

Dr. Max Kintner, PhD  
Latin American Studies  
Tulane University

---

CANS Advisor  
Northern Rivers Family of Services  
CANS Coach, NY CANS Institute

[www.chichimax.com](http://www.chichimax.com)

# Taking TCOM to the Maya

LESSONS FROM A PILOT PROJECT USING THE FAST  
AND CANS WITH INDIGENOUS MAYA IN GUATEMALA

# Who are the Maya?





# Chichicastenango, Guatemala

## Location, History, Culture

# Why this Project?

- ▶ My research and work history in community, and need to rethink where and how the NGO can best serve the community—a 15 year reset.
- ▶ Need for donors and NGO staff to better understand the needs of a rapidly changing target population
- ▶ Desire to identify resources and services that may already exist in the community
- ▶ Strategy to articulate the community's needs for funding and resource-seeking

# *Why TCOM?*

## *The New York/US Perspective*

- ▶ My own familiarity, through my work with NYS waiver programs, with the FAST and CANS tools, and my discovery of TCOM's ability to assess the needs of culturally diverse families and children in the context of multidimensional and complex service systems

Changes in the makeup of the populations being served in NY and my role as Spanish language interpreter in assessment process—increased need to explain to the treatment team why their “assumptions” of client behavior may not be culturally appropriate.

# *Why TCOM?*

## *The Guatemalan Perspective*

**The growing realization that while CEBAR was created to promote education for girls, what we actually spend our time doing is social work for families –**

**To include:**



# *Education Promotion*



# *Women's Clinic*





# *Pediatrics and General Medicine*



# *Home Visits to Disabled and Elders*



# *Dental Clinics*



# *The Research Team*



Max Kintner

Manuela Larios

Tomás Estuardo Pacajoj

# *Basic Plan of Action*

- ▶ Training of Guatemalan Colleagues
- ▶ Purposive Sample: 11 “client families” who have had at least one child with a CEBAR scholarship for several years, and/or a family who regularly receives crisis assistance from CEBAR
- ▶ Before and after interviews, a line-by-line consideration of FAST and CANS modules and anchor descriptions to discuss cultural and normative relevance of assessment anchor descriptions and ratings. Adaptations of coding where appropriately
- ▶ Coding done collaboratively by team members after interviews.

# *Interview and Coding Methodology*

- ▶ Team based, due to language as well as to commitment to TCOM principles. All interviews done at least in part in K'iche' Maya, with a few interviews done mostly in Spanish
- ▶ Explanation to clients of what we were going to do in terms of asking questions about their families and challenges they may or may not face in their lives
- ▶ Obtaining signed consent assuring client privacy and giving us permission to use data

# *The Details ....*

- ▶ In 8 workdays in early August 2018 we did 11 FAST Assessments at the CEBAR office in Chichicastenango.
- ▶ CANS was done for children/youth with actionable scores on the Child Functioning section of the FAST. N=13

# *Specific Cultural Considerations*

1. Generalized extreme poverty... (*poor compared to whom?*)
2. Extremely complex extended family arrangements that made assessment of informal supports difficult
3. Parenting styles different from US norms
4. Less stringent expectations regarding school attendance and achievement
5. Housing standards inconsistent with US expectations
6. Concepts of Mental Health inconsistent with norms in Western Cultures; epidemiology of trauma
7. History of repression and ongoing extreme corruption makes population reticent to engage with legal system



# 1. *Generalized Poverty*

- ▶ Recent UN Report says 83% Extreme Poverty in Guatemala (CIA Factbook says 79% Extreme Poverty among indigenous population)
- ▶ > 60% growth stunting rate in this section of Guatemala (50% nationally)
- ▶ No sewage outside the town of Chichicastenango, about 1/3 of our respondents had no electricity
- ▶ > 80% unemployment in formal sector (>70% underemployment in all sectors – part-time or day work)
- ▶ Absence of services, particularly outside cities

# *Financial Resources in Context*

- ▶ We settled on a '2' on the indicator Financial Resources if the family did not know where food will come from in a week or two or has relatively dependable family resources in event of extreme need. A code of '3' was applied if every day is a hand-to-mouth struggle to eat
- ▶ In some families a huge percentage of the income supports chronic alcoholism of one or more family members – who may not show up in FAST/CANS coding as caregivers or children
- ▶ Found it necessary to take into consideration the stress of high-pressure debt-collectors resulting from failed emigration attempts and/or high-pressure unsecured loans from quasi-banks that charge extortionate interest.

# *Extent & Impact of Poverty*

- ▶ Financial Resources:
  - ▶ 36.4% of families coded a “2”
  - ▶ 63.6% of families coded a “3”
- ▶ Strain on Families
  - ▶ Caregiver Collaboration (88.9% actionable)
  - ▶ Family conflict (63.7% actionable)
  - ▶ Work/vocational (48% actionable; for those who financial resources support alcoholism, 75% actionable)

## 2. *Complex Family/Kinship Arrangements*



# *Family Together - Findings*

- ▶ Opaque relationships between Extended vs. Nuclear Family
- ▶ Discreet nuclear families live in very close proximity – as in the room next door or across the patio – from other nuclear families within the same extended family. To include shared kitchen, bathroom, and washbasin (pila).
- ▶ Reliance on extended family as primary resource, but complexity of relationships and prevalence of family conflicts

*Postcard sent from parents in Los Angeles to abandoned children in Guatemala*



### 3. Housing and Residential Standards

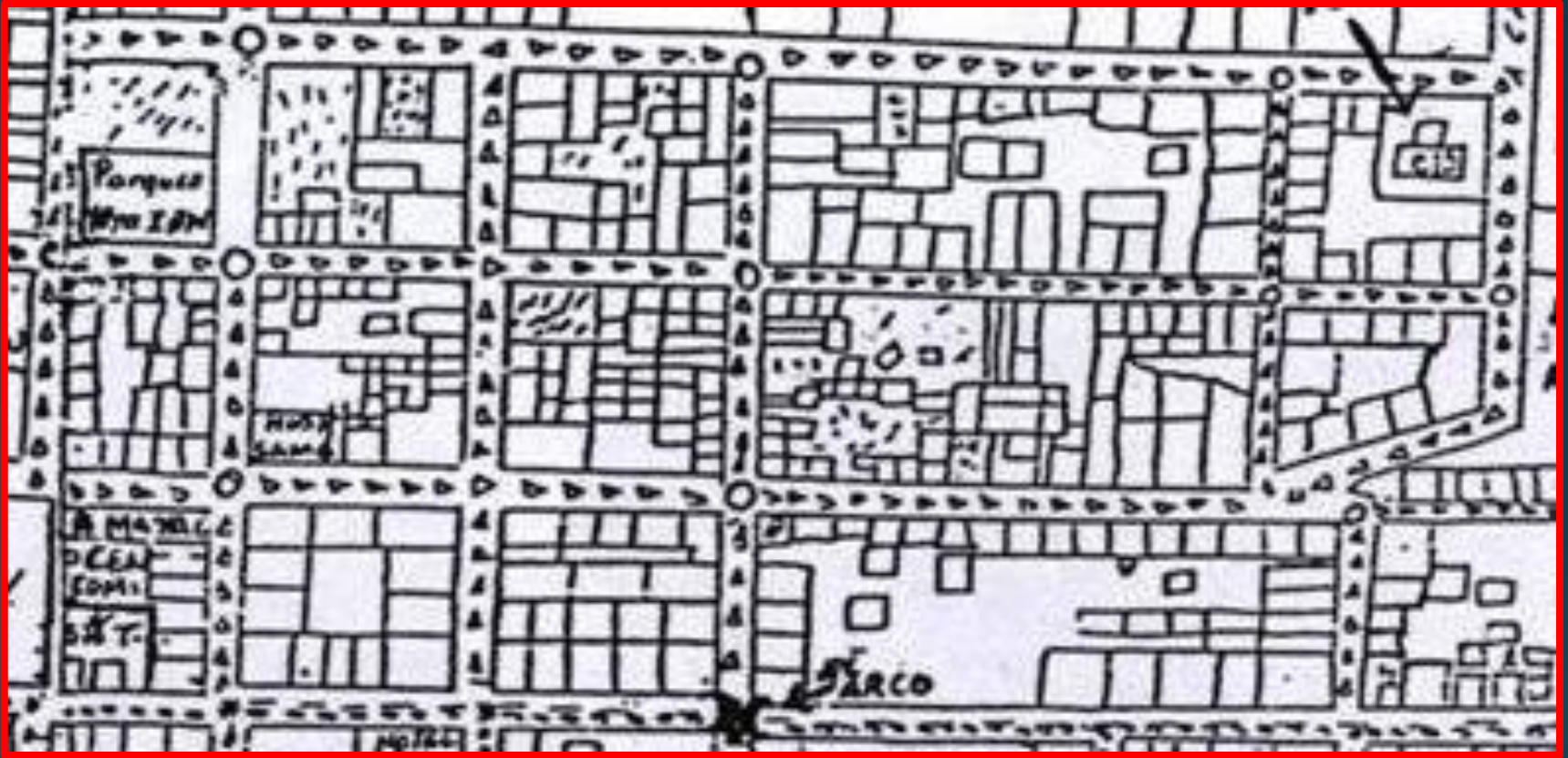
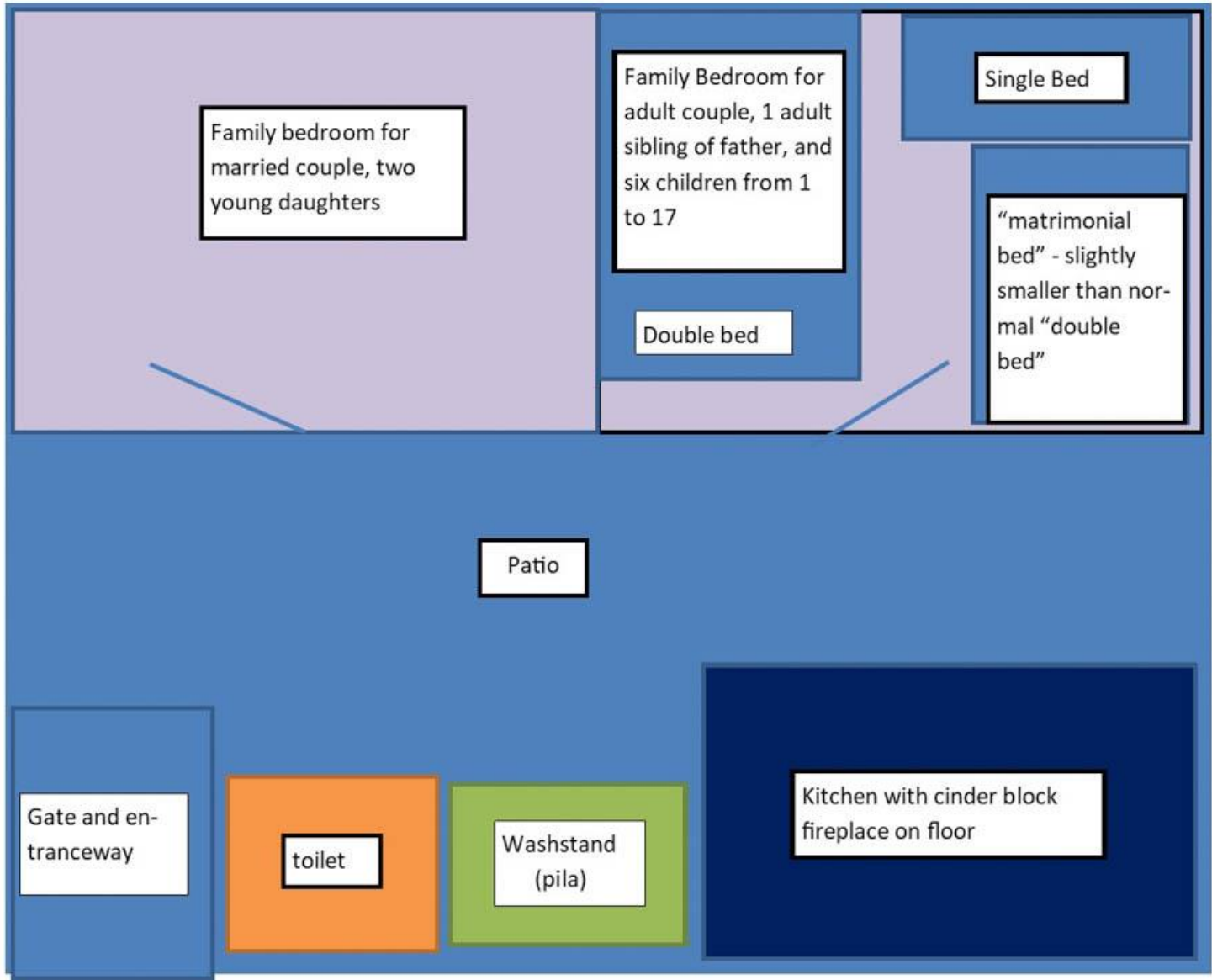


Diagram of several blocks in the pueblo





# Residential Stability

- ▶ Coding confused by very stable ownership of housing that is unsanitary and inadequate, or extreme insecurity of housing in other cases. Residential Stability (27.3% actionable)
- ▶ Payment of rent and/or mortgage complicated by complex and often conflictive extended family arrangements
- ▶ Dissolution of family assets through loss of land due to generational inheritance divisions, and /or exploitation by lenders for failed emigration attempts
- ▶ Family instability increasingly exacerbated by lending and debt – with financing of failed emigration attempts the most extreme form of debt insecurity

## 3 & 4: Caregiving in Context

- ▶ Blurring of role boundaries, with pre-pubescent or very early adolescent youth (especially girls) saddled with onerous parenting responsibilities
- ▶ Flat/depressed affect common in women who have had a lot of children or girls who have had to raise families
- ▶ High rate of violent domestic relationships due to alcoholism, behavioral health issues
- ▶ Public inebriation common for men ... due to lack of employment opportunities and cultural factors?

# *Locating "acceptable parenting" in the Rural Maya Context*

- ▶ Caregiver collaboration: 88.9% actionable
- ▶ Family conflict (63.7% actionable)
- ▶ Appropriate roles: 72.8% actionable
- ▶ Supervision: 64.0% actionable )

# *Supervision ....*

- ▶ Cultural predisposition that infants be carried on their mother's back, or in some cases an older sister's back, almost all the time. Coddling of boys.
- ▶ Economic pressures that force mothers to leave children at home with inappropriately young siblings or other caregivers who are not really qualified to provide supervision.
- ▶ Rural/Small town laid-back style of child supervision the norm in many families.
- ▶ No, or very little, disciplinary structure to enforce supervisory norms. Notions of "consequences" appears to be somewhat alien to families

# *Tolerance for Adolescent Behaviors...*

- ▶ When adolescents become liabilities to the economy or status of a family or a community, they may be physically sanctioned, shunned, and sometimes shoved out of family or community unit when:
  - ▶ they start to drink
  - ▶ become violent toward family members or neighbors
  - ▶ engage in delinquency or other unacceptable behaviors
  - ▶ Exhibit non-conformance with norms of school or work
- ▶ High levels of depression among adolescents in the most challenged families

# *Schooling...*

- ▶ It's accepted by many families if children don't go to school because "they don't want to"
- ▶ Very high elementary school dropout is the norm
- ▶ Parents engage in what would be "exploitative practices" with kids as a survival strategy
- ▶ No enforcement of current law requiring children to be in school till they are 13
- ▶ Logistical and economic reasons not to go to school – outright costs and lost opportunity costs
- ▶ Few clear models of advantages of going to school – employment opportunities rare, most successful men in pueblo have scant education

## #6 and #7

*Perceptions of Mental Health and the Generalized Toxic Stress of Living in Impoverished, Unstable Environments*

# *Trauma in Guatemala*

- ▶ Historical trauma: social context of trauma – *La Violencia* (1976-1986)
- ▶ Non-functioning government, and aversion to contact with government officials due to endemic corruption and history of bloody brutalization
- ▶ Trauma is often not as related to specific events or situations (ACEs) as it is to pervasive poverty



# *The Trauma of Daily Life in Guatemala*

Highest crime and gang violence areas: Guatemala City, the eastern part of the country, and the southern coastal areas. Vigilante actions in Western Highland Region can be even more traumatic



## *Pre-Migration Trauma & Current Mental Health Functioning (Keller, et al.)*

- ▶ Migrant families from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala (N=234)
- ▶ Overall, 32% met PTSD symptomology, 24% for depression, and 17% for both disorders (Harvard Trauma Questionnaire/PHQ-9)
- ▶ Met criteria for asylum: 80% from El Salvador , 74% from Honduras; 41% from Guatemala
- ▶ Limitations: Need for additional information/research on Guatemala and the nature of the trauma being experienced.

# *Emigration as Response to Trauma*

- ▶ Gangs and Community/Family Violence
- ▶ Reunification – sometimes against child's will - with Family members in US
- ▶ Economic desperation – loss of land or home, and/or financial stability due to lack of employment or vocational opportunities, and high levels of depression, trauma-related pathologies, and alcoholism
- ▶ Young men frequently sent by families as “last best hope” of economic salvation

# *Our Experience with TCOM*

- ▶ The value – often overlooked – of the FAST/CANS Assessments as a structured interview tool
- ▶ Enthusiastic reception by Guatemalan Colleagues
- ▶ Enthusiastic cooperation (catharsis) of participants
- ▶ Sense of bonding/empowerment for all concerned
- ▶ Achievement of primary goal— identification of needs and strengths
- ▶ Organizational learning—use of TCOM tools to engage families in the Educational Scholarship Program and Wellness Promotion Programs



# Considerations for US professionals working with Central American Immigrants:

- ▶ Language acuity may not be obvious – clients may seem to be fluent in Spanish but not have real fluency
- ▶ Families are a source of primary conflict as well as of support
- ▶ Trauma symptomology may not be informed by ACE events
- ▶ Health and Mental Health are likely to be unfamiliar concepts, necessitating outreach strategies
- ▶ Need to build trust in institutionally based service structures

# TAKING TCOM TO THE MAYA

Max Kintner, PhD

[Max.kintner@northernrivers.org](mailto:Max.kintner@northernrivers.org)

(518) 937-0581

[maxkintner@gmail.com](mailto:maxkintner@gmail.com)

(518) 258-6923