

On Fostering Counseling Worldwide: A Latino Counselor's Experiences at NBCC Headquarters

By George Davy Vera

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Professional counseling in Venezuela and other Latin American countries is getting stronger and more socially visible. School counseling activities started during the 1930s and '40s, and have grown tremendously since then. Because of this growth, several professional counseling development needs are emerging; two of these needs are related to counseling professionalization and leadership. A way to address these needs is to create long-lasting professional interactions with international counseling organizations and related organizations worldwide, as well as with recognized counseling departments at universities,

and to attend leading counseling conferences and specialized training on diverse counseling knowledge and technology.

To this end, I organized a postdoctoral proposal focusing on these needs. My employer, the University of Zulia, accepted my proposal and granted me a sabbatical leave. However, many questions remained. Where should I go or who should I interact with in order to develop my postdoctoral proposal? In what part of the world are the professional counseling matters included in my proposal presently being dealt with?

The answers came in September 2009 when NBCC, a leading international professional counseling organization, invited me to be a visiting scholar and counselor in residence from March to May 2010. Accepting that invitation was one of the best professional decisions I've ever made because my experiences at NBCC helped me to reshape some of my leadership competencies and to develop a comprehensive view about the internationalization of the counseling profession.

At NBCC, I had the opportunity to engage in ongoing dialogue and interactions with well-known counseling leaders and scholars. Topics such as leadership, continuing education, counseling organizations, legislation, advocacy, counselor education program accreditation, and the challenges faced by the counseling profession worldwide were amply researched and discussed. Being able to exchange knowledge about these matters was very invigorating and helped me to understand some foreseen international trends in counseling development; to see strengths, differences and similitude; and to identify some key ideas for further collaborations and joint projects with counseling leaders and organizations in Latin America.

Additionally, discussions and practice experiences related to services, supervision, ethics and certification helped me to see how professional counseling leadership

The Latest Developments With the MHF Credential

NBCC International (NBCC-I) is proud to be associated with organizations and institutions in countries worldwide as the Mental Health Facilitator (MHF) program continues to expand to meet the diverse needs of citizens of these countries.

Liberia

Four NBCC-I-registered MHF master trainers traveled to Monrovia, Liberia, in March 2010 to conduct an initial training of trainers in partnership with Lott Carey Mission School. These four master trainers were sponsored by The Joseph Alliance and were trained by NBCC-I in the first MHF master training class, which was held in January 2010. Sixty-seven trainers received their registration certificate at the conclusion of the training. The group included teachers, administrative staff and ministers. NBCC-I will continue to work with the master trainers and Lott Carey Mission School to expand the program in Liberia.

Malawi and Tanzania

The Guidance, Counselling and Youth Development Centre for Africa (GCYDCA) continues to be the leader for MHF development in Africa. NBCC-I staff recently traveled to the center to discuss the MHF program, among other projects. While there, staff met with guidance teachers trained in the curriculum and a group of students from several schools to talk about issues affecting children in Malawi. The guidance teachers have formed MHF clubs to assist Malawian children with their unique challenges.

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NBCC-I staff also had the opportunity to meet with GCYDCA leadership and two registered MHF trainers from the December 2009 Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, training of trainers to discuss the expansion of the MHF program in Tanzania. A second training of trainers is being scheduled for fall 2010. The MHF curriculum will also be translated into Swahili for use in Tanzania and potentially in other African countries.

“Tanzania history of mental health services is riddled with limited resources and poor management, even for common disorders like depression, anxiety and traumatic conditions. Hence the coming of NBCC-I with its MHF program will indeed be very resourceful to alleviate the situation,” says Eliezer R. Mdakilwa, president of Tanzania Users and Survivors of Psychiatry Organisation (TUSPO), an NGO in Dar Es Salaam.

Mexico

Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, the headquarters for NBCC Mexico, was the site of the MHF pilot training in 2007. The feedback from the participants in that training was essential in finalizing the original MHF curriculum. NBCC Mexico recently decided to expand the program in that country and held an MHF training in conjunction with a training of trainers at the university in April 2010. Twenty-four trainers and MHF registrants completed the program and became registered with NBCC-I. Participants included people from a wide variety of professions and some of the original MHF registrants from the pilot training.



Dr. Patricia Garcia Fernandez, MHF master trainer; Mr. Eitan Kleinberg, coordinator, NBCC Mexico; Dr. Daniel Paredes, MHF master trainer

Master Training of Trainers

The second MHF master training was held at NBCC headquarters in early May 2010. Eleven counselors were trained and registered as master trainers. As the program continues to expand, the addition of qualified master trainers who can assist in developing it are welcome. Individuals who are invited to become master trainers bring with them a combination of qualifications that are important to ongoing MHF development, such as early involvement in the program, international training and travel experience, and experience with credential development in the United States and/or other countries. NBCC-I staff are proud to welcome Dr. Fred Bradley, Dr. Matt Buckley, Dr. Marcheta Evans, Dr. Lorraine Giardino, Dr. Judy Green, Dr. Lynn Hall, Dr. Kurt Kraus, Dr. Dwaine Phifer, Dr. Stephen Sharp, Dr. Mary Jo Trombley, and Dr. George Vera as MHF master trainers. Plans for developing the MHF in other countries and within the U.S. were discussed with this dynamic group.

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and professional practice are likely to be successful when professional counselors and counselor educators are able to conceptualize their practice focused on shared professional values, knowledge and procedures that are linked and that respond to the needs and contextual realities of people and societies.

Attending the ACA conference in Pittsburgh was another key experience. I was invited to speak about current challenges in Venezuela as part of a forum on mental health counseling worldwide. This gave me the opportunity to connect professionally and network with conference attendees from other Latin American institutions.

One unforgettable hands-on learning experience I had at NBCC was the master training workshop for the Mental Health Facilitator (MHF) program. As part of the MHF training, I learned how to teach basic skills that almost everybody can use to aid those who may not have access to professional mental health services.

During my time at NBCC, I touched some cutting-edge trends in the counseling profession, witnessed the challenges of devising the best possible ways to meet the needs of those we serve, and shared a vision for counseling worldwide. My deepest gratitude to NBCC’s team members—you are making a difference in the world of professional counseling.