

# Welcome

Welcome to Ranchito con Esperanza (Little Ranch with Hope)!

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to the 24/7 care and protection of abused, abandoned, and neglected children in Mexico. Since 2008, Amy and Chuy Acosta have opened their home, raising the children with great love, building strong Christ-like character into them, and equipping them to help others and be a productive part of society.

We are grateful for the mission teams, interns, teachers, house parents, staff members, and volunteers who are such a valuable resource for the Acostas and for the children entrusted to their care. By partnering with the Acosta's, you'll not only help the children, but will also strengthen the ministry to be a Christ-like example to the people of Camichines.

This guide will help you have the best possible experience as a volunteer. It answers frequently asked questions and gives information about the Acosta's, the ministry, and your role. Please feel free to contact Amy Acosta ([amyacosta@lenamac.org](mailto:amyacosta@lenamac.org)) anytime you need assistance.

Thank you for serving with us. We are grateful to God for your involvement. You are making a difference in the lives of these children.

Sincerely,  
The LENAM, Inc. Board

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## Purpose of Handbook

This handbook has been produced to help you become a better ministry partner. It shares with you a little of our history, philosophy, practices, and policies, as well as all the benefits we will provide to you as a valued volunteer.

We hope this handbook will allow you to feel comfortable with us. We believe all good gifts come from God, and your work is vital to the stability of our ministry. Please read this handbook carefully, and refer to it whenever questions arise. LENAM, Inc. reserves the right to modify the policies in this handbook without prior notice.

Please don't hesitate to ask questions. Your team leader will gladly answer them. We believe you will enjoy your volunteer work and your fellow volunteers here. We also trust you will find Ranchito con Esperanza a good place to serve the Lord. Thank you for giving your time and talents to help others. We hope you find volunteering at Ranchito con Esperanza a positive and rewarding experience.

## Organization Information

### The Acostas

Chuy Acosta, a native of Camichines, Jalisco, Mexico, moved to Chicago as a teenager to get his GED and attend trade school. While there, he met and married the love of his life, Amy, a Chicago native. Four children and a successful electrician's career later, the Acostas were well-established in Chicago, but a desire for their children to know their Mexican heritage and family compelled the Acostas to do something kind of crazy. In September 2001, they put life "on hold" in Chicago and moved to Chuy's hometown in Mexico. They intended to return to Chicago in a couple of years and pick up where they left off..

With no long-term plans to live in Camichines, daily life was simple - look for needs and meet them. Early on, they helped build and furnish a new library for the town. Next, they helped create a breakfast program at the local school, and hosted kids' clubs, youth group and Bible studies. As they lived as friends and neighbors with those around them, a couple of years turned into seven!

While homeschooling her own children, Amy also offered to tutor children from town. In 2008, Maya arrived. Little did they know that this little girl would change their lives forever. Maya began learning to read and do basic math with the family who not only taught her but also cared for her basic needs. As time went on, Maya's story started to come out. It was a story riddled with abuse and neglect. This information caused the Acostas to fight for her safety. Working with the county government and finally formalizing their union with EIRENE AC, a non-profit organization legally established in the state of Jalisco and recognized by the government authorities, they were able to protect not only Maya, but her three young siblings as well. This was the start of Ranchito con Esperanza, a home that protects and cares for many children.

Today, the Acostas run an official "casa hogar" or children's shelter named LENAM, AC, affectionately known as Ranchito con Esperanza (Little Ranch with Hope), in the state of Jalisco. Ranchito con Esperanza is a safe haven for children. While some have been successfully returned to family members, the number of children living with the Acostas is constantly changing. Ranchito con Esperanza provides a very unique experience for these children. The children at the Ranch are not separated from one another by age and gender as is done in traditional Mexican shelters. Instead, they are allowed to grow up with their siblings. Every child receives a state-accredited education. Additionally, children have the opportunity to learn about farming, animals, family and God's love.

In 2013, the Acostas formed LENAM, a non-profit organization in both Mexico and the United States. LENAM is not only a "parent" organization for Ranchito con Esperanza, but will be the vehicle to expand the effort to improve the lives of the children who come into the Acosta's life.

### LENAM, Inc. and LENAM, AC

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting Ranchito con Esperanza, a 24/7 care and



protection of abused, abandoned and neglected children in Mexico. Our goal is to raise funds and support so the children can be shown love and a strong Christ-like character to equip them to one day be a productive part of society and help others.

## Mission

To provide excellent, comprehensive care for Mexican children who come from vulnerable situations through meeting all their basic needs: a safe home, education, formation of values, physical wellness, emotional health, and spiritual development within the context of a loving family.

## Vision

To promote virtuous change in the lives of Mexican children in order to influence future generations through Christ-like service to society.

## Values

- Respect - To show an attitude of honor and esteem toward all people, treating each person with dignity.
- Honesty/Trustworthiness - To make decisions with truthfulness and sincerity.
- Responsibility - To hold a personal commitment to carry out our obligations with excellence and to the best of our ability.
- Compassion - To be aware of the suffering of others, extending a hand of love, help, and support where possible.
- Forgiveness - To freely extend mercy by pardoning the offenses of others without harboring resentment.
- Kindness - To do good to others, showing warmth and affection with consideration for their well-being.
- Patience - To respond to adversity and long-suffering with hopeful endurance through faith and without protest.
- Goodness - To conform our character and choices to express moral excellence and purity of heart.
- Humility - To always show preference for others, putting their needs first, regarding them as more important than ourselves.
- Diligence - To earnestly strive to achieve goals through hard work, perseverance and refusal to give up.
- Perseverance - To maintain our mission with steadfastness and persistence in spite of difficulty, obstacles, or discouragement.

## Information for Teams

The Acosta's are happy you are investing your time at the Ranch, and so are the children! You are encouraged to play with the children in your free time. They love playing games, having someone read to them, and spending time with visiting team members.

That said, please remember that each child has been placed here for a reason—neglect, abuse, abandonment, or possibly all three. Therefore, they may have issues of which you are not aware. In order to protect you and the children, we have established house rules and team rules. Although our rules may seem rigid, the children come from unstable backgrounds and need explicit rules to feel secure and know exactly what is expected of them. Team members should respect these rules and the commands given to the children. Please do your best to follow the rules...and have fun!

### What teams can expect at Ranchito con Esperanza

- Wonderful new experiences - Things are different here. It is essential that you consider those differences before you arrive. Think and pray about how you will adjust to new sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and demands on your time. Expect to be stretched, perhaps more than ever before, and ask others to pray for you!
- Three Meals a Day
- Bottled water - Drink plenty; it helps in the high altitude
- Living quarters and restroom facilities - Just let someone know if you need supplies or if your room/bathroom needs maintenance
- Laundry facilities
- Limited internet
- Transportation to and from the airport
- Medication for stomach issues and some allergies - The most common items we deal with are stomach/bowel issues and allergies. DO NOT self-medicate without asking first. Just let us know if you are having stomach/bowel issues - - - we know this can be embarrassing, but we are used to it. Sometimes medicine is required (we have great medicine in those cases), but most often it is your body adjusting to the food, or a one-day ailment like you could have anywhere. Allergies are also very common. Even if you don't typically suffer from allergies, there is a possibility that you will have allergy symptoms here. It is very dusty! Again, let us know and we will help with medication.
- Questions answered cheerfully - No question is silly. Things are different in Camichines. Sometimes the Acosta's may forget to explain things because it is "normal" for them. So, just ask and they will be happy to answer.

## What Ranchito con Esperanza Expects from Team Members

- A strong work ethic - Please put forth your best effort while working on team projects.
- Meals - We eat whatever God provides (often through donations to the ministry), and since you're living with us, you will do the same. In the Mexican culture it is considered rude not to eat what you are served, so please do your best to eat what the children eat. You must be a good example to the children on how to be grateful for what God provides, even if it isn't our favorite meal.
- Keep your living quarters clean - Please keep your personal belongings tidy as a courtesy to others. Allow time to clean the team rooms before leaving. Instructions are posted on the doors of each room. Please complete all cleaning tasks before leaving.
- Restrooms - Use only the bathroom in your team's room. The rest are off limits. Limit your showers to 3 minutes, one per day. It helps to turn off the water while you soap.
- Use of hair care appliances - Please do not use hair straighteners, blow dryers or curling irons. They use a lot of very costly electricity.
- Limit your use of electronics - Internet and phone services are very limited. We encourage you to "unplug" while at the ranch. "Disconnecting" helps you engage more fully in the life and ministry here. Should you require internet or phone service, please ask Amy Acosta.
- Flirting and physical affection among team members is not acceptable - Flirting and PDA send a confusing message to our children and it cannot be tolerated.
- Respect evening hours - Please excuse yourself from the main house by 8:30pm. The children are in bed by then and need their sleep. Keep outside noise (patio) to a minimum after 8:30pm.
- Appropriate language and conversation - The children hear everything. Please keep this in mind.
- Snacks from home - Keep and eat any snacks from home in your room in bug-proof containers. Please get permission from house parents before sharing snacks with the children.
- Always wear shoes - (even in your room) to protect against possibly stepping on stinging insects. Wear sturdy shoes for construction, not flip-flops or sandals.
- Do not drink tap water.
- Do not go up on the roof of either house without specific permission from a staff member - Team leaders will be held responsible for any team members on the roof without permission.
- Do not leave the ministry property without the permission of a staff member.
- Wear sunscreen or a hat - The Mexican sun at this altitude can be intense.
- Inform the staff of any injuries or illnesses - Treat any and all injuries that break skin with extreme caution to avoid infection. If you receive a skin tear, other injury, or become ill or in need of any medication, please inform Amy Acosta to avoid taking the wrong medicine for a misdiagnosed problem.
- Taking photos - You are welcome to take pictures during your time in Camichines, but please remember that this is our home and these are our dearly loved children. Please be respectful of our



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privacy. If you aren't sure about taking a particular picture, feel free to ask Amy or Chuy for permission. Please do not tag the children or use their names in captions for pictures posted on the internet. Do not share any information about the children on the internet.

- Bedrooms - Please do not enter bedrooms belonging to the Acosta's, the children, or the staff

## Rules for dealing with children

- Team members should respect any disciplinary action taken by the house parents or interns. Do not talk to children in time out or under any other disciplinary action.
- Be respectful if you and a child are asked to stop playing. Your display of respect will be a good example for the children.
- When you first meet the children, be friendly, but allow them to get to know you and feel comfortable with you before overwhelming them with attention.
- Do not tickle the children. The less physical contact/touching, the better.
- Do not pick up a child or place them on your lap.
- Do not allow the children to hang on you or cling to you.
- Do not hug a child unless the child initiates the hug. Keep the hug short.
- You may hold a child's hand, but the child should initiate the action.
- If you go on a walk with the children, you must be accompanied by an intern or house parent.
- No team member may be alone with a child or take a child to the bathroom! If a child needs assistance to use the bathroom please ask a member of the household.
- No team member may take a child off the property unless specifically given permission by the house parents.
- The children are not allowed in the school without a teacher, in the teams' rooms, on the outdoor stairs, or behind the house. DO NOT encourage them to be in these areas or they will have consequences.
- Avoid boisterous play in the house. Things are chaotic enough in such a large family and when multiple team members are working in and around the house. Let's try to keep the noise and chaos to a minimum.
- Do not show favoritism to one or two children or allow a single child to become too "attached" to you. This makes it much more difficult for them when you leave. Maintaining some "emotional distance" makes the coming and going of teams much easier for the children.
- Do not share details about the children, either in Camichines or when you return home. You may post pictures from your trip, but please do not use the children's names under/on posted pictures on the internet. Please respect their privacy.
- Do not give the children anything such as candy, treats, gum or jewelry without permission from the house parents. Some have allergies to sugar and dyes.
- Do not let the children touch any of your electronics including phones, cameras, ipods, computers, etc. Do not use electronics in front of the children except cameras.
- Do not accept the children's personal clothing, toys or any other item as a gift.
- Do not, under any circumstance, touch blood or other bodily fluids from the children!



## Information for Interns

### What interns can expect at Ranchito con Esperanza

- Wonderful new experiences - Things are different here. It is essential that you consider those differences before you arrive. Think and pray about how you will adjust to new sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and demands on your time. Expect to be stretched, perhaps more than ever before, and ask others to pray for you!
- You will be treated like a welcome member of the family - You can join in any of the Acosta's family activities.
- Three Meals a Day
- Bottled water - Drink plenty; it helps in the high altitude
- Living quarters and restroom facilities - Just let someone know if you need supplies or if your room/bathroom needs maintenance
- Laundry facilities
- Limited internet
- Sundays off - Your day off will be Sunday. We encourage you to rest and enjoy yourself!
- Transportation to and from the airport
- Use of ministry vehicles - Upon request
- A library of books and movies - You are free to use them in your free time, but please ask before taking one as some are being used for homeschooling.
- Medication for stomach issues and some allergies - The most common items we deal with are stomach/bowel issues and allergies. DO NOT self-medicate without asking first. Just let us know if you are having stomach/bowel issues - - - we know this can be embarrassing, but we are used to it. Sometimes medicine is required (we have great medicine in those cases), but most often it is your body adjusting to the food, or a one-day ailment like you could have anywhere. Allergies are also very common. Even if you don't typically suffer from allergies, there is a possibility that you will have allergy symptoms here. It is very dusty! Again, let us know and we will help with medication.
- Questions answered cheerfully - No question is silly. Things are different in Camichines. Sometimes the Acosta's may forget to explain things because it is "normal" for them. So, just ask and they will be happy to answer.
- Open communication - It is hard to be far away from your family and friends. Sometimes adjusting is more difficult than expected. If you need any help, please feel free to talk to anyone on staff. They will understand, having gone through the same thing.
- Two week trial period - On rare occasions, interns are very excited to come, but have a difficult time adjusting after they arrive. If you are very unhappy and don't want to stay, please let the Acosta's know. They won't be offended! We hope you also understand that, after two weeks or later,

they may decide you are not a great fit for Ranchito con Esperanza. If that's the case, they will always explain their reasons for ending your internship.]

## What Ranchito con Esperanza Expects from Interns

- A strong work ethic - Everyone is expected to help with dishes, food preparation, laundry (your own), and cleaning, in addition to our designated responsibilities. Twelve-plus hour days are the norm. We understand this can be hard at first. This might be the most challenging job you have encountered, but it is very rewarding! Please remember you are here for a short time, and the people who live here work this way 365 days a year. Give it your all while you are here.
- Meals - We eat whatever God provides (often through donations to the ministry), and since you're living with us, we expect that you will do the same. In the Mexican culture it is considered rude not to eat what you are served, so please do your best to eat what the children eat. You must be a good example to the children on how to be grateful for what God provides, even if it isn't a favorite meal.
- Keep your living quarters clean - Please keep your personal belongings tidy as a courtesy to others. Allow time to clean the team rooms before leaving. Instructions are posted on the doors of each room. Please complete all cleaning tasks before leaving.
- Limit your use of electronics - You are encouraged to limit your use of cell phones and electronic devices to emergencies. "Disconnecting" helps you plug into the life and ministry here! That said, we also understand the desire to maintain a connection with home. Therefore, we simply ask that you stay off all electronics until after the kids are in bed and the kitchen is clean. Then you are more than welcome to use them as well as anytime on your day off.
- Absolutely no dating, flirting or PDA - Many of the children come from situations where they were convinced that inappropriate physical affection and attention were the only ways to be "happy." Flirting and PDA send a confusing message to our children and it cannot be tolerated.
- Drugs, alcohol, and tobacco are strictly prohibited
- Respect evening hours - Try to be out of the main house or in your room by 9pm. If you are invited to watch a movie, play a game, go out to eat, or anything of this sort, you are more than welcome to stay. We only ask that, under normal circumstances, you be out of the main house's common area by 9pm so the Acosta's have time to spend as a family.
- Refill the gas tank - If you drive any vehicles for personal use, please replenish the gas before returning to the Ranch.
- Wear shoes at all times - (even in your room) to protect against possibly stepping on stinging insects. Wear sturdy shoes for construction, not flip-flops or sandals.
- Do not drink tap water.
- Always ask permission before going up on the roof of either house.
- Wear sunscreen or a hat - The Mexican sun at this altitude can be intense.

## Rules for dealing with children

- Try not to play favorites with the children - We know this can be very difficult, but please do your very best to be fair to the children. They never forget.
- Please avoid unneeded physical contact with the children - Tickling, excessive hugging, touching, allowing them to “hang” on you and sit on your lap, etc. can cause undue attachment and may revive memories of past experiences that are not very pleasant.
- Please do not constantly entertain the children - It is okay to play with them, but they need to be able to entertain themselves and each other, especially after you leave!
- Do not share personal details about the children online or in newsletters - We ask that you not even put their first names online, nor details of their personal situations. You must respect their privacy.
- Do not, under any circumstance, touch blood or other bodily fluids from the children! If anyone is bleeding please notify us and we will take care of it. This is very important because some of the children have diseases that can be spread through bodily fluids.

## Dress Code for Interns and Teams

**DISCLAIMER:** Please understand this dress code was created after years of experience. We do NOT judge people if they do not follow this at home, but at the Ranch it is mandatory. We live in a little town where we are observed like a specimen under a microscope. The teens and children copy a lot of the outsiders' examples. We do not want to be the reason they do something that will anger their parents.

- If you have an offensive tattoo, please try to keep it covered at all times.
- If you have any visible piercings, other than your ears, please remove them at the ranch.
- Do not wear any clothing with inappropriate holes, messages or pictures (skulls and the like).
- Do not wear dirty work clothes if you are going on an outing or out to eat.
- Do not wear clothing with writing on it to church.
- Closed toe shoes and long pants are required for working construction.
- Lightweight, long-sleeve shirts are recommended for farm and construction work as the sun is deceptively strong and you will sunburn easily.
- Women -
  - Shirts must be modest. Please maintain modesty even when you bend over so the kids cannot see down your shirt. Spaghetti straps, low-cut shirts or tank tops can only be worn in your dorm room.
  - Shorts can be worn, but use the fingertip rule. If your hands are by your side the hem of your shorts must fall below your fingertips.
  - Skirts must be knee length.
  - Do not wear tight-fitting jeans or shirts.
  - Leggings may only be worn under dresses, skirts or long shirts that cover your backside.
  - It is preferable that women wear skirts or dresses to church if at all possible.
- Men -
  - Do not wear muscle shirts or tank tops. (They can be worn in your dorm room only.)
  - Keep your shirt on at all times.
  - Do not wear pants low enough that any part of your briefs or boxers can be seen.