

Texas Baptist children minister at Mexican orphanage

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Children receive notebooks and markers from Texas Baptist Children's Home residents on the last day of the one-week mission trip.

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By Miranda Bradley

Texas Baptist Children's Home

JUAREZ, Mexico-Youngsters at Texas Baptist Children's Home have chosen acts of service as their love language, speaking it fluently for more than 20 years at a small Mexican orphanage.

Since 1982, children from the Round Rock child and family services ministry have trekked to Juarez, Mexico, where they have developed a special bond with the children at Orphantorio Benito Juarez.

“There's a strong connection between the children here and the ones there because of the similarities in their circumstances,” said Brenda Toner, a house parent at Texas Baptist Children's Home who has been on every trip but one. “Their living conditions are different, but our kids identify with them.”



A Texas
Baptist
Children's
Home
resident
helps a
Mexican
orphan with
his
Vacation
Bible
School
project
during an
annual
mission trip
to
Orphanorio
Benito
Juarez.

In fact, those living conditions are what probably impact the Texas children most. During a reflection time after returning from their weeklong mission trip, one Round Rock resident observed: "They have so little. But they are so happy."

It was something most of the children recognized. Children in the orphanage never were bored, never complained and were thrilled with something as simple as a set of markers.

The longstanding relationship began when children from Round Rock accompanied First Baptist Church of Austin to the orphanage, where

volunteers conducted Vacation Bible School. Eventually, because of a surplus of volunteers, Texas Baptist Children's Home began mission work on its own.

Today, the children's home group still conducts Vacation Bible School but completes other projects as well. This year, they built a large fence, filled in a five-foot-deep trench outside the orphanage and helped paint an expansive wall. Volunteers also repaired a cooling system, since the children at the Juarez orphanage had been suffering through record-high temperatures with no air conditioning.

“These kids worked very hard this year,” Toner said of the children. “This certainly isn't just for fun.” Not every child at Texas Baptist Children's Home gets to make the trip; there is usually room for only 12 children. Each is chosen according to his progress while at the home, including behavior, grades and attitude over the course of a year.

Children throughout the Round Rock campus participate in a variety of fund-raising efforts to help defray costs. All of the children on campus contributed clothing and toys to send with their peers to Mexico.

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More school supplies are handed out to children in Juarez.

While in Juarez, the Texas children rode around town distributing bags of

clothes that, Toner says, spoke to the children in Juarez as much as anything else they did there.

“People would be sitting on these high hillsides outside their homes. When we'd stop the van, they would bound down that hill like it was nothing,” she said. “It was very moving to know something so simple had such an impact.”

The Texas Baptist Children's Home van also served as a mobile Vacation Bible School unit during the week. Children would sit in the middle of a dirt road just to hear about Jesus, Toner said.

Patricia, an 18-year-old former resident of the Round Rock campus, made her fourth trip to the orphanage this year. When her buddies headed home, she decided to stay another week.

“The first time I came here, I was in awe,” she said. “Just the poverty and dirt everywhere really hits you. Until you are here, you just have no idea how bad it is.”

Patricia, who recently graduated from high school, purchased her own plane ticket just so she could stay behind. She said she felt called to help minister to the children with whom she identifies.

“I've shared some of my testimony with them,” she said. “I want them to know that just because I am from America, that I have troubles and that God helps with everything. The Lord has blessed me just by being here.”

Over the years, Toner has seen positive changes in the orphanage. Ada Loire has operated the facility by herself since her parents retired, serving as chauffeur, teacher, mother and fundraiser for the children she considers her own.

Because of their love for the children they serve, Toner and Loire have

become close friends, talking regularly on the phone and providing encouragement during trying times. So, it's not difficult for Toner to answer the one question some might ask: Why this ministry over any others all these years?

“It's about relationships,” she said. “It's because of a commitment that was made to this place many years ago. Like I tell the kids, always remember it's only a body of water that separates poverty from wealth. And we will continue that commitment to always serve people less fortunate than ourselves.”

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