

**"[Autism] is no more than a characteristic of that person, of that child. It doesn't define them."**

(Translated from Spanish)



SOCIAL INVESTMENT PROFILE: GIOVANNY PORTILLO



**Name** **Giovanny Portillo**

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**Position** Founder of Agencia para el Tratamiento Integral de la Conducta (ATIC)

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**“What’s in a name”** ATIC, or the Agency for Comprehensive Behavioral Treatment, works with children to help improve and develop behavioral skills. While ATIC serves a wide variety of children, many tend to have autism. For the past ten years, Giovanny has worked as a psychologist to battle what he refers to as “la etiqueta del autismo” – the label of autism.

“It’s as if your son or your daughter came with the characteristic, as if someone has blonde hair, someone has darker hair, someone has blue eyes,” Giovanny explains in Spanish. Autism, he added, doesn’t define a child or person – a concept ATIC emphasizes in its teaching.

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**What brought you to Nogales?** Giovanny hails from Nogales, Sonora, a city heavily rooted in the *maquila*, or factory, industry. While he knew he wanted to study psychology, that option wasn’t always available in his hometown.

“Practically all the universities have focused their careers in industry,” Giovanny explains. After a local university realized that students in Nogales wanted to study humanities, the college opened a general psychology program. Giovanny was among the first to graduate.

But Giovanny’s education didn’t stop after college: he attended trainings with families in Southern Arizona. This experience inspired Giovanny, because he was observing the family unit, and how to work with children in the context of their social settings. “It’s to manage the behavior of the child in the natural environment of the child,” he says. Later on, he traveled around the U.S. through a program that sought to study different NGOs – out of 23 worldwide participants, Giovanny was the only chosen participant from Mexico.

After returning to Nogales, Giovanny had a plan: to establish an organization that would work to empower children, and to help them live as independently as possible. He wanted transparency and fairness within the non-profit itself. This led to the creation of ATIC.

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**An average day  
in ATIC**

ATIC gathers children into groups of four, and over the course of two hours, they rotate through different cognitive training sessions: they focus on themes like attention, language and communication, and physical activity.

For a couple hours each month, ATIC faculty spends time with the child in school or with the child's family. Immersing themselves into the child's home or school life allows ATIC faculty to work with children on life skills and social situations.

"For us," Giovanni explains, "the main objective is that the child can be self-sufficient."

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**What does social  
investment mean  
to you?**

"In Mexico," Giovanni says, "there's an idea that social work is given." To keep employees motivated and financially supported, and to enforce the idea that social work is a profession, ATIC sustains from offering sessions that are completely free. However, Giovanni explains, parents pay a notably lower price than they would for a private therapy firm. If parents can't pay the monetary fee, they can instead organize an activity for the children as a method of payment.

Giovanni's days are long. He shows up and leads four rounds of sessions at ATIC before heading to a second job. But he looks forward to Wednesdays, when he leads his favorite group activity with the children. "More than work," Giovanni explains, "it's like having fun."

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