



## Hadas Madrinas Programming Guide

By: Carishina en Bici Collective  
Quito, Ecuador



### History

Carishina en Bici is a collective of female urban cyclists who organize races and events for women with the intention of creating spaces that are safe, supportive, and create solidarity between women on wheels. We promote and advocate for more women to bike, and that more women participate and are visible in public spaces in our city (Quito, Ecuador). More than anything, we are a group of women who

love and have fun biking, and want to share that with as many women as possible. The collective started in March of 2010 as a series of alley-cat races, and has since evolved into a larger volunteer run collective that organizes rides (urban, rural, and cultural), races, workshops, and the Hadas Madrinas program.

The Hadas Madrinas en Bici program started in November of 2011 in response to a perceived need for a mentoring program

for women who wanted to learn to ride a bike, and for women who wanted to learn to use their bikes as a form of transportation. We as a group decided to do something about the lack of resources for these women and started Hadas Madrinas en Bici *Fairy Godmothers on Bikes*. The idea was to have a decentralized model pairing together a “madrina” *godmother/big sister* and an “ahijada” *goddaughter/little sister* to work together regularly to share necessary skills, and to have a few larger workshops where all the pairs would come together. We felt that this model was best for a few reasons. First, we wanted the model to be as decentralized as possible because the Carishina en Bici collective is a volunteer-run group, and therefore doesn’t have the time or resources to provide the majority of programming. Second, we felt that by creating one-on-one relationships we could increase the number of times that women would go out biking since it is easier to arrange schedules between two people as opposed to between fifty. Lastly, we felt this would be the most sustainable model to encourage as many women as possible to participate since it asked for relatively little time from its volunteers, and created future volunteers (the ideal evolution being that ahijadas would become mdrinas to future participants).

In the summer of 2012, the Hadas Madrinas program was awarded a grant from the Davis Projects for Peace Foundation to buy bikes to loan out to participants in the Hadas Madrinas Program. This greatly improved the capacity of the program to reach low-income women who wanted to participate but did not have access to a bicycle. In total, Hadas Madrinas now functions with 20 bikes to loan out, along with helmets, locks, and reflective vests. We used this one time

grant as an investment in the infrastructure of Hadas Madrinas program, while the program continues to rely on the support and time of volunteers.

Our belief that education and support is the key to getting more women on bikes on the road continues to drive this program. We believe that women teaching women provides a unique relationship to help encourage more women to ride a bike. Furthermore, biking in traffic in cities such as Quito can be intimidating, but anyone can do it once they learn the necessary skills, and, most importantly, practice!

Our hope with this guide is to provide a manual for other women’s bike collectives and organizations to replicate this program. We have been struck over the years by how many women have expressed interest in learning to ride, or wanting to learn more bike handling skills, but simply did not know who to turn to for advice. We are hopeful that the structure of this program can be adapted to and replicated in a variety of contexts, and help to provide the education and support that many women need to feel empowered to use a bicycle as a form of transportation.



*A madrina teaching her ahijada the basics.*

## Overall Structure

We will give a brief overview of the structure before going into more detail. You'll need two or three people to be the main organizers for the project, one volunteer for every five pairs of *madrinas* and *ahijadas* who is willing to make follow-up calls (this volunteer can also be a *madrina* – but shouldn't make follow-up calls to their own *ahijadas*, because that would be awkward), and then as many volunteers to be a *madrinas* as you have *ahijadas*. With the *Carishinas en Bici* collective we generally run the program over a four month period, which consists of three workshops (about once a month), and a final graduation event (an alley-cat race!). We ask pairs to meet at least once a week to go for a bike ride, and to attend the monthly workshop. With that overall structure in mind – now we will get into the details.

## Outreach to Participants

The first step in this program is to find participants. This will depend on the context of the program. When thinking about how to get the word out it's important to think critically about how you are going to reach *madrinas*, and how to reach *ahijadas*, because these might be two separate outreach processes. At least for the *Carishinas en Bici* collective, each time we open the program we can send out an email to our existing contacts to ask for *madrina* volunteers, and that is normally enough to get the volunteers we need. In addition, we sometimes flyer at bike shops and go on bike radio shows. Finding *ahijadas* is a different story. Ideally we try to reach women who don't already participate in bike spaces, and may not even be aware that the *Carishinas en Bici*

collective exists. To find *ahijadas* we do interviews on non-bike related radio shows, reach out to neighborhood organizations in low-income communities, and flyer in targeted neighborhoods. There are many ways to find *ahijadas*, depending on where you are working, but reaching out to non-bike related spaces is important to make sure you're reaching women outside your normal demographic.

## Making the Madrinas/Ahijadas Pairs

The next step is making the *madrina/ahijada* pair. This is a crucial step because the success of the program depends on these pairs. Once *madrinas* and *ahijadas* sign up, we send them a short questionnaire to get a better idea about who they are, their experiences with biking, and what they want to get out of the project (we normally use a Google Form for this to keep all the information together and easy to look at).

For *ahijadas* we ask:

- Where do you live?
- Have you ridden a bike before?
- What type of biking do you want to do? (Urban/Mountain/Road)
- Why do you want a big sister?
- How did you find out about this program?

For *madrinas* we ask:

- Where do you live?
- How many times a week do you ride your bike in traffic?
- What type of biking do you do? (Urban/Mountain/road)
- Why do you want to be a big sister?

These are just examples, but gathering some information about participants will

help increase the likelihood of creating successful pairs.



*A happy madrina/ahijada group!*

After gathering this information we tend to split the mdrinas and ahijadas into different levels. For ahijadas we categorize the women into levels 0, 1, and 2 (we encourage you to rename the levels into something more fun than numbers). Zero means that the participant does not know how to ride a bike. Level 1 means that she knows how to ride, but only bikes in the park, doesn't know how to use gears, and lacks other basic biking skills. Level 2 are women who are very good cyclists (in the context of Quito - normally mountain bikers) and know how to handle a bike well, but don't know how to ride in traffic and are interested in learning to use their bike as transportation. We similarly break down our madrina volunteers into levels according to their self-assessed ability. There are some women who sign up as ahijadas who could be mdrinas, and vice versa. We generally put the mdrinas into two categories: women who can be a mdrinas to anyone, and women who probably fit better with level zero or level one ahijadas.

Next we start to organize the ahijadas and mdrinas into pairs. We start with organizing pairs by neighborhoods. We try our best to have the mdrinas and ahijadas live in the same neighborhood, or at least the same part of the city. This is really important because the closer they live together the more likely that they are to meet up on a whim to go for a bike ride. We also think about age, previous experiences on bikes, and the other questions from the questionnaire to try to make the best pairs possible. There are many ways to think about creating pairs, this is just the way that we have decided to do it.



*A pair going out for their first ride.*

This process can take a while, but we believe it's really important to put in the time to make the pairs as compatible as possible. The main volunteers who are heading the project normally create the pairs. Once the pairs are made, we send out an email to all the mdrinas and ahijadas to invite them to the first workshop where everyone will meet.

As a side note, there are a few ways to deal with the very possible situation that you

have more ahijadas or more madrinas sign up. We've only ever had more ahijadas sign up than madrinas, but it's possible that a reverse situation could happen as well. One strategy is to say from the beginning that there can only be XX number of pairs, and fill those spots with the first people who sign up. You can intentionally set this number lower than you think you need to - this way you're basically covering for yourself. The people who don't get a partner can be placed at the top of the list for the next time you run the program.

In the case that you have more ahijadas than madrinas, you can ask if there are madrinas who are willing to double up. We've often done this in the past when there are multiple ahijadas who are at similar levels who live in the same neighborhood as one madrina. We then ask the madrina to mentor two little sisters (we've even had up to 3, or two madrinas for 5 people too). We encourage them to set up times that work for all three so that we're not asking the madrina to do double the work.

We've never experienced having more madrinas than ahijadas, but here are some ideas. First, you could have more people who signed up as madrinas be involved with program oversight and logistics to keep them involved in the program. You could also have floater extra madrinas, that are back-up to the primary madrina. This madrina might have five ahijadas that she is back-up for, and can arrange to meet with them occasionally (maybe once a month) to be another person to ride with and learn from.

## Workshops

When we run the Hadas Madrinas program we generally organize it around three workshops. The first is a meet up, and get to know you/ know your bike, the second is a check-in, mechanic workshop, and short relay race, and the last workshop is another check-in and a ride. We close the program with an alley-cat race where the madrinas and ahijadas participate together in a team (the ahijadas who have recently learned to ride a bike volunteer at the stops).



*Introducing the parts of the bike.*

We normally use the first workshop to do some icebreakers, give some inspirational speeches about how to conquer fear, and have a previous madrina and ahijada talk about their experiences. We also separate the madrinas and ahijadas to do separate workshops. With the madrinas we go over the different types of skills they need to teach to their ahijada, and how to teach it. For example, we'll have all of the madrinas who have a level zero ahijada together and talk to them about how to teach someone how to ride a bike. We'll do the same for level one and level two madrinas about the different skills that each level needs to learn. With the ahijadas we ask them to

talk about their previous experiences learning to ride a bike, and what fears they might have. We also go over the names of the parts of the bikes. We close with having all of the madrinas and ahijadas get into their pairs, exchange information, and set a time and date for their first meet-up.



*Working on brakes.*

We begin the second workshops by separating the madrinas and ahijadas again and talk about how the program has been going so far. We ask about successes and set-backs, and what are their goals for the next month. Then we normally do a short fix-a-flat workshop, or other mechanic skill to get everyone more familiar with their bike. Lastly, we close the workshop with a relay race around a park. We'll start with all of the level zero ahijadas (biking, or pushing with their feet) going 100 meters to hand-off to a level one ahijada. The level one ahijada then has to bike through another part of the park practicing a skill (such as biking standing up, changing gears, or anything else you can think of). Lastly the level one participant, hands off to a level two participant, who has to bike on the street the rest of the way around the park back to the beginning. (Or at least this is one idea that has been really fun.)



*Going for a ride in the Ciclopaseo.*

We begin the last workshop the same way by dividing the madrinas and ahijadas to talk about how things are going. Then we separate into different groups to go for a bike ride: level zero may just bike around the park, level one might go on quiet, flat streets, and level two might go on busy streets.

We like to end each cycle of the program with a graduation event. We've normally done this in the form of an alley-cat, but there are many different ways to celebrate the end of the program.

## **Following Up**

Following up with both the madrinas and ahijadas is an important part of the structure of the program. It helps to

identify pairs that aren't working out well, identifying when pairs aren't going out biking as often as they should be, and just keeps an eye on things. As we mentioned earlier, you'll want one person to volunteer to make follow-up calls to five pairs each month. Ideally they make the follow-up call somewhere in between the monthly workshops. They call the pairs and ask about how things have been going, what they've learned so far, and how often they've been going out biking. Ideally this volunteer then reports to the main organizers about how the pairs are doing. If something isn't going well, or a pair needs to be switched up, the main organizers can then step in.

## Goals for Little Sisters

Overall the goal is that each level of ahijadas will have graduated to the next level by the end of the program – level zero has become a level one, level one to a level two, and a level two would be ready to be a madrina.



Here are some basic ideas for goals for the different levels:

### Level Zero:

Overall goal by end: Ride a bike!

Intermittent goals:

- Be able to get on and off the bike easily
- Walk around comfortably pushing the bike at your side
- Sit on the bike and walk pushing with your feet
- Sit on the bike and push with both feet and try to pick up your feet for longer and longer intervals (start with 1 second, try to make it to 10 seconds)
- Learn to smoothly brake while pushing with your feet
- Learn to curve while pushing with your feet
- Keep your head up and look where you are going while pushing with your feet. Don't look at the ground!
- After pushing with your feet try to lift up your feet and put them on the pedals
- Try to start pedaling!
- Practice curving and braking once you're pedaling
- Celebrate your successes!

### Level One:

Overall goal by the end: Feel comfortable on your bike for recreation, and feel confident in bike handling skills

Intermittent goals:

- Practice getting on and off the bike quickly and easily
- Practice starting and stopping on the bike (starting with a pedal stroke with your dominant foot)
- Practice smoothly braking, and trying to brake in shorter and shorter distances

- Practice figure 8's while closing the eight more and more each time
- Practice standing up without pedaling
- Practice standing up pedaling
- Practice experimenting with gears – find a small hill and try to keep the same cadence all the way up the hill
- Find a bigger hill and try the same thing
- Celebrate your successes!

### **Level Two:**

Overall goal: Feel confident using your bike as a mode of transportation!

Intermittent goals:

- Practice getting on and off your bike quickly and easily
- Practice walking up stairs carrying your bike
- Practice turning your bike upside down
- Go for a bike ride in your neighborhood to the different bike stores near you. Go inside one of them and ask someone a question.
- Learn how to lock up your bike effectively and safely
- Practice signaling in a parking lot.
- Practice scanning behind you for traffic while maintaining a straight line.
- First practice on quiet streets. Practice taking the lane and occupying your space on the road.
- Try a slightly busier road. Practice taking the lane, and scanning behind you for traffic. Try scanning, signaling, and changing lanes.
- Practice a left turn at a busy intersection that involves changing lanes.
- Plan a route to work and bike there. Try it first at a time when there might be less traffic to get used to it,

then try it again when there is more traffic.

- Celebrate your successes!

You might change and adapt the goals for your context, but these are ideas of goals we have used in the past.

## **Documenting the Process**

Take pictures! Interview participants about the program! You want to document the process both to document your successes, but also to have an idea of things to improve for the next time. We often have our participants fill out a before and after questionnaire, and ask for input on their favorite parts of the program, and what has room for improvement. This will help to improve the program in the future. It's also nice to have stories and pictures to share with other groups that are interested in the program and might want to be involved the next time.

## **A Note about Bikes...**

As we mentioned earlier, the Hadas Madrinhas program now has bikes to lend out to participants who do not have their own bikes. Although many organizations and collectives may not have access to that type of resource, we want to explain a little bit about how lending process works. On the original questionnaire that we ask participants to fill out, we ask if they have a bicycle. Once we know which participants need a bike, we also look at what level they are at. We prioritize first lending bikes to participants at level one, then level two, and lastly, level zero. The idea is that most women who are at level zero can practice on their madrina's bike since they will mostly be practicing in parking lots and parks. We figure that participants at level



one are on the verge of getting excited about biking, and that having a borrowed bike will inspire them to want to purchase their own. Many of the women who are at a level two may not have bought a bike because they don't have enough money, but once they learn to use a bike as transportation they can save money on transportation and use it towards buying their own bike.

We start with the bikes in one central location and then ask the madrinas to come to pick up the bikes. We then give the madrinas a form that the ahijadas must fill out once they receive the bike that says they commit to biking with their madrina, attending workshops, will repair the bike if needed, and agree to pay for the value of the bike if it is lost or stolen. We ask all participants to sign that note, but we also know that the last clause is on a case-by-case basis (at least for us). To prevent theft we ask that the madrinas go to the ahijadas

houses to see where they will keep the bike, and to promptly have a lesson about how to lock up bikes. The ahijadas have the bikes for the duration of the program, but then must turn the bikes back in at the start of the next round of the program. The idea is that the bikes should be in constant circulation and use. Participants may re-apply for a bike for the next round, but we prioritize new participants.

## Contact Us

We would love to hear your feedback about this program, and to hear your stories. Feel free to email us with comments and questions. You can contact Charlotte at [charlotte.fagan@gmail.com](mailto:charlotte.fagan@gmail.com) (for questions in English), or [carishinaenbici@gmail.com](mailto:carishinaenbici@gmail.com) (for questions in Spanish). We can also provide you with more details about any part of the process.

## Appendix

### Lessons and Metrics about Hadas Madrinas:

At this time we've opened the Hadas Madrinas program two times. We significantly overhauled the program between the first and second cycles. The first time we had fewer participants, we had no bikes to lend out, and it was our first time so made a lot of mistakes. We didn't have participants fill out basic information at the beginning, so we had no way to arrange pairs by neighborhood, interests, or abilities. Each pairing ended up being a shot in the dark as to whether or not it would work out. We had no follow-up mechanism to check-in with participants, so we didn't recognize or intervene when pairs weren't working out. That being said, the few pairs that did work out continued with the program, and are now some of our most enthusiastic organizers within the collective. Some graduated to become madrinas and others graduated to the next level of ahijadas.

We learned from these mistakes, modified the structure, and came back to the second cycle of the program with new energy and new ideas. This guide is a reflection of those changes. During our second time organizing Hadas Madrinas we had a lower drop-out rate, higher participation rate, and the majority of participants graduated to the next level or became madrinas. That being said, this program is always a work in progress, and after each cycle of the program we reflect on what worked, what didn't, and think of ways to improve the project.

#### First Cycle:

Total Number of Ahijadas	19
Total Number of Madrinas	19
Number of Ahijadas who Dropped-out of Program	11 (58%)
Number of Ahijadas who graduated to the next level	5
Number of Ahijadas who Became Madrinas	2

#### Second Cycle:

Total Number of Ahijadas	52 (Total)
Level 0	7
Level 1	23
Level 2	22
Total Number of Madrinas	25
Number of Ahijadas who Dropped-out of Program	12 (23%)
Number of Ahijadas who graduated to the next level	20
Number of Ahijadas who Became Madrinas	12