

Building Together the Foundations of Primary Childhood

Irene Velasco Rocha 27 June 2018

Executive Summary

Being a parent is one of the best life experiences without a doubt. "Babies come without an instruction manual" and "nobody teaches you how to be a parent," is what we as parents and caregivers answer regularly when we are asked about our experience; but what we are really trying to answer is "we do the best that we can."

According to data from the National Occupation and Employment Survey (ENOE) published by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), in the first quarter of 2017, 96.5 percent of the female economically active population (EAP) were employed, and 73.6 percent of that employed female population had children.

Additionally, the 2013 National Survey of Employment and Social Security (ENESS) shows that most of the children under six years old are taken care of by family members or acquaintances, while only four percent are taken to a nursery or daycare. There is no provision in the law to support life-work balance for those workers who have children or family responsibilities, making parenthood in

the working class in Mexico a big challenge from any point of view.

For this reason, helKi Parental was conceived, a school for parents without them having to attend a classroom. As the companion of mothers, fathers, and caregivers, it helps to provide the adequate development information for infants and toddlers and provides advice regarding issues identified with kids, enabling parents to build foundations for their children for the future.

Article

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Research indicates that the lack of quality care in early

childhood or negligent actions can seriously affect the health of infants and toddlers. Healthy cognitive, emotional, and social development is fundamental to enable their development towards the next school phase. The lack of adequate and timely care can lead to more serious problems in young people, such as school drop-outs, suicide, violence, and crime. This situation can greatly affect the ever growing, and difficult to break, social gap in Mexico.

And why create this solution? After investigating how to really impact the roots of many of the current social problems, we find that many of them can be prevented from early childhood. For decades, the positive effects of intervening in early childhood from infancy to five years have been studied in different control groups by different research centers. As we know, education (or teaching) is not an exact science; it is full of variations, contexts, experiences, cultures, ideologies, myths, and opinions that influence us to make conscious and unconscious decisions to educate and raise our children. And the decisions we make today will play a role tomorrow, as expressed by the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative, *"the experiences that will affect the physical architecture of the developing brain."* The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University tells us that:

Children need a holistic environment of relationships invested in their healthy development [...] so what can we do to strengthen the capacity of all those who interact

*with children? This question led us to think about the type of skills needed to face adversity; these skills focus on attention, plan monitoring, delayed gratification, being able to solve problems, working in teams, executive functions, and self-regulation. They are the same kind of skills needed to create a well-regulated home and school environment in which healthy development and learning can take place."*¹

Considering the studies carried out, it can be affirmed that it is not enough to give information and advise people *"it is necessary to do active activity, develop skills with coaching, training, and practicing."*²

Another study center is Heckman Equation that says, *"High quality early childhood development programs can reduce chronic diseases and the costs of medical care. Benefits include lower drug use and blood pressure in men, as well as better educational outcomes and higher earnings in adulthood."*³

First Steps

Following my calling of helping others, I was a novice for a year and a half in the Congregation of Missionaries of San Carlos. Then I worked for 20 years in the information technology industry, leading and coaching those around me to become better human beings through my motto "when we no longer work together, not only will they have grown into good professionals, but also they will be better

people." During my professional career, while finding myself a mentor of colleagues and friends seeking my advice and support, I became driven and inspired to refocus my talents and energies. This is how I started to investigate how to help those in great need in my society, i.e., exploited street children.

But the catalyst that pushed me to focus my energy towards early childhood, was an experience with my nephew Diego. He began to exhibit developmental problems at three months old and it was escaping notice. The opinion of other mothers and grandmothers' experiences with their first child, were not enough to take the necessary actions in time and thus avoid painful consequences for the child and for the family. Questions such as why if most people have the capacity to be parents, do we not have information at our fingertips that allows us to have the necessary tools and empowerment to help our children in the first years of life? Why can only people with money access necessary and timely help? Why are there not quality services accessible to all? These were the origins of helKi.

Through the methodologies of design thinking, lean start-up, based on customer and user orientation, we began to investigate what are the biggest pains of early childhood. We found topics such as: the absence of public policies for health systems and systems of work in support of working parents, the increasing tendency of working mothers, insufficient infrastructure capacity for public and

private childcare services, the rift in the level of technology in the sector, and the absence in the amount of information in real time that reaches the investigation.

Without much logical explanation, the help to create helKi was coming from this handful of ideas and social entrepreneurs with the dream of being able to democratize information on early childhood development to all parents and caregivers as a natural right for all.

helKi: An Innovative Project with Social Impact

helKi's work is based on the research and focus of the development of parents and caregivers who are important in the lives of infants as stated in the Center on the Development Child at Harvard University -- *"we focus on your abilities, your needs, for that, they can be better parents, more effective."*⁴

This is how helKi's purpose, mission, and vision emerged.

Vision: That all parents, educators, caregivers, and society in general have the advice, support, and capacity to support during early childhood the development, upbringing, and adequate influence needed to create the foundations of prosperous societies.

Mission: To improve the culture and practice of early childhood development in Mexico, becoming the support network for parents and early childhood caregivers, and

enabling them to develop optimally through secure attachment and emotional ties.

Purpose: Create human, innovative, and inclusive high-quality solutions that are developmental tools for the social construction, prosperity, and sustainability.

In Mexico there is a growing entrepreneurial ecosystem, and we have been selected in important assemblies at a national level as "Start Up of New Ventures, SAP Innomarathon, Innovative Creatives of Promotora Social Mexico, Regenera of SVX Mexico, and Reto Zapopan of the government of Zapopan" among many other entrepreneurs, to accelerate and improve our business in such a way that we continue to generate value, be innovative, and make our purpose real by finding alliances that help us complement and achieve an impact on the public policies of our locality and nation.

helKi is made up of a multidisciplinary team that supports the good use not only of information, but of tools, alliances, analysis, and everything that guarantees the greater achievement for our children and the society of the future. We are passionate about early childhood, social impact, and technology: Karen Casillas Gómez, CPO, psychology professor from Universidad Panamericana, responsible for the methodology; Eduardo Salcedo Castañares, CSO, cybersecurity expert, Electronic Engineer from ITESO University, responsible for the security of information and process; Aldo Orozco

Gómez Serrano, CTO, data science and artificial intelligence expert, Mechatronics Engineering, responsible for the analysis of the information and the emerging technologies; Lorena Lawrence, MBA candidate, Texas A&M University, Electronic Engineer, whose will expand a market in the U.S.; Ofelia Velasco Rocha, COO, computer engineer expert in high critical operations; and I, Irene Velasco Rocha, CEO, MBA for IPADE; computer engineer, early childhood development certified, expert in business, technology, innovation, and passionate about early childhood with a social purpose to fulfill.

Although we know that being a parent is a challenge at all socioeconomic levels, we are targeting the working class since there is less economic capacity to access and maintain high-quality services. More precisely, we address in a special way the worker of the working class or low and low-middle socioeconomic level (not in a situation of extreme poverty) in this first stage of market penetration.

The project is developed through a digital web/mobile app platform based on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), analytics, and big data.

It is contracted through a subscription per infant. Through a profiling of parents, caregivers, and infants, a custom development plan is created. Through their mobile devices, we send information daily on recreational activities for the development of the infants and advice on care according to the infant or child's current stage of

growth. This will help strengthen emotional bonds, secure attachment, and promote parenting based in love.

Additionally, we created "The Chat," a communication tool and permanent accompaniment between parents and specialized professionals. Parents value the opportunity and ability to ask all types of questions at any time and get professional responses in real time, not just when emergency situations occur but also at times when help is not traditionally available.

The Chat includes a summary of the impact of the activities that were carried out to show users the positive influence of the tool on the development of their children. It also contains an evaluation of the infant's status, seeking to identify any anomaly in the child's development. Together with the parents, this will proactively strengthen a development plan for the next month, and if necessary the evaluation may also link them with specialist(s) to help them be more efficient at the time their children receive care for a specialized diagnosis.

Currently, there are test markets that will validate our hypotheses and find new information to continue developing the solution. We have reached coverage in five cities of which, four are in Mexico and one is in the U.S.; impacting 43 infants and 33 families, and increasing our data and analytics to continue learning and validate our value proposal.

One hundred percent of parents have stated that it is a tool that should be available to use every day, even those who have not been willing to continue with a paid service.

The feedback has been very positive since, according to the parents' experience, from having a trustworthy professional ally to ask questions that arise at the moment, to a coach that can help channel the emotions of the caregiver, empathize with the infant, and even use appropriate language, all are of vital importance in interactions with infants and they are the hallmarks of the relationships between parents and children over time.

Future Projects

In this process we have learned a lot about the behavior of the parents, their questions, their needs, and above all their pain and struggles. The future vision of our plans is to strengthen the support network we seek to be. For example, in the coming months we will be making an alliance with a local enterprise that offers professional mental health services including the mobile area as part of the help network that caregivers need in order to have the necessary emotional strength to help children.

The information that we are obtaining serves us to be able to have the data that will take us to train AI and to be able to have a chat able to solve the most common parenting doubts for millions of people. We call this process democratizing the care of early childhood, thus avoiding

that it which is only achievable for the wealthiest.

We dream very loudly, and we want to bring this parental accompaniment to millions of parents in the Spanish speaking markets in MX, LATAM, and the USA. For more information visit: <http://www.helki.org>.

Author bio

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Irene is a computer engineer with a specialty in innovation who is passionate about human development and early childhood. She is a mentor, presenter, and marathon runner. Irene can be contacted via [LinkedIn](#).

¹ The Center on the Development Child at Harvard University developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/

² Heckman Equation heckmanequation.org/resource/

³ The Center on the Development Child at Harvard University developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/

⁴ The Center on the Development Child at Harvard University developingchild.harvard.edu/resources