

Bringing



Diagnosis, Treatment, and Awareness in Mexico

Joyce Cooper-Kahn, PhD, interviews Maria Elena Frade Rubio

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Proyectodah (Project for ADHD), an education and advocacy effort to support individuals with ADHD in Mexico. The Proyectodah is the achievement of Maria Elena Frade Rubio, created with the support of the Fundacion Cultural Federico Hoth, a family foundation. It is a project born out of her own experiences, given energy and urgency by her concern over the lack of knowledge and services in her country for children and families dealing with ADHD.

Among the accomplishments of the Proyectodah is a partnership with CHADD to translate the Parent to Parent program into Spanish and to train and certify parents in Mexico so they can offer the class. Over the years, the Proyectodah has partnered with research, clinical, and advocacy groups around the world, and Rubio has built a dynamic team that shares her commitment.

Looking at the list of accomplishments of the Proyectodah, one is reminded of the famous words of Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

You have devoted the last decade of your life to teaching others about ADHD and building resources to support children and families in Mexico. What drives you? What is the source of your passion?

I am definitely passionate about the education of my family, as well as the lack of information and proper doctors in Mexico, because I had to diagnose and tend to the ADHD in my family. I learned that when both medication and education work hand in hand, my children got ahead in life. I was very upset to have wasted so much time because one of my kids wasn't diagnosed until he was a teenager.

You wrote in your book about some of your own struggles as a parent of children with ADHD. What was your biggest ADHD-related parenting challenge and how did you work through it?

My biggest challenge as a mother was trying to explain to others what ADHD was, for them to understand or sympathize. An even worse challenge was the low self-esteem caused by ADHD, not just on those who suffer from it, but for the whole family. The best way to fight this is by assuring the children that even though the treatment is lengthy, as grownups they will be able to lead great, productive lives that can make them feel very proud of themselves.

How prevalent are ADHD experts in Mexico? How available are services such as medication management, behavior management, psychoeducational testing, and counseling?

How has this changed over the course of your work?

There is very little help for children with ADHD in Mexico because there are very few professionals who know about it. In Mexico there are only 225 child psychiatrists and only 190 child neurologists. Because of this, medication, behavior management, and psychological education are available only to very narrow social circles within the population. Most children have not even been identified or diagnosed with ADHD, because of the lack of doctors. Thanks to the work of the foundation, things have changed. Before its work, for example, few children in Mexico City went to the doctor for ADHD, whereas now, this disorder is the third most common reason for consultation in doctors' offices. Because of this, we are lowering the specialist level to make it available to head doctors, parents or pediatricians, so they can provide these services to this increasing number of people.

Does the educational system in Mexico have regulations that require individualized plans for students with ADHD or other diagnosed problems that affect classroom learning and performance? Are teachers and school administrators well trained in teaching students with ADHD?

Many teachers in Mexico do not have the proper training to handle students with ADHD. Our foundation has already reached seventeen states in the country, training teachers with great rates of success. We have trained 14,323 teachers, and this is visible in all the states we've worked in.

Have you noticed any cultural and other differences between how families in Mexico and in the United States deal with ADHD?

It's amazing how much Mexican and American families have in common. Whenever I sit down to talk to the parents of children with ADHD from either the United States or Mexico, we immediately hit it off. We endure the same sorrows and low self-esteem problems, even when the education systems and attention to ADHD may be different.

What have you learned from your work in Mexico that could be useful to Latino families in the United States?

I have learned that Latino people are not self-centered; we have a more collective culture and therefore we learn better in groups. We have a support group for parents of children with ADHD which is not precisely intended to provide psychological aid, but rather to offer a space where people can share their burdens, applaud their successes, and learn how to plan and achieve assertive strategies that can help them with their families in a structured way. I believe that in the United States, Latino families would learn more effectively in groups.

What recommendations would you provide to parents that are considering creating an ADHD parent support organization?

My recommendation would be to establish the intended goals clearly, to plan them, and not give up until they're met, as long as they are also intended to help people with ADHD as well as their families.

What do you feel are your greatest accomplishments in the field of ADHD over the last decade? What are your goals for the next ten years?

My biggest achievement has been to have instructed 56,657 people in seventeen states in Mexico—leaders in education, medicine, psychology, and parents. My goal for the next ten years is to spread ourselves throughout the Mexican republic, because we are still fifteen states short! 🇲🇽

Joyce Cooper-Kahn, PhD, is a clinical psychologist based in Maryland. She is coauthor of the award-winning book, *Late, Lost and Unprepared: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children with Executive Functioning* (Woodbine, 2008) and coauthor of *Boosting Executive Skills in the Classroom* (Jossey-Bass, 2013). She would like to express her gratitude to Jose Bauermeister, PhD, for his assistance with this interview.



Maria Elena Frade Rubio (front row, center, and inset, opposite page) joins participants in a conference sponsored by Proyectodah.