

# CASITA LINDA

## 2017 Annual Report



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## Message from Louise Gilliam, President

Dear Friends,

This past year has been extremely satisfying and successful, and marked 12 years of service for Casita Linda. Our dedicated staff, construction team, Board of Directors, Advisory Board and volunteers have done an incredible job of enabling us to fulfill our mission and goals. We continue to provide sustainable housing for the families we serve in the poorest communities of San Miguel de Allende. During the last fiscal year, we built 8 homes for those less fortunate, bringing the number of homes built by Casita Linda to 109. To date, we have provided warm shelter, hope and dignity to 600 people, and we hope to greatly increase that number in the years to come.



Perhaps our greatest achievement in 2017 was a significant expansion of our mission to include community building and personal empowerment through workshops. Although we began actively providing regular workshops in 2016 to the men and women who apply for and/or receive a home, this past year these workshops became a truly integral and core part of the services we provide to the families. Through conducting a survey recently, we learned that the workshops have had nearly as profound an effect on our families' lives as receiving a home.

We are also proud of the strong partnerships we have developed with other local NGOs. With the assistance of Caminos de Agua, we now provide a rainwater catchment cistern for each house we build, thereby vastly improving the health of the families we serve. We also partner with the San Miguel School for Special Education, with their hearing-impaired students building all of the furniture for our homes. And we implemented a program in conjunction with Amigos de Animales to sterilize the pets in the community of Palo Colorado, where we have been focusing our efforts.

Other new developments in 2017 include receiving 501c3 status in the U.S., adding two wonderful Mexican Board members, rebranding Casita Linda with a new logo that better represents our mission, and revamping our website. Additionally, Casita Linda is continually looking for ways to decrease our building costs. In 2017 we saw an increase in the cost of materials and labor; however, our Board is actively investigating ways to lower these costs while providing the most sustainable homes to our families to ensure that their homes will be able to be passed on for generations to come.

Our goal, as always, is to keep our expenses low while building as many homes as possible and providing the best support we can to the neediest families in San Miguel. I am grateful to our volunteer Board of Directors and wonderful staff who devote their valuable time to helping Casita Linda fulfill its objectives. On behalf of all of us at Casita Linda, I also want to thank our supporters, without whom none of this would be possible. We look to the future with hope and inspiration.

*Louise Gilliam*

## Mission

To create a dignified, safe and empowering environment that provides a foundation of hope for families living in extreme poverty.

## Vision

A San Miguel de Allende in which everyone has a dignified home and hope for the future.

## Core Values

Empowerment, Dignity, Respect, Community, Transformation and Compassion.

## History

In 2000, the city of San Miguel de Allende in the state of Guanajuato suffered a particularly harsh winter. The unusual freezing temperatures of this winter caused several deaths in the municipality because of the extraordinarily difficult living conditions in which many rural families found themselves. Jeffrey Brown, a San Miguel resident, stonemason, and graphic artist, together with Irma Rosado, a local human services consultant, secured a small donation and in 2001 formed Casita Linda, A.C., a Mexican NGO. From the very beginning, Casita Linda has been a wonderful team of foreigners and Mexicans working together to create hope for impoverished local families.

Over the years, our impact has steadily expanded. In January 2016, Casita Linda's mission grew from just providing homes to also offering a series of intensive workshops to the recipients of our homes.

## Building homes for San Miguel's neediest families



*House 102 in Palo Colorado, before and after*

According to the World Bank, 43.6% of the population in Mexico as of 2016 was living below the national poverty line. Casita Linda works to alleviate poverty and suffering in San Miguel de Allende, a city marked by extreme economic inequities. Casita Linda enables families to transition from dirt-floor shacks made of scrap metal, cardboard and plastic into a real house all their own. In order to receive a home, the family has to fulfill many criteria including owning the land, putting in 75 hours of “sweat equity,” participating actively in our twice weekly workshops and in the community, and proving that their children are attending school regularly. Additionally, in order to protect the mothers and children, if the land is not in the woman’s name, the couple must be legally married.

In 2017 Casita Linda began building its houses using an innovative construction technique developed by ARMO, a Mexican company based in Puebla ([www.armo-system.com](http://www.armo-system.com)). Using ARMO bricks enabled us to reduce by 70% the amount of water used in the construction process, and also gave us the opportunity to involve volunteers more readily. ARMO bricks work much like Legos and once the foundation is poured, it is quite easy to assemble them because they are mortarless and self-aligning.

Moving into a home that is safe, secure, clean, dry and big enough for the whole family is literally a life-transforming event. In the words of Claudia, recipient of House 106: “The significance of having my own home is that we have a much happier life now. It was very sad to live with all those bugs in the house, and it was dangerous for my little girls. But now that we’re in the house, it’s like a dream that you made come true. For many women, their dream is to get married; but for me, my dream was always to have my own house. I am so happy now. It is something that I cannot compare to anything else.”

## Supporting families through community workshops

As we came to know the families that we build homes for, we learned more about the huge challenges they face in their daily lives, and they inspired us to do more. Since 2016 Casita Linda has been providing year-long, twice weekly, intensive workshops to the recipients of our homes and to the community as a whole. These workshops are led by two gifted Mexican women – Magda Perez, a social worker, and Ilian Barrera, lawyer. Working as a team, they both empower our families to lead the best lives they can lead and also strengthen the community by having the families support one another. Our workshops begin with topics such as self-esteem, goal-setting, nutrition, child care, education, home care, water conservation, organic gardening, and income-generating projects, and work up to such challenging issues as sexuality and family planning, addiction, and domestic violence. We also partner with other NGOs to provide additional services and referrals for our Casita Linda families.

With the skills and knowledge we provide to our home recipients through these workshops, the participants are better prepared to start a new chapter in their lives and to break negative cycles. In the words of Raquel, recipient of House 102: “The most important workshops for me were those that focused on values, respect and self-esteem. These had the greatest impact on me. There are people who will tell you that you’re not valuable or that men are more valuable than women, but I now realize that women are as important as men and that I do have value.”



## Special highlights from 2017



### Built our 100<sup>th</sup> house!

In 2017 Casita Linda celebrated a major milestone, the building of our 100th house! This home in Palo Colorado was built for the Aguilar Vargas family, a lovely, hardworking family of six. The 100th house was dedicated to the 100 Women Who Care in San Miguel de Allende, whose members generously provided funding to build it.

See page 10 for this family's inspiring story.



## Partnered with Caminos de Agua

In 2017 we enlisted the help of Caminos de Agua to teach and help our families to build rain water catchment cisterns. Water safety is a major concern in San Miguel de Allende, so enabling our families to have safe drinking water was a priority for us. The families' first team project was to build a cistern for their elementary school, and they have continued to work together to build cisterns for each home, showing a wonderful sense of community.



## Partnered with CDR Realty

In 2017 CDR Realty not only began generously donating their office space to Casita Linda for our monthly Board meetings, but also held a corporate volunteer day for all their employees and their families. It was a fantastic day!



## Kids for Casita Linda is founded!

Students at the Academia Internacional formed a group called Kids for Casita Linda, which has grown to include young people from all over San Miguel. In 2017 these young volunteers organized clothing and backpack drives, ran a lemonade stand, helped build a house, and painted several houses. They are a dynamic group of kids and continue to be an inspiration for all of us!



## Obtained our 501c3 status

In 2017 Casita Linda earned its 501c3 status, becoming a recognized non-profit organization in the United States. This achievement makes it easier and more appealing for supporters in the U.S. and Canada to donate to Casita Linda.



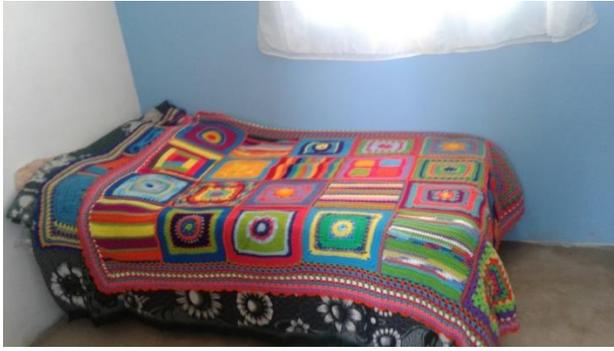
## Held another successful gala

Our 6th Annual Spirit of Hope Gala, La Dolce Vita, was an elegant Italian-themed evening featuring opera singing waiters, human marble statues, and Tarantella dancers, as well as fabulous food, an open bar, and an endless flow of the incomparable Solorzano tequila donated by our wonderful Advisory Board members Agustin Solorzano and Valerie Fischer. With nearly 230 guests in attendance, we raised enough money to build five more homes!



## Partnered with Amigos de Animales

We collaborated with Amigos de Animales to organize a spay/neuter clinic for pets in Palo Colorado, successfully sterilizing 28 dogs and cats.



The Escuela de Educación Especial is a school for the deaf and hearing impaired whose students learn and practice trades such as furniture building.

## Partnered with Blanket Babes and Escuela de Educación Especial

We are so grateful for our ongoing collaboration and friendship with these two wonderful San Miguel institutions. Their contributions turn our houses into homes.



## Board retreat – moving forward

Casita Linda held a Board retreat at the beautiful Hacienda Santa Clara where we developed an exciting and ambitious three-year strategic plan for Casita Linda.

## The stories that inspire us



### The Aguilar Vargas Family

Casita Linda couldn't have been more thrilled to provide the Aguilar Vargas family with our 100<sup>th</sup> house.

This wonderful family used to live in a shack made of scrap metal and cardboard where they all slept together in one small, cold, drafty room with a dirt floor that turned to mud with each rainfall. The children were often sick from the cold.

The father, Manuel, worked for the city as a garbage collector, picking through the trash looking for things to salvage and sell. The mother, Cony, grew herbs which she sold to buy beans and tortillas to feed her family. Despite their extreme poverty, they knew that education was the only way to improve the lives of their children, and so Cony made sure that their four children attended school every day looking their best.

Cony and Manuel heard about Casita Linda from our workshop leaders Magda and Ilian, who had recently begun holding workshops in Palo Colorado and educating the community about our work. Cony attended the twice weekly workshops without fail. They also provided documentation showing that they were married and owned the small plot of land they lived on. And they proved that their children attended school regularly.

Our Board of Directors approved the Aguilar Vargas family unanimously and the building began. Soon, they had a beautiful house with a rainwater catchment system, furniture, separate bedrooms for the girls and boys, and their first indoor bathroom. With this house came hope. Hope for a brighter tomorrow and the desire to continue on a path toward a better life. In Cony's own words: "Our lives are improving so much. Now we can have a life plan, a plan for the future." Their housewarming celebration on November 15th was attended by 75 guests who all came out to support the family and Casita Linda.



# The stories that inspire us



## The Aguilar Jimenez Family

We first met Claudia, a young mother of two, through our workshops. She immediately impressed us with her commitment to her children and her desire to improve her living conditions. Claudia lived in this one room dirt floor shack in La Cantera with her husband Marcos and two young children, with no kitchen or bathroom. The cold, wind and rain constantly made her children sick. Claudia says that having a real house not only gave her family greater security, peace and comfort, but also instilled in her a strong sense of self-confidence and a drive to create a better life for her children.



## The stories that inspire us



### The Rico Zúñiga Family

This wonderful family was the recipient of our final house built in the community of Nuevo Pantoja, House #98. They couldn't have been more deserving or in need of our assistance. Berenice and her husband Luis have a beautiful 4-year-old daughter with severe cerebral palsy. Caring for their daughter Renata is expensive and all-consuming. Berenice's husband works very hard in construction as an albañil, but they couldn't even dream of ever affording their own house.

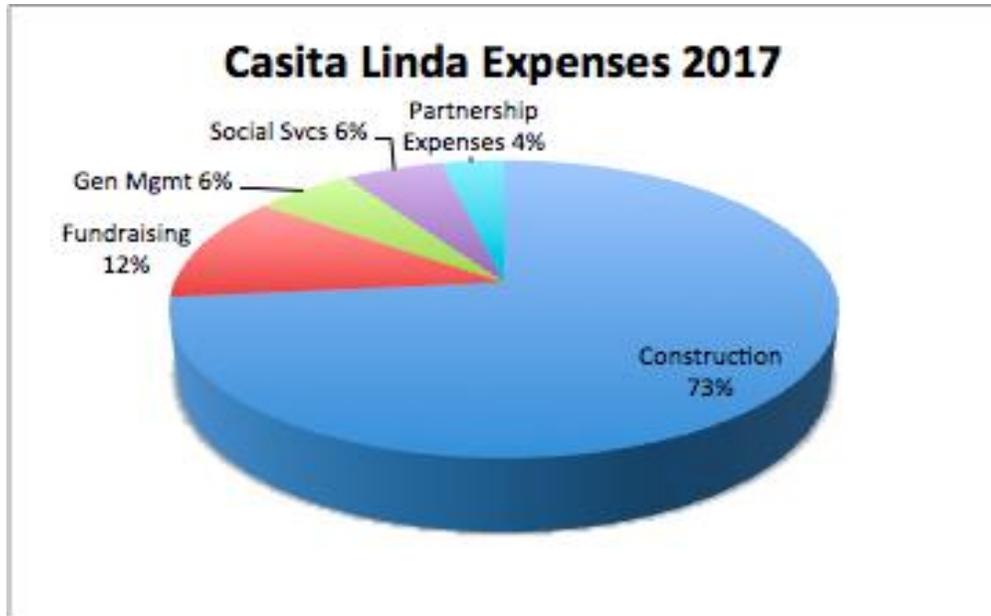
When they applied to Casita Linda, they were living with many extended family members in an awful situation where the children were continually exposed to the cold, rain and wind, as well as to certain extended family members whom Berenice didn't think were safe to have around her girls. They were desperate for a solution, for a home of their own.

As we were designing their house, we realized that it needed to be modified to accommodate the special needs of Renata. The son of Board member Ricardo Posada, Jacobo, a young college student, was so moved by her situation that he launched a GoFundMe campaign to modify the bathroom to include a bathtub and bathing chair for Renata, as well as a fund for her ongoing medical expenses. Then, our Advisory Board member Ted Davis generously donated a hot water heater for the house, a feature that is not provided by Casita Linda. The result of all this amazing teamwork is a home where Renata can be taken care of in comfort, the way she deserves. The family couldn't be happier.



# Financial Report 2017

## EXPENSES



*Note: Partnership expenses include costs associated with cisterns built with our partner, Caminos de Agua, and with furniture built by another partner, Escuela de Educación Especial.*

Construction 73%	2,827,399
Fundraising 12%	447,293
General Management 6%	220,200
Social Services 6%	217,275
Partnership Expenses 4%	139,612
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>3,851,779 MXN</b>

## INCOME

In 2017 Casita Linda earned \$2,606,826 from donations and fundraising events. We ended the year with \$303,459 MXN in our operating accounts. We also carry approximately \$30,000 USD in reserves.

## Our leadership

### Staff

Amber Nieto, Executive Director  
Guillermina Reyes, Office Assistant



Magda Perez, Workshop Facilitator  
Ilian Barrera, Workshop Facilitator



### Board of Directors

Louise Gilliam, President  
Ann Marie Jackson, Vice President  
Gregg Blackburn, Treasurer  
Lyn Gawron, Secretary  
Kim Slote, Board member  
Guadalupe Alessio, Board member  
Ricardo Posada, Board member



### Advisory Board

Ted Davis  
Lorenza Dipp  
Oswaldo Encinas Carreno  
Valerie Fischer  
Barbara Marvin  
Pablo Marvin  
Oliver Mayer  
Christoph Moher  
Agustin Solorzano  
Beth West

## Call to Action

### Donations

Casita Linda homes are fully funded through donations from individuals, service organizations and private foundations. Our supporters' contributions not only help build pretty little houses for deserving families, they also help provide them with a more dignified, peaceful and safe life.

\$12,000 USD – Build a full Casita Linda

\$6,000 USD – Build half a Casita Linda

\$1,000 USD – Furniture and mattresses for a Casita Linda family

\$500 USD – Windows and doors for a Casita Linda

\$200 USD – Paint for a Casita Linda

\$50 USD – Sponsors one woman for 9 months of workshops

Donations can be made directly on our website: <https://casitalinda.org/donate/>



Casita Linda is also an authorized 501c3 on AmazonSmile. This means that every time a supporter makes an eligible Amazon Smile purchase on Amazon, Amazon donates 0.5% to Casita Linda: [https://smile.amazon.com/gp/chpf/about/ref=smi\\_se\\_dshb\\_aas\\_saas](https://smile.amazon.com/gp/chpf/about/ref=smi_se_dshb_aas_saas)

### Volunteering

Volunteers help with house construction and painting, and special projects such as blanket, book, backpack and mattress drives.

Casita Linda has also begun an exciting corporate volunteer retreat program whereby a company finances the building of a Casita Linda house and its employees help build the house.

*We are so grateful for the generous support of our donors,  
and for the hard work of our staff, Board of Directors,  
Advisory Board, volunteers, and the entire ARMO team.*