



“Casa M.A.N.U. was born from a terrible loss. We took something positive from our pain, and moved forward creating a home for children with a team of volunteers that do what the Casas family had done for Manu”

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Casa M.A.N.U. 

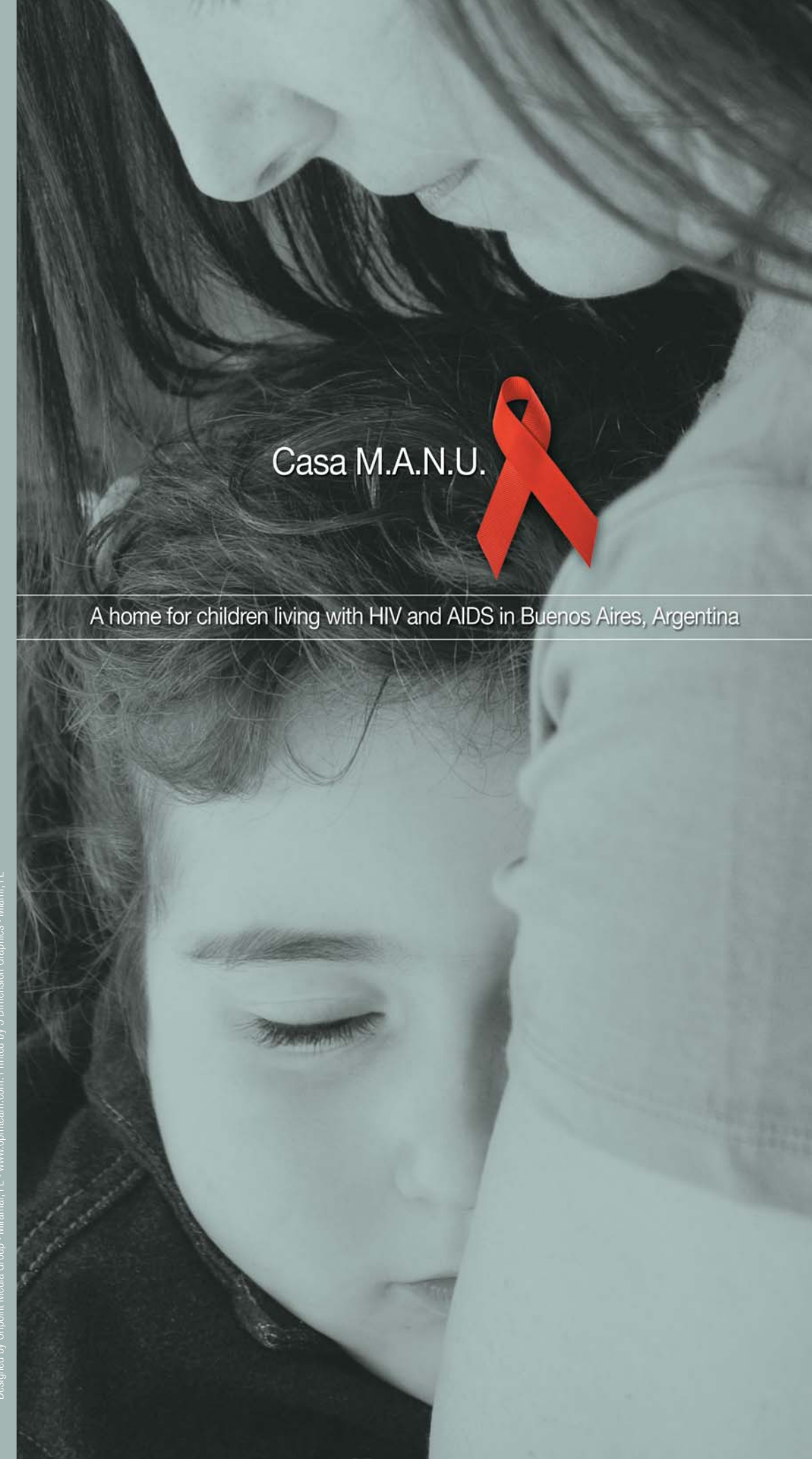
We invite you to visit our web site at www.casamanu.org.ar to learn more about Casa M.A.N.U.



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Casa M.A.N.U. 

A home for children living with HIV and AIDS in Buenos Aires, Argentina



When Silvia Casas, a volunteer at the Red Cross, cradled a three-week-old baby in her arms, abandoned by his mother, she first noticed the blood under his fingernails and his damaged knuckles. A pediatrician confirmed that the wounds were from having continually scratched and scraped at the boards of his crib, having been left alone for prolonged periods of time by his biological parents.

Manu, as he became to be known, was left at a Buenos Aires hospital in June 1990 with syphilis, hepatitis B and an ailment that nobody knew too much about - HIV. Manu's prognosis was terminal. According to doctors he would live, at most, a few months.

As a last resort, the coordinator of Silvia's section of the Red Cross phoned her one evening and asked if her family might be able to take Manu for a few days, or at most, a couple of weeks. Silvia already had a family; married at 15, she had a husband and three children when she was called on to make what would be a life-changing decision. "I asked for some time to think about it. I phoned my husband and he just said: if they're calling us, it's for a reason".

Silvia Casas consequently became the first Argentine woman to adopt a HIV-positive baby, an adoption that was finalized when Manu was three years old, already having greatly transcended his original prognosis. The Casas family had begun to look for answers, for information, to educate themselves about HIV/AIDS in a time where it was still an unfamiliar and alien illness.

Manu enjoyed a relatively normal childhood under the care of the Casas family. He went to school, complained about eating his vegetables, played and ran around as much as his health would permit him to. Everyone that knew him tells of a child full of life, hope and happiness, but Manu's health began to deteriorate rapidly. At the age of seven he managed to have his first viral load assessment to gauge the progress of the virus. It was then that Dr. Jorge Vila made adjustments to Manu's medication and informed Silvia that although Manu was clinically compensated, his immune system was destroyed. After this modification Manu lived some "wonderful months" but his fate had already been sealed and he died shortly after his eighth birthday.

"Casa M.A.N.U. was born from a terrible loss. We took something positive from our pain, and moved forward creating a home for children with a team of volunteers that do what the Casas family had done for Manu", says Alejandra Casas, Silvia's daughter and coordinator of Casa M.A.N.U., which stands for 'mucho amor nos une' (much love unites us).

Casa M.A.N.U. opened in 2002 as a non-governmental organization. The current house was lent to Casa M.A.N.U. Currently they have 14 children living there between the ages of 3 months to 18 years old in two bedrooms. Many children arrive at Casa M.A.N.U. with AIDS and in less than a year, with the care, medications and the love they receive, have undetectable levels of the virus (HIV).

Unless you see you see the multicolored cards on the kitchen wall with the children's medication schedule on them, it's easy to forget why they are there at all. It resembles any other large family.

More than 17 children have passed through the doors of Casa M.A.N.U. in the last six years. While some have been there since the home's opening, others found adoptive parents and left the house to start a new life with their new families.

In 2007, Argentina's former president Nestor Kirchner became interested in Silvia's work. Casa M.A.N.U. was awarded a government subsidy enabling them to purchase a vehicle to take the children to school and begin building a new facility. With time, and much needed funds, the new house will be built and a more suitable and comfortable environment for the children of Casa M.A.N.U., present and future.

Silvia has since adopted another HIV-positive child, continues to work with the Red Cross, and travels the country with the National Program of HIV/AIDS giving talks and workshops on prevention and other HIV/AIDS related issues.

As an organization Casa M.A.N.U. has become a point of reference regarding issues linked with HIV+ children and adolescents in Argentina. Casa M.A.N.U. benefits from the trust and respect of the general community and HIV/AIDS related governmental and non-governmental organizations alike. The association has 20 volunteers, most of which are over 25 years of age, some of which are also HIV+. Since its creation, Casa M.A.N.U. has focused part of its activities on the general community. Presently, the association is working with the Garrahan Hospital in Buenos Aires, which is the main treatment facility for children affected by HIV/AIDS in Argentina.

The Secretary of Culture in the Municipality of Partido de Esteban Echeverría (where Casa M.A.N.U. is located), CLAPAR (Center of Attention to Patients with High Risk Infections) associated with the School of Dentistry of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), is a member of RAONAS (Argentine Network of Organizations for Children and Adolescents with HIV/AIDS) and participates in activities in conjunction with the Argentine Network of Women Living with HIV/AIDS, the Foundation Miguel Abuelo and the Association "Por Las Dudas", all NGOs with extensive work in the prevention and the awareness of HIV/AIDS.

There have been two important projects with foreign funding which recognize the outstanding work by Casa M.A.N.U.

"A better life for children living with HIV/AIDS" was sponsored by CIAT (International Coalition of Activists for Treatment), with funds from Foundation TIDES, whose fundamental objective has been "to improve the adhesiveness and quality of children affected by HIV/AIDS" (2005).

"Making a happy home for children living with HIV/AIDS" financed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, represented in Argentina by UBATEC S.A. (2006).

There is also a free Advice Service, with virtual and personal interactions, provided by the board of Casa M.A.N.U. and their trained volunteers.

Currently there are 14 children living in Casa M.A.N.U. between the ages of three months and 18 years. Nine newborns have been adopted with negative results for HIV after receiving the corresponding treatment. Four children have rejoined biological families following diagnosis and treatment after having achieved an excellent adherence to their treatment. Another four children have been adopted by families close to Casa M.A.N.U. after receiving essential training in the daily care of the children and having formed relationships with the adopted children based on mutual love. Our work is a clear demonstration of a vital commitment towards children affected by HIV/AIDS.

Today, we are confronted with a difficult challenge; the building of the permanent home for Casa M.A.N.U. since the current home lacks space and comfort for the children. A new facility will allow the children all the comforts needed to guarantee and improve the quality of life for the children of Casa M.A.N.U., who not only need medication to sustain the adherence to the diverse treatments but also air, sun and space to play and enjoy themselves.

We are in need of economic resources in order to continue with this mission. The project of the new house is a dream and together we can realize it. We need your help to make the new Casa M.A.N.U. a place to carry on working for a better quality of life for children living with HIV/AIDS.

We encourage you to make a monetary contribution to Casa M.A.N.U. and be part of our campaign "A Brick for M.A.N.U.". Please find our bank information below. All contributions, regardless of the amount, are greatly appreciated.

Recipient: Asociacion Civil Casa M.A.N.U.
Bank: Banco Provincia de Buenos Aires
Branch: 5001
Account: 050053/1
C.B.U.: 0140058801500105005311



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