

Caring Across Communities Success Story

Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic



A Grab for Attention, A Cry for Help: Maria's Story

Maria was in danger of being written off. She had become more noted for her disruptive classroom behavior and her complaining about work than for any of her other traits. Maria would protest loudly when assigned a task, cry inconsolably when she didn't get what she wanted, and respond with angry outbursts when the teacher resorted to sending her to the principal's office. Even though she was just in the ninth grade, few of her teachers or administrators thought she would graduate.

Maria came to the U.S. with her parents when she was eight years old. Upon arrival she spoke no English but managed to learn the language well enough to advance through elementary and middle school. Along the way to high school, she became depressed and desperate for attention—even if it meant keeping her classmates from their work. Her fellow students began to dread Maria's outbursts and, as a result, isolated her, avoiding interaction with her whenever they could. The situation was spiraling out of control.

School administrators spent more time with Maria than just about anyone else. After being sent out of the classroom, Maria would spend long hours in the principal's office waiting for her mother to be able to leave work and pick her

up. Her mother, too, had become desperate and asked the school what they could recommend.

Fortunately for Maria, the school had begun to work with the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic, a Caring Across Communities partner dedicated to increasing and improving mental health services for children. Maria began to participate in that organization's 3R's Project, designed to teach struggling youth resiliency, relationships and recovery.

Meeting regularly with a therapist, Maria worked to develop self-regulation skills. She was also referred to a child psychiatrist who recommended to Maria's mother that she could benefit from carefully administered medication to further assist in her self-control. The psychiatrist worked closely with Maria to monitor and assist in her progress.

At the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic, a family advocate began to help Maria apply the skills of self-regulation in her classroom performance. At the same time, the advocate worked with Maria's teachers to develop effective interventions that kept Maria focused and the other students working on their own activities. The process also resulted in a better assessment of Maria's

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educational needs and she began to receive the special education she required to succeed. It took a special group of people to recognize that Maria was not a bad child, just a young person crying out for the help she needed.

In the months since Maria began this process, she has shown significant progress, has become less depressed and better able to handle school work and relationships. Her sights are set on advancing to the 10th grade and beyond.

But for many children like Maria—students who seem to be more trouble than they're worth—help is not always there. According to the Surgeon General's office, there are approximately 15 million children in America with diagnosable emotional or behavior health disorders. Too often, the last in line to get help are the children that were not born in the United States.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is supporting Caring Across Communities and its partners to address this need by increasing and improving mental health services for all of America's children. This work creates immediate and lasting change where families live, learn, work and play. Learn more about how Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic finds quality of life solutions for people like Maria as well as the community in which she lives at: <http://www.healthinschools.org>.

For more information about the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic, contact Eric Inouye at: einouye@lacgc.org

For more information about the Caring Across Communities national program and related resources visit: <http://healthinschools.org/Immigrant-and-Refugee-Children/Caring-Across-Communities.aspx>

Center for Health and Health Care in Schools
George Washington University
2121 K Street, NW, Suite 250
Washington, DC 20037
202-466-3396 fax: 202-466-3467
www.healthinschools.org

