

# Voices: The value of Hispanic families in foster care and adoption

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Belonging is something I have thought about most of my life. It shapes our identity, who we are and who we will become.

It's fitting to discuss what belonging means in November when we recognize National Adoption Month. This is a time we honor children who need a place to call home—a place to belong.

## My story of belonging

While I was born in Corpus Christi, I grew up in Southern California in a Hispanic-majority neighborhood and attended school and church in a multicultural context. When I returned to Corpus Christi, my environment shifted to a bicultural context, mainly Anglo and Hispanic.

The phrase I heard growing up was, *"No somos ni de aquí, ni de allá"*; "We are neither from here nor there."

We were not Mexican enough to be truly Mexican and not American enough to truly be American. Instead, we thought of ourselves as Tejanos, native Texans of Mexican descent.

In seminary, I learned another word for this: liminal. Liminal means occupying a position at or on both sides of a boundary or threshold. My own liminality is an advantage that helps me navigate two worlds at the same time.

And yet, my family always provided me with a strong foundation where I belonged with my own identity and community. I remember I am a product of my family. My parents and their families—who provided me with 74 first cousins—my wife and her family, my brothers and their families, and our sons have blessed me with a place to call home and a family to belong to.

## Need for Hispanic homes

I think many of the [more than 12 million Hispanic Americans in Texas—a little less than 40 percent of the state population](#)—would agree with this search for belonging and identity. Family is an important anchor in that search. Unfortunately, many children—particularly Hispanic children—do not have a family to anchor them in that way.

According to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, [more than 40 percent of children](#) in the Texas foster care system are Hispanic. That means out of the 30,000 children in the system, approximately 13,000 are Hispanic. [Out of the 4,700 children waiting for adoption in Texas, around 2,000 are Hispanic.](#)

These numbers highlight the urgent need for Hispanic foster and adoptive families.

At Buckner, our primary goal is to place children in safe and loving homes. We also acknowledge a familiar cultural context and language can help children feel connected and secure. Buckner finds families for children, rather than finding children for families. That's why we are working toward finding more Hispanic families who are willing to foster or adopt.

## One family's story

The Jasso family from Fort Worth is an example of a Hispanic family who

chose to open their home to foster care.

Mike and Senaida Jasso grew up with strong ties to their Mexican heritage. Both are first-generation Americans whose families instilled in them values important to many Hispanics, one of which was the importance of family.

They married a bit later in life, and while Mike had two older daughters from a previous marriage, Senaida yearned for the opportunity to raise children, too. When a client of Mike's told them about Buckner's work in foster care, they were apprehensive of the idea at first.

Foster care is not as common in Hispanic cultures. The Jassos, like other couples, had many doubts. Interestingly, the main one came from a cultural emphasis on the importance of family: Why would you bring an "outsider" in when there are enough nieces and nephews or other relatives to give your love to?

Despite doubts, the Jassos' strong faith compelled them to move forward with foster care. Senaida said they still had a lot more love to give.

It was a lengthy journey, but with Buckner at their side, eventually they received a foster-to-adopt placement—three Hispanic siblings ages 3, 5 and 7. They said the kids felt at home right away, immediately asking, "Which room is mine?" They were quickly comfortable with the affection Mike, Senaida and their extended families offered.

A similarity in culture or language between the children waiting to be adopted and the family placement can help the healing process, giving children a connection, security and a sense of belonging. The Jassos witnessed it firsthand and believe it was valuable for their children.

And it wasn't just Mike and Senaida who opened their minds and hearts, but their large families, too. More than 50 people, many of whom were family, were at the courthouse on the day of the adoption. The judge was so

impressed, she mentioned it was the most people she'd ever seen in the courtroom.

## **You can be that family**

This is what Hispanic families can bring to vulnerable children through foster care and adoption—not just a family, but a whole community that can come around a child and love them well.

Hispanic families can provide unique support and understanding for Hispanic children in foster care. They offer a sense of cultural continuity and belonging through traditions, language and values familiar to the children.

If you are a Hispanic family wondering what value you would bring, the Jassos can be an example. For more than a year, they have been an anchor for these kids, and they would say the kids have done the same for them.

Consider how you may be that anchor for a child that needs it. You can be the place where they not only find a family, but a large community of people who look, talk and think like them. You can be the place for these children to finally say, “*De aquí somos*”; “Here we belong.”

*Dr. Albert L. Reyes is the president and CEO of Buckner International. He is a member of the board of directors for the Christian Alliance for Orphans, Angelo State University Foundation, and Stark College and Seminary. He has written three books: The Jesus Agenda (2015), Hope Now (2019), and Never Alone: The Power of Family to Inspire Hope(2024). Reyes is the first Hispanic president in Buckner International's 145 year-history.*