



## A Man of His Word

After working more than 30 years in social service, 19 as head of Healthcare Alternative Systems Inc. (HAS), he remains faithful to the promise he made when he saw so much need: I will not stop helping.

In Chicago, this Ecuadorian is considered one of the persons that serves the community the most out of Healthcare Alternative Systems Inc. (HAS), the institution which he came to 27 years ago as a counselor and later became its executive director 19 years ago. Every year he is recognized by authorities, local and national institutions and his name is among the most authoritative voices to speak about substance abuse, in fact he is a national spokesperson for this issue and has contributed to the production of documentaries on alcohol and drug abuse.

His name also appears on the boards of institutions in Chicago and at the federal level such as the Hispanic Latino Caucus for the Target Capacity Expansion for the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) and the Cultural Competency and Diversity Network and CSAT Hispanic / Latino Stakeholders.

When he started this job he did not expect to be so involved in trying to help people with alcoholism, addiction, depression and other problems that primarily affect low-income Latinos. "I did not come to this job for a personal or family experience.

I never had that motivation, it was by an invitation from a fellow student while trying to get my master's at Northeastern University. When I arrived what I saw shocked me and I made a firm promise to myself to do everything I can to help them. I never left this institution because I believe there are still many people who need my support," said Jácome

He arrived in the United States at the age of 20 to study, with the hope of becoming a professional to give pride and honor to his family. And he did. Jácome is a highly qualified professional; his titles occupy the same space as his written name Marco Jácome MA, LPC, CSADC, CEAP. He graduated from North Park University (BA in psychology / sociology); from Northeastern University (Master of Family and Community Counseling); from the School of Public Health, Boston University (National Leadership Fellows Program); and the School of Government, Harvard University (Executive Leadership).

He is a strong advocate of the premise that you must lead by example. "This is what we need for our children and young people so they don't fall into alcoholism and drugs. It does not have to be an example of professional success, but of good behavior and good moral character" he says.

Jácome gets excited just talking about this issue. "Keep in mind that these problems fall into three causes: the first is to experiment and join a social group, the second is depression and disorientation, and the third is a bad example, which could be from home or from the neighborhood where they live. And all these causes are preventable, so I'm convinced that alcoholism and drug addiction is a war we can win, as we are winning the war against smoking which began 20 years ago in California. Parents are the foundation of everything," he says. He recalls when he was young he found a

city that was difficult for him because of the problem of language and his fellow student's customs that he did not understand. "Thank God I was able to arrive at my uncle's home. They were the ones who helped and advised me not to fall into youth temptations that would keep me away from my main goal which was to finish a career. I am very grateful to them," he said as he recalled the time he had to work as a driver for a hotel and as a library employee for his university. His work has changed his life and the way it is perceived.

"I have a 17 year old son and when I think of all the things that can happen to him I get worried. But I understand that he belongs to another generation, grappling with two cultures and a lot of social and media pressure. So I think that parents have to comprehend them and they need a lot of understanding. We must supervise them, but not be on them," he reflects.

Healthcare Alternative Systems Inc. (HAS) is the largest organization in Illinois in its field with 10 locations serving about 8,000 people a year, of which 70% are Hispanic, and although it was founded to serve the Latino community, it serves all those who knock on their door. "The need has increased because the community has grown, because alcohol and drugs are too accessible to children, and because the economic crisis is drowning more households in poverty. But mostly because our neighborhoods compared with more affluent ones are full of bars and liquor stores," he said. "My projection is to ensure that the agency serves more people and thus fulfill my promise to help as many as possible. That is my projection.