

# Finding Balance: Mayan Sacred Ceremonies



## Maya Yok'hah as Healing Remedy



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## OBJECTIVES: Finding Balance: Sacred Mayan Ceremonies

This project aims to promote mental health services, reduce stigma, and increase the capacity of the public mental health system in Los Angeles County. The project also aims to increase community member engagement in the LACDMH stakeholder process. The goal of the Finding Balance: Sacred Mayan Ceremonies project is to help reduce stigma associated with emotional/mental health difficulties while providing emotional/mental health education that will allow them to better understand how to incorporate mental health services into their traditional forms of healing. The use of the concept of "La Cultura Cura" allows for a discussion on integrating traditional Mayan healing practices with Western mental health services;

It is designed to educate different communities about the culture and sanctity of Indigenous ceremonies, rituals, and its healing effects on people.

- to promote mental health services, reduce stigma,
- increase the capacity of the public mental health system in Los Angeles County.
- aims to increase community member engagement in the LACDMH
- to help reduce stigma associated with emotional/mental health difficulties
- provide emotional/mental health education
- better understand how to incorporate mental health services into their traditional forms of healing.
- The use of the concept of "La Cultura Cura" allows for a discussion on integrating traditional Mayan healing practices with Western mental health services.
- Releases fear when talking about mental health.

# What the Healing CIRCLE Mayah and represent:

## Definitions of Healing Circles.

The Healing Circle is symbolic of the cycle of life; all beings are interrelated. The Elders and the teachers use the Talking Circle as a place to teach important lessons about the sanctity of all of life: the trees, water, the sky, plants, animals, and all four races.

Healing circles are safe havens. They help us step out of ordinary time into a safe and accepting environment in which we can explore our healing. With open minds, we work together to discover the best ways to remove obstacles to healing, alleviate suffering, and deepen our capacity to heal.

The CIRCLE represents the notions of: wholeness, original perfection, the Self, infinity, eternity, timelessness, all cyclic movement, God/Creator. A spherical object has no stress points since all parts are equal.

**That's how we want our body, our mind, and our spirit to be... Balanced –No Tensions, Peace... With me, with my family, friends, community, with the universe.**

## Definition of MAYA.

**MAYA = Ma (No) Yaj (pain) = “Without Pain”. We should be a generation of no pain.**





Elements of Altar







The Collective



The Individual



In the FINDING BALANCE: MAYAN SACRED CEREMONIES, we use:

- ▶ the Circle as our main sitting layout
- ▶ Diosa Ixchel: Mayan Goddess of Live/Death/Fertility/Water
- ▶ Invocation to the Four Directions
- ▶ Maya Yok'hah to heal intergenerational trauma no matter the people's origins.
- ▶ Talking Stick – as a Talking/Listening tool
- ▶ Altar -with personal items
- ▶ Music
- ▶ Water, Food as a closing gathering

Maya Yok'hah is a traditional physical, mental and spiritual discipline originated in Mexico in the Maya region.

Yok'hah = A compound of the proto Mayan meaning “Above”,  
“Transcendence” the connection between a higher spiritual state of mind

and the physical awareness of the grounding of the person.

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Yok'hah incorporates [www.Mundomayafoundation.com](http://www.Mundomayafoundation.com) breathing, voice, levels, training, meditation in

## Curriculum subjects covered in the Mayan Healing Circles:

### Maya Yok'hah as Healing Remedy

1. Introduction to Finding Balance: Mayan Sacred Ceremonies
2. Training the Healer in Finding Balance: Mayan Sacred Ceremonies – The apprentices
3. The Sacred **Word**/*El poder de la Palabra*/Healing through Talking Stick = **Listening**
4. Self-Love, Taking Care of Ourselves – Love, laugh, dance, sing, play, work.
5. What Troubles Us: Financial Stability = Peacefulness – Work or Business Issues, Housing Issues, Family, Domestic Violence, Addiction
6. Healing Our Bodies through Nutrition and Physical Activation
7. Feeding our bodies, our spirit, our mind, our heart: Repent, Reconcile, Compassion, Forgiveness
8. “Sana tu mente, sana tu vida/Heal your mind, heal your life.”



## RECRUITMENT OF APPRENTICES:

Recruitment of FINDING BALANCE: MAYAN SACRED CEREMONY APPRENTICES took place throughout Los Angeles County..

- ▶ We contacted organizations that were involved with Mayan immigrant communities
- ▶ Word of Mouth
- ▶ Attended meetings where potential apprentices could be found
- ▶ Handed out flyers.

## RECRUITMENT of Healing Circles

- ▶ With flyers announcing the FINDING BALANCE: SACRED MAYAN CEREMONIES
- ▶ Contacting and sending flyers to organizations involved with the Mayan immigrant diasporas
- ▶ Promotion on podcasts and internet shows

## Gratitude

To be inclusive we invited other nonprofits to collaborate with us and also to promote within their staff, members or communities where their offices were located. Some of our collaborators were:

HOLA: (Heart of Los Angeles)

General Consulate of Mexico in Los Angeles

East Los Angeles Public Library

CABE WHITTIER PODCAST

Pedro Tohil Soto and Newmark Continuation High School

Tierra Blanca Arts Center

# Results & Outcomes

## 8 Healing Circles complete- including graduation.

- **Apprentices:** 9 were accepted and 9 Graduated and received their Certificates of Participation at level 1: Cultural Bearers of Mayan Sacred Ceremonies/Healing Circles (8 paid internships, 1 no payment by choice)
- **Participants:** Overall Attendance – 150 (grant called for 120 participants)
- **55** (Mayas. And a mixed immigrant community. Many indigenous immigrants from Oaxaca, Mexico and others that did not identify their heritage)

## SOCIAL WORKER CONSULTANT OBSERVATIONS:

The project called for a certified social worker to observe each Sacred Mayan Healing Circles and to serve as psychological and emotional support. Veronica Hernandez was hired by Lead Project: Sara Mijares, Cultural Bearer. These are the areas she identified with repeated occurrences during the Healing Circles and her observations:

The Finding Balance: Mayan Sacred Circles identified areas:

### SPACE:

- Trilingual/Multilingual: (Maya Quiche, Mayataan, Spanish, English)
- Talking Stick
- Deep Listening
- “Sacred Word”

- ALTAR: décor, - Colorful, Inviting, Grounding
- Music/Cantos

### **STRENGTHS/COPING:**

- Family (long distance)
- Family and Friends here
- Faith
- Warrior Mindset
- Insight/Self Reflection
- Patience
- Exercise (Sundance around the Fire)
- 5 Elements (Water, Fire, Earth, Wind, Sun)
- Breadth Work (Increase awareness)
- Spirituality Practice
- Music
- Eating with others (togetherness, sense of community)

### **COMMON STRESSORS:**

- Intergeneration Pain
- Post COVID
- Terminal Illness (Cancer)
- Trauma
- Giving/Self Sacrificing

- Technology Distractions
- Cultural Differences
- Loss of Cultural Identity
- Parenting Support (Bullying)
- Financial Limitations in Reconnecting
- Sense of Disconnection/Racial Discrimination
- Migration to USA

### **NEEDS (EMOTIONAL):**

- Sense of acceptance
- Sense of Belonging
- Knowledge of Cultural Strengths
- Self Awareness
- Acceptance
- To be understood/Support

### **GRATITUDE:** Participants comments:

- “Fortalecida/Strengthen, Continued growth, THANKFUL, I’am open, Reconnected, Yesterday I was feeling suicidal, today I am feeling that people care.”



# Mayan Sacred Ceremonies Pre-Test and Post Test Results

## DATA COLLECTION –

### ATTENDANCE:

241 from which 164 were new (not repeat).

### ETHNICITY:

100 identified as Mayas (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, Yucatan)  
the rest 64 identified themselves as: indigenous Oaxaca, Nayarit, Sonora,  
Mexico City, Queretaro)

60% identified themselves as indigenous immigrants

37% has Latino immigrants

3% - Anglo, African American, Asian

### AGES:

Children- 5-12 years old – 15

Teenagers: 32

Adults: 18+ = 125

Seniors: 50 – 75 = 69

### GENDER:

Male: 80%

Female: 15%

Other (LGBTQIAXX+): 5%

We developed Pre and Post Test using a Likert Scale. They PRE AND POST-TESTS were administered to attendees of the Healing Circles to gather information on the level of acknowledge gained by the attendees.

- Pre –Test – Post-Test Approximately 75% of people responded to both Pre-Post Tests with 95% positive respondents –
- Results submitted in spread sheets and hard copies turned into LACDMH
- Apprentices were dedicated to learning the Healing Circles and their participation was consistent.
- All apprentices that started completed the required 85% attendance to graduate.
- Apprentices are using what they learned in the Healing Circles and putting it into practice in the community.
- Apprentices and participants expressed an immediate healing as a result of participating in the Healing Circle, understanding that it is a beginning, and they can use this ancestral practice at home with family or friends to continue healing in addition to seeing counseling services. A few participants expressed that they had considered suicide. We gave them the LA County Department of Mental Health **Suicide number 988** and the **Emergency Number 800-854-7771**.

Mayan Sacred Ceremonies Pre-test Outcomes : 105 surveys						
Statements	Strongly Agreed	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Surveys's Answers in 8 Healing Mayan Circles
	Number/ %	Number/ %	Number/ %	Number/ %	Number/ %	Spanish/English/Maya Quiche
1) In my hometown we practiced Mayan Ceremonies	21 / 20%	22/20.95%	20/19.05%	14/13.33%	28/26.66	105
2) I am familiar with Mayan	24 /23.30%	45/43.60%	10/9.70%	12/11.65%	12/11.65%	103
3) Mayan Sacred ceremonies	51/50.49%	38/37.62%	4/3.96%	3/2.97%	5/4.95%	101
4) Mayan Sacred Ceremonies can help me understand about	51/48.57	35/33.33%	8/7.61%	3/2.85%	4/3.80%	105
5) Mayan Sacred ceremonies can be good for the	72/70.58%	24/23.52%	3/2.94%	0/0%	3/2.94%	102
6) I am Familiar with "Circulos Sagrados" of healing/Sanacion	29/32.22	37/41.11%	13/14.44%	7/7.77%	4/4.44%	90
7) I am familiar with Traditional Healing from my (Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Honduras, Oaxaca.	19/24.35%	26/33.33%	8/10.25%	15/16.66%	10/11.11%	78

## Mayan Sacred Ceremonies Pre-Test and Post Test Results

Mayan Sacred Ceremonies Post-test Outcomes: 164 Surveys						
Statements	Strongly Agreed	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Surveys's Answers in 8 Healing Mayan Circles
	Number/ %	Number/ %	Number/ %	Number/ %	Number/ %	Spanish/English/Maya Quiche
1) Mayan Sacred ceremonies help	56/54.36%	33/32.03%	9/8.73%	0/0%	5/4.85%	103
2) The Circulo of the Mayan Sacred Ceremonies was a good way to listen and understand	127/77.43%	27/16.46%	4/2.43%	0/0%	6/3.65%	164
3) Mayan Sacred ceremonies can help	71/71%	20/20%	3/3%	0/0%	6/6%	100
4) Mayan Sacred Ceremonies /Healing "Circulos" can help	60/58.25%	30/29.12%	7/6.79%	1/.097%	5/4.85%	103
5) These healing "Circulos" of the "Mayan Sacred	74/72.54	19/18.62%	2/1.96%	0/0%	7/6.86%	102
5) These healing "Circulos" of the Mayan Sacred Ceremonies	73/70.87%	19/18.44	2/1.94%	2/1.94%	7/6.79%	103
'Healing Circulos" of the Mavan Sacred Ceremonies to	81/78.64%	15/14.56%	1/.097%	0/0%	6/5.82%	103

# The Power of Healing Circles





# TESTIMONY

**Genara Cor** - From Santa Cruz del Quiche Guatemala San Antonio Ilotenango Quiche, Guatemala

Neighborhood: MacArthur Park area

“When I was little my parents did not teach me my own culture, as in school or church it was not ‘proper to talk about it’. We are Maya and we speak nahuatl.

Through Mundo Maya Foundation first and the apprentice program, I started to understand, learn and cultivate the sacred circles. I want to create this legacy for my children and other Maya children and their families. I have a folklorico group called Los Chapincitos and my 2 daughters are part of the dancing and circles as well. We are proud of our heritage and race. These circles cure people just by letting go all their worries, rejection, pain, suffering, loneliness, etc.”



# TESTIMONY



Apprentice of Finding Balance:

Mayan Sacred Ceremonies

Alex Alvarado- From Guatemala

Neighborhood: Westlake - MacArthur Park area

“The impact that the Healing Circle has left me is awareness, has helped me with healing, calmness, to create more consciousness, to spread cultura, to help my moods with the circles, tranquility, breathing techniques has helped me also, organizing time, connection, sharing, community, and teamwork.”

# TESTIMONY



Social Worker Consultant of  
Finding Balance:

Mayan Sacred Ceremonies

Veronica Hernandez, LCSW

1 Generation Counseling Services

“Sara, your presence in the Mayan Sacred Healing Circles has been truly impactful. Your energy and openness have contributed to the positive and nurturing environment created alongside Tata Jose. Thank you for the invitation to join this beautiful series of healing circles. Upon your review of the attachments, if you have any questions or suggestions, please let me know.

In gratitude,”





Sara, your presence in the Mayan Sacred Healing Circles has been truly impactful. Your energy and openness have contributed to the positive and nurturing environment created alongside Tata Jose. Thank you for the invitation to join this beautiful series of healing circles. Upon your review of the attachments, if you have any questions or suggestions please let me know.

In gratitude,

Veronica Hernandez, LCSW

1 Generation Counseling Services

## ROOM and Set up of Mayan Sacred Ceremonies

- 30 Chairs in a Circle
- 2/3 tables for Registration, Pre/Post Test, Food
- Food/snacks, water
- Registration Forms, pens, notebooks
- Pre-Test Spanish, Pre-Test English, Post-Test Spanish, Post-Test English



# Lessons Learned

## CHALLENGES:

- Finding free community venues. Perhaps we overlooked asking for support to the SPA's areas.
- For us - Access to LA County Department of Mental Health is difficult based on length of waiting time, language access, referral to language, cultural sensitivity professionals in Mental Health Department.
- Not all participants completed the Pre and Post Tests or sometimes signed up.
- TIME: Hard to fit the 2 hours stipulated by grant. It would take approximately 30 min for sign in, pre and post test, leaving only 90 minutes for the Healing Circles. When we had 30 people in the Healing Circle and each one took 3 minutes to express themselves, we already used 90 minutes and some required more time.
- Weather: Rainy days prevented us from having Healing Circles in open spaces

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To seek for additional funding to continue the Healing Circles opening it to all immigrant communities and public at large. Prioritizing the Spanish speaking or indigenous immigrant languages.
2. **Time factor.** Participants wished the Healing Circles would not have a time limit. They really wanted to express their problems, discharge their emotions and mental pain. However, and they were cognizant of the time factor and sometimes we felt the need to express and discharge in a fast way.

# Project Acknowledgment





# Project Team

Co Presenters:

**Abuela Sara Mijares** - Project Leader  
*Cultural Bearer/Maya Yucatec/Mayan Culture Guardian*

**Tat Jose Ajpu Munoz** - Co-Project Leader  
*Cultural Bearer/Guatemalan /Mayan Timekeeper*

Barbara Rabelo – Administrator

Karla Silva – Graphics, PR

Aury Martinez – Registration Assistant

Eddie Sakaki – Anita Martinez– Photography and Video

Anallely Tapia – Photography and Video

## PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORKER CONSULTANT



Veronica Hernandez, LCSW – Consultant  
1 Generation Counseling Services, LLC  
Founder and Clinical Director  
9650 Telstar Ave, Unit A - El Monte, CA 91731

1 Generation Counseling Services, LLC, offers bilingual individual and family therapy, integrating Western therapeutic modalities and ancestral healing ways to aid in the transformation and alignment of the self and collective whether family and/or workplace.

## Apprentices Graduates 2024



**Salvador "Chalchihuitzilli" Melgoza** *Healing Circle Practitioner - Mexico*

**Sarai "Xica" Rodriguez** - Mexico

**Marlene Lopez** – Guatemala - *Artist*

**Pedro Tohil Soto** – Guatemala - *High School Teacher*

**Genara Cor** – Guatemala - *Community Leader*

**Alex Alvarado** – Guatemala- *Community Leader*

**Abuela Maya Yucateca: Sara Mijares** – President, Mundo Maya Foundation

**Yesenia Ochoa** – Guatemala

**Ruth Valle** – El Salvador

**Lizbeth Gallegos** – Yucatán (not in photo)

**Karla Silva** – Board Member – Mundo Maya Foundation

Location: Newmark Continuation High School

# In Gratitude...Gracias!

HOLA

St. Annes Family Center

East Los Angeles Public Library

## Pictorial









Co Presenters:

**Abuela Sara Mijares** - Project Leader  
*Cultural Bearer/Maya Yucatec/Mayan Culture Guardian*

**Tat Jose Ajpu Munoz** - Co-Project Leader  
*Cultural Bearer/Guatemalan /Mayan Timekeeper*





Abuela Sara Mijares

Ready for Finding Balance: Mayan Sacred Ceremonies



Promotion

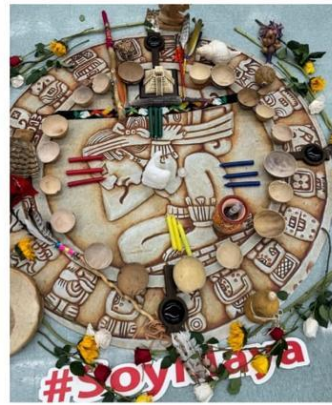






# SACRED MAYAN HEALING CIRCLE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15TH  
NEWMARK HIGH  
MPR ROOM, 1:30PM-3:15PM  
1575 W 2ND ST. LA, CA 90026



Join us for a cultural experience with a traditional Mayan Circle Ceremony.

Immerse yourself in the healing Maya Yok'Hah traditions of your ancestors.



**Presenters:**

**Abuela Sara Mijares  
Jose Ajpu Muñoz**

**RSVP WITH MR.  
SOTO IN ROOM 340**

**CLASS AND SERVICE  
CREDIT AVAILABLE FOR  
PARTICIPATING STUDENTS**

