

An Interview with a PLAY Project Consultant:

Maggie Gons & Monica Quezada Lott

Monica Quezada Lott

Mónica has participated in The PLAY Project both as a parent and a professional. She is a Certified PLAY Project and Teaching PLAY Consultant, a PLAY Project Supervisor and a PLAY Project Trainer. She is also an Expert DIR Floortime Provider and Training Leader, and a Profectum Fellow. Mónica has a M.S. in Education from Mercy College in New York where she taught Kindergarten and First Grade in the NYC public school system. In 2008, along with her late husband Eddy, she founded the Relate & Grow program in Columbus, Ohio. Since then, she has provided training and educational consultation to parents of children with developmental challenges and training to other professionals in child development fields. She currently serves as a PLAY Project supervisor to newly trained PLAY Project Consultants for the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and for The PLAY Project Organization, trains new DIR Floortime trainees through the Interdisciplinary Council on Development and Learning (ICDL), manages special projects for The Childhood League Center and continues to provide services to families, consultation to schools and trainings to professionals through Relate & Grow.



What drew you to pursue a career in helping children with developmental disabilities?

Destiny :), really! There were 3 crucial paths that life put in my way to guide me in this direction.

For starters, I had never considered a career working with kids. But as it turns out, right after graduating college as a Visual Communications major I saw an ad for the New York City Teaching Fellows. They were looking for professionals willing to teach in the highest need areas of New York, and they specially needed bilingual and special education teachers.

Just like that, I decided to take this new path and go on this adventure. I taught full time for a few years and during that period of time, I had 2 babies and completed a graduate degree in education.

It was also during this time that the second path appeared: autism became a part of my family's world. My late husband and I quickly learned as much as we could about all things autism, and decided that DIR Floortime and the PLAY Project made the most sense for us. We moved back to Columbus to be near our families, and became a PLAY Project family under the guidance of Dr. Rick. Since PLAY Project was not available in our central Ohio county at that time, we had to travel to see Dr. Rick in Ann Arbor every few months. When I learned that his organization also trained consultants, I realized that I had the perfect situation to bring PLAY to Columbus!

I had been working for my family's health care agency, which was a perfect fit for the PLAY Project, I had already been travelling on path number 3. I soon started the training and certification process to become a PLAY Consultant and began working with other families. As it turns out all paths led to the PLAY Project, to work that I had never considered doing in the past, but that is very clearly what I am supposed to be doing. I have been working with families and kids with developmental disabilities ever since and loving it!

What spurred your interest to become a Certified PLAY Project Consultant?

As anyone who has been doing this kind of work will tell you, this is really fun and rewarding work. You get to PLAY for a living and can help change families' lives. That, along with helping spread a wonderful model and making it available to more people is what propelled me to take the leap into getting certified.

What is the most satisfying part of being a Certified PLAY Project Consultant?

Seeing the effect that this work has on families and the progress of their kids. I have received amazing testimonials over the years and nothing keeps me going more than that. They never fail to give me goosebumps and bring tears to my eyes.

What is one piece of advice you would give to new professionals working with children with developmental disabilities?

“Never give up on a family or child”

Never give up on a child or family. Seek mentoring if you feel stuck and reevaluate the appropriateness of your goals when necessary. Always continue to learn and develop your skills, this model is so rich, you can always go deeper. New research and the understanding of the brain and human development are always evolving.

What are you looking forward to in your future work as a PLAY Project Consultant?

These are exciting times and I can't wait to see what's ahead! DIR and the PLAY Project used to be widely unaccepted around here. I was the first consultant in Columbus and I often felt like the "black sheep". But I knew how important this work was and the impact that it could have, and I always stood for this belief. Now, things are different, PLAY is more available and accepted. I am looking forward to helping more families, building more awareness, and continuing to train and supervise others in Ohio and around the world.

What is the funniest thing you've experience at a PLAY Project visit?

Many years ago, when I was still a newer consultant, I worked with a child that had a hard time sharing attention and showing much affect. One day, while I was modeling for his parents, he passed gas pretty loudly. He stopped for a second and giggled. So as a good Floortimer, I made a similar sound with my mouth, he looked at me and laughed again. Having finally found an activity that got his attention and raised his affect, I kept making fart noises and he kept looking and laughing. This family was fairly new to the program so I think they were a little uncomfortable. But I explained what I was doing and soon after they were happy to engage their son with farting sounds as well.

“My first piece of advice is always that there is hope.”

What is the first piece of advice you would give to a parent whose child has been diagnosed with autism?

The families that I encounter shortly after diagnosis are often overwhelmed, confused and worried about their child's future. My first piece of advice is always that there is hope. Their child is still the same child they had before they were diagnosed. He/she has strengths and challenges just like any other child, label or not. If we figure out how to support his/her needs, we can help give them the best chance at reaching their own unique potential.



Maggie Gons

Maggie Gons, M.A., CCC-SLP is a speech-language pathologist, certified PLAY Project Consultant, and PLAY Project Supervisor. She works for The Childhood League Center serving families in both early intervention and preschool. Maggie has presented as a PLAY Project trainer at the Intensive Workshop, OCALICON, state-wide webinars, regional, and local agencies about the benefits of intervening early using evidence based practices such as The PLAY Project within Ohio's early intervention system.

What drew you to pursue a career in helping children with developmental disabilities?

Initially, I was drawn into the field of speech-language pathology because I was trying to avoid math! I started out wanting to work with adults in a medical setting but all of my placements were with preschoolers. Along the way I discovered my love of working with young children & their families to help each and every individual reach their full potential.

What spurred your interest to become a PLAY Project Consultant?

My interest in becoming a PLAY Project consultant began in 2012 when my supervisor approached me about an exciting opportunity in Ohio to get trained. I did more research and found it to be a great fit with my clinical style and philosophy in working with families in early intervention.

What is the most satisfying part of being a Certified PLAY Project Consultant?

The most satisfying part of being a PLAY Project consultant is helping families build connections with their child. The joy they share engaging with their child transforms the family. It is a gift to know that you have given a family the tools to engage their child and strengthen their relationship beyond the time we spend together.

What is one piece of advice you would give to new professionals working with children with developmental disabilities?

One piece of advice I would give new professionals is to slow down, listen, and join the families' priorities with openness.

“Slow down, listen, and join the families”

What are you looking forward to in your future work as a PLAY Project Consultant?

I look forward to all the opportunities being a PLAY Project consultant has created. It has shaped my clinical practice with all young children and continues to be a rewarding, challenging job that has become a passion.

What is the funniest thing you’ve experience at a PLAY Project visit?

Hmmm...what happens during a PLAY visit stays on a PLAY visit unless its caught on video!

What is the first piece of advice you would give to a parent whose child has been diagnosed with autism?

Take a deep breath and explore all your options. Once you understand your options find an intervention that meets your child and family priorities.

Maggie & Monica have been an integral part in the establishment of the first PLAY Project Center at The Childhood League Center in Columbus, Ohio. This center, will not only provide PLAY Project services, but will also be able to provide PLAY Project Workshops and train future PLAY Project Consultants.

The Childhood League Center has just held its first PLAY Project Intensive Workshop & Certification training on December 1st & 2nd, 2016, in which Maggie & Monica facilitated this training as part of The PLAY Project Center.

Monica also provides child development services through her won private practice, *Relate & Grow*, located in Columbus, Ohio.

For more information, here are some helpful links referenced in this article:

The Childhood League Center: <http://www.childhoodleague.org/>

The Childhood League’s PLAY Project Center: <http://www.interveningearly.org/>

Relate & Grow, Developmental Intervention Services: <http://www.relateandgrow.com/>

