

Buckner's 3 millionth pair of shoes given to Guatemalan child

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JOCOTENANGO, Guatemala—Dulce Alquijay Raymundo smiled as Buckner social worker Perla Maldonado crouched beside her and slid new pink and white athletic shoes on her feet. Maldonado laced and tied them. They were ready to wear, and Dulce was ready to wear them proudly.



Dulce Alquijay Raymundo grins ear to ear as she shows off her new shoes - the 3 millionth pair of shoes delivered by Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls since it began in 1999.

(Buckner Photos)The 5-year-old jumped for joy, her arms in the air, her dark pigtails flying. It was a moment 16 years in the making.

On Jan. 12, Dulce was the recipient of the 3 millionth pair of shoes distributed through Buckner [Shoes for Orphan Souls](#), Buckner International's largest humanitarian aid project.

Buckner President Albert Reyes became emotional when he spoke of the accomplishment. Since 1999, individuals across the United States have donated shoes, led shoe drives, sorted the footwear and placed them on the feet of vulnerable children around the world.

"This is a tremendous moment for the Buckner family and a testimony to the power of God," he said. "While we celebrate the 3 millionth shoe being distributed, the Lord has touched many more lives through Shoes for Orphan Souls, bringing people together every step of the way to live out the James 1:27 mandate of ministering to vulnerable children.

"As a result of the shoes that have been distributed, children are healthier. They're able to attend schools. And their families can spend scarce resources on other necessities. We thank God for the opportunity to have ministered to these children and look forward to serving many more."

Transforms the giver and recipient

The act of putting new shoes on the feet of a child has the power to transform the giver as well as the recipient, he added.

"This year marks 40 years since I answered a vocational call to preach the gospel," Reyes said. "I can honestly say that kneeling in front of a child to wash and dry their feet and place new socks and shoes on them is among the most impactful experiences I have ever had. It is the Jesus way, a way to say, 'Hope Shines Here!'"

Like so many children who have received shoes through the years, Dulce's pair was another step along a larger journey toward health and wholeness with the help of the local Buckner Family Hope Center.

Dulce's mother, Maria Elena Raymundo, came to the Family Hope Center in 2012 when the family lived in the neighborhood. At the time, her husband, Oscar Francisco Alquijay, was unemployed, and she was cleaning houses to try to scrape a living together. It wasn't enough. The family couldn't afford to eat. She met Maldonado and received food assistance immediately.

Soon Maldonado visited the family's home, where conditions were poor. Alquijay was dealing with a drinking issue that kept him from keeping a job. It also contributed to violent outbursts that frightened his wife and her girls. Their home was heavy with sadness and short on hope.

Maldonado told Raymundo about parenting classes offered at the Hope Center and invited the girls to the children's devotionals. The family's visits to the center's doctor revealed that the oldest, Michel, was suffering from malnutrition and her growth was stunted. The doctor prescribed a special diet, supplemented the family's food supply and provided vitamins. Now 13, Michel is healthy again. In 2014, Buckner Guatemala provided a stove for the family.

Processing the hardships

As Raymundo and her four daughters developed relationships with Buckner Guatemala staff members and established trust, they began seeing the Hope Center's psychologist. In time, Raymundo was able to process some of the hardships she's experienced and develop self-confidence.

"Before Buckner, it was a sad life," she said. "But I had dreams. I dreamed of one day having a stove, and now I do. I know that all these gifts come from God. Nothing is impossible with God. I feel more safe and confident,

because I know God will never leave me and I have the support of people I can talk to.”

Her faith in God flourished through the emotional and spiritual support she’s found through Buckner Guatemala, and she now trusts him to provide for her family’s needs. Her husband reduced his drinking enough to hold down a full-time construction job, and his temperament and relationship with his family have improved.

Positive change

“I have seen a positive change in Maria Elena through her time at the Family Hope Center,” Maldonado said. “Now she has a life plan and knows where she wants to go. She wants to buy a piece of land to buy a proper, established house for her kids. The children seem happier. They have better hygiene. They shower more often. They have learned to trust God, and they have been strengthened spiritually.”

Reyes reflected upon the family’s transformation, noting they represent all Buckner seeks to accomplish through its ministry and Shoes for Orphan Souls.

“In my time with Buckner, I have seen children celebrate their new shoes. I’ve seen them cherish their new footwear. I’ve seen them cry when they wear them. I can’t help but be moved when I think of all the lives who have been touched by this ministry, helping children and families in their times of need.”