sup>81</sup> She pointed out that the community they worked with in Puebla was predominantly women and children, as the men were often away for work, making them especially vulnerable.<sup>82</sup> The former staff member felt it was irresponsible to bring Dr. Noe on these trips knowing his history.<sup>83</sup> Steve Ross reportedly responded that another doctor had canceled, and he did not want to cancel the trip.<sup>84</sup> The former staff member expressed her strong disagreement, stating that it was irresponsible to take Dr. Noe Flores.<sup>85</sup> Despite her concerns, the former staff member had to participate in the trip with Dr. Noe Flores, which she found distressing.<sup>86</sup> She also noted that after leaving the organization, Dr. Noe Flores took a job at another orphanage, which contradicted the idea that he had genuinely retired.<sup>87</sup>

## Alleged Victim 38

GRACE reviewed victim statements given by AV38. AV38 stated that when she was seven years of age she started seeing Dr. Noe Flores once a month for medical checks when he would visit the house. AV38 recalled that Dr. Noe Flores would insert two fingers into her vagina and say that it was part of the medical checks he needed to perform. She said that a female house parent, Beatriz Peral, was present for the exams.

## Alleged Victim 18

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<sup>78</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16.

<sup>79</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16-17.

<sup>80</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16.

<sup>81</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16.

<sup>82</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16.

<sup>83</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16.

<sup>84</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16.

<sup>85</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16.

<sup>86</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16.

<sup>87</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 16.

AV18 described experiencing sexual misconduct by Dr. Noe Flores while AV18 was a minor resident at Ninos and Dr. Noe Flores was the medical doctor.

GRACE reviewed messages AV18 sent to a former staff member in or around January 2023. AV18 shared personal struggles related to trauma, lack of opportunities, and depression, often expressing feelings of anger and frustration. They mentioned a desire to leave their current situation and start anew, lamenting the lack of support they received in the past, particularly regarding education and financial assistance.

AV18 described instances where Dr. Noe Flores touched them inappropriately during their childhood while watching a cartoon movie. AV18 also recounted an incident where Dr. Noe Flores offered them money in exchange for sexual activity, which AV18 declined, but the individual still sent the money. AV18 also mentioned receiving inappropriate photos from the individual. AV18 expressed frustration about the lack of evidence to support their claims, as they deleted previous evidence due to shame.

AV18 disclosed the following regarding experiences of sexual misconduct by Dr. Noe:

And really, every time I think about the doctor, my vagina remembers the pain as if it were something recent. I can remember the boys raping me in the bethel house through the anus and bleeding so much and the cold floor that was against the floor. I remember all that pain and it wasn't fair.

...And I didn't know how to scream all that time because everyone knew my story in the past. Since I was three years old I was a victim of sexual abuse with my mother, she offered my body for drugs. And then then the DIF and on and then a place full of people who supposedly love God and just don't protect you. Do you think their children know their atrocities?

Two years ago, Noe sent me a photo of his penis [2021], and he wanted to have sex with me when he was in Pachuca, he was still married to [Noe's Ex-Wife]. He told me he would like to take you and welcome you.

AV18 told the former staff member that they disclosed being sexually abused "many times to my Uncle Steve." AV18 stated "they always said that I just wanted to cause problems that it was a lie."

On July 10, 2023, AV18 posted a public statement of their experiences at Ninos on a blog. AV18 described a history of sexual abuse, neglect, and experiences of poverty prior to being placed at Ninos. AV18 then described experiences of minor-on-minor abuse and physical punishment at Ninos before articulating experiences with Dr. Noe Flores:

I'm at Dr. Noe's house. I'm about 5-6 years old. He puts on the movie "Another Egg and Chicken Movie." I'm standing up and he comes over and secretly touches my behind.

Noe has given me some injections to regulate my period and, as always, we deal with something that has to do with my abuse. That day we are in a consultation. There is a window with blinds on the left side, I am on the table and he closes it to check me and says that having a big clitoris makes you come faster. This time he has gotten very close with a clear desire and I can feel his penis.

I needed money to buy a sweater for my girlfriend back then. I asked for a job to earn money.

He asks me to kiss him.

He penetrates me from behind (I think it was near the door at the back).

He gives me 400 pesos.

Another day he called me in to check my period. He will give me medicine and do a check on my behind. I have on a school uniform. I have on some white leggings. On the stretcher he adjusts me so that my leggings straddle his neck. He pulls down my leggings and my underwear. I'm lying down and he starts to penetrate me. I tell him to stop, but he is saying "COME" COME" until he ejaculates on me.

He tells me that it's okay, that he's had a vasectomy.

I have a feminine pad. He takes it and wraps it in his white glove and puts it inside his undergarment.

He always asked me, you haven't told our secret, right?

And I told him no, I haven't told anyone.

And he told me you can tell it when I die, if you want.

An advocate of AV18 filed a report with the Public Prosecutors Office around December 16, 2022, which was provided to GRACE. This report included information about the victim's reported abuse: "[The victim] is referred to me to receive support, since she is one of the victims of rape within the institution and wants to report it."

A criminal attorney representing AV18 was interviewed, but as of November 2024, no progress had been made on the case. The attorney's work was complicated by an inability to contact the victim. The victim disclosed being afraid of medical visits due to a history of unwanted touching by the doctor. The abuse reportedly began with inappropriate touching and kissing, then escalated over time. The attorney noted that the abuse occurred numerous times over several years, making it difficult for the victim to recall specific dates and times.

## Alleged Victim 64

According to W1 and W13, AV64 was sexually abused by Noe Flores, starting around the age of 9 and continuing until she was about 15. Although other victims have corroborated AV64's abuse, AV64 has reportedly not wanted to formally report it to the authorities. GRACE was unable to make contact with AV64.

## Alleged Victim 67

GRACE reviewed written victim accounts of AV67 regarding her experiences at Ninos de Mexico beginning in or around 2012 at the approximately 7 years of age.

The testimony describes encounters with a doctor named "Noe" who worked at the institution. AV67 states that when she was sick, Doctor Noe would examine her and tell the house parent to wait outside, "And he started touching my body. He put his fingers in my

vagina." She described being given sweets and gummies by him. She also recounted an incident where she was required to help him clean, and remembered trying to get away from him by saying she was going to the bathroom. However, Dr. Noe reportedly had a key to the bathroom and entered the bathroom where he allegedly assaulted her. The testimony includes specific details of the alleged assault. AV67 mentioned that she tried to tell a house parent about the incidents, but she was not believed and was punished instead, including not being allowed to watch TV and hitting her with a board.

## Response of Dr. Noe Flores

Dr. Noe Flores declined to a request to be interviewed by GRACE and responded:

GRACE, I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY TO YOU, I DON'T KNOW YOU OR YOUR MOTIVES.

I'll tell you that there isn't a Christian organization in the world that doesn't have stories of abuse, abused, and abusers. There are also many liars, bitter and resentful because things didn't go as they planned. There are many Christians and accusers due to their own bad thoughts, just as there are innocent people who are accused and condemned without reason because people believe the accusers and nobody defends the innocent. Congratulations, I hope God helps you with your "Godly response to every Situation."

Ninos de Mexico is a beautiful institution of God, like church. It is part of the Church of Jesus Christ, and I ask that you proceed in favor of the institution. It has helped many girls and boys move forward, giving to them and helping them forgive and love, guiding them to God. The truth is that hurt children who have arrived and are arriving to churches and who don't want to be helped, but only to take advantage of its benefits, deprecate all help until the end, accusing those who serve. And be careful of those who are vengeful, who do not want to be transformed.

God bless Ninos de Mexico and all Godly missions in the world.

## Knowledge and Response of Allegations Against Noe Flores

Concerns and allegations regarding Dr. Noe Flores's conduct at Niños de México have been noted by multiple sources, with varying accounts of leadership's awareness and response over time. The board of directors, as well as current and former executive directors and field directors, have maintained that they did not receive any allegations of misconduct by Dr. Noe while Dr. Noe was employed by Niños. However, Steve Ross did acknowledge to GRACE an awareness of "odd behavior" that was reported by staff while Dr. Noe was the medical director and a need for the institution to reinforce expectations with Dr. Noe that he not be alone with children during medical exams. The knowledge and response surrounding these events are detailed in this section.

Documentation provided by Niños to GRACE provides an account from leadership that "Dr. Noe was not let go. He retired in 2016, working until he was 65" and that "no allegations, or rumors, of sexual abuse surfaced during Dr. Noe's decades of working for Niños."<sup>88</sup> This document acknowledges that one house parent expressed concern about Dr. Noe examining children without a house parent present, leading to the implementation of a rule requiring an adult presence.

However, this contradicts later information. A timeline provided to GRACE by Niños, updated April 11, 2024, states that "Niños was first made aware of allegations against Dr. Noe Flores in [former intern's] initial letter to the Niños' board of directors which was received in November of 2022." This timeline specifically identifies AV18 and includes messages AV18 sent to Steve Ross in 2022, detailing abuse by Dr. Noe, including a report of him abusing AV18 in his clinic around age 12, and a memory of him looking at AV18's "rear end" when AV18 was 5. AV18 also messaged Steve Ross in November 2022, stating, "I am in the process of reporting Dr. Noe." Steve Ross's notes in this timeline acknowledge: "I had not heard any of these accusations or other accusations against Dr. Noe prior to 2022. When she expressed these accusations, I encouraged [AV18] to report the accusation if that was her desire. I realize now that I could have done more and planned to take her into the Prosecutors office to make the report." He also noted, "It was a shock to me [Steve Ross] to later hear [AV18] talking about Dr. Noe raping her multiple times."<sup>89</sup>

Steve Ross told GRACE he became aware of an accusation against Noe Flores from AV18 in or around March 2022, who he said alleged inappropriate touching. Steve Ross said he advised AV18 to report it to the Public Prosecutor's Office, which AV18 did in November

<sup>88</sup> Documentation Relevant - Sheldon, Niños Meeting Observation 2, March 13, 2023.pdf

<sup>89</sup> Timeline provided by Niños de Mexico to GRACE. April 11, 2024.

of the same year. Steve Ross stated that he did not recall any informal reports or knowledge of misconduct about Dr. Noe Flores prior to this allegation, though he later conceded that there might have been "frustration" if a girl was seen without a house parent present, implying potential unreported incidents. Ross was "shocked" and "disappointed" by the allegations, finding it "definitely possible" that something could have happened, but stated that AV18 was likely not offered aftercare or support from Ninos.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the stated lack of prior knowledge by Steve Ross, AV18's written accounts explicitly states they "disclosed being sexually abused 'many times to my Uncle Steve'" and that "they always said that I just wanted to cause problems that it was a lie." This directly contradicts Steve Ross's claim of no prior knowledge.

Further, a former staff member expressed concern that Dr. Noe Flores was still being utilized by the organization after his retirement, noting his presence on mission trips to villages in Puebla as late as Fall 2018. The former staff member confronted Steve Ross about this, questioning the decision to bring Dr. Noe Flores, especially given the vulnerability of the population, but Steve Ross reportedly stated another doctor had canceled and he did not want to cancel the trip.

In an interview with GRACE, Steve Ross said Noe Flores retired around 2016 in a "joint decision" with Ninos leadership, prompted by his age and health issues.<sup>91</sup> Steve Ross explicitly stated that this retirement was not due to rumors or allegations. Ninos leadership, specifically Steve Ross, initiated a fundraising effort to help Dr. Noe Flores retire, appealing to supporters who had a long-standing relationship with him. After his retirement, Dr. Noe Flores continued to participate in medical mission trips to mountain villages for a few months, as he was a well-loved doctor in those communities. Steve Ross stated that he was not aware of the allegations when Dr. Noe Flores continued on these trips, and he did not recall a specific conversation with an employee who confronted him about Dr. Noe Flores's continued participation on mission trips.<sup>92</sup>

Steve Ross did recall reports of "odd behavior" from Dr. Noe Flores, specifically "kissing" children, but he did not recall taking any action regarding these reports or

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<sup>90</sup> Steve Ross Tr.

<sup>91</sup> Steve Ross Tr.

<sup>92</sup> Steve Ross Tr.

addressing concerns from a house parent about being excluded from children's medical exams.<sup>93</sup> The following is an excerpt from GRACE's interview with Steve Ross:

GRACE: So there were reports of odd behavior such as Dr. Noe licking and sucking on the children's faces. Were you aware of these reports, this odd behavior?

Steve Ross: I do remember something about that, yes.

GRACE: What do you remember?

Steve Ross: Just what you just said.

GRACE: And what did you do?

Steve Ross: Well not licking. I don't remember that. Not sucking either. More like a kiss is what I gathered.

GRACE: So a kiss. And what other behaviors?

Steve Ross: That's it.

GRACE: Okay. So what did you do about that when you heard about that?

Steve Ross: I don't recall doing anything about that.

GRACE: You don't remember talking to him?

Steve Ross: I can't put a conversation. We've talked about so many different things through the years. I don't recall a particular conversation. Probably protect yourself, don't do silly things.<sup>94</sup>

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations against Noe Flores

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<sup>93</sup> Steve Ross Tr.

<sup>94</sup> Steve Ross Tr.

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of sexual misconduct by Noe Flores, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from reporting victims, other staff, and institutional response strongly supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test without reaching "beyond a reasonable doubt," is met through the consistency, specificity, and corroborating factors present in the accounts.

The primary and most compelling evidence comes from the direct and detailed testimonies of multiple victim accounts. RV36 recounted an experience of sexual misconduct during a medical exam by Dr. Noe that left her feeling deeply uncomfortable and violated, noting unsolicited medical help, lack of informed consent or chaperone, and inappropriate procedures. She felt powerless due to his authority and later learned of similar experiences from others, expressing significant emotional distress. AV38 victim accounts detail that from age seven, Dr. Noe would insert two fingers into her vagina during monthly medical checks, even with a house parent present, which he claimed was part of necessary medical procedures. AV18 explicitly described being raped by Dr. Noe as a minor, recalling instances of inappropriate touching while watching cartoons, and offering money for sexual activity. She also detailed receiving inappropriate photos from him in 2021 and his desire for sexual contact. Her public statement on a blog in July 2023 contained graphic details of sexual abuse by an "old man" and further stated she "disclosed being sexually abused 'many times to my Uncle Steve'" but was dismissed. AV67's victim accounts stated that Dr. Noe would examine her when she was sick, telling the house parent to wait outside, and then "started touching my body. He put his fingers in my vagina." She also described an incident where he allegedly assaulted her in a bathroom after she tried to escape him, and that her attempts to tell a house parent were disbelieved and led to punishment. These accounts, while varying in specific acts, collectively describe a pattern of sexualized touching and abuse by Dr. Noe under the guise of medical care or authority.

Corroborating evidence comes from multiple other sources and institutional admissions, despite initial denials. A former staff member stated that Dr. Noe was "essentially forced into retirement" due to meeting with children alone and "odd behavior" such as "licking and sucking on the children's faces," and that continued violations led to his forced retirement. While Steve Ross later denied this specific conversation, the underlying concerns about Dr. Noe's conduct were widely known. The Niños Timeline, updated April 11, 2024, explicitly states that "Niños was first made aware of allegations against Dr. Noe

Flores in [former intern's] initial letter to the Niños' board of directors which was received in November of 2022," identifying AV18 as the alleged victim and including her messages to Steve Ross detailing abuse. This timeline includes Steve Ross's acknowledgment of encouraging AV18 to report the allegation and his later shock at hearing about multiple rapes. A report was filed with the Public Prosecutors Office around December 16, 2022, which included information regarding AV18's reported victimization. W17, a criminal attorney working on AV18's case, noted AV18's fear of seeing Dr. Noe Flores due to his touching and the escalation of abuse over many years. W1 and W13 also shared knowledge that AV64 was sexually abused by Noe Flores, beginning around age 9 and continuing until age 15.

The institutional response further supports the credibility of the allegations. While Steve Ross initially claimed no prior knowledge of allegations against Dr. Noe Flores before 2022, AV18's public statement directly contradicts this, asserting multiple disclosures to "Uncle Steve" that were dismissed as her "just wanting to cause problems." Steve Ross's own "Timeline of Situations Faced by Niños" acknowledges AV18's allegations in 2022 and his encouragement for her to report. His later admission in a February 3, 2023 email that an allegation in 2015 (referring to a different case, but establishing his general reporting philosophy at the time) was not reported directly to authorities, stating, "I now fully understand that reporting or not is not up to us," highlights a prior failure in reporting and an evolving understanding of responsibility. His acknowledgment in an interview with GRACE of remembering "odd behavior" from Dr. Noe, specifically "kissing" children, and his lack of recall regarding any action taken, further indicate a prior awareness of concerning conduct that was not adequately addressed. That Dr. Noe was "forced into retirement" or retired under circumstances that led to his removal from direct contact with children, even if the precise reasons are disputed, points to underlying issues with his conduct. Witness concerns about Dr. Noe's continued presence on mission trips after his retirement also underscore a failure to fully disengage him from vulnerable populations.

In conclusion, based on the consistent, specific, and detailed direct testimonies from multiple victim accounts significantly corroborated by observations and reports from other staff, and partially supported by institutional records and admissions (Niños Timeline, Steve Ross's evolving statements and acknowledgments of mishandling), the allegations of sexual misconduct against Noe Flores are deemed credible under the GRACE burden of proof. The confluence of these factors supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred.

## Luis Escutia

Luis Escutia began his tenure as a house parent at Genesis House in January 2008, serving alongside his wife. By Summer 2013, Luis was leading a congregation established in a new area of San Vicente, known as Mision Chicoloapan. In April 2014, they were actively involved in a new outreach initiative, attempting to plant a church within San Vicente. This outreach aimed to serve individuals who faced difficulties attending other churches due to transportation costs.

### RV77 and RV15

Two former residents of Genesis House (RV77 and RV15) reported experiencing various forms of corporal punishment during their time as minors in the institution. These accounts establish a pattern of disciplinary actions that were often disproportionate, excessively harsh, and, in some cases, involved psychological manipulation.

RV77 described punishments such as being forced to stand in the sun for extended periods while carrying heavy cinder blocks, being confined in a dark storage room for hours without food, and being made to stand with her nose against a wall. A particularly distressing form of punishment involved the use of a wooden stick or "wand" inscribed with a Bible verse, which house parents used to hit children on their buttocks or hands. RV77 recalled receiving such punishments from multiple house parents, including Luis Escutia, who, along with others, appeared to perpetuate disciplinary methods they themselves had experienced within the institution.

RV15 corroborated the presence of excessive punishment, detailing instances where school behavior reports led to disciplinary actions. These included forced wall sits, during which children were hit if they moved, and spankings with a 50 cm paddle that often caused large bruises. RV15 specifically implicated Luis Escutia in these incidents, recalling an instance where Escutia folded RV15 in half and squeezed him as a form of punishment.

The accounts further indicate that house parents, including Luis Escutia, justified their disciplinary actions through biblical interpretations. Additionally, children were instructed to conceal these punishments from visitors, particularly Americans, with punishments being temporarily suspended during such visits and resumed afterward. These detailed accounts from RV77 and RV15 highlight serious concerns regarding the

disciplinary practices employed at Genesis House, with specific allegations directed at Luis Escutia.

## Alleged Victim 81

GRACE interviewed a witness who was a child resident at Ninos and recounted an incident that occurred in or around 2015 where Luis Escutia physically assaulted one of the minor girls, AV81, with excessive force. The assault was reportedly so severe that it left AV81 with significant bruising. This incident was allegedly reported to visitors at the home, who were part of the church group that oversaw the institution.

AV81, who was a young girl at the time, reportedly showed visitors the bruises inflicted by Luis Escutia. This evidence led to an investigation by the institution's director. Consequently, Luis Escutia was reportedly terminated from his position. All the girls were reportedly transferred to Bethel House.

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Luis Escutia

In assessing the credibility of allegations of misconduct by Luis Escutia, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from reporting victims and institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test without reaching "beyond a reasonable doubt," is met through the consistency, specificity, and corroborating factors present in the accounts.

The primary and most compelling evidence comes from the consistent accounts of RV77 and RV15, two former residents of Genesis House. Both individuals reported experiencing various forms of corporal punishment during their time as minors, establishing a pattern of disciplinary actions that were often disproportionate, excessively harsh, and involved psychological manipulation. RV77 specifically described being forced to stand in the sun with heavy cinder blocks, confinement in a dark storage room without food, and being hit with a wooden stick or "wand" by multiple house parents, including Luis Escutia. RV15 corroborated the presence of excessive punishment, detailing forced wall sits and spankings with a 50 cm paddle that caused large bruises, directly implicating Luis Escutia in these incidents, including an instance where he folded RV15 in half and squeezed him as punishment.

Further corroboration of physical misconduct comes from the account of a witness who recalled misconduct suffered by Alleged Victim 81 (AV81). GRACE interviewed a witness who was a child resident at Niños and recounted an incident in or around 2015 where Luis Escutia physically assaulted AV81 with excessive force, resulting in significant bruising. This incident was reportedly reported to visitors who were part of the overseeing church group, and AV81 reportedly showed the visitors her bruises. This direct evidence of physical harm, observed and reported by others, significantly strengthens the credibility of the allegations.

The witness stated that the incident with AV81 led to Luis Escutia being reportedly terminated from his position. Furthermore, all the girls were reportedly transferred to Bethel House, indicating a significant institutional response to the severity of the situation. This decisive action by the institution, including termination and relocation of children, reinforces the credibility of the physical assault allegation against Luis Escutia.

In conclusion, based on the consistent and specific accounts of several witnesses and the reported institutional response of termination and relocation of children, the allegations of physical misconduct by Luis Escutia are deemed credible under the GRACE burden of proof. The confluence of these factors supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred.

## Alberto (Beto) Reyes

According to Steve Ross and documentation provided by Ninos, David Hernandez hired Alberto (Beto) Reyes and his wife, initially as relief house parents before they became principal house parents. Steve Ross stated that at that time, they were looking for employees who were stable, Christian, and had demonstrated an ability to raise their own children well. Steve Ross assumed a background check was done but could not verify it. Alberto Reyes and his wife were reportedly house parents at Genesis, a girls' home, around 2015.<sup>95</sup>

In 2016, a change in Alberto's role was reportedly announced during a leadership team meeting. It was stated that while Alberto and his wife would remain house parents at Bethel House, where the girls had moved, Alberto's primary responsibility would shift to driving and errands, and he would no longer be a houseparent overseeing the girls.

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<sup>95</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 5.

According to Steve Ross, Alberto Reyes was dismissed by David Hernandez in or around May 2016.<sup>96</sup>

## Alleged Victim 17

AV17 was reportedly 15 years of age when she experienced sexual misconduct from Alberto Reyes, a house parent, around 2015 at the Genesis house.<sup>97</sup> The incident in 2015 was reportedly discovered by an older resident and reported to David Hernandez, the field director. Despite the report, no action was reportedly taken against Alberto Reyes; instead, AV17 was reportedly relocated to live with David Hernandez's wife.

Alberto Reyes's wife also reportedly caught Alberto Reyes kissing AV17 and this information was reported to Ninos leadership.

Some time later, a letter written by girls at Bethel House detailed the sexual abuse they experienced. This letter was reportedly known to several leaders, including Steve Ross and David Hernandez.

GRACE was unable to make contact with AV17.

## Alleged Victim 83

AV83 was reportedly a minor resident, approximately 16 years of age, who experienced physical misconduct by Alberto Reyes. This alleged physical misconduct included Alberto Reyes hitting AV83 "really hard" and punching and hitting her with a belt. Photos of bruising on AV83's leg, resulting from the abuse, were reportedly sent to a then-board member by W30, a former resident who contacted the board member with concerns about the abuse. The abuse was reportedly brought to the attention of Steve Ross, the executive director, but he allegedly dismissed W30's claims, describing W30 as a "troubled kid" who was "making up lies" and had a history of dishonesty. The board president, Ron Cook, also reportedly dismissed concerns when contacted by another board member, advising them to "quit micromanaging" and let Steve handle it. GRACE was provided with and reviewed the photos of the bruised leg sent to the former board member.

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<sup>96</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 36, 43.

<sup>97</sup> Email from W6 to GRACE. May 31, 2024.

## Knowledge and Response of Allegations Against Alberto Reyes

A former intern recounted hearing in 2015 about an alleged incident involving Alberto Reyes and AV17. He stated that other children informed him they had witnessed Alberto Reyes alone with AV17 in a room, and that "something" was happening, though the specific nature of the activity was not disclosed to the former intern by the children.

Upon learning of these allegations, the former intern approached Steve Ross, who was his boss at the time, on multiple occasions. According to the former intern, Steve Ross indicated that he was already aware of the situation and that it was being handled, although he did not provide details about how he knew or who informed him. The former intern initially understood "being handled" to mean Alberto would no longer be on staff. However, Alberto was instead moved to a different position, and his wife remained on staff as a house parent in the same house.

The former intern recalled that when he spoke to Steve Ross again, he was told that no laws were broken and that the incident was "nothing major." The former intern disagreed, asserting that regardless of legal implications, Alberto should have been removed from the institution. Eventually, Alberto did leave Ninos, though the former intern was unsure if he was fired or left voluntarily. The former intern estimated that Alberto's departure occurred less than a year after the allegations were raised, but still considered it "too long" given the circumstances.

In July 2015, while visiting Ninos, a former US board member who spoke with GRACE was informed by the former intern that the house dad at Genesis, Alberto Reyes, had been caught kissing a girl by his wife but was still working there. The former board member recalled confronting Steve Ross about this the same night in a two-hour conversation, during which he assured the board member he was handling the situation appropriately. The former board member now believes Steve Ross did not handle it appropriately and that Alberto Reyes remained employed after the report.

Steve Ross told GRACE he first became aware of concerns regarding Alberto Reyes around 2015.<sup>98</sup> The initial report was described to him as an "undesired touch" by Alberto toward AV17.<sup>99</sup> Steve Ross does not recall who made the report, but believes it may have

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<sup>98</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 32.

<sup>99</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 32.

been David Hernandez.<sup>100</sup> He stated his involvement was "very little," and he does not recall speaking directly to either AV17 or Alberto about it.<sup>101</sup> At the time, the incident did not seem like a "serious offense" or sexual abuse, but rather like someone who did not set correct limits with children who have trauma backgrounds where things could be misinterpreted.<sup>102</sup>

On March 3, 2016, W12 received messages from an adult (W30) who had formerly been a minor resident of Ninos.<sup>103</sup> W12 had previously worked at Ninos on short-term mission trips and had some connections to the US board.<sup>104</sup> W30 expressed to W12 an urgent need to speak with a board member, stating that "there's something very important" and that he was "not really" okay.<sup>105</sup>

W30 subsequently disclosed to W12 allegations of abuse and misconduct occurring at Ninos.<sup>106</sup> He reported specific incidents, including allegations that Alberto Reyes had "touched one of the girls, and after that he touched another one."<sup>107</sup> He reportedly stated the abuse has been happening since 2012.<sup>108</sup> He also shared that "two days ago, [Alberto Reyes] hit [minor resident] really hard."<sup>109</sup> The minor resident [AV73] would have been approximately 16 years of age at the time of the alleged physical misconduct.<sup>110</sup>

He claimed that despite his personal attempts to bring these issues to the attention of Steve Ross for three years "many, many times," no action had been taken, and that "[Steve] doesn't want to do nothing. A lot of people talk to him."<sup>111</sup>

W12 reportedly relayed these concerns to a board member at the time who then contacted Steve Ross.<sup>112</sup> According to W12, the board member said that Steve had dismissed W30's claims, describing W30 as a "troubled kid" who was "making up lies" and

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<sup>100</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 32.

<sup>101</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 33.

<sup>102</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 32-33.

<sup>103</sup> W12 Tr. at 1, 4.

<sup>104</sup> W12 Tr. at 1.

<sup>105</sup> W12 Tr. at 1.

<sup>106</sup> W12 Tr. at 1.

<sup>107</sup> W12 Tr. at 2.

<sup>108</sup> W12 Tr. at 2.

<sup>109</sup> W12 Tr. at 2.

<sup>110</sup> Baptism files. March, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> W12 Tr. at 2.

<sup>112</sup> W12 Tr. at 2.

had a history of dishonesty.<sup>113</sup> Steve reportedly stated that he had the situation "all under control."<sup>114</sup>

On or around November 9, 2016, during a leadership team meeting at Niños de México, David Hernandez reportedly announced a change in Alberto Reyes' role.<sup>115</sup> Alberto and his wife had previously been house parents of Genesis House, a home for girls. Alberto was no longer to be a house parent providing oversight to the girls, but would instead handle driving and errands.<sup>116</sup> However, W6's observations allegedly contradicted this information, as she consistently saw Alberto alone with AV17. W6 noted that AV17 was frequently by Alberto's side, and he would often remove her from group activities to be alone with her.<sup>117</sup> This pattern of behavior made W6 uncomfortable, and she sought clarification on Alberto's role in a subsequent team meeting. David Hernandez, however, reportedly appeared visibly uncomfortable and did not provide a response.<sup>118</sup>

W6 provided GRACE with the following notes taken contemporaneous with the events in November, 2016 that were part of a document prepared at the time listing safety concerns with management:

11/9/16- I inquired about Beto's role in the house on 11/9/16. I was told by David through [REDACTED] that he has been returned to full duties in the house. This information was given in our multidisciplinary meeting. I am very concerned about this.<sup>119</sup>

According to W6, she had a conversation with an older minor resident on November 14th, 2016. During this meeting, the resident reportedly disclosed to W6 that another minor girl who resided at Bethel House, had contacted her approximately three weeks prior. The resident allegedly informed W6 that Alberto Reyes was still molesting AV17. The resident further reported that this information had been conveyed to the leadership at Niños de México, but AV17 was not believed.<sup>120</sup> According to the resident, Alberto had also threatened AV17 if she revealed the abuse. This conversation prompted W6 to promise the

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<sup>113</sup> W12 Tr. at 2.

<sup>114</sup> W12 Tr. at 2.

<sup>115</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 7. W6 Tr. 2 at 2.

<sup>116</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 7.

<sup>117</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 8.

<sup>118</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 8.

<sup>119</sup> W6. Concerns with Management. Undated.

<sup>120</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 9.

resident that she would closely observe the situation involving Alberto and AV17 when she was at Bethel House.<sup>121</sup>

W6 told GRACE that she discussed her concerns with Steve Ross, the executive director, on December 8, 2016.<sup>122</sup> Steve Ross allegedly disclosed that he had a letter from AV17 accusing Alberto of sexual abuse, pulled the letter from his pocket, and read it to W6.<sup>123</sup> According to W6, the letter included accusations from AV17 that Alberto was still sexually abusing AV17. AV17 was approximately 16 years of age at the time of the letter.<sup>124</sup> He also reportedly stated that there had been previous, substantiated accusations, but the leadership had chosen to keep Alberto employed as a house parent of the girls, but with a modified job description.<sup>125</sup> When W6 expressed dismay and anger at this decision and asked who had made it, Steve Ross reportedly replied that it was his decision and the board's.<sup>126</sup> W6 recalled that Steve Ross said he was going to Bethel House to address the situation that day and invited W6 to join him as he thought W6 would be a support to AV17.<sup>127</sup>

W6 accompanied Steve Ross and his wife, Janet Ross, to meet with AV17 where Steve Ross questioned AV17. W6 recalled that Steve Ross inquired about the details of what had occurred between AV17 and Alberto Reyes.<sup>128</sup> Specifically, she remembered that Steve Ross asked AV17 about the specific nature of the accusations, including how she had been touched.<sup>129</sup> He also delved into the type of contact and the frequency of contact, from what W6 could remember.<sup>130</sup> AV17 reportedly shared that the other girls in the letter had helped her write the letter due to a disability, and that she gave the letter to Maribel Hernandez, David Hernandez's wife. According to W6, Maribel Hernandez gave the letter to David Hernandez who then provided it to Steve Ross.<sup>131</sup> W6 pulled AV17 aside and comforted AV17, who expressed gratitude for being believed. W6 recalled that AV17 said the abuse

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<sup>121</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 9.

<sup>122</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 9.

<sup>123</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 9.

<sup>124</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 13.

<sup>125</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 9.

<sup>126</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 9.

<sup>127</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 9.

<sup>128</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 19.

<sup>129</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 19.

<sup>130</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 19.

<sup>131</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 10.

had taken place over a long period of time but no one in leadership at Ninos had believed her before.<sup>132</sup>

Janet Ross stated she was not in Mexico when the initial allegations against Alberto Reyes surfaced but heard that he was seen in an "embrace" with AV17 by older girls, who reported it to the field director, David Hernandez. She was not privy to the details of how it was handled at that time. According to Janet Ross, David Hernandez required Alberto to undergo therapy and established safety parameters.

Subsequently, Janet Ross was present at a meeting with a staff member and AV17 to discuss a second allegation where AV17 claimed Alberto Reyes "hurt me." At Steve Ross's request, Janet Ross attended to translate for the staff member. During the interview, when asked to explain how she was hurt, AV17 reportedly stated, "He doesn't pay attention to me anymore," referencing the safety parameters that had been established preventing him from being alone with her. Janet Ross stated her impression was that the "hurt" was more of an emotional withdrawal. She also noted that several male staff had to be careful with AV17 because she was "drawn to them."

Alberto Reyes and his wife were reportedly terminated shortly after this meeting.<sup>133</sup>

Following their dismissal, W6 was asked to temporarily work in the girls' home. Reportedly, less than a week after this transition, W6 took the girls to David Hernandez's church. To her surprise, Alberto Reyes was present at the church service. W6 was then instructed to take AV17 to the van and remain with her there, while the rest of the girls attended the service. This directive was allegedly given to W6 despite concerns about Alberto's past behavior.<sup>134</sup>

W6 expressed feeling extremely upset about this situation. She felt that the leadership was mishandling the situation by allowing Alberto to attend the church while requiring her to isolate AV17. She perceived this as further victimization and retraumatization of AV17. W6 also indicated that she struggled to understand the leadership's mentality and decision-making process in this instance.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 10.

<sup>133</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 10.

<sup>134</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 11.

<sup>135</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 11.

W6 recalled that after these incidents she received information from multiple sources regarding concerns about Alberto Reyes and AV17.<sup>136</sup> Reportedly, house parents Marco and Nayelli Parra approached W6 and thanked her for helping AV17.<sup>137</sup> They stated that they had repeatedly reported concerns about Alberto and AV17 to David Hernandez for a long time, but allegedly, nothing was ever done.<sup>138</sup> This suggests that concerns about Alberto's behavior were not new and had been previously raised within the organization.

Additionally, a local pastor, who was also W6's pastor at the time, reportedly came to W6 with further information.<sup>139</sup> The local pastor stated that he and his wife had reported similar concerns to David Hernandez.<sup>140</sup> These concerns allegedly stemmed from observations made by a parking lot attendant at a grocery store.<sup>141</sup> The attendant had reportedly told the local pastor that when Alberto and his wife would take the girls grocery shopping, Alberto's wife would go inside with most of the girls, while Alberto would remain in the van alone with AV17.<sup>142</sup> The parking lot attendant reportedly believed that AV17 was being molested in the van during these times.<sup>143</sup>

W6 stated that her assumption was that the leadership at Ninos was reporting AV17's case to the appropriate agencies.<sup>144</sup> This assumption was based on her understanding that employees were required to report such incidents to the leadership. However, she admitted that she does not definitively know if reports were actually made to law enforcement.

After Alberto's termination, W6 observed what she perceived as punitive measures against the girls in the home, including dietary changes and the separation of sibling sets.<sup>145</sup> The protein, specifically meat, was reportedly removed from their diet.<sup>146</sup> This change was noticed and raised as a concern in a team meeting by the organization's psychologist.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 11.

<sup>137</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 11.

<sup>138</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 11.

<sup>139</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 11.

<sup>140</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 11.

<sup>141</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 11.

<sup>142</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 11.

<sup>143</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 11-12.

<sup>144</sup> W6 Tr. at 16.

<sup>145</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 12.

<sup>146</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 12.

<sup>147</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 12.

The psychologist expressed worry about the nutritional needs of the girls, who were of various ages and required protein for their development.<sup>148</sup> The psychologist reportedly requested that this dietary change not be permanent and questioned the reasoning behind it.<sup>149</sup>

W6 stated that David Hernandez did not provide a clear answer as to why the dietary changes were implemented. In W6's opinion, this was a form of retaliation related to the situation involving Alberto Reyes. She described the culture under David Hernandez as being very retaliatory, with various methods used against the children. W6 further stated that Steve Ross was present during these times and that she did not know who gave the directives regarding the dietary changes. However, she stated that Steve Ross was aware of these issues.<sup>150</sup>

W6 also raised significant concerns regarding the practice of splitting up sibling sets at Niños de México. She highlighted the psychological importance of maintaining sibling bonds, especially for children who have experienced trauma. W6 pointed out that the organization, in its public image, claimed to prioritize keeping siblings together. However, she observed instances where siblings, including twins, were separated. W6 acknowledged that while the leadership might not have explicitly stated that these separations were disciplinary measures, she perceived them as such.

Specifically, W6 cited the case of another minor resident, who was allegedly moved from her long-term residence without explanation.<sup>151</sup> W6 approached Steve Ross to inquire about this decision and was reportedly told that it was disciplinary action related to the situation involving AV17, and the letter that the minor resident had reportedly helped AV17 write to report the abuse she suffered from Alberto Reyes.<sup>152</sup> W6 expressed her disagreement with this rationale, arguing that the minor resident was being punished for helping AV17 speak the truth about her abuse. W6 questioned the logic of punishing someone for supporting a victim, especially when the organization purportedly believed the victim's account. She stated that Steve Ross did not provide a satisfactory response and made it clear that he did not welcome her questioning. W6 also recalled a conversation with the organization's psychologist, who expressed concerns about the psychological

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<sup>148</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 12.

<sup>149</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 12.

<sup>150</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 12.

<sup>151</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 12.

<sup>152</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 13.

damage caused by separating siblings, particularly twins. The psychologist allegedly emphasized the importance of these bonds for the children's well-being. Despite these concerns, W6 reported that the separations continued to occur, and she perceived a lack of understanding and empathy from the leadership regarding the significance of sibling relationships for the children.

Ninos provided GRACE with a "Timeline of Situations Faced by Ninos." It was presented to the board on February 10, 2023, reportedly in response to public allegations. The timeline appears to have been written by Steve Ross. A portion of the timeline includes information pertaining to the "Alberto Reyes Case" and the "Affected girl: [AV17]." The timeline includes content pasted from communication W9, a former intern, had sent to leadership:

Before this, an older girl at the Genesis home (when it was a girls home) came forward and informed Niños leadership that another girl in her house was being sexually abused by their housedad, Alberto "Beto" Reyes. She was not believed. On top of this, Alberto's wife caught him kissing the girl who had already been reported to have been being abused by him, coming forward to tell Steve and David. Rather than file a report and suspend Alberto, as was their legal and moral obligation, they put in place arbitrary rules about the kind of interaction Alberto was allowed to have with this girl...In the end, he broke those rules and was finally fired, but not before he abused several girls in the Genesis house. He was in jail for a time, though I have lost track of his whereabouts in the time since.

The timeline also included testimony, purportedly from a former board member, that stated:

In respect to my remembrance of Alberto Reyes and other items: When I was there in July 2015, [REDACTED] made me aware that the house dad at Genesis was caught kissing a girl by his wife and he was still working there. I spoke about this directly to Steve that night.

The timeline document contains the following "note" from Steve Ross:

"Unfortunately, [W9] is correct and I am VERY SORRY that this was not handled differently.

The timeline states that Alberto Reyes was dismissed in May 2016 and that [AV17] left the organization on October 3, 2018.

These allegations were not reported by Ninos to the authorities. In a February 3, 2023 email to a supporter, Steve Ross acknowledged that he did not report an allegation of child abuse in 2015:

Unfortunately, there was an allegation in 2015 that was not reported directly to the authorities. I am heartbroken about that. I now fully understand that reporting or not is not up to us and our feelings of the validity of the testimony, rather it is up to the legal authorities to determine if the claims are credible or non-credible, and it is their responsibility to determine guilt or innocence.

Steve Ross told GRACE the report was not reported to authorities.<sup>153</sup> When asked why it was not reported, Steve Ross responded, "What I'm remembering is that reporting was not something that really was done much in general in Mexico at that period of time. And the Minister Publico, at that point in time, anything that you do, you would pay for it, turn it in, you'd pay for it. If you wanted it to advance, you had to pay for it. So I don't know if that was basically the reasoning why it wasn't."<sup>154</sup>

When asked what led to the change in understanding regarding reporting requirements, Steve Ross referenced the situation with Javier Colosia and stated:

Again, had this been in the US I would've reported it immediately, but in Mexico, it just didn't seem to be the right thing to do or the normal thing to do at that point. So what led to my understanding is everything that happened with Javier, it was very clear that we just have no choice to report anything and everything, even if it is a pain to do it, and it is a pain.<sup>155</sup>

Ross explained that reporting was not common practice in Mexico at the time, and the system was such that an accusation could lead to an arrest before a full investigation, putting the accused's "complete future on the line" over what he thought at the time was a

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<sup>153</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 34.

<sup>154</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 34.

<sup>155</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 34.

"simple accusation".<sup>156</sup> Looking back, Ross acknowledged that in that specific case, he put Alberto's reputation over the safety and wellbeing of the children, although that was not his intention at the time. He said his understanding of the necessity to report everything to legal authorities, regardless of personal feelings about validity, changed after the situation with Javier Colosia.

Steve Ross could not recall the specific circumstances around Alberto Reyes being dismissed from Ninos, but believes it was related to "an accusation that some other point in time he took a girl by himself when he was not supposed to take anybody by himself, ever. I think that's what led to, but I'm not sure about that."<sup>157</sup> Steve Ross said the incident was looked into but his "memory is not very good on those details, but it was inappropriate."<sup>158</sup> In his interviews with GRACE, Steve Ross frequently claimed he could not recall certain details. When asked about his memory limitations, Ross described himself as a "big picture" person who does not always recall specific details.<sup>159</sup>

Ross does not recall receiving a letter written by girls from Bethel House detailing sexual abuse, nor does he recall a meeting with AV17, another employee, and his wife to discuss allegations against Alberto.<sup>160</sup> However, he noted his wife recalled a meeting where a girl complained that Alberto was hurting her by *not* paying attention to her, which was after he had been told not to have contact with her.<sup>161</sup> Janet Ross also recalled this meeting in her interview with GRACE, as described previously in this section. Steve Ross acknowledged that it was a mistake for Alberto Reyes to have been given a modified job description limiting his responsibilities to driving errands after the initial reports, and stated that he and David Hernandez had made that decision.<sup>162</sup>

Steve Ross said the children were separated by gender and moved to different homes before Alberto Reyes left Ninos and for reasons related to peer-on-peer sexual activity.<sup>163</sup> He also did not have any awareness of punitive measures being taken against

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<sup>156</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 35.

<sup>157</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 36.

<sup>158</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 36.

<sup>159</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 40.

<sup>160</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 38.

<sup>161</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 40.

<sup>162</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 42-43.

<sup>163</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 43.

any children for reporting misconduct by Alberto Reyes, such as dietary restrictions, but that the new house parents may have done things differently.<sup>164</sup>

Steve Ross told GRACE he "regretted what had happened, and if I had to do it over again, I would've done it differently."<sup>165</sup>

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Alberto Reyes

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of sexual and physical misconduct by Alberto Reyes, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from reporting victims, other staff, and institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test without reaching "beyond a reasonable doubt," is met through the consistency, specificity, and corroborating factors present in the accounts.

The primary and most compelling evidence comes from AV17's account of sexual misconduct, corroborated by multiple sources and institutional admissions. AV17, reportedly 15 years old, experienced sexual misconduct from Alberto Reyes at the Genesis house around 2015, which allegedly began when she was around 9. This incident was reportedly discovered by an older resident and reported to David Hernandez, the field director. Further corroboration of sexual misconduct comes from Alberto's wife, who reportedly caught him kissing AV17 and reported this to Niños leadership. W6 also observed a concerning pattern of Alberto being alone with AV17 and removing her from group activities, making her uncomfortable. A letter written by girls at Bethel House detailing sexual abuse, which was known to Steve Ross and David Hernandez, further supports a pattern of abuse. Steve Ross later reportedly confirmed to W6 he had a letter from AV17 accusing Alberto of sexual abuse, stating it included accusations that Alberto was still sexually abusing AV17.

There is additional compelling evidence for physical misconduct by Alberto Reyes committed against AV83, who was reportedly a minor resident, approximately 16 years of age. AV83 was allegedly physically abused by Alberto Reyes, with incidents including Alberto hitting her "really hard" and punching and hitting her with a belt. Photos of a welt on AV83's leg, resulting from the abuse, were reportedly sent to a board member by W30, a

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<sup>164</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 43.

<sup>165</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 44.

former resident, who contacted the board member with concerns about the abuse. This specific detail provides concrete evidence of the physical harm inflicted.

The testimony of Janet Ross adds important context and corroboration to the concerns surrounding Alberto Reyes. While she was not present for the initial allegation, her direct participation in a subsequent meeting regarding AV17 provides critical insight. Her account confirms that the dynamic between Reyes and AV17 was serious enough to warrant the implementation of safety protocols (i.e., preventing him from being alone with her) and a formal follow-up meeting involving multiple staff members. Although AV17 clarified her statement of being "hurt" in that meeting as emotional distress over his withdrawal of attention, this does not negate the initial concern; rather, it speaks to a potentially complex grooming or attachment dynamic that leadership was actively managing. Therefore, Janet Ross's testimony corroborates that a problematic situation existed and that the institution was aware of and responding to a perceived risk.

The institutional response, while initially inadequate, ultimately corroborates the allegations. A former intern approached Steve Ross multiple times about allegations involving Alberto and AV17, and Steve Ross indicated he was aware and it was "being handled," though Alberto was only moved to a different position, not dismissed. A US board member also confronted Steve Ross in July 2015 after being informed by the former intern that Alberto was caught kissing a girl but was still employed. Steve Ross's later reported admission to W6 that he had a letter from AV17 accusing Alberto of sexual abuse, and that there had been previous, substantiated accusations but leadership chose to keep him employed with a modified job description, directly confirms awareness of the abuse. Steve Ross also admitted it was his and the board's decision to keep Alberto employed. The "Timeline of Situations Faced by Niños" document, presented to the board in February 2023 and reportedly written by Steve Ross, includes a section on the "Alberto Reyes Case" and "Affected girl: [AV17]," stating that an older girl reported AV17 was being sexually abused by Alberto, and that Alberto's wife caught him kissing AV17. This timeline includes a "note" from Steve Ross: "Unfortunately, [W9] is correct and I am VERY SORRY that this was not handled differently." This serves as a direct institutional admission of mishandling and regret.

Furthermore, the dismissal of Alberto Reyes by David Hernandez in 2016 reinforces the credibility of the underlying misconduct. Other house parents and a local pastor also reportedly shared concerns with staff. Steve Ross's acknowledgment in a February 3, 2023 email that an allegation in 2015 was not reported directly to authorities, stating, "I now fully

understand that reporting or not is not up to us and our feelings of the validity of the testimony," further supports the seriousness of the unreported incident. His self-acknowledged failure in prioritizing Alberto's reputation over child safety also lends weight to the credibility of the abuse.

In conclusion, based on the information available regarding allegations of misconduct against AV17 and AV83, significantly corroborated by observations from other staff, reports from Alberto's wife, an alleged letter from Bethel House girls, and multiple admissions and acknowledgments of mishandling by institutional leadership, the allegations of sexual and physical abuse against Alberto Reyes are deemed credible under the GRACE burden of proof. The confluence of these factors supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred.

## Ana Laura Hernandez Trinidad

Laura Hernandez was initially hired by David Hernandez, her brother, to work in an administrative role in the office.<sup>166</sup> She was announced as the new house parent of Agape House, a girls' home, in January 2015. Prior to this, Ricardo Peral Gonzales and his wife had worked as house parents in Agape House. At the same time Laura was announced as the new house parent for Agape House, Ricardo Peral Gonzales was announced as the new house parent in the Esperanza home, an all boys home. Laura Hernandez is no longer working at Ninos.

W6 lived in the same house from January to May 2015 and described Laura as ruling with an "iron fist," noting that the girls were afraid of her.<sup>167</sup> W6 mentioned that the girls' behavior would change drastically when Laura entered a room, shifting to a stoic demeanor.<sup>168</sup> W6 found Laura to be manipulative and a compulsive liar and felt uncomfortable around her.<sup>169</sup>

## Alleged Victim 41

W9 told GRACE that "no more than a few days prior" to June 17, 2018, a male resident at Ninos (W40) showed W9 nude pictures of Laura Hernandez that Laura

<sup>166</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 26.

<sup>167</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 22.

<sup>168</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 22.

<sup>169</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 22.

Hernandez had reportedly sent to another male resident at Ninos, AV41.<sup>170</sup> Laura Hernandez was reportedly a house parent at Agape House at the time.<sup>171</sup> AV41 was reportedly a graduating High School senior at the time and was at least 18 years of age.<sup>172</sup> At W9's request, W40 provided the pictures to W9.<sup>173</sup> W9 recalled there were 4 pictures and the pictures reportedly included a nude image of Laura Hernandez's vagina, a nude image of Laura Hernandez's anus, and an image of Laura Hernandez clothed but revealing cleavage.<sup>174</sup> According to W9, he contacted Steve Ross on June 17, 2018 via Facebook to request a time to speak with Steve Ross about information W9 "had received about a sexual relationship" between Laura Hernandez and AV41.<sup>175</sup> W9 reportedly sent the pictures to Steve Ross on June 18, 2018. W9 and Steve Ross reportedly met to discuss the matter sometime between June 18, 2018 and June 20, 2018.<sup>176</sup>

W9 noted that Steve Ross appeared visibly shocked and emotional upon seeing the images, initially expressing disbelief and distress.<sup>177</sup> W9 interpreted this reaction as a positive sign, believing that Steve Ross was taking the allegations seriously and would address the matter appropriately.<sup>178</sup> W9 explained to Steve Ross how he had obtained the images without revealing the identity of the individual who had provided them.<sup>179</sup> Steve Ross stated that he needed to contact David Hernandez, Laura's brother and the administrative director, and requested permission to use W9's name in the conversation, stating he couldn't proceed without that permission.<sup>180</sup> Despite initial reservations, W9 agreed to this request.<sup>181</sup>

Following a phone call with David Hernandez, Steve Ross returned to the meeting with what W9 described as a noticeably different demeanor.<sup>182</sup> Steve Ross reportedly asserted that the woman in the photos was not Laura Hernandez.<sup>183</sup> W9 disagreed, noting the resemblance and suggesting that a birthmark visible in the photos could be used for

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<sup>170</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>171</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>172</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>173</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>174</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>175</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>176</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>177</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>178</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>179</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>180</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>181</sup> W9 Tr. at 6.

<sup>182</sup> W9 Tr. at 7.

<sup>183</sup> W9 Tr. at 7.

confirmation.<sup>184</sup> They then accessed Laura Hernandez's Facebook profile and located a photo that appeared to match the birthmark.<sup>185</sup> However, Steve Ross then stated that they would also need to verify her nose, which W9 perceived as an attempt to avoid addressing the issue.<sup>186</sup>

W9 recalled that he spoke to AV41 on July 4, 2018, and AV41 disclosed to W9 that he had been having sex with a house mother since he was 16 years of age.<sup>187</sup> According to W9, AV41 disclosed that Laura Hernandez would use the institution's van to take AV41 off-site where they would engage in sexual activity.<sup>188</sup> W9 secretly recorded the disclosure and provided a copy of the recorded audio to Steve Ross on July 17, 2018.<sup>189</sup>

On July 17, 2018, W9 provided Steve Ross with an audio recording of AV41 admitting to the sexual relationship with Laura Hernandez, stating it began when he was underage.<sup>190</sup> In their subsequent meeting to discuss this audio, Steve Ross initially focused on the fact that W9 had recorded AV41 secretly.<sup>191</sup> However, W9 asserted that this action was necessary due to the initial handling of the situation.<sup>192</sup> W9 asked Steve Ross if he was convinced by the recording, to which Steve Ross stated he was "too convinced."<sup>193</sup> When W9 inquired about reporting the matter to authorities, Steve Ross offered various excuses, including concerns about AV41's wishes and the potential closure of the institution if it was reported.<sup>194</sup> Steve Ross eventually decided not to report to the authorities, stating he would instead speak with AV41.<sup>195</sup> W9 later heard that Laura Hernandez had left Niños but did not receive further direct communication from Steve Ross about the matter.<sup>196</sup>

W6 was a staff member at Niños at the time of these incidents and described to GRACE conversations W6 had with Steve Ross regarding these allegations. In or around January 2019, Steve Ross spoke with W6 privately<sup>197</sup> and told W6 that while she was gone,

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<sup>184</sup> W9 Tr. at 7.

<sup>185</sup> W9 Tr. at 7.

<sup>186</sup> W9 Tr. at 7.

<sup>187</sup> W9 Tr. at 8.

<sup>188</sup> W9 Tr. at 17-18.

<sup>189</sup> W9 Tr. at 8.

<sup>190</sup> W9 Tr. at 8.

<sup>191</sup> W9 Tr. at 8.

<sup>192</sup> W9 Tr. at 8.

<sup>193</sup> W9 Tr. at 8.

<sup>194</sup> W9 Tr. at 8.

<sup>195</sup> W9 Tr. at 8.

<sup>196</sup> W9 Tr. at 9.

<sup>197</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 24.

they had met with Laura, reviewed text communications between Laura and AV41, and that Laura had denied the allegations.<sup>198</sup> Steve stated that he recommended Laura resign from the organization, but he did not state whether they believed she was guilty of abuse.<sup>199</sup> Steve said the information was questionable.<sup>200</sup> Several days later, David Hernandez asked W6 in front of the team how she found out about Laura's departure, and W6 simply stated that Steve had informed her.<sup>201</sup>

During her conversation with Steve Ross, W6 informed him of reasons, based on direct encounters she had with AV41, she felt AV41 should be believed and helped to understand that what he experienced from Laura was abuse.<sup>202</sup> W6 felt that Steve did not believe the allegations against Laura and that he minimized the situation, stating that Laura had resigned rather than being fired, and emphasizing the procedural implications of termination.<sup>203</sup> Steve reportedly acted as if he did not believe anything had happened to AV41.<sup>204</sup> W6 also shared that Steve made it clear that they did not really believe AV41 was a victim.<sup>205</sup>

AV41 declined an interview with GRACE.

## RV61

In a public statement reviewed by GRACE, RV61 described experiencing physical and emotional mistreatment from Laura Hernandez after being sent to live in the home she supervised.<sup>206</sup> According to RV61, after the women's dormitory was dismantled, she was the only one sent to live with Laura Hernandez, who subsequently began to treat her badly.

RV61 reported that Hernandez subjected her to punitive measures, including locking her in a room without food and withholding her meals. RV61 also stated that Hernandez threatened to "throw me out on the street" and isolated her from the other girls in the house. Additionally, RV61 reported witnessing Laura Hernandez physically and verbally

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<sup>198</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 24.

<sup>199</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 24.

<sup>200</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 24.

<sup>201</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 24.

<sup>202</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 25.

<sup>203</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 25.

<sup>204</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 25.

<sup>205</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 25.

<sup>206</sup> While RV54 agreed to participate in an interview and did so, she later expressed a preference that her interview statements not be included in the final report, and GRACE honored that preference.

abuse another resident, stating she "saw how she slapped [another girl]... and she told her that she was just a nobody."

According to the statement, RV61 eventually "couldn't stand it and I left the house without her noticing," remaining away for approximately two weeks. After speaking with "Uncle" Steve about her desire to leave the home due to the abuse, she returned to retrieve her belongings. Upon her return, RV61 stated that Laura Hernandez had locked her door in the same manner as when she had previously confined her without food. RV61 also reported that Hernandez told Steve Ross that she "thought she had committed suicide."

## Knowledge and Response to Allegations Against Laura Hernandez

Steve Ross told GRACE he heard about allegations of sexual misconduct by Laura Hernandez toward AV41 when W9 brought this to his attention. He recalled that W9 provided pictures that allegedly included an upper body shot of Laura and other photos of intimate body parts that Steve Ross told GRACE could have belonged to any woman. Steve Ross said he spoke to both Laura Hernandez and AV41 about the allegations. AV41 allegedly stated that he and Laura had a sexual relationship and met in the parking lot of Walmart and Home Depot. Laura, however, consistently denied that any sexual relationship occurred.

Despite Laura's denials, Steve Ross concluded, based on AV41's statements and the presence of the pictures, that a sexual relationship had occurred. He stated that he "had to let her go," meaning he fired her. He also mentioned that he handled the investigation himself to avoid putting David Hernandez, Laura's brother, in a difficult position.

The following information was detailed in a document containing a "Timeline of Situations Faced by Ninos" prepared by Steve Ross for the Ninos board of directors.

In May 2018, W9 brought information concerning "possible abuse" by a house mom, Laura Hernandez, of an 18-year-old boy, AV41. This information included "sexually provocative photos" of Hernandez and a "photo of a vagina." Hernandez was also accused of having a "rendezvous and sexual relationship" with AV41. Steve Ross wrote that the information was initially "hard for me to believe" due to AV41's "pattern of making sexual comments" to female staff members.

Steve Ross wrote that upon receiving the information, he spoke with AV41, who admitted to having met with Laura in a van at a Walmart/Home Depot parking lot "and had a sexual relationship," with previous encounters also occurring.

Steve Ross wrote that the house mom was then spoken to, placed on administrative leave, and that she denied any sexual contact with AV41. According to Steve Ross, AV41, being 18 years old at the time and "soon to be 19," decided he did not want to testify about the situation. Steve Ross stated that as AV41 was of age, this was his decision.

Steve Ross wrote that in early June 2018, AV41 decided to leave the organization and live with his family. He was transported there to ensure his family would receive him on June 26, 2018. Steve Ross wrote that on July 4, AV41 returned to participate in the Ninos graduation party and received his papers.

Steve Ross wrote that he had a conversation with an alumnus who is a policeman who told him that the organization was not obligated to report the situation to authorities, given AV41's age. Steve Ross stated that after further conversations with AV41 and considering the "provocative photos," Laura Hernandez was released from staff on August 16, 2018.

Steve Ross wrote that he spoke with AV41 several times after he left Ninos and was offered assistance to declare if he chose to, but he consistently declined. Steve Ross stated that on January 27, 2023, AV41 affirmed that he did not want to testify then and did not want to testify at the time Steve Ross prepared the written timeline.

Steve Ross wrote that subsequent to this case, the "House Parent Manual" was revised to include "even clearer stipulations about relationships with children."

Regarding Laura's demeanor toward children under her care, Ross described her to GRACE as being "in control" in a positive way, helping children to establish limits. He did not recall seeing her overstep any boundaries in terms of discipline or hearing about such instances. He did not recall having any knowledge of someone being locked in a room by Laura Hernandez for several days without food.<sup>207</sup> He did recall hearing that Laura Hernandez had slapped a child under her care but could not remember when he heard that or any details, and acknowledged that he did not address it at the time.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 30.

<sup>208</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 29.

David Hernandez reportedly became aware of allegations against Laura Hernandez when Steve Ross informed him. According to Steve Ross, he told David Hernandez, "you're not going to touch it. I'm going to do the investigation and do the checking because I don't want to put you into that position with your sister to have to deal with that. So I took care of that." However, standard protocol reportedly involved initiating an investigation by the psychologist and removing both the accused individual and the reporting victim from their previous settings, a measure taken to safeguard the reporting victim.

Steve Ross told GRACE that he alone conducted the investigation: "...because it was David's sister, I felt like I had to do the investigation. He couldn't do it. Nobody else could do it. I had to do it."<sup>209</sup>

As a result of the investigation, Steve Ross told GRACE that Laura Hernandez's employment was terminated, and she no longer works for Niños de México. According to Steve Ross, Laura reportedly asked to be rehired several years later, but Steve Ross refused.

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Laura Hernandez

In assessing the credibility of the allegations of misconduct by Laura Hernandez, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from reporting victims, other staff, and institutional response presents a complex picture. While there are inconsistencies in the accounts of leadership, particularly Steve Ross and David Hernandez, compelling evidence supports the veracity of some claims, especially regarding the sexual misconduct toward AV41 and the physical misconduct toward RV61.

The primary evidence for misconduct involves AV41 and RV61. W9's account of receiving nude pictures of Laura Hernandez, reportedly sent to AV41, and AV41's later disclosure to W9 of a sexual relationship with Laura Hernandez that began when he was underage, provides direct and detailed allegations. The audio recording of AV41's

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<sup>209</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 29.

admission further strengthens this claim. RV61's testimony of witnessing Laura Hernandez verbally abuse and slap girls, and subsequently being locked in a windowless room without food for days as retaliation for reporting misconduct, points to a pattern of physical and emotional abuse.

The institutional response to these allegations, as described in this report, reveals significant inconsistencies and a lack of clear accountability from leadership. Steve Ross's initial reaction to the nude photos, expressing shock and distress, contrasted sharply with his later assertion that the woman in the photos was not Laura Hernandez, despite W9's observation of a matching birthmark. This shift in demeanor, and Steve Ross's focus on W9 secretly recording AV41, suggests an attempt to downplay or avoid addressing the allegations.

There are notable discrepancies between Steve Ross and W6 regarding the handling of AV41's case. Steve Ross told GRACE he "had to let her go," implying he fired Laura Hernandez. However, in a private conversation with W6, Steve Ross reportedly stated he recommended Laura resign, and he did not explicitly state that they believed she was guilty. These differing accounts of Laura Hernandez's departure create an inconsistency in the institutional narrative.

Further inconsistencies emerge in the reported investigative processes. A standard protocol reportedly involved initiating an investigation by the psychologist to discuss the allegations and AV1 reportedly did not engage in conversation about the photos and was unwilling to discuss the matter, thus not corroborating any concerns. In contrast, Steve Ross's account of the investigation does not mention the involvement of a psychologist. Instead, he recounts his own direct involvement in speaking with Laura Hernandez and AV41. Steve Ross concluded, based on AV41's statements and the presence of the pictures, that a sexual relationship had occurred, indicating that AV41 did corroborate the allegations, even though Laura denied them. These direct contradictions highlight a significant lack of a unified and transparent investigative process within the leadership.

Furthermore, Steve Ross's "Timeline of Situations Faced by Niños" states that AV41, being 18, decided he did not want to testify, and that an alumnus who is a policeman confirmed no obligation to report due to AV41's age. However, W9's account indicates that Steve Ross offered various excuses for not reporting, including concerns about the institution's closure.

Regarding Laura's demeanor, Steve Ross described her to GRACE as being "in control" in a positive way and did not recall seeing her overstep boundaries. This contradicts W6's description of Laura "ruling with an 'iron fist'" and the girls being afraid of her, as well as RV61's direct experiences.

In conclusion, while there are clear inconsistencies in the accounts and actions of leadership, particularly concerning the severity of the allegations and the reasons for Laura Hernandez's departure, the direct testimonies of AV41 and RV61, corroborated by W9's observations and the existence of the nude photos, lend significant credibility to the allegations of inappropriate sexual conduct and physical abuse. The institutional response, marked by conflicting statements and a perceived lack of transparency, further highlights the challenges in achieving clear accountability in such cases.

## Ricardo Peral Gonzalez

An archived history web page from the Ayudante al Nino website states that Ricardo Peral took on the role of houseparents at Genesis House in February 2012. However, a December 2012 edition of a Ninos newsletter states:

Pictured above with the Genesis family is Ricardo Peral who grew up in the Agape home (1994-2008). He and his wife Bety have been serving as houseparents at Genesis since May.

In August 2014, they were specifically noted as houseparents for the Agape home, which had transitioned to an all-girls home. He was announced as a new house parent in the Esperanza home, an all boys home, in January 2015.<sup>210</sup> Ricardo was reportedly dismissed from the organization in February, 2017.<sup>211</sup>

According to Ninos leadership, allegations of abuse by Ricardo Peral were reported to the Prosecutor's Office. An investigation file was opened on November 11, 2017. While there were issues with obtaining consistent information from the minors and some expressed discomfort with male agency personnel, the case was eventually suspended due to inconsistencies in statements. No charges of abuse were filed against Ricardo Peral.

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<sup>210</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 3.

<sup>211</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 4.

## RV77

RV77 described to GRACE experiences she had while a minor resident of Genesis House, where she and other girls were subjected to various forms of corporal punishment by Ricardo Peral. These included being forced to stand in the sun for extended periods, sometimes up to an hour and a half, while carrying heavy cinder blocks used for construction. RV77 noted that the duration of the punishment was often dependent on the child's reaction, with crying leading to longer periods of duress. RV77 recalled that she was nine years old when she was first made to stand in the sun carrying heavy building blocks. According to RV77, all the girls in the home were subjected to this form of punishment.

RV77 recalled that other forms of punishment at Genesis included being locked in a dark, unlit storage room in the back of the house for hours without food, sometimes from afternoon until night. The girls also endured being made to stand with their noses against the wall for extended periods. RV77 also described an occasion where the girls were given only beans to eat. This was not described as a regular dietary restriction, but rather as a punitive measure.

RV77 recounted a form of punishment involving a wooden stick or "wand" used to hit the children. She described an instance where, following other forms of punishment such as being forced to carry heavy objects in the sun or being confined in a dark room, the house parents would engage in what she perceived as manipulative behavior. This involved taking the child to the office and attempting to reason with them. However, this conversation would often lead to the house parent brandishing a wooden stick or "wand" inscribed with a Bible verse. RV77 remembers the verse as being something along the lines of "I love my son, and that's why I correct him." This appears to be a reference to Hebrews 12:6.

The use of this wooden instrument was not merely symbolic. RV77 stated that the house parents would use it to hit the children, targeting areas such as their buttocks or hands. The specific area targeted would depend on the perceived transgression. RV77 described this experience as a form of manipulation, as the house parents would transition from seemingly compassionate dialogue to physical violence while invoking religious justification. This combination of psychological manipulation and physical punishment created a particularly distressing experience for the children. RV77's account suggests a pattern of behavior where punishment was not only physical but also designed to instill a sense of guilt or religious obligation.

RV77 described these punishments as being disproportionate and expressed her belief that they were excessively harsh, especially considering the young age of the children.

RV77 told GRACE that in addition to receiving these forms of punishment from Ricardo Peral, she also received similar punishments from the other house parents she had while at Genesis, including Ruben Lopez and Luis Escutia. She noted that these house parents had grown up within the same institution and appeared to perpetuate the disciplinary methods they had experienced. This created a cycle of harsh treatment, where the house parents, having been subjected to similar punishments, felt justified in administering them to the younger children in their care.

## RV76

RV76 described physical misconduct he experienced from Ricardo Peral while RV76 was a minor in the Agape House. According to RV76, Ricardo Peral continued the same disciplinary methods he experienced when he grew up at Ninos, which involved physical punishment. RV76 described how Ricardo Peral would hit children with thick boards, and even though RV76 vocalized at around 13 or 14 years old that this discipline was ineffective and motivated by anger rather than education, it persisted. This physical misconduct escalated to a point where, during a conflict with Ricardo Peral when RV76 was 14, he physically retaliated after being slapped in the face by Ricardo Peral. According to RV76, this incident led to Agape House becoming girls-only and RV76 being moved to Esperanza House. RV76 said this incident marked the last time he endured physical punishment in the form of beatings.

## Alleged Victim 19

GRACE spoke with a current adult (W8) who was a minor resident of Genesis House during the time of the reported misconduct by Ricardo and learned that Ricardo had committed sexual misconduct against AV19 when AV19 was approximately 15 years of age. W8 recalled that she was living in Genesis House at the time when she learned from other younger girls in the house that Ricardo was in a relationship with AV19. W8 told GRACE that she asked Ricardo's wife about these allegations and Ricardo's wife asked W8 how she knew. W8 was unwilling to disclose to Ricardo's wife how she learned about the misconduct. According to W8, Ricardo's wife then told W8 that she had walked into a supply room adjacent to the bedrooms where she found Ricardo kissing and touching AV19. W8

recalled that Ricardo was then moved to Agape House following this incident. W8 does not know if any other staff or leaders were told about this incident at the time. Attempts by GRACE to contact AV19 did not elicit a response.

## Alleged Victim 31

AV31 reportedly disclosed to a former staff member(W6) that Ricardo approached her during the time he was a house parent at Agape House and solicited romantic and sexual favors.<sup>212</sup> AV31 reportedly said no to Ricardo's advances.<sup>213</sup> According to W6, AV31 shared that she was aware of Ricardo's abuse of two other girls in the home, which she said occurred at night while Ricardo's wife was sleeping.<sup>214</sup> The abuses reportedly took place in the kitchen, living room, and laundry room.<sup>215</sup> According to W6, AV31 disclosed that she saw Ricardo with another minor girl with his pants down and also witnessed him kissing the girls "like a husband and wife would kiss."<sup>216</sup> AV31 reportedly shared that this knowledge made her afraid of Ricardo, especially at night, and that this fear kept her from wanting to say anything about the abuse to others.<sup>217</sup>

W6 provided GRACE with the notes W6 took contemporaneously with the interviews and prepared for Ninos leadership on institutional letterhead.<sup>218</sup> GRACE reviewed those notes and they are consistent with the testimony W6 provided to GRACE.

In September 2017, AV31 was returning from school via public transportation when robbers boarded and robbed the passengers, also physically assaulting AV31.<sup>219</sup> A woman in the community provided AV31 with money to return to the house.<sup>220</sup> AV31 arrived at Niños de México bleeding and with a severely bruised face. David Hernandez contacted W6 and instructed her to attend to AV31.<sup>221</sup> W6 found AV31 in the shower, fully clothed.<sup>222</sup> W6 was concerned that AV31 might have been sexually assaulted in addition to being robbed and beaten and wanted to preserve any potential evidence by having AV31 change

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<sup>212</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>213</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>214</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>215</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>216</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7-8.

<sup>217</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>218</sup> W6. Interview Notes. November 2017.

<sup>219</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 28.

<sup>220</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 28.

<sup>221</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 28.

<sup>222</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 28.

clothes.<sup>223</sup> However, AV31 refused to change. W6 helped AV31 get cleaned up and dressed.<sup>224</sup>

After W6 attended to AV31, David Hernandez instructed someone to bring AV31 to him.<sup>225</sup> W6 objected to this, but AV31 was taken to David Hernandez anyway.<sup>226</sup> David Hernandez then presented AV31 to a group of people who laid hands on her and prayed for her.<sup>227</sup> W6 was upset by this, believing that the police should have been contacted immediately and that AV31 should not have been subjected to having a group of people pray over her.<sup>228</sup> W6 thought the incident should have been reported to the authorities but heard nothing about it being reported.<sup>229</sup>

W6 provided GRACE with the following incident report that was documented on September 2, 2016:

Date: 9/2/16

Time: 10:45 am

Documentation:

David led me into the back part of the Agape house about 10:45 am, and I saw [AV31] there with blood on her sweatshirt and she was crying. She said she was robbed by 4 men and they punched her and took her backpack. She immediately wanted to get into the shower which alarmed me because she was fully clothed.

Laura Hernandez went and got her some fresh clothes. After she got cleaned up and changed, we were told that David wanted to see her. I took her to the door to the living room and he opened the door and there sat all of the staff and our visitors from the other institution. He announced her and then had her sit to the right hand side. He had another house tutor go over and hug her and he told her to hug stronger. Given that she has just been physically attacked 1 hour prior, I didn't understand why these directions were given.

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<sup>223</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 28.

<sup>224</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 28.

<sup>225</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 28.

<sup>226</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 28.

<sup>227</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 28.

<sup>228</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 28.

<sup>229</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 29.

I was asked if I felt she needed a medical exam and I responded yes. [Staff Medical Professional] conducted a physical exam of her and she stated the following:

That she was on the bus going to school late and 4 men with guns got on the bus. She said they robbed everyone on the bus and she didn't have money or a phone, so they were mad. She claimed that they frisked her, put their hands down her shirt/bra to check to see if she had anything hidden in her blouse. She didn't. I asked her if they had pulled her pants down and she said no. She said that the men shot 2 people on the bus and [Staff Medical Professional] asked if we should file a police report and Laura (through google translate), said that they didn't need to because the police might have been "in on it." We also asked what happened to the people who were shot and [AV31] said she didn't know.

What happened next is unclear because we were talking through google translate. [AV31] saw the door to the bus open and she ran. She tripped or fell, and they came over to her and started to beat her up. She claimed they punched her in the stomach, right cheek, nose, and busted her lip. She had visible bruises and had blood on her sweatshirt when I first saw her. [Staff Medical Professional] instructed Laura what to do and we left. He advised her to give her Tylenol or Advil, treat her face with ice and have her rest.<sup>230</sup>

Later, Steve Ross arrived from the United States.<sup>231</sup> W6 informed Steve about the incident.<sup>232</sup> Steve reportedly expressed that he was unaware of the situation and became visibly angry with David Hernandez for not reporting it to the police.<sup>233</sup> Steve Ross reportedly told W6 that David Hernandez admitted to Steve Ross that the incident was not reported to the police.<sup>234</sup> W6 does not know if the incident was ever reported to the police.<sup>235</sup> W6 recalled that she told Steve Ross that it was the wrong decision for people to pray over AV31 when AV31 was in shock and in physical pain.<sup>236</sup> Steve Ross reportedly

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<sup>230</sup> W6 Documentation of incident involving AV31. September 2, 2016.

<sup>231</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 29.

<sup>232</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 29.

<sup>233</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 29.

<sup>234</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 29.

<sup>235</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 29.

<sup>236</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 29.

replied that the people had asked to pray over AV31, to which W6 said he should have advocated for the wellbeing of the child at that moment.<sup>237</sup>

Attempts by GRACE to contact AV31 did not elicit a response.

## Alleged Victim 32

According to W6, Ricardo Peral was reportedly stoic and uncomfortable with the boys, but was observed to be "incredibly beyond expressive" and "very flirtatious" with the girls, which made W6 uncomfortable.<sup>238</sup> W6 recounted an incident in May 2015 where she witnessed an interaction between Ricardo and AV32 that she perceived as "incredibly familiar and almost too familiar for a male adult and a teenage girl."<sup>239</sup>

According to W6 and notes taken contemporaneous with W6's interview of AV32 at the time, AV32 disclosed during the interview with W6 that she was a victim of sexual abuse. AV32 reportedly could not recall the exact year the misconduct from Ricardo began, believing it was two or three years prior to AV32's interview with W6, in or around 2014-2015. W6 recording the following notes, dated November 10, 2017, from her interview with AV32 on November 6, 2017:

She described the process to me with many details. She said that at first he would give side hugs, and those who [sic] eventually changed to front hugs. Then he advanced to sitting with her as they watched a movie in the living room.

She said that he would touch her breasts, her butt, and that they kissed. She also mentioned another incident when he approached her from behind and jumped on her back. That made her feel uncomfortable and spoke of the fear she had of him. She said she's still mad at him for his actions.<sup>240</sup>

AV32 reportedly told W6 that she knew that Ricardo had also abused three other alleged victims.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 29.

<sup>238</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 3.

<sup>239</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 3-4.

<sup>240</sup> W6. Interview Notes. November 2017.

<sup>241</sup> W6. Interview Notes. November 2017. W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

AV32 declined to be interviewed by GRACE.

## Alleged Victim 33

According to W6 and notes taken contemporaneous with an interview W6 conducted of AV33, AV33 disclosed during the interview that "she was a victim of sexual abuse from [Ricardo Peral], but did not want to discuss it."<sup>242</sup> W6 respected that decision and did not continue the interview because AV33 was uncomfortable.<sup>243</sup>

GRACE was also provided with an audio recording of testimony from AV33. AV33 recalled she was 13 years old when Beatriz Peral went to the hospital to give birth, leaving Ricardo Peral the lone house parent at the house. Ricardo Peral reportedly asked AV33 to stay the night in his young daughter's bed to help keep her company. AV33 recounted an incident that occurred as she was falling asleep. She stated that a house parent began touching her body. She reported being unable to speak or act due to a previous traumatic experience with her stepfather. She feigned sleep to stop the touching, after which the house parent carried her to an adjacent room, removed her pants, and sexually assaulted her, causing pain. AV33 recalled feeling stunned and not knowing how to react. She did not remember crying but remained silent, not wanting to disclose the incident. Her reluctance was attributed to shame, fear of being disbelieved (due to a prior experience with her mother regarding her stepfather), and the perceived authority of the perpetrator as a pastor. At 13 years old, AV33 chose to remain silent.

AV33 recalled that after that first incident, there were times Ricardo Peral would tell her to go clean his bedroom, where he would then "go and start touching me, and the only thing I did was to run away." AV33 also said that she witnessed Ricardo Peral engaged in a sexual act with another girl in the home.

According to AV33, she reported the abuse to David Hernandez and Steve Ross. She and other children were then moved to a different house. She also said they started to medicate them for "psychological problems."

Attempts by GRACE to contact AV33 did not elicit a response.

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<sup>242</sup> W6. Interview Notes. November 2017. W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>243</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

W6 interviewed another minor girl on November 6, 2017 regarding possible misconduct by Ricardo Peral but the girl reportedly did not disclose any abuse.<sup>244</sup> W6 clarified to GRACE that the girl told W6 she was not a victim of Ricardo Peral but was aware of allegations involving Ricardo's misconduct toward other girls in the home, including an additional alleged victim.<sup>245</sup>

## 2013 Paddling Incident

During a summer internship in 2013, W22 witnessed an incident of corporal punishment that made her "super uncomfortable." The house parent, Ricardo Peral, paddled a girl who was approximately 10 or 12 years old at the time. W22 described the event as "very theatrical" and "humiliating." Ricardo Peral gathered any children who were nearby in the living room to watch the discipline, getting everyone's attention so they could see it. While she does not recall him hitting the girl "really hard," she was disturbed by the "public shaming aspect of it." The girl who was paddled responded by laughing, making jokes, and "sticking her butt out to get smacked," which W22 perceived as a defensive mechanism to protect her feelings by pretending it was a joke.

W22 reported the incident to Steve and Janet Ross shortly after it occurred. According to W22, they "kind of brushed it off as just this is a cultural difference" and did not ask follow-up questions. W22 felt this response was dismissive, particularly given that the discipline was used on a child who had a history of trauma and physical abuse.

## Knowledge and Response of Allegations Against Ricardo Peral

Steve Ross reportedly informed W6 that in 2014, Ricardo had been accused of sexually abusing several girls in Agape House, which led to his transfer to the boys' home in Esperanza House in January 2015. This move was reportedly made after Ricardo's wife reported seeing him kissing one of the girls, AV19. Steve Ross also disclosed that Ricardo was later found to be physically abusing boys in Esperanza House. W6 told GRACE:

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<sup>244</sup> W6. Interview Notes. November 2017. W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>245</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 9.

Steve Ross during a conversation had informed me that in 2014, Ricardo had been accused of sexually abusing several of the girls in Casa Agape, and that is the reason that he was moved to the boys' home in Casa Esperanza in January of 2015. Apparently his wife [REDACTED], reported that she saw Ricardo kissing one of the girls and leadership figured that if they put him with the boys, it would eliminate the problem. He also discussed that they moved him to Esperanza and then later found out that he was physically abusing the boys in Casa Esperanza. So Steve Ross disclosed this information to me personally.<sup>246</sup>

Furthermore, W6 documented in her journal that on October 27, 2017, David Hernandez disclosed at a staff meeting that officials from JAPEM had delivered a letter regarding the accusations against Ricardo.<sup>247</sup> The leadership team was reportedly instructed by David Hernandez to file an official report with the police within 24 hours.<sup>248</sup> When a team member reportedly questioned Ninos' lack of advocacy for the reported victims, David Hernandez allegedly claimed he and the psychologist, Idida Ivonne Martinez Garcia, would go to jail and Ninos would be shut down if they were found to be negligent in their care for the children.<sup>249</sup> The team member recalled that there was no concern expressed for the reported victims and that this was the first time staff were being told about the allegations against Ricardo.<sup>250</sup> According to W6, David Hernandez stated that they never knew anything about the alleged abuses.<sup>251</sup> W6 reportedly told David Hernandez that she knew he was lying because Ricardo's wife had reported him kissing RV19.<sup>252</sup> W6 recalled that she told David Hernandez that "it was sexual abuse because it was an adult and a child and a man who had power and authority over a child."<sup>253</sup> David Hernandez reportedly became angry and ended the conversation.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>247</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>248</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>249</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>250</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>251</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>252</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>253</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>254</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

According to W6, David Hernandez asked the team to “concoct documentation” related to the allegations against Ricardo that he could submit to officials.<sup>255</sup> W6 refused to participate and left the meeting, while other staff members remained.<sup>256</sup>

W6 recalled that after the meeting she received a call from Steve Ross, who was in the US at the time. W6 recalled:

And Steve explained to me that yes, they made a mistake and his exact words were he extended grace where they should not have and that they were handling things differently now. And I will never forget those words. They're etched in my memory. In addition, I told them that they would be held accountable for what they did or didn't do for those children.<sup>257</sup>

David Hernandez reportedly then asked W6 to interview the reported victims due to the trust she had built with the girls and the possibility they would disclose their experiences to W6.<sup>258</sup> W6 was instructed to write a report based on the interviews.<sup>259</sup> W6 agreed out of a desire to help the reported victims.<sup>260</sup> W6 recounted a conversation she had with David Hernandez in which she communicated her belief that they should have informed her of the allegations due to the role she had meeting with the girls on a regular basis to provide spiritual direction.<sup>261</sup> W6 reportedly told David Hernandez that they had failed to provide adequate care to the girls.<sup>262</sup> David Hernandez reportedly made excuses and then eventually apologized to W6 for not informing her earlier.<sup>263</sup>

On or around November 6, 2017, W6 interviewed several girls from Casa Agape, as described previously in this section of the report, who disclosed instances of sexual abuse and inappropriate behavior by Ricardo. The girls were between 11 and 16 years of age.<sup>264</sup> W6 documented these disclosures in a report that she submitted to Steve Ross and David Hernandez, but the subsequent actions taken by the organization remain unclear to her.

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<sup>255</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>256</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>257</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>258</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>259</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>260</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>261</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>262</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>263</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>264</sup> W6. Interview Notes. November 2017.

W6 later realized she was "used to create documentation" to submit to JAPEM.<sup>265</sup> W6 also learned that Ricardo was an alumnus of the organization, which she noted was common, particularly for male staff.<sup>266</sup>

W6 believed several aspects of how her interviews with the girls were set up were problematic.<sup>267</sup> The location was arranged at a public restaurant, which W6 felt was inappropriate for such sensitive discussions.<sup>268</sup> Additionally, the girls were having dinner with their house mother, Laura Hernandez, who is David Hernandez's sister, prior to the interviews.<sup>269</sup> Laura was present and seated nearby, potentially overhearing the conversations.<sup>270</sup> The girls were aware of why W6 was there, suggesting they had been debriefed in advance.<sup>271</sup> W6 was told which girls she would be speaking with, and she was simply directed to a time and place without any preparation time or input into the process.<sup>272</sup> She was given a booth to conduct the interviews individually, but the public setting and Laura's proximity remained concerns.<sup>273</sup> W6 felt the entire situation was controlled and that she was simply told where to go and when to show up, despite the sensitive nature of the interviews.<sup>274</sup>

W6 compiled a report based on the interviews she had with the alleged victims on November 6, 2017, and submitted it to David Hernandez and Steve Ross.<sup>275</sup> She does not know what they did with the report after they received it.<sup>276</sup> W6's report was similar to an IEP and contained individualized plans for each child's support.<sup>277</sup> W6 felt that she was used to produce a paper trail that Ninos could provide to the authorities.<sup>278</sup>

After submitting her report on Ricardo Peral Gonzales to David Hernandez and Steve Ross, W6 requested updates on the case multiple times.<sup>279</sup> She was informed that the

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<sup>265</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>266</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 6-7.

<sup>267</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>268</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>269</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>270</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>271</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>272</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>273</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>274</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>275</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>276</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>277</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 10.

<sup>278</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 10.

<sup>279</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

girls would be giving depositions.<sup>280</sup> W6 asked if she could accompany the girls to offer support, but Steve Ross denied her request.<sup>281</sup> He stated his reason was that he did not want W6 to lead the girls in their testimonies.<sup>282</sup>

W6 continued to ask David Hernandez about the case.<sup>283</sup> She observed two of the alleged victims dressed up with the organization's psychologist, Yvonne Martinez Sanchez, on the day they were to give their depositions and noted they appeared distressed.<sup>284</sup> David Hernandez later told W6 that when the girls turned 18, the case was closed.<sup>285</sup> W6 questioned this and David responded by stating she did not understand the laws and how things worked in Mexico and refused to discuss the matter further.<sup>286</sup>

W6 also questioned why the organization did not advocate for the girls.<sup>287</sup> David Hernandez repeatedly responded with the concern that if the organization was found negligent, he would go to jail, and the organization would be shut down.<sup>288</sup> He also claimed it would cost a lot of money and he did not want to go to JAPEM with more victims, as that would be the consequence.<sup>289</sup> W6 stated that the girls' lives and experiences were worth the risk and offered to help with expenses.<sup>290</sup> She also expressed her opinion about the organization's handling of the matter and stated that if they were found liable, it was their responsibility.<sup>291</sup> David Hernandez reportedly ended the conversation.<sup>292</sup>

GRACE was unable to make contact with Idida Ivonne Martinez Garcia, who was the chief psychologist at Ninos from 2011 to 2015.

W9 was working at Ninos in February, 2017, contemporaneous with Ricardo's departure, and received information about the reasons for Ricardo's departure.<sup>293</sup> According to W9's account, in February 2017, while W9 was staying at the Esperanza house

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<sup>280</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>281</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>282</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>283</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 9.

<sup>284</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 9.

<sup>285</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 9.

<sup>286</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 9.

<sup>287</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>288</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>289</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>290</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>291</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>292</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 8.

<sup>293</sup> W9 Tr. at 15.

with Ricardo and Betty Peral, Ricardo told the staff and children during dinner that he was leaving Ninos out of concern for his children's safety and issues with management that were not right.<sup>294</sup> W9 was aware that Ricardo and Betty Peral had concerns with David Hernandez handling of finances and had previously demanded that David Hernandez remove an older boy from their home who had allegedly committed sexual misconduct against other boys.<sup>295</sup> W9 recalled being present at the dinner when Ricardo made this announcement.<sup>296</sup>

According to W9, On February 15, 2017, he exchanged communication with a board member at the time to share his concerns about Ricardo and was reportedly told by the board member, "It doesn't surprise me that Ricardo was going to be leaving because he was going to be fired anyways."<sup>297</sup> According to W9, Ninos had a going away party for Ricardo when he left Ninos in 2017.<sup>298</sup>

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Ricardo Peral Gonzalez

In assessing the credibility of the allegations of misconduct by Ricardo Peral Gonzalez, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory and legal principles, rules of evidence, and other credibility factors, the information contained in this report substantially supports the veracity of these claims, particularly concerning physical abuse and boundary violations. While the report notes that no charges of abuse were filed against Ricardo Peral due to inconsistencies in statements and discomfort from minors with male agency personnel, the presented evidence from multiple witnesses provides a compelling case for the credibility of the alleged misconduct.

Multiple direct and indirect disclosures against Ricardo Peral establish a credible pattern of physical and potentially sexual misconduct. RV77's detailed account of corporal punishment at Genesis House, including being forced to stand in the sun with cinder blocks, being locked in a dark storage room, enduring extended periods with her nose against a wall, and being hit with a "wand" inscribed with a Bible verse, provides consistent and specific examples of excessive and psychologically manipulative discipline. Her

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<sup>294</sup> W9 Tr. at 15.

<sup>295</sup> W9 Tr. at 17.

<sup>296</sup> W9 Tr. at 15.

<sup>297</sup> W9 Tr. at 17.

<sup>298</sup> W9 Tr. at 17.

identification of Ricardo and Beatriz Peral, Ruben and Eunice Lopez, and Luis and Lorena Escutia as individuals responsible for these actions, and her observation that house parents who grew up in the institution perpetuated similar methods, suggests a systemic issue. RV76's account of Ricardo Peral continuing physical punishment at Agape House, using thick boards to hit children, and the incident leading to RV76's physical retaliation further corroborate the pattern of physical abuse.

Allegations of sexual misconduct also carry significant weight. W8's testimony about learning from other girls that Ricardo was in a relationship with AV19, and Ricardo's wife confirming she found Ricardo kissing and touching AV19 in a supply room, provides a direct corroboration of sexual misconduct. AV31's disclosure to W6 about Ricardo soliciting romantic and sexual favors, and witnessing Ricardo with his pants down and kissing another girl, indicates a pattern of sexual boundary violations. AV32's disclosure to W6 of sexual abuse by Ricardo, including touches to her breasts and butt, and kissing, along with her belief that he abused three other minor girls further supports the claims. AV33's audio testimony, detailing being touched, carried, and sexually assaulted by Ricardo when she was 13, and witnessing him engaged in a sexual act with another girl, offers a deeply personal and compelling account of abuse. AV33's experience of fear, shame, and the impact on her mental health underscores the severity and credibility of the trauma.

The institutional response to these allegations as described in this report further supports the credibility of the claims by demonstrating a pattern of insufficient action, denial, and potential cover-up. Steve Ross reportedly informed W6 in 2017 that Ricardo had been accused of sexually abusing girls in Agape House in 2014, leading to his transfer to a boys' home, and that Ricardo's wife had reported seeing him kissing AV19. This direct admission from Steve Ross contradicts any claim of a lack of knowledge regarding Ricardo's prior misconduct. The "2013 Paddling Incident" witnessed by W22, which was reported to Steve and Janet Ross and allegedly dismissed as a "cultural difference," highlights a history of leadership downplaying serious disciplinary concerns.

Furthermore, David Hernandez's reported disclosure at a staff meeting in October 2017 about a letter from JAPEM regarding accusations against Ricardo, and his instruction for staff to "concoct documentation," along with his concern about Niños being shut down and himself going to jail, suggests an effort to manage appearances rather than prioritize victim well-being. W6's refusal to participate in "concocting documentation" and her direct confrontation of David Hernandez, asserting that Ricardo's actions constituted sexual abuse, further underscores the internal knowledge of the severity of the allegations. Steve

Ross's reported admission to W6 that "they made a mistake" and "extended grace where they should not have," although framed as a retrospective recognition, indicates prior knowledge and mishandling.

In conclusion, based on the consistent and detailed accounts of direct victims, the corroborating testimony of multiple witnesses regarding observed inappropriate behaviors and disclosures, and the documented patterns of delayed or inadequate institutional responses—particularly as highlighted by the inconsistencies in leadership's stated knowledge and actions compared to other evidence—the allegations of misconduct by Ricardo Peral Gonzalez are assessed as highly credible. The evidence, examined through the lens of investigatory and legal principles, establishes a compelling case for the veracity of these claims, demonstrating a pattern of physical and sexual abuse that was reportedly known to leadership and not adequately addressed through formal legal channels.

## Javier Colosia

Javier Colosia was a house parent at Bethel House, a home for girls, from approximately 2017 to July 2020. He was reportedly hired by the field director, David Hernandez, due to a close friendship they shared. Steve Ross shared that Javier and his wife were students at a Bible college. They initially worked as substitute house parents during the summer. After Javier finished school, they joined the staff the following summer as house parents at the Bethel House.

In 2019, it was reported to Veronica de La Riva Valdes, the Coordinator of the Psychology Area of Ninos, that Colosia was sexually abusing a minor girl. He resigned from his job at Ninos in July 2020, after which there were further reports of abuse by Colosia.

In March of 2022, Javier Colosia was arrested and formally charged with child sex crimes in Mexico. A local news entity published an article on April 1, 2022 regarding the arrest:

Pastor Javier Colosia López was hiding in Frontera, a fugitive from justice with an arrest warrant out for rape in the State of Mexico.

In a joint operation, officers from the Coahuila Attorney General's Office and the State of Mexico Attorney General's Office arrested the preacher in charge

of the Christian church called "La Amistad Fe," located on Felipe Ángeles Street in the Borja neighborhood of Frontera, Coahuila.

The investigations carried out by both agencies established that the pastor accused of rape had been hiding in the municipality of Frontera for several months. Following intensive intelligence work, he was finally arrested last Wednesday night.

Colosia López was presented at the Monclova Public Prosecutor's Office and later transferred to the State of Mexico to begin legal proceedings against her [sic] for the crime of rape.

Colosia López had been leading the church for approximately six months, taking over after the previous pastor died from Covid-19.<sup>299</sup>

He faced trial for the aggravated rape of two teenage girls. According to an attorney representing four alleged victims, Colosia was convicted on one of those charges November 6, 2023, with additional court proceedings still ongoing as of the attorney's interview with GRACE.<sup>300</sup> He was sentenced to 11 years and 3 months of prison. He has reportedly received additional sentences since.

## RV11

Initially, when Javier Colosia and his wife arrived in 2017, RV11, who was a minor at the time, was distrustful and avoided close interaction. She perceived that Javier and his wife expected the girls to serve them rather than the reverse, leading to negative feelings and a reluctance to engage with them for approximately three to four months. During this time, she voiced her concerns to a psychologist at Ninos.

Over time, RV11 began to open up to Javier and his wife, particularly as she formed a bond with their young children. This led to a period where Javier expressed affection, telling the girls he loved them like daughters and hugging them. RV11 felt uncomfortable with the physical affection, stemming from her past experiences of abandonment and a reluctance to accept guardians as parental figures.

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<sup>299</sup><https://rcgmedia.mx/articulo/detienen-en-coahuila-a-un-pastor-que-fue-acusado-de-violacion-en-el-estado-de-mexico/>

<sup>300</sup> eMissourian article

As the relationship evolved, RV11 recognized what she perceived as manipulative behavior from Javier. She described a situation where he would attempt to involve her in family activities, expressing annoyance when she chose to spend time alone in her room.

GRACE reviewed written victim accounts which provided further context and details regarding the allegations by RV11.

According to RV11, the first incident of abuse occurred in mid-July 2018 within the ground floor bedrooms of Bethel House. Javier reportedly entered, pushed RV11 onto the bed, and removed all her clothes before engaging in vaginal and anal penetration. Javier then reportedly told RV11 she would miss what he did to her. After Javier left, RV11 experienced strong pain and bleeding and began to cry. Javier returned, told her not to cry, and threatened that if she spoke about what happened, no one would believe her, and he would harm her sisters. These attacks were reportedly repeated on her vaginal, anal, and oral cavity.

According to RV11 the second incident occurred in January 2019, in Javier's bedroom, and continued intermittently until 2020. RV11 was cleaning the room when Javier entered, locked the door, and turned off the light. RV11 reacted in alarm but was unable to leave. Javier then began to penetrate RV11 vaginally. After the assault, Javier told RV11 he loved her and threatened that if she told anyone, his family would be ruined. RV11, in shock, did not know how to respond. After Javier left, RV11 felt dirty and never wore the same clothes again, opting for loose clothing, which Javier disliked. Javier also restricted RV11's communication with others, becoming angry if she spoke to anyone for too long. There were further vaginal and anal penetrations, causing bleeding that Javier dismissed as her period. He never used a condom and forcibly gave her contraceptive pills. Javier would hit RV11 if she spoke to other housemates, claiming her vagina was his alone and she wasn't going to cheat on him. These attacks, along with constant surveillance, continued throughout his time in charge until 2020.

According to RV11 Javier actively manipulated and threatened RV11 to prevent her from disclosing the abuse. He told her no one would believe her and that his family would be ruined if she spoke out. He isolated RV11, preventing her from communicating with others. If anyone spoke to her, it had to be a quick greeting, otherwise Javier would get angry. He physically assaulted her if she tried to talk to other residents of the home. He threatened RV11 with the same consequences AV12 received if she spoke out.

According to RV11, David Hernandez knew about the misconduct and shared information regarding her disclosures with Javier. RV11 said that as a result, "we had no escape or help from anyone outside."

## Alleged Victim 12

AV12 reported experiencing sexual misconduct by Javier Colosia, which began in March 2018. The misconduct started with inappropriate touching and escalated to further abuse. A reported incident occurred in a room where Javier Colosia had brought donated clothing. After ensuring other girls were absent, Javier Colosia was alone with the alleged victim and reportedly initiated inappropriate touching and an attempted kiss. The alleged victim resisted these initial advances but described subsequent regular, inappropriate touching by Javier Colosia whenever an opportunity arose.

The alleged victim recalled an afternoon in May 2019 when they were the only child in the house with Javier Colosia present, while other children were at a camp. After taking an afternoon nap, AV12 woke up feeling certain of vaginal and anal penetration. Although very sleepy, the alleged victim noted marks on their chest and legs upon waking, and experienced vaginal and anal bleeding for one to two days afterward.

Another incident was recalled in October 2019, during which the alleged victim awoke to Javier Colosia on top of them, unable to remove him. Javier Colosia's pants were down, and the alleged victim felt vaginal and anal penetration.

According to AV12, Javier Colosia consistently stated his intention to leave his wife and take the alleged victim with him. He also reportedly threatened to harm the alleged victim's sibling if the alleged victim disclosed anything to anyone.

According to AV12, she reported the misconduct to the chief psychologist at Ninos, Veronica de la Riva, in August 2019. Another adult was reportedly present during the report to Veronica de la Riva but she could not recall who it was. According to AV12, Veronica de la Riva offered to give her a tape recorder to record any future misconduct.

W7 told GRACE that one of the victims, AV12, reported that she had disclosed to Veronica de la Riva an incident in which the victim was beaten by Javier Colosia in front of

the other girls in the home and Javier Colosia reportedly asked the girls who else would dare to speak.<sup>301</sup>

AV12 recalled that she suffered verbal and physical mistreatment from Javier beginning two days after this report, including being hit in the ribs, slapped, called derogatory names, and threatened to remain silent. Similarly, RV11 recalled that Javier Colosia physically assaulted AV12 for speaking out. AV12's experience served as a threat to RV11, discouraging her from reporting the abuse RV11 experienced from Javier Colosia.

AV12 continued to experience sexual abuse and recounted incidents of forced oral sex and other sexual acts. The last incident reportedly took place on or around July 10, 2020.

AV12 described how it was difficult for her to tell anyone about the ongoing abuse because the first time she reported in 2019 resulted in no action from leadership and retaliation from Javier Colosia.

AV12 declined an interview with GRACE. Veronica de la Riva declined an interview with GRACE.

## Alleged Victim 13

According to written victim accounts reviewed by GRACE, AV13 experienced sexual misconduct by Javier Colosia beginning in 2019, with the last sexual assault occurring in May 2020. These incidents took place in both the kitchen and bedroom areas. AV13 stated that Javier Colosia initially presented himself as a father figure, which was appealing to her as she had not had a father since she was a young child. He supported her interests and provided her with attention.

AV13's account describes an experience where Javier Colosia would enter her room and touch her, or touch her when she was alone. When she tried to distance herself, Javier stopped supporting her interests and would hit her or punish her sibling if she resisted. AV13 described numerous physical and psychological symptoms of trauma as result of the abuse.

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<sup>301</sup> W7 Tr. at 6.

AV13's case reportedly progressed through the trial stages and resulted in a conviction and sentencing.<sup>302</sup> GRACE was unable to find contact information for AV13.

## Alleged Victim 14

GRACE reviewed written accounts in which AV14 detailed misconduct she experienced from Javier Colosia when she was a minor at Ninos.

According to a written victim account, in December 2019, an incident involving sexual misconduct by Javier against AV14 occurred in AV14's room. The account details that during one instance, after AV14 left the bathroom, Javier began to touch her. AV14 reported feeling panicked and unsure how to react. Javier allegedly pulled down AV14's pants and his own, then anally penetrated her with his penis.

On multiple occasions, Javier Colosia reportedly touched AV14's breasts and vagina, causing her to become convulsed. He would leave before other girls returned to their rooms. The account states that Javier Colosia repeatedly punished AV14, and each time she was sent to her room, he would immediately enter and begin touching and caressing her. In the afternoons, when AV14 was going to sleep, Javier would enter her room to touch her, leading AV14 to try to avoid him by going into the bathroom or leaving the room.

Javier Colosia also allegedly threatened to harm AV14's siblings and beat her when she tried to defend them, even attempting to hang her. AV14 reportedly disclosed these events to Javier's wife, who dismissed the allegations as lies. GRACE was unable to find contact information for AV14.

## Alleged Victims 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 78

AVs 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30 were reportedly minors at the time Ninos de Mexico engaged with GRACE, and therefore GRACE did not make attempts to interview them. GRACE received and reviewed various government and judicial records regarding the allegations of misconduct by Javier Colosia toward these alleged victims. During the course of this investigation, GRACE interviewed a recent staff member (W28) who stated that one of the current minors under her care, AV78, disclosed that years prior, while in the care of Javier Colosia, he would bathe her and touch her private parts. AV78 indicated to W28 that she had never been able to confide in anyone about this previously, either due to a lack of

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<sup>302</sup> W13 Tr. at 28.

trust or a belief that nothing would come of it. Upon AV78 disclosing this information to W28, a report was subsequently created and submitted by the current psychology department, and follow-up therapy was provided to AV78.

## Knowledge and Response to Allegations Against Javier Colosia

The following section details the institution's awareness and actions regarding the allegations of misconduct involving Javier Colosia, beginning with reports made to leadership around Fall 2019.

### Reports to Leadership in and around Fall 2019

W8 recalled that she was a minor at Niños when one day she went to Genesis House to drop something off and was told by three reporting victims that Javier Colosia was kissing them on the mouth and touching their private parts, which was making them uncomfortable. W8 recalled that she reported the disclosure to David Hernandez about a week later. David Hernandez reportedly told W8 that it was none of her business because she lived in a different house.

According to AV12, she reported the misconduct to Veronica in August 2019. She recalled that she suffered verbal and physical mistreatment from Javier Colosia beginning two days after this report, including being hit in the ribs, slapped, called derogatory names, and threatened to remain silent.

Steve Ross told GRACE he recalled a report in 2019 concerning an "unwanted touch or something of that nature" involving a girl at Niños. His understanding was that the team, including psychologist Veronica de la Riva, investigated, and the girl later recanted, stating "nothing had happened."<sup>303</sup> Due to this recantation, Ross did not conduct a personal investigation, and the matter was not reported to authorities. He noted that Niños did not have a policy to immediately report child abuse allegations to authorities until "unofficially the fall of 2021 and officially in 2022." GRACE received and reviewed this 2022 policy and subsequent versions.

Niños' internal documentation, obtained by GRACE, contains a timeline of events pertaining to allegations against Javier Colosia, with the file's metadata indicating its

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<sup>303</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 47.

creation on October 12, 2021. According to the timeline, on October 30, 2019, a girl housed at Bethel House reported academic problems and a lack of appetite, mentioning that her house parent did not love her and sometimes entered her room to touch her. The Coordinator of the psychology area, Verónica de la Riva, requested evidence, but the girl stated she had none. De la Riva then directed her psychological evaluation towards a possible case of mythomania due to the child's previous behavior. According to the timeline, this was reported to the Administrative Director, David Hernandez, who suggested following up. According to the timeline, on November 6, 2019, the same girl stated she no longer wished to discuss the situation, claiming "it's not happening."

Despite these documented reports, leadership consistently claimed they were unaware of any direct or indirect allegations of misconduct against Javier, and that allegations against Javier first came to their attention when a reporting victim approached them at a birthday party in 2021.

## Reports to Leadership in and around November 2020

Javier Colosia resigned from Ninos on or around July 13, 2020 to "minister in a church in Northern Mexico." Ninos held a going away party for Javier. The last time RV11 was reportedly abused by Javier was the night after the going away party.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> W17 Tr. at 25.


**Niños de Mexico**

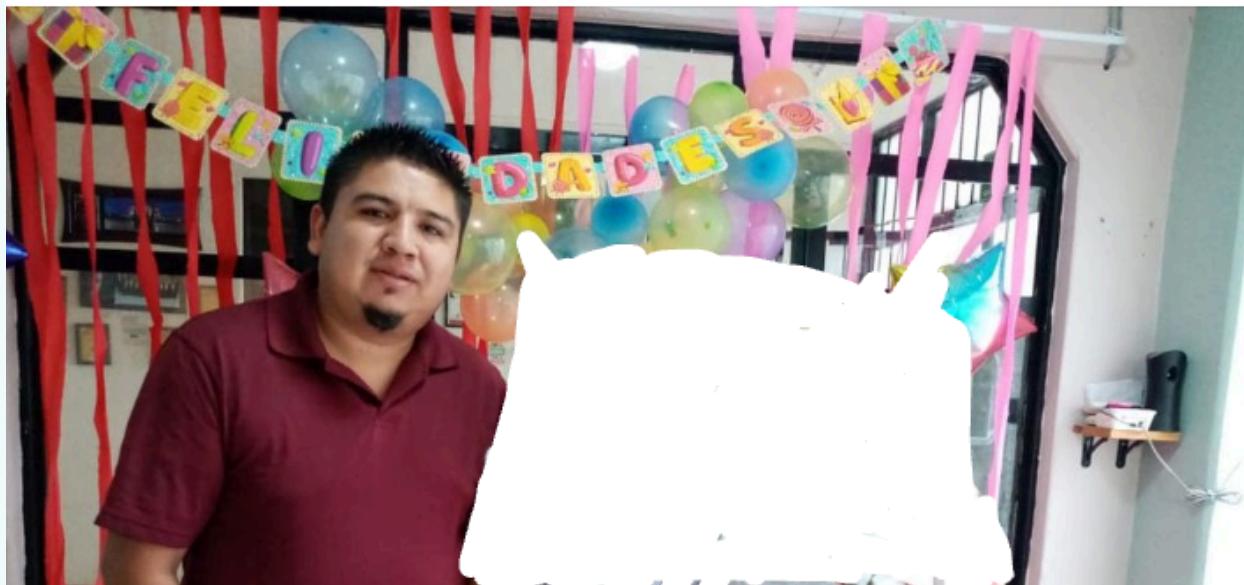
July 20, 2020 ·

...

We praise God for his work in the life of each and every child! It was great to be able to celebrate God has blessed them greatly.

This birthday celebration was one of the last celebrations with David Javier Colosia and Cocolia who have been house parents here at Bethel for 3 years. They came to us after graduating from the UCM - Mexican Christian University in Queretaro. They are moving to minister in a church in Northern Mexico this month.

May God richly bless and may He bless David & and their family in this transition.



GRACE interviewed a staff person (W14) who started working at the home in September 2020, a few months after Javier Colosia left, and received disclosures from some of the girls at Bethel House regarding their experiences of misconduct by Javier Colosia.<sup>305</sup> W14 recalled that she had built a good relationship with the girls in the home during the first couple of months she was at Ninos, and that this contributed to a willingness of the girls to disclose their experiences to her.<sup>306</sup> In or around November 2020, W14 received a disclosure from an alleged victim, who was encouraged by one of the older girls, also an alleged victim, to confide in W14 after W14 overheard the girls talking.<sup>307</sup>

<sup>305</sup> W14 Tr. at 6.

<sup>306</sup> W14 Tr. at 6.

<sup>307</sup> W14 Tr. at 7.

AV29, appearing nervous and distressed, initially hesitated but eventually agreed to speak with W14 privately after W14 offered to go wait in an upstairs office for her if she wanted to come speak with her.<sup>308</sup> AV29 proceeded to disclose an experience of being extorted online, a disclosure which led to AV29 also disclosing misconduct by Javier Colosia. AV29 disclosed that a photo of her in her underwear was circulating on social media.<sup>309</sup> Initially, AV29 denied it was her in the photo, stating someone was claiming it was her and threatening to release more photos unless she complied with further requests.<sup>310</sup> However, upon W14's insistence and after viewing the photo, AV29 admitted it was indeed her.<sup>311</sup> W14 recognized AV29 and the room in the photo, confirming its authenticity.<sup>312</sup>

AV29 then revealed that she had been communicating with someone on Facebook who she thought wanted to be her friend.<sup>313</sup> This person, who turned out to be a male, had begun asking for photos, eventually leading to AV29 sending a photo of herself in her underwear.<sup>314</sup> The photo was taken in her room, showing her standing in front of a mirror. AV29 was between 12 and 13 years old at the time.<sup>315</sup> W14 noted that the individual had also sent friend requests to other girls in the home, though AV29 was the only one whose photo had been leaked.<sup>316</sup> W14 did not recall the name of the person as the profile was later unable to be found.<sup>317</sup>

Following AV29's disclosure, W14 informed her that they needed to speak with the house parents at Bethel House, who had replaced Javier Colosia and his wife, as W14 did not have the authority to handle the situation alone.<sup>318</sup> W14 shared the details of AV29's situation with the house parents, emphasizing the seriousness of the photo leak and the potential risk to other girls in the home.<sup>319</sup> W14 also recalled the House Parent Coordinator, Alejandro (Aleks) Hernández, having previously cautioned her about the girls' social media activity, as supporters of the organization in the United States sometimes viewed their

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<sup>308</sup> W14 Tr. at 8.

<sup>309</sup> W14 Tr. at 8.

<sup>310</sup> W14 Tr. at 8.

<sup>311</sup> W14 Tr. at 9.

<sup>312</sup> W14 Tr. at 8.

<sup>313</sup> W14 Tr. at 9..

<sup>314</sup> W14 Tr. at 9.

<sup>315</sup> W14 Tr. at 9.

<sup>316</sup> W14 Tr. at 9.

<sup>317</sup> W14 Tr. at 9.

<sup>318</sup> W14 Tr. at 10.

<sup>319</sup> W14 Tr. at 10.

profiles.<sup>320</sup> The house parents and W14 then contacted Alejandro Hernández to inform him of the situation.<sup>321</sup>

That same day, the house parents, Alejandro Hernandez, and W14 gathered with AV29 in the office.<sup>322</sup> According to W14, Alejandro Hernandez emphasized that AV29 needed to resolve the issue and calm things down.<sup>323</sup> When asked if something else may have happened that AV29 had not yet shared, Alejandro Hernandez reportedly suggested AV29 needed to go to bed and get some rest.<sup>324</sup> According to W14, one of the house parents (W15) accompanied AV29 to her bedroom, while the other house parent (W16), W14, and Alejandro remained in the office.<sup>325</sup>

GRACE interviewed the house parent (W15) who accompanied AV29 to her bedroom. W15 told GRACE that AV29 disclosed to her that Javier Colosia "touched" AV29.<sup>326</sup> W15 recalled that AV29 said the touching happened in her bedroom at night and occurred on at least three occasions.<sup>327</sup> After this disclosure, W15 returned to the office where W14, W16, and Alejandro were waiting.

W14 recalled that when W15 returned she had a "face totally of terror, of surprise, of evil, a face like that, outside of herself, and she enters the office and says, 'I just can't believe what [AV29] just told me.'"<sup>328</sup> W15 then told the group that AV29 disclosed that Javier Colosia abused her.<sup>329</sup> According to W14, AV29 had reportedly shared with W15 that Javier Colosia would touch her under her pants at night when they were going to bed.<sup>330</sup> AV29 also reportedly disclosed that AV12 was aware of the abuse.<sup>331</sup> W14 recalled it was initially hard to understand because they knew Javier Colosia had left Ninos to go pastor a church and it was difficult to believe a pastor would abuse a child.<sup>332</sup> They also knew there were cameras in the home, in all the hallways, offices, and facing the bedrooms.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> W14 Tr. at 10.

<sup>321</sup> W14 Tr. at 10.

<sup>322</sup> W14 Tr. at 12.

<sup>323</sup> W14 Tr. at 12.

<sup>324</sup> W14 Tr. at 12.

<sup>325</sup> W14 Tr. at 12.

<sup>326</sup> W15 Tr. at 4.

<sup>327</sup> W15 Tr. at 4.

<sup>328</sup> W14 Tr. at 12.

<sup>329</sup> W14 Tr. at 12.

<sup>330</sup> W14 Tr. at 13.

<sup>331</sup> W14 Tr. at 16.

<sup>332</sup> W14 Tr. at 14.

<sup>333</sup> W14 Tr. at 14.

According to W14, Alejandro was the person responsible for reporting the disclosure because he was the coordinator of the house parents, and reported directly to David Hernandez, Alejandro's father.<sup>334</sup> When the group asked Alejandro what they should do, Alejandro initially expressed doubt, suggesting AV29 might be in shock from the photo incident.<sup>335</sup> However, W14 emphasized her belief in AV29's statement and how AV29 could not have reasonably made such a disclosure up.<sup>336</sup>

Alejandro asked the group to remain calm, that perhaps there was a misunderstanding, and stated he would tell his father, David Hernández, about the situation.<sup>337</sup> However, David reportedly did not come to address the issue for approximately one week.<sup>338</sup>

The day after AV29 disclosed the photo incident and subsequent abuse allegations, W14 was tasked by W15 with speaking to AV12 to corroborate AV29's claims.<sup>339</sup> W14 was told to approach AV12 discreetly to avoid further upsetting AV29, who had expressed a desire for the matter to remain private.<sup>340</sup>

W14 found AV12 in the kitchen and initiated a private conversation.<sup>341</sup> W14 began by expressing trust in AV12 and asked for honesty.<sup>342</sup> W14 alluded to AV29's distress and mentioned AV29's statement about Javier Colosia having "behaviors" towards her that were not right, and also mentioned that AV29 said AV12 had seen this and knew about it.<sup>343</sup> W14 asked AV12 if this was true.

Upon hearing W14's question, AV12 appeared shocked, as if "a bucket of cold water" had been thrown on her.<sup>344</sup> AV12 confirmed that AV29's statement was true.<sup>345</sup> AV12 then

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<sup>334</sup> W14 Tr. at 15.

<sup>335</sup> W14 Tr. at 15.

<sup>336</sup> W14 Tr. at 15.

<sup>337</sup> W14 Tr. at 15.

<sup>338</sup> W14 Tr. at 15.

<sup>339</sup> W14 Tr. at 16.

<sup>340</sup> W14 Tr. at 16.

<sup>341</sup> W14 Tr. at 16.

<sup>342</sup> W14 Tr. at 16.

<sup>343</sup> W14 Tr. at 17.

<sup>344</sup> W14 Tr. at 17.

<sup>345</sup> W14 Tr. at 17.

revealed that she herself had also experienced similar abuse from Javier Colosia.<sup>346</sup> W14 asked AV12 if she wanted to discuss the situation further.<sup>347</sup> AV12 agreed, indicating that not only had she been abused, but that AV13 and AV26 had also been abused by Javier Colosia.<sup>348</sup>

Subsequently, AV12 agreed to discuss the situation further with W14.<sup>349</sup> AV12 then stated that she would ask AV13 and AV26 if they also wanted to join the conversation.<sup>350</sup> The girls requested to speak with W14 in W14's bedroom, as it was a private space without cameras and they were fearful of being seen or heard.<sup>351</sup> W14 agreed and AV12, AV13, and AV26 joined her in her room.<sup>352</sup>

During this conversation, the girls shared their experiences with Javier Colosia, which W14 described as a "horror story."<sup>353</sup> AV12 detailed not only sexual abuse but also bullying from Javier Colosia.<sup>354</sup> He had given her derogatory nicknames, told her she was unintelligent and clumsy, and generally undermined her self-esteem.<sup>355</sup> AV12 also disclosed that Javier Colosia would pull his pants down and force her to touch him, threatening punishment or social isolation from the other girls if she refused.<sup>356</sup> She also mentioned instances where Javier Colosia would enter the bathroom while she was showering or changing and enter their bedrooms without knocking.<sup>357</sup>

The girls also informed W14 that Javier Colosia had hit AV12 on multiple occasions, sometimes requiring Javier Colosia's wife to intervene.<sup>358</sup> The girls reportedly shared that it was unusual for Javier Colosia's wife to intervene because she was largely absent from the care of the home, spending most of the day in her room with her own children.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> W14 Tr. at 17.

<sup>347</sup> W14 Tr. at 17.

<sup>348</sup> W14 Tr. at 17.

<sup>349</sup> W14 Tr. at 17.

<sup>350</sup> W14 Tr. at 17.

<sup>351</sup> W14 Tr. at 17.

<sup>352</sup> W14 Tr. at 18.

<sup>353</sup> W14 Tr. at 18.

<sup>354</sup> W14 Tr. at 18.

<sup>355</sup> W14 Tr. at 18.

<sup>356</sup> W14 Tr. at 19.

<sup>357</sup> W14 Tr. at 19.

<sup>358</sup> W14 Tr. at 21.

<sup>359</sup> W14 Tr. at 22.

They further stated that Javier Colosia had physically abused some of the younger girls and had also subjected some to psychological abuse, with Javier Colosia making disparaging remarks about their intelligence and appearance.<sup>360</sup>

AV12 also reportedly disclosed to W14 that she had previously reported the sexual abuse to the psychologist at Ninos, Veronica de La Riva, and that she believed that Veronica then went and told Javier Colosia about the disclosure.<sup>361</sup> AV12 told W14 that Javier Colosia then beat her in the presence of the other girls for reporting the abuse to Veronica.<sup>362</sup> W14 told GRACE that this had the effect of causing all of the girls in the home to be distrustful of Veronica.<sup>363</sup>

After W14 received the disclosures from AV29, AV12, AV13, and AV26 regarding Colosia's abuse, W14 contacted Alejandro Hernández, the coordinator of house parents, the very next day.<sup>364</sup> W14 informed Alejandro that she could no longer handle the situation alone and that it went beyond what she could resolve.<sup>365</sup> W14 emphasized that the girls' distress was significant, indicating real and extensive damage.<sup>366</sup> She highlighted that AV29, AV12, AV13, and AV26 had all corroborated the abuse allegations.<sup>367</sup> W14 told Alejandro Hernandez that he needed to come to the home and determine what steps to take, as she could not manage the situation any longer.<sup>368</sup> She felt overwhelmed by the severity of the situation.<sup>369</sup>

W14 also expressed to Alejandro Hernandez that the issue involved abuse, including sexual abuse and rape, and psychological abuse.<sup>370</sup> She conveyed her concern that they were dealing with an abuser who might be on the run.<sup>371</sup> W14 felt a strong sense of responsibility to protect the girls, especially given the existing trauma they had already experienced prior to arriving at Ninos.<sup>372</sup> She also brought up the fact that the institution

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<sup>360</sup> W14 Tr. at 22.

<sup>361</sup> W14 Tr. at 24.

<sup>362</sup> W14 Tr. at 24.

<sup>363</sup> W14 Tr. at 24.

<sup>364</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>365</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>366</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>367</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>368</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>369</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>370</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>371</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>372</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

was supposed to be a Christian organization, which made the situation even more disturbing to her.<sup>373</sup> W14 questioned how such abuse could occur within an institution claiming to care for children and uphold Christian values.<sup>374</sup> She felt personally affected by the girls' disclosures and the realization of what was happening within the institution.<sup>375</sup>

Alejandro Hernandez's initial response to W14's distress was to try to calm her down.<sup>376</sup> He told her they would resolve the issue and advised her not to get upset.<sup>377</sup> W14 insisted that Alejandro Hernandez come to the home and decide what actions to take, suggesting the possibility of filing a report or taking other measures.<sup>378</sup> W14 emphasized that the situation could not be ignored since multiple girls were involved.<sup>379</sup> W14 also discussed the disclosures and need for action with W15, one of the house parents.<sup>380</sup>

In addition to disclosures received by W14, W15 also received disclosures from AV12 and AV26 that Javier Colosia abused them.<sup>381</sup> According to W15, AV12 also shared that she had already reported the abuse to Veronica de la Riva but was not believed.<sup>382</sup> W15 told GRACE that she went immediately to Veronica de la Riva and Alejandro Hernandez to report the disclosures.<sup>383</sup> W15 recalled that she reported the disclosures to Veronica in November 2020.<sup>384</sup>

W16 also told GRACE that the abuse disclosures from the girls in November 2020 were reported to Veronica de la Riva and Alejandro Hernandez.<sup>385</sup>

Alejandro Hernandez subsequently arrived at the home and suggested that the girls speak with Veronica de la Riva.<sup>386</sup> W14 expressed her reluctance, knowing the girls did not trust Veronica, due to a prior incident where Javier Colosia was informed of AV12's disclosure to Veronica, resulting in further abuse, and had not reported or investigated

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<sup>373</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>374</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>375</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>376</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>377</sup> W14 Tr. at 23.

<sup>378</sup> W14 Tr. at 24.

<sup>379</sup> W14 Tr. at 24.

<sup>380</sup> W14 Tr. at 24.

<sup>381</sup> W15 Tr. at 6, 10.

<sup>382</sup> W15 Tr. at 10.

<sup>383</sup> W15 Tr. at 6.

<sup>384</sup> W15 Tr. at 12.

<sup>385</sup> W16 Tr. at 6.

<sup>386</sup> W14 Tr. at 24.

further.<sup>387</sup> W14 told Alejandro that she would not force the girls to speak with Veronica, as they did not trust her.<sup>388</sup> However, Alejandro insisted that the girls needed to talk to Veronica, as she was responsible for documenting the abuse.<sup>389</sup>

W14 reminded Alejandro that at least one of the girls had already spoken to Veronica in 2019 and nothing had been done.<sup>390</sup> She told Alejandro that she was not going to force the girls to speak with someone they did not trust.<sup>391</sup> W14 conveyed her frustration with Veronica's handling of the situation, feeling that Veronica should have taken the girls' disclosures more seriously and not revealed them to Colosia.<sup>392</sup>

W16 told GRACE that during a meeting attended by W16, Veronica, Steve Ross, Alejandro Hernandez, and David Hernandez, discussions centered around the reports that had been made regarding abuse of the girls.<sup>393</sup> W16 recounted telling the group that Javier Colosia had been turning off cameras within the home.<sup>394</sup> When W16 shared this information, David Hernandez questioned what W16 wanted to do.<sup>395</sup> W16 expressed a desire for justice for the girls, to which David Hernandez responded that W16 had no proof of the alleged abuse.<sup>396</sup> W16 recalled feeling frustrated and unheard. He felt the girls' experiences were being dismissed due to the absence of concrete evidence, despite his belief in their accounts.

Niños' internal documentation, obtained by GRACE, contains a timeline of events pertaining to allegations against Javier, with the file's metadata indicating its creation on October 12, 2021. According to the timeline, in November 2020, the girls at Bethel House began to feel confident enough to speak with their new guardian about having been sexually abused and subjected to threats and manipulation to keep them silent. They reported this to David Hernandez and Veronica de la Riva. They were then instructed that the girls would need to discuss these matters with Veronica de la Riva to validate the information, but the girls refused to do so.

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<sup>387</sup> W14 Tr. at 25.

<sup>388</sup> W14 Tr. at 25.

<sup>389</sup> W14 Tr. at 25.

<sup>390</sup> W14 Tr. at 25.

<sup>391</sup> W14 Tr. at 25.

<sup>392</sup> W14 Tr. at 25.

<sup>393</sup> W16 Tr. at 6.

<sup>394</sup> W16 Tr. at 6.

<sup>395</sup> W16 Tr. at 6.

<sup>396</sup> W16 Tr. at 7.

Despite these concerns, Ninos moved forward with having Veronica interview the girls. Alejandro returned to Bethel House with Veronica, the institution's psychologist.<sup>397</sup> Upon arrival, Veronica asked W14 to recount what the girls had disclosed.<sup>398</sup> W14 shared the information but also confronted Veronica about her handling of AV12's previous disclosure.<sup>399</sup> W14 expressed frustration that Veronica had not taken AV12 seriously and had allegedly informed Colosia about the disclosure, leading to further abuse.<sup>400</sup> Veronica denied informing Colosia and stated that AV12 had a history of lying.<sup>401</sup> W14 argued that even if AV12 lied, the seriousness of the allegations warranted further investigation, not dismissal.<sup>402</sup> W14 stated that she would not force the girls to speak with Veronica alone, as Veronica was not worthy of their trust.<sup>403</sup>

According to W14, Alejandro Hernandez said that they needed to help the girls speak with Veronica if they wanted to remain in their roles at Ninos.<sup>404</sup> W14 and W15 gathered the girls and explained that they needed to talk to Veronica to move forward with the situation, as requested by the institution.<sup>405</sup> The girls agreed to speak with Veronica only if either W14 or W15 was present during the interviews.<sup>406</sup>

The interviews were conducted in the office, where a security camera was located, and Veronica recorded the interviews on her phone.<sup>407</sup> Each girl was called in individually to speak with Veronica while W15 was present.<sup>408</sup> After the interviews, Veronica stated she would speak with David Hernández to determine the next steps and prepare the necessary documents.<sup>409</sup> W15 recalled that the girls were very hesitant to speak with Veronica, even with W15 present, but that they did disclose being abused.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> W14 Tr. at 25.

<sup>398</sup> W14 Tr. at 25.

<sup>399</sup> W14 Tr. at 26.

<sup>400</sup> W14 Tr. at 26.

<sup>401</sup> W14 Tr. at 26.

<sup>402</sup> W14 Tr. at 26.

<sup>403</sup> W14 Tr. at 26.

<sup>404</sup> W14 Tr. at 26.

<sup>405</sup> W14 Tr. at 27.

<sup>406</sup> W14 Tr. at 27.

<sup>407</sup> W14 Tr. at 27..

<sup>408</sup> W14 Tr. at 27.

<sup>409</sup> W14 Tr. at 27.

<sup>410</sup> W15 Tr. at 8.

Following the interviews, the situation appeared to stall.<sup>411</sup> The girls remained "very emotionally affected," but no action was taken by leadership.<sup>412</sup> Alejandro Hernandez would only say that David Hernandez was "working on the corresponding documents."<sup>413</sup> W15 also told GRACE that she inquired with Veronica about the status of their response but nothing happened.<sup>414</sup>

According to W16, David Hernandez sent a message via WhatsApp to W15 indicating he was going to write a letter denying all allegations of abuse that had taken place at Niños.<sup>415</sup> He intended for W16, W15, Veronica, himself, and all the Ninos administration to sign this letter, essentially stating that the girls' allegations were not true.<sup>416</sup> W16 and W15 refused to sign the letter.<sup>417</sup> They did not agree with the letter's content, as they believed the girls' accounts.<sup>418</sup> W16 and W15's refusal prevented the letter from being written and signed by all parties.<sup>419</sup> W16 said the letter was meant to quiet the girls from continuing to speak about what had happened to them.<sup>420</sup> W15 reportedly no longer has the messages from David Hernandez.<sup>421</sup>

Steve Ross acknowledged to GRACE hearing "rumors of something" about Javier Colosia before the July 2021 report, possibly in the fall of 2020, after Javier Colosia had already left.<sup>422</sup> He stated he could not recall who he heard these "rumors" from. When asked about his response to these earlier rumors, Steve Ross stated that he "asked the psychologist to check it out" to see if there was "something there that we need to be aware of."<sup>423</sup> He indicated that, to his understanding, nothing was ever found, and the individuals would not talk to the psychologist about it.<sup>424</sup> He stated that "nothing was ever substantiated" and "nobody wanted to talk to anybody about it."<sup>425</sup> He clarified that his

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<sup>411</sup> W14 Tr. at 27.

<sup>412</sup> W14 Tr. at 27.

<sup>413</sup> W14 Tr. at 28.

<sup>414</sup> W15 Tr. at 11.

<sup>415</sup> W16 Tr. at 9.

<sup>416</sup> W16 Tr. at 9.

<sup>417</sup> W16 Tr. at 9.

<sup>418</sup> W16 Tr. at 9.

<sup>419</sup> W16 Tr. at 9.

<sup>420</sup> W16 Tr. at 9.

<sup>421</sup> W16 Tr. at 9.

<sup>422</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 30.

<sup>423</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 30-33.

<sup>424</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 30-33.

<sup>425</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 30.

understanding came from the psychologist.<sup>426</sup> The efforts to investigate these earlier reports involved assigning a psychologist, Veronica, to look into "conversations with girls at the Bethel House," where Javier Colosia was reportedly a house parent, as that was where the reports were centered.<sup>427</sup> Steve Ross confirmed that he did not know the source of these initial reports, nor did he recall if the psychologist at that time knew of any specific girls involved.<sup>428</sup>

## 2021 Reports to External Authorities

In 2021, the intervention of external governmental bodies brought allegations of abuse at the Ayudante al Niño I.A.P. institution to the attention of Mexican authorities, culminating in formal criminal investigations.

Allegations against Javier Colosia were brought in July 2021 by a psychologist at JAPEM. JAPEM is the Private Assistance Board of the State of Mexico and they send psychologists to Ninos twice a year to conduct regular check-in interviews with the children. The JAPEM psychologist submitted a report to the Attorney General's Office that she had contact with several girls at Niños de México, specifically at Bethel House, who had reported sexual abuse and rape.<sup>429</sup> The Attorney General's Office sent a team of psychologists to conduct an investigation at Ninos. W7, a psychologist who supervises social assistance centers or shelters in the State of Mexico, was part of that team.<sup>430</sup>

W14 recalled to GRACE that in 2021 Alejandro Hernandez informed them that JAPEM was scheduled to visit as part of a routine inspection that occurred twice a year.<sup>431</sup> Alejandro instructed them to ensure everything was in order for the visit.<sup>432</sup> JAPEM conducted their inspection, which appeared routine.<sup>433</sup> However, according to W14, a psychologist with JAPEM conducted extended reviews and said that no official report of abuse by Javier Colosia had been made to authorities but that she would be making that report.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 30-33.

<sup>427</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 30-33.

<sup>428</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 30-33.

<sup>429</sup> W7 Tr. at 3.

<sup>430</sup> W7 Tr. at 3.

<sup>431</sup> W14 Tr. at 28.

<sup>432</sup> W14 Tr. at 28.

<sup>433</sup> W14 Tr. at 28.

<sup>434</sup> W14 Tr. at 29.

On July 22, 2021, the psychology department of JAPEM, the oversight board for private assistance institutions, contacted Ninos to schedule psychological evaluations for its entire resident population. Following this notification, David Hernández and Verónica de la Riva went to JAPEM to report what they described as "delicate events."

A formal meeting was held at JAPEM's offices on August 12, 2021. In attendance from Ninos were David Hernández and Verónica de la Riva Valdés. During this meeting, they officially disclosed that a situation involving sexual abuse and harassment by a former house parent against four minors had occurred at Bethel House, stating they had become aware of it on July 29, 2021. The following day, August 13, JAPEM instructed the institution's Legal Representative to file the necessary criminal complaints.

Steve Ross told GRACE that a young lady and her brother came to him in July 2021 and reportedly said that "something had happened to their sister and the house parent, Javier."<sup>435</sup> He further recounted that Javier had allegedly been gone for a year at that point.<sup>436</sup> Ross then described the subsequent actions taken: a psychologist, identified as Veronica, was reportedly brought in to investigate and "figure out what in the world they were talking about."<sup>437</sup> This investigation purportedly revealed that "four young girls who had claims of sexual abuse against Javier."<sup>438</sup> Ross stated that this information was immediately taken to JAPEM to inquire about the next steps, and they were reportedly instructed to take it to the Texcoco Prosecutor's Office, which they did the following day.<sup>439</sup> According to leadership accounts reviewed by GRACE regarding the response of leadership, a reporting victim approached organizational leadership at a party in 2021 and briefly mentioned sexual abuse involving Javier Colosia. Following this disclosure, the reporting victim was advised to consult with Veronica de la Riva, the psychologist. Sources indicate the reporting victim subsequently met with Veronica de la Riva, who then informed the multidisciplinary team, which included Steve Ross, Veronica de la Riva, and a medical doctor. A formal report was reportedly initiated, and the relevant authorities were contacted. The psychologist's report was delivered to DIF which detailed allegations understood to involve sexual touch and penetration, which necessitated immediate reporting to law enforcement.

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<sup>435</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 29-30.

<sup>436</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 29-30.

<sup>437</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 29-30.

<sup>438</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 29-30.

<sup>439</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 29-30.

GRACE was able to determine the identities of the "young lady and her brother" who reportedly disclosed to Steve Ross in July 2021 but attempts to interview them were not successful.

JAPEM's Directorate of Assistance Development conducted a verification visit to Bethel House on August 16, 2021, where they administered projective tests and interviews to the girls residing there.

On August 17, 2021, Verónica de la Riva accompanied four of the girls to file a formal report. However, the minors later alleged that before giving their statements, de la Riva instructed them not to disclose that she, David Hernandez, and Alejandro Hernandez had prior knowledge of the abuse. According to W16, Niños de México was the first entity to take the girls to the Prosecutor's Office in August to give their testimonies regarding the allegations of abuse.<sup>440</sup> This action was taken after JAPEM advised Niños de México that they needed to go to the Prosecutor's Office because they had heard the girls' testimonies.<sup>441</sup> W16 described it as a very sad day, as the girls returned from the Prosecutor's Office feeling like their efforts were in vain and that they had "lost the case."<sup>442</sup> The girls told W16 that they were given a sheet to write down their stories of what had happened, but it seemed that everything was being summarized and that only the events of that year were being acknowledged, rather than the full extent of their experiences.<sup>443</sup> The girls felt that their reports were not being taken seriously.<sup>444</sup> W16 stated that Niños de México wrote the summary sheets.<sup>445</sup>

On August 23, JAPEM's psychologist reported the findings, which indicated that 8 of the 11 girls had been physically and mentally violated, and four had been sexually abused. These findings were immediately shared with the legal counsel for the Secretary of Social Development.

The involvement of other government agencies intensified on August 24, 2021, when the DIF prosecutor's office dispatched a multidisciplinary team to the institution. This led to the decision to obtain statements from the other residents and to expand upon the

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<sup>440</sup> W16 Tr. at 16.

<sup>441</sup> W16 Tr. at 16.

<sup>442</sup> W16 Tr. at 16.

<sup>443</sup> W16 Tr. at 17.

<sup>444</sup> W16 Tr. at 17.

<sup>445</sup> W16 Tr. at 17.

interviews of the initial four victims. W14 recalled that DIF arrived at the home with 10-12 officials together with 4-5 police officers.<sup>446</sup>

According to W14, DIF asked to be given access to the entirety of the home and that they would be receiving statements from the girls.<sup>447</sup> They also took photographs, provided a printed photograph of Javier Colosia to the police, and took note of where cameras were located.<sup>448</sup> While they were there, W14 realized that she could get in trouble with Ninos leadership for giving DIF access so she decided to immediately inform them of DIF's presence.<sup>449</sup> She told DIF she needed to call Alejandro Hernandez and DIF reportedly said it wasn't a problem because they needed to speak with Alejandro anyways.<sup>450</sup> W14 recalled that when she informed Alejandro, Alejandro immediately said, "do not let them pass, do not say anything, if they ask you, tell them that you do not have any authorization to speak, do not let them talk to any of the girls."<sup>451</sup> Alejandro very quickly arrived at the house and DIF reportedly told him that they could not prevent them access as DIF held custody over the girls.<sup>452</sup>

W16 also told GRACE that he was instructed by David Hernandez to not allow DIF officials into the home and that they needed to have a letter showing they had permission to enter the home.<sup>453</sup> W16 said he ignored this instruction from David Hernandez.<sup>454</sup> Witnesses stated that David Hernandez arrived at Bethel House in an angry state<sup>455</sup> and received an account of the situation from Alejandro, who was also distressed by the situation.<sup>456</sup>

W16 described to GRACE efforts by David Hernandez to silence the staff from speaking to government officials. David Hernandez often questioned where the proof was and if certain actions had truly occurred.<sup>457</sup> W16 stated that David Hernandez would give

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<sup>446</sup> W14 Tr. at 29.

<sup>447</sup> W14 Tr. at 30.

<sup>448</sup> W14 Tr. at 30.

<sup>449</sup> W14 Tr. at 30.

<sup>450</sup> W14 Tr. at 31.

<sup>451</sup> W14 Tr. at 31.

<sup>452</sup> W14 Tr. at 31.

<sup>453</sup> W16 Tr. at 13.

<sup>454</sup> W16 Tr. at 13.

<sup>455</sup> W16 Tr. at 14.

<sup>456</sup> W14 Tr. at 31.

<sup>457</sup> W16 Tr. at 10.

the staff looks that seemed to say, "Shut up."<sup>458</sup> When officials asked detailed questions about dates and events, W16 felt David was trying to intimidate them into silence.<sup>459</sup> David Hernandez reportedly became angry with the staff.<sup>460</sup> During one exchange, David Hernandez reportedly asked W16 what team he was on.<sup>461</sup> W16 responded that he was on the girls' team.<sup>462</sup> W16 recalled that David Hernandez told W16 that he could sue him for defamation because everything W16 was saying to DIF was "wrong" and threatened to fire W16.<sup>463</sup>

DIF informed them that they would need to begin taking the girls to testify in front of a judge and that they would be taking them to the Prosecutor's Office in parts and that it would be a complicated process.<sup>464</sup> According to W14, DIF took ten of the girls with them that day.<sup>465</sup> David Hernandez sent Veronica to the Prosecutor's Office.<sup>466</sup> The girls reportedly arrived back at the house very late that evening.<sup>467</sup> W14 recalled that the girls expressed discomfort with Veronica's presence at the Prosecutor's Office because when they would say something, Veronica would reportedly contradict them, say they were exaggerating, and didn't let them speak freely.<sup>468</sup> W7 stated that David Hernández and Verónica de la Riva were present at the Prosecutor's Office, where Hernández allegedly attempted to intimidate the girls by questioning their gratitude and telling them not to speak. W7 also reported a belief that Veronica de la Riva had prior knowledge of the abuse but failed to report it to protect Hernández.

W7's team interviewed 12 minors and subsequently reported the alleged sexual abuse of all 12 by former house parent Javier Colosia to the Public Prosecutor's Office.<sup>469</sup> From July to October 2021, W7's team transported the girls for interviews at the Prosecutor's Office. David Hernandez was reportedly notified that they were going to take the girls to the Prosecutor's Office to testify. According to W7, David Hernandez and

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<sup>458</sup> W16 Tr. at 10.

<sup>459</sup> W16 Tr. at 10.

<sup>460</sup> W16 Tr. at 10.

<sup>461</sup> W16 Tr. at 12.

<sup>462</sup> W16 Tr. at 12.

<sup>463</sup> W16 Tr. at 14.

<sup>464</sup> W14 Tr. at 31.

<sup>465</sup> W14 Tr. at 31.

<sup>466</sup> W14 Tr. at 31.

<sup>467</sup> W14 Tr. at 31.

<sup>468</sup> W14 Tr. at 31.

<sup>469</sup> W7 Tr. at 4.

Veronica de La Riva Valdes, the psychologist at Ninos, arrived at the Prosecutor's Office and remained there.

W7 observed that David Hernandez was immediately present with the girls at the Prosecutor's Office during their interviews and told the girls not to say anything. David Hernandez reportedly asked one of the victims why she was testifying after all he had done to help her and how much Ninos had provided for her and her siblings.<sup>470</sup> He also reportedly kept trying to make eye contact with the victims.<sup>471</sup> David Hernandez was not allowed to continue speaking with the girls due to a concern that he was intimidating them and causing them to feel guilt and blame for not remaining quiet.<sup>472</sup> W7 recalled that Steve Ross and his team were always very nearby while she conducted interviews of the children, such that even when she would close the door to conduct interviews, they'd be waiting outside the door.<sup>473</sup>

David Hernandez also reportedly denied everything to the Prosecutor's Office and claimed the allegations against Javier Colosia were not true.<sup>474</sup> According to W7, Steve Ross also maintained that he had no prior knowledge of allegations against Javier Colosia.

W7 told GRACE that David Hernandez had continued to visit the girls at Bethel House during the investigation and spoke to them about their participation in the investigation. He reportedly told them to be grateful, that they were only there because he allowed them to stay, and that "Uncle Steve" had given them everything.<sup>475</sup>

As a result of these interactions, David Hernandez was reportedly prohibited by government officials from entering Bethel House. Staff at Bethel House told GRACE they were simply informed that David Hernandez was not permitted inside the home but were not given reasons or told who had made the decision. Despite the lack of clarity regarding the decision-making process, the restriction was enforced. David Hernandez did not return to Bethel House during that time, and no other visitors were allowed.

GRACE obtained documentation that confirms this restriction. On September 28, 2021, JAPEM issued a formal notice to the Board of Trustees of Ayudante al Niño, I.A.P..

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<sup>470</sup> W7 Tr. at 9.

<sup>471</sup> W7 Tr. at 9.

<sup>472</sup> W7 Tr. at 9.

<sup>473</sup> W7 Tr. at 24.

<sup>474</sup> W7 Tr. at 9.

<sup>475</sup> W7 Tr. at 10.

Citing Article 58 of the Law of Private Assistance Institutions of the State of Mexico, JAPEM requested that the board instruct David Hernández and Verónica de la Riva to "temporarily not have any contact with the affected population, specifically with those housed in Casa Bethel". The stated purpose of this request was "to ensure the adequate advance of the matter and the healthy development of the minors... and avoid any action of revictimization" while the legal procedure concluded.

The institution responded to JAPEM in a letter dated October 7, 2021, signed by Steve Ross. In the letter, the organization stated that, prior to receiving JAPEM's notice, the institution and its multidisciplinary team had already "determined verbally" on September 23, 2021, that David Hernández and Veronica de la Riva would not have contact with the sheltered population "to not hinder the development of the judicial process." The letter also clarified that both individuals were continuing to collaborate professionally in the institution's other houses.

## October 12, 2021 Attack on Government Officials

From July to October 2021, W7's team transported the girls for interviews at the Prosecutor's Office.<sup>476</sup> On October 12, 2021, W7 and her team were ambushed and violently attacked outside the Bethel House while arriving to pick up the girls. W7 reported being sexually assaulted and noted that the assailants' specific questions about their work led her to believe the attack was not random but an attempt to silence the investigation.

October 12, 2021 was supposed to be the last day the team was to pick up the girls to take them to testify at the Prosecutor's Office. Due to their need to navigate several travel constrictions and needs, the team picking up the girls had planned on arriving at 5:30 in the morning, which was much earlier than they would typically arrive to pick up the girls on other occasions.

The team called Bethel House on the afternoon of October 11, 2021, to give the house parents instructions for getting the girls ready to spend the day at the Prosecutor's Office, so the girls would be prepared at their scheduled pick-up time.<sup>477</sup>

On that same day, October 11, 2021, Alejandro Hernandez arrived at Bethel House and told the house parents they could take the day and night off, and that Alejandro would

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<sup>476</sup> W7 Tr. at 6.

<sup>477</sup> W7 Tr. at 20.

prepare the girls for the trip and make sure they were ready on time the next morning.<sup>478</sup> This was reportedly unusual for Alejandro Hernandez to substitute as a house parent.<sup>479</sup>

The team arrived at Bethel House at approximately 5:20-5:25 AM. W7 recalled that there were no other cars on the street when they arrived at Bethel House.<sup>480</sup> According to W7, the driver parked the vehicle, which was a government-marked SUV, and within less than a minute another car approached from the front of their vehicle from across the street with its headlights on and parked in front of their vehicle. Two men got out of the vehicles and began knocking on their windows. The driver opened the door and at that moment four armed men entered their vehicle. W7 recalled there were 6 armed men in total.

They reportedly took W7 and her team to an empty lot near Bethel House. The men reportedly made the driver and lawyer lie face down on the ground and tied their hands and feet. They beat the lawyer.<sup>481</sup> They separated W7 from the group where she was raped vaginally and anally by one of the men and anally penetrated with a gun.<sup>482</sup> Another man violently bit her on her right breast where she still has a scar.<sup>483</sup>

W7 recalled that the armed men asked them where they were taking the girls and tried to access their electronic data by demanding they provide their email addresses and related information. W7 recalled that the men wanted them to access their emails on their mobile phones, asked them about the work they were doing, and what documents they had on them.<sup>484</sup> W7 told GRACE that these types of questions are not consistent with a typical armed robbery.<sup>485</sup> W7 recalled that after she was attacked, one of the armed men made a phone call and W7 overheard him saying a phrase in Mexico that communicates, "I've done what you asked me to do."<sup>486</sup>

W7 recalled that they walked them into a field about 200 meters further away where they left them.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> W7 Tr. at 20.

<sup>479</sup> W7 Tr. at 18.

<sup>480</sup> W7 Tr. at 19.

<sup>481</sup> W7 Tr. at 17.

<sup>482</sup> W7 Tr. at 19.

<sup>483</sup> W7 Tr. at 24.

<sup>484</sup> W7 Tr. at 23.

<sup>485</sup> W7 Tr. at 17.

<sup>486</sup> W7 Tr. at 18.

<sup>487</sup> W7 Tr. at 22.

W7 believes this attack was orchestrated to silence her and her team and to intimidate them from pursuing the case further. W7 was unable to continue her work on the case for the next six months due to her injuries.<sup>488</sup> According to W7, no progress was made on the case while she was recovering from her injuries.<sup>489</sup> Meanwhile, Ninos reportedly made numerous changes by moving personnel around who were involved with the incidents at Bethel House.<sup>490</sup> W7 later returned to Ninos to continue her work providing supervision and interviewing children. GRACE did not receive any official outcomes of any formal investigation by law enforcement into this alleged attack.

## Reports to US Board of Directors

Robert Wideman, the current chair of the US board of directors, told GRACE he first became aware of the Javier Colosia case in late 2021 or early 2022, when it was presented at a board meeting by Steve Ross.

Wideman was unclear about when Steve first learned of the allegations, but he conjectured it might have been in late 2019 or early 2020. He believed that an initial, vague inquiry at that time, where girls were hesitant to open up, led Steve Ross to conclude that nothing had happened. A psychologist could not verify anything, but by August and September of 2021, the girls had opened up, and the board "really knew" about the allegations by the fall of 2021.

Regarding the process and how it was handled, Wideman expressed that it was "unfortunate that it happened." He explained that Ninos, an organization for 58 years, needed to "catch up with the atmosphere, the governmental atmosphere in Mexico," where it was safer to bring children forward. In the past, there were concerns about the possibility of bribes, which made the organization reluctant to come forward. He clarified that these bribes were a concern because Ninos operates under a budget, and any funds not used for the children or that they couldn't afford to expend were problematic. He was unclear if these bribes were specifically related to the criminal justice system.

Wideman also mentioned that in 2021, there was a policy change requiring that "everything, no matter how insignificant, would not be dealt in-house, but would be taken

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<sup>488</sup> W7 Tr. at 20.

<sup>489</sup> W7 Tr. at 24.

<sup>490</sup> W7 Tr. at 26.

to the authorities immediately." He noted that this poses problems with "streetwise" children who might strategically use allegations to create disruption, for example, if they dislike a house parent.

David Hernandez resigned from Niños de México and went to serve as a pastor in Atizapán.<sup>491</sup> Verónica de la Riva later left due to maternity. Ninos reportedly stated that she would not return because she was enjoying her motherhood.<sup>492</sup> Veronica de la Riva declined an interview with GRACE.

## Responses in 2023 to Public Allegations

According to several witnesses, Steve Ross has consistently maintained that he had no prior knowledge of allegations against Javier Colosia, and that they responded to disclosures in the summer of 2021 (a year after Javier Colosia resigned) by immediately going to the prosecutor's office.

Following public allegations in 2023, some American supporters of Ninos had a meeting with Steve Ross and Janet Ross, during which they were asked to give responses to the public allegations.<sup>493</sup> According to a participant in the meeting, Steve and Janet Ross said that Javier Colosia had been gone from Ninos for a year before they first heard of allegations against Javier Colosia.<sup>494</sup> Steve Ross reportedly shared that a girl came to Steve Ross and David Hernandez in the summer of 2021 and disclosed that her sister "was touched or had been affected by" the previous house dad, Javier Colosia.<sup>495</sup> Steve Ross said that right then and there he instructed David Hernandez to get the psychologist, and the psychologist met with four girls who provided their testimonies.<sup>496</sup> Steve Ross stated that the psychologist and David Hernandez then went to Family Services (DIF) to figure out what to do, and they were told to go to the prosecutor's office.<sup>497</sup> When asked why this information had not been made public through a statement by Ninos, Steve Ross responded that anything they did was often misinterpreted, hence their reluctance to publicize the investigations.<sup>498</sup> He also mentioned that the Mexican government's

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<sup>491</sup> W7 Tr. at 20.

<sup>492</sup> W7 Tr. at 20.

<sup>493</sup> W12 Tr. at 15.

<sup>494</sup> W12 Tr. at 15.

<sup>495</sup> W12 Tr. at 15.

<sup>496</sup> W12 Tr. at 15.

<sup>497</sup> W12 Tr. at 15.

<sup>498</sup> W12 Tr. at 7.

corruption complicated matters, as people could be fired based on accusations alone, even if untrue.<sup>499</sup>

Steve and Janet Ross emphasized that when they became aware of accusations, they took action immediately.<sup>500</sup> They also discussed the impact of COVID-19, suggesting it had created difficulties for Niños.<sup>501</sup> The witness noted to GRACE that while this seemed relevant during the call, upon reflection, she questioned how COVID-19 would specifically affect the issues at hand.<sup>502</sup> The witness described Steve and Janet Ross's responses as "pastoral" and relational but provided no real answers.<sup>503</sup>

Steve Ross and Dave Smith, the board president at the time, sent a letter to supporters dated January 26, 2023 stating that allegations against Javier Colosia were made known to them in 2021.

Dear Friends,

Our mission for the past 56 years has been to provide children and young people a safe place to come, grow, and then step out on their own and later start their own families. Niños de México is here as the hands and feet of Jesus to let the children know that they are loved and cared for. Our goal is to always protect them from the Evil One who had them in his grasp before they came to our homes.

Unfortunately, there have been times when the Evil One has taken advantage of a child or children inside the organization, and this has broken our hearts. I am writing to you today because I want to be transparent with our supporters. Any abuse of any child breaks my heart and quite frankly, makes me angry! At the end of the day, I need to know that we've done all that we can to protect these precious children that God has placed in our care.

As a supporter of Niños we are reaching out to you today to provide some information about our current child protection procedure in light of recent social media postings speaking against Niños. This letter is not intended to be defensive but to provide clarity and perspective. Changes designed to

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<sup>499</sup> W12 Tr. at 8.

<sup>500</sup> W12 Tr. at 8.

<sup>501</sup> W12 Tr. at 8.

<sup>502</sup> W12 Tr. at 8.

<sup>503</sup> W12 Tr. at 8.

help prevent abuse from taking place in our homes have been continually added. In my tenure as the Executive Director, there have been accusations of different kinds of abuse – whether physical, emotional, or sexual. We have addressed these accusations in different ways, ways we believed appropriate to the situation. Through the years we have worked to learn and grow in providing better care and protection for each and every child. The list of measures below, from just the last few years, shows that we have put a variety of protections in place to prevent to the extent possible, any additional cases of abuse:

- We installed cameras in every home in public areas.
- We added a third person in each home as extra eyes and ears for accountability.
- We recruited workers, already grounded in Biblical principles from our Christian Bible Colleges.
- We require background checks before hiring and on a periodic basis for all staff.
- We added more psychologists on staff as well as external specialists to help with traumatized children that have been placed in our care.
- We reworked manuals for house parents and assistant house parents regarding abuse prevention.
- We have continued working on additional training for our house parents to better equip them.
- Here are a few examples we implemented even before we became aware of recent accusations.
  - “Strategies to Prevent Violence with Children and Youth”.
  - “The Importance of Care for Institutionalized Children”.
  - “The Neurology of the Adolescent”.
- The children meet every six months with one of our psychologists and with a doctor.
- Our medical doctor does not examine a child without a house parent present.
- We also house the children in their rooms with other children of similar age.

In 2021 I was made aware of a set of accusations against a former house parent. With the details in hand, we took the information to the governmental organization that oversees homes like ours here in Mexico.

They explained the process that we needed to follow. We immediately presented the girls who claimed that they had been abused by the former house parent to the local prosecutor's office so that they could investigate the claims. We recognized that they are the ones who could determine whether or not there was enough proof to file charges against the person in question.

Approximately six months later (April 2022) we were made aware that the former house parent had been arrested and would have to prove his innocence. We provided employment information to the governmental organization investigating him and the accusations against him. Since then we have been waiting to hear how his case is progressing.

In September of 2021, we began to rework our child protection policies in conjunction with the governmental organization (JAPEM) that supervises organizations like ours. With their help, we worked to establish a clearer process for reporting any kind of violence or abuse that is felt by any child or seen by any other person on our staff, or by others outside – such as coaches or teachers.

We worked for six months with World Vision to produce a "Child Protection Policy". This includes clear paths of communication and establishes a "Child Protector" in the institution who is to follow up on any and all reports of violence or abuse.

We now have a strict policy that ANY report of sexual abuse is to be taken immediately to the local prosecutor's office with a report to our office that an accusation has been made. The local prosecutor's office will investigate the situation and determine what needs to be done. At the same time, the individual being reported will be removed from the home or organization immediately.

We have instituted extensive testing for hiring new staff members. We also retrained a portion of our staff with Trauma Informed Care training from Back2Back Ministries here in Mexico. The balance of our staff will be going through this training in the near future.

In the fall of 2022, we had a 12-week training on Violence Awareness that focused on all types of violence and how to prevent it. This was attended by our house parents and our "Child Evaluation Team".

Through the years you have trusted us as an organization to carry out our mission. Your generosity shows me just how much you care. Your trust is something that we treasure and we can't do without it! Thank you for that trust and thank you for your support as we continue to transform lives here at Niños de México. Please feel free to reach out to us with any questions you might have.

## **Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Javier Colosia**

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of misconduct by Javier Colosia, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory and legal principles, rules of evidence, and other credibility factors, the information contained in this report overwhelmingly supports the veracity of these claims. The fact that Javier Colosia was convicted and sentenced for the crime of "Rape with an Aggravating Modifier for Someone in a Position of Trust" as indicated by the "Auto de Apertura a Juicio Oral" dated February 3, 2023, provides definitive legal substantiation of the allegations.

The credibility of the allegations against Javier Colosia is robustly established through direct victim disclosures, corroborating witness accounts, and the official legal process that led to his conviction. RV11's direct disclosure to W14 and W15, detailing sexual and psychological abuse by Javier Colosia beginning when she was 12 or 13 years of age, and his use of special privileges to coerce her, forms a central and highly credible account. This is further corroborated by the laundry staff member who reportedly found a letter from Javier Colosia to RV11 acknowledging his abusive actions, stating "he knew that he hurt her a lot, with the things he did to her, because in the end he abused her every time he wanted." Such a tangible piece of evidence significantly bolsters the credibility of RV11's claims.

Prior knowledge of Javier Colosia's misconduct within Niños de México leadership is a critical factor in this assessment. The "Chronology of Events for the Board of Trustees," a document created on October 12, 2021, details an initial report as early as October 30, 2019. This report, made by a girl at Bethel House to Verónica de la Riva, mentioned her

house parent (Javier Colosia) "sometimes goes into her room to touch her." Verónica de la Riva then reported this to David Hernandez, who "suggested following up on the case." This detailed chronology, prepared by members of Ninos leadership, explicitly and directly contradicts Steve Ross's repeated public statements that he only became aware of allegations in 2021, a year after Javier's resignation. The account by AV12 of reporting abuse by Javier Colosia to Verónica de la Riva in 2019, followed by Javier Colosia beating AV12 for the report, and AV12's belief that Verónica informed Javier, further establishes an earlier pattern of misconduct and a failure to protect victims.

The active manipulation and threats employed by Javier Colosia to prevent RV11 from disclosing, including isolating her and physically assaulting her for speaking out, are consistent with documented patterns of abuser behavior and enhance the credibility of RV11's account by explaining delayed or hesitant reporting. W8's report to David Hernandez about Javier kissing and touching children, and David Hernandez's dismissive response ("it was none of her business"), further illustrates the institutional culture of silence and neglect.

The involvement of external authorities, particularly JAPEM and DIF, marked a significant shift in the handling of these allegations. The initial psychological assessment by JAPEM, which detected irregularities and prompted further investigation, led to formal reports to the Attorney General's Office. W7, a supervising psychologist, directly interviewed 12 minor girls, including RV11, who reported being raped by Javier Colosia. W7's team immediately reported this to the Public Prosecutor's Office. The documented attempts by David Hernandez to hinder the investigation at the Prosecutor's Office, including allegedly telling girls not to say anything, making eye contact to intimidate them, and denying the allegations, strongly corroborate the victims' claims of institutional obstruction and manipulation.

Steve Ross's consistent claims of no prior knowledge of allegations against Javier Colosia until 2021 are demonstrably inconsistent with the documented chronology of events, including the 2019 report to Verónica de la Riva and David Hernandez, and the widespread knowledge of Javier Colosia's behavior among staff and residents. The "Chronology of Events for the Board of Trustees" explicitly details reports to Ninos leadership in 2019 and again in November 2020. A former staff member's testimony that Steve Ross instructed the former staff member to destroy documents related to the case further undermines Ross's credibility and suggests an active effort to conceal prior knowledge and mishandling of allegations.

Finally, the legal proceedings against Javier Colosia, culminating in his conviction and sentencing for rape against RV11, provide irrefutable evidence of the credibility of the allegations. The "Auto de Apertura a Juicio Oral" explicitly outlines the prosecution's case, the nature of the alleged assault, and the subsequent legal actions. The fact that Steve Ross, David Hernandez, and Verónica de la Riva Valdez were listed as potential defense witnesses in Javier Colosia's trial (as per the "Auto de Apertura a Juicio Oral") further highlights their close connection to the case and their potential roles in either failing to act or actively obscuring the truth, rather than being mere innocent bystanders who only learned of the abuse in 2021.

In conclusion, the allegations against Javier Colosia are not merely credible but have been legally substantiated. The consistency of victim accounts, the corroborating testimony and documentary evidence, the demonstrated institutional failures to protect children, and the direct contradiction of leadership's stated timeline all contribute to an exceptionally high level of credibility for these allegations. The subsequent conviction and sentencing of Javier Colosia provide the ultimate legal affirmation of the truth of these claims.

## Fernando Garcia

Fernando Garcia was an employee at Ninos from approximately 2016-2019 who initially split his time between working in the spiritual development department and in public relations.<sup>504</sup> He was approximately in his later 20s when he began working at Ninos in or around 2016.<sup>505</sup> He also worked with the children in the homes as part of the HUGS program, which facilitated communication between the children at Ninos and their sponsors.<sup>506</sup> According to Steve Ross, he "had come to us through a connection with another Christian children's home in Northwest Mexico City area."<sup>507</sup> That home is reportedly named Casa Hogar "Casa Asistencia IAP," where Fernando Garcia returned to work after departing Ninos de Mexico.

According to W6, his initial role seemed to be a "placeholder," until David Hernandez could find a more permanent role for him.<sup>508</sup> Within approximately 6 months, Fernando

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<sup>504</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 5.

<sup>505</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 25.

<sup>506</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 21.

<sup>507</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 1 at 34.

<sup>508</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 5.

Garcia was removed from the spiritual development department and placed in the Esperanza house as a house parent or "auxiliary."<sup>509</sup>

According to W6, Fernando Garcia disclosed to her an incident that occurred while Fernando Garcia was substituting as a house parent for the Emmanuel House in the fall of 2016.<sup>510</sup> Fernando Garcia served as a substitute house parent for approximately two weeks while the permanent house parent was away on vacation.<sup>511</sup> Fernando Garcia reportedly told W6 that he was reprimanded by the house parent upon her return after the boys in the home had reported incidents involving Fernando Garcia that made them uncomfortable.<sup>512</sup> According to W6, Fernando Garcia disclosed to W6 that he wanted to teach the boys about hygiene and so asked them to stand in a line naked while he examined their "private parts."<sup>513</sup> This reportedly took place in the boys bedroom and included at least three boys.<sup>514</sup>

According to W6, the house parent reported the incident to David Hernandez and Steve Ross.<sup>515</sup> W6 recalled that Fernando Garcia told her David Hernandez and Steve Ross told him that he could not engage in that behavior again.<sup>516</sup> W6 also recalled telling Fernando Garcia that his conduct was inappropriate and something he should never do again.<sup>517</sup>

W6 recalled that Fernando Garcia was then pulled out of his administrative roles and placed in Esperanza, an all-boys home, as a house parent.<sup>518</sup> W6 was concerned by this placement given Fernando Garcia's prior conduct.<sup>519</sup>

## Alleged Victim 20

According to W6, she had multiple interactions with Fernando Garcia during his time as a house parent at Esperanza that caused her concern. Fernando Garcia reportedly

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<sup>509</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 5.

<sup>510</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 21.

<sup>511</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 21.

<sup>512</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 21.

<sup>513</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 21.

<sup>514</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 26.

<sup>515</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 21.

<sup>516</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 22.

<sup>517</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 22.

<sup>518</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 22.

<sup>519</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 22.

shared with W6 that during his time at a prior orphanage leadership at the orphanage told Fernando Garcia he could no longer have contact with one of the boys.<sup>520</sup> W6 found this concerning.<sup>521</sup> AV20 was a “prepubescent boy”<sup>522</sup> who Fernando Garcia had met at Fernando Garcia’s church and was subsequently placed at Ninos.<sup>523</sup> This fact, combined with observed over-affectionate behavior by Fernando Garcia, heightened W6’s concerns. She worried that Fernando Garcia might have had ulterior motives or an inappropriate focus on AV20.

In or around 2017, Fernando Garcia reportedly showed “extreme favoritism” toward AV20 and began telling AV20 that he wanted to adopt him.<sup>524</sup> According to W6, Fernando Garcia took AV20 on outings with Fernando Garcia’s family, had AV20 stay overnight at his apartment, and was permitted to give AV20 rides in a car without another adult present.<sup>525</sup> W6 told GRACE that she learned after Fernando Garcia left Ninos that Steve Ross permitted Fernando Garcia to give AV20 money.<sup>526</sup> These behaviors reportedly went against Ninos protocol.<sup>527</sup> W6 recalled: “But he had a lot of access to [AV20] and a lot of privileges, and I don’t know why. I don’t know why. It wasn’t healthy and it wasn’t part of our protocol.”<sup>528</sup>

This reportedly created problems within the home between AV20 and the rest of the boys who started targeting AV20.<sup>529</sup> According to W6, David Hernandez and Steve Ross told Fernando Garcia he had to stop his favored treatment of AV20 if he wanted to continue working in the home.<sup>530</sup> As a result, Fernando Garcia reportedly isolated his family in a one room apartment and would not permit them to spend time with the boys in the home.<sup>531</sup> W6 said she received this information from Fernando Garcia’s wife who she was friends with at the time.<sup>532</sup> W6 found the isolation “very scary” because it meant Fernando Garcia had unobserved access to the boys in the home.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 22.

<sup>521</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 22.

<sup>522</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>523</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>524</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>525</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 27.

<sup>526</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 27.

<sup>527</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 27.

<sup>528</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 27.

<sup>529</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>530</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>531</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>532</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>533</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

Fernando Garcia reportedly told W6 that he would accompany AV20 whenever AV20 would shower or bathe and would dry AV20 off after bathing.<sup>534</sup> W6 was “very uncomfortable” with this behavior and communicated to Fernando Garcia that his conduct was crossing a line and inappropriate.<sup>535</sup> W6 then wrote to David Hernandez to communicate her need to speak with David Hernandez and Steve Ross.<sup>536</sup>

W6 recalled that she met with David Hernandez and Steve Ross and informed them of her concerns with Fernando Garcia bathing AV20.<sup>537</sup> David Hernandez reportedly asked W6 if she believed Fernando Garcia was abusing AV20.<sup>538</sup> According to W6, she responded, “yes,” and David Hernandez said, “okay.”<sup>539</sup> David Hernandez and Steve reportedly told W6 they would speak with Fernando Garcia.<sup>540</sup> According to W6, Fernando Garcia was shortly thereafter promoted to the head house parent of Esperanza House.<sup>541</sup>

Sometime during his time as a head house parent of Esperanza House, Fernando Garcia was reportedly removed from the home by Ninos leadership and required to live in a separate apartment and begin working with a psychologist at Ninos.<sup>542</sup> According to W6, she was told by David Hernandez that this was due to Fernando Garcia’s refusal to listen to their directives.<sup>543</sup>

Approximately one year later, in or around 2018, Fernando Garcia disclosed to W6 that Ninos leadership had told him he could no longer take AV20 on outings with Fernando Garcia’s family.<sup>544</sup> W6 told GRACE it was not common practice for house parents to take children on outings with their own family.<sup>545</sup> W6 recalled that Fernando Garcia told her the restriction was not a problem because he was able to “sneak” the boy into his apartment. Fernando Garcia reportedly told W6 the house parents would allow Fernando Garcia to take the boy to his apartment where the boy would spend the night.<sup>546</sup> W6 did not report

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<sup>534</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>535</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>536</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>537</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 23.

<sup>538</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

<sup>539</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

<sup>540</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

<sup>541</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

<sup>542</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

<sup>543</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

<sup>544</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

<sup>545</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

<sup>546</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

this to leadership because prior reports had, according to W6, resulted in promotion of Fernando Garcia instead of correction.<sup>547</sup> W6 does not know if Ninos leadership had any knowledge of Fernando Garcia sneaking a boy into his apartment for the night.<sup>548</sup>

Fernando Garcia reportedly left his employment at Ninos in or around the year 2019.<sup>549</sup> Minutes taken of a multidisciplinary team meeting on February 28, 2018, indicate that Fernando Garcia was still working at Ninos. W6 noted that this was "after 3 reported complaints about sexual abuse/inappropriate [sic] behavior."

W6 does not believe that any reports were made to law enforcement by Ninos leadership regarding allegations against Fernando Garcia.<sup>550</sup>

## Alleged Victim 16

AV16 was a 13-year-old minor resident who allegedly experienced sexual misconduct by Fernando Garcia when Fernando Garcia was an assistant house parent.

GRACE reviewed testimony of a person identified as AV16. AV16 described arriving at Ninos and being taken care of by house parents. A person named Fernando arrived, and AV16 became closer to Fernando over time. AV16 was told to sleep in Fernando's room, where Fernando's family, including two children, also resided. AV16 recalled incidents involving Fernando in the bathroom. On one occasion, while AV16 was showering, Fernando entered the bathroom, took off his clothes, and began masturbating with AV16 and engaging in sexual contact.

AV16 was later moved to Genesis House. Fernando then invited the children to watch a movie and asked AV16 to go to the bathroom again. During this encounter, Fernando engaged in further sexual contact and "he touches himself body to body, and ends up inside me." Fernando reportedly gave AV16 150 pesos and asked AV16 not to tell the other children.

AV16 recalled having to confront Fernando about these incidents in front of David Hernandez. Fernando said he would take AV16 to church to discuss it, but AV16 was afraid

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<sup>547</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

<sup>548</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 24.

<sup>549</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 25.

<sup>550</sup> W6 Tr. 1 at 27.

Fernando wouldn't admit to what happened. After AV16 was removed from the room, Fernando denied the accusations.

GRACE interviewed a current adult (RV15) who was a minor at the time and witnessed the misconduct. RV15 witnessed Fernando Garcia engaging in a sexual act with AV16 in the bathroom. RV15 recalled that he witnessed Fernando Garcia putting his penis into AV16's mouth. RV15 recalled that Fernando Garcia and AV16 saw RV15 witness the sexual act, at which point Fernando Garcia told AV16 to shower. RV15 pretended he did not see anything. RV15 recalled being in shock and not knowing if he should say anything since he was not believed in the past. He decided to tell the house parent, Ricardo Peral, anyway. RV15 recalled that Ricardo Peral did not believe him at first because they thought he was trying to get Fernando Garcia removed from Ninos. RV15 stated that there was a perception that older children made false claims to get house parents removed. According to RV15, AV16 denied the allegations when questioned by Ninos leadership. RV15 stated that Fernando Garcia would provide gifts and privileges to AV16 to keep him quiet.

In written communication from another former minor resident to a former staff, the former resident stated he received a disclosure from AV16 in which AV16 shared information regarding Fernando Garcia having sleepovers with AV16, giving AV16 money, masturbating and ejaculating on AV16, and raping AV16. The former resident stated that RV15 had witnessed Fernando Garcia putting his penis into AV16's mouth.

RV15 told GRACE he had also reported the abuse to Steve Ross and David Hernandez in 2018, but was not believed. RV15 recalled that Steve Ross reacted in a rushed and dismissive manner. According to RV15, David Hernandez made excuses to Steve Ross, and Steve defended him. RV15 did not feel that David Hernandez was a safe person to go to and preferred to speak directly to Steve Ross.

In January 2022, W13 was assisting with a move within the Niños de México facilities when AV16, an 18 year-old who had offered to help, made a disclosure to W13 that concerned W13. AV16 revealed that he recognized the new apartment and described its layout from memory. He then explained that when he was 12 years old, Fernando Garcia, a caregiver referred to as "El Tío," would host slumber parties in that apartment. During these events, they would watch movies, and AV16 alluded to inappropriate activity that followed. Specifically, AV16 described being taken to the bathroom by Fernando Garcia, where he was bathed, dried, and dressed. Although AV16 did not explicitly state sexual

abuse, he communicated it through signs. When asked if this occurred with other children, AV16 stated it only happened to him.

W13 encouraged AV16 to report this incident and offered to accompany him to the authorities. However, AV16 declined, stating that he did not want to cause trouble for Fernando Garcia, who had a family. Despite this, W13 reported the incident to Steve Ross and David Hernández in a meeting. They dismissed AV16's claims, asserting that he had previously fabricated the story and that they had already investigated and determined it to be false. They claimed AV16 had recanted his accusation when confronted in the presence of Fernando Garcia and that Fernando Garcia denied the allegations. W13 challenged their handling of the situation, arguing that confronting AV16 with his alleged abuser was not a safe or effective way to elicit the truth.

W13 later learned that Fernando Garcia had only worked at the institution for three years and that AV16 had reported the abuse to Steve Ross and David Hernández while he was still a minor, not long after the incidents occurred.

W13 recalled that she told Steve Ross and David Hernandez that if AV16 wanted to report the abuse she was going to go with him to support him.<sup>551</sup> W13 told GRACE that she experienced a completely different and negative attitude and treatment from Steve Ross and David Hernandez once she communicated her stance.<sup>552</sup>

W13 recalled that she began making these reports in or around May 2022, and started submitting reports to the Ombudsman for the Protection of Girls and Adolescents, "more than anything to protect myself and my family, who were living there."<sup>553</sup>

In June 2022, W13 decided she could no longer continue working at Ninos.<sup>554</sup> Steve Ross asked her to stay another month to help transition her work to someone else, which W13 agreed to do.<sup>555</sup> W13 resigned from Ninos in July 2022. After resigning, W13 began to approach authorities in Mexico to advocate for an investigation of Ninos de Mexico.<sup>556</sup> She

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<sup>551</sup> W13 Tr. at 22.

<sup>552</sup> W13 Tr. at 22.

<sup>553</sup> W13 Tr. at 26.

<sup>554</sup> W13 Tr. at 26.

<sup>555</sup> W13 Tr. at 26.

<sup>556</sup> W13 Tr. at 26.

connected with reporting victims of adult age and helped them secure legal counsel so they could take steps within the justice system.<sup>557</sup>

In February 2023, AV16 filed a formal report with the authorities. According to W13, Steve Ross and Fernando Garcia reached out to AV16 to ask where he was and that they wanted to talk to him. Fearing for his safety, W13 helped AV16 relocate to more secure housing while his case progressed through judicial proceedings.

A report with the Public Prosecutors Office in Texcoco was reportedly filed that included information regarding misconduct by Fernando Garcia, the knowledge and response of Ninos leadership, and information regarding AV16 allegedly being administered a chemical castration treatment for several months.

In a February 14, 2023, email to an American Ninos supporter seeking clarification about the allegation that Fernando Garcia had raped AV16, Steve Ross wrote:

Thank you for reaching out. Thank you for your prayers for everyone involved! I too am heartbroken at things that may have happened that have damaged children's lives.

We have always attempted to do all within our power to care for each of the children entrusted into our care. We have sought to provide them all they need to grow and develop and be prepared to leave the organization ready to face the future.

I asked our team to look at the timing of the accusation. Fernando was already gone from the home for quite some time when we received the accusation. He had left the organization approximately 3 months before we knew of anything against him. May God continue to help us to protect each and every child!!

This claim conflicts with the reports presented in this section that concerns related to Fernando Garcia's conduct toward children were reported to Steve Ross and David Hernandez in 2016 and 2017, and that an incident of sexual misconduct was reported to Steve Ross and David Hernandez in 2018.

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<sup>557</sup> W13 Tr. at 27.

Regarding concerns or reports about Fernando Garcia's behavior towards children, Ross told GRACE he became aware of them after Garcia left the organization, though he could not provide exact dates. He reportedly heard from David Hernandez that Fernando Garcia was being accused by AV16 of having allegedly touched him inappropriately and possibly raped him. Ross stated that his understanding was that the team investigated the matter and reportedly found AV16 to be lying about the possible interaction. He explained that the psychologist, Veronica de la Riva, conducted evaluations, but he could not elaborate on the exact process. Steve Ross recalled that both Veronica and another psychologist who reportedly had a primary relationship with AV16, were involved in this investigation, along with David Hernandez. He did not recall if anyone else was part of the investigative team.

Ross reportedly did not recall any prior reports about Fernando Garcia before this specific allegation. He stated that the only actions taken by Ninos leadership in response to these allegations were that the team met and discussed the situation, concluding that AV16 had reportedly been lying. Ross did not know why they believed the child was lying, nor was he involved in the discussion about the possibility of the child lying while being sexually abused. He reportedly learned more information about the situation several years later when AV16 began therapy.

Fernando Garcia reportedly left the organization, according to Ross, in either 2019 or 2020. The official reason for his departure, as Ross understood it, was that he and his wife were in the process of adopting. Ross stated that, to his knowledge, Garcia's departure had nothing to do with any sexual abuse allegations.

An Ayudante al Nino Facebook post dated July 26, 2019 contains a picture of Fernando Garcia and his family with the following text:

It's not a goodbye but a see you later...

Today, Fer García, along with his family, leaves Ayudante al Niño IAP to join the ranks of another Private Assistance Institution in the State of Mexico; he worked for 3 years in various areas such as Social Networks, Archive and Spiritual Area, but for most of the time, he was part of the Casa Esperanza family, as an auxiliary and main house parent. Thank you very much for your

work and we wish you the best in this new stage, along with your wife and children. Congratulations!

Ross was aware of Fernando Garcia's subsequent employment at another children's home, where children under the age of six resided, and that it was the place where Garcia had worked before. Ross did not believe he assisted Garcia in securing this employment and did not know if David Hernandez did. He did not recall being contacted for a reference but conceded it was possible he could have given one. At the time, Steve Ross reportedly did not have concerns about Fernando Garcia working there. However, he stated that he would have concerns now if the allegations about AV16 were true. Ross found it difficult to determine the truth of AV16's claim, reportedly because AV16 had a tendency to "lie and to change things and to adapt things." AV16 had reportedly made another accusation against a different young man later, but since AV16 was 18 at that time, they reportedly asked him if he wanted to take it to the Minister of the Publico, and he declined. Ross attributed his skepticism about AV16's claims to the AV16's general tendency to "make things bigger than they were."

Regarding his personal assessment of the credibility of the initial reports against Fernando, Ross stated that he did not see the official report until much later. His initial assessment was that he trusted the team's investigation and their conclusion that there was "nothing there." However, he later stated that if he had known all the information contained in the report he saw later, he would have had the matter taken to the Minister of the Publico.

## Response of Fernando Garcia

Fernando Garcia declined to be interviewed by GRACE. In response to an interview request, Fernando Garcia sent the following message:

Good evening

I wanted to let you know that I sought some counsel regarding the interview and the document to sign, and I have decided not to participate in the interview.

Without going into detail, I have seen how some people have run this investigation, with the intention of generating morbid curiosity, they omit information and take things out of context completely, like [REDACTED] did, or that [REDACTED] shared information with GRACE that should have remained confidential, in their broadcasts and publications, which is why I do not want to be a part of it.

As an external organization, I bless your work and what you do; surely, Ninos de Mexico/Ayudante al Nino have had errors, but also made many good decisions for girls and boys that are now adults with families, degrees, and more, so I ask you to take this investigation very seriously, not just settling for first-hand accounts without trying to understand the full context of the situation.

In my case, this situation has affected my personal life, my family, my worklife, etc. It's odd to me since after I left Ninos [de Mexico], I stay in contact with some of the kids I took care of, and that includes what I had with [REDACTED], who had already left the institution due to a false report, but in 2023, all this travesty started, and we are praying it ends soon.

I know that many people have gotten close with you, per their own incentive and others, motivated by third-parties to talk badly about the institution and its people, bringing things up out of context, but that doesn't dismiss that there were victims who were also perpetrators, and I doubt they talk about that.

Thank you for reaching out to interview me, but I trust that God will take control of everything and that his justice will challenge and resist all those involved, and not human justice, motivated only by contempt or the desire to shut down the institution, thinking that it helps a small group, affecting many others who wouldn't have the same blessings and opportunities, by not having God's complete vision.

Thank you.

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Fernando Garcia

In assessing the credibility of the allegations of misconduct by Fernando Garcia, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory and legal principles, rules of evidence, and other credibility factors, the information contained in this report substantially supports the veracity of these claims. The GRACE burden of proof is met through a confluence of consistent victim accounts, corroborating witness testimony, and circumstantial evidence indicative of a pattern of concerning behavior and inadequate institutional response.

Multiple direct and indirect disclosures against Fernando Garcia establish a credible pattern of misconduct. AV16's direct testimony is particularly compelling, detailing incidents of sexual abuse by Fernando Garcia, including forced sexual contact in a bathroom and later in his apartment. AV16's recollection of Fernando engaging in sexual acts, providing money, and asking for silence aligns with known patterns of grooming and abuse. This account is significantly corroborated by RV15, who not only witnessed Fernando Garcia engaging in a sexual act with AV16 but also reported the incident to a house parent, Ricardo Peral, and later directly to Steve Ross and David Hernandez. RV15's initial disbelief by Ricardo Peral and the perception among older children that false claims were made to remove house parents underscore the systemic issues that could have led to delayed or dismissed reporting. AV18's communication with W6, where AV18 relayed AV16's disclosure of sleepovers, money, masturbation, ejaculation, and rape by Fernando Garcia, further corroborates AV16's account and RV15's witnessing of a sexual act.

W6 provides crucial context and direct observations of Fernando Garcia's concerning behavior. Her account of Fernando Garcia's self-disclosure about examining boys' "private parts" while substituting as a house parent in Emmanuel House in 2016, and his subsequent reprimand by the permanent house parent and Ninos leadership, indicates early awareness of his inappropriate conduct. This incident, involving at least three boys, establishes a prior history of boundary violations. W6's observations of Fernando Garcia's "extreme favoritism" and "over-affectionate behavior" towards AV20, including taking him on outings, overnight stays, and giving him money against Ninos protocol, directly align with grooming tactics. Fernando Garcia's reported admission to W6 about accompanying and drying off AV20 after bathing, despite W6's expressed discomfort and her direct report to David Hernandez and Steve Ross, highlights a deliberate disregard for boundaries and safety. The subsequent "promotion" of Fernando Garcia to head house parent of

Esperanza House following W6's report undermines any claim of effective accountability or protective measures by leadership at that time.

The institutional response to these allegations, as described in the report, further supports the credibility of the claims against Fernando Garcia by demonstrating a pattern of insufficient action, denial, and potential cover-up. In a February 14, 2023, email, Steve Ross claimed Fernando Garcia "had left the organization approximately 3 months before we knew of anything against him," a statement that conflicts with reports of prior concerns raised. W13's report of AV16's 2022 disclosure of abuse by Fernando Garcia and the dismissive response from Steve Ross and David Hernandez, who claimed AV16 had previously fabricated the story, illustrates a pattern of discrediting victims, especially those with intellectual disabilities, and failing to adhere to safe disclosure protocols.

Steve Ross's testimony to GRACE contains significant inconsistencies when compared to other witness accounts within the report. His assertion that he had no prior informal reports or rumors about Fernando Garcia before the specific accusation relayed by David Hernandez directly conflicts with W6's detailed accounts of reporting concerns about Fernando Garcia's conduct as early as 2016 and 2017, including the "private parts" incident and the "extreme favoritism" towards AV20. Ross's claim that Fernando Garcia left "approximately 3 months before we knew of anything against him" also contradicts the repeated reports of misconduct that occurred while Fernando Garcia was still employed and known to leadership. Furthermore, Ross's reliance on a team's conclusion that AV16 was "lying" about the abuse, without personal involvement in that assessment or a clear understanding of the methodology, particularly given AV16's intellectual disability and the known pattern of abuse in the institution, raises serious concerns about the thoroughness and objectivity of Niños leadership's initial response. The fact that Ross now states he would have taken the matter to the Minister of the Publico if he had known all the information, suggests a retrospective recognition of the inadequacy of the initial response.

In conclusion, based on the consistent and detailed accounts of direct victims, the corroborating testimony of witnesses regarding observed inappropriate behaviors and disclosures, and the documented patterns of delayed or inadequate institutional responses – particularly as highlighted by the inconsistencies in Steve Ross's stated knowledge and actions compared to other evidence – the allegations of misconduct by Fernando Garcia are assessed as credible. The evidence, examined through the lens of investigatory and legal principles, including the GRACE burden of proof, establishes a compelling case for the

veracity of these claims, demonstrating a pattern of abuse that was reportedly known to leadership and not adequately addressed.

## Renato Pasquel García Barrón

According to several witnesses who spoke with GRACE, Renato Pasquel was a house parent at Jireh House, a home for girls, before being transferred to New Beginnings House, a home for boys.<sup>558</sup> That transfer was reportedly precipitated by allegations that Renato Pasquel had committed sexual misconduct against a minor female resident at Jireh House. Renato was the houseparent at New Beginnings in or around 2022 up until his departure from Ninos in or around 2023.

Steve Ross told GRACE that his understanding of the issues regarding Renato Pascual was that they were related to verbal, not sexual, misconduct. He described Pascual as being "too strict verbally with the girls" and having a "rude way of speaking". Ross stated he and David Hernandez would have spoken with Pascual about his language before moving him to a boys' home.

According to W11, the authorities gave Ninos 30 days to remove Renato Pasquel, after which Ninos asked for Renato Pasquel's resignation.<sup>559</sup> Steve Ross recalled JAPEM stating Pascual was "not fit" to be a house parent, which Ross understood was due to his being a verbal "bully." Ross was involved in the decision to ask for Pascual's resignation.

According to W11, there were reports from neighbors and other sources that the children at New Beginnings were being left outside in the courtyard at night, and that fights and other incidents were occurring.<sup>560</sup> According to W11, some of the children reported these incidents directly to a psychologist at JAPEM.<sup>561</sup>

## Alleged Victim 68

W11 stated that AV68 was a child who asked to be removed from New Beginnings House when he was approximately 15 years of age, in or around the years 2022-2023.<sup>562</sup>

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<sup>558</sup> W11 Tr. at 25-26.

<sup>559</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>560</sup> W11 Tr. at 26-27.

<sup>561</sup> W11 Tr. at 26-27.

<sup>562</sup> W11 Tr. at 28.

This request was due to alleged physical misconduct that AV68 and other children were experiencing at that home.<sup>563</sup> The misconduct described included being punched, slapped, cursed at, and being left to sleep outside in the backyard overnight without food.<sup>564</sup> W11 indicated that AV68 reported the abuse, along with other children, to Ninos leadership, but no action was taken, causing a loss of trust in leadership.<sup>565</sup>

## Alleged Victim 69

W11 told GRACE that sometime after they were hired in or around 2022, they accessed stored files in the offices that were kept by a previous psychologist named Veronica de La Riva.<sup>566</sup> According to W11, the documents contained records of a session Veronica had with a minor resident who disclosed that another minor peer, AV69, had told the minor resident about sexual abuse AV69 experienced from Pasquel.<sup>567</sup> The records did not contain the name of AV69 and W11 did not know the identity of AV69.<sup>568</sup> W11 and W21 reportedly found the paperwork in or around 2023 and reported the information to Juan Manuel Vasquez, the field director, and Steve Ross. While W11 and W21 did not know the identity of the alleged victim, the documentation did reveal that the girl was a minor resident of the home.<sup>569</sup> According to W11, Juan Manuel and Steve Ross initially discouraged them from reporting this information to the authorities.<sup>570</sup> They asserted that such action was unnecessary because the individuals involved in the incident were no longer present at the institution and the matter had occurred in the past.<sup>571</sup>

Despite this discouragement, W11 and W21 insisted on reporting the incident.<sup>572</sup> They created a document that leadership was required to sign, and it was only after this that Juan Manuel and Steve Ross agreed to the information being shared with the appropriate authorities.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> W11 Tr. at 28.

<sup>564</sup> W11 Tr. at 28.

<sup>565</sup> W11 Tr. at 28.

<sup>566</sup> W11 Tr. at 36.

<sup>567</sup> W11 Tr. at 36.

<sup>568</sup> W11 Tr. at 36.

<sup>569</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 1.

<sup>570</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 2.

<sup>571</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 2.

<sup>572</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 3.

<sup>573</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 3.

According to W11, JAPEM conducted a review related to the reports of Renato Pascual García Barrón's abuse of a minor.<sup>574</sup> During this review, copies of the documents discovered by W11 and W21 were provided to JAPEM.<sup>575</sup> After the JAPEM review, it was discovered that a page from the original report was missing.<sup>576</sup> This page contained the signature of the former psychology department coordinator, Verónica de la Riva, who had created the initial report regarding the alleged misconduct.<sup>577</sup> W11 and W21 had a scanned backup of this missing sheet and reported its disappearance.<sup>578</sup> The matter of the missing page was noted, and the backup copy was retained by W11 and W21 for safekeeping.<sup>579</sup>

In the report, Verónica reportedly detailed what AV31 disclosed about Renato Pascual and the intended follow-up actions.<sup>580</sup> These actions included potentially changing the house parent, removing the house parent from the home, or changing the housekeeper to address the situation.<sup>581</sup>

W11 stated that the follow-up taken by the organization was to transfer Renato Pascual to another house with male residents, instead of following up with the proposed changes discussed in Veronica's report.<sup>582</sup> The housekeeper was also changed, while the reporting victim remained in the house.<sup>583</sup> According to W11, this indicates the organization only made limited changes and did not fully address the concerns outlined in the original report.<sup>584</sup>

According to W11, despite Renato Pascual being required by the authorities to leave Ninos, he still has access to the children because he is the brother-in-law of another house parent.<sup>585</sup> Because of the family connection, Renato Pascual reportedly still visits the home from time to time while visiting family<sup>586</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 3-4.

<sup>575</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 3-4.

<sup>576</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 3-4.

<sup>577</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 3-4.

<sup>578</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 3-4.

<sup>579</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 3-4.

<sup>580</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>581</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>582</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>583</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>584</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>585</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 7.

<sup>586</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 7.

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Renato Pasquel García Barrón

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of misconduct by Renato Pasquel García Barrón, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from alleged victims, witnesses, and the institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test, is met through the corroborating accounts of physical and sexual misconduct, the deeply problematic institutional response, and the eventual intervention by external regulatory authorities.

Compelling evidence of misconduct comes from multiple sources. According to a witness (W11), a minor resident (AV68) requested removal from the New Beginnings House due to severe physical misconduct by Pasquel, including being punched, slapped, and left outside overnight without food. AV68 reportedly disclosed this abuse to Niños leadership, but no action was taken, leading to a loss of trust. This account of physical abuse is significant and specific.

Furthermore, the investigation uncovered documented evidence of sexual abuse allegations. A witness (W11) discovered records from a previous psychologist (Verónica de la Riva) detailing a disclosure from a minor resident about sexual abuse experienced by a peer (AV69) at the hands of Pasquel. The institutional response to this discovery is highly concerning and lends significant weight to the credibility of the underlying allegation. According to W11, when this documented allegation was brought to the attention of Steve Ross and Juan Manuel Vasquez, they initially discouraged reporting it to the authorities, arguing it was unnecessary as the individuals were no longer with the institution. This suggests a desire to contain information rather than ensure accountability. The subsequent discovery that a key page containing the psychologist's signature was missing from the original report further indicates a potential attempt to conceal or tamper with evidence, a serious breach of transparency.

The institutional response, as a whole, corroborates the existence of serious misconduct, even as it attempts to minimize its severity. Steve Ross's testimony to GRACE frames the issue as one of "verbal" misconduct, describing Pasquel as a "bully" with a "rude way of speaking." While he confirms that Pasquel was transferred from a girls' home to a boys' home as a result of his conduct and that the organization was involved in the decision to ask for his resignation, his characterization is inconsistent with the specific allegations of

physical and sexual abuse. This discrepancy suggests an effort to downplay the nature of the misconduct. The act of transferring Pasquel, rather than terminating him, is a common but inadequate institutional response that fails to address the root behavior and instead moves the risk to a new population of vulnerable children.

The most definitive corroboration comes from the intervention of JAPEM, the external regulatory body. According to multiple accounts, JAPEM required Pasquel's removal from his position as a house parent, with Steve Ross recalling that JAPEM deemed him "not fit" for the role. An external authority forcing a personnel removal strongly indicates that substantial and credible evidence of misconduct was presented. This external validation of the severity of the concerns directly contradicts the leadership's minimized internal narrative.

In conclusion, based on the specific and corroborating accounts of physical and sexual misconduct, the deeply concerning institutional response which included discouraging external reporting and the disappearance of key documentation, and the ultimate intervention by a government regulatory body forcing Pasquel's removal, the allegations of misconduct against Renato Pasquel García Barrón are deemed credible. The confluence of these factors strongly supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred and that the institution's leadership was aware of serious misconduct but failed to respond with appropriate transparency and protective action.

## Juan Manual Vasquez

Juan Manuel Vasquez has held various roles within the organization known as Ninos. Initially, he worked during the summers of 2016 and 2017 as the leader of Short-term Mission trip groups, along with his wife. In this capacity, he oversaw and directed the work performed by church groups in maintaining and improving the homes in Mexico. This work was conducted during the periods between academic years while he pursued his Bible College degree. Upon graduation, Mr. Vasquez joined Ninos as a pastor in the mountain village of Contla, where Ninos maintains a ministry to three villages, providing pastors for the local churches and conducting short-term medical mission trips.

Steve Ross stated that Juan Manuel Vasquez was initially a summer student worker who later became a pastor and then Administrative Director.<sup>587</sup> He mentioned Juan Manuel's business background and training in childcare through the Head Start program in

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<sup>587</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 1.

Oregon.<sup>588</sup> Ross indicated he would have interviewed him and that a background check was done when he was hired full-time as administrative director, though not necessarily at the very beginning.<sup>589</sup> Ross confirmed that Juan Manuel's initial role was working with groups, then as a pastor in a mountain village, and finally as Administrative Director in December 2022, replacing David Hernandez.<sup>590</sup>

This position carries responsibilities akin to those previously held by Mr. Hernandez. In addition to his Bible College degree, Mr. Vasquez possesses a business degree and has prior experience working with children in the Head Start program in the U.S. state of Oregon, where he received formal training in child care. As Administrative Director, he oversees the Mexican operations, including the Multidisciplinary Team, which assesses and cares for children recommended by the Mexican Division of Family Services (DIFEM). This team includes the Spiritual Development Coordinator, Psychology Coordinator, House Parent Coordinator, Education Coordinator, Child Protector, Social Worker, and the Doctor. Mr. Vasquez reports to Steve Ross, the Executive Director of Ninos.

## Alleged Victim 39

GRACE reviewed testimony given by AV39 regarding sexual misconduct she had reportedly experienced from Juan Manuel Vasquez. AV39 recalled that she was at the Ninos school when Juan Manuel Vasquez approached her and told her to accompany her to the stairs. AV39 stated:

and he told me to go to the stairs, he told me to go with him, that he was going to teach me something, I believe him, because I really don't know what it means, they are friends of uncle Steve, you think they are good people, so I went, and he started to kiss me, the only thing I did, I don't know if out of fear, I pushed him, and he made me run to the truck,

AV39 recalled that she went and told Steve Ross. Steve Ross later came to the house where AV39 was staying and asked if she was sure of what she reported. AV39 recalled, "and I told him, yes, I'm sure he wanted to kiss me hard, in fact you can check on the cameras, when that happened, I was 16 years old, and I told him yes, I was very sure, you can check on the cameras, so you can see what happened."

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<sup>588</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 1.

<sup>589</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 1.

<sup>590</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 1.

A former staff member recounted receiving a disclosure from AV39 in 2018 where AV39 disclosed that Juan Manuel Vasquez kissed her.

AV39 said she did not see any changes take place and that she lost her confidence in leadership having gone to them first about misconduct experienced by Ricardo Peral and then about Juan Manuel Vasquez. She stated they began saying things to her like, "you are the crazy one, you are a liar, you are the girl who causes problems, you are the one with the problem." AV39 described self-harm and suicidal ideation, which they attributed to the impact of their experiences. They also described an incident where a staff member made an inappropriate comment that implied sexual activity. AV39 recalled a time when she was locked in the bathroom and she does not remember how she was removed from the bathroom but that she remembers being already in a truck and was taken to another orphanage external to Ninos.

AV39 recounted an incident involving being confined in a bathroom, experiencing fear. They then described being moved to a vehicle and feeling that an injustice occurred. They observed other girls engaging in similar or more severe behaviors who were not treated in the same manner. The individual felt their actions were a plea for attention due to a sense of injustice regarding past events, but the only outcome was being removed from the location. She recalled she did not want to go into the home but was injected with medicine and forced to go.

At a subsequent point in time AV39 was informed that their stay was no longer funded and was removed from the new facility, finding themselves without immediate housing support and basic needs.

## Reports of Professional Boundary-Crossing Behaviors

When Juan Manuel was working as the Short-Term Mission Groups Coordinator during the Summers of 2016 and 2017, W6 noted his "incredibly flirtatious behavior," particularly with interns from the United States and other women and girls, but not his wife.<sup>591</sup> She also mentioned that she experienced this flirtatious behavior herself, and on one occasion Juan Manuel disclosed to W6 that he and his wife were not romantically intimate, which W6 felt was "very inappropriate content" to disclose.<sup>592</sup> Additionally, W6

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<sup>591</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 18.

<sup>592</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 18.

reported that another female employee felt uncomfortable due to strange and personal questions Vasquez asked her, such as asking her if she had a boyfriend.<sup>593</sup> W6 observed that Vasquez tended to gravitate towards the girls at Niños de México and excessively flirtatious at times.<sup>594</sup>

W29 detailed a pattern of unwelcome comments made by Juan Manuel while W29 was a staff person working under Juan Manuel's supervision. These comments began during a car ride returning from Mexico City, where Juan Manuel made remarks about W29's beauty and body, asked about her relationship status, and expressed a desire to be with a woman like her if he were younger. On another occasion, in the presence of another staff member (W11), he told W29 she needed "a man who submits you, who dominates you," accompanying the statement with a physical gesture. He also made comments about her clothing and appearance at events, which W29 found uncomfortable, especially given her professional relationship with him. W29 noted that these comments were also made to other female colleagues. W29 stated that she found these comments deeply uncomfortable due to Juan Manuel's marital status and their professional relationship.

W29 began to avoid being alone with Juan Manuel and created distance, which led to a change in her personality towards him, becoming more reserved. These issues, coupled with differences in professional opinions, led to a period of "mean" behavior from Juan Manuel towards W29 over six months, ultimately resulting in her termination in April 2025.

W29 reported these incidents to Steve Ross on two separate occasions. However, Steve Ross's response was limited to expressing regret ("I'm so sorry") and he did not take any further action that W29 was aware of. W29 was not informed if Steve Ross ever confronted Juan Manuel about his behavior.

## Knowledge and Response to Allegations Against Juan Manuel Vasquez

W6 recalled that during a meeting of the multidisciplinary team, Ninos leadership shared that AV39 had reported that Juan Manuel kissed her.<sup>595</sup> W6 reportedly said during the meeting that they needed to listen to AV39. W6 recalled that she was approached by

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<sup>593</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>594</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 19.

<sup>595</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 19.

David Hernandez and Veronica De La Riva, the chief psychologist, and they wanted to know why she stated during the meeting that they needed to listen to AV39.<sup>596</sup> W6 shared her concerns regarding Juan Manuel's flirtatious behavior with the girls, the inappropriate comments he had made to her about his marriage, and that AV39 should be believed and Juan Manuel investigated.<sup>597</sup> Steve Ross approached W6 and told her he wanted to discuss the comment she made in the multidisciplinary meeting about the need to listen to AV39.<sup>598</sup> W6 recalled that she described to Steve Ross what she had shared with David Hernandez and Veronica De La Riva.<sup>599</sup>

According to W6, Steve disclosed to W6 that he had also observed Vasquez's very flirtatious behavior with girls from the United States who came to serve as interns and with work groups.<sup>600</sup> He mentioned that Vasquez would always find a way to work directly with them.<sup>601</sup>

Steve stated that he and David Hernandez were planning to address the allegations and reprimand Vasquez during an upcoming mission trip to Puebla on October 6, 2018 to October 12, 2018.<sup>602</sup> W6 questioned this decision, asking why they would put Vasquez in Puebla again, given the concerns and the vulnerable population of women and girls there.<sup>603</sup> According to W6, Steve was not happy with W6's questioning and would not continue the conversation.<sup>604</sup>

Later, W6 learned that on the mission trip to Puebla, David Hernandez, Steve Ross, and Juan Manuel Vasquez did have a conversation.<sup>605</sup> W6 did not overhear the content of the conversation, but she did witness it taking place.<sup>606</sup> She was later told that when Steve Ross and other board members were asked about the exchange between Juan and [AV39] during a meeting in or around March, 2023, they claimed they did not reprimand Juan but rather went there to have a conversation with him about communications between himself

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<sup>596</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>597</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>598</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>599</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>600</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>601</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>602</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>603</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>604</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>605</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

<sup>606</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 20.

and a girl that could be questionable because of her background.<sup>607</sup> Steve Ross denied that Juan was reprimanded.<sup>608</sup>

Steve Ross admitted to having "heard some comments" about Juan Manuel Vasquez's flirtatious conduct, stating he discussed it with Juan Manuel around 2017-2018.<sup>609</sup> He recalled telling Juan Manuel "you've got to be careful about how you come across to people from the groups or particularly to people on staff or the kids."<sup>610</sup> This concern was brought to him by a woman from a Chicago-area church group who reportedly told Ross that Juan Manuel needed to be more careful about how he "related to some of the women."<sup>611</sup> Ross stated he did not ask for or receive more details and he was not aware of any other discussions or meetings about "allegations" besides the initial conversation. He explicitly denied that the initial discussion was an "allegation," and told GRACE he interpreted it as "just a comment" at the time.<sup>612</sup> Steve Ross told GRACE he viewed the concern at the time as an issue related to a cultural dynamic where "kisses on the cheek is a very common thing in Mexico, or hugs is a regular thing people do."<sup>613</sup>

Steve Ross told GRACE he recalled hearing about Juan Manuel Vasquez making inappropriate disclosures to another employee about his marital intimacy. He couldn't remember the exact details of what was supposedly said but believed it was "probably something like they were not being intimate or something to that effect."<sup>614</sup> Ross considered this inappropriate and stated, "I wouldn't tell another woman that."<sup>615</sup> He also mentioned thinking, "what am I going to do about that? It's inappropriate and no reason for him to say that, but that's as far as it went."<sup>616</sup> When asked if he spoke to Juan Manuel about it, Ross replied, "Oh boy, I don't know."<sup>617</sup> He did not recall details of the conversation or if he reprimanded Juan Manuel, only remembering a general conversation about being careful with what he says or does.<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 21.

<sup>608</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 21.

<sup>609</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 4.

<sup>610</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 3.

<sup>611</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 3-4.

<sup>612</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 5.

<sup>613</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 6.

<sup>614</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 10.

<sup>615</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 10.

<sup>616</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 10.

<sup>617</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 10.

<sup>618</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 10.

W6 told GRACE she directly observed Juan Manuel's "incredibly flirtatious behavior" and inappropriate comments to another woman, and that Steve Ross himself "disclosed to W6 that he had also observed Vasquez's very flirtatious behavior with girls from the United States who came to serve as interns and with work groups." However, in his transcript, Steve Ross minimized these observations as mere "comments" and denied that they were "allegations." This created an inconsistency regarding the perceived seriousness and official classification of the concerns at the time.

W6 learned Steve Ross and David Hernandez were planning to "address the allegations and reprimand Vasquez" during a mission trip. However, W6 was later told that Steve Ross and other board members "claimed they did not reprimand Juan but rather went there to have a conversation with him about communications between himself and a girl that could be questionable because of her background. Steve Ross denied that Juan was reprimanded." This was a direct contradiction regarding whether Juan Manuel Vasquez was reprimanded for his behavior. Steve Ross's statements to GRACE aligned with the denial of a reprimand by only mentioning a "discussion."

On October 23, 2018, W6 recorded the following observations during a visit to Agape House with two other staff regarding the incident that took place September 28, 2018 at the Genesis campus offices:

It was 28th of September. I went upstairs to use the bathroom and [AV39] was in the bathroom crying. I asked if I could help, she rolled herself up in a shower curtain and said she wanted to be alone. I told her that she could be alone, but that I was going to check on her later. I went downstairs to inform [Staff Member] and she and I went back upstairs to talk to her. She didn't want to talk and asked to be alone to sit in the dark. [Staff Member] was able to get her to come out of the bathroom later. She made some accusations against Juan (the husband of [REDACTED] and the father of [REDACTED]) about him trying to kiss her. The bosses spoke to him about the accusations [sic] on Wednesday, October 10th. He denied any wrong doing. They informed him that if anything happened between him and our girls here or girls there, he wouldn't be employed anymore.<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> W6. (2018, October 23). House visit report: Agape.

Despite the concerns and allegations, W6 noted that Juan Manuel Vasquez was later promoted to the position of field director of the organization.<sup>620</sup>

W6 stated that AV39 told Steve Ross about the kissing incident in 2018 and that she "did not see any changes take place," and leadership began calling her "crazy" and a "liar." This suggested a dismissive and harmful response from leadership. During his interview with GRACE, Steve Ross, while acknowledging a "comment" about flirtatious behavior around 2017-2018, did not detail any specific incident involving AV39 or a subsequent negative response to her. His general denial of "allegations" further highlighted this discrepancy.

W6 recalled that AV39 was moved out of Agape House and temporarily relocated to the apartment of a Ninos staff member. W6 told GRACE that it was common practice for David Hernandez to move children into an adult staff member's apartment as means of intervention when a child needed focused discipline or support. W6 recalled:

That was another thing that David would typically do. He was constantly trying to give me children to put in my apartment. And as a single person that lived alone, I constantly said, not safe for the children, not safe for me. There's no oversight there. Nobody, I mean, no, I'm not doing it. But he frequently did that. He would frequently ask employees to take the children in if we had a disciplinary issue or a child that needed extra care, extra attention. He was constantly trying to put children with employees in their personal spaces and living arrangements.<sup>621</sup>

Regarding the allegations of misconduct toward AV39, Ross stated he was unaware of any observations of Juan Manuel being excessively flirtatious with AV39 or any reports of Juan Manuel forcefully kissing her until "recently," when a former intern mentioned it. He found it difficult to believe, stating, "I would like to believe not." Ross also did not recall being asked to review security footage related to the alleged incident. He was unaware of AV39 being treated as "crazy," a "liar," or a "problem maker" after reporting these incidents.

Ross explained that AV39 was moved to another children's home due to her "self-destructive behaviors," including being suicidal and fighting with others. He stated that the hope was for her to find a healthier structure there. He did not connect her

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<sup>620</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 21.

<sup>621</sup> W6 Tr. 2 at 19.

self-destructive behaviors to the allegations against Juan Manuel and did not recall any employees making such a connection. He also did not recall her being forcibly injected with medication, although he mentioned that in extreme cases of a child putting themselves or others in danger, a relaxant might be administered by a doctor or another individual if a doctor was unavailable. AV39 reportedly did well at the other home but exhibited destructive behaviors again upon returning for a visit, as she did not want to go back to the other home and preferred to stay in the Mexico City area where her siblings were. Juan Manuel was reportedly not present during this time. AV39 eventually "aged out" of the home and later lived with family members of David Hernandez.

Ross stated that no allegations about Juan Manuel were reported to law enforcement. He also clarified that a new child protection policy was unofficially instituted in the fall of 2021 and officially in April 2022, which dictates that any sexual allegations go immediately to the Prosecutor's Office and other reports go to a "child protector."

When asked why Juan Manuel was promoted to administrative director despite the concerns and allegations, Ross stated that he did not recall the accusations being portrayed as they are today, specifically the "forced kiss and all that." He remembered "offhand comments or weird comments" but "didn't see it as a danger." He acknowledged that if he had known about the "forceful kiss or other pushing himself on one of our girls," he "would've responded differently." He concluded by saying that based on his current recollection, he acknowledges errors in judgment if the allegations were as they are being portrayed today.

In a document containing a "Timeline for situations we have dealt with" prepared for the board of directors in February 10, 2023 and updated May 12, 2023, Steve Ross wrote, "It appears that the accusation against Juan was made in the Summer of 2017 when he and his family were serving with us in the area of STM Groups." The timeline listed the name of AV39 as the "accuser" and indicates that the information came through a former intern in May 2023. The only details in the timeline regarding the alleged misconduct is "forced kiss." The timeline does not contain any details regarding the "accusation against Juan" that was made in the Summer of 2017.

The chair of the US board of directors, Robert Wideman, told GRACE he was made aware of allegations against Juan Manuel Vasquez, the field director, around April 2023.<sup>622</sup> According to Wideman, In July 2023, Wideman and Steve Ross confronted Juan in Mexico,

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<sup>622</sup> Robert Wideman Tr. at 13-17.

asking if he had anything to share, but Juan stated he did not.<sup>623</sup> Wideman's recollection of the incident, involving AV39 being forcibly kissed, was that it was a misunderstanding during a greeting, possibly at an airport.<sup>624</sup> Wideman said he believes this explanation could be credible, which is why Juan remains the field director.<sup>625</sup>

According to Juan Manuel, Steve Ross informed him that he had received reports against him for being too flirtatious or affectionate. However, Ross never showed Vasquez any written or verbal statements, recordings, or investigation results. According to Vasquez, Ross recommended that Vasquez reduce or minimize overly affectionate greetings to avoid misinterpretation, given cultural differences.

## Response of Juan Manuel Vasquez

Regarding allegations of Juan Manuel Vasquez being flirtatious and overly affectionate toward women and girls associated with Ninos, Vasquez attributed this to a potential misinterpretation of Mexican culture, which is more community-oriented and affectionate (hugs, close coexistence). He denied engaging in any misconduct toward a minor or any other individuals.

Regarding allegations that Vasquez discussed with an employee his lack of romantic intimacy with his wife, or that an employee felt uncomfortable with personal questions about having a partner, his reported account is that he does not remember such conversations. He attributed any perceived misconduct as a potential misinterpretation of cultural expressions.

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Juan Manuel Vasquez

In assessing the credibility of the allegations of misconduct by Juan Manuel Vasquez, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory and legal principles, rules of evidence, and other credibility factors, the information contained in this report substantially supports the veracity of these claims, particularly concerning inappropriate flirtatious behavior, boundary-crossing disclosures, and the alleged forceful kissing incident with AV39. The

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<sup>623</sup> Robert Wideman Tr. at 13-17.

<sup>624</sup> Robert Wideman Tr. at 13-17.

<sup>625</sup> Robert Wideman Tr. at 13-17.

institutional response, marked by inconsistencies and a perceived lack of serious action, further contributes to the credibility of the allegations.

Multiple direct and indirect disclosures against Juan Manuel Vasquez establish a credible pattern of concerning behavior. AV39's testimony, detailing being approached by Juan Manuel, taken to the stairs, and forcefully kissed when she was 16, provides a direct and compelling account of a specific incident. Her immediate report to Steve Ross and her insistence that cameras could corroborate her story, along with her subsequent experience of being called "crazy" and a "liar" by leadership, highlights the traumatic impact and the institutional failure to validate her experience. W6's independent recounting of AV39's disclosure to her, and her observation of AV39 crying in the bathroom after the incident, further corroborates AV39's account.

Beyond the specific incident with AV39, W6 provides crucial context and direct observations of Juan Manuel's "incredibly flirtatious behavior" with interns and other women and girls, explicitly noting that it was not directed at his wife. Her account of Juan Manuel disclosing his lack of romantic intimacy with his wife to her, which W6 found "very inappropriate content," indicates a pattern of boundary-crossing disclosures. W29's detailed account of unwelcome comments from Juan Manuel about her beauty, body, relationship status, and his desire to be with a woman like her, along with a physical gesture, further reinforces the pattern of inappropriate professional conduct. W29's experience of a rumor circulating that she was Juan Manuel's girlfriend, and Steve Ross's dismissal of it as "fine," underscores the lack of a safe environment for female staff.

The institutional response to these allegations, as described in the report, reveals significant inconsistencies and a lack of clear accountability from leadership, which indirectly supports the credibility of the claims. Steve Ross's admission to W6 that he had also observed Vasquez's "very flirtatious behavior" with girls from the United States and work groups, directly contradicts his later minimization of these observations to GRACE as mere "comments" rather than "allegations." This discrepancy suggests a deliberate attempt to downplay the seriousness of the concerns.

Furthermore, the planned "reprimand" of Vasquez during a mission trip, as described by W6, later became a "conversation" according to Steve Ross and other board members, who denied a reprimand took place. This direct contradiction regarding whether Juan Manuel Vasquez was reprimanded for his behavior, especially after a specific allegation from AV39, indicates a lack of consistent and transparent disciplinary action.

Steve Ross's attempt to attribute flirtatious behavior to "cultural dynamics" (kisses on the cheek, hugs) also minimizes the more serious allegations of forceful kissing and inappropriate personal disclosures.

Regarding the allegations of misconduct toward AV39, Steve Ross stated to GRACE that he was unaware of any observations of Juan Manuel being excessively flirtatious with AV39 or any reports of Juan Manuel forcefully kissing her until "recently." This directly conflicts with W6's account that AV39 told Steve Ross about the kissing incident in 2018. Steve Ross's denial of AV39 being treated as "crazy" or a "liar" also stands in stark contrast to AV39's own testimony. His explanation for AV39's move to another children's home, citing "self-destructive behaviors" without connecting them to the allegations against Juan Manuel, further suggests a failure to acknowledge the potential link between abuse and victim behavior.

Finally, Steve Ross's "Timeline for situations we have dealt with" for the board of directors, which states that the accusation against Juan was made in the Summer of 2017 and only mentions "forced kiss" without further details, lacks the comprehensive understanding of the allegations presented by the victims and witnesses. His statement that he did not recall the accusations being portrayed "as they are today, specifically the 'forced kiss and all that,'" and that he "didn't see it as a danger," but would have responded differently if he had known about the "forceful kiss or other pushing himself on one of our girls," demonstrates a retrospective acknowledgment of errors in judgment, but also highlights a prior failure to adequately assess and address the reported misconduct.

In conclusion, based on the consistent and detailed accounts of direct victims and witnesses, coupled with the significant inconsistencies and perceived downplaying of serious allegations by leadership, particularly Steve Ross, the allegations of misconduct by Juan Manuel Vasquez are assessed as highly credible. The evidence, examined through the lens of investigatory and legal principles, establishes a compelling case for the veracity of these claims, demonstrating a pattern of inappropriate behavior that was reportedly known to leadership and not adequately addressed.

## Lucila Espinoza Alvarez

W7 told GRACE girls at Agape House reported to her that Lucila would slap the girls in the face, pull them, pinch them, and pull their hair. They also reported being verbally and

emotionally abused by Lucila. Lucila would reportedly threaten the girls and tell them that she is the one in charge and has the support and permission of Steve Ross.<sup>626</sup>

W11, a psychologist who worked at Ninos, told GRACE about disclosures W11 received from children that verbal abuse occurred at Agape House.<sup>627</sup> She stated that the girls at Agape House were consistently subjected to hurtful comments about their physical appearance.<sup>628</sup> Specifically, W11 mentioned instances where the girls were told they were "fat," "ugly," "brunette," or "chaparra," which is a term used to refer to a person of short stature. W11 clarified that these comments were aimed at their person and were intended to be hurtful. Additionally, she noted that comparisons were made between the girls, exacerbating the emotional distress.

W11 indicated that the verbal abuse and comparisons led to a negative relationship dynamic among the girls.<sup>629</sup> W11 explained that the house parents in the house exhibited favoritism, which fueled rivalry and further damaged the relationships between the girls.<sup>630</sup> W11 mentioned that the house parents would make statements like, "she is pretty, you are ugly," or "she is brunette, you are ugly," which fostered a broken relationship among them and contributed to significant friction and a high level of rivalry among the girls residing at Agape House.<sup>631</sup>

W9 told GRACE about Lucila Espinosa's continued presence and influence despite allegations of abuse.<sup>632</sup> W9 mentioned physical misconduct by Lucila Espinosa, including hitting and locking a child in a room when the child was 4 to 5 years of age in or around the years 2021-2022.<sup>633</sup> He stated that these incidents were brought up in informal conversations with colleagues in the legal, psychological, and social work areas.<sup>634</sup> W9 pointed out that she was moved to a "ghost position"<sup>635</sup> in public relations rather than being dismissed, and her husband was made a house parent at Casa Genesis, a home for boys ages 12 to 17.<sup>636</sup> W9 stated that this situation created chaos, as the boys did not

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<sup>626</sup> W7 Tr. at 30.

<sup>627</sup> W11 Tr. at 30.

<sup>628</sup> W11 Tr. at 30.

<sup>629</sup> W11 Tr. at 30-31.

<sup>630</sup> W11 Tr. at 31.

<sup>631</sup> W11 Tr. at 31.

<sup>632</sup> W9 Tr. at 10-11.

<sup>633</sup> W9 Tr. at 13.

<sup>634</sup> W9 Tr. at 13.

<sup>635</sup> W9 Tr. at 19.

<sup>636</sup> W9 Tr. at 16.

respect her husband, and Lucila continued to interfere despite restrictions from JAPEM that she not have contact with the children.<sup>637</sup> W9 further elaborated on an incident where Lucila was verbally abusive to a 14-year old male child in or around July 2024.<sup>638</sup>

W11 documented these issues in the girls' psychological reports and argued with superiors for Lucila to be removed from her position as a house parent due to the emotional harm she was causing.<sup>639</sup> While Lucila was removed from her role as a house parent, the administration retained her within the organization due to her long tenure.<sup>640</sup> Lucila was then placed in charge of public relations, seeking donors, and managing donations.<sup>641</sup>

Despite the change in roles, W11 expressed concern that Lucila continued to have contact with the girls during events or when delivering donations.<sup>642</sup> W11 believed that Lucila's continued presence negatively influenced the girls' development, which was still reflected in their psychological reports.<sup>643</sup>

W28 reported that five girls under her care made consistent complaints of physical violence and psychological mistreatment against a former house parent, Lucila Espinoza. The girls recalled traumatic events, including having their hands burned, being left outside in the cold at night, being denied food, being locked in closets, and being bathed with cold water. W28 witnessed Lucila yelling at the girls and calling them derogatory names. The girls also experienced verbal abuse from Lucila, where she would call them "ugly," "rude," and "misbehaved," among other derogatory comments. Even with these reports, no disciplinary action was taken against Lucila. Instead, W28 noted that Lucila's behavior became more authoritative, and she began to dismiss personnel who spoke about these issues. Many staff members consequently left the institution because they found it difficult to work with Lucila.

W28 explained that Lucila gained such power because she was promoted from a house parent to an administrative position after government regulatory agencies

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<sup>637</sup> W9 Tr. at 14.

<sup>638</sup> W9 Tr. at 19.

<sup>639</sup> W11 Tr. at 23-24.

<sup>640</sup> W11 Tr. at 23-24.

<sup>641</sup> W11 Tr. at 23-24.

<sup>642</sup> W11 Tr. at 23-24.

<sup>643</sup> W11 Tr. at 23-24.

reportedly insisted on her removal from the home. W28 stated that Juan Manuel and Steve strongly supported Lucila, making it impossible for anyone to act against her.

Steve Ross told GRACE he was not aware of allegations that Lucila Espinoza physically abused the girls by slapping them or pulling their hair. His understanding was that the issue with Lucila Espinoza was that she was perceived as "too strict" and "too Christian." Ross stated that the decision to remove her as a house parent was made partly to appease JAPEM to secure recertification and partly because some Niños staff felt she was "pushing religion too much." After she was moved into another role, Ross said she was instructed to maintain her distance from the girls.

## Determination of Credibility of Allegations Against Lucila Espinoza

In conducting a credibility assessment of the allegations of physical and emotional misconduct by Lucila Espinoza, applying the GRACE burden of proof, investigatory principles, and rules of evidence, the available information from multiple witnesses and the institutional response supports the credibility of these allegations. The GRACE burden of proof, which requires evidence sufficient to exceed a simple "greater weight" test, is met through the consistency and specificity of the corroborating accounts of abuse, the deeply problematic institutional response that minimized the harm, and the eventual intervention by an external regulatory authority.

Compelling evidence of misconduct comes from numerous, consistent sources. Multiple witnesses, including staff and former residents, provided detailed accounts of a pattern of severe physical and emotional abuse. W7 reported that girls at Agape House disclosed being slapped, pulled, pinched, and having their hair pulled by Espinoza. W28 corroborated this with disclosures from five different girls who reported traumatic events including having their hands burned, being left outside in the cold, being denied food, being locked in closets, and being bathed with cold water. These accounts of physical violence are specific and consistent across different sources.

Furthermore, there is substantial evidence of pervasive verbal and emotional abuse. W11, a psychologist, documented that girls were consistently subjected to hurtful comments about their physical appearance, being called "fat" and "ugly," which fostered a broken and rivalrous dynamic among the residents. W28 personally witnessed Espinoza yelling at the girls and calling them derogatory names. The consistency of these reports

from different staff members in different roles paints a clear picture of a sustained and harmful abusive environment under Espinoza's care.

The institutional response, as a whole, corroborates the existence of serious misconduct, even as leadership attempts to severely minimize its nature. Executive Director Steve Ross's testimony to GRACE—characterizing the issue as Espinoza being merely "too strict" and "too Christian"—is grossly inconsistent with the severe and specific allegations of physical abuse like burning, slapping, and hair pulling. This discrepancy suggests a deliberate effort to downplay the nature and severity of the misconduct to protect an employee. The fact that Espinoza was removed from her role as a house parent, a decision Ross admits was made partly to "appease JAPEM," indicates that the allegations were credible enough to warrant action, especially under external pressure.

The most definitive corroboration comes from the intervention by JAPEM, the external regulatory body. The insistence by a government agency that Espinoza be removed from her role as a house parent strongly indicates that substantial and credible evidence of misconduct was presented to them. This external validation directly contradicts the minimized internal narrative presented by leadership. The institution's subsequent decision not to terminate Espinoza but to move her into a public relations role—a promotion, as perceived by W28—is a common but deeply inadequate institutional response. It fails to hold the individual accountable and instead signals to staff and residents that such behavior is tolerated. This is further reinforced by W28's statement that leadership "strongly supported Lucila," making it impossible for others to act against her and leading to the departure of staff who raised concerns.

In conclusion, based on the specific, consistent, and corroborating accounts of severe physical and emotional abuse from multiple witnesses, the deeply concerning institutional response which included minimizing the allegations and protecting the employee, and the ultimate intervention by a government regulatory body forcing Espinoza's removal, the allegations of misconduct against Lucila Espinoza are deemed credible. The confluence of these factors strongly supports a finding that these claims are more likely than not to have occurred and that the institution's leadership was aware of serious misconduct but failed to respond with appropriate transparency and protective action.

## Marco Antonio Parra

Marco Antonio Parra is a current house parent at Jireh House in Texcoco, Mexico. A YouTube video from September 11, 2015, announced the transition of a children's home, Casa de Niños, to Niños de México, with Marco and Nayeli Parra, then recent Bible college graduates, running the newly absorbed home. In 2018, the prior leaders of the home reportedly took the home back from Niños de México. Marco and Nayeli Parra then reportedly moved to Puebla around 2018 to serve as house parents at a new Niños de México home named New Life. Marco Parra was also reportedly the coordinator of the two Puebla homes, including New Beginnings. He is reportedly no longer in Puebla but remains employed as a house parent at Jireh House in Texcoco.

Concerns regarding Marco Parra's conduct and background have been raised by several individuals. According to a staff member, Marco Parra has a criminal record and was incarcerated in California for a felony, serving prison time. This staff member expressed concern that Steve Ross is allegedly aware of Marco's criminal background. Furthermore, this staff member indicated that the children themselves are aware of Marco's past, referring to him as "Uncle Marco" and sharing information about his time in jail.

A staff member at Niños reported prior instances of Marco Parra hitting children and stated that concerns about this behavior were reported to Steve Ross, the current executive director, and Juan Manuel Vasquez, the current field director, but no action was reportedly taken.

Additionally, a reporting victim recounted an experience during his time at Bethel House when he was approximately 10 or 11 years old, stating that Marco Parra, a houseparent, withheld food from him for three days, including water.

Upon request by GRACE, Niños provided a background check report for Marco Parra's residency in Mexico. The background check report includes an official document from the Attorney General's Office of the State of Mexico, dated September 19, 2025. The report states that, after consulting their databases, no criminal records were found for Marco Parra.

Steve Ross confirmed to GRACE his knowledge of Marco Parra's past criminal record in the United States, which included gang involvement, a jail sentence, and deportation. He stated that background checks were conducted in Mexico but that these did not reveal the U.S. record. When asked why a U.S. background check was not performed, Ross explained,

"we believe in grace and transformation". Ross also acknowledged hearing that Parra had used physical discipline "years ago," but stated that the organization had stopped the practice of physical discipline around 2019 or 2020. In response to Parra using Christian arguments to justify the punishment, Ross said that in the past, his stance would have been to agree with the "spare the rod, spoil the child" philosophy, but his stance now is that physical punishment is no longer permissible.

## Juvenile Offendor-2

RV80 described to GRACE an incident in the 1990s involving an older juvenile boy (J2), whom RV80 estimates was around 16 at the time of the incident, while she was 10 or 11. At the time of the incident, RV80's parents were serving as temporary houseparents, awaiting the arrival of the permanent houseparents, Noe and Yolanda. J2 invited RV80 to the van outside the Bethel house, where he unzipped his pants and wanted her to touch him, and unbuttoned her bra and kissed her breasts. He asked if she wanted to do more, and she declined. RV80 felt scared and knew she didn't want to continue, and J2 told her to go straight to her room when she went back upstairs. RV80 cried in her bed, terrified that it would happen again. She continued to be fearful of J2 throughout her childhood at Ninos.

RV80 did not initially share what had happened with any adults. She later confided in a friend, Dulce, about the incident and her fear of J2. RV80 learned that Dulce and J2 were in a consensual relationship. Dulce subsequently told J2 what RV80 had disclosed to her. The houseparents, Noe and Yolanda, were aware that Dulce and J2 were not permitted to be alone together. They discovered the two talking, and it was through this discovery that the houseparents, and subsequently Steve Ross, learned about the misconduct J2 had committed against RV80.

Steve Ross later spoke to RV80 about the misconduct, and RV80 felt as though he was disappointed in her, although years later, he denied ever thinking it was her fault. RV80 also recalled Janet Ross expressing that she wished she had educated RV80 about abuse sooner but felt RV80 was too young to have had something like that happen to her. RV80 did not receive any counseling after these conversations.

While J2 remained in the home until he was 18, measures were taken to separate him from RV80. Following the disclosure, RV80's family was moved to a different, separate home on the property. They lived there as a family unit of five until moving into the Esperanza house when RV80 was approximately 12 or 13.

After J2 became older and moved to the Genesis house, RV80 learned that one of six sisters residing there became pregnant and delivered a baby in the bathroom of the home. RV80 did not know if the relationship between the girl and J2 was consensual. An older sibling of the girl took the baby to be adopted out.

## **Juvenile Offender-3, Juvenile Offender-4, & Juvenile Offender-5**

According to documentation obtained by GRACE from a former staff member, another staff member, witnessed Juvenile-3, Juvenile-4, and Juvenile-5 holding down AV53 and raping him in the boys' quarters. The staff member was responsible for doing the laundry and frequently entered the boys' quarters to collect laundry, which is how she witnessed the incident. The staff member reported this to two other staff members who reported the incident to David Hernandez and Steve Ross. According to one of the staff members who reported to David Hernandez and Steve Ross, they dismissed it, saying, "Boys will be boys," and moved Juvenile-5 to Esperanza House.

According to a current adult who was a minor resident at Ninos, Ricardo Peral left because he did not get help from the directors in removing Juvenile-5, who was a male minor resident allegedly sexually abusing younger children. According to the witness, Ninos leadership tried to prevent Juvenile-5 from sexually abusing children by moving him in with an older child who was supposed to watch him and report back to Ricardo Peral. When Ricardo Peral went to David Hernandez and Steve Ross to get Juvenile-5 removed, they reportedly blamed Ricardo Peral for not being able to handle the situation.

## **Juvenile Offender-6**

RV73 recounted a personal experience of attempted sexual misconduct by J6. According to RV73, this incident occurred at the San Vicente house when she was a child. The adults at the home had gone to a theme park, and RV73, along with approximately five other children, remained behind as they did not wish to go. RV73 and another young boy were bathing together in the babies' room, playing in the water. She does not recall the exact circumstances of how she became unclothed, but remembers being on the floor, naked and face down, when J6 was on top of her, also naked. RV73 stated that she began to cry because she knew this was not normal or pleasant. J6 reportedly called her a "crybaby" and left her alone. RV73 indicated that J6 was young, possibly under 18 years old or around that age, but she could not recall his exact age. She also mentioned that J6 was part of the San Vicente residential community but not an adult in charge.

## Juvenile Offender-7

GRACE interviewed a former resident of Niños de México (RV79) who reported experiencing sexual misconduct by another minor (J7) when RV79 was between nine and ten years of age. The incidents reportedly took place at Bethel House. According to RV79, J7 was an older student, approximately 14 or 15 years old, who offered RV79 protection from other boys with whom RV79 had conflicts. J7 also reportedly had toys, such as firecrackers, which he used to entice younger children.

The misconduct reportedly occurred within a play structure on the property. RV79 stated that in exchange for protection and access to toys, J7 made him perform oral sex and touch his penis with his hands. RV79 clarified that no penetration occurred during this incident. He recalled that this happened while the house parents at the time, Marco Parra and Nayeli Castañon, were in their room. RV79 noted it was a common understanding among the children that such opportunities for misconduct arose when house parents were in their rooms and not actively supervising the children.

RV79 also described a separate, second incident where J7 attempted another assault, but they were interrupted when a house parent, Marco Parra, saw them from his window and called out. J7 reportedly told RV79 to hide and remain silent before telling Marco Parra they were just playing. RV79 did not report either incident to any adults at the time. No one else witnessed the initial assault.

## Juvenile Offender-8

RV82 reported experiencing sexual misconduct by another student (J8) when RV82 was approximately 12 years old. This occurred at Genesis House while the children's normal rooms were under construction, and they were temporarily housed in the dormitories typically used for visiting American mission groups.

According to RV82, J8 would allow him to play games on his cell phone. In exchange, while RV82 was using the phone, J8 would get on top of him and perform thrusting motions. RV82 stated that these encounters sometimes included penetration. This reportedly happened on four to five separate occasions. RV82 never told any staff members about the abuse. However, he reported that on April 15, 2025, he received a video from J8 apologizing for the incidents.

## Additional Information Regarding Responses to Alleged Juvenile Offenders

GRACE obtained documentation and received witness accounts showing that Ninos sought to treat some alleged male Juvenile Offenders by administering injections of Depo-Provera. This information is detailed in a subsequent section of this report on Medicating Children and Adolescents.

W6 expressed that W1, a house parent in Casa Genesis, had concerns about the sexual activity of the boys in the home.<sup>644</sup> W6 noted that it was "kind of known in the organization" that W1 was concerned about the boys' sexual behavior, specifically oral sex and other sexual acts.<sup>645</sup> These behaviors reportedly occurred during movie nights, where boys would lie on the ground or couches, and engage in these acts with each other.<sup>646</sup> The ages of these boys were reported to be mostly middle school age.<sup>647</sup>

W1 felt that her concerns were not taken seriously by the leadership, specifically David Hernandez and Steve Ross.<sup>648</sup> W6 stated that W1 believed her reports of these incidents were dismissed or downplayed.<sup>649</sup> W6 explained that there was a "boys will be boys" rhetoric within the organization, which contributed to the lack of serious response to these concerns.<sup>650</sup> W6 further described a pattern where complaints or concerns from female employees were generally dismissed by leadership.<sup>651</sup> She personally witnessed David and Steve dismissing W1's concerns, often with eye-rolling, laughter, or labeling her as a "complainer."<sup>652</sup> This pattern of dismissal led W6 to believe that critical information was not being heard or addressed appropriately.<sup>653</sup> In response to these reports, W6 stated that the house parents attempted to implement some protocols, such as physically separating the boys during movie nights, preventing them from lying too close to each other, and

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<sup>644</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 8-10.

<sup>645</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 8-10.

<sup>646</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 8-10.

<sup>647</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 8-10.

<sup>648</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 8-10.

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<sup>652</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 8-10.

<sup>653</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 8-10.

restricting the use or sharing of blankets.<sup>654</sup> These measures were attempts to discourage the behavior and de-escalate the situation.<sup>655</sup>

GRACE also received concerns related to recent responses by Juan Manuel Vasquez, the current Field Director, to alleged misconduct by juvenile offenders. For instance, on an unspecified date in 2024, W20 reported an incident where a 14 year-old boy touched a 12-year-old boy in a sexual manner in the younger boy's bedroom.<sup>656</sup> W20 conveyed this information to Juan Manuel, whose response caused W20 concern.<sup>657</sup>

Juan Manuel reportedly dismissed the incident as "normal behavior."<sup>658</sup> He reportedly stated he would not report the incident, considering it not to be abuse.<sup>659</sup> According to W20, he further suggested measures such as installing motion sensors in the halls and having house parents check on children at night, which W20 considered insufficient and impractical.<sup>660</sup> W20 asserted that Juan Manuel's response minimized the severity of the incident, indicating a failure to protect the younger boy from potential harm.<sup>661</sup>

## Death of Jose Luis Canizales Jimenez

Concerns regarding the death of Jose Luis Canizales Jimenez in 1998 while under the care of Niños de México were initially received by GRACE through several channels during the course of this investigation.

A witness shared information with GRACE from two adults who were minor residents at Ninos in the 1990s. These former residents disclosed in a meeting with the witness that a boy died during a field trip led by Steve Ross. According to the witness, these former residents stated that Dr. Banta attended to the child for hours before he died and that no medical service was called or attended to him at the scene of the accident. The former residents also informed the witness that Steve Ross was arrested for a short time after this incident, and that both Steve Ross and Dr. Banta then reportedly left for the United States.

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<sup>654</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 8-10.

<sup>655</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 8-10.

<sup>656</sup> W20 Tr. at 5-10.

<sup>657</sup> W20 Tr. at 5-10.

<sup>658</sup> W20 Tr. at 5-10.

<sup>659</sup> W20 Tr. at 5-10.

<sup>660</sup> W20 Tr. at 5-10.

<sup>661</sup> W20 Tr. at 5-10.

According to a death certificate obtained by GRACE, Jose Luis Canizales Jimenez, born on January 1, 1988, died on August 27, 1998, at 2:00 AM, in Texcoco, Mexico. The listed cause of death was "asphyxia from incomplete submersion in a subject with multiple contusions on the exocranial scalp, reported dead by his tutor from a shelter home." Jose Luis was reportedly a resident of Bethel House, one of four homes operated by Niños de México at the time. Approximately 18 children resided in the home at the time. Steve and Janet Ross were the house parents, or tutors, of Esperanza House at the time.

GRACE did not receive any information about this death from Niños de México during the course of its investigation prior to learning about it from witnesses. Steve Ross also did not share any information about the incident with GRACE investigators during his first interview, but provided an account during a subsequent interview when asked about the incident.

Steve Ross, who was a house parent of Esperanza House at the time, told GRACE he was the sole adult on a mountain outing with approximately eight boys. Some boys ran ahead of the group, and Jose Luis was discovered at the bottom of an 8-to-10-foot ravine, lying in approximately four to six inches of water. He was found by other boys, who may have turned him over or lifted his head from the water before Steve Ross arrived. Steve Ross estimated he had been separated from Jose Luis for about five minutes.

The boy was conscious but not fully alert when Steve Ross reached him. Steve Ross carried him from the ravine to the campsite, a walk of about 15 minutes. At the camp, they laid the boy under a blanket and lit a fire to warm him up, as he was shivering and said he was cold. They remained at the campsite for approximately 30 minutes, a decision Steve Ross now believes was "probably a mistake." Steve Ross stated he got beside the boy to warm him but denied reports that he had disrobed to do so. He said it was possible he removed the boy's wet clothes.<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>662</sup> GRACE was unable to authenticate screenshots of messages purportedly from a former resident to a former staff member, who reported that Jose Luis Canizalez Jimenez died while camping with Steve Ross. The former resident allegedly stated the boy "mysteriously fell into the mud and it got in his lungs." After extracting the boy and removing his clothes, Steve Ross reportedly removed his own clothes to "warm the body." The boy was then transported to Texcoco, where he died. This former resident also claimed that during the investigation by local law enforcement, Steve Ross was found guilty of sexual assault, as the autopsy indicated a recent assault, leading to his incarceration for approximately 20 days. The resident further alleged that they were asked to state that it was one of the boys who gave him heat "and not the adult in order to not cause problems for the institution." The former resident explicitly identified Steve Ross as the adult involved and noted that after the boy's death, Steve Ross "stopped tutoring for the house of hope and went to the United States, and after a few years he returned to become the director of Niños de México." GRACE also received written messages from an anonymous individual, sent in or about June 2025, detailing that the child fell into a river. This individual stated

When the boy's condition did not improve, Steve Ross drove him and the other children down the mountain. After dropping off some of the children at their house, he took Jose Luis to a clinic to be seen by Dr. Larry Banta, a psychiatrist with general practice experience. Jose Luis passed away at the clinic several hours later. Steve Ross could not recall specific life-saving measures Dr. Banta performed.

Steve Ross was questioned by authorities following the death. He stated the authorities suspected he had sexually abused the child and killed him to prevent him from talking, a theory that he recalls involved putting the boy's head in a bucket of water. Steve Ross denied ever abusing Jose Luis. He was subjected to a forensic medical exam, which included having his clothes removed and a swab taken from his penis. He stated that Ninos' attorney, Manuel Torres, was present at the facility but not during the exam or questioning. Steve Ross told GRACE he was not arrested and does not believe any money was paid for his release. He had little memory of the specific questions asked by police, attributing the memory loss to his distraught mental state at the time. In his interviews with GRACE, Steve Ross frequently claimed he could not recall certain details. When asked about his memory limitations, Ross described himself as a "big picture" person who does not always recall specific details.<sup>663</sup>

Dr. Larry Banta seemingly referenced this incident in a book he authored in 2015 titled *Effective Orphan Care Ministry : Rock Solid Kids to Rock Solid Adults*. The following is an excerpt from the book:

José Luis was a seven-year-old child when brought by relatives to the orphanage in Mexico City, as his parents no longer were able to care for him. He initially adjusted fairly well but then started having episodes in which he was not coherent, only repeating, "I have to go now." On one occasion, he was let go and allowed to get up. He walked right out of the facility where a woman was waiting to take him, having presumably been summoned by the demons herself. It was not known who she was; she just came out of an alley intent on taking Jose Luis from me. I had to wrestle him away from her; she was very strong and had the same one-hundred-mile stare the child had. Once he was brought back, we prayed with him and repeatedly commanded the evil spirits to leave. It was noted he had a Y-shaped scar on his head that

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they pulled the child out and administered first aid, and the child began to breathe. According to this anonymous individual, Steve Ross indicated the child was fine, but the anonymous individual insisted the child needed to go to a hospital. However, the child was reportedly taken to the house instead of a hospital.

<sup>663</sup> Steve Ross Tr. 2 at 40.

he stated was from a beating he suffered at the hand of his father or mother, possibly from an iron or a belt. The story kept changing. One day, he came on his own to the clinic asking to have his Y removed. He recalled having been branded by his parents in a special ceremony where there were candles and everyone was in black robes. With several people assigned to pray on the outside of the clinic, the Y was carefully removed and the wound sutured. He felt much more freedom after that and grew rapidly in his faith. One day while camping in the forest with his group home, some unseen force threw him off a cliff into standing water while he was hiking with the others. He was OK for a while but then had breathing problems. By the time he was brought to the clinic, his condition was very serious. While in the process of preparing to take him to the hospital, he passed away. Resuscitation efforts were in vain. This had an unexpected outcome, as the spirits seemed to have a stronghold on him. His parents showed up about a year later to take him back—it was presumed he had been selected to be a satanic priest. Instead, God had victory and took the boy home. His peers always called him "Champion," which was how he was remembered during his memorial service.<sup>664</sup>

According to Dr. Banta, they took the child to the clinic, presumably the Ninos de Mexico medical clinic at Bethel House in Texcoco. The Texcoco location is consistent with the location of death listed on the death certificate.

In his interview with GRACE, Dr. Banta described Jose Luis as a "troubled" child who had come from a family allegedly involved in "cult activity" and who personally struggled with "spiritual kind of things." He recalled a distinct "Y-shaped scar" on the boy's head, which Jose Luis claimed was from a branding ceremony dedicating him to be a "satanic priest." At the boy's request, Dr. Banta had surgically removed this scar.

On the day of the incident, Dr. Banta was notified by house parent Steve Ross that Jose Luis was being brought to the clinic after falling into some water during a hike. Upon arrival, Dr. Banta observed that Jose Luis was "conscious but not alert," appeared "drowsy," and "confused." A physical examination revealed what sounded like a significant amount of fluid in his lungs.

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<sup>664</sup> Banta, Larry E. Effective Orphan Care Ministry : Rock Solid Kids to Rock Solid Adults. North Charleston, South Carolina, Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015. Pp 128-129.

According to Dr. Banta, the child's condition deteriorated "very rapid[ly]," and he "suddenly... stopped breathing" before he could be transported to a hospital. Dr. Banta, his wife, and his son performed CPR until a Red Cross ambulance arrived, at which point Jose Luis was pronounced deceased. Dr. Banta stated his belief that the cause of death was likely secondary drowning, also known as a "parking lot drowning."

In the aftermath, Dr. Banta recalled being advised by the US Embassy to be ready to leave the country immediately as he would likely be arrested for murder, but that after a police investigation, he was told he "did a good job." Dr. Banta stated that he was not aware of an autopsy being performed, nor was he aware of any findings of sexual assault on Jose Luis or a sexual assault examination being conducted on Steve Ross. When informed of these details, he stated, "This is all news to me." He also denied any knowledge of anyone laying naked with Jose Luis in an attempt to transfer body heat.

Terry Stine was the executive director at the time these incidents transpired. In his interview with GRACE, Terry Stine described Jose Luis Jimenez as a young boy who had been deeply traumatized before arriving at Ninos de Mexico. Stine stated the boy's mother was involved in Satan worship and that a "Satanic priest" had inscribed the letter 'A' into the back of his skull with a knife. He also noted that an examination upon Jose Luis's arrival at Ninos revealed he had pre-existing scars on his rectum from being previously violated, a fact that was recorded in his file.

According to Terry Stine, the incident occurred during a camping and rock-climbing trip led by Steve Ross. According to Terry Stine's account:

- Jose Luis fell down a hill, struck his head, and landed in water, being knocked unconscious for about a minute.
- He was pulled from the water, and initially, he seemed fine as the group had supper around a campfire.
- Subsequently, he began to exhibit symptoms including dizziness and problems with his balance.
- Recognizing a problem, Steve Ross immediately packed up the group and transported Jose Luis to the Ninos medical clinic to be seen by Dr. Larry Banta. Ross called Stine via cell phone while en route to inform him of the accident.

According to Terry Stine, Jose Luis was treated by Dr. Banta at the Ninos clinic for the remainder of the night. Stine asserted that the child died at the clinic, which he claimed was better equipped and significantly cleaner than the local municipal hospital.

An autopsy was performed, and the official findings according to Terry Stine were heart failure resulting from the aspiration of dirty water into his lungs, which diluted his blood. Stine referred to this phenomenon as "parking lot syndrome." GRACE did not receive any official investigative findings or medical records outside of the death certificate.

Stine described the ensuing investigation by Mexican authorities as "very thorough" and "very involved." According to Stine, the investigation operated under Mexican law, which he said is based on the Napoleonic Code, meaning Steve Ross was considered guilty until proven innocent. Stine said he was required to be present for the entire investigative hearing before the judge. He explained this was due to a legal authority or "power" he held as the representative of Ninos, which obligated his presence as a witness for the defense, though he was not permitted to speak. Steve Ross was interrogated by police for what Stine recalled as an entire day. All of the boys on the trip were also individually and "harshly" questioned by the prosecutor in a manner that Stine said traumatized them. According to Stine, the investigation, which included witness testimony and the autopsy, concluded that Jose Luis's death was an accident. Terry Stine told GRACE that Steve Ross was officially declared "innocent of anything" by the judge and prosecuting attorney.

Stine recalled that following the investigation, the children who were on the trip received individual counseling from Dr. Banta and his wife to address the trauma from the event and the subsequent "grilling" by the investigator. Stine stated that no changes were made to Ninos' policies or protocols as a result of the death, as he considered it an accident that could not have been prevented. He did not recall any contact with Jose Luis's biological family regarding his death.

## Knowledge and Response to Death of Jose Luis Canizales Jimenez

The accounts concerning the death of Jose Luis Canizales Jimenez present a complex narrative with both consistencies and inconsistencies, requiring a careful assessment and additional investigation.

There is a consistent report across multiple sources that Jose Luis Canizales Jimenez died during a field trip or camping trip led by Steve Ross. The former resident's account, the anonymous individual's messages, and the witness's report all corroborate the central event of the child's death in Steve Ross's care. The official death certificate provides the most reliable factual basis for Jose Luis's death, confirming "asphyxia from incomplete submersion" and "multiple contusions to the scalp." The presence of these injuries points strongly to a traumatic event.

However, significant inconsistencies emerge regarding the immediate circumstances of the death and the subsequent medical response. The former resident stated the boy "mysteriously fell into the mud and it got in his lungs," while the anonymous individual claimed the child "fell into a river." While both describe an immersion incident, the specific medium (mud vs. river) differs. Furthermore, the former resident's account of Steve Ross removing his clothes to "warm the body" and the boy being transported to Texcoco where he died contrasts with the anonymous individual's report that Steve Ross said the child was fine after initial first aid, but the anonymous individual insisted on a hospital visit, and the child was instead taken to the house. The witness's account, citing two former residents, states that Dr. Banta attended to the child for hours before he died and that no medical service was called or attended to him at the scene. This suggests a lack of immediate professional medical intervention at the site of the incident, which contradicts the idea of a prompt transport to Texcoco for medical care.

Steve Ross's admitted "30-minute mistake" in delaying transport after pulling Jose from the ravine is a significant concern. In cases of aspiration or head trauma, immediate medical attention is crucial. This delay, coupled with the decision to take Jose to the on-site clinic rather than a full hospital, raises serious questions about the judgment of Niños leadership in a critical situation. Terry Stine's assertion that the Niños clinic was "better equipped and significantly cleaner" than a municipal hospital is a questionable claim when a child is critically injured.

Steve Ross's description of Jose Luis being found in a ravine with water, his efforts to move him, and the eventual transport to a clinic aligns with some basic facts. His recollection of the death certificate's cause of death is also consistent with the document itself. While Ross attributes memory loss to distress, this is a common defense mechanism and makes it difficult to fully trust the completeness of his narrative. His admitted "mistake" of delaying transport for 30 minutes, if truly acknowledged, suggests a degree of self-awareness regarding a poor decision. However, the subsequent lack of policy changes, as stated by Terry Stine, undercuts this self-awareness as leading to institutional improvement.

Stine's assertion that the death was due to "heart failure resulting from the aspiration of dirty water... which diluted his blood" and "parking lot syndrome" sounds like a medical interpretation possibly designed to be less accusatory than "asphyxia by incomplete submersion." His statement that "no changes were made to Niños' policies or

protocols" because it was an "accident that could not have been prevented" demonstrates a lack of accountability and learning from the event, which significantly impacts the credibility of his leadership's response.

Terry Stine's statement that "no changes were made to Niños' policies or protocols as a result of the death" is a major red flag. Regardless of the exact cause, a child died under the institution's care, and an admitted delay in transport occurred. A responsible institution would conduct a thorough review and implement preventative measures to ensure such a tragedy could not be repeated. This lack of response suggests a prioritization of image and minimizing culpability over child safety.

Dr. Banta's explanation of Jose Luis being "thrown off a cliff into standing water by some unseen force" and the spiritual narrative of "demons," "evil spirits," and a "satanic priest" is highly subjective, non-factual, and borders on the fantastical. This spiritual framing detracts significantly from the account's objective credibility as a medical or factual narrative. It may be an attempt to explain the inexplicable or to attribute the cause to non-human factors, thereby absolving human responsibility. The parents reportedly showing up a year later for him to be a "satanic priest" further entrenches this supernatural interpretation.

Terry Stine's detailed medical explanation ("heart failure resulting from the aspiration of dirty water... which diluted his blood") and Banta's "unseen force" narrative appear to be attempts to reframe the official death certificate findings, possibly to soften culpability or spiritualize the event.

Both Stine and Banta's accounts emphasize Jose Luis's history of significant trauma, including alleged satanic worship, branding, and prior abuse (Stine mentions pre-existing rectal scars). While these details could be used to deflect blame, they also highlight Jose Luis's extreme vulnerability. A responsible care institution should have robust systems for identifying, addressing, and protecting highly traumatized children. The incident occurring during a camping trip, which can be disorienting for traumatized individuals, also raises questions about risk assessment and appropriate supervision for vulnerable children in such settings. Dr. Banta's spiritual interpretation of Jose Luis's issues and the "unseen force" leading to his fall, while possibly reflective of deeply held beliefs, could also serve to obscure potential human culpability or systemic failures within the institution by attributing the tragedy to supernatural forces.

The knowledge and response to this incident, as described in the various accounts, raise serious concerns when viewed through the lens of trauma-informed principles and best practices.

The immediate response to Jose Luis Canizales Jimenez's immersion, as described by the anonymous individual, where Steve Ross reportedly dismissed the need for a hospital visit and took the child to the house instead, directly contradicts the principle of ensuring immediate safety. A trauma-informed approach prioritizes the physical and emotional safety of individuals, especially children in distress. Delaying professional medical care in a life-threatening situation demonstrates a severe failure in upholding this principle.

The alleged request to say that "a boy who gave him heat and not the adult in order to not cause problems for the institution" directly undermines trustworthiness and transparency. This suggests an attempt to manipulate narratives and conceal information, which is antithetical to a trauma-informed environment where honesty and open communication are paramount. Such actions can further traumatize victims and witnesses by creating an atmosphere of secrecy and distrust.

The alleged pressure on individuals to provide a false account to protect the institution also violates the principle of empowerment, voice, and choice. In a trauma-informed setting, individuals should feel safe and supported to share their experiences truthfully without fear of retaliation or coercion. The reported actions suggest a prioritization of institutional reputation over the well-being and truth-telling of those involved. The allegation of being "asked to say that it was 'a boy who gave him heat and not the adult'" suggests institutional pressure to alter testimony, which is a serious claim of cover-up that, if true, undermines the integrity of any official investigation at the time.

The reported departure of Steve Ross to the United States after the incident and his subsequent return years later to become the director of Niños de México also warrants scrutiny. This raises questions about accountability and whether a thorough, transparent investigation and appropriate consequences were implemented at the time, or if the organization's response allowed for a return to leadership despite serious allegations.

In conclusion, while the various accounts consistently point to the tragic death of Jose Luis Canizales Jimenez under Ninos' care, the discrepancies in the details surrounding the incident and the subsequent alleged attempts to control the narrative are deeply

concerning. The reported responses fall short of trauma-informed best practices and biblical principles, suggesting a potential prioritization of institutional protection over the safety and well-being of the children and the pursuit of truth and justice.

## Findings and Analysis of Niños Policies, Procedures, Safeguarding Training, Environment, and Culture

This section details the findings and analysis of Niños de México's policies, procedures, safeguarding training, environment, and culture. These elements are evaluated against established child protection best practices, Scriptural principles, and the core principles of trauma-informed care, as defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The investigation reveals a profound and systemic breakdown across all these areas, collectively creating an environment of risk that actively compromised the safety and well-being of the children under Niños' care.

Safety, in its multifaceted forms—physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual—is paramount. While physical safety encompasses freedom from injury, assault, and bodily harm, emotional, psychological, and spiritual safety are equally critical. These can be eroded by dismissive attitudes, cultural and gender biases, unexpected changes, insecurity, unclear boundaries, and the misuse of Scripture or spiritual authority to justify inappropriate behavior or silence dissent. The absence of this foundational principle of trauma-informed practice inevitably undermines the effectiveness of all other principles. Scripture consistently underscores the importance of safety, as evidenced by passages such as Ezra 8:21-23, Psalm 82:3-4, Proverbs 22:3, Mark 10:14, Titus 1:7, and Deuteronomy 24:6, all of which highlight God's concern for protecting the vulnerable.

Central to safety is trustworthiness and transparency, which extend beyond mere truth-telling to encompass how information is shared, framed, and delivered, as well as the perceived and actual motivations behind actions. Trust is built through consistent follow-through and a clear demonstration that trauma-informed practice is a guiding force, not merely a slogan. A truly trustworthy and transparent culture ensures that organizational operations and decisions are conducted with integrity, fostering trust among residents, staff, and all stakeholders. Scriptural themes emphasize this, with calls for Christian leaders to walk in truth (3 John 1:3), believe and love truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12), put off falsehood, and speak truth in love (Ephesians 4:25, 4:32). God delights in trustworthiness (Proverbs 12:22) and responds to the prayers of those free from deceitful

speech (1 Peter 3:10-12), demanding that leadership embody truth-telling and transparency at its core.

Research consistently demonstrates that supportive relationships are a significant factor in fostering resilience after trauma. Trauma-informed practice actively seeks to strengthen these relationships and enhance peer support by recognizing that support can originate from various connections, including family, friends, faith communities, and colleagues. Strategies involve helping individuals identify supportive relationships, develop skills to access support without over-dependence, and empower their network to provide necessary assistance. Biblical principles resonate with this, illustrating how peers can offer support during adversity (Proverbs 17:17), refine one another (Proverbs 27:17), bear burdens (Galatians 6:2), and encourage and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Collaboration and mutuality are fundamental to trauma-informed care, reflecting a commitment to partnership and the equitable distribution of power within an organization, particularly between staff and those they serve. This principle recognizes that healing is fostered through meaningful relationships and shared decision-making. In the context of implementing trauma-informed practices, collaboration is most critically demonstrated by the organization's partnership with survivors to determine the path forward. Scriptural principles also emphasize collaboration and mutuality, highlighting the safety found in a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14) and the strength of unity, where two are better than one, and a cord of three strands is not easily broken (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). The Church itself is depicted as a body with diverse members, all working together to support and build one another in love (Romans 12:4-6; Ephesians 4:16).

Trauma is inherently disempowering, stripping individuals of control over their lives, with its effects often persisting long after the traumatic event. This is particularly true for children and vulnerable individuals, who frequently have little agency in the responses to their trauma. Unfortunately, formal and informal support systems can inadvertently perpetuate this disempowerment, especially within Christian communities when survivors are marginalized, silenced, or pressured to accept actions they disagree with. Trauma permeates all levels of society, and trauma-informed practice is dedicated to restoring power to those from whom it has been taken. In Christian faith communities, this is especially vital, as all power ultimately belongs to God. Leaders, as stewards of this divine power, are called to emulate Jesus, who consistently used His power to uplift the hurting, protect the vulnerable, and strengthen the weak, willingly setting aside His own power for the sake of others.

Finally, the enduring impact of trauma often stems from historical, cultural, and gender factors, where specific groups are knowingly or unknowingly targeted by potentially traumatic actions. This includes overt forms like slavery and genocide, as well as more subtle manifestations such as unconscious bias, systemic practices, stereotypes, and issues of representation, all of which can contribute to a collective traumatic experience. These factors are increasingly recognized as an overarching theme within trauma-informed practice, foundational to all its elements. Scriptural narratives consistently address these themes, with Leviticus 19:33-34 instructing equitable treatment of sojourners, Jesus embodying care for the historically oppressed (Luke 4:18-21), and the Apostle Paul striving to be all things to all people (1 Corinthians 9:22).

## Policy, Procedures, and Safeguarding Training

This review analyzes two primary policy documents from Ninos: the April 2024 "Política de Protección Institucional" (2024 Protection Policy) and the November 2022 "Institutional Protection Policy" (2022 Protection Policy), an English translation of a previous version provided to GRACE by Ninos. These policies aim to create a safe environment for children and collaborators by outlining a code of conduct, hiring processes, and incident response mechanisms.

The policies demonstrate several strengths. They establish clear prohibitions against harmful behaviors, including inappropriate physical contact and corporal punishment (2024 Protection Policy, p. 8-12; 2022 Protection Policy, p. 9-12), and provide avenues for disclosure through the establishment of a "Safeguard" role and confidential suggestion boxes (2024 Protection Policy, p. 6, 18; 2022 Protection Policy, p. 9, 15). Furthermore, the policies show an intent to properly vet personnel by mandating a multi-step hiring process with interviews and psychological testing (2024 Protection Policy, p. 15-16; 2022 Protection Policy, p. 14). They also provide a basic procedural framework by categorizing incidents and outlining initial response steps (2024 Protection Policy, p. 19; 2022 Protection Policy, p. 15) and ground themselves in an external legal foundation by acknowledging Mexican laws that protect children (2024 Protection Policy, p. 5; 2022 Protection Policy, p. 8).

Despite these strengths, there are significant high-level gaps and risks. Most critically, the policies lack a mandate for immediate external reporting of suspected criminal abuse to law enforcement, instead directing all reports internally, which creates a risk of concealment and violates the principle of Trustworthiness & Transparency. The

response protocols are not survivor-centered, focusing on internal management rather than trauma-informed care for the abused child, a failure of the Safety principle. The documents are also undermined by vague and discretionary language that affords excessive discretion to internal actors, another violation of Trustworthiness & Transparency. Finally, the policies feature insufficient training requirements (violating Safety) and fail to adequately address the inherent power imbalances between staff and children, which contravenes the principle of Empowerment, Voice & Choice.

The 2024 Protection Policy states its purpose is to "achieve a safe environment for children, adolescents, and collaborators, guaranteeing the fulfillment of their Human Rights" (2024 Protection Policy, p. 6). It assigns primary responsibility to the "Safeguard of Institutional Protection," who is "in charge of following up on the application of the Protection Policy," while also noting that "Each collaborator... has the responsibility to point out potential dangers and react immediately" (2024 Protection Policy, p. 6). The primary procedure for reporting requires that "in case of suspicion of possible non-compliance with the Code of Conduct, warnings or complaints must be made through the enabled channels (Safeguard) who will receive any report... and will channel it to the corresponding area for its resolution" (2024 Protection Policy, p. 15). Training requirements are described broadly, stating that "Continuous training will be maintained for staff through courses or workshops" (2024 Protection Policy, p. 16). For accountability, the policy identifies tools such as "Complaint boxes... Report form from children to collaborators... [and a] Behavioral crisis form" (2024 Protection Policy, p. 18) and mandates that "Within a maximum period of 24 hours, an initial evaluation of the case must be carried out" (2024 Protection Policy, p. 19).

Similarly, the 2022 Protection Policy shares the same purpose to "Achieve a safe environment for girls, boys, and adolescents and collaborators" (2022 Protection Policy, p. 8). It outlines identical roles and responsibilities for the "Institutional Protection Safeguard" and for each collaborator (2022 Protection Policy, p. 8-9). The procedures and protocols for reporting non-compliance are also the same, funneling all reports through the Safeguard (2022 Protection Policy, p. 13-14). Training requirements are described in similarly general terms of maintaining "Continuous training" (2022 Protection Policy, p. 14). For monitoring and accountability, the policy notes "an institutionalized procedure to process complaints" and requires the same "initial evaluation of the case" within 24 hours (2022 Protection Policy, p. 15). Neither document provides key definitions for terms like abuse or consent, nor do they specify implementation resources or timelines.

## Safety Concerns Regarding Forms of Punishment

Regarding the principle of Safety, the policies explicitly support it by prohibiting physical harm, stating staff must "Never hit them or generate any type of physical, verbal or emotional harm" (2024 Protection Policy, p. 11). However, they only partially address safety in discipline, as a rule prohibiting discipline in private rooms still allows its use in view of cameras, which merely changes the location of potentially harmful practices (2024 Protection Policy, p. 11). The policy does not clarify what forms of discipline are appropriate. The policies fail to address psychological safety or trauma-informed de-escalation. A best-practice approach would frame safety more comprehensively, ensuring all persons experience an environment of safety and justice, free from any form of abuse. Justice, in this context, refers to both the appropriate redress and support for children who have experienced mistreatment, and the fair and consistent application of consequences for rule-breaking or misbehavior. This concept of justice is notably absent from the Ninos policies.

According to W11, Ninos had a policy as recent as approximately 2022 that permitted corporal punishment of the children as long as the punishment takes place in view of a camera.<sup>665</sup> According to W11, Ninos has since revised the policy to prohibit corporal punishment, presumably in reference to a 2024 version which GRACE received and reviewed, but house parents still engage in this type of punishment and several children have reported being punished in this way and that the house parents tell them it is for their good and in accordance with Christian discipline.<sup>666</sup> This appears to be incongruent with Mexican law, which prohibits corporal punishment in alternative care settings since 2014: Corporal punishment is unlawful in institutional forms of care under article 105 of the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents 2014, which establishes the obligations of "directors and staff of health, social assistance, academic, sports, religious or other institutions" to "refrain from any form of violence, abuse, prejudice, aggression, damage, abuse, harassment and exploitation" and of "those who have dealings with children and adolescents to refrain from any violence against them, including corporal punishment."

W11, along with other staff, told GRACE about attempts they have made to change the approach Ninos has taken to punishment and the use of corporal punishment. W11 told GRACE:

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<sup>665</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 10.

<sup>666</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 9-10.

...as professionals in the area we know that this is not correct and that it is not a form of discipline that can be exercised with these children. So we have exposed it on several occasions and there is no support. And well, obviously also contemplating some other things that I mentioned, such as the fact that tutors lie to say that children are gluttonous and want to medicate them, or that they will be punished with food, or that they make comments that damage their emotional part, their self-esteem.

So we have reported all this to our bosses and it is documented by our area, but there is no support from them to make decisions to protect the children. I know that maybe they do not take it as something serious because it is not physical or sexual violence, but it is also violence, to say an insult or manipulate them through words to exert certain punishments.<sup>667</sup>

## Safety Concerns Regarding the Security Camera System

Niños de México implemented a security camera system, reportedly in "every home in public areas," to enhance resident safety. The application used for monitoring these cameras was accessible on the cell phones of several individuals, allowing them to view, record, and download footage without additional supervision.

However, significant concerns regarding the system's reliability and effectiveness have been raised. According to a witness, there were "blind spots" that children and adults were aware of, creating areas where activities could occur unrecorded and potentially facilitating misconduct. Furthermore, footage was reported to go missing, raising questions about the system's integrity and suggesting potential tampering or technical issues that could lead to the disappearance of evidence.

A witness recounted two instances where requests to review footage related to incidents were met with explanations of malfunction or unavailability. In one case, concerning an employee potentially striking a child, the witness was told the employee did not strike the child but was never shown the footage. In another incident involving a child attempting to break into the witness's apartment, the witness was informed that the camera angle did not capture the event, leading to doubts about the cameras' functionality.

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<sup>667</sup> W11 Tr. 2 at 12.

Concerns were also expressed about the placement and angles of some cameras, with one in a girls' room at Agape House reportedly facing the bathroom instead of the sleeping and play areas.

Another witness, who worked at Niños in the area of child protection, gained access to the cameras in July 2022 to review an incident of a girl running away. During this review, the witness discovered a security camera inside a girls' bedroom that was directed to show the inside of the bathroom and a large portion of the bedroom where girls changed clothes. When questioned by the witness, Steve Ross stated they forgot to remove it when the room was converted from an office to a bedroom. The house parent, however, reportedly stated she had asked directors to keep it for monitoring the younger girls. The witness expressed concern about the possibility of recordings with intimate images being downloaded, as there was no control over who accessed the footage. According to the witness, individuals known to have accessed the cameras at the time included Steve Ross, David Hernández, Luis Carmona, Alejandro Hernández, Verónica de la Riva, and houseparents Jonathan and Lucila Tacache.

According to staff accounts, cameras were primarily for security, monitoring situations like falls or missing items, and external security against intruders. The multidisciplinary team, including institutional safeguarding and legal personnel, were primarily responsible for reviewing footage, with other departments and directors also having access. Each house parent could access their specific house's feed but not others. The camera in the girls' room, initially left due to its prior use as an office, was ultimately removed for the girls' protection.

New cameras, alarm systems, and motion sensors have reportedly been installed, and monitoring staff has been increased. According to staff, cameras were intentionally not placed in bedrooms or bathrooms to ensure privacy and were located in social areas like kitchens, dining areas, patios, playrooms, and hallways.

An analysis of Niños de México's security camera system reveals significant deviations from best practices and trauma-informed care principles. The presence of "blind spots" and "missing footage" directly contradicted the fundamental principle of a robust security system, which is to provide comprehensive and reliable surveillance. This created vulnerabilities that could be exploited for misconduct and hindered accountability. Furthermore, there was inadequate access control and oversight, as multiple individuals could view, record, and download footage without supervision, and there was a lack of

control over who reviewed footage and when. This represented a severe lapse in security protocols, greatly increasing the risk of misuse of sensitive information and potential privacy violations.

The most concerning aspect was the inappropriate camera placement, with a confirmed camera directed at a girls' bathroom and bedroom. Regardless of its initial purpose, this was a critical breach of privacy and a violation of child safeguarding standards. While an explanation of a forgotten removal was provided, its retention for "a few months" and a caretaker's request for its retention for "more constant monitoring" highlighted a profound disregard for the children's right to privacy and dignity.

Additionally, there was insufficient transparency and accountability, as requests for footage were denied or met with vague explanations, and there was an alleged lack of control over who accessed recordings. This undermined trust and prevented proper investigation of incidents. Lastly, inconsistent policies and practices were evident through conflicting accounts regarding camera placement, suggesting a lack of clear communication and enforcement.

From a trauma-informed care perspective, the issues with the camera system, particularly the inappropriate placement and lack of control over footage, directly violated the core principles of safety and trustworthiness. Children in a care setting, especially those who may have experienced prior trauma, need to feel physically and psychologically safe, and a compromised and intrusive camera system can re-traumatize them by eroding their sense of security and privacy. The potential for re-traumatization is a deeply disturbing concern, particularly the possibility of "recordings downloaded with intimate images of the girls," which would represent an extreme risk of further exploitation and catastrophic failure of care.

The top-down implementation of the camera system and the reported dismissiveness towards concerns indicated an absence of collaboration and mutuality. A trauma-informed approach would involve seeking input from those most affected by the system and working collaboratively to ensure it meets their needs for safety and privacy.

Finally, the cumulative effect of these issues pointed to a systemic disregard for robust child protection, creating an environment where the potential for harm was elevated, and the organization's ability to prevent and respond to abuse was severely hampered. Despite the stated intent of enhancing safety, the reported deficiencies in the

security camera system's implementation, oversight, and adherence to privacy standards at Niños de México demonstrate a significant failure to uphold safety best practices and the principles of trauma-informed care. The concerns raised by witnesses underscore a critical need for a complete overhaul of the security camera system and its associated protocols to ensure the genuine safety, privacy, and well-being of the children.

## Digital Extortion and Online Safety Concerns

The investigation uncovered serious concerns regarding digital extortion and the inadequate management of online device and social media use among minors at Niños de México, highlighting a significant failure in safeguarding children in the digital realm.

A 2021 report prepared by JAPEM highlighted that the children at Bethel House have access to tablets for at least three hours and can use social media. Behavioral issues were addressed through warnings, with repeated incidents resulting in the removal of television or tablet privileges.

Reports from witnesses received by GRACE indicated that minor girls at Niños were using social media and mobile devices without adequate supervision, leading to a case in 2020 where a minor was extorted by an online offender. This individual shared sexualized images of the minor, demonstrating the severe risks associated with unmonitored online access. A former staff member corroborated this, recounting an incident involving a 12 to 13-year-old girl whose photo in her underwear, taken in her room, was circulated on social media. The girl reported that a person she added on Facebook, believing him to be a friend, began harassing her and demanding more photos, threatening to leak the existing photo if she did not comply.

A witness who worked at Niños from 2021-2022 filed a report with the Public Prosecutor's Office on or around December 16, 2022. A section of that report explicitly addressed the extortion attempt, stating: "The Institution has a dynamic of using mobile devices without close supervision which has given rise to risky events mainly in girls' homes where a case of extortion for sharing sexual content of one of the girls has already been reported."

The problem of unsupervised online activity was exacerbated by a lack of oversight. Leaders, including Steve Ross, were reportedly aware of minors' social media accounts, as indicated by their presence on the friends lists of these accounts. This suggests a failure to

intervene or implement protective measures despite knowledge of the children's online presence.

Further contributing to the risk was the inadequate screening of employees, as detailed in another section of this report. The hiring of individuals without proper training or qualifications, and the reported pressure on psychologists to deem unqualified candidates viable, created an environment where staff may not have been equipped to recognize or respond to the complexities of online safety and digital threats. The lack of education about sexuality among the children, as highlighted elsewhere in the report, also left them vulnerable and unprepared to navigate the challenges of online interactions and potential exploitation.

Concerns about the security camera system, including "blind spots" and "missing footage," also indirectly contribute to the issue of digital safety. If physical surveillance is compromised, it creates an environment where online misconduct might go unnoticed or unreported, further hindering accountability.

The documented instances of digital extortion and unsupervised online activity at Niños de México reveal a profound failure to adhere to safety best practices and the principles of trauma-informed care.

From a safety best practices perspective, the institution clearly failed to implement adequate digital safeguarding policies. GRACE was not provided any policies in place at the time of this incident related to online safety. Allowing minors unmonitored access to social media and mobile devices, especially in a care setting for vulnerable children, is a critical breach of responsibility. Best practices dictate strict guidelines for internet usage, including supervised access, educational programs on online safety, and clear protocols for reporting and responding to cyberbullying, harassment, and exploitation. The reported awareness of leaders regarding minors' social media accounts, without apparent intervention, further underscores a significant lapse in proactive protection. The lack of a robust vetting process for staff, as noted in other sections, also means that those responsible for supervising children may not have possessed the necessary skills or awareness to manage digital risks effectively.

Through the lens of trauma-informed care, these failures are particularly egregious. The experience of digital extortion and the sharing of sexualized images are deeply traumatizing events that can have severe and lasting psychological impacts on children. For

children who may have already experienced trauma, such incidents can exacerbate existing wounds, erode their sense of safety and trust, and lead to feelings of shame, isolation, and powerlessness. A trauma-informed approach would prioritize creating an environment of physical and psychological safety, which extends to the digital space. This includes not only protecting children from harm but also empowering them with knowledge and skills to navigate online environments safely. The reported lack of comprehensive sexuality education further compounds this issue, leaving children ill-equipped to understand and protect themselves from online predators or inappropriate content. The institution's apparent failure to adequately address these concerns, and the reported culture of discouraging whistleblowers, directly undermines the trauma-informed principles of trustworthiness and transparency, as well as empowerment, voice, and choice. Children need to feel safe to report incidents without fear of blame or reprisal, and the institution must demonstrate a transparent and proactive commitment to their protection. The systemic issues with missing documentation, including camera footage, also contribute to a lack of accountability, making it harder to investigate and address incidents of digital harm, thereby failing to provide a sense of safety and predictability for the children.

The 2022 safety policy establishes a highly structured and compliance-focused framework for technology use by adolescents and oversight by caregivers. For adolescents, access to personal devices with SIM cards is restricted to residents aged 16 and older who are enrolled in secondary education, while non-SIM devices are permitted from age 13. A significant component of the policy is its approach to monitoring; residents must surrender all device passwords to House Parents, who are mandated to conduct weekly, random "surprise" checks of all device content. Use is further limited to specific times, ending at 8:00 PM, and confined to common areas, with social media access blocked during school travel and all devices confiscated nightly. The policy explicitly forbids accessing or sharing pornographic material, sexting, or cyberbullying, citing specific Mexican laws and stipulating device confiscation and potential referral to external authorities as consequences for violations.

For caregivers, or "House Parents," the policy assigns several key responsibilities. They are tasked with the strict enforcement of all rules, including the use of parental control applications to manage access. Furthermore, they are mandated to report any discovery of high-risk content or behavior to the organization's Safeguarding lead. The policy underscores the seriousness of these duties by stating that a failure to enforce the regulations may be considered "institutional negligence," potentially leading to legal repercussions for the caregiver.

The policy demonstrates a clear intention to protect residents from significant digital risks, which is a fundamental component of safeguarding. Its strengths lie in its unequivocal zero-tolerance stance on illegal content and harmful behaviors like cyberbullying, establishing firm boundaries designed to mitigate risk and reduce exposure to online predators. Another strength is the clear delineation of staff responsibility, ensuring that caregivers are aware of their active role in monitoring and safeguarding.

However, the methodology relies heavily on restriction and surveillance, revealing several areas for development when viewed through a trauma-informed lens. The model of non-consensual surveillance, including mandatory password sharing and "surprise" checks, is contrary to a trauma-informed approach and can inadvertently replicate past traumas related to breaches of trust and abuses of power. This prioritizes procedural security over the more effective relational security. The policy's primary mechanism is restriction rather than education, as it lacks a proactive curriculum for digital literacy, which is essential for preparing youth for independence. Instead of teaching residents how to navigate the digital world safely, it focuses on what they cannot do. Additionally, some restrictions, like a universal 8:00 PM cutoff, are developmentally inappropriate for older teens and can lead to clandestine behavior rather than open communication. Finally, the punitive tone, with frequent references to legal statutes and staff liability, fosters a fear-based compliance culture that may deter residents from reporting uncomfortable online experiences.

To better align with best practices and a trauma-informed model, several enhancements can be made. First, the policy should shift from a surveillance-based model to one of collaborative partnership. This can be achieved by replacing mandatory password sharing and "surprise checks" with a Collaborative Technology Agreement, co-developed with each resident and their House Parent. Such an agreement would outline expectations and goals tailored to the individual's age and maturity, thereby fostering trust and empowering residents to take an active role in their own safety.

Second, it is crucial to implement a comprehensive digital literacy curriculum. The organization should develop and integrate a mandatory, ongoing educational program for all residents covering essential topics like online privacy, consent, cyberbullying, and managing one's digital footprint. Proactive education equips residents with the critical thinking skills necessary to make safe choices independently, which is a more sustainable safeguarding strategy than perpetual monitoring.

Third, the organization should adopt a graduated, developmentally-staged approach. This involves reworking the rigid age-based rules into a tiered system where

residents can earn greater autonomy by demonstrating responsibility and completing digital literacy modules. A graduated model acknowledges that digital maturity is a process and better prepares older adolescents for the transition to independent living.

Fourth, establishing a non-punitive reporting system is essential. The policy should explicitly state that residents can report any online incident that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe to a trusted adult without the automatic consequence of losing their technology privileges. Removing the fear of punishment will significantly increase the likelihood that they will seek support when needed.

Finally, the policy should be supported by enhanced staff training. House Parents should be equipped with training on trauma-informed digital supervision, conversation-starters for talking about online life, and the principles of digital citizenship. This shifts the role of the House Parent from solely an enforcer to a supportive mentor, reducing their liability burden by building their capacity for proactive, positive interventions.

The current technology policy provides a foundational layer of protection but is misaligned with modern, trauma-informed principles of care. By shifting the philosophy from control and surveillance to one of education, collaboration, and empowerment, the organization can create a more effective and developmentally appropriate safeguarding environment. This evolution will not only better protect residents from immediate harm but also equip them with the resilience and skills needed for a digitally integrated world.

In conclusion, the incidents of digital extortion and the broader issues surrounding online device and social media use at Niños de México highlight a critical gap in child safeguarding. A truly trauma-informed approach would necessitate comprehensive digital safety policies, rigorous staff training, open communication with children about online risks, and a transparent system for reporting and addressing incidents, all aimed at fostering an environment where children feel secure and empowered in both their physical and digital worlds.

## Protocols for Reporting Misconduct

Niños de México's policies, as outlined in the 2024 Protection Policy, state that "Well-intentioned whistleblowers... do not have to fear any personal or professional harm" (p. 15), aiming to support trustworthiness and transparency. The policies also mandate a 24-hour timeline for an "initial evaluation" (p. 19), though the specifics of this internal

process remain unclear. However, a critical failing of these policies is the absence of any requirement for external reporting to law enforcement, which is a cornerstone of true transparency and accountability in child protection. A more robust directive would necessitate immediate reporting to external authorities by all adults and explicitly prohibit internal investigations that could lead to concealment, thereby ensuring a professional and objective response.

A significant high-risk gap identified is an internal-only reporting funnel, which dictates that "complaints must be made through the enabled channels (Safeguard) who will receive any report... and will channel it" (2024 Protection Policy, p. 15). Even within the sexual abuse protocol, the decision to report to the Prosecutor's office is an internal one with no specified timeline (2024 Protection Policy, p. 23). This structure creates a single point of failure and a mechanism for potential concealment, directly undermining trustworthiness and transparency and increasing the risk of delayed or uninitiated investigations.

Supporting these concerns, a witness recalled three separate occasions around 2017 when they discussed allegations of child abuse and Niños' reporting obligations with David Hernandez. On one occasion, a house parent reported to David Hernandez and Steve Ross that a minor had disclosed experiencing sexual abuse prior to becoming a resident. The witness had a conversation with David Hernandez about reporting the incident, but David Hernandez "made it clear" that they would not report the information to authorities, stating that the witness did not understand the systems and reporting procedures in Mexico. In two subsequent discussions about mandatory reporting, David Hernandez responded with questions like, "do you want me to get arrested?" and explained that the police would "arrest me as the director," "arrest the psychologist," and "shut the organization down." The witness maintained that their obligation was to report information received, but David Hernandez reiterated that the witness did not understand their system, procedures, and protocol, and would not discuss these issues further.

Further evidence of a culture of concealment emerged when a witness told GRACE that Juan Manuel Vasquez explicitly asked staff to defend the institution during interviews, even if it faced closure. This recent directive, given in person, sought loyalty and included a request for staff to sign a privacy letter to prevent them from discussing internal matters. This witness refused to sign the letter, and no copies of the letter or other internal regulations shifting responsibility to house parents were provided to staff. The witness stated that most staff were aware of these irregularities but remained silent, and when

they began to advocate for the children, they and their spouse faced problems and were targeted. This witness alleged that Juan Manuel sought staff loyalty to cover up irregularities, implying complicity in defending the institution even if it meant concealing misconduct. When this witness and another staff member refused to comply, they were asked to resign.

During an interview with GRACE, Juan Manuel Vasquez described a new process for responding to misconduct allegations implemented since 2023, replacing an older system. The older process involved a witness informing their immediate superior, who would then notify the administrative and general directors. The legal, medical, and psychology departments would then investigate and determine appropriate action, including reporting to authorities like DIFEM and JAPEM. Since 2023, protocols have been continuously reviewed and improved, including personnel selection processes with multidisciplinary interviews and psychometric tests. However, the effectiveness and transparency of these new protocols in practice remain to be fully assessed, especially given the historical context of internal decision-making regarding external reporting.

The policies and practices concerning reporting abuse and misconduct at Niños de México, as described, present significant concerns when viewed through the lens of best practices and trauma-informed care.

Firstly, the stated support for "well-intentioned whistleblowers" is undermined by the lack of a clear mandate for external reporting. Best practices in child protection unequivocally prioritize immediate reporting of all suspected abuse to external law enforcement or child protective services. This ensures an independent investigation, removes the potential for institutional bias, and protects victims. The current internal-only reporting funnel and the internal decision-making process for reporting to the Prosecutor's Office create a profound conflict of interest, violating the trauma-informed principle of Trustworthiness and Transparency. Survivors and those who report abuse need to trust that their disclosures will be handled impartially and that the institution will prioritize the child's safety over its own reputation or legal exposure.

The absence of a clear mandate for external reporting, or the failure of governmental agencies to pursue investigations, does not absolve an organization of its inherent responsibility to protect the children and participants under its care. It is imperative that the organization maintains a proactive stance in investigating allegations of misconduct and taking appropriate action, even when external authorities do not follow

up. Relying on a premise that 'the government declined to investigate so we couldn't take action' is an unacceptable justification for retaining an offender on staff. The organization's primary duty remains the well-being and safety of its vulnerable population, and this responsibility necessitates independent action to investigate and address credible allegations, ensuring that the best interests of children are always prioritized, regardless of external involvement.

The reported instances where a witness was told that reporting would lead to arrests and the closure of the organization further demonstrate a culture that prioritizes institutional self-preservation over the well-being of children, directly eroding trust. The explicit request for staff loyalty to "defend the institution" during interviews, even in the face of potential closure, and the attempt to impose privacy letters, directly contradict the trauma-informed principles of Empowerment, Voice, and Choice, and Collaboration and Mutuality. Such directives create an environment of fear and silence, where staff are discouraged from speaking truthfully about misconduct. This not only disempowers potential whistleblowers but also prevents a collaborative approach to addressing abuse, as it fosters an adversarial relationship between the institution and those who might expose wrongdoing. In a trauma-informed environment, staff should feel empowered to report concerns without fear of retaliation, and the institution should actively collaborate with all stakeholders to ensure accountability and safety.

The historical "older process" for responding to allegations, while involving multiple departments, still placed the initial decision-making for external reporting within the organization. While the reported improvements since 2023, including multidisciplinary interviews and psychometric tests, are positive steps, their efficacy in ensuring external reporting and fostering a truly transparent environment is crucial. Without a clear, non-negotiable policy for immediate external reporting, the risk of internal investigations leading to concealment, delays, or inadequate responses remains high, directly impacting the Safety of children. Trauma-informed care emphasizes creating environments where children feel safe enough to disclose abuse, and this safety is fundamentally compromised when reporting mechanisms are perceived as controlled by the very institution that may be implicated. The consistent pattern of failing to report alleged abuse to authorities, as described by witnesses, also constitutes a failure in Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues, as it perpetuates a historical pattern of institutions failing to protect vulnerable populations and silencing their voices.

In summary, the policies and practices at Niños de México regarding reporting abuse and misconduct exhibit critical shortcomings in trustworthiness and transparency. The emphasis on internal processes, the absence of mandatory external reporting, and documented instances of discouraging whistleblowers create an environment that is not conducive to best practices in child protection or the core tenets of trauma-informed care. A genuine commitment to the safety and well-being of children necessitates a fundamental shift towards policies that prioritize immediate external reporting, protect whistleblowers, and foster a culture of unwavering transparency and accountability.

To rectify a significant and decades-long pattern of failure in reporting abuses, it is crucial for the organization to unequivocally acknowledge these past shortcomings. This acknowledgment must be coupled with a clear recognition that trust has been profoundly broken. Moving forward, the onus rests entirely on the organization to proactively demonstrate, through concrete actions, its unwavering commitment to 'non-negotiable policies that require external reporting.' No one should be expected to simply 'trust' that the organization will adhere to its stated policies; rather, there must be a continuous willingness to prove that fundamental changes have occurred and that commitments are being honored. This may necessitate implementing additional layers of accountability, such as regularly inviting outside, survivor-centered groups to interview child residents, and being prepared to submit to programmatic audits by independent external sources.

Effective implementation of new policies and procedures for reporting misconduct hinges on clear communication, consistent reinforcement, and comprehensive staff training. These elements are fundamental to fostering internal trustworthiness and transparency. It is not enough to simply establish new protocols; the organization must ensure that all staff members are not only aware of these policies but also thoroughly understand their roles and responsibilities in upholding them. Regular training sessions, accessible resources, and open channels for questions and feedback are crucial to embed these policies within the organizational culture, thereby building confidence and ensuring that every individual feels empowered and supported in reporting concerns.

## Documentation Deficiencies

The investigation revealed significant deficiencies in documentation practices at Niños de México, creating substantial risks to the safety and continuity of care for children. Several witnesses told GRACE that they knew about or were directly instructed by leadership to destroy documents. One former staff member told GRACE that Steve Ross

directed him to destroy documentation related to the abuse of minor girls in a home, but he secretly kept the documents knowing they may someday be needed to defend the children.

A witness, upon assuming an interim coordinator position, discovered that previous documentation was often missing or inaccessible. This made it difficult to understand past interventions and the history of care provided to children. This issue was particularly evident in the context of medication administration, where a witness found that children were being given medication without proper preceding reviews or evaluations documented in their files. This suggested that medication might have been administered to keep children calmer, rather than based on thorough assessment. Similarly, a doctor prescribing medications indicated that she was provided with referral sheets listing children and their purported disorders by the coordination of psychology, but did not conduct individual evaluations. When a witness requested to evaluate the children, the doctor declined and ended their working relationship.

As mentioned in a prior section of this report, concerns were raised regarding the security camera system, where footage was reported to go missing, hindering the ability to review incidents. A witness recounted instances where requests to review footage related to alleged misconduct were met with explanations of malfunction or unavailability, and footage was never provided. This pattern of unavailable or missing documentation extended to other areas, making it difficult to verify events or hold individuals accountable.

The absence of comprehensive care plans was another critical documentation deficiency. For instance, Niños reportedly lacked a care plan for its young adult population, despite housing them and having reported cases of alleged abuse by young adults against minors. This absence of formal documentation for the care and supervision of young adults created a significant vulnerability for the children in their care.

The pervasive issues with missing and inadequate documentation at Niños de México represent a profound failure to adhere to best practices in child protection and the core principles of trauma-informed care, particularly concerning trustworthiness, transparency, and the safety and continuity of a child's care.

Effective documentation is a cornerstone of trustworthiness and transparency within any caregiving institution. When records are missing, inaccessible, or incomplete, it erodes trust among staff, external oversight bodies, and, most importantly, the children

and their families. The inability to verify past actions, track medical treatments, or review incidents creates an environment where accountability is compromised, and concerns can be easily dismissed or concealed. The reported deletion of video evidence and elimination of reports, as mentioned in the introductory content to this section, further indicate a pattern of making issues "go away," directly undermining any claim of transparency. This lack of clear and accessible documentation makes it impossible to establish an accurate narrative of events, fostering an environment of suspicion and doubt.

Missing documentation also directly jeopardizes the safety and continuity of care for children. Without a complete medical history, including medication records and evaluations, children are at risk of receiving inappropriate or unmonitored treatments. The reported instances of children being medicated without proper documentation or individual evaluations are deeply concerning, as they expose children to potential harm and undermine their right to appropriate medical care. Similarly, the absence of clear care plans for vulnerable populations, such as young adults residing on the same complex as minors, creates significant safety gaps. In a trauma-informed approach, consistent and thorough documentation is vital for understanding a child's history, triggers, and needs, enabling caregivers to provide individualized and sensitive support. When this information is absent, caregivers are ill-equipped to provide consistent, informed care, potentially re-traumatizing children by failing to acknowledge their past experiences or provide a stable, predictable environment. The inability to access past documentation also complicated efforts to understand the work that had been done, impacting the quality and consistency of care provided.

The widespread documentation deficiencies at Niños de México signify a systemic failure that compromises both the ethical integrity of the organization and the fundamental safety and well-being of the children in its care. Adhering to best practices in documentation is not merely an administrative task; it is a critical component of establishing a trustworthy, transparent, and safe environment that prioritizes the holistic needs and healing of traumatized children.

## Medicating Children and Adolescents

According to W13, she learned during her time as a staff member in or around 2021-2022 that Ninos had been giving children with behavioral concerns controlled medications that were obtained without a prescription and brought to Ninos from outside the country. According to W13, Dr. Lawrence (Larry) Banta sometimes left blank

prescriptions signed. W13 recalled that as a result of a new policy and internal reporting system they set up in 2022, whereby children could submit concerns safely, they began learning about teenagers who were being injected with a chemical castration drug "to lower their libido."<sup>668</sup>

W6 described concerns related to a child who lived in Genesis House and exhibited significant behavioral problems.<sup>669</sup> These issues included poor school attendance, bad grades, and sexual behaviors, specifically initiating sexual activity with other boys.<sup>670</sup> Due to these problems, the boy was moved from Genesis House to Esperanza House, another boys' home on the same property, in an attempt to mitigate the situation.<sup>671</sup> However, the behavioral and educational issues persisted between 2016 and 2017.<sup>672</sup> W6 noted hostility between staff members David Hernandez and Ricardo Peral regarding the boy.<sup>673</sup> Later, in 2017, Steve Ross informed W6 that the boy, who was approximately 16 years of age at the time, had allegedly raped or sexually assaulted two other minor boys who were approximately 11 years of age at the time.<sup>674</sup> Ricardo Peral and his wife Betty had reportedly wanted the boy removed from the home prior to this incident.<sup>675</sup>

Furthermore, W6 reported a private conversation with Dr. Adriana Gonzalez, the organization's medical doctor at the time.<sup>676</sup> Dr. Gonzalez disclosed that she was being asked to give the boy medication that would eventually make him sterile.<sup>677</sup> This request created an ethical dilemma for Dr. Gonzalez, as she was uncomfortable administering such medication.<sup>678</sup> She confided in W6, stating she did not want to give the boy the drugs.<sup>679</sup> W6 advised Dr. Gonzalez to pray about the decision and consider the ethical, moral, and spiritual implications.<sup>680</sup> Dr. Gonzalez also questioned the leadership's decision regarding this medication.<sup>681</sup> W6 recalled that this discussion occurred around 2018 or 2019.<sup>682</sup> W6

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<sup>668</sup> W13 Tr. at 24.

<sup>669</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 2.

<sup>670</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 2.

<sup>671</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 2.

<sup>672</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 2.

<sup>673</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 2.

<sup>674</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 2.

<sup>675</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 2.

<sup>676</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 3.

<sup>677</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 3.

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<sup>679</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 3.

<sup>680</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 3.

<sup>681</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 3.

<sup>682</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 3.

understood the purpose of the medication recommendation from leadership was to suppress the boy's sexual urges.<sup>683</sup> W6 believed the boy remained at Esperanza House for most, if not all, of her tenure, which began in 2015 and ended in 2019.<sup>684</sup>

On December 8, 2016, Corrie Glenn, an American nurse practitioner serving as the medical doctor at Ninos, wrote to Dr. Larry Banta to request advice on how to address minor-on-minor sexual activity and abuse that was occurring in the homes.

I recently heard from a houseparent encountering two boys (of the same house, both 15-16 yrs of age) known to be "friends" in bed together and the adult not sure just how to handle the situation other than to separate them at the time. Another situation involved a newer boy in another house of 11 yrs of age found standing and masturbating behind his 10 yr old roommate. The younger boy related he did not understand what was going on at that time. He further related that there were other times of his roommate being with another boy in bed under the covers and them making some strange grunting noises. When he asked them what was going on, 'o, nada' was the response.

One of our staff who been [sic] leading small group activities has had a 10 yr old female on several occasions raise her blouse in an obvious effort to get attention and astound the adult. Now perhaps this a simple case of a youngster trying to flash the adult to get her attention and disrupt the small group. The staff member was directed to give some sort of punishment and otherwise ignore the behavior. But I feel that some investigation into the behavior (i.e.- check with the houseparents, past hx of the behavior, issues of past possible abuse, etc) are potentially warranted.

My hope is to have all of us here at Niños, from professional staff to house parents along with administration, have appropriate training and formulate some suitable intervention strategies. The sort of training to help us teach, model, and support normal sexual development in this challenging environment on a consistent basis and help us identify and address behaviors that simply may be minor and transitional to more pathologic and seriously damaging to the individual and his/her peers and housemates.

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<sup>683</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 3.

<sup>684</sup> W6 Tr. 3 at 3.

GRACE was provided an email that Dr. Larry Banta sent on December 8, 2016, in reply to Corrie Glenn, with Steve Ross and David Hernandez copied, in which Dr. Banta recommended the use of monthly Depo-Provera injections "to control the impulses if they are not able to" and stated "We have been able to manage some very difficult kids this way."

I had not heard back regarding what needs might be coming up there where I might be of assistance so had not set up a time to drop by. However I will get you on the schedule and this can be one of the main topics. There are a couple of chapters in the book regarding sexuality which can be helpful. Working with sexualized children is very difficult and has to be done with care and eyes wide open. When sexual activity is discovered it is dealt with in a way that is not condemning but firmly talking to the parties involved and that it is not proper. Then more vigilance has to be in order. Most of the street kids are sexualized. If adolescents with Tanner Stage above III they can be placed on monthly Depoprovera injections to control the impulses if they are not able to. We have been able to manage some very difficult kids this way. Girls are a bit more difficult to manage but SSRIs can be helpful as well as trauma therapy. I would love to have more of a dialogue on this and to set a time to drop by. I would be okay for Skype or phone call maybe Sunday after 8pm mountain. Am usually home by then.

Corrie Glenn, an American nurse practitioner who served as the doctor at Ninos in 2016-2017, wrote the following in an email to Steve Ross and David Hernandez on December 9, 2016 in which Corrie Glenn advocated for Ninos to do more to address the sexual development needs of the children:

We may not be able to turn back the clock on those children who come to Ninos damaged, but we certainly will be held accountable if we help perpetuate this tragic cycle by doing little to nothing to make the youngest and most vulnerable among us safe.

You and David have the responsibility as our leaders to help all of the Ninos staff to do their part. It cannot be a simple knee jerk sort of approach. I appreciate your willingness to allow me to open up dialogue with Dr. Banta in this area. I included [W6] in this email as she has such an important role to

play, especially with the young ladies coming through Ninos since this topic is integral to spiritual development and one's overall character.

W6 provided GRACE with psychological notes from a visit Dr. Banta made to Ninos March 3-8, 2017. The notes include what appears to be an order from Dr. Banta to give a 15 year old male child a monthly dosage of 150mg of Depo Provera.

W13, who worked at Ninos from 2021-2022, filed a report with the Public Prosecutors Office on or around December 16, 2022. A section of that report includes information regarding chemical castration treatment being given to another minor. W13 stated that she learned during her time at Ninos that it was customary to administer controlled medications obtained without a prescription to children and adolescents with behavioral disorders since they were brought from abroad and the doctor sometimes left signed blank prescriptions. W13 told GRACE:

A [married couple] that took care of children was the one who told me about the use of this drug, but they never remembered the name. And the doctor who administered it at that time no longer worked there. So I have investigated and I think it is a single drug that is used, well, it is illegal in several countries. This drug is illegal, it is used only in prisoners, is what I have read. For example, one of those who administered it was precisely [AV16].<sup>685</sup>

Now, the doctor who got all these drugs, which I really don't know how he passed them to Mexico, is Dr. Banta, that's his last name. Dr. Banta is American.<sup>686</sup>

The couple allegedly told W13 that they knew the drug was dangerous but they did not feel they could say no because they were being instructed by the Ninos doctor, Adriana Gonzalez to administer it.<sup>687</sup> Adriana Gonzalez was reportedly the medical doctor from approximately 2017-2019. W13 told GRACE that she did discuss concerns with Ninos leadership related to providing medication without a prescription:

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<sup>685</sup> W13 Tr. at 30.

<sup>686</sup> W13 Tr. at 31.

<sup>687</sup> W13 Tr. at 32.

I did question how they could medicate children without prescription. I told them how they would get the medication if they didn't have prescription, because I saw that the files didn't have the prescription of the controlled medication, and that's why I found out that Dr. Banta was the one who brought them, and that he was the one who prescribed them, but I questioned them, hey, but he's American, he can't medicate Mexican children, he can't exercise as a psychiatrist in Mexico.

And it was just like, I don't know, yes, we do it here, so there was no further answer about that.<sup>688</sup>

W11, a psychologist who worked at Ninos, reported discovering that children were being given medication, specifically in Agape House.<sup>689</sup> They noted this upon taking the position at Ninos and reviewing documentation mandated by regulating authorities.<sup>690</sup> W11 found that children were being administered medication without a proper preceding review or evaluation documented in their files.<sup>691</sup> This suggested to both W11 and the authorities that the medication might have been given to keep the children calmer.<sup>692</sup>

W11 stated that there was no clear initial documentation of how or why the children began receiving medication.<sup>693</sup> A local doctor was found to have been prescribing medications, but she indicated that she was provided with referral sheets listing children and their purported disorders by the coordination of psychology.<sup>694</sup> The local doctor did not conduct individual evaluations but prescribed based on new behavioral findings and the provided sheets.<sup>695</sup> When W11 requested to evaluate the children, the local doctor declined and ended their working relationship with Ninos.<sup>696</sup>

W11 mentioned that house parents in Esperanza House reported characteristics like hyperactivity in children, which may have influenced diagnoses and continued medication.<sup>697</sup> W11 indicated that 70% of the listed children did not appear to need

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<sup>688</sup> W13 Tr. at 33.

<sup>689</sup> W11 Tr. at 14.

<sup>690</sup> W11 Tr. at 14.

<sup>691</sup> W11 Tr. at 14.

<sup>692</sup> W11 Tr. at 14.

<sup>693</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>694</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>695</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>696</sup> W11 Tr. at 21.

<sup>697</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

medication based on external psychological evaluations.<sup>698</sup> Current efforts were being made with pediatric, psychiatric, and neurological evaluations to gradually remove the medication.<sup>699</sup> External individual therapeutic processes were also implemented to support the children.<sup>700</sup>

W11 expressed concerns regarding Daniel Hernández's role in influencing children's diagnoses and the continued administration of medication.<sup>701</sup> Specifically, W11 mentioned that Daniel Hernández participated in questionnaires about children's behaviors, which were used in diagnostic processes.<sup>702</sup> W11 noted that Daniel Hernández's responses in these questionnaires differed from those provided by psychologists and teachers, suggesting he exaggerated or altered children's characteristics.<sup>703</sup> According to W11, Daniel Hernández would report behaviors such as hyperactivity in children, even when those behaviors were considered normal by external psychologists and W11.<sup>704</sup> These inflated reports contributed to the children receiving diagnoses, which then led to them being medicated.<sup>705</sup> W11 expressed concern that Daniel Hernández might be doing this so that the children remained on medication, as he believed it made them calmer.<sup>706</sup>

W11 said that Daniel Hernández was insisting that children should be medicated and the individual evaluations for the children did not match with his observations.<sup>707</sup> W11 said that the psychologists and teachers agreed on diagnosis when doing evaluations, but Daniel Hernandez's input would change results so the children were marked to have ADHD.<sup>708</sup> W11 raised the concern with Ninos leadership, but was informed that Daniel Hernández was considered a trustworthy and long-serving employee. While caregiver observations and reports are commonly collected by doctors when evaluating children, this should not replace a personal evaluation and physical examination of a child, along with other inputs like school performance and teacher observations, when diagnosing neurodevelopmental and behavioral conditions.

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<sup>698</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>699</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>700</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>701</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>702</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>703</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>704</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>705</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>706</sup> W11 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>707</sup> W11 Tr. at 23.

<sup>708</sup> W11 Tr. at 23.

During his interview with GRACE, Dr. Banta said he brought medications into Mexico with a special permit. He used various psychiatric medications, including mood stabilizers like Depakote for aggression, Paxil and Zoloft for depression and anxiety, and Haldol and Risperdal for psychotic symptoms. Prazosin or clonidine were used for nightmares associated with post-traumatic stress. He also mentioned the intermittent use of Depo-Provera for adolescent males over 13 who were experiencing sexually aggressive problems, always with their consent. He stated that Depo-Provera could have been used for girls as well, but a gynecologist would have handled the prescribing in those cases.

## Inadequate Screening and Training of Staff

The investigation revealed significant and systemic deficiencies in Niños de México's screening and training of staff, which directly contributed to an environment where children were at sustained risk of harm. While the institution's policies outline a formal process for vetting and developing personnel, witness accounts and documented incidents demonstrate a profound gap between stated policy and actual practice. This failure was characterized by a tendency to prioritize personal relationships and institutional loyalty over professional qualifications, a disregard for internal screening recommendations, and a persistent lack of mandatory, effective training in critical child protection competencies.

Niños de México's institutional protection policies from both 2022 and 2024 describe a structured hiring process intended to ensure the suitability of candidates. The policies mandate that all personnel, including volunteers, undergo an evaluation process that includes interviews with a recruitment team and the relevant area coordinator, followed by psychological testing. For roles with direct child contact, the policies specify psychometric tests to evaluate personality, caregiving abilities, and psychological symptoms, with additional projective tests required for house parents.

Despite these written protocols, the investigation found that their application was inconsistent and often undermined by leadership. A former staff member with safeguarding responsibilities concluded that the institution lacked adequate screening policies and had "several people close to the children who are not trained, putting them at risk". This was corroborated by multiple witnesses who reported that leadership, particularly former Field Director David Hernandez, was responsible for hiring unqualified individuals. One former resident expressed a belief that the institution tended to place individuals in positions of power based on family ties and friendships to ensure they would not dissent.

This practice reportedly extended to overriding the formal screening process. A witness described a conflict between screening staff and senior leadership, wherein

leadership would push to hire individuals that the screening process had deemed unsuitable. This concern was echoed in reports that a recent restructuring led to the promotion of individuals who had previously been deemed "not viable" for working with children by licensed psychologists, including some with alleged histories of abuse or criminal activity.

The institution's policies state that "Continuous training will be maintained for staff through courses or workshops" and that attendance at these workshops is obligatory when requested. However, witness accounts indicate that this policy was not effectively implemented, resulting in a workforce that was dangerously unprepared to care for a vulnerable child population.

Multiple witnesses reported a severe lack of training for house parents in essential areas such as identifying and responding to abuse, understanding trauma, and crisis management. One former staff member stated that she never received any training on child abuse reporting during her entire tenure at Niños. Another witness noted that while some courses were offered, they were not always mandatory and that the information was often not effectively implemented by the house parents. This lack of training was seen as a direct cause of house parents being unprepared, resorting to harsh punishments, and exhibiting harmful "passive-aggressive" behaviors toward children, such as making disparaging comments about their bodies. One former resident believed many house parents were unprepared and treated children poorly as a result.

The institutional gap in training was so significant that some staff members took it upon themselves to organize workshops on recognizing and responding to sexual abuse, covering topics like trauma symptoms and offender behavior. While current Field Director Juan Manuel Vasquez stated that he has received numerous certificates and that the institution provides training to its staff, the overwhelming testimony points to a historical and ongoing failure to ensure all caregivers possess the foundational knowledge required for their roles.

From a best practices standpoint, the screening and training of staff are the most critical preventative measures an organization can take to protect children. The findings indicate a catastrophic failure in both areas. Effective screening is a multi-layered, rigorous process that includes comprehensive background checks, structured behavioral interviews, psychological assessments, and thorough reference checks. While Niños de México's policies give the appearance of such a process, the practice of overriding professional psychological assessments and hiring based on personal relationships renders the entire system ineffective. It prioritizes loyalty over competence, a decision that has repeatedly proven to be dangerous for the children in care.

Training in a residential care setting cannot be optional or sporadic. It must be mandatory, comprehensive, and ongoing. The failure to provide and require training on

foundational topics—most critically, the recognition and mandatory reporting of child abuse—is a profound dereliction of the institution's duty of care. The "boys will be boys" rhetoric reported by one staff member exemplifies a culture that minimizes harmful behavior, a direct result of a lack of professional training in child development and trauma.

From a trauma-informed perspective, these failures are deeply damaging. The core principles of Safety and Trustworthiness are fundamentally violated when children are placed in the care of unscreened, untrained, or incompetent adults. For children who have already experienced trauma, a safe and predictable environment is essential for healing. Untrained caregivers are more likely to use punitive measures, misunderstand trauma-related behaviors, and inadvertently re-traumatize children. Furthermore, a system where leadership can override professional judgment to hire "unsuitable" candidates fosters an environment devoid of Trustworthiness and Transparency. Staff cannot trust the system to prioritize safety, and children cannot trust the adults who are supposed to protect them. The reported practice of promoting individuals previously deemed "not viable" communicates to both staff and children that safety is secondary to other institutional priorities. This directly undermines the principle of Empowerment, as it silences the voices of professionals tasked with ensuring safety and leaves children powerless in the face of potential harm.

## Inadequate Provision of Food and Clothing

This investigation uncovered significant concerns regarding the inadequate provision of food and clothing to children at Niños de México, highlighting a critical failure in meeting basic physical needs and a disregard for their well-being.

Multiple accounts indicate a consistent pattern of insufficient and poor-quality food. A witness who resided at Niños during the 1970s recalled that some children were favored and provided with food and water, while others had to travel to get their own water. This suggests an early disparity in the provision of basic necessities. Another witness, who lived at Niños from ages 10 to 19 during the earlier decades of Ninos' existence, noted that while his initial experience was positive, it changed as he witnessed disturbing events and observed that older children received privileges like better clothing, while other children struggled to get enough food. This highlights a persistent issue of unequal access to basic provisions. A November, 1968 publication of the Ninos de Mexico newsletter references the hunger of children and the troubling responses of both the children and the institution:

Sometimes we think our children are perfect and I'm sure that we often give you all that idea, too, but they aren't. The other day we found that some of the children had been stealing food. Now, they aren't hungry but they think

they are. Anyway we had a good idea of who was at fault but we wanted the guilty ones to tell us themselves. All of us gathered in the dining room and standing in a line by ages we waited for confessions. Believe me it was a horrible day for everyone. One boy confessed right away and one by one during the next eight hours of standing the rest confessed. Altogether there were eight boys involved. I think we all learned a lot that day.

More recently, a witness who started working at Niños after 2021 reported that children were often hungry and that the food provided was inadequate in both quantity and quality. The witness stated that children frequently complained of hunger, and the food was sometimes expired. These observations were corroborated by another staff member who also noted the poor quality of food, including expired items, and the children's complaints of hunger.

A witness who worked at Niños reported that children were given a "drop box" to write down their complaints, and some of those complaints included reports about hunger and inadequate food. However, these complaints were reportedly ignored, and the children's hunger persisted. This suggests a lack of responsiveness from the leadership to the children's basic needs.

GRACE also spoke with two witnesses who grew up at Ninos and each separately described an experience of being made to go days without food as punishment. These punishments took place in different houses, at different times, and were meted out by two different house parents. One recounted an experience during his time at the Bethel house when he was approximately 10 or 11 years old. He stated that Marco Parra, a houseparent, withheld food from him for three days. He emphasized the severity of this experience, noting that he was not even provided with water during this period. He described this as a particularly difficult ordeal. Similarly, another witness described being locked in a room by Laura Hernandez for days without food, and only escaped with the help of another resident.

Similar to food, the provision of clothing was also found to be inadequate. A witness who lived at Niños from the 1970s recalled that some children received preferential treatment, including better clothing. More recently, a staff member observed that children often wore ill-fitting clothing, including shoes that were too small, and that some children were forced to wear clothing they disliked. This staff member also noted that children were

sometimes given clothes that were too large or too small, indicating a lack of attention to individual needs and dignity.

The documented inadequacies in the provision of food and clothing at Niños de México represent a profound failure to meet the most basic human needs of the children, directly violating fundamental best practices in child care and the core principles of trauma-informed care.

Any institution caring for children has a primary responsibility to ensure their physical well-being, which includes consistent access to nutritious food and appropriate clothing. The consistent reports of hunger, poor-quality food, and ill-fitting or insufficient clothing indicate a systemic failure to uphold these basic standards. The reported favoritism in food distribution in earlier years and the later disregard for children's complaints about hunger, demonstrate a lack of equitable and responsive care. Furthermore, the use of food deprivation as punishment, as described by two witnesses who were made to go days without food and even water, is a deeply harmful and unacceptable practice that constitutes abuse and is a severe violation of child protection best practices.

Through the lens of trauma-informed care, these deficiencies are particularly damaging. Children who have experienced trauma often arrive in care settings with a history of deprivation, instability, and unmet needs. Forcing them to endure hunger, consume poor-quality food, wear inadequate clothing, or be subjected to food deprivation as punishment can be deeply re-traumatizing. These experiences reinforce feelings of powerlessness, shame, worthlessness, and a lack of control, exacerbating existing trauma and hindering their ability to heal. This directly undermines the trauma-informed principle of Safety, as children cannot feel physically or psychologically safe when their basic physiological needs are not consistently met, and when they are subjected to punitive measures that involve deprivation.

The lack of responsiveness to children's complaints about food also violates the principles of Empowerment, Voice, and Choice, and Collaboration and Mutuality. Children's voices were not heard, and their needs were not addressed, further disempowering them and eroding their trust in the caregivers. The unequal distribution of resources, as seen in the favoritism regarding food and clothing, also contributes to a sense of injustice and can exacerbate existing trauma. A trauma-informed approach would prioritize creating a stable, predictable, and nurturing environment where children's basic needs are

consistently met, fostering a sense of security and allowing them to begin the healing process. The failure to provide adequate food and clothing also reflects a lack of Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues consideration, as it fails to acknowledge the potential impact of prior deprivation on the children and to provide culturally sensitive and appropriate care.

In conclusion, the pervasive and long-standing issues with inadequate food and clothing at Niños de México, including the use of food as punishment, represent a critical failure in providing basic care and upholding the dignity of the children. Addressing these fundamental needs is not merely a logistical challenge but a moral imperative and a foundational component of creating a safe, nurturing, and trauma-informed environment where children can heal and thrive.

## Unsupervised Access to Minors by External Adults

This investigation revealed critical concerns regarding the unsupervised access of external adults, including sponsors, to minors at Niños de México, particularly in the context of outings outside the homes. These practices created significant vulnerabilities for the children and deviated sharply from established child protection best practices.

Niños de México's sponsorship program, H.U.G.S., allowed individuals to sponsor children, make monthly contributions, and potentially engage in personal correspondence. However, the program reportedly extended beyond these interactions to include unsupervised outings. A former staff member recalled that sponsors were permitted to take children on outings, sometimes for an entire day, without any Niños staff supervision. This practice was described as a long-standing tradition, with sponsors often taking groups of children to various locations, including their own homes.

Another former staff member corroborated this, stating that sponsors were allowed to take children off-campus for extended periods, including weekends, without staff accompaniment. This was particularly concerning as many of these sponsors were not subject to the same level of background checks or vetting as staff members.

Another former staff member said children were put at risk because people would come from the US and bring their friends without proper safety precautions to protect children against abuse.

The lack of supervision during these outings was a recurring theme. A witness described a culture where external adults, including those from supporting churches, were permitted to take children on outings without any Niños staff present. These outings often involved taking children to their homes, raising serious questions about the safety and accountability of such arrangements. A former staff member wrote to Steve Ross to share specific concerns with an external adult taking a child out without supervision:

W9 wrote the following statements to Steve Ross:

...[Ninos] retains (relative) control over who may enter its property and under what circumstances, and under what circumstances and to what extent any person may have access to any or all of the children...[External Adult] took a keen interest in the boys while they were his students, at one point going so far as to buy them new cell-phones. This can be seen as grooming and calls into question [External Adult's] judgement and his interest in [Minor Residents].

[External Adult] is staying in Casa Esperanza over certain weekend. This should not be allowed to continue effective immediately...Others have described him as a "tutor." [External Resident's] role, if any, at the institution, needs to be clarified, and it needs to be made clear that he is not the legal guardian of or authority figure over any child at [Ninos].

At least once, I saw [External Adult] and [Minor Resident] leave the house alone together at night. This should not be allowed to continue effective immediately. There should always be an third-party adult chaperone with [External Adult] and any of the children at Ninos...[External Adult] was presented to Niños staff as someone interested in Christianity, one of the rationale for why he was staying in the house. However, in the two weeks I attended church with him, both times he would often stay outside the sanctuary with [Minor Resident] before going in and would leave the sanctuary early. He seemed distracted, would talk to the kids, and would go in and out during the service. We must not be naive. He is interested in the boys, for good or bad, and we should not let our faith be used to manipulate us or put any kids at risk.

The problem of unsupervised access to minors by external adults is potentially compounded by the inadequate screening of employees, as detailed in another section of this report. If internal staff were not consistently vetted, it is highly probable that external sponsors and other adults with unsupervised access to children were subjected to even less rigorous scrutiny. This created a significant gap in child protection, as individuals with potentially harmful intentions could gain access to vulnerable children.

Furthermore, the general lack of comprehensive documentation, as highlighted in the "Documentation Deficiencies and Their Impact on Child Care" section, likely extended to records pertaining to sponsor interactions and outings. Without proper documentation of who took which child, when, and for how long, accountability becomes nearly impossible, and any incidents that may have occurred during these unsupervised periods would be difficult to investigate.

The practice of allowing unsupervised access to minors by external adults, including sponsors, at Niños de México represents a severe breach of safety best practices in child protection and a profound disregard for the principles of trauma-informed care.

From a safety best practices perspective, unsupervised access to children by non-staff adults is universally recognized as a high-risk activity. Reputable child-serving organizations implement stringent policies requiring all adults with direct access to children to undergo comprehensive background checks, receive child protection training, and always be supervised by trained staff. Allowing sponsors to take children on outings, even for a day, without any staff presence, creates an environment ripe for potential abuse, exploitation, or neglect. The lack of consistent vetting for these external adults further exacerbates this risk, as the institution cannot guarantee the safety or intentions of individuals interacting with vulnerable children. The long-standing tradition of such practices indicates a deeply ingrained systemic failure, rather than isolated incidents.

Through the lens of trauma-informed care, these practices are particularly egregious and potentially re-traumatizing. Children in care, especially those who have experienced prior trauma (such as abandonment, abuse, or neglect), require predictable, safe, and trustworthy environments. Unsupervised outings with external adults introduce an element of unpredictability and can trigger feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness.

For a child who has experienced abuse, being placed in an unsupervised situation with an unfamiliar adult, even a "sponsor," can evoke past traumas and create a sense of unease and fear. This directly violates the trauma-informed principle of Safety, as children

cannot feel secure when their boundaries are not consistently protected and when they are exposed to unknown risks. It also undermines Trustworthiness and Transparency, as the institution implicitly communicates that these unsupervised interactions are safe, despite the inherent risks and lack of oversight. The lack of comprehensive documentation surrounding these interactions further erodes trust and makes it impossible to ensure accountability or provide a clear history of a child's experiences. Furthermore, it neglects the principle of Empowerment, Voice, and Choice, as children may feel pressured to participate in these outings or may not feel safe enough to voice discomfort or concerns about an adult, especially if that adult is perceived as a benefactor.

In conclusion, the practice of allowing unsupervised access to minors by external adults at Niños de México constitutes a critical failure in safeguarding children. A trauma-informed approach demands rigorous adherence to child protection best practices, including comprehensive vetting, constant supervision, and transparent documentation for all interactions between children and external adults, thereby ensuring the physical and emotional safety and well-being of every child.

## Inadequate Sexuality Education

The investigation revealed a significant and persistent lack of comprehensive education about sexuality provided to children at Niños de México. This deficiency created a critical vulnerability, leaving children ill-equipped to understand, prevent, or report sexual abuse and misconduct. Despite internal advocacy efforts in 2016, a formal and adequate program for sexuality education was not implemented, contributing to an environment where children remained at heightened risk.

This gap meant that children lacked the necessary knowledge to understand healthy boundaries, recognize inappropriate behavior, or comprehend the nature of sexual abuse. This deficiency is particularly concerning given the documented instances of sexual misconduct and abuse within the institution, as well as reports of digital extortion.

In December 2016, two staff medical professionals actively advocated for education and training on sexual development and behavior for both children and employees at Niños. This advocacy followed a meeting with Dr. Larry Banta, Steve Ross, David Hernandez, and other leadership team members, during which a concerning joke was made about "getting [Minor Resident] 'married off.'" In an email to leadership, a medical staff member stressed the critical need for intervention, stating, "We may not be able to

turn back the clock on those children who come to Niños damaged, but we certainly will be held accountable if we help perpetuate this tragic cycle by doing little to nothing to make the youngest and most vulnerable among us safe." He underscored the responsibility of leaders like Steve Ross and David Hernandez to "help all of the Niños staff to do their part." He also expressed concern that "often as Christians, we would choose, at the very least to ignore/avoid/minimize dealing [with] this fundamental aspect of human development in this challenging and at times dark environment." He provided a resource document, "Sexual Behavior and Children: When Is It a Problem and What to Do About It," which outlined normal sexual development, problem sexual behaviors, and key steps for caregivers to help children change behavior and promote healthy sexuality. Despite this clear plea and the provision of educational resources, a formal program for sexuality education was not implemented.

As highlighted in the "Digital Extortion and Online Safety Concerns" section of this report, minor girls at Niños were using social media and mobile devices without adequate supervision, leading to a case in 2020 where a minor was extorted by an online offender who shared sexualized images of her. The lack of education about sexuality among the children, combined with unsupervised online access, potentially contributed to their vulnerability to such exploitation. Without a foundational understanding of healthy sexual development, consent, and personal boundaries, children are less likely to identify and report predatory behavior, whether online or in person.

GRACE also reviewed information related to current and recent sexuality education and psychological support measures and concerns at Niños de México. Based on interviews with current and former staff, a significant lack of education and support for current children at Niños de México has been identified, particularly in two key areas: comprehensive sexuality education and consistent, trustworthy psychological support.

Interview testimony reveals that the institution lacks comprehensive sexuality education, including topics such as masturbation, birth control, and sexual preferences. This lack is reportedly rooted in religious objections, with leadership stating that such information "goes against religion" and incites children to behaviors that are "not compatible" with biblical teachings. Some staff expressed concern that this gap in education leaves children without crucial information for their personal health and safety. Yet, healthy Christian curricula exist that teach about sex and sexuality, including boundaries and consent.

Furthermore, children have historically lacked trust in the institution's psychological support systems. An interviewee explained that this mistrust was a direct result of past experiences where psychologists either did not listen to the children's concerns or were perceived as "accomplices" in the harmful events that occurred. This history of breached confidence eroded the psychology department's credibility, making it difficult for children to seek help or report issues.

Ninos has implemented specific abuse prevention programs. Multiple interviewees described a "Body Traffic Light" program designed to teach children about safe and unsafe touch. This system uses colors to designate parts of the body: "green, is where someone can touch you, which is the arm, which is the hand... And in red are the parts that no one can touch, which are the private parts..." This visual aid is reportedly placed in a visible location in the homes and is used for frequent training. Complementing this is a tool called a "violentometer," which "helps us identify certain actions and attitudes that should not be normal, that should not happen in the house." The responsibility for delivering this training falls to the psychology department and the spiritual area. In addition to these specific programs, witnesses confirmed that both house parents and children receive some general training on abuse prevention, which has at times been provided by external organizations. Staff have also participated in courses like "sensibilization to violence" to learn techniques for listening to children in vulnerable situations. However, the overall educational framework remains fragmented, addressing basic physical safety while avoiding the broader context of sexuality and identity development..

From a safety best practices perspective, comprehensive and age-appropriate sexuality education is a fundamental component of child safeguarding. Such education empowers children with the knowledge and vocabulary to understand their bodies, recognize inappropriate touch, differentiate between healthy and unhealthy relationships, and know how to report concerns. The persistent absence of this vital education, even after staff members highlighted the critical need and provided resources, indicates a systemic failure to prioritize child protection. This failure is particularly glaring in an institution caring for vulnerable children, where the risk of abuse may be elevated. The direct link to digital extortion is clear: without an understanding of online safety and the risks associated with sharing personal images, children are easily manipulated by predators. The leadership's apparent historical inaction on this critical issue, despite being directly informed and provided with educational materials, represents a significant missed opportunity to implement preventative measures.

Through the lens of trauma-informed care, the lack of sexuality education is deeply problematic and potentially re-traumatizing. Children who have experienced trauma, especially sexual abuse, often struggle with understanding their bodies, boundaries, and healthy relationships. Comprehensive sexuality education, delivered in a sensitive and trauma-informed manner, can be a powerful tool for healing and empowerment. It can help children regain a sense of control over their bodies, understand that they are not to blame for past abuse, and learn to advocate for their own safety. Conversely, the absence of this education can perpetuate feelings of shame, confusion, and isolation, hindering their recovery. It undermines the trauma-informed principle of Empowerment, Voice, and Choice, as children are not given the tools to understand or articulate their experiences, leaving them disempowered and voiceless. It also compromises safety, as children are left unprepared to protect themselves from harm, both online and offline. The institution's historical failure to provide this essential education, despite the advocacy of its own staff, demonstrates a lack of understanding of the holistic needs of traumatized children and a missed opportunity to foster resilience and protection. A former staff member's concern expressed to leadership in 2016 that "as Christians, we would choose, at the very least to ignore/avoid/minimize dealing [with] this fundamental aspect of human development" highlights a potential cultural barrier within the organization that prioritized avoidance over the proactive safeguarding of children.

In conclusion, the inadequate education about sexuality at Niños de México is a critical deficiency that directly impacts child safety and well-being. A trauma-informed approach demands the implementation of comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education that empowers children, promotes healthy boundaries, and equips them with the knowledge and confidence to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation.

## Supervision and Support of a Young Adult Population

Ninos has dormitories for young adult men and women (18+). Concerns have been raised regarding the inconsistent support provided to children transitioning out of Ninos homes. One house parent expressed concern about a young adult with significant medical needs to treat a terminal illness who was reportedly removed from the institution despite an alleged commitment to continue medical treatment. Other former residents are reportedly experiencing homelessness and substance abuse. This contrasts with the significant support, including private schooling and housing, offered to some children, leading to questions about the fairness and consistency of Ninos's aftercare and long-term

well-being initiatives. Additionally, a staff member expressed concern of past retaliation against minors aging out by withholding college opportunities from them.

According to a former staff member who worked at Ninos in or around 2021-2022, Ninos at the time lacked a care plan to ensure that young adults were not a risk to children. According to the former staff member, there were two cases of alleged abuse by a young adult resident against a minor resident. The former staff member was able to demand they be reported to external authorities based on the Safety Policy. The former staff claimed to be "aware that prior to these cases there have been multiple similar cases, which have been reported to Steve Ross Earl and Carlos David Hernandez Trinidad, but have never been denounced."

A section of a report from the former staff member submitted to the Public Prosecutors Office on or around December 16, 2022 includes information regarding the young adult population residing at Ninos:

The Institution houses a population of young adults without an established care plan for this type of beneficiaries, having already given rise to two cases of alleged abuse by an adult beneficiary of a minor beneficiary, in which I was able to demand that they be reported to the corresponding prosecutor's offices due to the existence of the protection policy, but I am aware that prior to these there have been multiple similar cases, which have been reported to Steve Ross Earl and Carlos David Hernández Trinidad without ever being reported.

The policies for young adults (residents 18+) present significant safeguarding concerns. The 2022 policy outlines a set of behavioral rules for this population, focusing on their obligation to work or study, contribute financially, and adhere to moral and behavioral codes, with expulsion as the penalty for non-compliance. While the 2024 policy introduces a provision for young adults to interact with their minor siblings under staff notification, both policies lack a distinct, trauma-informed care and safety plan tailored to the complexities of a mixed-age residential setting.

A former staff member alleged there were two cases of abuse perpetrated by a young adult resident against a minor resident during that time, which were reportedly only escalated to external authorities at the insistence of the staff member. Most concerning is

the allegation that leadership had been made aware of "multiple similar cases" prior to these incidents that were never reported to authorities.

From a best-practice and trauma-informed perspective, this indicates a systemic failure in safeguarding. Housing young adults, who are often trauma survivors themselves, alongside vulnerable minors without a specific, robust, and distinct safety framework creates an unacceptably high-risk environment. The existing policies focus on the young adults' obligations to the institution rather than on a structured plan for their transition to independence, their unique therapeutic needs, and, most importantly, the prevention of potential harm to minor residents.

Ninos must implement a comprehensive Young Adult Care and Safety Plan. This plan must be entirely separate from the policies for minors and should include risk assessments for all young adults residing with children, clear guidelines on appropriate and prohibited interactions with minors, and a structured, phased program for transitioning to independence.

## Responses to Teen Pregnancies

W31, a former staff member, recalled that in or around 1990 approximately 4-5 girls became pregnant during their time at Ninos and some were made to marry the man who impregnated them. According to W31, some of the pregnancies were a result of rape. The alleged rapes were not reported to law enforcement. W31 did not recall Ninos having concern for the pregnancies and the girls. According to W31, the girls were kicked out of Ninos either when the pregnancy became known or after giving birth. According to W31, this was done out of concern for the reputation of Ninos among the churches supporting Ninos.

Dr. Banta recalled an incident while he was medical director in the 1990s involving a girl who became pregnant and delivered the baby in a bathtub, attempting to drown the child while experiencing a psychotic episode. Dr. Banta attended to her medically, and his wife cared for the baby. The baby was later adopted out by the girl's adult sister.

Dr. Banta recalled that contraception measures were discussed with the resident population and abstinence was emphasized through retreats and pledge cards.

W31 discussed concerns with responses to teen pregnancies with the executive director at the time, Terry Stine, expressing his concern and offering advice on how to

address it. He suggested that the girls and the boys involved should be given more responsibilities and work to occupy their time, thereby reducing opportunities for sexual activity. However, his suggestions were not well-received. The Yarnells, who were in charge, reportedly dismissed his concerns and made excuses, claiming that the girls who became pregnant were impregnated by individuals outside of the home and from the town or that the pregnancies resulted from rape.<sup>709</sup> W31 felt that the Yarnells did not take the matter seriously and were unwilling to take corrective action. He felt that his concerns for the well-being of the children and the reputation of the institution were being ignored.

W31 recalled that he and other staff signed a letter presenting their concerns and potential solutions for addressing the pregnancies that had occurred among girls at the Genesis House.<sup>710</sup> W31 told GRACE that Terry Stine did not receive the letter well and responded by removing the staff who wrote it. W31 told GRACE that the leadership response to his concerns was abusive.<sup>711</sup> W31 provided GRACE with a copy of the letter.

W31 described experiencing retaliation in the form of being removed from the institution and in being discredited. According to W31, Terry Stine told W31, who had grown up at Ninos during the Beemans' tenure, that he knew that he was involved sexually with Merlyn Beeman because the Beeman's kept a book of everyone they had been sexually involved with.<sup>712</sup> This hurt W31 given the poor treatment he suffered for resisting Wanda Beeman's advances.<sup>713</sup> W31 recalled that he asked Terry Stine to prove the book's existence.<sup>714</sup> Terry Stine reportedly said another individual, a missionary named Hill Contreras, had told him about the book.<sup>715</sup> W31 went to Hill Contreras and asked him about the book. W31 recalled that Hill Contreras invited him to pray with him but did not answer his questions about the existence of the book.<sup>716</sup>

According to W31, a board member named Gonzalo Flores told him he should not defy Terry Stine because Terry Stine is a friend. W31 reportedly met with the board of directors in the 1990s and informed them of what Terry Stine had accused W31 of. W31 recalled that the board said nothing in response.

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<sup>709</sup> RV1 Tr. at 12

<sup>710</sup> RV1 Tr. at 13.

<sup>711</sup> RV1 Tr. at 13.

<sup>712</sup> RV1 Tr. at 14.

<sup>713</sup> RV1 Tr. at 14.

<sup>714</sup> RV1 Tr. at 14.

<sup>715</sup> RV1 Tr. at 14.

<sup>716</sup> RV1 Tr. at 14.

## Financial Concerns

This investigation uncovered significant concerns regarding the financial practices and management of resources at Niños de México. Witnesses reported a range of issues including the inadequate provision of funds for children's basic needs, mismanagement of donations, potential tax fraud, and conflicts of interest that prioritized personal influence over the well-being of the children.

According to witnesses, the allowances provided for children's essential needs were insufficient. Each child was reportedly allocated minimal amounts for meals, cleaning supplies, and personal hygiene, leading to shortfalls that staff sometimes covered with their own personal funds. This financial strain was compounded by allegations of mismanagement of donated goods. A witness described observing trailers of donated items arriving at the institution, only to later see those same goods, which were intended for the children, being sold by the accountant. Other witnesses corroborated that donated items, including food, clothing, and personal gifts from sponsors, frequently did not reach the children and were instead retained by administration or house parents.

Concerns were also raised regarding potential financial impropriety and conflicts of interest. A witness reported that staff members were instructed by then-Field Director David Hernandez to submit personal receipts for reimbursement in what was explained as an effort to lower the institution's tax obligations. This practice, coupled with David Hernandez's background in accounting, raised concerns about intentional financial manipulation. Further allegations of impropriety include a report that the accountant's wife received payments from Niños de México despite not being employed there.

Witnesses also described a system where finances were allegedly used to consolidate power and influence. It was reported that institutional funds were directed to the church pastored by David Hernandez, a practice perceived by a witness as a means for him to maintain control over the homes and staff, many of whom were members of his congregation. This created a structure wherein personal loyalty and relationships appeared to be prioritized, leading to inequities in pay and treatment among staff.

The financial concerns raised in this investigation represent a severe deviation from industry best practices for non-profit and child-caring ministries and a fundamental violation of the principles of trauma-informed care. From a best practices standpoint, ministries have a fiduciary duty to act as responsible stewards of the resources entrusted to them, ensuring that donor funds are used transparently and for their intended purpose:

the care of children. The allegations of mismanaged donations, insufficient allowances for basic needs, and potential tax fraud suggest a profound breach of this duty. Financial transparency is the bedrock of donor trust. Practices such as selling donated goods, making questionable payments, and directing institutional funds to a leader's personal ministry erode this trust and call the organization's integrity into question.

The application of SAMHSA's trauma-informed principles reveals the deep psychological harm that such financial mismanagement can inflict on vulnerable children. The most fundamental principle of a trauma-informed environment is ensuring physical and psychological safety. When children's basic needs for adequate food, hygiene, and clothing are not met due to financial mismanagement, their sense of safety is fundamentally compromised. Hunger and deprivation are re-traumatizing experiences for children who have often come from backgrounds of neglect, reinforcing a worldview where their basic needs will not be met by those in authority.

A culture of financial secrecy and alleged impropriety also creates an environment of profound distrust. Children and staff cannot trust an institution that appears to be misusing the very resources meant for their care. When children's complaints about hunger are ignored while leadership appears to benefit financially or consolidate power, it communicates that the institution's needs are prioritized over theirs, destroying any foundation of trust.

Trauma is inherently disempowering. Providing for a child's basic needs is a foundational step in restoring their sense of agency and worth. The reported disregard for children's complaints about hunger and the inequitable distribution of resources actively disempower them, reinforcing feelings of helplessness and worthlessness that are common among trauma survivors.

The alleged top-down and non-transparent financial decision-making, without regard for the needs expressed by children or frontline caregivers, violates the principle of collaboration. A collaborative approach would involve transparently assessing the needs of the children and allocating resources accordingly, ensuring that those most affected have a voice in the process.

The alleged financial practices at Niños de México did not merely represent poor accounting; they created an environment that was antithetical to healing. The failure to provide for basic needs while engaging in practices that suggest a lack of transparency and a prioritization of personal influence over child welfare actively undermined the safety, trust, and empowerment essential for a trauma-informed care setting.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the specific findings of this investigation into Niños de México. They are designed to address the deep-seated, systemic failures that allowed for pervasive abuse and a subsequent culture of concealment. Implementation of these measures must be comprehensive, transparent, and verified by an independent third party to be considered credible. A piecemeal approach will be insufficient to remedy the profound harm caused and to ensure the future safety of any child in the organization's care.

In a sinful world, no set of reforms can guarantee a child will never be abused in a residential environment where children grow up with other children and adult caregivers. At the same time, God has given us an abundance of research and access to child protection experts that can help us significantly reduce the risk of abuse and, when abuse does occur, to respond with excellence. Failing to use these God-given resources to protect children entrusted to one's care is a conscious rejection of Christ's command to care for the "least of these" (Mt. 25:34-45).

GRACE's guidance in this section focuses on developing a structure that implements reforms and creates a culture where addressing the sin of child abuse is not something done only when it comes to our attention, or when a specific policy might lower the risk of liability or insurance costs. Instead, Ninos must strive to create a culture where caregivers protect and honor children because Christ instructed Christians to do so.<sup>717</sup>

## Cooperate with Judicial Proceedings and Law Enforcement

Given the recent actions by Mexican authorities to close the Niños de México homes and remove the children, it is paramount that the institution fully cooperates with all ongoing judicial proceedings and law enforcement investigations. This cooperation is not merely a legal obligation but a moral imperative to ensure justice for any victims, facilitate a thorough understanding of past events, and prevent future harm to vulnerable children.

Niños de México must immediately and proactively provide all relevant documents, records, and information to Mexican authorities (e.g., Public Prosecutors Office, DIF, judicial

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<sup>717</sup> For a discussion of the role organizational culture plays "in the perpetration, detection, and response to child sexual abuse" in churches and other youth-serving organizations, see Donald Palmer & Valerie Feldman, *Toward a More Comprehensive Analysis of the Role of Organizational Culture in Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Contexts*, 74 Child Abuse & Neglect 23-34 (2017).

courts) and any relevant U.S. agencies (e.g., FBI, Homeland Security) involved in any investigations. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Personnel Records: Complete employment records for all current and former staff, including applications, background checks (if any were conducted), training records, disciplinary actions, and termination reasons. This is especially crucial given concerns about inadequate screening and unqualified personnel.
- Medical and Pharmaceutical Records: Detailed records of all medical care provided to children, including diagnoses, prescriptions (particularly those involving Depo Provera and SSRIs), medication administration logs, and the names of all prescribing and administering medical professionals, and a list of any prescription-level medication proactively kept onsite (or obtained generally, and without a prescription that specifically named an individual) at any Ninos-affiliated home. This should also include any documentation related to the 1998 death of a young boy.
- Financial Records: Comprehensive financial statements, donation records, expenditure logs, and any documentation related to alleged tax fraud or misuse of funds. This includes records related to funding provided to David Hernandez's church and payments to individuals not actively working at the institution.
- Incident Reports: All internal reports, complaints, and investigations related to alleged abuse (sexual, physical, emotional), neglect, inadequate care (food, clothing), and any other concerning incidents involving children or staff.
- Surveillance Footage: Provide all available camera footage, including historical archives, and details regarding the functionality, blind spots, and access protocols of the camera system. Investigate and explain any missing footage.
- Sponsorship Program Details: Full records of the "Hugs" or "Abrazos" sponsorship program, including sponsor identities, communication logs with children, records of any in-country visits and protocols for sponsor access to minors.
- Communications: All relevant internal communications (emails, messages, meeting minutes) among leadership, staff, and medical professionals pertaining to the concerns raised in this report, including discussions about medication practices, personnel issues, financial matters, and responses to reported incidents.

## Survivor Support in Legal Proceedings

Niños de México should do whatever it can to support witness and victim cooperation. This support should include, but not be limited to, the following actions:

- Non-Retaliation Policy: Publicly commit to a strict non-retaliation policy against any current or former staff, residents, or other individuals who cooperate with authorities or provide information to investigations.
- Implement mechanisms to protect those who come forward: Serious safety concerns have been raised, based on the violent events experienced by others who have participated in these proceedings. The physical safety of survivors must be supported. Survivors must be consulted to identify their individual safety concerns, and individualized plans must be developed, paid for by Niños, to help ensure their safety. Survivors may need to be presented with options, as they may identify concerns without understanding how to mitigate their risks. These options could include relocation, temporary provision of security guards at their homes or places of work, security escorts in the community, support for removing personal information from the internet, purchase and installation of window and door locks, etc. Additionally, because survivor trust is low, survivors need access to someone who can advocate on their behalf with the organization, such as a third-party ombudsman with the conferred authority to speak with survivors, identify and manage concerns and engage with organization leadership to resolve concerns, issues, provide additional support, etc.
- Access to Legal Counsel and Support: Assist authorities in ensuring that victims and witnesses have access to independent legal counsel and appropriate psychological and emotional support services throughout the investigative and judicial processes.
- Timely and Accurate Information for Judicial Proceedings: Ensure that victims and their legal representatives are properly notified and present at all relevant hearings and judicial proceedings, addressing the reported issue of victims not being present or notified.
- Public Statement of Cooperation: Issue a public statement acknowledging the severity of the allegations and committing to full cooperation with authorities.

- Acceptance of Findings: Publicly commit to accepting and acting upon the findings and directives of Mexican judicial and law enforcement authorities, including any sentencing, orders for institutional closure, or requirements for reparations.

## Post-placement support for removed children

Niños de México should do whatever it can to support the affected children. This support should include, but not be limited to, the following actions:

- Post-Removal Care Coordination: Collaborate with DIF and other child welfare agencies to ensure a smooth transition and appropriate ongoing care for all children removed from the homes, including young adults who were housed at Ninos and those with specific medical needs.
- Provide Records for New Placements: Furnish comprehensive records for each child to their new caregivers or institutions, including medical, psychological, and educational histories, to ensure continuity of care and support.

This comprehensive cooperation is essential for accountability, justice, and to demonstrate a commitment to child protection that was severely lacking in the past. It will be a critical step in addressing the systemic failures identified in this report and beginning to repair the trust that has been broken.

## Governance and Board Oversight

The investigation revealed a catastrophic failure of oversight by the U.S. Board of Directors, which operated with a severe lack of awareness and authority over the Mexican field operations. To remedy this, the entire governance structure must be rebuilt from the ground up to prioritize child safety above all else.

1. Dissolve and Reconstitute the Board of Directors: In response to the Board's multi-decade failure to provide meaningful oversight, the current U.S. Board of Directors must be immediately and completely dissolved. A new, independent board must be constituted through a transparent process overseen by an external governance expert. This new board must have term limits and a strict conflict of interest policy that explicitly bars any family members of staff or leadership, as well

as major long-term donors, from serving. The board must be composed of individuals with professional expertise in relevant fields, including at least two external experts in child protection and trauma-informed care, a legal expert, and a licensed financial professional who can provide meaningful, professional-grade scrutiny rather than passive approval.

2. Establish a Mandate for Direct, Intrusive Oversight: To correct the dangerous "hands-off" approach that enabled decades of abuse, the new Board's bylaws must mandate direct, frequent, and intrusive oversight of all field operations. This is non-negotiable. This mandate must include, at a minimum:
  - quarterly unannounced site visits by a designated board committee
  - direct, unfettered access to all staff and children for confidential interviews. These interviews should be conducted by board members with expertise and experience in children protection, trauma, survivor-care or working with children in out-of-home placements. All interviews should be conducted in pairs, but without management present.
  - ultimate authority over hiring and firing of all personnel, including the Executive Director
  - direct approval of the field operating budget to ensure resources are allocated to safety and care, not just expansion. This represents a fundamental shift from a passive, advisory role to an active, governing one.
3. Mandate Third-Party Forensic Financial Audits: To address the finding that institutional reputation and finances were prioritized over child safety, the organization must undergo an annual, independent forensic financial audit conducted by a reputable firm with no prior ties to the organization. The scope must go beyond standard accounting to analyze spending for potential irregularities and ensure donor funds are directly supporting child welfare. A clear, understandable summary of this audit, including an analysis of per-child expenditures on health, education, and safety, must be made public on the organization's website to ensure transparency and rebuild donor confidence on a foundation of integrity.
4. A standing child protection committee that will take a leadership role in implementing policy reforms, enforcing policies, and in updating policies. GRACE also proposes the development of a theological working group within the child protection committee to develop a long-term strategy for engaging theologically with the subject of abuse, including God's view of children, the prevention of abuse, and a God-honoring comprehensive sexuality education methodology designed to equip children with information critical to their understanding of themselves, their God-formed bodies, how to make well-informed decisions, how to protect

themselves and how to honor and protect others. In the absence of theological engagement, survivors of abuse will continue to leave the church,<sup>718</sup> offenders will be emboldened to repeat their crimes,<sup>719</sup> children will lack critical knowledge, and the Church will not be taken seriously by the watching community.<sup>720</sup>

## Leadership and Accountability

The investigation found that leadership, including multiple Executive Directors, consistently failed to protect children, actively concealed abuse, retaliated against whistleblowers, and in some cases, were accused of personally abusing children. This requires a complete removal of compromised leadership, a professionalization of all management roles, and the establishment of new accountability standards.

1. Immediate and Permanent Removal of Implicated Leadership: As a direct result of their documented failures to report abuse and protect children, Executive Director Steve Ross and Field Director Juan Manual Vasquez must be permanently removed from any and all roles, paid or voluntary, within Niños de México. Furthermore, a review must be conducted by the new Board to identify any other senior staff who had knowledge of allegations and failed to take appropriate action. This action is the minimum first step necessary to break the cycle of concealment and institutional protection identified in the report. Their continued presence in any capacity would render all other reform efforts meaningless.
2. Implement a Professional, Third-Party Vetting and Hiring Overhaul: The hiring, for instance, of Marco Antonio Parra without conducting a US criminal background check demonstrates a failure and insufficiency of current vetting protocols. Ninos should immediately take steps to complete that check. All hiring for roles with child contact must be managed by an independent professional firm specializing in high-risk environments. A new, rigorous, multi-stage hiring process must include

<sup>718</sup> Survivors of abuse “are leaving [the church] because they feel utterly alone in their stories and because so few abuse stories are even hinted at on Sunday mornings. While we [abuse survivors] long to see the church grow deeper through evangelism, instead we are experiencing a shameful exodus of the very people who could offer the world the kind of authentic, raw hope the next generation craves and needs.” MARY DEMUTH, *We Too: How the Church Can Respond Redemptively to the Sexual Abuse Crisis* 22 (2019).

<sup>719</sup> In the words of one convicted sex offender: “I consider church people easy to fool...they have a trust that comes from being Christians...They tend to be better folks all around. And they seem to want to believe in the good that exists in all people...I think they want to believe in people. And because of that, you can easily convince, with or without convincing words.” ANNA SALTER, *PREDATORS* 29 (2003).

<sup>720</sup> “This is a watershed moment for the church, and how we deal with it while the world watches *matters*. We can no longer retreat into the ‘holy’ cloisters of our own making, wearing our Sunday best while predator people commit crimes against the innocent.” MARY DEMUTH, *We Too: How the Church Can Respond Redemptively to the Sexual Abuse Crisis* 22 (2019).

international criminal background checks, interview and examinations involving psychological and behavioral screening for predatory indicators, extensive reference checks that include specific, scripted questions about the applicant's suitability to work with vulnerable children, including any past instances of discipline related to inappropriate conduct, and written job descriptions for every role that include essential functions and necessary skills, education and experience required for these roles that can be used as objective measures in evaluating candidates abilities to be successful in the job they are applying for.

3. Establish and Promote Robust Whistleblower Protections: To counteract the culture of fear and retaliation that silenced victims and honest staff, a formal, confidential whistleblower policy must be established and heavily promoted. All reporting must be directed to an independent, third-party ethics hotline, not to internal leadership. This service must be available 24/7 in both Spanish and English, accessible via phone, text, and web, and guarantee absolute non-retaliation. All staff, volunteers, and children must receive mandatory, regular training on what this policy is, why it is safe, and exactly how to use it. This creates a critical safety valve outside the traditional chain of command.
4. Establish multiple, safe, confidential and child-friendly feedback mechanisms and include children's feedback into program design and implementation: There are internationally recognized resources for Accountability to Affected Populations that could be adopted by Ninos to ensure that children's perspectives and experiences are included in all stages of program design, implementation and evaluation. This includes proactively seeking out feedback from children regarding what they like/don't like about programming, what they see is working or needs improvement, and providing a feedback loop to children to acknowledge that the feedback was heard and what the organization will do with the feedback. This feedback could be gathered from adult-led focus groups, surveys, the establishment of resident's "councils" where children seek out feedback from each other and are empowered to present ideas to leadership, or other mechanisms. This also means providing spaces for children to share feedback if and when they feel they need/want to, such as having regularly checked, confidential/locked feedback boxes, establishing a children's ombudsman to speak with or other mechanisms continually available and accessible by children in each of the locations Ninos operates.

## Child Protection and Medical Safety

The core failure of Niños de México was its inability to provide a safe environment, resulting in horrific misconduct. Policies must be rebuilt from the ground up based on current, evidence-based best practices.

1. Develop and Implement a Gold-Standard Child Protection Policy (CPP): The absence of effective policies was a root cause of the abuse. A new CPP must be drafted by an external, internationally recognized, trauma-informed child protection agency. It must include clear, non-negotiable rules on all staff-child interactions (including the "two-adult rule"), prohibitions on corporal punishment and any form of degrading treatment, strict guidelines for digital and social media communication, vetting processes and engagement rules for all visitors, and mandatory, immediate reporting of any suspicion of abuse directly to Mexican law enforcement, bypassing any internal investigation or delay. This policy must be the supreme operational authority, and every single adult, from director to volunteer, must sign it annually.
2. Overhaul and Externalize All Medical and Pharmaceutical Care: The finding of improper medication, including the use of Depo-Provera for "chemical castration," and the long-term sexual abuse by Dr. Noe Flores Floriano, necessitates a complete and permanent overhaul of medical services. All medical and mental health care must be provided by accredited external clinics or hospitals. The use of on-site "house doctors" must be permanently prohibited. A new policy must require written, informed parental/guardian consent for any and all medications, with a second opinion from an unaffiliated provider required for any psychotropic or hormone-based treatments. All past medical records must be audited by an independent medical expert to identify other potential victims and patterns of malpractice.
3. Commission an Independent Investigation of the 1998 Death of Jose Luis Canizales Jimenez: The suspicious 1998 death of Jose Luis Canizales Jimenez was never adequately investigated. The organization must fund a fully independent, external investigation by a qualified firm (e.g., former law enforcement investigators) into this death and any other suspicious child deaths, disappearances, or serious injuries in its history. The investigators must be given full access to all records and personnel. The complete, unredacted findings must be delivered to the appropriate legal authorities in Mexico and the U.S. and made public. To do otherwise would be to remain complicit in the potential obstruction of justice.

## Transparency, Repentance, and Cultural Reform

The deep-seated culture of secrecy and institutional self-preservation must be dismantled through radical transparency and tangible, costly acts of repentance.

1. Issue a Comprehensive Public Apology and Acknowledgment of Harm: The organization must issue a formal, detailed public apology that is permanently and prominently displayed on its website and communicated to all past and present donors. The apology must specifically name the founders (Wanda and Merlyn Beeman) and key leadership (including Steve Ross, Terry Stine, David Hernandez, Juan Manuel Vasquez, Noe Flores, etc.) as having failed to protect children. It must unequivocally acknowledge the specific findings of this report, including the decades of sexual and physical misconduct, the harmful responses, and the culture of fear. It must explicitly reject the past culture of secrecy as a profound moral and operational failure, not an unfortunate mistake.
2. Establish and Fund an Independent Victim-Survivor Restitution and Care Fund: As an act of repentance and to provide tangible support for those harmed, Niños de México must establish a substantial restitution fund. This fund must be legally separate from the organization and administered by an independent third party, with a governing board that includes victim-survivor representation. The fund must provide accessible, non-adversarial funding for counseling, medical care, education, and other long-term care needs for all victim-survivors of abuse at its facilities. This is not a matter of charity, but of justice, a recognition of the harm the organization is responsible for both causing and failing to address, and a tangible demonstration of remorse. When Zacchaeus repented for his sins, he gave half of his possessions to the poor and paid back four times the amount of money he had cheated his victims out of (Luke 19:1-9). In this case, Niños de México cannot give the reporting victims back their childhoods or restore to them what was taken from them, but they can take ownership for the harm the organization caused..
3. Confront and Eradicate Theological Malpractice: The investigation found that religious authority was used to groom, manipulate, and silence victims. The organization must engage an external, trauma-informed theological consultant to review all curriculum, training materials, and teachings. This process must lead to a public renunciation of specific doctrines that were weaponized, such as demands for unquestioning obedience to authority. It must be replaced by mandatory, ongoing training for all staff on the misuse of religious authority, the nature of spiritual abuse, and the development of a trauma-informed theology of child protection that affirms the voice, value, and agency of every child.

## Implement Child Protection Policy Reforms

This report contains a number of child protection policy reforms. Some of them can be implemented quickly, others will take thought and planning. All policies should be reviewed annually and modified as appropriate. One or more roles at Ninos will need to be identified, and their job descriptions modified to include responsibility for review of new research on policies or education that may improve their ability to protect children in the future. These roles should have sufficient authority to recommend and implement changes and enhancements as needed to stay abreast of developments in best practices.

Beyond apologies and restitution, Niños de México must commit to a fundamental reorientation of its organizational culture to be fully trauma-informed, integrating SAMHSA's six key principles into every policy, procedure, and staff interaction. This includes implementing mandatory, recurring, and in-depth trauma-informed care training for all staff, emphasizing recognizing trauma responses, de-escalation techniques, and avoiding re-traumatization. Robust accountability mechanisms should be created to address any staff behavior that contradicts trauma-informed principles. Niños de México should actively seek and integrate feedback from survivors in the development and implementation of all future child protection policies and operational procedures, potentially through a survivor advisory council. A standing child protection committee with independent oversight should be established. This committee should include external experts, and positions on the committee should be offered to survivors, should they be willing to participate. This committee should ensure continuous review and improvement of policies and practices. Additionally, intentional integration of trauma-informed activities into the daily programming of the children's homes, as well as operating general activities with a trauma-informed lens and evaluation of physical structures from a safeguarding perspective will help to establish a culture of care and concern for children coming from traumatic backgrounds and help ensure they are not further traumatized through participation in Ninos programs or living in Ninos home.

Finally, recognizing that the harm occurred within a religiously affiliated context, Niños de México should offer access to independent spiritual counselors or chaplains, chosen by the survivors, who can provide support without being tied to the institution's past or current leadership. They should also support the development of survivor-led peer support networks or connect survivors with existing, independent support groups, acknowledging the power of shared experience in the healing process. This multifaceted approach to repentance and amends, deeply rooted in restorative justice and

trauma-informed principles, is the only path towards genuine healing for the victims and any possibility of integrity for Niños de México in the future.