

Bosque de las Madres Peer Educator Project in Gender-Based Violence Prevention

Conducted by Fundación Cuencas de Limón (The Limón Watershed Foundation)

Project Duration: October 2021-October 2023

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Project Summary

The Bosque de las Madres (“The Mothers’ Forest”) Peer Training is a project of Fundación Cuencas de Limón in Costa Rica, which trains adolescents and adults to become skilled Peer Educators in the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV). Peer Educators can have powerful, positive impacts on preventing gender-based violence when trained in communications skills they can use to convey messages to their peers and adults in their communities; when they are equipped with the Hacete Escuchar (“Be Heard”) prevention curriculum; and when they receive their training in a trauma-informed, nature-based educational experience.

We are training youth in at-risk situations to become confident Peer Educators, to apply evidence-based skills, and to influence their communities with powerful messages of GBV prevention. The 150 youth and adult GBV Prevention Peer Educators we are currently training come from three collaborating shelters: La Posada de Belén and Casa Mariano in the Province of Alajuela, and SOS Aldeas Infantiles in the Province of Limón. After an initial 4-day training session in the Bosque de las Madres Biological Corridor area of Costa Rica (Bananito, Province of Limón), we continue to provide to each Peer Educator 12 months of extended mentoring beyond the initial training sessions, through means such as monthly follow-up meetings (virtual or in-person), social media messaging and posts, and the creation of professionally produced tutorial videos, all of which further reinforce the Hacete Escuchar curriculum and the mindfulness skills learned.

Three things make our approach unique: first, the initial training includes trauma-informed, nature-based mindfulness techniques in a safe, calm environment away from the participants’ usual domiciles, which enhances the experience and improves learning. Second, technology and social media are used to reinforce what is learned in person, and this approach is expected to reach a wider number of beneficiaries, appeal to young participants, fit a diversity of learning styles, and teach participants basic computer skills they can apply to future jobs. Third, participants plant trees in the Bosque de las Madres Biological Corridor in honor of someone they love; in this way they build a concrete legacy by helping restore a native forest area, while engaging in a symbolic activity of healing that represents the journey of their own lives. Fourth – and most importantly – our Peer Educator training is an alternative to more traditional top-down approaches, because it empowers trainees to become mentors and instructors.

This project gives vulnerable, young people skills in gender-based violence prevention and turns them into teachers of their peers. There is solid research that shows that peer-to-peer learning is often more effective than top-down learning. The sustainability of this project is guaranteed by the built-in follow-up sessions over the course of a year, by the creation of training videos and closed social media groups that will persist well into the future, and the trajectory of Fundación Cuencas de Limón, a foundation which has carried to completion some fifty successful programs in the province of Limón, Costa Rica, since 1996.