



*Voices Today:**
History in the Making

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I came to Guatemala as a volunteer in 1999, only for 6 months. I fell so in love with its people and its nature, that after 21 years I continue in the country. In 2009 I applied for the position of Executive Director at ABPD. I have to admit that I had not heard of the organization because I had never worked in the Chimaltenango area, but what I read about it was interesting to me and it is what prompted me to apply for this job, in which I continue after 11 years.

When I started, I learned about everything that BPD (now ALDEA) had done for decades in the rural communities of Chimaltenango, as well as the legacy of Dr. Behrhorst, whom I would have loved to meet. The different members of the boards of BPD (today ALDEA) and ABPD, explained to me about Doc's work, his humanity and everything he did during his years at the head of the organization. As director of ABPD, I saw him as a guide and a reference, even though he was no longer with us. I inquired more about him and listened to the stories of people who shared with Doc in the 80s, read published books of his work, and little by little I understood how he wanted to work with people and where he wanted to take the work of BPD. I needed no convincing of this vision; I fully shared from day one.

In the years that I have worked in ABPD, I have seen how the program has grown and reached new municipalities in Chimaltenango, and little by little our implementation strategies have been refined and evolved to be better, taking into account the lessons learned. Without realizing it, we got closer and closer to Doc's vision. A few years ago

we started using a new training methodology, SARAR, which listens to people in the communities as they identify their own challenges and find a way to address them, without the need for an external agent to tell them what their problems and solutions are. The ABPD approach, within its current strategic plan, has different components, such as nutritional education, drinking water, sanitation, and others, but we have always given special importance and consider community empowerment as the most essential element, gaining more and more importance every year, since the people of the communities that participate in the program must be the ones who lead it, and we must be only a support system as they recover what they have not had for centuries.

Thus, in the communities in which ABPD works, there are local promoters who, in just a matter of months, feel empowered and lead the development of their villages and families, women who become part of development committees and even auxiliary mayors from their communities, or young people who develop their own projects without external support, because the capacity is there. They just need to be heard.

Reflecting, after this time working at ABPD, I realize that Doc was totally correct with his philosophy of not letting people just participate, but doing things themselves. Of not being paternalistic; people can do for themselves. You just have to listen to them and support them with what they want to do. More than 50 years later, in our own way, we follow the philosophy of Dr. Behrhorst.

Sometimes we need to stop, step aside and observe what is happening to realize what we have become as an organization, separate from the hospital and the Behrhorst Foundation. One day, in a village, a person who was visiting us and had volunteered with Doc, lingered alone with me, considering the activities that were being carried out with a group of women, by our staff, and said: "I see ABPD's work now and I can see Doc. After so many years, he is still alive; you have kept him alive." These words, in addition to moving me, led me to reflect and to know that, although we make mistakes and we are not perfect as an organization, we have managed to get closer and we have been able to follow the path that Dr. Behrhorst marked half a century ago.

I hope we have become something of which Doc would be proud.