2008

In the Absence of Family: How Ideas of the Substitute Family in Honduran Children's Homes Shape Perception of the Needs of at-risk youth

Stephanie Bowman
Colby College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses
Colby College theses are protected by copyright. They may be viewed or downloaded from this site for the purposes of research and scholarship. Reproduction or distribution for commercial purposes is prohibited without written permission of the author.

Recommended Citation

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact mfkelly@colby.edu.
In the Absence of Family:

How Ideas of the Substitute Family in Honduran Children's Homes Shape Perception of the Needs of At-Risk Youth

Stephanie Bowman
Latin American Studies Honors Thesis
Colby College
Spring, 2008
In the Absence of Family:

How Ideas of the Substitute Family in Honduran Children's Homes Shape Perception of the Needs of At-Risk Youth

Stephanie Bowman has completed the requirements for Honors in Latin American Studies

________________________________________

Dr. Ben Fallaw, Thesis Advisor

________________________________________

Dr. Patrice Franko, Second Reader

Department of Latin American Studies
Colby College
Spring, 2008
Acknowledgements

There are many people without whom this thesis would never have happened. To those in Honduras, Maine and Minnesota who chose to encourage me as I worked on this project, I am very grateful.

Firstly, I would like to thank all of the children’s homes who welcomed me onto their property, and invited into their lives. I wish I could have captured the voice of every child in these homes because they each have an important story to tell. Specifically, I would like to thank Ana Elizabeth Alberto, Christof Wittwer, Gonzalo Rodriguez, Julia Phillips, and Geovani Rivera Baca for their cooperation in my research in Honduras. I would like especially to thank Vivian Chahín who has given more than just her cooperation, but also friendship. You are doing a wonderful job, Vivian, and on behalf of the children, please know that all your hard work is much appreciated.

I would like to thank Ben Fallaw and Patrice Franko for agreeing to advise this project. I know you both are extremely busy, and it means a lot to me that you encouraged me to begin and continue, knowing it would mean more work for you. I am also grateful to the Latin American Studies Program for the financial support they provided by means of the Walker Fellowship.

I would most like to thank my friends and family who have tolerated me throughout this year. Thank you to all my friends who have listened and given feedback. Specifically, I would like to thank Kristin Weigle and Jess Feigal. You are two of the best friends a person could hope to have. Thank you mom for your unconditional support in everything I do. You taught me to try new things, seek out new experiences and never give up. Your support throughout has been unwavering. Last, but certainly not least, I must thank my fiancée Hugo whose daily encouragement kept me sane and who constantly reminds me of what is important. Gracias, mi amor, por apoyarme en todo. No hubiera podido hacer esto sin todo lo que haces por mí y sin tu amor constante. Aunque ha sido difícil a veces, los niños del hogar y yo te amamos más que nunca. Te lo digo de verdad.

THANK YOU ALL!
# Table of Contents

Abstract 1  

Introduction 2  
   - Definition of Terms 4  
   - Methodology 7  

Chapter 1: The Condition of Honduran Children 10  
   - The Role of the State: IHNFA 13  
   - The Role of NGOs 16  

Chapter 2: A Child’s Needs 22  
   - The Idea of Childhood 22  
   - Children’s Needs 28  
      - Childhood development 28  
   - Long-Term Needs 40  
      - Family Structure 41  
      - Family as a Social Network 45  
   - Common Problems in Children’s Homes 49  
   - Moving Beyond the Theoretical 54  

Chapter 3: Is the Proxy Family Model Ideal? 56  
   - Aldea Infantil SOS (SOS Children’s Village) 60  
   - Hogar de Fé (Faith Home) 68  
   - Amigos de Jesús (Friends of Jesus) 73  
   - Conditions for Success?: Who proxy family homes do and do not help 75  

Chapter 4: Group Homes as an Alternative 81  
   - El Refugio (The Refuge) 83  
   - Hogar de Niños Emanuel (Emanuel Children’s Home) 90  
   - Hogar San Rafael (San Rafael Children’s Home) 98  
   - Major deficiencies?: Who group homes do and do not help 103  

Conclusions 107  

Appendices 113  
   - Appendix A: Questionnaires 113  
   - Appendix B: Questions used to analyze the homes and their responses 115  
      - Questions 115  
   - Appendix C: Interviews 117  

Bibliography 118
List of Figures

Figure 1 - Reasons Children Live in a Children’s Home and Their Prevalence 13
Figure 2 - Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development 30
Figure 3 - Prominent Characteristics of Proxy Family Homes 59
Figure 4 - Synopsis of Needs Met by Proxy Homes 75
Figure 5 - Characterization of Group Homes 82
Figure 6 - Synopsis of Needs Met by Group Homes 104
Abstract

Through an interdisciplinary analysis of children’s homes in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, this project reflects on how conceptions of family affect the prioritization of the needs of the homes’ beneficiaries. One consequence of the impoverished nature of Honduras are orphaned, abandoned, mistreated, malnourished, abused, neglected and disowned children who have come to live in group children’s homes that, for the most part, meet their short-term physical needs. But what about children’s developmental, social and educational needs? In this study, we analyze what needs homes meet according to the kind of familial substitute they provide as either a group home or a proxy family home. Conscious of the limited financial resources these small NGOs have available, each home has chosen a particular structure that meets some children’s needs, while ignoring others. How well do these homes provide for the spectrum of short and long-term needs of Honduran children? How does their conception of family and organization affect their efficacy? What conclusions can be drawn about the most effective allocation of all available resources?
Introduction

Family. The implications of family are endless in shaping who we are, regardless of how exactly we define it. Although for most people from developed countries the idea of family indicates a nuclear or extended group of blood relatives, in many contexts family can mean friends or other social networks that are voluntarily chosen. However, what is the effect if one’s family, the entity that supports into adulthood, is a place with 30-120 other children, designed to house underprivileged or orphaned children until age 18, providing them with all their material needs? In other words, how does the family in the absence of family, created in an organization such as a children’s home, shape the children who pass through it? Obviously, the traditional concepts of family are not applicable in this context because children are not there from the time they are born and do not have any unbreakable ties to those who care for them. A children’s home is therefore something else; something for which a new concept must be created. Although children’s homes cannot entirely mimic a nuclear family setting, the model that is currently in use in most regions of the world, is based on the developed world’s ideas of adulthood and emotional autonomy. Globally, developing nations have to deal with the poorest children with the greatest needs; experts in developed nations too often ignore that developing nations conceive of the family in very different terms. As the goals of these organizations are to improve the lives of children and relieve poverty, we must look specifically at how well homes recreate family to address the needs of children.

Latin America, as a region, is characterized by social conditions that are below internationally acceptable levels in terms of health, education and specifically the well-being of children. These conditions affecting children are worse in Honduras. Twelve percent of children below the age of 18 live or work on the streets in Honduras as compared to an 8%
average for Latin America. In Honduras, various types of public and private organizations exist to help these children, including many children’s homes. These homes are a substitute for the children’s families that provide for material needs, but also seek to provide the children better opportunities in life.

The most effective children’s homes are private because they can house children until adulthood, while state-run homes provide only temporary alternative families. Private children’s homes have the financial resources to create an artificial family that provides not only for short-term material needs, but also long-term needs that empower the children to successfully integrate into Honduran society. However, the familial background and support required to empower children can only be supplied if those resources are put to the best use. This requires understanding the developmental process of children and applying it in a group setting.

Children’s homes differ widely in what kind of substitute family they are going to create.

A lack of resources forces homes, with different assumptions about the nature of family, to highlight some needs while ignoring others. Children come to homes with very different needs, and any one model rarely meets all needs.

How do these homes’ family ideals shape the way they allocate resources and provide the children the best possible future given the circumstances? In order to draw any conclusions about the role of private Honduran children’s homes as substitute families in Honduras, we will analyze these homes based on their ability to provide children with needed skills. First we will look at the home situation in general both historically and sociologically to understand the role of family and the child. Then, we will look specifically at the development of the child. We will consider the role the state plays in the process and the effect of more involvement by Honduran

---

social services in the organization and specialization of service offered by specific homes. We will determine which needs are being met and what that means for the children who live there, according to the kind of substitute family provided by the home. Is one model of children’s home more suitable to act in the absence of family?

Definition of Terms

People vary in how they define terms we will use throughout, so it is important to familiarize ourselves with tools that we will be using to understand the issues at hand. In the context of Honduras, we are using the term *children’s home* to refer to an institution in which children live because they have left home either by force or by choice. Depending on policies, these children may live at a home for many years. In this thesis, we will be looking only at private organizations that are non-profit, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations); most of these NGOs have foreign influence either in their funding or their direction.

As our study reflects upon children’s homes’ ability to create a substitute family for children in need, a clear definition of family is required. According to the Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology, *family* is “a social institution defined by the social functions it is expected to perform: reproducing and socializing the young, regulating sexual behavior, acting as a major focus of productive work, protecting children and providing emotional comfort and support for adults, and serving as a source of ascribed statuses, such as ethnicity and race.”

The fact that family is an institution emphasizes that individual families are characterized not by a universal definition, but by social norms.

---

There are two major categories of concern with respect to how the children are raised within the children’s homes. **Short-term needs** are material and daily needs such as food, shelter, medical attention, school supplies, safety and critical developmental needs. The question of whether these needs are met will not be addressed quantitatively here, but instead used to analyze the prioritization of these needs with respect to their long-term equivalent. **Long-term needs** are skills and resources that the children are equipped with during their time at the home that empowers them, upon becoming an adult to leave the home and to integrate successfully into society. As we will see, this dichotomy does not accurately portray the spectrum of children’s needs, but currently, it is the accepted model.

Empowerment is a difficult term to describe definitively. Various concepts must be addressed in any attempt to understand how children’s homes can act as tools of empowerment. Some define empowerment as simply the attainment of a certain level of material needs to allow the freedom to make life choices. However, this seems more closely related with short-term needs in that it is determined by material resources. Therefore, other scholars consider empowerment in terms of resources that are less tangible: “the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.” Specifically in this project, we are using **empowerment** as the ability to sustain oneself and adapt to one’s environment by means of a job or the prospect of a stable future through higher level education or training, and the skills to maintain it. Similarly, we use the word **integration** to refer to one’s ability to make new acquaintances and contacts, broadening one’s social networks.

---

The concept of social networks is a sociological term that can be rather ambiguous. When referring to gangs and violence it is defined as “voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange.”\(^5\) The man who first coined the term said it was “an association of people drawn together by family, work or hobby.”\(^6\) Here we will use the definition found in Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology: “A **social network** is simply a collection of relationships that connect people, social statuses, or other units of analysis such as groups and formal organizations.”\(^7\) In this sense, networks are based more on where people are located in various networks than on who they are as unique individuals.

“**Western**” and “**non-Western**” are terms employed by anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists whose work is important to understanding many concepts relating to children cross-culturally. However there are many who take offense to this world view claiming it is limiting or that it characterizes the “non-West” as the “other.” In general, “Western” refers to developed countries, specifically Europe and the United States, that hold characteristically different beliefs from the rest of the world, or the “other.” Some of these “Western” beliefs, which we will explore further, are independence and individualism, specifically emotional autonomy. However, I will only use these terms when quoting the work of others. Otherwise, I will use the terms developed or developed nation to refer to culturally similar countries such as the United States and Europe, and developing countries or simply Latin America to specify what other scholars lump into the term “non-Western.”

Finally, I would like to address the idea of culture as it relates to a comparison between cultural norms of developed and developing nations. Because culture is used specifically in

---


terms of conceptions of children and parenting, as well as what is best for the good of society, I am using a rather abstract definition from Kenneth Rubin: “Culture is considered by some to reflect a complex of variables, a set of separable (if related) contextual factors, and by others to constitute a more abstract entity of learned meanings and shared information transmitted from one generation to the next through social interaction.”

Culture determines what family system is normal within a society and how being aware of and adaptable to one’s culture is important to successfully integrate as an adult.

Methodology

During the months of January 2006 and January 2007, I observed the workings of children’s homes in Honduras using the ethnographic methods I learned in Cultural Anthropology, an introductory course to the principles and techniques of anthropology at Colby College. I also conducted formal and informal interviews with the children, faculty and administrators of the homes to understand the various perspectives of those involved on a daily basis. Time spent in some of these homes in the year 2006 was spent acquainting myself generally with the system. I did not have a specific topic that I was exploring to guide my interactions with those I met. Instead I aimed to became familiar with the homes generally and their organization.

In January 2007, I returned and became more familiar with Hogar Emanuel, El Aldea Infantiles SOS, El Hogar de Fé, El Refugio, and Hogar San Rafael. I revisited homes I had already seen as well as became acquainted with a larger variety of homes, allowing me to see that different homes create different kinds of substitute families. I chose these homes because

---

they represented a wide variety of care available to children. I grouped them, based on their organization, into the two models analyzed in chapters 3 and 4. The method of investigation I used with these homes was to visit (if it was the first time) for a short period of time in which I was introduced to the director, given the official explanation of the workings of the home, and then given a tour of the premises. Their programs were explained and I could briefly meet a few of the children. After this, I returned as often as possible to the homes to observe their daily activities and speak with the children informally. This at times proved very helpful while other times, disappointing. The children were not hesitant to speak, however it was difficult to guide our conversation. I would ask them questions about their life in the home, their daily activities, who cared for them, and how happy they were in the home. They often wanted to talk about other topics. Working with these children, it is necessary to recognize that they are not always reliable sources. Because they crave attention, they will often exaggerate or fabricate in order to receive the attention they crave. Although it is important to understanding their psychological development, it is hard to have a clear picture of the facts. Unfortunately, it was difficult to speak openly with the staff because they were nervous about saying anything negative about their place of employment. Often I would discover information about a staff member’s job indirectly either through the children or the director, and once asked, the staff member would explain. Much of the information that could have been discovered through the employees of the homes, I did not learn for this very reason.

I also interviewed outsiders associated with the children’s homes, including psychologists, social workers and administrators of the federal social services agency IHNFA. In addition to the questions asked at the homes, I asked these more objective individuals about the system as a whole and the deficiencies and strengths of each of the homes. I asked them for
their opinion of the most important component in providing good care for these children and discussed whether their needs were met or unmet. With a few people, I discussed the role of the state and role of NGOs, specifically foreign one, in the organization and function of the homes.
Chapter 1: The Condition of Honduran Children

What are the local conditions surrounding this group of at-risk youth in San Pedro Sula? To what extent is their difficult situation a reflection of circumstances in Honduras? San Pedro Sula, Honduras has a population of about 900,000 people (2006 estimate) in its metro area. It is the second largest city after the capital of Tegucigalpa, and is considered the economic center of Honduras. Similar to other parts of Honduras and Latin America in general, San Pedro Sula is a growing but dangerous city characterized by delinquency and poverty. The existence of bordos demonstrates the dire socio-economic situation of the city. Because of gangs and poverty itself, there is a high rate of delinquency making the streets dangerous and social circumstances unstable. Very poor social indicators characterize Honduras and San Pedro Sula reflects these national trends. Although the situation may seem dismal, it is slowly improving: The mortality rate for children under 5 has decreased from 59/1000 born in 1990 to 41/1000 born in 2004, life

9 “Recuperemos La Paz” La Prensa, April 12, 2008.
10 A bordo is a shantytown, which is an area where otherwise homeless people have constructed homes out of whatever they can obtain. Definition by author.
expectancy has risen from 65 to 68.\textsuperscript{11} Due to Honduras’s extremely poor economic and social standing, it has been identified as a HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Country) by the Inter-American Development Bank since December 1999, and is currently receiving $70 million in loans and $3.6 million in grants that are dedicated to programs reducing poverty.\textsuperscript{12} Generalized poverty affects the children of the country as well. In this section we will explore the context in which these children’s homes have been set-up and the social challenges they face.

As in most of Latin America, the youngest sector of Honduran society (children between the ages of 0-18) is the largest percentage of the population: 49.8\% of the total population or 3,567,712.\textsuperscript{13} According to Convention of the Rights of Children from the UN, of these 3.5 million children, 3,876 were under the care of some entity that was not their family, which monitored by INHFA (Instituto Hondureño de la Niñez y la Familia). Of those children, 3,565 Honduran were located in NGOs for care while 217 were placed in state centers and managed directly by INHFA. Of the children who were housed by INHFA, 67 were “reintegrated” into the homes from which they were removed. From this data we can conclude that a relatively small proportion of the total population of Honduran children are housed in children’s homes (~1\%), but the vast majority of those who are, live in NGO-run homes. The personal stories and size of the problem have elicited a significant humanitarian response. Many organizations believe it is their duty to care for these children.

Millions of children are born and live in extremely impoverished conditions. Many children are removed from their home because of abuse, often sexual, or because of extreme

\textsuperscript{12} Inter-American Development Bank, “Honduras and the IDB” http://www.iadb.org/countries/home.cfm?id_country=HO.
poverty reported to INHFA.\textsuperscript{14} Casa Alianza reports that there were an estimated 10,000 cases of sexual exploitation in 2005 alone, for which it removed 125 girls and INHFA removed 205 children from their homes.\textsuperscript{15} Extreme cases of poverty where a single mother supports many children on very little money is often a reason for removal. A small percentage of the children in the homes are actual orphans, but among those who are, their parents generally died from AIDS or violent death by gang or domestic violence. Finally, some of the children at the homes are street children. The number of street children in total in Honduras is very difficult to estimate because they are socially invisible. In Tegucigalpa, the capital, it is estimated that there are 302 street children.\textsuperscript{16} According to most social scientists, this is a very conservative estimate. With little interaction between street children conventional institutions (e.g. school), there is no way to count them. The given number most likely reflects the number of children who have had documented interaction with the state either through incarceration or IHNFA. Often these children find themselves in the street because of rejection by their family or the need to work to support their family. It is also important to note the difference between children \textit{in} the streets and children \textit{of} the streets. The former refers to children who have family, but because of financial difficulty, are forced to work in the streets for money. Occasionally, these children sleep in the street, but they still have family that support them and whom they are helping to support. The latter refers to children who have completely severed ties with family and solely inhabit the streets.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Gonzalo Rodriguez (IHNFA employee and social worker), in discussion with author, January 30, 2008.
\textsuperscript{15} United Nations Human Rights Website, 26.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 27-8.
\textsuperscript{17} Tobias Hecht, \textit{At Home in the Street: Street Children of Northeast Brazil} (Cambridge, U.K.: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1998), 103-115.
Considering the extreme situations from which the children who live in the children’s homes come, we direct our attention to the agencies that are responsible for street kids and other at-risk youth.

The Role of the State: IHNFA

In Honduras there are two governmental agencies that are dedicated to addressing the needs of children and families. They are PRAF, Programa de Asignación Familiar, and IHNFA, Instituto Hondureña de la Niñez y la Familia. The former deals principally with programs that help families to support themselves, specifically single mothers. While such programs are important and relate to many of the same problems we are addressing here, this agency, in general, does not create an alternative family for the children. IHNFA, on the other hand, is the equivalent of the United States’ social services. It, along with other state powers such as the
fiscalía, removes children from at-risk situations and either places them in a home or in another program dedicated to “familial integration.  

There are three main thrusts to the programs created by IHNFA. Familial and Communal Development is the first and its goal is to prevent at-risk situations. These programs help families who otherwise may have ended up abandoning their children to IHNFA because of difficult conditions. However, prevention has its limits, so Intervention and Protection, the second branch, is the majority of IHNFA’s work. This branch removes children from situations that are detrimental to their well-being. Usually such situations are reported either to IHNFA or the fiscalía and are then investigated. The child is removed if they are found to be at-risk. They can then be put in a familia solidaria, foster home, or they can go into a Hogar de Protección, a children’s home. At this point, the home may be a state home or an NGO. The third branch of IHNFA is Re-education and Social Reinsertion, which works with youth who have committed crimes and are either at a home for juvenile delinquents, are under house arrest, or must perform community service.

IHNFA’s interaction with non-profit children’s homes, therefore, falls within the second category of its responsibilities. IHNFA is organized regionally, and similar to a governmental organization, follows a chain of command that ends at its national administration. This means that the activities of an office are not determined necessarily by the needs of its community, but rather by national politics and bureaucracy. Nationally, it is the law that it is the responsibility of the state to take care of any children that cannot be cared for by their biological parents. This gives IHNFA power to claim that it is responsible to look after any children who need care, however since 90 of the 105 million lempira (approximately 4.75 of the 5.5 million US dollars)

---

18 The fiscalía is the branch of government that is responsible for investigating injustices.
20 La Constitución de Honduras. Art. CXIX
allotted to IHNFA go to personnel, there is not much left to do anything. Therefore, the current social services system for children subsists through the aid of private organizations and churches that make up (estimated) 90% of the care given to children in need. The state-run homes in the northern region of Honduras, where San Pedro Sula is located, are few, overcrowded and serve only as temporary solutions for children. Children rarely stay more than a couple months, unless they have been sent there for some kind of behavioral correction. These homes are truly institutions. They usually cannot provide a long-term family substitute for children. Because of these deficiencies, the vast majority of homes in the region are some kind of NGO.

This system causes a tense relationship between the state, which believes itself responsible to care for children although it cannot, and the NGOs who can provide a substitute family for the children but do not necessarily have the authority to act. IHNFA, supposedly because of the same lack of funds, does not certify the homes, but only “supervises” their activities and makes suggestions. However there are no negative repercussions if the homes do not follow IHNFA’s suggestions. Homes in general are left to their own devices regarding their organization and methods of child care. Many are internationally-funded and managed, yet some have local influence. Various homes have developed additional programs to aid their communities and better meet the needs of their beneficiaries, which we will look at more closely when speaking of individual homes in chapters 3 and 4. It is a complicated system that must be examined in more depth.

22 Ibid.
The Role of NGOs

NGOs have been criticized for providing assistance that does not meet the actual needs of their community, but follows a pre-set agenda based on the NGO’s values. In the case of children’s homes, the criticism is that they provide for children short-term needs, but as part of international organizations may not be conscious of cultural norms. Poverty in Latin America is endemic and, without solid social networks, people are marginalized and unable to truly leave poverty. Consequently, we must consider whether children who are housed in children’s homes and socialized according to cultural constructions, appropriate or inappropriate, have the “social capital” to break out of the system of poverty from which they came. What can we identify as the specific role of these substitute families in providing appropriate socialization to their children? First, we must consider the purpose of private children’s homes to understand what kind of family substitute they provide, and then analyze how similar organizations help their beneficiaries. Then we will consider the role of domestic participation and the importance of local ownership in projects aimed at improving Latin American society. Finally, we will consider specific methods used to bridge the gap between international NGOs and the communities they reach, and what if any disconnect exists between the two entities.

Firstly, the purpose of most NGOs in Latin America is “development.” Although a rather vague term, it refers usually to its economic component, but also to its social implications. One concise definition is “the process of meeting the basic needs of the population and enhancing options for how economic resources will be allocated today and in the future to increase the choices citizens have in their daily lives.”23 These organizations can be domestically originated, but more often, they are created and funded by international organizations. This is the case with

---

many private children’s homes in Honduras. Almost all of the homes were either originated by an international body, often a church, or are now under the direction of an international actor due to complications or necessity. Most literature analyzing the role of NGOs pertains to development organizations that are dedicated to the promotion of democracy, development of agriculture, and sanitation of water. However, this literature also addresses general concerns that arise with any NGO. For example, is the role of an NGO simply to improve material conditions while allowing the institutions to remain intact or is it to change the institutions themselves? In the case of children’s homes, this would mean allowing the children to maintain lifestyles they had before they came to the home and simply providing them with room and board until they are old enough to leave. This is the bare minimum required of a children’s home to substitute a child’s family. An alternative is to take the children out of the context in which they live and completely change their lifestyle, and perhaps improve their opportunities for the future. Usually, NGOs opt for the latter, thinking it will cause a clean break from prior conditions and allow for improvements in the future. Who decides what the change should be and what priorities should be applied in effecting those changes? The relationship with the community determines to what extent the NGO internalizes the priorities of the culture that surrounds it and is “owned” by those who are most closely affected by it.

Robyn Eversole analyzes the question about how NGOs are to relate to the community that they are trying to serve. She identifies four rules that should guide NGOs work:

1. NGOs must understand local culture
2. NGOs must understand their own culture
3. NGOs have vital roles to play within local communities
4. The heart of success is grounded in the relationship between the NGO and the local community.  

---

Eversole contends that NGOs work as “brokers” between communities and outside interests, be they international or domestic interests. In order to play that role effectively, organizations must move away from “fast food” models of development to incorporate the community. One problem however, lies in the fact that because of a legacy of patron-client relationships in Latin America, many Latin Americans are skeptical of organizations that come in telling a community they know how to fix all their problems. Therefore, the NGO must act as a bridge between the community and its work as agents of change. For a children’s home acting as a family substitute, this requires developing the organization of the home around the needs of its children keeping in mind the community into which the children will later integrate. She mentions four characteristics by which an NGO could facilitate community involvement: by being an “energizer” of the community or a catalyst for change instead of an imposer of change, a “broker” who links communities to tools, networks and information that can be useful, a “coach” who optimizes the knowledge of a community by demystifying concepts, processes and strategies, and a “champion” who promotes the community’s efforts in the wider world. By using this technique, human capital grows and the NGO is effective in creating long-term change. She gives the example of EURODAD, a large European NGO that was introduced into Honduras to help the government relieve poverty and debt under HIPC in 1999. Currently, its work is very ineffective because EURODAD and the Honduran government have differing views of poverty, and how to go about solving it, with the result of making very little concrete progress. Although EURODAD is a much larger project and of a very different nature than that of a small children’s home NGO, the lesson to be learned from EURODAD is that NGOs do not work in a vacuum. It must work constructively with not only those whom it is trying to help, but also the community that surround its beneficiaries. For children’s homes this means building
constructive relationships with other entities (e.g. school, church, neighborhood) involved in the child’s life.

The division between those who help and those who are being helped becomes particularly contentious in the case of international NGOs. Aside from the possible political implications or interests involved with international NGOs, the social and cultural implications affect a home’s prioritization of its children’s needs. The groups that organize and fund NGOs have a set of goals when they organize a children’s home. Without adequate local input, homes focus their attention according to these goals, which may or may not address the actual needs of the community. Usually conflict arises because of funding. The mentality is he who gives the money should get to decide how it is spent. In the case of children’s homes in Honduras, the funding often comes from churches in the United States who have taken a vested interest in these homes. What these individuals believe to be the most important need of a child is not necessarily what a family raising the child would focus on. They may prioritize needs according to external influences instead of on the children’s actually condition. In the case of children’s homes, there are five tiers of people who think they know what is best: individuals donating their money to churches, groups who go to Honduras to support the home, administrators/volunteers who go to make sure things are well-managed, those who work and live at the home on a daily basis, and Honduran community members who are affected by the home’s activities. Who should decide how children are raised and where funding is directed?

NGOs must reach a balance between funders and the community to be effective. Miguel Pickard has a few insights into partnerships between NGOs in southern Mexico and their funders from developed nations. He says the amount of the budget that is or could be raised from self-financing schemes indicates how autonomous an NGO is. The higher this quantity, the less the
imposition of international goals, and both parties can enjoy a partnership instead of lapsing into a patron-client relationship. 25 After analyzing the history of aid to Mexico and noticing that for decades foreign aid was sent and no change was seen, he decided the structural elements were lacking. He decided the focus cannot be on poverty as a whole but instead on root causes of underdevelopment. Therefore, “the proper role of development agencies [is to encourage] … participation with, and strengthening of, ‘local social subjects’ to collaborate in building alternative social and economic paradigms.” 26 As a consequence of this realization, NGOs started to focus more on working with communities on an equal footing from the 70s to the 90s. This he labels at the time of ‘partnership’ where projects were jointly constructed and not imposed. However, in the 90s, when democracy grew throughout Central America, money poured into helping ‘fledgling’ democracies, and subsequently, the lending governments of the North pressed to see results. The projects that were emphasized highlight aspects thought to be important in the North, but as one of Pickard’s informants states, “the main problem…is that funders are asking to see quantitative indicators that come from financial-investment circles and have nothing to do with social processes.” 27 Many times, this was because the lenders assumed that the South lacked the skills necessary to address issues. Because of these confrontations, pessimistic conclusions such as Pickard’s seem inevitable: “In summary, real development, as understood by a great many Southern organizations, e.g. designed, controlled, and operated by social agents, is being thwarted by a Northern vision too often driven by the need to please back-funders.” 28 With the homes, these back-funders are the first few tiers of people who are well-intentioned and make any change possible. However, because of cultural influence, Americans

26 Ibid, 577.
27 Ibid, 580.
28 Ibid, 585.
and Hondurans can have very different views on how to raise children and what is best to produce and “successful” adult. They are creating families for the children with conflicting beliefs about how children should be raised. A home could choose to base its organization on a model that actively incorporates the community, ensuring that local values are imparted to the children. However, this requires a substitute family model other than the developed world’s nuclear family - or at least adjustments must be made to account for alternative concepts of family and childhood. Therefore, it is essential that these children’s homes consider carefully the organization of their home in order to incorporate the community and Honduran culture.
Chapter 2: A Child’s Needs

Aware of the fact that different societies conceive of family differently, we must consider the components that shape their ideas with respect to childhood and children’s needs. What needs, if any, are universally recognized as essential for childhood development? What elements of childhood are cultural constructs, and how does that affect a home’s prioritization of needs? Conscious of the possible negative effect of foreign NGOs, do the methods homes use to raise children reflect culturally appropriate or inappropriate ideals? We will use concepts presented in this chapter to analyze specific homes’ ability to provide for their children’s needs in chapters 3 and 4 with respect to the kind of substitute family they create.

The Idea of Childhood

Conceptions of childhood have changed over time and vary based on culture. The idea of a ‘normal’ childhood in developed countries has changed significantly in the last few centuries. Historically, children were conceived of as mini-adults and were even dressed accordingly, beginning to work at an early age to help support the family. However, in the last couple of centuries, family structure in developed countries has changed so that parents hold all responsibility for the well-being of the family while children enjoy an innocent and carefree experience. This model has become the ideal and has come to define what many believe childhood “should” be like.\(^\text{29}\) This conception of childhood has determined the rights of the child, as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); it is to be used as law anywhere it is adopted. However, ‘childhood’ is a social institution, a reflection of cultural values and social construct rather than a biological stage. Moreover, a particular child’s

experience is hugely influenced by socially determined factors such as class, gender, and a country’s position in the global pecking order. 

It is for this reason that parts of the CRC such as Article 3 that determines what should be done in the “best interests of the child” or Article 27 that states that if the child’s “standard of living” is not met, it is the State’s duty to find someone to care for the child, are not applicable in an absolute sense in all situations. This responsibility becomes an issue particularly when states adopt these ideas as law but cannot fulfill their duty, as discussed earlier with regards to IHNFA and Article 13. We must interpret these articles according to each country’s cultural context, specifically in determining what is in the children’s “best interests.” For example, in the case of children’s homes, is it in the best interest of the children to take them from their homes and biological family because they are at-risk, to put them in an institution that may meet their material needs more adequately, but could weaken or sever familial ties? Do concepts of childhood such as that which is utilized in the CRC affect homes’ organization and the prioritization of which needs are met?

Specifically in a Latin American context, there has never been only one concept of childhood. Instead a dichotomy of values between the indigenous already present at the time of Colonization and imported values brought by the Spanish and Portuguese existed. Indigenous conceptions of childhood revolved around a reciprocal relationship where parents and children could learn from each other instead of developed nations’ ideas about knowledge being unidirectional, flowing only from the parents to the children. Moreover, the family unit was solid, but part of a larger body called the ayllu (Andes) or calpulli (Mesoamerica), so while the child was understood to be inexperienced and a symbol of new life, he or she was also seen as a

30 Ibid.
full member of the community.31 However, as stated by Elizabeth Kuznesof, “In the colonial period, the parent/child relationship was seen as an aspect of the corporate family, embedded in the patriarchal property rights of legally constituted families”.32 Children were to obey their parents and work without wages to help out. Orphaned children were usually the responsibility of grandparents or their parents’ siblings. In the 18th century it was estimated that 10-25% of all births were abandoned by their parents to be cared for by family members. The Catholic Church often played a key role, especially during colonialism in providing a critical social function to support the population of abandoned children and provide them a home. However the dominant cultural norm was that they were the concern of the family, and therefore a private matter and should be handled as such.

At the time of independence, Latin Americans became preoccupied with order and social control in the protection of children. Consequently, children became a concern of the state. There already existed in much of Latin America a clearly defined class system between land owner, latifundistas, and landless workers. This class-based system continued after independence and eventually translated to the treatment of the children based on their class. With growing poverty of the lower class, there arose a “problem” in urban centers of street children who previously had worked inside the home, helping their parents, but now helped by moving to the streets and performing any odd job that would earn them extra money. Some would say that there was a strong dichotomy between the concept of children in Latin America based on class in which the elite’s children led a life characterized by innocence and the need for protection. The other children were characterized as barbarians who must be controlled or

---

presented an urban “problem” that must be dealt with. This exemplifies Hecht’s concept of a “nurturing child” in comparison to a “nurtured child.” The “nurtured child” is one that is protected by its mother and father and leads a carefree existence until marriage or some other transition to independence when he officially becomes an adult. A “nurturing child” is considered a working part of a family unit that cannot and should not be shielded from the hard truths of life. The “nurtured” experience is obviously a luxury that only the financially secure can afford, while the “nurturing” experience is one that is inevitable for those of the lower classes who depend on the labor of their children to survive. As this “nurtured” ideal of childhood became dominant, children became “minors” and the “problem children” were pushed to the margins of society.

Coming into the modern period, social policies revolved around trying to eradicate poverty, specifically the visual reminders of poverty such as street children in rich neighborhoods, through state agencies and various organizations. In many ways, they are still seen as a threat to society. Evidence of this is the 1998 killing of street children and supposed gang members in Honduras. Although, no official number can be known, Casa Alianza estimates that there were summary executions of up to 500 street children by death squads. In 1999, CODEH claimed that business and government officials had been involved in plans to “clean up the streets” through enlisting military death squads to kill 200 gang members. Knowing this, we must recognize that depending on location and culture, the conception of children’s innocence can be significantly different, creating differing family dynamics:

33 Green, 8.
34 Hecht, 92.
“Observers in several Latin American countries argue that childhood as a stage of life is denied to a large proportion of their children; however, it might be more accurate to say that the childhood experienced by poor children is distinct from that of the elite.”

Considering the American influence and direction many children’s homes have, the strong American influence may be an act of globalization of values. The management of the homes is based on concepts of how childhood and family should be. Foreign influences impose their own ideas about childhood on the home that embody what Kuznesof calls a global “morality.” This is the morality that makes strict laws about child labor (Article 32 of CRC) based on a few shared cultural norms, to prevent children from helping their families with income. Although it is unfortunate that 1 in 5 children in Honduras (10-14 years old) work, it is not the result of an egregious violation of human rights, but instead an unfortunate product of the larger problem of poverty. It is values, such as the value of contributing to the family’s income, that are cultural constructions affecting family dynamics. The kind of family dynamics a home recreates determines into which society the child can integrate himself. If the child is raised with values only found in the highest classes, his lack of access to those classes later will pose a problem for his social integration.

A result of the different conceptions of childhood is a difference in parenting style. A major factor determining parenting techniques is how the parent conceives childhood “should” be. The result is the promotion of differing “themes.” As explained in Kenneth Rubin’s analysis of cross-cultural perspectives on parenting, there are three important characteristics of parenting

---

37 Kuznesof, 864.
38 Ibid, 861.
styles: settings, activities, and thematicity.\textsuperscript{40} Within the final characteristic we can identify specific North American values that may be promoted in how children are raised. For example, he claims ‘independence’ for many middle-class parents is an idea that is promoted in daily activities such as how chores are done or in sleeping arrangements. Also, Bornstein mentions various characteristics that affect parenting: biological processes and personality attributes of parents; actual or perceived characteristics of children; and contextual influences, including social situational factors, family background socioeconomic status, and culture.\textsuperscript{41} Therefore, if we think about the children’s homes not as self-regulating entities, but instead as substitute families, we can understand how the influence of American values and concepts of children would shape “parenting” styles. This parenting style translates in a daily context to shaping behavior based on what is considered to be acceptable. “If a given behavior is acceptable, then parents will attempt to encourage its development; if the behavior is perceived as maladaptive or abnormal, then parents (and other caregivers) will attempt to discourage its growth and development.” \textsuperscript{42} With respect to the children’s homes, it is important to understand the behaviors that would be encouraged in other contexts, such as the United States, are maladaptive in the Honduran context. Therefore, more caution must be used when raising Honduran children in a home that is an international NGO. This could cause difficulty integrating into the Honduran society as an adult if raised with culturally inappropriate behaviors. On the other hand, perhaps the homes themselves are not adopting foreign technique of raising children and the values they impart actually enable the children-adults to succeed.

\textsuperscript{40} Rubin, vii.
\textsuperscript{42} Rubin, vii.
Later, when analyzing the homes, we will utilize these concepts to identify the homes’ approach to addressing the needs of their children. Therefore, we are going to specify questions that we can apply to the homes based on what we have just discussed.\textsuperscript{43}

\section*{Children’s Needs}

There are various methods by which families address children’s needs. Many social sciences divide children’s needs simply along the lines of short-term and long-term needs. However the division drawn between the two is too simple. There are needs, specifically developmental that fall neither in the category of material needs, nor do they solely relate to the ability of a grown child to integrate himself into his society. Instead, there are many developmental needs that are both short and long-term in that they must be addressed immediately for the child to be able to function. As is the case with trauma or neglect, they provide personal and social skills necessary to succeed outside the home. Therefore, here we will address needs according to this simple division, referring to developmental needs as short-term needs, while understanding that they have serious long-term implications.

\section*{Childhood development}

Developmental psychologists have spent years analyzing and arguing many contradicting models. Here we will look at the most prominent models of cognitive development and social development. We will only address these dense and rich fields of study insofar as they relate to the unique situation of children in homes. We will begin with an overview of what are

\textsuperscript{43} Appendix B is a list of the questions used to analyze the homes.
considered the two major theories of cognitive development, Piaget’s theory and the theory of Information-Processing, and then continue with the main points of social development. Understanding these technical psychological stages allows us to determine what children’s optimal cognitive development is and compare that to how well a substitute family is able to facilitate growth.

Cognitive development refers to the “growth and maturation of thinking processes of all kinds, including perceiving, remembering, concept formation, problem solving, imagining and reasoning.” Jean Piaget developed the first theory we will look at the beginning of the twentieth century and holds that “knowledge arises through a subject’s actions on objects.” Depending on how one interprets his theory, there are 3 or 4 levels or stages children pass through to reach maturity. These include infancy (practical intelligence), childhood (representational thought), and adolescence (formal understanding). Childhood can be broken into two sub-stages: preparation (preoperational) and completion (concrete operations, i.e., operations on actual objects). This theory takes into account that these levels may be reached at different ages depending on the physical and social environment of the child and stresses various criteria as mechanisms for the advancement between stages.

---

44 APA Dictionary of Psychology, s.v. “Cognitive Development.”
Figure 2 - Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy (practical intelligence)</td>
<td>Birth to age 2</td>
<td>Based on sensorimotor experiences where the child learns he is separate from his environment and the concept of object permanence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood – Preoperational</td>
<td>Language development to about age 7</td>
<td>With the acquisition of language the child understands the use of symbols to represent objects and can think about things that are not present. Fantasy is very prevalent in this stage and there is an undeveloped sense of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood – Concrete</td>
<td>About first grade to early adolescence</td>
<td>Develops an ability to think abstractly and to make rational judgments about concrete or observable phenomena, which in the past he needed to manipulate physically to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence (Formal Operations)</td>
<td>Teenage years into twenties. Highly variable</td>
<td>The teenager no longer requires concrete objects to make rational judgments and is capable of hypothetical and deductive reasoning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data from Smith 2002, 517-522.

The second category of models that have been highly researched in the last 30 years are Information-Processing models that stress development as a function of how children perceive of and process information about the world around them. Among the various theorists belonging to this model, there are Neo-Piagetian models which strive to redefine Piaget’s stages according to new criteria: number of concepts that can be considered simultaneously (McLaughlin), conceptions of space (Pascual-Leone), or the ability to make use of the brain’s total processing space (Case). The best synthesis of this group of models resembles what was proposed by Chapman: “the total capacity requirement of a given form of reasoning is equal to the number of operatory variables that are assigned values simultaneously in employing that form of reasoning.
in a particular task”46 In other words, a child passes through stages of development based on their ability to consider an increasing number of variables simultaneously to make maximum use of what Case labeled the brain’s total processing space. The advances made with these models is not in developing their own stages, but rather identifying the processes that occur at each stage, the empirical and theoretical fieldwork, linking neural science with neural net models, and developing neo-Piagetian models more fully.47

The other major framework concerning childhood development is social development or simply, socialization. This is “the gradual acquisition of certain skills (e.g. language, social skills), attitudes, relationships, and behavior that enable the individual to interact with others and to function as a member of society.”48 Unlike cognitive development, different theories are not necessarily at odds with each other, but rather they offer many components that may or may not affect a specific child’s development. The Handbook on Child Development, when speaking of Social Understanding, identifies three conclusions:

- Social experiences are uniquely generative of new understanding of people and the psychological world.
- Individual differences in social experience are important for differences in early social understanding.

---

47 Halford, 574
48 APA Dictionary of Psychology, s.v. “Social Development”
• Integrating understanding of early social cognitive development from cognitivist perspectives and social viewpoints is important to theories of sociopersonality development.49

An important point to make with regard to social development is that socialization is how culture is transmitted. Cultural values can be transmitted along various lines. Parenting styles differ culturally and Baumrind identified three general categories: authoritative, authoritarian or permissive. This reinforces other cultural values such as collectivism versus individualism. For example, many parents from individualistic cultures are authoritative because they “set and enforce clear standards of conduct but also value and encourage adolescents’ independence and autonomy.”50 A child’s social development depends almost entirely on the relationships presented to him. Arguably, the most important of these relationships is with his parents or primary caregiver.

The parents’ role is crucial as they normally act as a child’s attachment figure. Bowlby introduced the concept of Attachment as a crucial component childhood development in 1969, identifying an “attachment figure,” usually a parent or primary caregiver, as essential to healthy development.51 Although an attachment figure is usually a parent, there are innumerable situations in which an attachment figure could be someone else, a grandparent, a sibling, a foster parent etc. This first serious relationship is critical because, as the theory holds, “out of this first relationship stems a set of expectations and assumptions which will influence subsequent relationships.”52 This first relationship plays a crucial part in shaping our sense of the difference

---

50 Lena Robinson, Cross-Cultural Child Development for Social Worker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 140
between healthy and unhealthy relationships. A “normal” attachment in childhood also sustains the children’s feelings of security and can be identified by the following characteristics: proximity seeking, secure base effect, and separation protest. The first of these characteristics refers to the fact that the child will attempt to remain within a protective range of his parents (attachment figures) and in threatening or strange situations, this range will decrease. The secure base effect is another characteristic and is simply that children feel secure with the presence of an attachment figure and will therefore not crave attention, but instead will explore and play confidently. Finally separation protest means that once an attachment is formed, there will be some discomfort when a child is forced away from his or her attachment figure.

There are a couple other characteristics important to understanding attachment figures. One of these is the idea of specificity of attachment figure. “Whereas other figures may provide companionship, the attachment system seems to require the particular figure it has already incorporated.” 53 In other words, a child’s connection with his attachment figure is a long-term relationship, which once made, is very difficult to replace. It is precisely because of their long-term nature that they provide the child with a sense of security and confidence. This leads to another characteristic of attachment: persistence. Once established, a child relies on his attachment relationship, for a sense of identity, and therefore, continuing separation from an attachment figure produces pining which abates only slowly and imperfectly. 54 These two characteristics are particularly meaningful in a home situation where people who normally would become attachment figures (educators, supervisors, etc) constantly come and go. It would stand to reason that a child upon coming to a home would look for the attachment figure they had had previously, or in the absence of one, would create a new attachment with some authority figure.

54 Ibid, 67.
within the home. However, when that person switches jobs, a child who had depended upon a
certain caregiver to understand his surroundings and feel secure in that space, now must find
another way to understand his surroundings alone, without a wiser and stronger figure to guide
them. The presence or absence of an attachment figure in the case of children’s homes is
determined by the organization and size of the home. The kind of substitute family a home has
decided to be either enables or disables caregivers to be an attachment figure. As we will see
later, proxy family models are more conducive to caregivers acting as attachment figures, while
in group home settings, the caregiver to child ratio is too low. In such cases, it is crucial that an
alternative attachment figure is found.

The general consequence that Bowlby identifies caused by the absence of an attachment
figure is the development of one of various personalities. First there are those disposed to
making anxious or ambivalent relationships (what is later labeled Disordered Attachment).
Those whose characters are disposed to compulsive caregiving have highly dependent
personalities and are prone to depression. The third group is those who are disposed to assert
independence of affectional ties and can often be hostile.\(^{55}\) This first consequence has been
highly studied with regards to children’s homes because it is the most common of the three in ex-
institutionalized children worldwide. Considering the work of Rebecca Johnson which compares
many studies of children’s homes done in the last 30 years, it is obvious that indiscriminate
friendliness, overfriendliness, and/or disinhibited behavior are all traits that characterize what she
identifies as disordered attachment.\(^{56}\) A logical consequence of this is that ex-institutional
teenagers are often oriented toward adult approval instead of being self-confident. Although the
lack of secure attachments in the early years of childhood does not lead to an inability to form

\(^{55}\) Parkes, 243-50.

\(^{56}\) Rebecca Johnson, “Young Children in Institutional Care at Risk of Harm,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 7 (2006): 41
close relationships, occasionally it can cause these relationships to be characterized by dependency. The possible negative outcomes of this kind of behavior or personality are countless and could be a way to understand the possible effects of children’s homes on the development of those who live there.

The social context of childhood development is important in understanding what is considered to be healthy. There are many theories regarding the stages a child must pass through as part of a healthy development, and as we have already discussed there are many cultural constructs that affect how a society conceives of adulthood and successful maturation. A major cultural difference we have identified is developed societies’ respect for independence versus the interdependence that many Latin American societies value. Various parts of childhood are important for developing “normally” according to one’s cultural context. According to Activity Theory, children develop the skills and knowledge to become competent members of their community when they are involved in active, positive socialization. This means that their behaviors are goal-directed and practical, development is a product of social and cultural history, and cognition is a socially mediated process. In other words, this means that children’s development is fostered by the activities in which they are involved and nourished by those who participate in the activities with them. We can see this concept’s application in children’s homes. The configuration of family affects the child’s daily activities and the structure of his life. Therefore, if a home organizes itself valuing independence, a child’s daily activities will transmit that value to him. In each home, do the values imparted to the children through the substitute family structure fill the child’s needs?

57 “A school of thought…that focuses on activity in general – rather than the distinct concepts of behavior or mental states – as the primary unity of analysis.” It is a system of routine behaviors requiring little thought that orients an organism in the world. APA Dictionary of Psychology, s.v. “Activity Theory.”

Mary Gauvain continues identifying various groups instrumental in this development: the family, siblings and peers. When referring to the family, she means primarily the parental figures and home setting which comprises the dominant social context for a child. Parents’ influence is immense: the method of punishment and rewards conditions the child’s behaviors, the structure the parents provide organize the child’s everyday experiences, the parents often regulate the relationships the child has with his peers, provide the child with face-to-face attention, and in general model socially acceptable behaviors. Siblings are unique in the cognitive development of children because they are partners in learning and frequently maintain a reciprocal relationship that is different from that of unrelated peers. Also, the role of older siblings with younger is important for the socialization of a child. We will look into the particularities of sibling relationships more closely later since they are very pertinent, perhaps more so than parents, in a children’s home setting. Finally, the importance of peers is in their symmetrical development. There is little cognitive or social distance between peers. The distinction between peers and siblings is not stark, but is important in the context of homes because it often determines the level of respect or competition and therefore, how much reciprocal learning can occur.

There are a few general processes that affect a child’s cognitive socialization, or the social processes that work as mechanisms of intellectual growth. “Legitimate peripheral participation and the arrangement for and regulation of children’s everyday activities” is the most influential process of cognitive socialization. Through this, children learn the ways of thinking and behaving that are valued in their community and given opportunities and support

60 Ibid, 59.
for developing these skills. These play into a third model of cognitive development which is that of Vygotsky who proposes 3 general themes about cognition:

1. Cognition must be understood developmentally (i.e. genetically) in terms of its genesis and subsequent development at individual and cultural levels of analysis.

2. Cognition is “mediated” by semiotic mechanisms, the most powerful of which is language.

3. Certain cognitive processes (such as voluntary memory, problem-solving, self-regulation, etc.) have their origins in social activity and interaction.

His theory on cognitive development is important because it takes into account socio-cultural and historical influences on development. Although we cannot adequately discuss his entire theory here, one important component is that

Higher mental functions have their origin in human social life as children interact with more experienced members of their community. This process involves a child as an active participant working with more competent partners to solve a problem. To facilitate children’s participation and learning, more experienced partners target their assistance to a child’s “zone of proximal or potential development” which is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

This concept lends itself nicely to others we have already looked and will look at, the importance of an attachment figure and the importance of social networks for the healthy maturation of children, specifically adolescents. This theory is specifically important when considering the social processes of cognitive development a child experiences in a home. Is the development of these higher mental functions adequately addressed or are they sacrificed because of lack of staff?

61 Ibid, 30.
62 Goswami, 538.
63 Lev Vygotsky, Interaction between Learning and Development, quoted in Gauvain, 86.
Because of the nature of children’s homes, we must analyze the role of siblings. In group homes, the ratio of caregivers to children is lower than in a family arrangement. Instead of an adult only having to care for one child, they may have 6, 10, 20 or 30 in their care. This means that in some homes, children spend the majority of their time with people their own age. Although technically they are peers, since most are not biologically related within the substitute family being created, they play a role more similar to sibling than to peer. Their relationships can be just as important, or at times, more important that the relationship the children have with a particular caregiver. This is especially true when caregivers come and go, providing no stability, while a child’s “classificatory siblings” or “fictive kin” stay. Just like parents, siblings often act as guides for cultural practices. Cultural values determine the strength and nature of this relationship. For example, cultures such as the United States often stress the role of the parent in childhood development more than cultures that emphasize interdependence. The latter could encourage siblings to work together to take care of the household or each other. Maynard analyzes this cultural dynamic noting that American parents usually influence/control sibling relationships, while “in non-Western cultures the sibling relationship is often more primary than the parent-child relationship, and parents worry less about fostering positive sibling relationships, usually because the siblings work out their own relations rather well, without intervention from adults.” However, less than perfect circumstances make developed nations’ ideal parent-child relationship impossible. If, for instance, a single mother works, siblings must rely on each other. In some developing countries therefore, the older children assume the role of caregiver, and in doing so, adults do not consider that they are shirking their duties as caregivers. On the contrary, parents often supervise sibling caretaking and give children increasingly

65 Ibid, 233.
complex tasks, initiating them into the role of child caretaker. The end result of this child caretaking system is that it promotes a sense of reliance on shared resources and a long-term connection among age-mates, who will grow together as a community throughout their lives.  

Applying these sibling relationships to the two frameworks of childhood development we have already established, we consider that socially this provides children with an arena to learn about social support and the social world in general while building perspective-taking and sibling teaching cognitively. Firstly, through sibling interactions, children develop socially by figuring out how other family members as well as peripheral actors behave in various situations, understanding others’ feeling in order to behave appropriately. The siblings also learn skills suitable to their age level. The older siblings learn to take care of others and the responsibility of being a role model, while as already stated, the younger learn appropriate ways to behave and participate in activities.  

Because of the reciprocal nature of this system, it also endows the children with the concept of sharing and cooperation. Cognitively, the presence of siblings teaches children the skill of understanding how others perceive of a situation at a younger age. They also are “more precocious in their acquisition of ‘false belief’ or understanding that others may hold beliefs that are actually false relative to the true state of the world, and that beliefs may change according to changes in the world.” This skill is the first step to empathy. The other major domain of cognitive development that siblings aid is sibling teaching or “learning from your peers.” This is the concept of learning from the mistakes or successes of others through first-hand experience of the consequences. Often, such lessons can be taught by a sibling more easily than a peer because children usually respect an older sibling more than a peer, however as Maynard notes, in many cultures “classificatory siblings” can be just as important as biological.

66 Ibid, 234-5.
67 Ibid, 236.
68 Ibid, 239.
What does this mean for children’s homes? This provides an alternative to adult supervision in a group setting by showing that children can develop socially and cognitively through sibling interaction. However, there are various important stipulations to this statement. Maynard first stresses the importance of a parent/caregiver guiding these relationships in the early stages and giving them tasks or projects to build a positive relationship. It also stipulates that one of the siblings be older in order to help the younger. In the absence of these two criteria, many of the possible positives of sibling interaction are moot. Therefore, in analyzing a home, we must consider whether the children are primarily with “siblings” of their own age or if they are older or younger than their siblings. We must then consider how much, if any, guidance is given to this relationship. In doing so, we can determine if sibling interaction is able to make up for any lack of caregiver attention to the children that there may be.

Long-Term Needs

Long-term needs refer to the ability of the homes to provide their children with the skills and networks needed to integrate into society after leaving. Although we cannot, within the limits of this project, study the children who have left the homes to determine various approaches’ efficacy, we can look at to what extent the homes provide for future opportunities. Specifically we will look at the long-term skills and assets children are given in a “normal” family setting and the role family and community organization plays in empowering a child. This is important because we will then determine to what extent children’s homes are able to mimic a family to provide for a child’s long-term needs adequately. If not, we will consider alternate methods homes do or do not use to meet children’s needs.
Family Structure

As mentioned earlier, specific parenting techniques are responsible for the values and knowledge imparted to children as they grow, and therefore, the kind of adults they become. The family structure and the personality it develops are vital in comprehending the kinds of individuals that make up a group. In this case we are analyzing the artificial families created in children’s homes. In order to understand fully the impact of the type of “familial” structure that the children growing up in homes have, we must comparatively analyze them to the “normal” Honduran family structure. In this way, we can understand what advantages and disadvantages children coming from the homes have upon becoming adults.

In any literature about the structure of family, specifically poor families, the most salient characteristic in comparison to developed nations’ families is the fluid nature of Latin American families. In an article by Carl Kendall analyzing specifically the “Loose Structure of Family in Honduras,” he identifies the Ladino family, or family composed of those of the mestizo race, as the dominant although unstudied portion of Honduran society. His is a critical view of the popular argument that much of the fluid nature of the family is based on the lack of social structure in rural society. Instead he, without stating a clear thesis, appears to argue that the loose kinship structure of vague blood-relation ties and ritual kinship creates large systems of kinships in all of Honduras. These kinships based on blood relations were recognized historically to the seventh degree legitimately, but he states that kinship based on conjugal family was also respected. He emphasizes the fact that because of the loose nature of family, fosterage by grandparents was common practice. He states, “Fosterage, as a solution for problems in child-rearing, may be generated by a number of circumstances, such as general economic conditions, need for cash income, and opportunities to travel, marital problems, and personal
He describes this as a common practice, and in doing so, underscores the norms of Latin society already discussed with respect to children’s place in society. A similar social situation can be found in the inner city of some cities in the United States. In “The Flats,” the poorest section of a black community in Jackson Harbor in Chicago, the responsibility for providing food, care, clothing, and shelter and for socializing children within domestic networks may be spread over several households. Stack describes this as a network of cooperating kinsmen or household with elastic boundaries. She says that in much of the world, individuals distinguish kin from non-kin and although kin terms are frequently extended to non-kin (ritual or fictive kinship) “the chain of parent-child connection is essential to the structuring of kin groups.”

Like Honduras, we see a family structure that is large and inclusive, although at its core, based on blood relations of some kind. For many Latin American countries, the three-generational-bilateral family is the basic unit of solidarity in the lower classes, making the fabric of society quite different from more individualistic societies. Because of its extensive nature, most academics consider Latin American families to be highly adaptable. Since the 1950s, with a high amount of migration, many families have separated; contrary to expectation, kinship ties have not weakened as a result. This fact demonstrates the intense bond that Latin families maintain. Some believe this had its beginning in the extreme urbanization that took place in Latin America in the 20th century, resulting in an increase in household size as more kinsmen moved to the cities. Family is so important to Latin Americans that scholars such as Oscar Lewis claim that the family is the unit connecting the individual and the society.

---

71 Ibid, 45.
73 Kuznesof, 865.
Demonstrating the importance of family, and religion, PANI (Patronato Nacional de la Infancia) declared 1994 the year of the family and their first conclusion was “La familia es el lugar fundamental de la formación de la persona; es la institución querida por Dios que verdaderamente otorga a cada quien el reconocimiento y valoración de su individualidad.”

The importance of family in shaping Latin American society is, therefore, paramount; people shape their identities around the family that raise them and the values they learn.

As a comparison, what are other ideas and values about family? As mentioned earlier, in the culture of the United States, most ideas of family are centered around a nuclear group (i.e. mother, father, and children) that is considered united. The extended family is acknowledged as important, however generally it is not a major actor in daily life, nor is the extended family consulted before major decisions. Instead, the nuclear family is considered a body unto itself. Some claim the importance of the nuclear family to be a result of a mobile country made almost entirely of immigrants who left behind family ties and stressed the separation from the old life in the name of incorporation in the new world. Others claim that attitudes about family in the United States are a product of the industrialization in the 1800s, which stressed the importance of the individual to become economically successful. This individualistic nature directly contradicts the communal, or loose, nature of family we described for Honduras and highlights an important difference in cultures that could potentially be disastrous. In American families, the child is expected to develop himself to become independent, and then when he reaches adulthood, he is to support himself, leaving his parents house. This independence could come at

74 The family is the fundamental space for the development of a person; it is the beloved institution by God that truly recognizes and values each person for their individuality. Translated by author. Patronato Nacional de la Infancia (Honduras). Memoria: 1994, Año internacional de la familia (Tegucigalpa, Honduras: PANI, 1994), 68.
75 Green, 2.
either age 18 after high school, when the child goes to college, gets job, or it could come later, perhaps being solidified by marriage. However, no matter when a break from the family in the name of financial and emotional autonomy occurs, it is an event that is expected of all children. For many, the success a child has on his own after leaving his parents’ house is the measure of successful parenting. Again, we see a strong dichotomy here with respect to the expectation of children in adulthood between the United States and Latin American countries. In Honduras, children may separate physically from the parents, but emotional closeness is anticipated throughout adulthood. With marriage, there is recognition that separate houses are sometimes appropriate, but often married couples will continue living with one set of parents, and when they do move to their own house, it is usually geographically close to the parents. Then, in the parents’ later years, it is expected that they will be cared for by their children, and everyone once again will live under the same roof. Therefore, we see that there is never the definitive emotional separation between parents and children that is made in North American society. In the United States, upon leaving the house of one’s parents, it is considered a failure to “move back home” and usually upon building a life independent from one’s parents, children do not want to support their parents in old-age, as evidence by the multitude of elderly care facilities in the United States.

These cultural influences affect the family structure homes adopt. For example, a home with direction from the U.S. may unknowingly consider it appropriate for a family unit to act separately from its extended family and community. It may therefore develop a substitute familial structure that echoes those views. Although anthropologically interesting, what concerns us is how this affects the provision for the children’s long-term needs. Considering how Honduran kinship has traditionally worked in society, the implementation of a familial
structure that does not emulate these established societal norms is not going to be effective in providing for long-term needs. Continuing our example, a children’s home that does not work to create and maintain positive relations within its community is not acting as a Honduran substitute family, since normal Honduran families have strong community-oriented (specifically extended family) bonds. Therefore, understanding that extended Latin families have an intense bond that is not found in American society and understanding the fact that in Latin American culture, the family is the basis for interactions with society in general, we must look at how the family is used as a social network.

Family as a Social Network

Familial structure in traditional Honduran society is central to social networks that give individuals support and stability. This allows people to work easily and effectively with a diverse group of individuals while sharing needed data. Families usually fill this role. Although family ties can be somewhat weakened by migration or poverty, as we have already discussed, Latin American families are able to adapt in order to maintain relationships. There is extensive research about how crime and gangs are often used as replacement for the “basic unit of society,” the family. The gangs provide connections for children who otherwise would have none. This applies if they have no family or for some reason have cut ties with their family. Especially in situations of poverty, the only connections children have of any worth are with their relatives or people they meet through their family. Because of the communal nature of Latin American

---

societies, one could argue that neighbors and acquaintances may create social networks; however, for children these are based on relatives’ connections. Without familial support, they would not be able to make use of these connections. The connections we are referring to here are people that could provide opportunities for a child, be they educational, a job or even simply as a positive role model. Because of the solidarity we have discussed within Latin American families as well as the extensive nature of Honduran families specifically, it is not surprising that many of these connections can be found within one’s extended or fictive family. It is therefore also not surprising that almost all connections arise through family members, considering the extensive network that would be created if one were to include spouse, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances of that family. One premise is that children’s homes in Honduras are not built and designed around the Honduran conception of family and childhood, but instead around the developed nations’ ideal of nuclear family and adult independence. Therefore, the homes may for example run according to the ideal that children are to be independent and start lives completely separate from their childhood.

Unfortunately, this approach might not take into account that the average American child who is raised with the individualistic goal of complete adult independence is also raised to make his own social network while growing up including friends, friends’ parents, co-workers, teachers and acquaintances. They are taught to not rely as heavily on the network created through their extended family. However, if the societal norm is to make connections, without that network, an individual lacks what social scientists have termed “social capital.” This is defined by Pierre Bourdieu as “among the resources that individuals draw upon to implement strategies of social mobility [and] are those potentially provided by their lovers, kin, and friends and by the contacts they develop within the formal associations to which they belong – in sum,
the resources they have access to by virtue of being socially integrated into solidarity groups
networks or organizations.” 78  Loïc Wacquant states that often in situations of poverty these ties
tend to have less social worth, as measured by the social position of their partners, parents,
siblings and best friends. 79 These networks in Honduras, as we have discussed, are usually
focused around the family. However, if there are few familial ties, such as in the children’s
homes, or the ties that do exist are loose and of little worth, the children are dependent upon ties
that can be made through the children’s home in order to create a social network.

One possible outcome of lack of social networks is social exclusion. “Social exclusion
may therefore be understood as an accumulation of confluent processes with successive ruptures
arising from the heart of the economy, politics and society, which gradually distances and places
persons, groups, communities and territories in a position of inferiority in relation to centers of
power, resources and prevailing values.” 80 In other words, it relates to the marginalization or
disenfranchisement of certain people, and often relates to class, race, or level of education. Social
exclusion is closely linked with chronic poverty. The poor live on the margins of society and are
never able to integrate into social relationships that could relieve their situation. One factor of
this chronic poverty that Andres Du Toit notes in a case study on South Africa, but is applicable
in Latin America as well, is the role of a paternalistic society. 81 He determines that an important
role has been played by the paternalist legacy of slavery and colonialism in that social relations
have been shaped around the development of a small, powerful, white landed settler elite. In
order to break out of chronic poverty, these legacies have to be erased along with the

79 Loïc J. D. Wacquant, “The Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in the Inner City,” Annals of the American
80 International Labour Organization, “CIARIS - the meaning and use of the term social exclusion,”
81 Andres Du Toit, “‘Social exclusion’ discourse and chronic poverty: A South African case study,” Development &
implications of relationships of this type of system. One dimension of chronic poverty that he
cites is that “social capital” is based around patron-client relationships, indicating that the
impoverished either have little social capital of worth, or they are actually relationships that
hinder the individual more than help them. One suggestion he presents is that we should “focus
on the limitation of effective or full participation in society. Although poverty does not rob
people of agency, it certainly leads to a massive circumscription of the forms of agency that are
available to them.”82 Another idea to consider here is that the type of inclusion the marginalized
population has may continue the chronic poverty already mentioned. Many processes and
institutions that attempt to integrate the poor into networks of ‘developed’ society simply
continue to marginalize them, undermining their ability to control and impact the systems into
which they are locked.83 Therefore, in the case of children who have left poverty to be provided
for by a children’s home and then leave it to become independent with or without a solid social
network, we see that the presence of some “social capital” is necessary in order to make the
transition from the home to the “real world” smoothly. If that social capital is not present, the
chronic poverty, which in many cases caused the child to go the children’s home, will simply
continue because he will be forced to rely on whatever networks, social capital, he can find. This
would indicate a lack of long-term resources, hence we can understand the importance of
providing for long-term needs.

This idea relates to a broader concept found in Latin America about the cycle of poverty.
Morán speaks of ITP (Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty) in terms of the probability that
children will have “more” than their parents had. This refers to wealth, education, and
opportunities for better lives. There are various figures that he claims determines the severity of

82 Ibid, 999.
83 Ibid, 1001.
ITP. He begins by stating that income correlation between generations is .58 and .40, set in a continuum in which 1 indicates an identical socioeconomic standing between generations and 0 a complete divergence from parental socioeconomic status. That means that about half the population will have the same social standing as their parents – not a pleasant thought considering the level of poverty in Honduras. Morán focuses on factors such as level of education completed, number of siblings, ethnicity, migrant status, health, domestic violence, and the presence or absence of basic social services. Specifically, he looks at the probability that a child born poor will complete a secondary education: Honduras .1 (10% will mostly likely complete secondary education), Nicaragua .14 (14%), El Salvador .25 (25%).

Claiming that obtaining secondary education is the most important factor in stopping ITP, Morán explains that with more siblings it is less likely that a child will complete secondary education because of lack of supplies and the utilization of time that could be used to earn money or get food. This of course, is not considering the problems that arise because of poor infrastructure and underpaid teachers, inadequate curricula and nonexistent monitoring. Removing children from poor homes supposedly breaks this cycle by giving them resources that they did not have access to before, but can the added social capital be maintained when the child-adult must independently continue to work to break the cycle?

Common Problems in Children’s Homes

There are many studies on the negative effects of institutionalized living, most of which are based on models of children’s homes that are not prominent in Honduras. Although the large, extensively-studied institutions found in Russia and Romania that rear children from

85 Ibid, 22.
infancy, and at times are exclusively “baby homes,” differ profoundly from what is found in San Pedro Sula, there are some structural similarities. Therefore, we will look at the commonly criticized characteristics of children’s homes to understand how these pitfalls affect childhood development. Rebecca Johnson and her companions identify, in addition to attachment consequences, problems with neurobiological, social and behavioral, and cognitive development. Neglect is the major factor that she pinpoints as a cause for differences in neurobiological development of institutionalized children compared to non-institutionalized children. She states that “for this process to result in normal brain development, the infant “must interact with a living and responsive environment.” The process she refers to is “pruning” of unnecessary neural pathways in the brain. She continues saying children have the ability to make synapses or neural connections if adequately stimulated, but without an interactive environment, those processes are halted. Johnson is referring to infants, who are scarce in the Honduran system because of inter-country adoption. However, this same idea applies to all young children in that without adequate interaction with a primary caregiver to aid the learning process, the acquisition of many neural connections is lost. Based on various case studies, Johnson and her companions conclude that home children have a higher tendency to exhibit problem behaviors, such as attention seeking. In general their research highlights “problems with behavior, social competence, play and peer and/or sibling interactions,” as determined by the children’s teachers. Poor cognitive development is the most common negative effect. Partly, because of the effect of neglect on early childhood and the lack of individual attention in children’s homes, children from institutions usually do not reach optimal levels of cognitive development. These optimal levels refer to the average intelligence that children with a stable family life reach.

86 Johnson, 36.
87 Johnson, 48.
Twelve of the thirteen studies they looked at illustrated a negative effect of institutional care on cognitive development. The one study proving homes to be a positive intervention, demonstrated that the cognitive development of children in the home was still better than those who had been returned to their biological family. Not all the studies were able to make this comparison, so there is no way of knowing how widespread those results could be. Many of the studies suggested that early intervention, or the removal to foster care, can result in recovery and attainment of optimal cognitive development. Therefore, one of the overarching conclusions was that “evidence indicates that infants who are placed in institutional care will suffer harm to their development if they are not moved to family-based [foster] care by the age of 6 months.”

This, however, does not help us understand the development of children who enter the system a little older or those with different problems from how they were raised in their first few years of life with their families.

One of the mental impairments that many impoverished children have is the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. These disorders appear in children whose mothers drank alcohol while pregnant, and the effects can be significant for the unborn child. Because the conditions that often cause these women to drink (poverty, abuse, absence of the father) are often the same reasons children are removed from their families, it is not uncommon that children arriving at children’s homes have some degree of FASD. The effects are wide-ranging and can include physical deformities, behavior disorders, attention deficits, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, sight and hearing impairments, and heart defects. Some of these effects are permanent, however there is research suggesting that some of the effects can be managed given the correct

---

88 Ibid, 53-6.
89 Ibid, 34.
In her research, Laugeson promotes the idea that because some of the impairments of FASD are connected with social functioning, the children are in need of social skills intervention. These interventions are based on behavioral intervention in line with the specific cognitive and behavioral deficits seen in children with FASD, such as attempting to improve children’s friendships, and has been shown to be effective in children ages 6-12.

It is important to analyze children’s homes based on the development of “normal” children, but it is necessary to look at them considering the situations surrounding the children. Children in these homes come with a host of unique needs that “normal” children do not have, so it is imperative that we consider if the homes are able to meet these unique needs. Unfortunately, many times the problems brought to a home are compounded by the poor attention and lack of resources available in the home. “Growth retardation is common among orphanage residents because of inadequate food supplies, improper feeding techniques, intercurrent illnesses, infrequent use of medications, and/or poor utilization of calories.”

Therefore, we must consider to what extent these substitute families improve the children’s situation and provide the attention necessary to avoid common problems in children’s homes.

Other possible conditions that a child may enter a home with could be an addiction to solvents (i.e. glue-sniffing), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from physical or sexual abuse, malnutrition, autism (sometimes poorly diagnosed), or other learning differences. Living with their biological or foster family, these children would receive substantial personalized attention, and if given the means, would be given treatment or educated according to their needs.

---


92 Although some of these factors (improper feeding techniques) obviously refer to infant development, we can see how lack of adequate resources for children with special needs could easily compound the negative effect of their disorder with respect to their cognitive, social and behavioral development. “Intercurrent” is a synonym of simultaneous. Miller, “Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders in Children Residing in Russian Orphanages,” *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental research* 30, 532.
In a group home setting, however, children often feel invisible because their needs are not known or cared about. In one publication from UNICEF, this is called the “anonymity of collective life” and is one of the reasons they urge against institutions or children’s homes. Usually this results not from the malicious intentions of those in charge of the home, but from the very reason the home exists. “An institution-oriented approach typically occurs under conditions of scarce personnel resources, and the staff within these types of facilities are primarily concerned with the physical care of the children.” The general lack of resources associated with the necessity for a group home, opposed to a proxy family home, is precisely the reason why children who end up living there might not receive the specialized attention they need. There is no money to pay for someone trained in working with autistic kids, or there is only one psychologist who comes five times a week for a home of sixty kids. Therefore, the situation is paradoxical in that the situations these children leave to go to the home are problematic and lend themselves to a mental, behavioral or even physical condition that require special attention. However, homes (instead of foster care or adoption) are needed because the resources needed for another option are lacking, and therefore, rarely do they have the resources to provide specialized care to a single child of the sixty who requires it. As we will see later, the exception to this rule is homes whose funds come from other sources, generally international organizations. The more internationally-based an institution is, the more stability it has financially, and the more efficient it is in providing for treatment and specialized care. Therefore, homes with consistent funding (often international) are able to provide for children’s individual needs because they can provide

94 Johnson, 55.
95 As we will see later, group homes often do not choose their organization, but rather do not have the funds to follow a proxy family model.
abundant individual attention for the children. Homes with less funding can still help children, but they must realize that they cannot meet many different needs, requiring individualized care.

Moving Beyond the Theoretical

From this framework of childhood development and family, on what criteria can we base the analysis of homes in Honduras? If we are going to look at very diverse homes filling a variety of needs, according to what standards could the homes be compared? We should analyze homes’ ability to provide for the needs of the children according to the kind of substitute family they have created. Therefore, we will look at the homes’ abilities to meet cognitive, social and in many cases, special needs, according to the model of family the homes have adopted. In this section, we will identify specific ways to measure the extent to which the homes in the following chapters provide for their children’s needs.

Throughout this chapter, we have identified children’s needs from which specific parameters can be derived. These simply guide analysis and provide a framework around which we can understand each home. In addition to the questions we have devised, one approach we will utilize is the Development Asset Approach. The Search Institute, starting in 1989, has developed 40 assets that children may or may not have. It bases its research on a self-assessment called Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors. From this nation-wide study, they have determined that there is a clear linear correlation between number of assets and “thriving behavior” in children. Risk behaviors include alcohol or drug use, adolescent sexual activity and poor academic performance while thriving behavior includes involvement in community, good grades and healthy friendships. The approach stresses that there is no one element of a child’s environment that determines whether he will develop optimally, but rather that there are many
factors that determine a child’s development. The rationale therefore, for the Developmental Asset Approach was “most clearly articulated by Bronfenbrenner (1979), the overarching theme in the work of these researchers and theorists is that young people live in multiple overlapping ecologies and that helping them create and maintain successful pathways to adulthood requires simultaneous attention to and marshaling of supports across all those ecologies.”96 It is difficult to know to what extent these assets are culturally developed, however, the framework of cognitive and social development is universal. Specific behaviors learned through social development, specifically may depend of different stages on different cultural contexts. We may refer to these in analyzing the homes in addition to the questions we have already identified.

96 Peter Scales, Developmental Assets (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999), 12.
Chapter 3: Is the Proxy Family Model Ideal?

In this and the following chapter we will begin to analyze the structure of various home types and what needs each meet. We will look at the homes that are considered ideal by NGOs and the state and looked to as models. Are these homes actually cases that model best practices? Do they leave anyone out? How can they be improved? In this chapter we will look at proxy family model children’s homes. These are children homes that contain casitas, or smaller houses, in which live “nuclear” families. In the following chapter, we will look at group homes and projects that are not considered ideal, but currently are the alternative for the care of Honduran children. How do these homes measure up? How well do they meet the needs of their children? Later, we will use the two chapters’ findings to determine how these two types of homes compare and what characteristics from each are beneficial and/or harmful to their children.

According to many international organizations’ expectations (e.g. United Nations’ CRC), we understand childhood to be a carefree period of life where a stable home life is essential in providing a child with the rights he deserves. These frameworks also prohibit any form of child labor and emphasize innocence as the salient characteristic of childhood. The family model that commonly fulfills these expectations is the nuclear family. A nuclear family is one where there are two parental figures, one paternal and one maternal, caring for any number of biological children. The parents are responsible for socializing their children and imparting to them any knowledge they need. The family is usually a vertical relationship between parents and children with less emphasis placed on horizontal relationships between siblings. Extended
family is important, especially when it assumes a more primary role in the child’s life, but here we want to focus on the organization of a child’s primary caregivers. Because of factors we have already discussed, this is easier to achieve in the upper classes. In situations with enough money that only one parent must work and the other may stay home with the children, parents are able to give them the attention they need. Or, if both parents must work, their workdays are not so long that they cannot be with their children at night and afford a good nanny or daycare during the day. The traditional nuclear family model also ignores any unexpected occurrence such as the death of a parent, divorce, illness or any number of complications that arise in life. However, it is precisely because of the ability to give the child stability and personal attention that the developed world has traditionally considered the nuclear model best for childhood development. This is changing now with a prevalence of “blended” families created by divorce and remarriage or the pairing of interracial parents and children because of transnational adoption. Nevertheless, the nuclear family is the unit around which organizations like the United Nations construct the ideal childhood.

It is therefore no surprise that implementing this model into a children’s home would make a children’s home resembling a nuclear family seem ideal. However, when we think about children’s homes, we envision the institutionalized group homes that are common in the direst of circumstances. The reality is that not all homes are like this. In fact there is a wide variety of children’s homes that make up the system of social services to children. Among them, are a few who have tried to adopt the nuclear model of family within the home, and it is these homes that are usually looked to as ideal. In other words, they are considered the best environments for a child to grow. Here we will characterize these homes, terming them proxy family homes, in general and then we will analyze specific cases according to the concepts identified in chapter 2.
The most obvious characteristics, making proxy family homes different from other homes, is the living situation. These homes are identified by the fact that the larger home has organized their children into smaller houses or “casitas.” These houses are managed by either one or two “house parents” and the children live in their house consistently, effectively making it like a “normal” home from the time the child arrives to the time when he is required to leave. These smaller houses have from 6-12 children and all of their daily activities are managed directly by their house parent. The house parents are given the resources they need to raise the children and a salary, but are responsible for providing for the needs of the children. It is a system of delegated responsibility. The director and those who assist him or her are responsible for meeting the needs of the house parents and the house parents are responsible for knowing about the needs of their children and requesting the resources to meet those needs. Although it varies from children’s home to children’s home, in each casita, there is usually a kitchen, a living room, the parents’ bedroom and bedrooms for the children that only 2-3 children share. Again, depending on the specific case, the responsibilities of the house parents are to prepare the food for their children, help them with their homework, take them to the doctor, organize activities and outings for them, and most other activities that a “normal” parent would do. These responsibilities are funded by the home’s direction, but not coordinated by it.98

98 Synthesis of information gathered from interviews with Ana Rivera (January 11, 2008), Julia Phillips (January 14, 2008), Gonzalo Rodriguez (January 25, 2008), and Maria Cristina Torres (January 8, 2008) in Honduras.
In general, the benefits of this organization are that the children have more personal contact with their primary caregivers and receive specialized attention based on their needs. In a group home setting, there may not be this personalized attention. Referencing the concepts of childhood development mentioned earlier, it is easy understand why this system may be superior, and it is certainly easy to see why this might be the model of best practices. It is the model closest to the developed world’s nuclear family model, because it provides children with more personalized attention, stability and traditional parental figures. It is, therefore, the best in recreating what much of the developed world has identified as what childhood should be like: a protected home where the children are cared for by parents.

---

Throughout this and the following chapter I use the term “caregiver” to refer to what the homes in Honduras call *educadores*, roughly translated “educators.” However, because many of the scholars I use in chapters 1 and 2 use the term “caregiver,” I will use that also.

---

### Figure 3 - Prominent Characteristics of Proxy Family Homes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>El Aldea Infantiles SOS</th>
<th>Hogar de Fé</th>
<th>Amigos de Jesús</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of children</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>50+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of houses</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of caregivers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Personnel</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director, <em>tías</em>, secretary, social worker, drivers, security guards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director, 3 missionary couples (administration), groundskeeper, security guards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Director, long-term volunteers, priest,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caregiver to child ratio</strong></td>
<td>1 to 7 (6.89)</td>
<td>1 to 5 (5.38)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and private - off premises</td>
<td></td>
<td>Private Primary – on premises</td>
<td>Private Primary – on premises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Primary – on premises</td>
<td>Public <em>colegio</em> – off premises</td>
<td>Public colegio</td>
<td>Public colegio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large events (gymnasium events)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Meals, laundry, church, outings, large events, chores</td>
<td>Meals, church, outings, large events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals, laundry, church, outings, large events, chores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>House</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals, homework, playing, chores, sleep, relaxation, outings</td>
<td></td>
<td>Homework, play, chores, sleep, relaxation</td>
<td>Homework, play, chores, sleep, relaxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Houseparent(s)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Houseparent(s)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender of Houseparent(s)</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male/Female couple</td>
<td>Male/Female couple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare, medical care, food, planning activities, educational assistance, laundry, discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td>Childcare, educational assistance, discipline</td>
<td>Childcare, educational assistance, discipline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Information gathered in discussion with each of the respective homes’ directors. See Appendix C
There are three homes in the San Pedro Sula area that we are using as case studies of this kind of substitute family: Aldea SOS, Hogar de Fé, and Amigos de Jesus. Each of these homes have significant differences; however, it is their similarities that intrigue us insofar as they indicate this type of home’s ability to meet the needs of its children.

**Aldea Infantil SOS (SOS Children’s Village)**

The Aldea SOS is unique in that it is part of an international organization of children’s homes. It is the only one of the homes we will examine that is managed as part of a larger system of homes.

SOS Children's Villages is an international non-governmental social development organization that has been active in the field of children's rights and committed to
children's needs and concerns since 1949. In 132 countries and territories our activities focus on children without parental care and children of families in difficult circumstances. SOS Children's Villages focuses on family-based, long-term care of children who can no longer grow up with their biological families.\footnote{SOS-Kinderdorf International. “What we Do” \url{http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/What-we-do/Pages/default.aspx}.}

This organization that began in Austria after World War II has homes all over the world providing care to children in need. The villages are well-organized: there is an international headquarters, below which are the regional headquarters. The seven villages that are in Honduras are part of the Central American regional headquarters, below which there is Honduran direction in Tegucigalpa (the capital). There is a large network supporting these homes with funding from throughout the world and headquarters in Germany, but stipulations accompany SOS’s high level of organization. For example Juan, a young man who has left the home, is still supported by the regional SOS (Central America) to attend the university to study medicine in Tegucigalpa.\footnote{All minors’ names have been changed.} His attempts to get financial support for university study from the Honduran level of SOS have been denied. Cultural or even personal values of the national administration affect how they will and will not allow their money to be used. Juan needed to go to the regional level to get the funding he needs to continue his studies. Each year it is a fight to get them to approve his funding and each year he must find the way to make it through the bureaucratic hoops. This example demonstrates that the presence of a larger organization supporting individual homes makes it possible for children to aspire to go to college and become professionals. At the same time, it demonstrates the possible negative effects of such wide-reaching bureaucratization.

At the time that I visited SOS in San Pedro Sula in January of 2008, there were 139 children living in 16 houses. In each of these houses lives a housemother who is responsible for
taking care of the 8 to 9 children living with her. She becomes their substitute or proxy mother. In addition to the housemothers, there are tías, or aunts, who make the system run fluidly. These women fill in for the housemothers if an emergency arises, such as they must return to their hometown or they become terribly ill. The tías are also housemothers in training, so that there is a constant supply of well-trained caregivers, a major problem in homes without the resources to keep and train this kind of substitute caregiver. All caregivers must be strictly female. They claim this is to promote the mother/child bond; that the presence of a man as the director of the home provides the necessary male figure of authority. However, in San Pedro, the director is not male and there is no adult male influence besides visitors and the security guard.\textsuperscript{102} The other characteristics that the organization stresses as important for the child’s development are the interaction of siblings, the house and the village.\textsuperscript{103} From what we have discussed here, we can see that all of the attributes are recognized as important for a child’s development. However, to what extent do these theoretical ideas really meet the children needs?

Considering the questions in Chapter 2, there are a few salient characteristics of this home that are important to note.\textsuperscript{104} Firstly, the positive influence that the housemother can have is crucial to the development of the child. The fact that the children are provided with a consistent attachment figure who gives structure to their daily activities and supervises their interactions is invaluable. As we saw in the previous chapter, the effect of a positive attachment figure is self-confidence, positive relationships with others and even better cognitive development. SOS creates an environment that is more stable than that of many other homes

\textsuperscript{102} Ana Elizabeth Alberto (Director of Aldea SOS), in discussion with author. January 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{104} See Appendix B and tables.
because the child depends on his primary caregiver as an attachment figure. However, it is important to note that this type of attachment also emphasizes a “nurtured” childhood that embodies many of the ideals of the developed world. These children are “encouraged to focus on their studies while they are in the home.” They do not need to work because all financial resources come from outside the home. Their lifestyle resembles what we identified in Chapter 1 as upper class. Additionally, each child has an individual sponsor (whom they are prohibited from knowing) who provides them with any additional funding they may require. This person pays for their schooling, their personal supplies, any medical treatment, clothing, and some food. Because of the seemingly unlimited money supply, children in this home do not experience the burden of working to support themselves. Some still choose to work when they are older, perhaps due to experience before the home, personality, or influences outside the home, however, there is no pressure to help the family unit (the child’s home). Because of the emphasis on the vertical relationship between parents/administration and children, a child does not feel he is financially responsible for providing for the family; that is the responsibility of the adults. There is a clear hierarchy throughout the entire village that transmits to the child his inferior and carefree status.

The professional success children leaving SOS can achieve is the most impressive of its characteristics. With more individualized attention and without the need to work or the stress of poverty, children are able to excel in their schoolwork and reach higher levels of education that might not have been possible without these opportunities. Yet, it is remarkable that a relatively large proportion of SOS “graduates” reach the university and become professionals and others

---

106 Juan (child graduated from SOS), in discussion with author. February 1, 2008.
finish bachillerato.\textsuperscript{108} The ability to reach such educational high points improves cognitive development, increase social capital and increase opportunities in general for the children, either through the organization internationally, or through the home’s local contacts. However, in order to provide the opportunity to reach this level of success, SOS’s international policy imposes restrictions on what kind of children it will house. SOS does not accept children who still have biological family that are willing and able to care for them. Also, generally, they do not accept children past the age of 8 to 10.\textsuperscript{109} SOS’s children’s ability to excel academically is impressive, but this success is contingent on the child being the right “type” and wanting to excel. As we saw with the story of Juan in such a large system, the children must push to take advantage of the opportunities presented in SOS. They have the personal support network of their house and their village, yet opportunities for the future require their own personal perseverance. This in itself is not so different from how life works outside the home, but it does contradict the upper class lifestyle taught to the children. The requirements put on the child in order to receive help pose an analytical problem. We cannot say that SOS is better at educating, empowering and equipping children for life after the home if they teach the children values contradictory to larger society.

The fact that more professionals come out of the SOS simply means that they are better at educating young orphaned or abandoned children who have no serious mental or physical ailments. The increased amount of individualized attention given to children by their primary caregivers indicates that children’s specific medical or psychological needs are identified and could be met. It does not indicate, however, that the home does this for all children. SOS has

\textsuperscript{108}The educational progression in Honduras is elementary school (K-6), colegio (7-9), bachillerato (10-12). In bachillerato students pick one skill they focus on such as computing or literature. It could be equate to an Associate’s degrees in the United States since finishing colegio is often compared to graduating high school.

\textsuperscript{109}Not official policy. Maria Jose (housemother), in discussion with author. January 16, 2008.
imposed requirements on the kind of child it will help, meaning its extensive financial and social resources are not used to give the hope of a similarly promising future to all children in need. A large population (an exact number is unavailable) of the at-risk youth in Honduras, especially those who are slightly older, have conditions that must be attended to in order to develop optimally, conditions that require the kind of financial resources SOS has. Solely because the SOS cannot help these children it is not universally ideal: it is unable to provide for the needs of many Honduran children.

As the SOS’s primary concern is providing “family-based” care, it is important to look at how well they achieve it. As stated earlier, SOS provides a cohesive nuclear family unit. This form of care encourages positive development because it provides stability and individualized attention. It also provides supervision to inter-sibling interactions and structure to daily activities. While we acknowledge that the substitute the SOS has created for family is important, and certainly beneficial in many aspects, are the other issues surrounding family addressed? The idea of family is a complex notion that is full of cultural implications. Specifically in Honduras, family is more fluid, revolving around community and extended kin as well as extremely strong familial bonds that are difficult to break. The director of San Pedro’s SOS stated that the community within the village provides the fluidity that is common to Latin American families and that the presence of other houses acts within the village as a substitute for extended family. This is also the rationalization she gave for the absence of men, stating that in many Latin American communities, single mothers from many different families share the responsibility of raising each other’s children and creating a communal family. 110 The major component that is missing, though, is the solidarity of Honduran families. In stable circumstances, the Honduran family has unbreakable ties. As the environment that SOS strives to create is one where the

children have a stable family and home life, it would follow that they should also be provided with the kind of family ties that are common in their society. However, this is difficult for SOS to achieve because the housemothers and others working at the SOS, and any home for that matter, inevitably change jobs. They try to reduce this by only accepting single women and mothers, reducing the possibility that conflicts with a husband cannot draw a housemother away.\textsuperscript{111} The absence of men is also rationalized as a way to avoid maternity leave of housemothers, should one become pregnant, and sexual indecency between male adults and female children. While inappropriate behavior between caregivers and children of the opposite sex is not an uncommon problem, it seems that this is not an appropriate way to the handle situation because it only increases the artificiality of the home and insulates the children. They must learn how to handle themselves in social situations with the opposite sex, a skill usually learned through relationships they have with the opposite sex within the home. Therefore “the complete exclusion of one sex in the hopes of avoiding problems actually creates problems for adolescents thrown into social situations without the social skills needed to act appropriately.”\textsuperscript{112}

In general, there are many positive stabilizing aspects to how SOS has organized their version of a proxy family home, however the situation still undermines the theory that this organization provides the children with all the skills a “normal” Honduran family would.

Another important part of the SOS system is how children are transitioned from their protective bubble into the “real world.” Upon reaching a certain age (18 by law in Honduras), children must become independent and sustain themselves. SOS recognizes, however, that very few people make this transition completely on their own. Most of us have family that, at least, gives us advice concerning the best roads to take. The solution SOS created for this is \textit{Casas de}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{111} Juan, in discussion with author. February 1, 2008.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Gonzalo Rodriguez (IHNFA employee and social worker), in discussion with author. January 25, 2008.
\end{itemize}
*Jovenes (Youth Facilities).* These are houses where children who have left SOS go while they find a job or go to the university. It is meant to be a temporary transitional stage in the child’s life, but it is also supposed to provide the support the young adult needs to successfully transition to adult life. Again, this contradicts the idea of recreating family for the children because at a certain age, they must leave their family to go to a house where only people of their own age live with one supervisor. It is artificial and indicates that the “family” created by the way the SOS is organized does not provide what a Honduran family normally provides, unity, social capital, and permanence. Instead, it provides only for the physical and educational development of a child into young adulthood.

The final note to be made about the Aldea Infantiles SOS is the paradox of exclusivity that it presents. As we have already noted, it only accepts children with no biological familial ties; however, they have created an alternative form of care for children who do not meet their requirements. They provide day care services for the community. It is a program in which *tías* as well as additional caregivers provide affordable day care for local families with difficulties. The director stated that in this way they “avoid the abandonment of children and the need for more homes such as the SOS.”¹¹³ This is what the international organization refers to as “other forms of care,” and is the role that the extended family has traditionally played. But since poverty precludes family members the ability to take care of themselves, much less someone else’s children, an alternative must be created. In many other countries this program takes the form of a semi-permanent home for families going through a difficult time or a home that provides for the special needs of children for which their biological family does not have the means to pay. This kind of program can possibly meet needs that the home itself cannot. For example, it is a way of helping children without setting requirements concerning their situation.

or problems they may have, instead they are simply offering a service without stipulations. The program, however, does not have the ability to provide for children’s overall well-being, it can only provide supervision and guidance during the weekday. After looking at the other homes of this type, we will return to why this kind of program is important for addressing needs, specifically community needs, that may have not been addressed with by residential care.

Hogar de Fé (Faith Home)

Source: http://www.faithhome.net/

In the absence of a formal international organization, the most common substitute is religion. The majority of the homes in San Pedro Sula have some kind of religious affiliation that financially support them. Churches provide the funds that the homes need to simply stay open. In some cases, a sufficient financial base enables a home to thrive. In the case of Hogar de Fé, it is the combination of a strong missionary base and its rural location that has provided several of this home’s advantages in comparison to others. The home is run by missionary couples that administer of the home and is spread over 25 acres of land on which they are constantly building. This home is not part of a larger organization but instead independently determines its rules and direction. This is good in that caregivers and administrators can do what is best for the children on a case-by-case basis without hierarchical rules restricting their actions.
However, there is a disadvantage in that they have no “tried and true” method. Without guidance from a larger organization, they deal with situations as they arise, using models and methods they consider positive. The latter is the method of most homes in San Pedro, and perhaps is more compatible with the Honduran lifestyle but makes long-term decisions as well as day-to-day situations more difficult.

The organization of the home is similar to Aldea SOS in that the children live in houses with house parents. The children are responsible to their house parents and form a cohesive unit within their proxy family. It is also similar in that the parents are responsible for caring for the children’s daily needs and activities while the home is mostly an administrative body. However, there are several critical differences. The most obvious is that the children live with a Honduran couple as their primary caregivers. The couple provides all the in-home attention for the children. However the children eat their meals all together and many activities are planned for the home as a whole. Elementary schooling is provided by the home on the premises and the children rarely leave the home except as a group all together. There are no stipulations as to the kind of situations from which the children must come. This is a religious home, funded by people who wish to do “good” in this world by investing in a social project with a spiritual end. The transition for the children out of the home starts earlier (age 14) and adolescents are transitioned to different homes on the premises with house parents that are specifically for the female or male adolescents. The houses are almost entirely segregated by gender except for the biological children of the house parents, and medical attention via clinics by teams of Americans, is administered on the premises. In many aspects Hogar de Fé is significantly different from

---

SOS; however, as we stated at the beginning of this chapter, we are analyzing a group of homes united by a few prominent characteristics to determine how children’s needs are best met.

Amongst the qualities that stand out about this home is the plethora of adult attention that is available to the children. Considering the Developmental Assets from the Search Institute, these children are doing very well in terms of their social interactions and self-worth within their community. However, this conclusion is based on the assumption that the home itself makes up a community. Although it may be maladaptive for the children to remain inside the home, or to consider it a valid social network, but for the time being, it is important to recognize what this community does provide. In addition to the higher levels of personal attention from the house parents, as in our discussion of the El Aldea SOS, there are many “other adult figures” present in the lives of the children on an almost daily basis. This fact makes neglect unlikely and indicates that very few physical and major emotional needs are going to go unnoticed and unmet. The community that the home creates and the presence of many adults also creates an atmosphere where the children are able to interact with supervision, making their daily activities, even chores, a positive experience developmentally. Positive engagement in their community also makes the child feel that he is an important member of the community while building self-confidence. This means that many of the negative side effects that often accompany living in a children’s home can be avoided, such as neediness or the craving for attention we discussed before as maladaptive.

As we discussed with Aldea SOS, the abundance of caregivers is an advantage that not all homes are able to afford. In Hogar de Fé, requirements for house parents are not as strict as the recruitment process at Aldea SOS, but that does not mean their presence is less important or

116 Scales, 8-9.
117 Ibid. Johnson, Rebecca, 48-53.
effective. There is some evidence, specifically with infants, that development of children can be enhanced by any positive interaction with adults, it does not necessarily require that they be extremely well-trained. Instead, simply through a basic training including the principles of basic childcare, the very presence of adults can be a positive effect in a child’s life. This statement is, of course, conditional on that the adult be a positive influence in the child’s life. What is positive is culturally determined and therefore hard to define, but in general, we refer to adults who want to improve the lives of the children with whom they are in contact, and put that goal above personal desires. Of course, we are not discounting the value of trained professionals. We simply acknowledge the value of positive adult interactions in children’s lives and the advantage that children who interact more with adults have.

Because the home is located in a rural area, there are few extracurricular activities in the near vicinity in which the children can participate. Therefore, it is logical that the children stay in the home almost the entire time, as many children in rural areas might stay close to home in the absence of any place to go. It is important then, that Hogar de Fé be as structured and expansive as possible, in order to provide a sense of living in a community to the children. The use of houses and house parents demonstrates this and mimics a similar concept in SOS villages. However, it is worrisome in terms of social development, that the children rarely leave the home. In the absence of socialization outside the home until the time of adolescence (when the children go to colegio), the home must strive to make up for the all the social experiences that the child would otherwise have in school, at friends’ houses, playing a sport’s team, etc.\textsuperscript{118} It is understandable that, as a home dedicated to the religious education of children, they would like to have exclusive control of the influences upon a child. This means that most of their socialization occurs within a Christian atmosphere that can “cleanse” the child of whatever

\textsuperscript{118} See earlier definition of colegio and bachillerato.
difficult past he may have and forms him into an adolescent or young adult with the “right” values. Consequences on social development may not be significant as long as he is well-socialized, but the child’s isolation leaves him little to no social capital outside the home. As we discussed in the second chapter, this is not unusual for Honduran children. Many do not have social capital outside their extended and fictive family before they reach young adulthood, but this requires that the home itself recognize the responsibility of providing the children leaving the home with the social capital they need.

One final factor that is important is the home’s plan to transition the children out of the home and incorporate them into their society. The home’s method of transition does not incorporate community and interdependence, but focuses solely on independence. The process of autonomy is based on the idea that by the age of 18, a child should be self-sufficient, and the home takes steps so that after leaving, the child is able to support himself. Fortunately, they do not try to say that the child should be completely independent nor does the home sever all ties with them. However, they do make evident in the various tiers of transition housing that they value a child’s ability to sustain himself through his teenage years. Instead of being a nurtured child, the children are required to learn to depend only on themselves, since the home will not always be there to support them. Perhaps in this way, the home gives them the skills the same way a mother with little money to pamper a child would. They want to equip him with the ability to take care of himself. They are equipping the children for the situation they will face upon leaving the home, but in many ways are simply promoting autonomy.
There is one final home that should be mentioned. Unfortunately, because of its difficult location, I was not able to visit this home. Nonetheless, I spoke with two IHNFA workers about homes in general, and both mentioned this home as the best in the area. It is located far outside of the city, and requires a car with four-wheel drive to get there. The primary reason these social workers complimented Amigos de Jesús was that in addition to having an organization based on family houses with house parents and the benefits of space, resources and abundance of caregivers (similar to Hogar de Fé), this home gives *talleres*, training the children vocational skills. As Amigos de Jesús is also located in a rural area, there are few activities outside the home for the children to participate in, meaning they spend most of their time within the confines of the home’s property. Amigos de Jesús’s *talleres* are numerous: sewing, baking,
caring for animals, and techniques in tending to a farm or large property. This Catholic community has a strong connection with the United States and provides the home significant support in the form of funds and long-term volunteers. For that reason, they have opened a bilingual school on the premises that most of the children attend. They also have a program similar to SOS in which the organization “supports hundreds of impoverished children living in local Honduran villages and overcrowded shelters through our [their] Sponsor-A-Child program.” This is simply a method by which individuals in the United States can sponsor children in the home and in the community.

It often is impossible to implement one strategy in a home without it causing negative effects or precluding the home from implementing another. For that reason, we are looking at these cases specifically to understand the contexts in which these homes operate. In the case of Amigos de Jesús, we have very little information about the work it does. Therefore, we can only notice the visible differences between Amigos de Jesús and the other two cases we have been looked at. Amigos de Jesús has discovered a way to ameliorate the possible problems posed by over-institutionalization, or never leaving the home. Although the talleres do not eliminate the problem of lack of outside socialization, they do improve upon the lack of social capital in the form of practical skills. Also, depending on how well it is administered, the community outreach program of sponsors giving directly to children in the community is a very promising program. It could address the less severe needs of children within the community that do not require the child’s removal from the home to be place in a substitute home and family.

122 Amigos de Jesus. “Who We Are” http://www.amigosdejesus.org/who_we_are.html.
Conditions for Success?: Who proxy family homes do and do not help

Having familiarized ourselves with a few cases that make up the proxy family group many consider the model of “best practices,” we can determine which characteristics of these homes are universally beneficial and meet the needs of the children. In other words, is this truly a case where these homes embody what all homes should be like or is it solely that there are some characteristics that prove important for the success of a home in meeting the needs of its children? How universal are these characteristics and how easy are they to implement? Also, are these models of “best practices” best in all situations? Are there populations that cannot be helped because of the organization of the homes, and if so, what are the stipulations in place making these homes perhaps not best in all cases?

**Figure 4 - Synopsis of Needs Met by Proxy Homes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Needs</th>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Aldea Infantiles</th>
<th>SOS</th>
<th>Hogar de Fé</th>
<th>Amigos de Jesús</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Material Needs</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bed</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medical Attention</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Needs</td>
<td>Attachment Figure</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fostered Sibling Relationships</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX (gendered)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Confidence</td>
<td>XX (conditional)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>XX (conditional)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term needs</td>
<td>Formal Education</td>
<td>X (sometimes into university)</td>
<td>X (primary and some <em>colegio</em>)</td>
<td>X (primary and some <em>colegio</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocational Skills</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Network</td>
<td>X (SOS Network)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Social Capital</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: information compiled by author. See appendix B.\(^{123}\)

\(^{123}\) XX = need met by primary caregiver, or, as with education, within the home; X = need met, nonspecific as to how
Ideally, all homes would be able to give the children that inhabit them copious amounts of personalized attention, at the same ratio as the “normal” parent/child relationship. Whether through the proxy family model or another model, all homes would have a low caregiver to child ratio and the caregivers would be able to dedicate all their time and energy only to the children in their charge. In the absence of this, it is important to recognize the value of the proxy family system and, especially, the attachment figure that this system provides to its children. There are many ways a home can organize: where and with whom the children sleep, where they eat, who prepares their food, and who helps them with homework. These homes give children one great advantage: long-term attachment to an adult figure who guides them through life.\textsuperscript{124} To reiterate, the fact that all three of these homes provide some kind of attachment figure, usually long-term, means that the child is able to achieve optimal cognitive and social development, they feel secure in their relationships and self-confident, they do not crave attention and in general, on a personal level are better equipped and empowered for adolescence and adulthood. Some kind of attachment figure is important regardless the exact situation. It does not necessarily require the children live in a certain way, or even that they be institutionalized in a home. Attachment figures are the characteristic of these homes that I consider universally beneficial and a need that can be effectively filled for all children and in all circumstances.

Another aspect of these homes that is universally applicable in meeting the needs of at-risk youth is the creation of a sense of community and family. It is important, as was determined by Search Institute in their developmental assets, that the child feel part of a larger entity and that there are others who depend on him and on whom he can depend. In addition to the importance of this in terms of social development, it forms social capital and life skills. Obviously, the best

\textsuperscript{124} See section on Attachment in Chapter 2.
implementation of this idea would successfully employ cultural ideas about family and community as well as give the child enough independence and self-confidence to empower him after he leaves the home. It would also equip him to be a positive influence in his community and a good role model for other children in the home instead of simply knowing how to survive. These are the effects of a healthy family and community environment, and the definition of empowerment. Therefore, one important achievement of these homes is that they are able to empower their children. This is most obvious in the many graduated children’s ability to become professionals. In general, it signifies that they have been empowered to confidently pursue what they want in life and feel that they have the stability and right to do so. Creating a stable base is necessary in this endeavor so as to give the child the social and personal skills to succeed and make the adult-child feel they have a home base and a group of people who care about him.

These are just a couple characteristics universally applicable in looking at programs aimed at helping children in need. They are measures, utilizing the proxy family as models, homes and social programs can be compared. Alone, they are useful for determining what steps are necessary in moving forward with new endeavors.

Each of the homes helps certain types of children more than others. In general, however, these homes are the most beneficial and desirable to work with young children who still have a significant amount of time to make a considerable difference in their lives. This means that many older children who are placed in homes based on changing the child, find that they are unable to succeed, and eventually the child is removed from the home or run away.\footnote{Fernando (Child in Hogar San Rafael), in discussion with author. February 2, 2008.} The case of Fernando is particularly poignant in demonstrating this idea. Fernando came from a troubled home (the details are confidential) and after being abandoned by his parents, was living on the streets when IHNFA picked him up. Social workers place him in the Aldea SOS, thinking he
would get the best care there, but Fernando could not “fit in” at SOS. He said, “es que no encajaba en el SOS. Me escapaba porque no pude con todas sus reglas.” After many attempts to make Fernando behave, he was eventually transferred to another home. This is also true with children who have significant behavioral problems. The trouble is that the people who start and run children’s homes want to help as many children as much as they can. Barring any kind of ulterior motive, the people who administer these homes have the good of the children in mind. Unfortunately, sometimes the desire to make as big a difference as possible precludes them from helping children with whom only a small improvement could be made with the time and resources available. It may sound unjust, but in many cases it is the logical response. If one is faced with many young children who all need attention and one unruly 13-year-old boy who is rude and steals, it is difficult to rationalize spending one’s time and efforts with a problematic adolescent instead of raising many young children into empowered adults. Whatever the reason, there is often a large disparity between the children who need help and those who receive it. There are a variety of children at-risk who should receive some kind of assistance, yet it is often those who are the easiest to help and with whom the most progress can be made who receive the attention they need.

We have not discussed at length the presence of street kids in Honduras and their specific needs beyond chemical abuse and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), still these are the children who are often the most difficult to help because of their unique psychological and behavioral problems. We have mentioned a few of the reasons that a child may find himself in or of the street, but now we must consider what unique challenges this would give a child who is then relocated to a home. They are used to doing things for themselves, their own way, without

126 Ibid. It’s just that I didn’t fit at the SOS. I would run away because I couldn’t stand all their rules. Translated by author.
anyone telling them what to do even though their actions may be illegal and cause them incredible pain in the end. It is how they discovered that they are able to survive. These children often are those who most need assistance, but are the most difficult to help. They are often resistant, proud or unpleasant. In addition, when institutionalized, many of the behavioral problems they have developed which may include stealing, swearing, or over-sexualization, are problematic other children are being raised. This is more problematic if the goal of such an institution is to provide the children with the kind of sheltered childhood idealized in most developed countries. The children’s behavioral problems manifest themselves and may affect the other children in the home, undermining the efforts of the caregivers. With many of these homes what is be the best in caring for children according to UN guidelines, and best in providing for optimal cognitive and social development given the right circumstances and resources, are not what these homes can necessarily provide for the more needy children.

One possible exception are the programs that Aldea SOS and Amigos de Jesús have implemented as a way to supplement in-home care. These are programs which help families and use their wealth of financial resources to fill needs that they do not meet. The distribution of money and/or goods is inefficient and therefore offers no real improvement in the quality of life to those who receive it. A one-time distribution of rice to a poor community helps them, but not very long. On the other hand, with the kind of supplementary programs that these homes provide, poor or needy families receive an extra resource, such as daycare, that make it a little easier for parents to provide for their children and for families to stay together. The hope is that there will ultimately be fewer at-risk youth.

127 Maria Cristina Torres (Social Worker, works specifically with Hogar Emanuel), in discussion with author. January 20, 2007.
However, this group of homes in and of themselves, does not address the issue of children, such as street kids, who are the most difficult to help. Sometimes, as with SOS, the home goes so far as to restrict the children it helps solely to true orphans or abandoned children, stating they are the only children who morally should be helped – those with biological family should be aided in some other way, but should not be separated from their family and put in an institution. We will consider this moral question in the conclusion because it is important to question the extent to which children’s homes are needed.
Chapter 4: Group Homes as an Alternative

We have established which homes are considered proxy family homes and what their characteristics are. What about the other homes in the San Pedro Sula area? It is more difficult to identify one specific characteristic among the rest of the homes because they all operate independently. However, one feature with which we can differentiate these “other” homes from the homes we analyzed in chapter 3 is their organization. In these homes, the children live in a group. Often group living means that the children sleep in larger rooms or are organized by gender and age. Activities are planned for the whole group or according to age or maturity. Children sometimes live in “pods” and are looked after by one or a few specific caregivers, but the majority of their time is spent in the company of all the children who live in the home. It is a fine distinction, especially considering homes where children may sleep in “families” but eat as a whole, such as Hogar de Fé, but we can differentiate the homes by their focus. Does it create proxy families or does it manage all the children together as a large group? The homes we will look at in this chapter do the latter; therefore we must analyze how well they provide an alternative sense of family and meet the special needs of their children.

Lack of funding usually forces homes in this category to adopt an alternative family model. They do not have the resources to create stand-in or substitute families and then, provide financially for each proxy family. It is much simpler to consider all of the children part of one gigantic family and manage that singular entity. Many times homes that have organized themselves in this fashion do not wish to change because they can help more children with fewer funds. There are characteristics that accompany limited financial resources: disorganization, difficulty hiring quality caregivers, and less stability. These disadvantages are present in most homes, although the degree to which they impact children’s lives varies. Unlike in chapter 3, we
will not focus on the unifying characteristic of the homes (i.e. their group organization), but on the shared features, and abilities of each to provide for their children. We will also identify other methods homes use to raise children.

**Figure 5 - Characterization of Group Homes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>El Refugio</th>
<th>Hogar de Niños Emanuel</th>
<th>Hogar San Rafael</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of children</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregiver to child ratio</td>
<td>1 to 19 (18.75)</td>
<td>1 to 7 (6.8)</td>
<td>1 to 4 (4.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of organization</td>
<td>4 buildings – 4-5 rooms per building – by age and gender</td>
<td>“pods” – children grouped by age and gender</td>
<td>Cabins – mixed ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children living together</td>
<td>About 5 children per room</td>
<td>2-20 per room</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Primary – On premises</td>
<td></td>
<td>Some private and some public – off premises</td>
<td>Private primary – on premises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Colegio – Off premises</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Public colegio – off premises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>2 male/2 female</td>
<td>9 female/3 male</td>
<td>4 male/2 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td>Supervise activities, educational assistance, childcare (evening)</td>
<td>Supervise activities, educational assistance,</td>
<td>Coordinate and supervise activities, plan talleres, discipline, childcare,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Information gathered in discussion with author of each of the respective homes’ directors

Although it is useful to base our analysis on the unifying characteristic of these home in order to draw conclusions about the role of children’s homes as substitute family in general, it is important to remember that each home is unique and has been created and maintained for different motives that may affect how a home decides to raise its children. This means that if a specific home fails to meet the needs of a child, it is not necessarily that the home consciously decided against it, but that the home might have prioritized that need below others. Moreover, it does not reflect on group homes as a category, but the role of external actors may indicate a common problem with these homes. Since most of the homes are conscious of the fact that some activities and endeavors must be sacrificed because of a lack of funds, they solely focus on what they can accomplish according to the goals they have set out for themselves.\(^{128}\) For example,

Home A’s goal is to raise children for academic success, and therefore, prioritizes the children’s educational needs above emotional needs. Consequently, if it opts to dedicate funds to higher education opportunities for their children instead of extensive psychological treatment, it is not neglect, but the result of specific goals and limited resources. This study cannot cover how different motives influence a home’s function, but we must keep in mind the possible consequences of various parties’ involvement. We must also recognize that each home has strengths and weaknesses reflecting their differing priorities. Therefore, one home often cannot be compared to other homes directly. We can only take from each home the ways in which they provide for the needs of their children and how their conception of the family and the child affect their decisions.

El Refugio (The Refuge)

Source: Photo taken by author
The first home that we will consider is dedicated principally to children who formerly lived on the street or have been removed from at-risk situations. Most of the children have family, but for one reason or another have ended up in a group children’s home. El Refugio separates the children into “pods” or groups of children of the same gender and roughly the same age. They eat, exercise, take part in activities and talleres in groups, and in almost no way live like the nuclear family model. They are supervised by a caregiver, usually female, and there is approximately one caregiver to every 6 children. There are 75 children total, a director, social worker, pedagogue (organizes activities in the home), 4 caregivers, psychologist, nurse, 2 cooks, driver, two guards, 4 primary school teachers, and instructors of the workshops. The home itself is funded by Germans and receives help from the Swiss Fund as well. They regularly have international volunteers, usually from Switzerland, and rely on generous donations to continue the work they do.129

Visiting El Refugio is a completely different experience from visiting one of the family-based homes. When one walks onto the property of one of the family-based homes, it is fairly calm; each child is in his own house or playing near it. If they are visiting a friend in a neighboring house, they may not be on their own, but they are near a house under the supervision of an adult who keeps them under control. At El Refugio, on the other hand, a visitor walks onto the property and the number of children overwhelms him. There appears to be no organization and it is a free-for-all where children are not required to “stick close to home” and can meander about as they please. The lack of order, in appearance if not in actuality, is representative of group homes. In the homes in the first group, children belong in a specific proxy family space within the home and there is little incentive to venture away unless there is an organized activity. The children are monitored closely by adult supervision, while in the group home, the children

are not supervised as closely individually. The children roam the home’s entirety, and his bed is the only specific place he has to cling to.\textsuperscript{130} Therefore, as the children in the first group would wander around inside their homes or in their yard, children in El Refugio wandered the entire premises of the home. This is not necessarily negative, but makes supervision of the children difficult and the home in general seem more chaotic than those from the family-home group.

In speaking with the director, it was very clear that this home has modest goals, the first of which is simply to provide for the physical needs of the children and equip them with a technical skill that will allow them to leave poverty once out of the home. The director admits to admiring some of the other homes for their ability to raise children who become doctors and lawyers but frankly states that they do not have the resources to send 75 children to the university. Instead, they have created an alternative educational method by means of \textit{talleres} where children learn skills such as sewing or bread-making that will allow them to get a semi-skilled job and probably earn more than they would have if they had lived with their biological family or on the streets. They also have an elementary school on the premises which is filled with federal teachers for children in and outside of the home.\textsuperscript{131} Graduating even 6\textsuperscript{th} grade could be a great advantage for these children who, living at home, might not have been given the chance to receive a basic education.\textsuperscript{132} The quality of this education is of course, questionable as is the entire federal education system. There is no religious affiliation connected to this home, yet if a church group visits and would like to donate or plan an activity for the children, the home is open to it.

Considering that in many ways, we have very superficial information upon which we must base our conclusions, what can be said about El Refugio? The most glaringly obvious

\textsuperscript{131} Christof Wittwer, in discussion with author. January 19, 2008.
\textsuperscript{132} Maria Cristina Torres (social worker), in discussion with author. January 8, 2008
characteristics of this home, for someone from the United States, seem to be negative. The worst of these is the possible neglect found in many group homes around the world, but is nonetheless disturbing. We have discussed the possible cognitive and social consequences of a child not receiving the attention they need, but often in extreme cases it also fosters negative behaviors such as stealing and sexual promiscuity. This is the conundrum of how a home manages its children’s needs: the children’s heightened behavior and emotional problems to explain the homes inability to help, but indicates these children’s particular need for attention. Their difficult past means that the children often require more supervision in order to improve problematic behavior that requires the home dedicate more energy to helping them. Without adequate supervision and guidance it cannot be expected of the children to change the behaviors that they have learned as part of life. However, homes with limited financial resources are not going to solve the most costly problems, especially when understaffed. Neglect, although a strong term, is a very real issue in group homes simply because of the ratio of caregivers to children. In a home, such as El Refugio with few caregivers, neglect is even more possible because they have allowed the number of children to grow so large. There are alternatives to adult attention. With more adult supervision, the relationship between the children would be a positive influence in their lives and the caregivers would not necessarily need to dedicate themselves to planning structured activities for the children as much a ensuring their interactions are not detrimental to their development. As we have seen, children can learn from one another under the correct conditions.

Although the attention to the children from caregivers is lacking, we can understand why El Refugio has allowed the ratio to fall so low. They see children in need that could benefit from being equipped with the right skills. In this way, they do not consider themselves a substitute for

133 Ibid.
the child’s family, but as an institution that is strictly concerned with the empowerment of children. This may be a dubious undertaking, seeing as without adequate attention to a child, many lack the self-confidence and social and personal resources to put the type of empowerment El Refugio offers to good use. Nonetheless, it is an endeavor that must be appreciated within its own context. As we discussed in the beginning, the homes approach their task of raising children differently according to their motives. El Refugio has a significantly different idea of its task than does, say, SOS. As the director made clear, he has different, lower expectations for these children. Knowing the resources he has available, and the large amount of problems these children may have, he does not expect them to change into “normal” children. The goal of the home is not necessarily to empower, but to provide shelter and the basic necessities (short-term needs) for children who need it, and some practical skills to help prepare them for the future.\(^\text{134}\)

In many ways, this approach is cold and appears too institutionalized, allowing the child to be lost in the midst of many children. This of course may neglect children’s needs based on consistent and frequent interaction with adults or involvement in individual activities; however, considered from the perspective of many impoverished children in Honduras, it gives them skills similar to what “nurturing children” would have.\(^\text{135}\) To maximize these skills, they must make use of the available resources and take advantage of every opportunity that is given to them. In this way, they not only learn the technical skill given to them in the talleres but also the practical skills needed by many young adults in the lower classes of Honduran society: how to make one’s own way. Unlike homes in the first group, some of which also had talleres, it is apparent that these workshops are for the purposes of raising children who are emotionally autonomous according to the developed world’s standards. It is simply the recognition that in the absence of


\(^{135}\) See discussion of “nurtured” versus “nurturing” childhoods in Chapter 2.
formal education, practical skills are the best option for these children. One question we must keep in mind however is whether these expectations are too low. Are there resources in El Refugio for particularly gifted or hard-working children who could achieve more academically or professionally? Do the limited expectations of the home to improve many children’s lives inhibit the ability of ambitious children to accomplish more? These questions are impossible for us to answer given the little information we have, but it is important to recognize the trade-off that may occur.

One consequence of the lack of personal attention is what Johnson identified as disordered attachment and what Bowlby described as a needing for attention and approval. As mentioned above, children do not necessarily receive personalized attention in a group home such as El Refugio. This makes it so that the children either retreat from the attention of adults (often because they have negatively associated attention from adults with being in trouble) or more commonly, desperately crave adults’ attention and try to win attention by differentiating themselves from the other children as much as they can. Although this may make the child strong and give him the skills to look after himself, it may also cause him to lack self-confidence or pursue unhealthy relationships, ultimately undermining efforts to empower him. This is most common in girls who crave attention and after developing physically, discover they can find it from boys and men through flirtation. They may even think that they are able to develop meaningful relationships by becoming emotionally dependent upon the man. For whatever reason, whether lack of education or lack of access to contraceptives, many such girls end up pregnant and/or abandoned, causing them to become even more desperate than before. This often precludes them from obtaining a better job and causes them to abandon any educational or

136 See Chapter 2’s discussion of attachment.
professional ambitions they may have had.\textsuperscript{137} This of course is a specific example and not true of all; I only use it to illustrate the fact that it is maladaptive for a child to crave attention, a relatively common characteristic in group children’s homes.

We must now focus on what the home does offer the children and on what needs does it focus its energies. In the absence of stable attachment figures for the children, they do offer group activities and structure to the children’s everyday life. This in and of itself can provide the children with stability that is otherwise lacking as long as they are predictable. We do not claim that structure makes up for a parental figure in terms of cognitive or social development, however structure and dependability may ameliorate many of the difficulties that accompany instability. The predictability of the rhythm of the home in El Refugio can be just as stabilizing as the dependable family home life in SOS.

Because of the Honduran family structure and the communal nature of many Latin American societies, the emphasis that the home places on community is important. The automatic interdependence the children learn and the general ability to be part of a group imparts to the children many of the cultural values that can be lacking in other homes where foreign influence overrides Honduran norms. Although the children do not necessarily feel they are part of a large “family,” most of them do feel they are included in a close-knit community. Unlike other homes, it does not give the children much of a social network, but it does teach the values of a communal society more than those of individualistic societies. This is important and appropriate considering the ambitions and expectations the home place on its children. For example, the SOS may have the right to impart more individualized values to its children because it is also able to give them the resources to pursue the kind of lifestyle that allows a person to depend solely on himself. However, in lower socio-economic classes, even the slightly

elevated ones to which the children leaving El Refugio may enter, community is important and dependable people are valuable. In this way, the sense of community is social capital that the child may be able to use later on.

Hogar de Niños Emanuel (Emanuel Children’s Home)

Of all the homes, I have had the most experience with this home. I have maintained a relationship with its children and administrators for about three years. While I believe I can be an objective observer, knowing the home’s history and the people who are struggling through this process, makes it more difficult to view its efforts negatively. Having stated that, I recognize that it is important to analyze all of the homes’ shortcomings equally in order to draw any meaningful conclusions.

The Hogar Emanuel, like El Refugio, houses children from at-risk situations. They are generally not true orphans. In January, when I visited, it housed 78 children, which is a number
that has grown significantly in the last couple years. The children live in a “semi-pod” organization in which they sleep with children of their same gender and roughly similar age. Their caregivers are assigned to these specific groups of children but work in shifts. The shifts differ between 8 and 12 hours depending on the group of children. This means that all the children are part of a group that has either 2 or 3 primary caregivers. The youngest children live separately in smaller houses with their caregivers. The older girls live together in one large room, as do the boys until they are a little older. There is a third living space for the “older” boys separate from the principal building and supervised by one caregiver. There is no “transition” system in place except that there exists a 6-month period after the time that the child leaves, in which the home makes sure that the young adult is maintaining himself adequately. This transitional period is short and does not help the child sever his emotional bond with home enough that he may move on. With such a short transition, the child may still feel dependent on the home, and therefore, lost without it.

The Hogar Emanuel is a Christian home whose funds come from churches in the United States, and to some extent by private business within San Pedro Sula. Unlike many of the other homes, the religious affiliation of the home is present in some of its politics. The children must go to church on Sunday, and they have weekly religious talks with one of the educators, but it is not the overwhelming presence that it is in other homes. Because Hogar Emanuel is a group home, like El Refugio, the children interact with each other more than they interact directly with a primary caregiver. The personnel dedicated to providing for the children are a director, a secretary (or 2), a nurse, a psychologist (or 2), an educators’ administrator, 11-13 educators, 1 cook, and 1 laundress. Also, there are usually 2 long-term volunteers, similar to El Refugio, who are responsible for doing a little of everything; unlike El Refugio, they are religiously associated.
Church groups are a major asset that develops the home’s physical space and while there, are a source of attention for the children. The goals of this home are wide-ranging depending on the child. Since it opened in 1998, many of the older children have already been in the home a long time, and have lived through its earlier period of poor management. Goals for the future are realistic for a child coming from a home which must provide for 77 other children. Many of the children leave with some kind of technical skill and have some formal education in colegio, if not bachillerato and would be able to maintain a job if they wanted to using those skills.\footnote{Rosangela (Coordinator of Caregivers in Hogar Emanuel) in discussion with author. January 22, 2008.} If the children are actually able to retain those jobs after leaving the home is not within this study’s boundaries; we will only look at the extent to which the home empowers them to succeed in the world—not if they actually do. The goals for the younger children, however, are loftier. Many of these children entered the home at only 2 or 3 years old and will have all the resources the home can offer them for almost 16 years. This means that given the right direction, these children can attain higher goals, such as going to the university, or working in some professional capacity. It seems that this home aims to provide the means for children to achieve what they would in a “normal” family.\footnote{Information in previous two paragraphs is synthesis of data collected from discussion with Vivian Chahín (director), Rosangela (coordinator of caregivers) and Hogar Emanuel’s website www.hogaremanuel.com.}

One of the most salient characteristics of the Hogar Emanuel is the apparent abundance of personnel, but the lack of actual child supervision and attention. The fact that they have at least 11 caregivers would, by simple mathematics, make it appear that there is about one caregiver to every 7 children. But with the caregivers working in shifts and the children living in larger groups, each caregiver, during his or her shift is responsible for about 20 children. Because of the more fluid nature of the home, many of caregivers do not directly supervise the children, but are simply responsible for them. So, there is a rather haphazard system in place in which
whatever adult (volunteer, cook, visitor) who happens to be in the area is responsible for ensuring that the children are behaving and interacting positively. In the absence of adequate adult supervision, there are many situations, such as sibling relationships, that could positively affect the child, but in the end, do the opposite. Socialization in general will not be positive and much of the development of the child may be lacking. This, as discussed earlier, can cause the attention-seeking behaviors of the child that, while bothersome in childhood, may be truly maladaptive in adulthood. Therefore, as with many of the homes, a major problem area for this home is its lack of personnel, but more specifically the effective use of personnel. Personnel often dedicate themselves to administrative or personal affairs instead of childcare. The Hogar Emanuel’s shift system of caregiving reflects a common problem of these homes: lack of personnel. The coordinator of the educators commented that it is difficult to find qualified personnel who are willing to work for the low wages that the home can offer. The same qualified individuals are also not willing to work constantly. Less-qualified individuals, who may be in more desperate financial situations are willing to work full-time (all day, everyday) but may not provide the same quality of care.\footnote{Rosangela, in discussion with author. January 22, 2008.} Therefore, in the interest of the children, the home opted for a schedule of shifts, hiring the more qualified personnel, but losing some stability and attachment in the children lives.

The contradiction between North American and Honduran values of emotional autonomy as adults, parenting techniques and education is another negative characteristic of this home. The home is funded by churches in the United States, has volunteers from the United States, and has management from the United States. Therefore, North American normative influences many of the values upon which the home bases its policies. One example of this is the independent versus interdependent mentality that we identified as a cultural construction of family. Although
we cannot definitely state that families in Honduras encourage their children to value the collective while families in the United States encourage their children to be independent, we have discussed some of the ways that Hondurans do value interdependence, and the possible influence of this in a children’s home. Hogar Emanuel presents a contradiction because it appears to be taking advantage of an interdependent, communal mentality while imparting individualistic values upon the children. For example, the children interact with each other more than they each do individually with adults, encouraging the mentality that the group of children is a strong entity while each individual cannot do much on their own. Yet as they get older, they are encouraged to get out on their own without that group they have learned to depend on.

Additionally, they are not given unconditional emotional or financial support and only 6 months in which to achieve autonomy. Therefore, there is a risk of raising children in a group home setting (versus the family house-based setting) which encourages them to think of themselves as a part of a larger group, but expecting them as adults to be independent, a skill and value they have not developed. Also, as we discussed earlier, Honduras, and Latin America in general, is an area where a person’s social capital revolves around their family. Although this may not be as pertinent a point with Hogar Emanuel, that provides a substantial social network, in other homes, this might be the reason a child is unable to find a job and sustain himself.

The extensive social network provided by Hogar Emanuel makes this home exceptional. There are very few homes that have the resources to provide the children with contact with influential people who can truly make a difference for them. Chief among these is the system of madrinas, or godmothers, the home has created. It is mostly a way of providing for whatever “extras” a child might need (e.g. a dress for an event at school, extra books for a course the child
is taking).\footnote{Various children from Hogar Emanuel, in discussion with author. May-July 2006. Vivian Chahín (Director of Hogar Emanuel), in discussion with author. February 3, 2008.} Given the importance of *compadrazgo* in Latin America, this program is natural for a group children’s home, but rarely implemented. With a personal connection between someone to provide for the particular needs of the child and the child himself, more opportunities are available to him. This is similar to the sponsorship program used at SOS, but involves a personal relationship between the sponsor and her child. The children at Hogar Emanuel see their *madrinas* semi-regularly and even occasionally go out to a meal with them. The potential positive effects of this program results from another adult being involved in the child’s life. The *madrina* could be concerned with his well-being and keep track of his situation. It is not a close enough relationship so as to call the *madrina* an attachment figure, but it does provide another adult in the child’s life that Search Institute labels as a developmental asset. In addition to the personal and financial benefits of the *madrina* program, they also are a significant part of the child’s social capital. Many children, while in the home, pursue technical training or, upon leaving the home, use contacts made through their *madrina* to find a job. This is part of a larger pattern at Hogar Emanuel that there is a significant social network available to the children through their *madrinas*, through activities and contacts of the home itself. This network however, was not solidly established until just a year or two ago, so the majority of children who have left the home have not had access to it, and consequently, had a lot of difficulty transitioning. Many of them were forced to move back to the at-risk situations from which they came. It is important to stress then, that this social capital is an alternative to the traditional social capital a child has through his family, but it is not equal to it. Without the network the home has begun to provide, the long-term effects of the home are minimal. Therefore, the disadvantage we identified earlier of the lack of family-based support accompanying the
communal living style at the home is still at play. Here we have an alternative that may serve the same purpose of providing social capital.

Among the children’s personal needs, we must consider if the organization of the home provides for disabled or handicapped children’s needs. Providing for special needs is a difficult task for any home that must provide for many children. Hogar Emanuel is no different. Only the children with the most obvious special needs get their need met: the mentally retarded child is provided the necessary medication and schooling, as are the two deaf children. However, the prevalence of other problems such as PTSD or behavioral problems from living on the street makes those children less likely to receive attention. It is an unfortunate consequence of helping children at-risk: most of them have problems that brought them to the home in the first place. Therefore if the majority of the children in the home have similar conditions, it is difficult for the home to provide that special attention to all, even though in a normal situation the child would most likely receive special treatment. At Hogar Emanuel, it appears they have overestimated their abilities to provide for children with such a variety of problems. However, consider this conundrum, at the home, there is space for two girls and at the same moment, IHNFA is looking to place two girls in a home. One of the sisters is intelligent and quiet and has potential to succeed if given the appropriate resources. The home has the resources to help her if she can be motivated, however her sister is autistic, and the reason for which they have not been placed. Does the home take them, knowing it can improve both their lives at least somewhat or does it reject them, recognizing that the home cannot adequately provide for the sister’s autistic needs? Many of the problems and successes come from the answer to questions like this and make it so difficult to provide for at-risk youth.
The final point we look at with respect to the case of Hogar Emanuel is the role of “siblings” within the home as fictive kin and positive socialization. We have already said that without the appropriate supervision, the possible positive socialization and development that can occur between siblings, even fictive siblings, is diminished. However, with the case of the Hogar Emanuel, there is a more fundamental problem realizing the possible positive effects of strong sibling relationships: there must exist a sense of family and belonging. There are many factors that determine if a family is cohesive and the children feel they are part of it. The Hogar Emanuel struggles with recreating that same sense of belonging. Because most children have family outside the home, with whom some of them maintain contact, they do not consider the home their family. They have siblings inside and outside the home who are blood relatives and therefore, reduce the importance fictive siblings could have within the home. Finally, there is little organizational cohesion within the home encouraging the children to feel included. The home as a whole has too many children living together for a single child to feel important, especially given the disjointed “semi-pod” set-up. There are no smaller groups within the home of which a child could be a part. The opposite extreme can often occur (i.e. a child actually feels invisible and not cared about). For all these reasons, the children lack the sense of family that would allow them to create the true ties of interdependence required to make the role of siblings in socialization effective for development in the absence of a stable primary caregiver.
The most unconventional home I visited in San Pedro Sula is the Hogar San Rafael. It is located on one of the mountains just outside the city and houses 25 boys while providing schooling and two meals a day for another 50 children. In may be more appropriate to refer to Hogar San Rafael as a project instead of a home due to its informality. Children are officially placed in the home, but they are not required to stay. They may leave if they would like, and later request permission to return. As the sub-director proudly informed me, “We have no problems with children who run away. They simply tell us that they have to leave and we let them. It is usually because of a family matter (outside the home) that the child decides to leave. When the matter is resolved, he comes back.”

The home is not only unconventional because of this fluid nature, it is a Catholic home run by Germans and managed by Hondurans. In January, it still did not have a quarter of the funds it needed to run the home for the year 2008 yet it manages to provide schooling and food for children in the community living with family but in need.

---

142 Geovani Rivera Baca (Sub-director of Hogar San Rafael), in discussion with author. February 1, 2008.
The home was founded by Germans and continues to raise financial as well as personnel support from all over Europe. Its goals have always been modest: it started simply to give street children a place to sleep. A Catholic church became involved when it requested the use of a small amount of land for housing nuns in return for help in the home. However, all of the personnel, including the sub-director, the caregivers and teachers are Honduran. It is clear its goal is to improve the children’s lives but do not wish to impose a behavioral code on them. Its goals are modest and focus on giving the children basic education and applied skills such as auto mechanics and making artisan products that they later sell.

Hogar San Rafael is a group home because the center is the community and the group as a whole. There are a small number of children, so the effect of the group organization is not the same, but it does have a similar feel. The only difference is that the kids sleep in smaller buildings with only 6-8 boys each. There is a mix of ages within these houses and no supervisor. Instead, all the educators/caregivers sleep in apartments near the main building. All the boys eat together. A couple of the boys have made it to colegio and therefore, leave the premises for their schooling everyday. When I asked how many people worked at the home, the sub-director avoided the question stating that everyone pitches in and does what he can. This makes actual analysis of the amount of attention given to the children difficult, however, in January there were 5 educators, an administrator of education and activities, sub-director, a director (who is German and was at that time in Germany), a handyman who was the instructor of talleres, and a small group of visitors who were staying at the home to help and improve it.

The school program that it provides to the children of the community is free primary schooling to as many children as possible. The school is maintained by the nuns who live on the premises and all the boys in the home of the appropriate educational level attend. The process
for children outside the home to attend is that a parent must request that their child be allowed to
attend the school and must explain why they are unable to provide schooling themselves. The
child may receive breakfast, lunch and a snack at school. Similar to SOS and Amigos de Jesus,
this program maintains that it is better to help families at-risk to avoid situations from which a
child must be removed and placed permanently in a children home. The resources to provide
shelter and care in addition to education and food are redirected toward more children and
families who are in need. What benefits and disadvantages do San Rafael’s alternative method
of childcare offer?

Hogar San Rafael is above all a community. 143  This fact is clear by how the kids are
raised. The boys obviously feel fortunate to be part of a community. This means however, that
they are also required to give to their community, a value very different from those of other
homes. The communal nature of the homes affects all of its parts: “parenting” style, the
relationships between the children, the responsibility of the children to the home, and the
children’s feeling toward the home in general. As the Search Institute found, if children feel they
are an important part of their community, they will have more self-confidence and therefore
perform better. This is most likely the reason that children at San Rafael have such self-
confidence: they feel like they belong.

One anecdote that highlights this is about one boy who lived in a family-based home.
The home did everything it could to help him but he never really fit in and rebelled against the
authority of the home. This boy then went to San Rafael where he says he immediately felt at
home and accepted. At the other home he had constantly tried to escape, but once he arrived at
San Rafael, he did not see a reason to escape. 144  We can understand how this sense of

144 Fernando (child), in discussion with author. February 2, 2008.
community therefore could help him develop by simply providing a community that supports him. This community is comparable to the indigenous communities of the Andes in that they believe the child, and especially the adolescent, to be an active member of the community, thus the child act as a responsible and active member of the community. They may not stress the idea that this is a family, but they mimic the bond that family members feel in that they need each other for survival and happiness and feel comfortable with one another. The social skills they develop through these relationships are a form of social capital.

Speaking of social capital in general, it is important to understand the kind of empowerment in a home like this. In all the homes, one of the primary goals is to provide the children with as much education and training as possible. Similarly, the goal of San Rafael is to provide the same, however in absolute terms, the educational level these children reach is considerably lower than the level that children in other homes might reach. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the home prepares them less adequately than do other homes. I must emphasize that these children, as street kids, are much older and have more behavioral problems than other children have. They have only a few years in the home and do not have the previous education, resources, and in some case, mental capacity to attain high levels of formal education. By encouraging the kids to learn a vocation or to provide for themselves, they are giving the kids tools they need to empower themselves in a different way. Perhaps, the kids will remain in the lower class, but they will at least be able to sustain themselves. Therefore, it is important to recognize the value of different forms of empowerment in different contexts.

Similarly, San Rafael provides for the special needs of the children that it has. Because the home principally cares for street kids, the special needs of its children are similar. Although

not all the children at San Rafael are street kids, because of its reputation children with similar dispositions or problems are placed there. This means that while San Rafael may not provide extensively for a variety of psychological or medical problems, it has learned from experience how to work effectively with children with behavioral and psychological problems related to living on the street. For example, a couple of the kids at San Rafael had obvious mental disabilities from some kind of substance abuse. Whether the child or his mother used substances, the caregivers at this home are very comfortable with kids suffering from that kind of trauma. They spoke openly about the difficulty of working with children with mental disorders and the techniques they have developed to help as much as they can. Although, it is not medical expertise, it is more than these kids would have found elsewhere, and much more than they had on the streets.

Assessing the home critically, we find that there are some serious shortcomings. The situation itself is unstable because of lack of funds. We are unaware of the rate of turnover of the caregivers but considering the experience of other homes, it is possible that without sufficient funds, they are unable to hire personnel that is qualified and consistent. Although the atmosphere of the home is one in which everyone is part of a community, those who are paid to be there, may not feel a sense of loyalty if not paid consistently. This poses a problem for creating a sense of stability for the child and a specific attachment figure for the kids. Considering their slightly older age, this may not be a significant problem, but it demonstrates the limitations of a home like this. This home is strictly for one type of child in need. Also, a lack of supervision means that should some of the children can be a bad influence on the others as there is not adequate supervision to ensure that their socialization be universally positive. This does not indicate neglect; again, the methods used in this home would only truly work with
a certain kind of child. Therefore, in general, what we have learned is that Hogar San Rafael fills a niche well and meets the needs of its kids adequately.

Major deficiencies?: Who group homes do and do not help

Although few, there are some commonalities among these homes. First of these is the presence of some kind of vocational training. Knowing that all homes do not have the same financial resources available to them as others, alternate forms of empowerment are a perfectly acceptable option and in no way makes these homes less able to meet their children’s needs. Instead, it is more appropriate considering the social class of the children and the resources necessary to provide for all of them well. However, in some homes, such as Hogar Emanuel, they have not accepted more modest goals for their children, sometimes to the detriment of the children’s empowerment. If the child is not fully equipped in any one thing (e.g. a technical skill or a formal education), then he is not empowered and will fail on his own. In order for vocational skills to be useful in acquiring a job, they must be well developed and accompanied by the appropriate socialization. Here we see the importance of encouraging children to pursue something that is obtainable considering the resources available to him and to the home.
### Figure 6 - Synopsis of Needs Met by Group Homes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Needs</th>
<th>Need</th>
<th>El Refugio</th>
<th>Hogar de Niños Emanuel</th>
<th>Hogar San Rafael</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Material Needs</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bed</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medical Attention</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Needs</td>
<td>Attachment Figure</td>
<td></td>
<td>X (madrinas)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fostered Sibling Relationships</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Confidence</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term needs</td>
<td>Formal Education</td>
<td>XX (primary)</td>
<td>X (primary and some colegio)</td>
<td>XX (primary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocational Skills</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>X (some)</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Network</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Social Capital</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Information compiled by author. See appendix B.146

One of the few other commonalities among these homes is the ideal of promoting the relationships between children in order to provide them the positive socialization they require. As we saw earlier, in the absence of a constant parental figure, siblings can adequately support and learn from each other.147 It seems that this is a concept that homes without funds to increase the number of caregivers know intuitively. The problem, however, is that many of the homes fail to adequately provide for this theory to work in practice. The relationships between the children must be encouraged correctly in order for them to be positive forces in the child’s development. San Rafael achieves this goal partially because it has a high caregiver to child ratio and partially because it promotes the communal nature of the home, automatically making these peer and “sibling” relationships important.

For whom then, do these homes provide well and what shortcomings do they have? The children who are most helped by these homes are children who would not be helped under any

---

146 XX = need met by primary caregiver, or, as with education, within the home; X = need met, nonspecific as to how
147 See Chapter 2.
other conditions. It may be a dismal fact, but many of the children in these homes would be much worse off if they did not live in the home. The current physical conditions and prospects for their future are better than they would have been in many other situations. Because some other homes do not accept older children or children with mental or behavioral problems, these homes, who want to help everyone they can, do accept them and can help them to some extent. However, these homes cannot provide for everyone and therein is one of this category’s shortcomings. Many of these homes cannot or simply refuse to acknowledge their limitations and in doing so, fall short of meeting the needs of their children. For example, the ability to provide for the special needs of a child is a responsibility of the home, however with limited funds, a single home cannot provide for a large variety of special needs. Therefore, their shortcoming is inadequately defining their goals in order to help everyone they can. They do not recognize their limitations clearly enough and thus are unable to effectively allocate their scarce resources.

Looking at the variety of homes we have just discussed, we can state that there is no one home best for all children. Instead, it is more appropriate to look at the homes in terms of what we can use from each toward understanding children’s homes in general. The homes in this group are examples of homes that do not necessarily have the same financial resources available to them that others do but have resources of a different kind. For example, El Refugio provides the children with a variety of skills and talleres, the Hogar Emanuel has an extensive social network, and San Rafael provides well for a specific type of children. Each home does one thing well which, in the case of San Rafael, has been crucial for its ability to succeed. The lesson to be learned from the case of San Rafael, consequently, is that focusing the home’s energy on a specific goal, such as providing for all the needs of street children, makes a singular home more
effective in meeting the needs of its children. From the example of Hogar Emanuel and El Refugio, we understand the importance yet again of stable adult figures in the children’s lives. At both of these homes there is a low caregiver to child ratio and there are incidences of attention-seeking behaviors and low self-confidence. Because so many other positive tools for the children’s development stem from adequate supervision and caregiver involvement, these homes show that maintaining a high caregiver to child ratio should be a priority to a home in the allocation of its funds.

Finally, the general lesson is that with limited financial resources, specialization of services is helpful rather than harmful. Of the children needing help, many have problems that require specific care. It can be better for a home to adequately meet that need rather than to partially meet all the children’s needs. Therefore, if for example Hogar Emanuel were to “specialize” in children with the special need of deafness, it would be a facility suitable to children with that need. Or conversely, if El Refugio “specialized” in children with PTSD, its psychologists would be particularly capable of dealing with those children.¹⁴⁸ This way, some special needs would not be ignored simply because the home does not have the resources to attend to it.

Conclusions

Becoming acquainted with the children’s homes of San Pedro Sula, we recognize the extreme need of Honduran children for adequate care. We see a large amount of street kids, abandoned children and mistreated youth. They have mental, behavioral and even physical problems “normal” children do not, and for that reason, require extra attention “normal” children would not. However, in addition to these special needs, Honduran children deserve to receive the same quality of upbringing any other child would receive. The sad fact is that the poverty that engulfs the whole country leaves few resources to provide for children who find themselves without family. Children’s homes face the challenge of providing culturally appropriate care, creating a bridge between the children and their community and working productively with Honduran state agencies. Recognizing the difficulty of addressing these issues, what can we say about the organization and role of children’s homes acting as substitute families and provide for the needs of their children? In the absence of family, proxy family homes DO provide better for children in the way a traditional family would, but do not provide as effectively for problems unique to Honduran at-risk youth.

Analyzing the information specific to the homes in light of concepts of family and children’s needs, this conclusion is obvious. As we saw in chapter 2, proxy family homes provide consistent attachment figures that assure that the personal needs of the children are well attended and that their daily needs are met. As we discussed with respect to the research of Bowlby and Rebecca Johnson, a consistent attachment figure provides security for a child, a means of understandings his surroundings, and an example for healthy relationships. It is often through a child’s relationship with his attachment figure that he learns self-confidence and
therefore is empowered to integrate himself into society as an adult.¹⁴⁹ We saw that proxy family children’s homes emphasize formal education over technical or vocational training, and when well-funded do raise children “better” according to concepts set forth in the CRC and promoted by developed nations. These homes, therefore, do provide very well for young children, whose entire life and personality can be shaped by the home. In other words, it is the best setting for children who truly need a substitute family. However, it does not necessarily provide a Honduran family substitute, and children who still feel connected to other family or whose previous family and experiences shape their identity cannot flourish as well in these homes for various reasons. The strict rules and lack of fluidity is problematic and often contextually inappropriate, specifically for street kids who are used to making their own rules, as well as for children with behavioral problems. These children’s histories cannot and should not be erased. They are issues that must be addressed. Proxy homes are not as well equipped to handle such cases, although such problems are characteristic of at-risk youth.

Group homes are not superior to proxy family homes, but they do provide for a large segment of the population of Honduran children that would otherwise still live on the streets or in poor conditions. Group homes, although they are not considered the best according to North American standards, provide important skills that are appropriate for the situation the children will face upon leaving the home. The emphasis on vocational training found in most group homes is essential to the success of these children. The children who have the most difficulty upon leaving the home are those who were not adequately equipped to face the economic situation they would be in as adults. For example, Hogar Emanuel places little emphasis on vocational skills, and instead, emphasizes formal education as an empowerment tool (although Hogar Emanuel in the last year has been working to address this issue). However, in Honduras, 

¹⁴⁹ See chapter 2.
only children in the upper classes enjoy the “nurtured” childhood that this prioritization of skills creates. Children from most families in the lower and middle classes experience a “nurturing childhood” at least to a degree. Children raised in homes where the ideal of childhood as an innocent, carefree period of life, find a significantly different situation upon leaving the home. The home cannot provide the same opportunities or financial resources that the upper class families of Honduras would, yet the children’s home is raising its children with the ideals of the upper class rather than perhaps more socio-economically appropriate ones. Group homes can provide a culturally more appropriate upbringing although they lack the resources to provide for all the children’s developmental needs, specifically an attachment figure. This means that proxy family homes provide a substitute for the nuclear family more effectively, but that the alternate family that group homes provide can be just as, if not more, effective in meeting the needs of certain children.

This conclusion is based on an informal arrangement of niches within the system of children’s homes. What we mean by niches is a specialization of the homes so that specific homes meet the needs of certain children. This already occurs informally with guidelines such as those of El Aldea SOS or Hogar San Rafael. These homes have already identified the kind of children they want to help. However, more often than not, IHNFA assigns children to homes based on vacancy instead of based on how well a certain home will meet the needs of a specific child. For example, if IHNFA needs to place three children and there is space for three children in Hogar Emanuel, the children will most likely move to that home, regardless of whether Hogar Emanuel can best meet the needs of those three children. Especially when speaking of special needs, it is imperative that the child receives proper care in order to develop the best he can. In cases, such as with street kids, a home must set realistic goals and accept children based on those

---

150 See Chapter 2 for the definition of “nurtured” and “nurturing” childhoods.
goals in order to adequately meet their needs. If IHNFA were to organize homes and place children into homes based on niches, they would avoid the detrimental effects of homes’ attempting to help every child without sufficient resources.

While each home should try to serve a specific niche, all homes must commit themselves to meeting some universal goals. One of these universal elements is an attachment figure. In the absence of a parental attachment figure, homes should foster positive sibling interactions. We have seen throughout this study the importance of an attachment figure as well as the possibility that in the absence of a traditional attachment figure, siblings can provide adequate developmental support, specifically social.\textsuperscript{151} Either way, this requires the consistent presence of an adult to guide children’s activities. The difference is simply that fostering positive sibling interactions allows flexibility in the amount of time an adult must actively supervise the children’s activities. In many circumstances, a home may opt to foster sibling interactions: as a result of a lack of personnel, to encourage maturity in the older children, or to encourage interdependence. However, a home must make siblings’ relationships a priority for this to be effective. Another alternative to the tradition parental attachment figure is a program of mentoring, alluded to in our discussion of developmental assets. Similar to the Hogar Emanuel’s program of madrinas, mentors can provide security, aid childhood development and exemplify a healthy relationship. Mentors are not substitutes for a true attachment figure, but can be effective in promoting healthier development. To some, it may seem that the home is reneging its obligation to supervise the children adequately, however, given the circumstances, it is simply a realistic approach to a difficult problem.

Similarly, it is universally important for a home to decide what kind of social capital it is going to provide to its children, and then make it a priority to see that the capital is effectively

\textsuperscript{151} See Chapter 2 and the discussion of the effect of children’s interactions on development.
used. For example, Hogar Emanuel has the ability to provide its children with an extensive social network, but it has not identified that social network as a tool for its children, and therefore, in the past has not used that network effectively. Instead it provides a little of both vocational training and formal education. We cannot measure empowerment definitively, but it is a fact that in not choosing, the home does not equip its children with either a well-developed formal education or vocational skill, due to a lack of resources. None of the homes develop social networks well enough to replace the social connections a tradition Honduran family would provide its children. Specifically, the homes lack the incorporation of the community into the home in order to provide the children a natural social network. Simply put, in making the home an available space for neighborhood activities and allowing children to have contact with their neighbours, the home builds the children’s social networks. Without negating the importance of formal education or vocational training, homes with limited resources could benefit from putting their energies into specific goals. We see the effectiveness of this in the example of El Aldea SOS. They have chosen, although not explicitly, to focus solely on formal education as a method of empowerment. For this reason, children successfully leave SOS and become professionals. Their method of empowerment is effective for the group of children they have chosen to focus on. Similarly, other homes may choose to focus on other forms of social capital (such as Hogar San Rafael and vocational skills) and tailor the entire home to meet that goal. All of the children’s homes must house only children that they can effectively help given the prioritization of needs they have created.

The kind of substitute family a home chooses to be would logically reflect this prioritization of needs, indicating that no kind of family substitute is absolutely superior, but that a children’s home is effective if it utilizes its organization as well as its other resources to
provide well for the most essential needs of its population of children. It is important to recognize that this does not necessarily require residential care. With the examples of SOS, Amigos de Jesús, and Hogar San Rafael, we have seen the role that alternative programs can play in the lives of children. These programs can meet needs of certain children and may be more effective in identifying a population of children and their needs it is dedicated to helping, making the system of assistance to at-risk youth more efficient.

The truth is that the resources are available to provide effectively for Honduran youth. Children do not have to be caught in the cycle of poverty. Homes, no matter who organizes them, can use whatever resources they have to provide a substitute family that empowers their children. The only requirement for this is that homes base their decision solely on the needs of their children and focus everything they do on their task: provide a family, however that may look, to children who have none.
Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaires

Questionnaire for Directors

1. How was the home started and with what purposes?
2. How many children live in the home and how are they organized?
3. How many caregivers are there? Other employees?
4. What is daily life like for the children in this home and what principles influencing the home’s organization determine this?
5. What are the most common problems with the children and how do you address them?
6. What is the process of leaving the home? Is there a transition period?
7. How is the home funded?
8. Are there any requirements with respect to which children may live in this home?
9. Are there only specific additional programs in place, such as sponsorship programs?
10. What level of education do most children reach?
11. Are there vocational *talleres* and what are they?
12. What is the greatest lack in this home? What needs improvement?
13. What are relationships with other organizations involved in the children’s life like?

Questionnaire for children

1. Where were you before and how did you arrive here?
2. What is your life like here?
3. Are you happy?
4. What do you like or dislike?
5. What do you do on a normal day?
6. Are you in school? What grade?
7. What are your responsibilities in the home?
8. What do you plan to do when you leave the home?

Questionnaire for Social Workers
1. Can you explain your position? What are your daily activities?
2. What is the goal of your organization? What is its structure?
3. What are the major problems with your organization?
4. What are your favourite and least favourite parts of your job?
5. How has the organization changed?
6. How do you view the role of NGOs and specifically, how does it benefit or is hurt by being and NGO?
7. How could the system be improved? What are major obstacles for improvement?
8. In your mind, which are the best homes and why?
9. How does x home compare to the others and why?

Additional Question with IHNFA

10. How does IHNFA pick which kids to remove and what is the process of removal?
11. What are IHNFA’s responsibilities to Honduras’s children?
Appendix B: Questions used to analyze the homes and their responses

Questions

Concept of Childhood

1. Are the children encouraged to help, work and live communally, or are they encouraged to be independent?
2. What is the parenting style of the caregivers and how are knowledge and appropriate behaviors transmitted?
3. Are the children encouraged to work, and if so, under what conditions? What stage of development are the children in when they are about to leave the home?

Developmental Needs

4. At what age do they normally reach the stage of adolescence?
5. What style of parenting is used? Authoritative, authoritarian or permissive?
6. Do the children have a stable attachment figure? Is he or she their primary caregiver? How many hours of daily (or weekly) face-to-face time do they spend together?
7. Are the children self-confident or do they crave approval and attention?
8. What characterizes their relationship with their “parents?” Siblings? Peers?
9. Are they involved in active positive socialization? Inside the home? Outside the home?
10. Are the children’s everyday activities structured?
11. Do “siblings” work together and/or take care of each other? Are they supervised in their interactions?

Family Structure
12. What kind of family model does the home follow? How does this affect the children’s daily activities?

13. Do the children feel they are part of a family?

Social Networks

14. What level of education do children reach in the home and how does that compare to what is needed to thrive in his surroundings?

15. Are the children provided with a social network of any kind? What characterizes the relationship they have inside and outside the home?

16. In general, what social capital do these children have?

Common Problems

17. What, if any, signs of neglect are there?

18. What services are provided for children that have special needs? Are there adequate psychological or educational resources for them? Are there active attempts to positively intervene?
Appendix C: Interviews

Note: I have not included the majority of interaction I had with children in these homes because they were informal exchanges that transpired on multiple occurrences. Also, all references to children in this project use pseudonyms, therefore there is little purpose in listing my interactions with them here. The children that appear in this list have been specifically quote in the text.

El Aldea SOS

Juan (graduated from SOS). Personal Interview. February 1, 2008.

El Hogar de Fé


El Refugio


Hogar de Niños Emanuel

Raul. Personal Interviews.

Hogar San Rafael


Others

Bibliography


Casa Alianza, "HONDURAS."


Miller, Laurie C., Wilma Chan, Aina Litvinova, Arkady Rubin, Kathleen Comfort, Linda Tirella, Sharon Cermak, Barbara Morse, Igor Kovalev, and Laurie C. Miller. “Fetal Alcohol


Skodak, Marie. *Children in Foster Homes, a Study of Mental Development.* Iowa City, Ia: The University, 1939.


