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## [College-Bound, Thanks to Latina Mentors](#)



Girls in the *Con Mi MADRE* program in Austin, TX

Photo: Courtesy of *Con Mi MADRE*

Maira Luna is one of almost 500 young Latinas who is in college thanks to *Con Mi MADRE*, (MADRE stands for Mothers and Daughters Raising Expectations), an Austin, Texas-based non-profit that shows middle-school and high-school girls - and just as importantly - their mothers, that a Latina girl's place *is* in college.

Luna, a freshman at the University of Houston who wants to study architecture, remembers one of her best days this past semester. "I had recently completed a really difficult project," she recalls. "But when I walked into the class, the professor told me I had done really well."

After class, the first thing Maira did was call her mother Teresa, who immigrated from Guanajuato, Mexico with an eighth grade education. "My parents had always wanted me to go to college, but they just did not know how it would work," Maira recalls. "My mom was so excited."

[Con Mi MADRE](#) started out as an Austin Junior League program in 1992, named the "Hispanic Mother Daughter Program." The women were alarmed by the fact that very few Hispanic girls in Austin were entering college. The group started providing counseling, mentoring, conferences, and more importantly, college visits - for both girls and their moms.

“I had one mom,” recalls Executive Director Sandy Alcalá, “who walked into the recreation room at Texas A&M, saw the beautiful facility, and said ‘But how much would it cost for my daughter to use this?’” Alcalá explained to the Hispanic immigrant mother that her daughter, a high-achieving student, could use these facilities for free - her grades would qualify her for a scholarship at the university.

“The mother’s eyes watered,” said Alcalá. “She said it was such a beautiful place, and it reminded her of where she worked - at a country club.”

The program became its own non-profit a few years ago. Since 1992 over two thousand mother and daughter teams have participated in the program. 67 percent of the girls will be the first in their family to attend college. Knowing this, the *Con Mi MADRE* staff have thought through the challenges many Latina teens face. The girls’ programs are during school hours, for example, since so many teens have to help babysit siblings or do not have access to transportation after school hours.

The program also anticipates that it is hard for families to let their daughters go off to college, and they know girls might feel guilty. “They told us how it would feel,” recalls Maira, “so I think about that when I miss my family and realize I’m not alone.”

Alcalá, the Executive Director, comes from a successful third-generation Mexican family. But she grew up volunteering, wanting newer Latino immigrant women to have a chance at the American dream. “Knowledge is power,” Alcalá says.

The program goes beyond showing girls the possibility of college; they help families obtain scholarships, fill out financial aid forms, and have provided over one hundred thousand dollars in scholarships.

Now, Maira says her father, who works in construction, can’t stop talking about his daughter, the future architect.

Nothing could make Alcalá happier. “We help these girls realize they belong in college. They can have a different life.”

*BY SANDRA LILLEY, NBC LATINO STAFF*

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