

Facilitator Highlight: Maria Rodriguez and Katherine Mateo

A Mother-Daughter Journey: Continuing a Legacy of Parent Leadership

For Maria Rodriguez and Katherine Mateo, AP-OD is more than a parenting program. It's a shared journey of learning, community, and leadership that has come full circle across two generations.

For almost a decade, Maria Rodriguez has dedicated herself to supporting parents and caregivers through AP-OD, helping families build confidence, access resources, and strengthen their connections with one another. What began as a personal journey to become a better parent grew into a passion for supporting families in her community of Cypress Hills.

Along the way, Maria had someone special watching and learning from her: her daughter, Katherine. As a child, Katherine often accompanied her mother to AP-OD sessions alongside her brothers. At the time, she didn't fully understand the significance of the conversations happening around her. But as she grew older, she began to recognize the meaningful relationships her mother was building and the difference she was making in the lives of families.

"Watching her is obviously very inspirational," Katherine shared. "Being able to see the work that she did with so many families" helped her understand the importance of her mother's commitment to the community.

For Katherine, those early experiences shaped her understanding of what it means to show up for others. She watched her mother create welcoming spaces where parents could share their experiences, learn from one another, and feel supported without judgment.

One of the most important lessons Katherine carried with her was the value of community.



Katherine often accompanied Maria to AP-OD sessions as a child where she saw the difference her mother was making in the lives of families.

> **"My mom has always shown us that community is important."**

Katherine explained, reflecting on how families continued to stay connected with Maria years after participating in AP-OD. Even after moving to a different community, Katherine still feels connected to the relationships and experiences that shaped her childhood in Cypress Hills.



Maria (center) with parents who graduated from the AP-OD program.

Following in Her Mother's Footsteps

Although Katherine had always admired her mother, she never imagined just how closely their professional journeys would align. Three years ago, when Katherine began working at her current agency, she discovered that the organization offered the AP-OD curriculum. She immediately reached out to Maria to share the exciting news.

During her first week, Katherine asked how she could become a facilitator herself. Although funding wasn't available for her training at the time, she continued learning about how AP-OD was implemented at her center and waited for an opportunity.

That opportunity finally came this year.

When her agency announced that funding was available to train new facilitators, Katherine eagerly volunteered. After completing her training, one of the first people she wanted to share the milestone with was her mom.

For Maria, the news was especially meaningful. She shared,

> **I was really proud. Abriendo Puertas for me was just something that I really enjoyed doing and believe in. I love working with the parents, sharing resources, and having conversations, and seeing them become more confident.**

Maria never expected that the work she began a decade earlier would become something she could share with her daughter in this way.

She reflected,

> **When I started, I never thought, oh, one day my daughter will become a facilitator.**

Today, Katherine is beginning to facilitate AP-OD sessions in her own community, bringing with her the lessons she learned from watching her mother and the experiences she has gained through her own work with families.

A Shared Commitment to Families

While Maria and Katherine serve different communities, they share a belief that parents and caregivers deserve spaces where their voices, experiences, and strengths are valued.

For Maria, being a facilitator has never been about having all the answers. It's about listening, building trust, and recognizing that every family brings unique experiences and perspectives. She shared,

> **“I hope the biggest thing she takes from me is always to remember that the parents are the most important people in the room.**

It's a lesson Katherine has already embraced. Having witnessed her mother's ability to connect with families through empathy and vulnerability, Katherine hopes to build those same lasting relationships with the parents and caregivers she supports.

She remembers seeing families return to her mother years after participating in AP-OD, sometimes simply because they needed someone to talk to. Those relationships demonstrated that the impact of a facilitator often extends far beyond the classroom. Katherine hopes that years from now, the families she works with will remember her in the same way.

"I want to build that trust and I want to build that relationship with them because I've seen it firsthand how far it goes," she shared.

And while Katherine is eager to carry forward the lessons her mother taught her, Maria is equally excited to see her daughter develop her own approach.

Her advice to Katherine is simple: be yourself. Maria encourages her daughter to bring her own personality, experiences, and strengths into every session, remembering that meaningful connections happen when families feel comfortable, respected, and heard.

Learning From One Another

Their relationship has also taken on a new dimension. Maria is no longer just Katherine's mother and role model; she's also someone Katherine can turn to for professional guidance as a fellow AP-OD facilitator.

Before beginning her first session, Katherine called Maria for advice on preparing materials and engaging families. It's a natural extension of a relationship in which her mother has always been the first person she turns to for support. Katherine shared,

> **“She's my mom, but she's also my mentor.**



Maria is not just Katherine’s mother and role model, she is now someone Katherine can turn to for professional guidance.

The two are even looking forward to the possibility of facilitating a session together, combining their individual strengths and experiences to support families in Katherine's community.

For Maria, the opportunity to learn from her daughter is just as exciting.

"I'm also excited to see how she makes Abriendo Puertas her way," Maria shared.

Their journey is a reminder that learning and leadership are not limited to one generation. As Katherine continues growing in her role, both mother and daughter have the opportunity to learn from each other while strengthening the communities they serve.

A Full-Circle Moment

Perhaps the most meaningful part of their story is how closely it connects to Maria's original motivation for becoming involved in AP-OD.

Long before she became a facilitator, Maria was a parent who wanted to create new opportunities for her children. She understood the importance of education, encouragement, and showing her children love and support every day. Through AP-OD, she found resources and a community that supported her own parenting journey while opening the door for her to support other families.

Now, a decade later, she gets to watch her daughter carry that commitment forward.

For Katherine, the journey has become even more personal as she prepares to welcome her first child. After growing up with a mother who practiced the same values she shared with families, Katherine is excited to bring those lessons into her own parenting journey.



Katherine is looking forward to bringing the lessons she learned from her mother and AP-OD into her own parenting journey.

> **"I'm excited to become a facilitator, but also step into a new role as a parent with AP-OD behind my back and my mom, too.**

For Maria, seeing her daughter become both a parent and a facilitator is a powerful reminder of how far their family has come. What began as one mother's commitment to creating a better future for her children has grown into a shared passion for supporting other families.

Their story reflects the lasting impact of parent leadership: when parents have opportunities to learn, connect, and lead, the benefits can reach their children, future generations, and entire communities.

And for Maria and Katherine, this new chapter is only the beginning.