

AK Words of Appreciation - AACAP Award, The Catcher in the Rye

Dr. Benton, President of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), professors, doctors, other authorities, and all those present, good morning.

I am deeply honored and grateful for this recognition, which fills me with immense joy. There is no doubt that this award will be an additional incentive to continue working for the mental health of children and adolescents. The United States has been, and continues to be, a global leader in this field. Many of the best specialists are trained in this great country, of which I am a great admirer, for all it has contributed and continues to contribute to our civilization, both in the health sciences and in many other areas of knowledge. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry is a shining example of this, for the great work it has carried out since its creation over a century ago, promoting training, research, and clinical care in the field of child and adolescent psychiatry. All of this is achieved through the support it provides to child and adolescent psychiatrists in their professional work, while recognizing and promoting initiatives from other organizations or individuals aimed at the same goal: the mental health and emotional well-being of children and adolescents.

I am pleased to share this objective, which guides the daily work and efforts of my foundation. I established the foundation in 1995, nearly 30 years ago, with the same aim of protecting and promoting the healthy development of children and adolescents in Spain. Our initial focus was on providing assistance to children under the guardianship of the Community of Madrid. These children came from dysfunctional families and were at high risk of social exclusion. We provided them with homes run by educators (designed to recreate a family home as closely as possible), as well as access to education, healthcare, recreational activities, etc... We also offered ongoing support after they came of age, including university education or vocational training and assistance with entering the workforce. This foster care program has assisted over 400 children, achieving a 95% success rate in terms of social integration.

Additionally, in 2005 I established the Multiple Sclerosis Day and Residential Centre, which bears my name, and donated it to the Community of Madrid. The center is dedicated to the treatment and rehabilitation of patients with multiple sclerosis.

From a young age, I was acutely aware of the suffering caused by mental health problems in our young people, as well as the impact it had on their families, and of the shortcomings in clinical care for mental health in my country. This concern led me to develop, 20 years ago, two new lines of action within the foundation: the *Grants for Advanced Training* in the fields of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology, and Pediatric Neurology; and the *Research Grants*, which fund the

development of research projects in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology, as well as in Neuroscience. The latter has funded 142 studies to date.

In Spain, the title of Specialist in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry was not created until 2021, and before this, there was no regulated training in this specialty. There is still no formal training in the area of Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology or Pediatric Neurology. Through our Advanced Training Grants, we have been able to offer specialized professional training to 80 psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and pediatric neurologists at university hospitals in countries where these specialties are well established; such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. To enable these professionals to bring their expertise back to Spain, we created return agreements, funding their first year of work in a Spanish public hospital. In 2014 our fellows established the Association of Scientists in Child and Adolescent Mental Health-Alicia Koplowitz Foundation with the objective of promoting scientific advancement in the fields of Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Neuroscience, in addition to facilitating professional development initiatives.

In recent years, we have taken another step towards making mental health care more accessible to children, adolescents and their families. As we all know, the incidence of mental disorders in the child and adolescent population had been increasing for years, and then the pandemic caused a sharp and even more alarming increase, which had a clear impact on the educational environment and greatly affected teachers. To mitigate these effects, we designed, promoted and funded a community mental health program for schools, following the WHO recommendations for ecological interventions: the Mental Health Liaison and Coordination Program for Schools in the Community of Madrid. We also created the Mental Health Education Program for Schools, which aims to educate teachers and families about the mental health of children and adolescents. Both programs, pioneers in Spain, are currently being implemented in partnership with the Community of Madrid. The Liaison Program is being developed by professionals from the Institute of Psychiatry and Mental Health of the Gregorio Marañón Hospital and the Southeast Hospital in Madrid. It was piloted in 13 public schools in Madrid during the 2022-2023 school year and has been extended to 44 other schools in Madrid and the southeast region since September 2023. In the new school year, the program will reach another 40 schools, for a total of nearly 100 schools. We lead this program in collaboration with the Education and Health Departments of the Community of Madrid, as a public-private partnership. In addition, we are conducting a research study on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the program in collaboration with the Institute of Psychiatry and Mental Health of the Hospital Gregorio Marañón and with the support of the London School of Economics. Our ultimate goal is to integrate this community mental health care model into public policy in Spain.

It is a tremendous honor for me to receive the humanitarian award "The Catcher in the Rye". I am deeply grateful for this recognition, which serves not only as a personal encouragement but also as an inspiration to continue the work that I am so passionate about. I want to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported me on this journey, this award belongs as much to them as it does to me. I am truly humbled and inspired to keep pushing forward in the serve of others.

Thank you very much for this incredible honor.



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Alicia Koplowitz