

# Buckner programs make history in Peru

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Nine-year-old Elvis greets his new foster parents Vilma and Adolfo Gomez for the first time.

(Photo/ANDINA/Carlos Lezama)

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## Buckner programs make history in Peru

**By Jenny Pope**

*Buckner International*

Buckner International made history in Peru when officials from the Ministry of Women and Social Work and the Texas-based agency placed eight Peruvian children into the country's first foster families.

It was the first step of many in an ongoing pilot foster care program. Organizers hope to place 60 orphans and at-risk children into families by the end of the year.

“We interviewed 43 families to choose these first seven,” said Buckner Peru Director Claudia León Vergara. “All the families are well adjusted and stable, with a lot of love to give. They are eager to help these great kids.”

León and her staff have faced overwhelming difficulties to bring the term “foster care” to life in their country. The term didn’t exist until they gave it a name: *acojimiento familiar*, which literally means “to admit into your house as a guest” or “to offer protection.”

“People frequently think that this concept is similar to adoption,” she said. “In that sense, it has been hard work to make them understand and accept foster care as a possibility.

“Ultimately, we hope to develop this program into public policy. We hope to persuade the government to consider foster care as an alternative to placing children into orphanages when they are in a crisis situation.”

In addition to foster care, Buckner Peru also is providing transitional services for 27 young women and mothers who have been raised in the orphanage system.



Junior, 8, hugs his new foster parent Pablo Vargas as his wife Maria Guadalupe looks on. Junior is one of the first eight children to be placed into foster care in Peru.  
(Photo/ANDINA/Carlos Lezama)

Two homes have been purchased—in Lima and Cusco—where these young women will live and study for their careers, which includes anything from baking to business administration to fashion design. Another home for teenage mothers will be supported at Reina de la Paz orphanage, near Lima.

“All the girls who take part in the transitional programs come from families living in extreme poverty conditions,” León said. “They have been victims of abuse, abandonment and sexual violence. For them, violence was a normal part of life. These homes will allow them to live in a calm environment and focus on their future careers.

“They will also be reinforced on issues like responsibility, Christian values and self sufficiency in order to encourage them to face the real world and its daily challenges.”

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