

FY21 PARAGUAY ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal year ending March 31, 2021



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Juan Carlos Ortíz Céspedes, program manager, and approved by Jorge Méndez Rheineck, country director, Children Believe Paraguay.

We are grateful to Children Believe's implementation partners in Paraguay and the Children Believe Paraguay team for their commendable work over the 2020-2021 fiscal year and support in the production of this report.

Special acknowledgement goes to Feleke Tadele, PhD., director of program effectiveness and resource management, and Dr. Belinda Bennet, chief international programs officer, for their guidance and insights. Thanks also to the Canadian communications team for report editing and design support.

Children Believe Paraguay, 2021

Front cover image: A young boy in Paraguay reading a letter he received from his sponsor. Children Believe connects Canadian donors with children in need to help young people access school and overcome the barriers they face.

CONTENTS

4	LIST OF BOXES AND TABLES
5	ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS
6	FOREWORD
7	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
8	Paraguay program impact and influence
11	I – TOWARDS DISMANTLING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION
11	Increased access to quality pre-primary and primary education
13	Increased access to inclusive education
14	Increased access to technical, vocational and higher education
15	II – ENSURING CHILDREN LIVE IN HEALTHY AND EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES
15	Improved the health of communities and the safety of school environments
17	Improved nutritional intake practices and access to food
19	Strengthened the delivery and use of maternal and newborn healthcare services
22	III – ADVANCING CHILD RIGHTS, PARTICIPATION AND PROTECTION
22	Sustained community actions and proactive engagement to end violence against children
25	IV – PROMOTING EQUALITY FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN
25	Increased girls’ and women’s participation through equal opportunities for leadership
27	Improved the adoption and enforcement of gender-sensitive programs and strategies
28	V – PARTNERING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH FOR CHANGE
28	Strengthened the capacity of children and youth to claim their rights and hold duty-bearers accountable
30	VI – CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
31	VII – STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS
32	ANNEX I – CHILDREN BELIEVE PARAGUAY’S IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

LIST OF BOXES AND TABLES

BOXES

- 11 **Box 1:** Success story – Supporting schools and students to ensure continuity of education
- 20 **Box 2:** Success story – Improving access to food and essential health resources
- 26 **Box 3:** Success story – Cultivating young advocates to promote child and girls’ rights
- 28 **Box 4:** Success story – Young people in Remansito effect positive change in their community

TABLES

- 14 **Table 1:** Reach of Children Believe Paraguay’s education and vocational programs
- 17 **Table 2:** Number of children and parents/caregivers Children Believe Paraguay benefited through COVID-19 prevention activities
- 18 **Table 3:** Number of people Children Believe Paraguay benefited through nutrition and food support
- 20 **Table 4:** Reach of Children Believe Paraguay’s maternal and newborn health initiatives
- 24 **Table 5:** Number of people Children Believe Paraguay engaged in child protection activities
- 27 **Table 6:** Number of people Children Believe Paraguay engaged in gender equality efforts
- 29 **Table 7:** Number of young people empowered through Children Believe Paraguay’s child/youth engagement and capacity-building initiatives

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
CFAM	Child-Friendly Accountability Methodology
CODENI	Conserjería Municipal por los Derechos del Niño, la Niña y el Adolescente (Municipal Councils for Children's Rights)
COE	Centre of Excellence
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FY21	Fiscal Year 2020-2021
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
USFs	Unidades de Salud de la Familia (Family Health Units)

FOREWORD

Children Believe Paraguay is pleased to present our annual report for the fiscal year extending from April 2020 to March 2021 (FY21). COVID-19 had an indelible presence, but despite the challenges, our team and partners were able to continue the implementation of our planned activities while also addressing the greater demand in need that came from the pandemic.

Over FY21, we reached a total of 108,804 children, youth, families and community members from all of our initiatives combined. Our team was very successful implementing our programs and surpassed a number of our planned targets, which you will soon read about in this report. Much of this was due to our incorporation of digital tools and platforms across our programming, allowing us to reach more people than expected.

Through the dedication of our team and partners, we helped ensure children and youth had access to inclusive, quality education and vocational training. We continued to work with young people, nurturing their empowerment and civic engagement, and made advancements in the protection of children and promoting equality for girls and women. Health was, of course, a critical area of focus and while supporting efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we were also able to improve newborn and maternal health, and nutritional intake.

I am incredibly proud of the achievements the Paraguay country office and our partners have made and feel inspired as we move through FY22. There remain obstacles to overcome and needs to address, but I feel assured that, together, we will be able to attain what we set forth to do.

Thank you to the Children Believe Paraguay team, our collaborators, implementing partners, sponsors, donors and, especially, the children, youth, families and communities in our program areas who have allowed us to be part of their journeys. I am grateful and honoured to be walking alongside you all.

Sincerely,



Jorge Méndez Rheineck
Country Director, Children Believe Paraguay

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 2020-2021 fiscal year (FY21), Children Believe Paraguay's road map for change was significantly impacted by COVID-19. The global pandemic affected all of our areas of operation – with some areas impacted more than others – and how we implemented our programs. Yet even with the challenges we faced navigating our new context, we had major breakthroughs, like reaching a greater number of people with the application of digital tools and virtual modes of our program activities. With the shift to virtual interactions, we were able to produce and distribute a vast amount of valuable digital materials and offer an array of flexible virtual formats in all of our Pathways of Change. Together with our partners, Children Believe Paraguay successfully adapted to our new situation and continued to reach large parts of our communities despite strict lockdowns and the halting of school.

Healthcare was a major area of concern with the threat of COVID-19 infection and the pressure placed on health services.¹ The urgent situation was met with rapid responses to assist health facilities strengthen their capacities, and carry out COVID-19 prevention activities. Increased levels of domestic violence were reported during the pandemic, which was worrisome. We responded by delivering protection and prevention training sessions across our program communities, awareness raising campaigns and offering outreach help. Training and other support to strengthen the National Protection System were also carried out.²

A byproduct of the pandemic and lockdowns was widespread job losses and, as a result, struggles with food insecurity. The demand for food aid in our program areas was significant, and addressing the need was a major achievement of ours in FY21. Through the provision of food kits and the organization of community kitchens, we were able to ensure that children and families had reliable access to food. Where in-person engagement was necessary for distribution, we made sure to apply COVID-19-prevention protocols, such as wearing masks, using hygiene and sanitation products, and implementing social distancing, to keep our communities and staff safe.



Community kitchens were an effective solution to help address the increasing struggles families were facing with food insecurity. Children Believe Paraguay and our partners were active in organizing them for our program communities in FY21.

¹ In FY21, COVID-19 infections were initially low in Paraguay, but saw a significant spike in Q4. Now, in FY22, the infection rate is very high and the situation is worsening with the collapse of the healthcare system.

² The National Protection System was severely weakened during the pandemic, as were most other government systems and services.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the greatest challenges we faced was ensuring continued access to education for young people. Although school closures were important for the health and safety of students, school staff and the broader community, the loss of an opportunity to learn was a serious risk for many children, particularly those who are part of marginalized populations. Distance learning was made available in a number of areas, but poor or no internet connection and a lack of proper technology (e.g. computers and smartphones) were major impediments. To help remove these barriers to education, we devised ways to reach children, including developing accessible material like printed worksheets and providing strong, ongoing assistance to teachers to help them remain connected to students and families.

In FY21, we reached a total of 108,804 people through our initiatives. From this number, 68,738 were children and 40,066 were members of the community who actively engaged in our education, health, child participation, protection and gender-equality programs.

Our education efforts reached 17,648 people. Of this total, 15,150 were children and youth who benefited from improved educational facilities and services, and 2,116 were parents and community leaders who benefited from training in early childhood development. The number of teachers and educational facilitators who received capacity-building support was 382.

As we continued to implement our programs this past year, COVID-19 pushed us to find solutions for the challenges we faced. This resulted in the development of innovative strategies and the use of new tools, such as the incorporation of WhatsApp as a main channel to reach our program participants. Through the trials we faced, we built our resilience and developed a greater capacity to overcome obstacles and continue to reach people in need.

Paraguay program impact and influence

By providing a comprehensive response to the challenges of COVID-19 in FY21, Children Believe Paraguay made a significant impact on the health and well-being of children and communities in the areas where we work. We contributed to the strengthening of Family Health Units (Unidades de Salud de la Familia – USFs – in Spanish)³ by equipping them with essential medical supplies, COVID-19 prevention materials and, in some cases, improved infrastructures. In turn, the health centres were able to consistently provide health services to our program communities, with specialized support for pregnant women and newborns. These improvements were particularly meaningful as the change was drastic. Before the pandemic, USFs faced a number of struggles in their operation and the pandemic further weakened them due to the increase in demand for services and a lack of response and support from the government. However, with the support of Children Believe and our local partners, we were able to build their capacity far beyond pre-COVID-19 levels.

To further help keep our program communities healthy and safe, we carried out a large-scale initiative to educate children, families and community members on preventing the spread of COVID-19. This involved running campaigns, delivering training

³ Family Health Unit is the English name for Unidades de Salud de la Familia (USFs). These are often small clinics with basic services, which largely depend on state funding. In the vast majority of cases, USFs are the first point of contact for health consultations in our communities of operation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

sessions and distributing hygiene kits and instructive materials. To ensure our information had the greatest reach, instructive and educational materials were circulated both in printed form and digitally. Handwashing stations were also installed in several schools in our program areas lacking these important facilities. Additionally, improvements to sanitary facilities were undertaken, along with the provision of drinking water dispensers. The combination of these efforts addressed essential, urgent needs and helped establish a strong foundation that promoted good hygiene practices, contributing to the health and safety of our communities.



To keep our program communities safe, Children Believe and our partners widely distributed hygiene supplies and aided in improving facilities to promote good sanitation habits.

Equally important to our prevention initiatives was our food relief activities that were carried out through the hosting of community kitchens and the distribution of food kits. This service was vital for two reasons: one, with schools closed, school meal programs that many children and families depended on were suspended, and two, the lockdown resulted in the loss of livelihoods and income. These circumstances resulted in an increase in economic hardship and many people facing food insecurity. Thus, our activities to increase access to food were significant and essential for the well-being of children and families.

Related to school closures, continuity of education was also a serious concern. We addressed this by providing ongoing support to teachers in all of our program areas to improve their ability to conduct online distance learning classes. Numerous trainings,⁴ workshops and meetings were organized to make sure teachers had the support and tools they required. In enhancing the capacity of teachers, they could then provide the education and learning support children needed and reduce dropouts. In addition to this, we delivered educational supplies and materials for children who were unable to participate virtually, enabling them to continue learning.

Through our activities in FY21, we identified several best practices and lessons learned worth noting. What we found most critical was being flexible, creative and adaptable in the face of uncertainty, and that hardships were elemental for innovation and finding solutions to overcome obstacles. Being adaptable and creative were central in helping us optimize our programs and continue to achieve results.

⁴ Due to the pandemic, in-person classes were halted and shifted to distance e-learning. Many teachers had weak online and general IT skills. In order to properly deliver distance e-learning education, they needed IT skills training.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Additionally, in our efforts to strengthen communities and fight a pandemic, it was crucial to involve all actors and create unity. Engagement and unity encouraged a sense of ownership and responsibility, maximizing the efficacy and benefits of our program activities. Related to this, a factor that was key in helping us respond to rising needs during the pandemic was having ongoing collaborations with local partners and the government to strengthen child protection and health systems. FY21 was a challenging year like no other, but we were able to work through it when we came together with a common purpose.



Working in coordination with partners, Children Believe Paraguay provided hygiene equipment to communities to help curb the spread of COVID-19.

I – TOWARDS DISMANTLING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

Increased access to quality pre-primary and primary education

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted almost every educational activity in our operating communities. Schools and programs moved to virtual methods to help mitigate the spread of the virus. However, at the end of 2020, public schools received directions from the Ministry of Education to prepare for in-person classes starting from March 2021.⁵ Children Believe Paraguay and our partners worked closely with school staff to help ready them for reopening.

To ensure access to and the continuity of education, it was essential to address the safety threats that COVID-19 posed in schools.

We renovated and/or equipped 42 formal and informal learning spaces with educational materials (books, games, toys, etc.), informative material on how to manage in-person activities to prevent COVID-19 infection, signage to identify and promote safety protocols, and hygiene facilities and equipment. Handwashing stations and restrooms were repaired as well as other facilities as needed to support the implementation of sanitation and hygiene protocols. Campaigns and workshops on proper handwashing and prevention measures were also carried out. In addition, we created outdoor activity spaces by building playgrounds at two schools for children in early childhood development (ECD). These playgrounds helped the schools follow the Ministry of Education's guideline to ensure outdoor spaces for ECD and help prevent the spread of the virus.

Box 1: Success story – Supporting schools and students to ensure continuity of education

In FY21, COVID-19 lockdowns jeopardized children's right to education and detrimentally impacted livelihoods, health and overall well-being in all of our program communities. One way Children Believe Paraguay addressed the risks to education was carrying out the Safe Return to Classes project, funded by the Australian Government, with our local partners at the end of the fiscal year.

In our Limpio Sur program area, we worked with 103 school staff members to prepare them for reopening and equipped 2,728 students with biosafety kits, which included a washable mask, sanitizer, liquid soap and a hand/face towel. Students were able to feel comfortable returning for a new school year, while being welcomed by teachers and principals prepared to provide them with the necessary support to remain healthy and safe.

⁵ Schools were required to offer in-person classes from March 2021, but that directive was later withdrawn because the rates of COVID-19 infections and deaths peaked around this time.

In partnership with Fundación Alda, we improved school washroom facilities, constructed handwashing stations and delivered biosafety kits. We also produced educational materials (posters, flyers, radio spots and videos) about COVID-19 prevention, good hygiene practices in general and providing situation updates. Training and prevention strategies for teachers and families were developed, as well. Teachers and parents valued this help, saying that without the additional support, they would not have been able to comply with the sanitation protocols essential for the safe reopening of schools.

In addition to creating a safer environment, these activities cultivated a sense of strength for school staff, as they were not alone in working to improve the conditions for children to continue learning. “The biosafety kits and facility improvements were valuable. We are very hopeful that students and teachers will have a safe return,” shared Delsa Martínez, director of the Emigdio Montiel school. Carlos López, director of the Pabla Ferreira school, stated:



With these supports, I feel confident and can impart confidence to parents that our school is prepared to welcome our students into a safe and healthy learning environment, free of the virus.

Similar activities and experiences can be noted across our program communities. In the case of the Villarrica, Coronel Oviedo and Caaguazú program areas, 4,488 children and adolescents from 30 schools benefited from improved water and hygiene services, educational materials and biosafety kits.

To continue to support ECD during the pandemic, we provided preschool children from 11 schools with stimulation and mindfulness kits called “Soul in Calm,” which included soothing activity materials and sensory toys. Clamp-shaped grips and “Let’s play with vowels” books were also distributed to help develop children’s cognitive and motor skills. These resources were given to parents with an explanatory guide on how to use them at home and on the importance of stimulating the development of skills to support literacy.

In addition to improving the infrastructure of schools, we trained 382 principals and teachers in organizational methods, teaching methodologies and technological tools. We worked with them to ensure compliance with the Ministry of Education’s directives, establish communication channels with local families, identify the educational challenges faced by families and find strategies to resolve them. Teachers were also trained in the use of virtual tools, like Zoom and WhatsApp, and received virtual educational resources to use with their students.

Of equal importance, we provided 13,313 students with school supplies, like paper, writing implements and educational materials, so they could continue learning even if they did not have access to equipment for online learning.



A young girl continuing to learn at home in Paraguay. Children Believe and our partners distributed educational resources during the pandemic to ensure continuity of education for all children.

Increased access to inclusive education

Socioeconomic barriers continue to have a significant impact on access to quality education in the communities where Children Believe Paraguay works. This past year, the pandemic amplified the challenges these vulnerable communities were already facing, increasing the divide between the children in our communities and children from wealthier areas.

Contributing to ensure equal access to quality education, Children Believe Paraguay and our partners worked closely with 382 teachers to provide them with training and continuous assistance throughout the entire year to enhance their teaching abilities.

Training topics included inclusive and participatory education methodologies, technological tools, healthy child development in violence-free environments and other similar themes. Additionally, we provided educational materials and office supplies, like printers, toner and paper, so schools could make sure that children who did not have access to cellphones and/or internet had resources to continue their education.

Working directly with families was an important aspect of our strategy to support the education and well-being of children. We worked with 1,832 parents and caregivers to give them information and tools on how to support their children's learning. Further,

we offered training and materials related to positive parenting, child stimulation and creating conducive learning conditions and opportunities at home which promote the interest of girls and boys in educational activities. We also provided families with life skills training and mental health support to help them cope with the stress of the pandemic, lending to healthier learning environments at home.

Workshops to support specifically adolescents’ mental health were provided, as well. The workshops focused on positive behaviors and thinking, strategies to reduce emotional distress and identified tools to deal with stress, social isolation and anxiety. The young people also received training on safety and privacy while using virtual platforms/social media.

Increased access to technical, vocational and higher education

This past fiscal year, we delivered vocational training for 441 young people. The training sessions helped youth develop valuable skills in areas such as computer literacy, customer service and cooking, and pursue entrepreneurial activities.

Rural communities were able to have some training conducted in-person where equipment or hands-on experience was needed (e.g. training in basic computer skills and hairdressing), but other sessions were virtual. Urban communities had the majority of their training online. One program, however, offered a workshop about making face masks and launching new business ventures. In addition to benefiting the students, the class created products that helped around 80 families in the community remain healthy and safe from COVID-19. Most of the training was offered in alliance with government institutions that provided internet credits, workshop materials and general operating support.

Together with our partners, Children Believe Paraguay worked hard in FY21 to support and maintain access to consistent, quality education and vocational training throughout the pandemic. As a result, we surpassed our educational targets for the year, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: REACH OF CHILDREN BELIEVE PARAGUAY’S EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Children Believe’s education and vocational programs have supported young people living in fragile, vulnerable and marginalized communities to dismantle barriers and access inclusive and quality education and training	FY21 Country Target	FY21 Country Actual
# of boys, girls and young women and men who benefited from increased and sustained access to inclusive, quality education/vocational skills development	9,734	15,150

II – ENSURING CHILDREN LIVE IN HEALTHY AND EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES

Improved the health of communities and the safety of school environments

Taking actions to stop the spread of COVID-19 in our communities was a dominant theme in FY21. Together with our partners, Children Believe Paraguay carried out a variety of critical initiatives to support the health and well-being of our communities, allowing them to continue operating, growing and advancing.

Awareness raising campaigns were launched to provide education about the virus, hygiene, proper handwashing techniques, the importance of wearing face masks and adhering to social distancing protocols. The campaigns were carried out in all of our program areas and every encounter with children and parents was an opportunity we capitalized on to create awareness and deliver easy-to-follow guidance.



A group activity conducted to educate and raise awareness about health and protection strategies. Learning about good hygiene was critical to keep the communities in Children Believe's program areas safe from COVID-19.

Key campaign messages were disseminated in print and digital formats through WhatsApp, online platforms during meetings and training sessions, radio programs in select communities and in-person at events like community kitchens. Information posters and other signage were also put up in schools and community centres. Delivering workshops about COVID-19 prevention was a central activity. Preventative measures were shared as well as important information on how to deal with infections, where to seek medical help and general resources available to support the health and well-being of children and families.

As an urgent need arising from the pandemic, access to clean water and sanitation facilities were a particularly critical area of focus for Children Believe Paraguay and our partners this past fiscal year. For schools, the need was even greater as the government's COVID-19 safety protocols dictated essential criteria, including access to water and sanitation facilities, that needed to be met before schools could reopen for in-person classes. Therefore, the protection of children and continuity of their education hinged on ensuring schools were prepared and equipped to provide a safe learning environment.

Many schools in our program areas did not have the resources to deliver on the changes needed, so we worked closely with them, contributing to their ability to reopen. Two major projects called Safe Return to Classes, and Children and Adolescents Return to Class Safe and Protected were carried out to support this effort.

Safe Return to Classes: With funding from the Australian Government through the regional Australian Embassy in Paraguay, Children Believe Paraguay and our partners installed water tanks, handwashing stations and improved the sanitation facilities at 11 schools from the Limpio Sur program area through this project. In addition, hygiene kits, which contained liquid soap, sanitizer, a hand towel and a COVID-19 prevention guide, were provided. In total, the activities from this initiative benefited 2,728 children, 95 teachers and 11 school principals.

Children and Adolescents Return to Class Safe and Protected: Funded by the Australian Embassy in Paraguay, this project was implemented in two program areas and supported several schools in each. Similar to the Safe Return to Classes project, the activities involved installing handwashing stations and distributing hygiene kits to students. A total of 4,200 children and school staff members benefited directly from the facility upgrades and supplies, while an additional 800 community members benefited indirectly.



With funding from the Australian Government, Children Believe and our partners were able to provide handwashing stations and hygiene kits to schools.

As part of a special project called Hygiene Promotion and Access to Safe Drinking Water in Schools, we were involved in installing handwashing stations and 124 electric water dispensers, with a supply of disposable cups and replacement water jugs, in 31 schools. The water dispensers helped maintain sanitation and good health as students would not need to drink from the same faucet and risk spreading or becoming infected with COVID-19. The estimated direct reach from this project was 5,900 students with an additional 23,600 community members benefiting indirectly.

With the effectiveness of these activities, Children Believe Paraguay and our partners continued to install water dispensers and handwashing stations in schools that were not a part of these projects throughout our program areas.

Table 2 presents a breakdown of the children and parents/caregivers we helped through our COVID-19 prevention activities.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS/ CAREGIVERS CHILDREN BELIEVE PARAGUAY BENEFITED THROUGH COVID-19 PREVENTION ACTIVITIES

Number of children reached	FY21 Total
Boys	18,738
Girls	18,950
TOTAL	37,688
Number of parents/caregivers reached	FY21 Total
Men	5,005
Women	6,200
TOTAL	11,205
GRAND TOTAL	48,893

Improved nutritional intake practices and access to food

Contributing to the health and well-being of children and families, instilling healthier lifestyles and more nutritious eating habits was an important objective of our work. Good nutrition was, therefore, an important topic and focused on in several awareness raising activities that we carried out. The activities involved delivering tips and advice on healthy eating habits through communication platforms like community radio programs. This was complemented with the delivery of digital and printed materials with information about proper nutrition distributed online and in-person at events, community centres and schools. Our partners were effective in taking advantage of any opportunity to share this useful material.

Healthy food consumption was a challenge this past year due to COVID-19. The pandemic exacerbated the already precarious economic situations of our program communities due to the loss of livelihoods, leading many families to struggle with food insecurity.

Children Believe Paraguay and our partners addressed this problem directly by providing food to vulnerable families. We implemented two main strategies: the distribution of food kits and supporting community kitchens.

Food kits: The kits contained a variety of non-perishable food items and basic cooking supplies like rice, beans, flour, sugar and cooking oil. The contents varied depending on the community and the assessment of their needs. Also included were instructions on how to prepare and mix local, affordable ingredients to achieve the highest nutritional value. Information about general health and protection were provided, as well.

Community kitchens: These are traditional Paraguayan events that typically see strong participation from community women and youth. The event involves a group of community members who come together voluntarily to cook and share food with their neighbours. Each event delivers around 200 to 300 meals and is cost effective because the cooking is done free of charge. Children Believe Paraguay and our partner organizations collaborated with communities to organize these events and supplied them with all the necessary ingredients, cookware and gas or firewood.

The events provided much needed nutritious food to vulnerable families. As the events took place during the pandemic, every precaution was taken to prevent the spread of the virus. For example, community members were required to book appointments to pick up their meals in order to minimize the number of people in the event space at any given time. In addition to the meals, educational materials about healthcare, nutrition and COVID-19 prevention were handed out.

In several of our program areas, we also promoted and supported family gardens for sustainable access to fruits and vegetables. Basic gardening equipment, seeds and guidance were provided to families, and we were successful in helping them establish their own small-scale crops at home.

In total, our efforts to improve nutritional intake and access to food helped 30,486 people in FY21 (Table 3).



Children Believe Paraguay participated in organizing community kitchens in our program areas. These valuable events helped vulnerable families access food.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF PEOPLE CHILDREN BELIEVE PARAGUAY BENEFITED THROUGH NUTRITION AND FOOD SUPPORT

Number of children reached	FY21 Total
Boys	9,337
Girls	9,552
TOTAL	18,889
Number of adults reached	FY21 Total
Men	5,033
Women	6,564
TOTAL	11,597
GRAND TOTAL	30,486

Strengthened the delivery and use of maternal and newborn healthcare services

Amidst the COVID-19 prevention initiatives, Children Believe Paraguay continued our efforts to improve the delivery and use of essential health services for mothers and newborns. USFs are the first point of contact and main facilities for the provision of health services to families in our program areas. They play an important role in providing care for newborns and pregnant mothers, among other basic services to the general population.

To ensure they were able to meet the needs of families, particularly during the pandemic when the demand for health services increased, Children Believe and our partners intervened to help strengthen the capacity of USFs.

Our key activities involved improving infrastructures/facilities and providing a large array of supplies, including COVID-19 prevention items (face masks, cleaning agents, soap, sanitizer, etc.). As the government's budget for USFs is limited, most USFs lacked medical and other types of resources. Our contributions were much needed and allowed for greater access to and delivery of valuable services to our program communities.



USFs offer critical health services to communities in our program areas. Supporting their ongoing operation, Children Believe and our partner Crece provided supplies and infrastructure improvements.

In addition to strengthening USFs, we carried out several activities at the community level to support improvements in maternal and child health. These included workshops on breastfeeding for mothers and expectant mothers, and the nutrition and mental health of young children. Digital and printed materials offering health guidance to expectant mothers were distributed to increase knowledge about proper healthcare.

As a result of these activities, there was an increase in mothers from our program areas visiting medical facilities to give birth and for pre- and post-natal care.

We improved the capacity of USFs to provide better services to pregnant women and newborns, and by the end of the fiscal year, all of our program communities had at least one health clinic that they could access for specialized maternal and newborn care. Table 4 presents our total achievement in the area of maternal and newborn healthcare over the target for FY21.

TABLE 4: REACH OF CHILDREN BELIEVE PARAGUAY’S MATERNAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH INITIATIVES

Children Believe improved maternal and newborn health and nutritional intake through the increased delivery and use of maternal/child health services in target communities	FY21 Country Target	FY21 Country Actual
# of children, young women and mothers who improved their use of maternal and newborn professional healthcare services and their nutritional intake	12,188	24,916

Box 2: Success story – Improving access to food and essential health resources

Like many of Children Believe’s program communities, the Remansito program area struggled with the lack of government funding support and access to clean water, hygiene facilities and food during the pandemic. For example, during an inter-sectorial coordination meeting, the director of a local USF, which supports 3,000 families in the community, shared his concern about the lack of an engine to ensure a consistent supply of clean water to the clinic. To resolve the issue we donated an engine as well as printers and office supplies, which were basic resources the USF needed for the effective operation of their clinic. Further addressing the needs of the community, we also supplied community centres, health centres and schools with biosafety kits, allowing them to continue offering their valuable services to the 500+ people they receive every month.

To counter the rising food insecurity due to the loss of livelihoods from COVID-19, a variety of initiatives were implemented to guarantee access to food for local children. In total, 650 food kits and 800 meals were distributed to more than 230 families in Remansito.

“The Remansito community centre was by our side when our situation became more difficult,” shared Gladys, a member of the Remansito community. She continues:



They gave us a food kit, hand sanitizer and soap, which is important for us because our work requires us to go around everywhere.

Gladys’ husband lost his job as a bricklayer due to the COVID-19 lockdown. To continue making an income to take care of their family, Gladys and her husband collected plastic, cardboard, cans and glass – anything of value that they could find on the street – to sell. “We received food and health through the support given to us, so our children are taken care of. This is the most important thing right now,” Gladys says.

In addition to the kits and meals, 26 families were supported in building home gardens, a water tank was installed at a community centre and educational materials about nutrition, health, illness prevention and COVID-19 prevention protocols were circulated. Pregnant women and nursing mothers were given special attention with the organization of campaigns, online workshops and the distribution of information dedicated to maternal and newborn health.



Children Believe Paraguay improved the capacity and resources of various local institutions to elevate the services they provide to their communities.

III – ADVANCING CHILD RIGHTS, PARTICIPATION AND PROTECTION

Sustained community actions and proactive engagement to end violence against children

With our local partners, Children Believe Paraguay engaged community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide them with workshops and training on violence prevention, its causes and routes of action to address situations. We hosted discussions to educate and increase the awareness of child protection issues. The message that violence is unacceptable and that prevention is key to stopping it was clearly communicated.

Important to our activities was developing the ability of community members to identify signs of violence, and supporting a reporting system. Community members were trained to utilize the national protection system to report cases,⁶ while also to report cases to our partner organizations, ensuring situations were responded to effectively. The groups we engaged in each community received continuous follow-up and support in promoting child protection and violence prevention. They, in turn, passed on the knowledge and information gained to their broader communities. This initiative created mass community involvement, noticeably increasing engagement and a sense of ownership in preventing and addressing violence against children. Since increased levels of violence were reported during the pandemic lockdown, community members became vital actors in alerting cases of violence to our program and government authorities.



Children Believe and our partners hosted discussions about child rights and protection in our program communities to help raise awareness and prevent violence against children.

Additionally, training was provided to several Municipal Councils for Children's Rights (Conserjerías Municipales por los Derechos del Niño, Niña y Adolescente), part of the National Protection System. The training centred on the effective Protection Stop Light (Semáforo de Protección) methodology, created by our partner

⁶ This includes municipal and departmental channels, and initiating legal action when the situation is grave enough. When appropriate, our partner organizations also took action to address reports of violence.

Global Infancia and used by other partners in our program areas. During the pandemic, the CODENI operated at a reduced capacity, thus, the training was important in helping them operate optimally.

To help protect children and build a safe environment for them, it was essential to work directly with families. This was especially important during the lockdown as families were forced to stay home for extended periods of time while experiencing pressures from the pandemic, which potentially contributed to a toxic space.

With the loss of jobs, economic and health concerns, and school closures, children in our program communities were having to stay at home with their parents or caregivers, often in crowded, small and unstable environments.

Reports of violence at home rose during the pandemic. Children Believe Paraguay and our partners responded by first addressing reported cases and coordinating support for victims. Secondly, we pursued intervention initiatives, like carrying out family outreach campaigns, providing psychological support and counselling, and making home visits to the residences of children we suspected to be at risk.

Prevention was the third layer of this effort. We delivered virtual workshops, training sessions and activities about child rights and protection, and focused heavily on positive parenting, stress management and healthy behaviors within the context of the pandemic. Families of ECD children and girls were primarily targeted due to their heightened vulnerability. For ECD children, for example, we provided games and small projects for the entire family to participate in. This helped relieve stress and mitigate emotional distress. Keeping children busy and stress levels low at home helped prevent incidences of violence in many cases. Positive feedback on these efforts were received from families in our program areas.



A young child at home happily using activity materials. Together with our partners, Children Believe Paraguay distributed resources to engage families and support safe, healthy environments at home.

Virtual platforms, such as Whatsapp, were also utilized to create support and information groups, and to host podcasts for discussions on child protection. We implemented digital tools like an information website and the “OPA Ending Violence” app for teenagers. The teenage participants, in turn, became promoters of child rights and protection among their peers, families and communities.

In FY21, primarily due to the pandemic, we faced a variety of challenges related to keeping children and youth protected. However, these trials solidified the resolve of our staff, partners and program community actors to come together and overcome them. As a result, we implemented a number of new and innovative initiatives and saw a great degree of success. The combined reach of our protection efforts can be seen in Table 5.

TABLE 5: NUMBER OF PEOPLE CHILDREN BELIEVE PARAGUAY ENGAGED IN CHILD PROTECTION ACTIVITIES

Number of children reached	FY21 Total
Boys	8,581
Girls	9,252
TOTAL	17,833
Number of adults reached	FY21 Total
Men	2,750
Women	3,198
TOTAL	5,948
GRAND TOTAL	23,781

IV – PROMOTING EQUALITY FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

Increased girls' and women's participation through equal opportunities for leadership

In FY21, Children Believe Paraguay worked to empower women by focusing on promoting and supporting women's leadership in communities. The CBOs supported by our activities (including child, youth and adult groups) were primarily led by women: of the 17 adult CBOs, 14 were led by women; of the 15 child organizations, 13 were led by girls; and all of the 18 savings groups trained and assisted by Children Believe and our partners were led by women.

Working with CBOs and supporting their leadership by girls and women was important as CBOs connect with schools, government institutions and key local actors to advocate for services and resources to improve their communities. Thus, they are central in shaping the future of local children, families and other community members.

Supporting this effort further, we provided training for girls and boys on gender equality, gender stereotypes, the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) in schools and supported them in becoming 'purple agents' (girls and boys that advocate for the rights of girls and women). Additionally, we organized forums and activities with children and youth to connect with their peers and discuss topics related to gender equality.



A young girl with her peers raising their voice to advocate for girls' rights. Children Believe provided training and opportunities to support the empowerment of girls and women.

Box 3: Success story – Cultivating young advocates to promote child and girls’ rights

In Paraguay, although we have seen progress in the civic participation of children and adolescents, advancement in gender equality is still lagging, particularly for women to access leadership positions and other roles traditionally assigned to men. To address this, Children Believe Paraguay worked with local partners to ensure girls’ participation at all levels of our programming, and during the pandemic, we doubled our efforts to make sure they were not left behind.

In the Limpio Sur program area, we worked closely with child and youth school associations, ‘purple agents’ groups and other child/youth networks to encourage the equal participation of girls in leadership positions within these organizations. The engagement of girls was successful and the groups gained strength and momentum, eventually having influence on the governance of their schools.

Ruth is a 15-year-old youth from the Limpio Sur program area who is active in her school and community. She is one of the 140 youth who participated in Children Believe-supported initiatives where she learned about her rights as a girl and adolescent, how to advocate for them, developed her skills and confidence, and connected with peers. These were valuable opportunities for her. Ruth explains:



It’s important to be involved in eradicating these rights violations from a young age so that we can create a better future for us, our communities and the next generation. If we don’t get involved from the beginning, we won’t have the knowledge, skills and confidence to express ourselves when we’re in a position of being heard. These chances can’t be wasted.

Ruth is one example of a civically engaged young woman supported by Children Believe and our partners. With the drive and commitment of youth like Ruth, young people have been creating more recognition and actions to support the rights of children and girls in their communities.

Improved the adoption and enforcement of gender-sensitive programs and strategies

Advocating for national change related to gender-based issues is a challenge in a conservative country like Paraguay. To achieve the greatest impact from our efforts, our focus in FY21 was to create awareness on gender equality and advocate with the local government for the protection of girls and women in our program communities.

For instance, in one community, we led a GBV awareness campaign. As part of the campaign, we trained teachers, members of school parent committees, Management Teams of Educational Institutions (Equipos de Gestión de Instituciones Educativas), financial savings groups and School Delegates Networks (student representative groups) on the importance of promoting women’s rights and the prevention of GBV. We also disseminated campaign key messages through podcasts, radios programs and social networks, and put up GBV prevention posters in schools, health clinics and community centres.

The campaign had a broad impact, reaching 103 teachers, 11 school principals, 2,728 children and adolescents, and an additional 1,200 community members.

We also collaborated with the local government to organize a campaign to support the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in public spaces. Leaflets and other printed materials with information about GBV were distributed and we hosted speaking engagements in public spaces to talk about the issue.

In addition to the campaigns, we organized various workshops on gender equality. For example, one workshop involved both adults and children discussing the topic, identifying challenges to achieve equality and brainstorming ways to overcome these challenges. Printed materials about the importance of sharing responsibilities between both parents and guiding parents on their responsibilities to promote gender equality were circulated.

The total of the number of people we engaged to promote girls and women’s rights, and prevent gender discrimination is provided in Table 6.

TABLE 6: NUMBER OF PEOPLE CHILDREN BELIEVE PARAGUAY ENGAGED IN GENDER EQUALITY EFFORTS

Children Believe’s programs facilitate the creation of spaces and opportunities for girls and women, ensuring their voices are heard in societal decision-making processes that affect their lives	FY21 Country Target	FY21 Country Actual
# of girls, women and other community members who promoted the collective rights of girls and women, and prevented gender-discriminatory norms and practices	3,285	7,541

V – PARTNERING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH FOR CHANGE

Strengthened the capacity of children and youth to claim their rights and hold duty-bearers accountable

Children Believe Paraguay and our partners carried out a variety of activities in FY21 for children and with their involvement that incorporated the Child-Friendly Accountability Methodology (CFAM). The CFAM is a ChildFund Alliance tool that strengthens children's understanding about child rights and empowers them to lead and organize themselves to respond to rights issues in their communities. The impact of this method can be seen in the following story.

Box 4: Success story – Young people in Remansito effect positive change in their community

Having taken part in Children Believe-supported activities that applied the CFAM, children and adolescents from the CORORE Committee in our Remansito program area became motivated to actively address the health and well-being issues children were facing in their community. Equipped with confidence and tools to organize their actions, the committee came together to establish a plan and see it through. This involved conducting a thorough analysis on the issues, engaging young people and community members, and developing solutions based on their findings.

What resulted was the creation of 'report cards' with criteria to evaluate the efficacy of critical institutions for children – USFs and schools. This was a valuable tool to help ensure children's right to education and good health were being met. Further, this effort led to the signing of a Letter of Agreement with local authorities that supported the establishment of a Remansito Community Management Team. The team would be made up of all sectors of the community, including health, education, security, CBOs, church groups, as well as involving children and adolescents, to develop actions to rectify issues identified.

In conjunction with our CFAM activities, Children Believe offered several internal and external opportunities for young people to raise their voices and be heard. Internal opportunities included engagement and consultations with children when developing Children Believe Paraguay's program protection and participation policies as well as our advocacy guide. Our local partners also involved children and youth in their planning processes and encouraged an open dialogue with them in the implementation of activities.

External opportunities included creating occasions for children to speak and lead the organization of activities, and supporting their participation in city, department and national civic events and associations. For example, children from one of our program areas organized a virtual international forum on child rights, with which we provided assistance. The event included participation from children in Paraguay, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. Young people from another program area hosted a virtual Safari for groups of schoolchildren. All the Safari activities were designed, led and monitored by the young people in our program.



Young people from a school council organization in the Caaguazú program area. Children Believe and our partners provide support to children and youth to become civically engaged and stand up for their rights.

In the past fiscal year, we also gave our support to children who attended an accountability forum with local government authorities. The forum enabled local young people to have an audience with governing bodies to discuss government activities that impact children and youth (particularly within the context of the pandemic), their concerns, needs and possible solutions to address issues.

As well, some of the young people we supported were part of the municipal and departmental lead councils of the National System for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Children and Adolescents. Others were active with the Red Nacional de Niñez y Adolescencia (REDNNA), a national network of child organizations that participate in national governmental accountability spaces. In addition, the Asociación en Defensa de los Derechos de la Niñez y la Adolescencia (ADDNA) is a network of 27 child representatives fully comprised of young people from organizations associated with our programs. All of these networks of children engage in municipal, departmental and national spaces to advocate for child rights.

Over FY21, Children Believe and our partners worked effectively to support and create spaces in which girls, boys and adolescents could lead and participate in civic concerns. Our activities had great traction and reach with the use of virtual tools and platforms, resulting in us considerably surpassing our target for the year, as can be seen in Table 7.

TABLE 7: NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE EMPOWERED THROUGH CHILDREN BELIEVE’S CHILD/YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND CAPACITY-BUILDING INITIATIVES

Children Believe’s programs have helped establish new networks, promoted collaboration and supported the civic engagement of children and youth	FY21 Country Target	FY21 Country Actual
# of adolescent boys and girls who meaningfully participated in and led child/youth agencies to promote their rights, amplify their voices and increase their influence in policy or actions that affect their future	9,336	52,845

VI – CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

In FY21, Children Believe Paraguay officially launched its Centre of Excellence (COE), focusing on child protection and participation.

The goal of our COE is to create opportunities and resources for key stakeholders (communities, governments, NGOs, funders, researchers, etc.) to share and learn from each other and contribute to regional, national and global advancement in child protection and participation.

Lending to this, at the launch of our COE, Children Believe shared four case studies as part of our “Incidence for child protection against violence” information series. The series captures the strategies and significant impact of the key initiatives we pursued through our programs over the last seven years, and offers a solid foundation from which to build on.

Supporting our COE further, we promoted community actions and facilitated the proactive engagement of CBOs and other community members to ensure collective accountability to protect children and youth from abuse, neglect, exploitation, trafficking and other forms of violence. Around 30 activities related to child participation and protection against violence were implemented in FY21. They included training, workshops and support delivered directly to community members, children’s organizations, schools and local governments.

Such initiatives led to a joint action with the Ministry of Children and Adolescents, resulting in the creation of the National Policy and Strategy for Child Participation. The draft policy, which is expected to be completed near the end of the 2021 calendar year, will shape the direction and set the priorities for promoting child and youth participation in Paraguay.



Children Believe Paraguay engaged CBOs, community members and institutions to strengthen collaboration and protective mechanisms to keep children safe.

Through creating child-friendly collaborative environments at the regional, national and global levels, great strides have been made in promoting broad accountability for child protection and participation.

VII – STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Strategic collaborations and partnerships have continued to be crucial for Children Believe Paraguay and our impact. Our relationship with the Ministry of Children and Adolescents, the main duty-bearer for children nationally, has continued to strengthen and expand in FY21. In addition to this, over the past fiscal year we achieved the following key results:

1. The approval of Children Believe Paraguay's proposed changes and recommendations for the National Policy and Strategy for Child Participation.
2. Joint participation in the production of the Ministry of Children and Adolescents' Brand Manual for the National Campaign on Child Protection, which references the work and impact of Children Believe Paraguay.
3. Our prominent participation, for the second consecutive year, in the annual national campaign on child protection against sexual abuse. This opportunity, in partnership with UNICEF, Plan International and SOS Children's Villages, enabled us to strengthen our bonds with key international organizations and the Ministry of Children and Adolescents.
4. As a lead member of the National Network of ECD organizations, we successfully implemented the "IV Workshop on Healthy Development in Environments Free of Violence," with the Ministry of Children and Adolescents. The success of this workshop helped us build our ECD networks and furthered our leadership position in ECD and child protection.
5. Invitation to participate in the preparation of the new National Plan for Early Childhood as a member of the Technical Advisory Team designated by the Ministry of Children and Adolescents.
6. The positioning of Children Believe Paraguay as the leader of the Front for Children and Adolescents⁷ in the revision of the official annual report on the 20 commitments to children and adolescents, and in the results presentation to children.
7. As a representative of the Front for Children and Adolescents, Children Believe was an active participant of the Childhood Investment Inter-Institutional Committee led by the Minister of Childhood, enabling us to further expand our network and raise the visibility of our organization.

Children Believe Paraguay has been leading the activities of the Front for Children and Adolescents for over three years and under our leadership, the coalition has substantially grown and made significant headway. During this time, the coalition was able to gain the National Network of Children and Adolescents as a key member, secure the signed agreement of the President of Paraguay to the 20 commitments in favour of children and established an indicator system in the Ministry of Children and Adolescents to monitor the fulfillment of the 20 commitments.

In addition to this, Children Believe Paraguay continued to maintain a close relationship with the ChildFund Alliance through the expansion of the CFAM across all of our programs, our participation in the Advocacy Task Force and in the Program Choice Working Group. We also developed a new relationship in FY21 through a grant provided by the Australian Embassy in Paraguay and the successful implementation of the Safe Return to Classes project by our partner Crecer.

Through these activities, we built and strengthened our relationships with like-minded NGOs, government bodies and funders, and enhanced Children Believe's position as a leader in supporting children and communities to thrive.

⁷ Front for Children and Adolescents is a coalition of 25 local and international non-governmental organizations and networks that promote child development.

ANNEX I

Annex I: Children Believe Paraguay's implementing partners

Partner	Operation
Fundación Alda Spanish for Alda Foundation	The Alda Foundation has been operating in Paraguay since 2003. It became a partner of Children Believe in 2010 and is currently implementing one Children Believe program in the city of Limpio Sur, located in the Central department. Alda's priorities are education, building networks in schools to increase educational outcomes, gender equality and vocational training, and its work involves advocacy, collaboration with the public and private sectors and generating evidence to support initiatives. Alda is comprised of 15 permanent staff members and operates on an annual budget of \$332,145 CDN.
Global Infancia Spanish for Global Childhood	Global Infancia has been operating in Paraguay since 1995. It became a partner of Children Believe in 2012 and is currently implementing two Children Believe programs: one in the semi-rural area of Remansito in the city of Villa Hayes, Presidente Hayes department, and the other in the semi-rural area of Villeta in the city of Villeta, Central department. Global Infancia's priorities are child rights, child protection and participation, vocational training and strengthening communities through collaboration and self-management. The organization is comprised of 19 staff members and operates on an annual budget of \$341,550 CDN.
Organizacion No Gubernamental Crecer (Crecer) Spanish for Non-Governmental Organization, Crecer	Organizacion No Gubernamental Crecer (Crecer) was established in 2015 and became a partner of Children Believe in the same year. It is currently implementing two Children Believe programs: one in a semi-rural community in the city of Caaguazú, Caaguazú Department, and the other in three rural cities – Blas Garay, Caaguazú department, and MJ Troche and Villarrica, Guairá department. Crecer's priorities are education, child participation, development and capacity building, advocacy and income generation. The organization is comprised of 35 staff members and operates on an annual budget of \$437,085 CDN.



Children Believe works globally to empower children to dream fearlessly, stand up for what they believe in – and be heard. For 60+ years, we’ve brought together brave young dreamers, caring supporters and partners, and unabashed idealists. Together, we’re driven by a common belief: creating access to education – inside and outside of classrooms – is the most powerful tool children can use to change their world.

A member of ChildFund Alliance, Children Believe is part of a global network of 12 child-focused development organizations working to create opportunities for children and youth, their families and communities. ChildFund helps nearly 23-million children and their families in more than 70 countries overcome poverty and underlying conditions that prevent children from achieving their full potential. We work to end violence against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children and youth to create lasting change and elevate their voices in decisions that affect their lives.

CHILDREN BELIEVE PARAGUAY

Flores Cantero 242 C/Telmo Aquino,
Barrio Mburicao,
Asunción, Paraguay

childrenbelieveparaguay.org
paraguayinfo@childrenbelieve.ca
595.021.229.835