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Center for Social Dynamics
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CENTER FOR SOCIAL DYNAMICS

CEO and Company Profile

Who is Pete?

Pedro Pallares Torres (Pete) believes that *all* children with autism can improve and that no case is too difficult. To him, success is unmistakably calculable: life gets better for all involved, or it does not. If patients *and* their families are not smiling, financial metrics don't matter.

Pete left the security of his job as an autism program director to found the Center for Social Dynamics, a company that provides therapy to children with autism. He did so with no formal

business training or executive background--just the tenuous likelihood of a sole contract and a desire to do things differently. In the beginning Pete used his passion, and a lot of resolve, to overcome his lack of business seasoning--ultimately elevating his company to the Inc. 500.

The startup years were very rough. Pete endured every challenge imaginable as he pioneered a multicultural approach to autism therapy that embraces difficult cases and non-English speakers. Pete carved out a niche by helping patients that no one else could handle and has subsequently attracted and helped hundreds of families and children. A minority himself, Pete learned through his years as a BCBA that autism needed a break from orthodoxy. Pete established a new clinical status quo which, surprisingly, includes such basic tenets as listening to and esteeming family input. By contrast traditional approaches subordinate family needs and wishes to a supposedly "expert" therapist.

Although Pete is not afraid to 'color outside the lines', he knows that group excursions to the edge outweigh solo missions into the unknown. His experience as an NCAA and professional basketball player taught him the value of teamwork. To him, families and staff are invaluable stakeholders; teammates. Pete implores them to contribute in the search for solutions—from scrutinizing and debating the latest autism research to formulating and implementing their own ideas, projects, and approaches to patient care.

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The Evolution of CSD

CSD was founded in 2012 contemporaneously with a change in the California health care laws that mandated insurance coverage for children with autism. Having helped to build clinical departments in other growing companies, Pete decided that his passion for treating autism, combined with a modicum of business savvy, was a solid enough foundation for him to strike out on his own.

Pete identified an under-serviced segment of autism patients, namely minorities, and decided to provide treatment to them. Minority families with autistic children felt alienated by a self-satisfied industry with an approach suitable only to the dominant culture. Thus, CSD tailored outreach efforts to these families, assuring them of a respect and sensitivity to different cultures.

CSD opened for business with just one payor, no institutional funding, and initial referrals were those that other providers had failed or deemed too challenging to accept in the first place. Pete accepted all of the patients he was offered which often meant having to recruit, hire and train multilingual employees in a matter of mere weeks.

Center for Social Dynamics risked very survival by prioritizing clinical outcomes over profitability. And it worked.

Not just patients signed up, but staff. As word spread about the provider that put clinical success and employee satisfaction ahead of financial rewards, resumes poured in. Some of the most passionate people in the field defected from their well-established employers to sign on to Pete's mission.

CSD grew fast—too fast, in fact. Early years, financial performance was inferior despite growing revenues. Stress levels were high among employees who were filling multiple roles they had not been trained for. In Pete's case, he went for long stretches without seeing his family in Spain, coaching basketball, or making music with his band. He lost touch with friends and learned many business lessons through sometimes painful mistakes. Today, the company currently has more than 400 employees, provides treatment to almost 800 patients, and boasts three-year revenue growth of 1,143%.

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A Unique Enterprise

Initially, Center for Social Dynamics strove to serve as many patients as possible. This has already been stated, but bears repeating: Pete took patients that mainstream providers did not want to provide for. He recruited talent and empowered his staff to search for solutions, instead of simply following industry orthodoxy and regularly presents an innovation award to deserving employees.

Though Pete was emphatic that no 3-year-old should ever be on a waiting list, this meant sustaining manpower growth in a very competitive recruiting environment. Towards this end, Pete has always established salaries above local averages despite a marginal reduction in profitability. Doing so differentiates us to candidates and attracts more and better potential hires.

Pete sees employment as a way to create a future for someone—not as a business function. In many large cities, for instance, babysitters, classroom aides, housekeepers, etc. are bilingual and have experience working with children but have no opportunity for advancement. CSD

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recognizes their language skills and informal experience, recruits and trains them, offers a salary increase, health care and a true career path. As a result, our recruiting pool is much larger than just career fairs.

Pete believes that with the proper attitude any employee can find a career path at CSD—first through training and then through continuing education and credentialing opportunities. Our employees know that we are ascending, and they understand that they have a chance to move vertically in the organization. They are motivated.

Any award won for individual brilliance in a team environment is an award shared. When a winner steps to the podium to accept an honor, and credits the team, it is not obligatory humility; it's honesty. Pete has built a winning team by valuing every member.

In order to rise and shine even further, Pete desires to scale responsibly, without sacrificing anything in the way of patient care. Already CSD has expanded from its first office in Oakland to the entire region, Southern California, Oregon, and is in talks with a payor in Colorado. Although he does meet with potential equity partners, Pete is still contemplating the right balance between institutional scale and preservation of his mission.

Giving Back

One of the greatest developments in the capitalist ethos is the notion of corporate social responsibility, and Pete is thrilled about that. Yet he also emphasizes that the greatest contribution a company can make to a community is to be successful. CSD provides excellent treatment for our patients, quality jobs for our employees, a market for our suppliers, and tax revenue for various levels of government.

CSD has been very successful, and with great success comes greater social responsibility.

For this reason, Pete established the Pedro Pallares Autism Foundation, which recently provided direct relief to clients who were also victims of the 2017 Northern California fires. The Foundation is also involved in projects to promote autism awareness and treatment in developing countries.

CSD has been very successful, and with great success comes greater moral social responsibility.

The one thing that a person can give away and still retain 100% of is knowledge. Pete is a volunteer lecturer at San Jose and San Francisco community colleges and developed the first semester course dedicated solely to autism in the California Community College System. He has established internships at those colleges, as well as at Sonoma State University.

Employee retention is high because CSD provides professional development and educational opportunities for employees. Pete established a partnership with the Florida Institute of Technology wherein CSD employees can earn scholarships for graduate degrees and clinical licenses. Jobs are initially posted internally to encourage the development of employees—external searches occur only when necessary. As a result, six employees who were once entry-level clinicians comprise the majority of our ranks of key administrators. Moreover, numerous entry-level employees have been with CSD while fulfilling the 1500 supervision hours and coursework to become a BCBA—the gold standard of autism therapy.

Pete's very first patient—then a nonverbal three-year-old—is fifteen years later a special assistant to the CEO and keyboardist in the company band. This in itself is proof enough that CSD is not your typical autism company.