



Inspiration in Community Psychology: Carlos Luis Zatarain

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Figure 1 Used under CCO

working with the Jesuits had instilled in him a commitment to understand and change social issues and systems. Following his spiritual trainings he ended up finishing his undergraduate degree in psychology while working for almost 10 years in the call center industry.

In 2011, Carlos Luis Zatarain was deciding whether to become a Jesuit priest. By then, he has been involved with the Jesuits in Mexico for 7 years and has even undergone the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The experiences with the Jesuits involved developing a critical conscience, the process of identifying how inequality and power shape our reality. Through developing his critical conscience Carlos became compelled to advocate for these causes, but because he contemplated having a family one day, he ultimately decided against becoming a priest. However, learning from and

The turning point came in 2012 in a form of a very tempting, major job offer - doubling his salary with great benefits. This is when Carlos realized that he needed to take time off to think about it and go on a spiritual retreat. His conclusion was that he would never choose an employment based on the income and benefits, that his career would be dedicated to pursuing something different. Instead, he would choose employment based on the positive difference he could make in others' lives and ask: "How is this work going to make my community better?" He felt compelled, morally and spiritually, to start looking into careers where he could put his skills into service for the community. Following the retreat the search began, and because he wished to employ his psychology degree occupationally, he made a list of fields that he wanted to explore like Social Psychology and Sociology, looking for areas that might address some of the causes and topics emphasized by the Jesuits. However, he felt something was not fitting while learning about these fields, in terms of being able to understand and change social factors affecting communities. While on the Social Psychology network website, Carlos came across a section called "related fields," and discovered Community Psychology (CP). Intrigued, he started by reading the description of the field and about the work of community psychologists and went on to check out the Dalton, Elias, and Wandersman (2006) textbook and immediately felt an innate, strong connection. Something that really impressed him about the field was its value system guiding the actions of community psychologists, and all those values felt like a

Who are Community Psychologists?

Profiles in Community Psychology highlights a community psychologist in their own words. Writers have chosen to share their personal and professional stories in order to inspire and personalize Community Psychology as it is lived by its diverse practitioners.

*All columns are also available at *The Community Psychologist*, and can be searched here:

<http://www.scra27.org/publications/tcp/>

precise alignment with what was important to him and what he wanted to do.

All this was happening while he was still at the call center. While he was immensely thankful for everything that was given to him by this job, he knew his time there was over. In 2013, after volunteering for a few months, Carlos began working at *Via Education*. It was the organization's values and mission that attracted him. The organization was looking to develop competencies for participation and engagement in the community with the core belief that social transformation required individuals and groups to be involved with the community to cause that transformation. Their focus was on enabling the citizens to engage in the communities. One such example - *Citizen Circles*, which included 16 to 32 weeks of weekly gatherings in which Carlos occupied the role of a facilitator. The goal of the program was to try to identify the needs in the communities they cared for and to identify the strengths and abilities and the social capital to address these needs. Together with the members of the community who will be affected the group would then develop a plan to address these needs. After reaching consensus, the group would implement the project and then evaluate it. Beyond the project itself, however, the most relevant thing was the development of the competencies (community organizing, participation, self-efficacy, democratic deliberation, peaceful coexistence, and empathy). Unfortunately, in the year and half, the funding ran out and Carlos was left looking for another job.

Because he was still in the process of applying to graduate school, he began working for the *Science and Technology Interactive Centre hornos*³. In the 80s it used to be a steel company that later went bankrupt. For 20 years the building was unutilized until some people decided to turn it into a technology and interactive center. The center honored the history of steel and the industrial character of the city with a museum of steel in Monterrey and Mexico that emphasized the impact it had on development of cities. Furthermore, the center aimed to inspire children, youth, and adults to become more engaged with science and technology through activities like short courses and robotics teams. While Carlos knew nothing about robotics, he decided to go forward with the job even though it felt like a bit of a mismatch compared to *Via Education*. Looking back, it has all been aligned, even now, with his Thesis work. All of these involve citizen engagement – Carlos's passion and current research interest.

The job at *Science and Technology Interactive Centre hornos*³ led Carlos to learn from US-based nonprofit – FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) founded by Dean Kamen, and how these programs contribute to the development of values and skills among children and youth. Carlos was especially touched by reading the story of how four undocumented Mexicans participating in robotics programs in Arizona and California, changed the course of their lives (full story can be read on the book *Spare Parts* by Joshua Davis), and was convinced that his work on technology was also aligned with community development. Carlos spent almost two years working for the organization and facilitating interest and settlement of children and youth with science and technology.

During this time, Carlos continued to learn more about the field, including the 2013 Biennial conference in Miami. He thought the conference matched what the organization was doing and it made sense to apply, attend, and present the work of the organization. At that time, he also began reading more of the CP books and the Community Psychology Practice blog. When he saw there was a posting for the blog coordinator position, he applied for it. This connected him with Gina Cardazone. She and others, like Sharon Johnson-Hakim, were helpful in guiding him into the Community Psychology Practice Council (CPPC). He felt really supported and welcomed by the group and right away became a part of the leadership team and an integral part of the larger group. Carlos would like to thank profoundly to those who voluntarily gave their time, wisdom, lived experiences, and

friendships, which made him feel even more happy to be a part of SCRA and the Practice Council. Special thanks to: Gina Cardazone, Sharon Johnson-Hakim, Olya Glantsman, Tom Wolff, Bill Berkowitz, Kyrah Brown, Nicole Freund, Gloria Levin, Susan Wolfe, Jean Hill, Bret Kloos, Lindsey Zimmerman, Jasmine Douglas and Greg Meissen.

One key moment came at the Biennial conference when he attended the keynote address given by Michelle Fine, who spoke of her work with women in prisons. Fine's main point was to highlight the cyclical process plaguing the institution. She argued, with empirical results, that this population of women lack the support systems necessary in prison to allow them to gain the tools and skills to pursue jobs when they were released. Fine continued to describe that without these tools and skills, these women are less likely to experience positive outcomes such as finding employment and safe housing. And, therefore, the institution inherently perpetuates the incarceration of women. For Carlos, this speech hit the spot! He finally heard someone else articulate what he has been aiming to do within his career and that it could be manifested into other diverse communities. As Carlos articulated, "It's not about having good intentions and trying to do good in the world, it's about learning about social conditions and structure, so that whatever measures we are trying to implement are effective and CP has these components - the right set of values and measure to help understand the social issues and evaluate solutions that you are trying to implement."

Following the inspirational conference in the summer of 2013, Carlos decided to pursue a graduate degree in Community Psychology. During the extensive search for programs in the United States, South America, and Europe, he learned about the 2014 International Conference on Community Psychology (ICCP) in Brazil. It was a long shot to try and attend that conference, but after he presented the potential benefits to his boss, he was granted permission. Among other things, the conference in Brazil helped Carlos to obtain a better understanding about graduate programs. It was then when he decided to focus his search in the U.S. and Canada.

Meanwhile, throughout the decision-making process, Carlos continued to learn about and make connections within the field. In 2014, he began regularly attending the Practice Council's peer consultations calls and learning about the work from the field's practitioners. He read the works of Leonard Jason, including the newly released book, *Principles of Social Change* and followed the *Public Science Project* by Michelle Fine. At the time, he started to conduct some interviews with community psychologists such as Eduardo Almeida in Mexico and Ruben David Fernández Carrasco in Spain, Mark Burton and Carolyn Kagan in the United Kingdom, Tom Wolff, Scott Evans, and Irma Serrano-García in the U.S. to learn even more about the field and its potential impact. More and more Community Psychology appeared to be the logical career path.

Carlos, like many others, found the application process to graduate schools challenging. From the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) and paperwork, to financing his education, it took him two and a half years to decide and complete everything required for the application process. Carlos ended up applying to the University of Miami, Vanderbilt University, University of Massachusetts-Lowell, and Wilfrid Laurier University. Each of these institutions had great promise and he found it difficult to decide where to go. The answer came one early morning when he found himself praying. In conversation with God, Carlos jokingly asked: "Are you going to send me an email telling where to go?" When he finished his prayers and opened the computer, he received two emails from Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada.

Carlos had met Geoff Nelson and Kathleen Worton, both from Wilfrid Laurier University, at the 2013 SCRA Biennial conference, and during the same year, through his work at the Practice Blog he met Natalie Kivell, alumni from Laurier. All of them being instrumental in learning from their experiences at Laurier and facilitating the decision process. Once accepted, he did not get the funding he applied

for with the Mexican government to attend and postponed admission for a year. In what seemed like a setback year, Carlos experienced great change within his employment situation, as well as for his family. This change helped him in this next venture, and he is thankful to his family and those who were there along the process. Specifically, he is thankful to the fabulous mentors and friends from the [Community Psychology Practice Council \(CPPC\)](#) and the SCRA Executive Committee.

It was now September 2016, and Carlos and his wife, Nancy, found themselves in Canada. While reflecting on his academic experience, he mentioned that he is, “Thankful for her to agree to take a step to the unknown and give this a chance.” For Carlos, it was also a step into the unknown. In a conversation with Geoff Nelson and [Natalie Kivell](#) at the 2015 SCRA Biennial, both had highly recommended the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council (WRCPC) for the practicum placement. Interestingly, Carlos never thought of himself as doing work in crime prevention. He thought he would end up working with the police or within the juvenile and prison systems. While he wasn't thrilled, he felt he had to open up, trust, and learn. It ended up being one of the most exciting experiences for Carlos in Canada. Not only was he able to do his practicum placement, but his Thesis work is also embedded within the WRCPC. Through his practicum he was entrusted with facilitating a conversation between the WRCPC and the Safety Metropolitan Agency (AMS) of the city of Guadalajara in Mexico. The idea for connecting both cities came from Juma Assiago, coordinator of the *UN-Habitat Safer Cities Programme*, who proposed for the cities to initiate a learning dialogue, engaging in an action oriented knowledge exchange that could lead to the revision and/or development of crime prevention policies. To this date, the cities have engaged in nine video conferences, and two face-to-face meetings, one in Guadalajara, Mexico and one in Calgary, Canada. Both organizations continue to learn from each other, with exciting possibilities for future collaborations. Carlos's thesis work is looking at the implementation and outcomes of a community course by the WRCPC titled *Reframing Crime, Justice, and Prevention*. The course aimed to facilitate a critical reflection process, for participants to examine their notions and assumptions around crime, justice, and prevention; leading to informed critical action.

One of the key learnings from Carlos's time at the WRCPC was coming to understand the role that the social determinants of health play in the creation and maintenance of safer cities. According to Carlos, “Healthy communities are where the social determinants of health are at play. Everyone has access to employment, good education, health services, and housing. These resources set up a foundation to create a city in which crime is in decline.” In other words, this is crime prevention through social development. However, how do we actively advocate for these social conditions so that communities become healthier and safer? This is what matters, this is the critical consciousness process to ask: “What does crime mean to us? What does justice mean to us? What does prevention mean to us? And what types of changes in our understanding need to occur? What type of changes are needed to understand crime, justice, and prevention so it becomes more clear how social determinants of health play a role in all of these.” Among other things, being a part of this organization has been a great learning experience for Carlos.

Carlos and Nancy have both been very appreciative of the people and organizations in Kitchener-Waterloo, a vibrant and caring community. They have been able to learn and interact with amazing organizations such as *The Working Centre*, *Bridges to Belonging*, *Better Beginnings Waterloo*, *Langs Community Health and Wellness*, *KidsAbility*, *Community Justice Initiatives*, *Community Health Centre*, *YMCA*, *Multicultural Centre*, *Extend a Family*, *Kitchener Public Library*, *Neruda Arts*, and the recently created *Library of Things*. In their own words: “We have been truly inspired in learning and living in such a remarkable community”.

Learning from his experiences both in the classroom and in the field, in the near future Carlos sees himself focusing on his work with his church, spirituality, immigrants and prevention efforts. His previous work with the community, as well as the support he and his wife received from the Latin American church inspired him to continue to collaborate with the Latin American community in Canada. There have been conversations with a group of Latin Americans about creating a space where Latin Americans could learn (in their language) about the programs and services in the community, as well as a space to honor and maintain their culture and traditions.

He also plans to continue collaborating with the programs and organizations he has been involved with. Carlos definitely sees himself as a community practitioner and is grateful that the university and his training in CP has given him a space to reflect and learn about the theories and skills needed to continue his work. At the end of the day, his many journeys appear to have had a common thread - the drive to help communities through participation and engagement.

Carlos's disclaimer: I apologize if bringing religion & spirituality seems inadequate, however, I cannot deny that my journey to and within Community Psychology has been guided by God, and my experiences with faith communities. For me not to mention this, would be to deny my Faith and core beliefs. I hope the reader excuses the language, should it be deemed inadequate. I can assure you, it is not a proselytism attempt.

This amazing journey has been possible through the support of outstanding people. Thank you so much. I will forever cherish in my heart your contributions to this journey. Special thanks to Nancy and our families in Mexico; in Canada special thanks to Geoff, Judy, Manuel, Christiane, Juanita, David, Dianne, Kathleen, to my cohort and all CP students, alumni and faculty, thank you so much! Thank you as well to the psychology department staff and chair, and to the University's support systems: Wellness Centre, Writing Centre and Study Skills programs. Thank you to the Latin American community and Church, and to the Jesuits in the World. You have all made a huge difference in my life. And above all, thanks be to God for guiding and accompany me in this life changing journey.

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