

# **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 was a project of Fundación Cuencas de Limón in Costa Rica, which trained 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 trained 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 trained came from three collaborating shelters: La Posada de Belén, 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 continued 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 reinforced the Hacete Escuchar curriculum and the mindfulness skills learned.

Four things made our approach unique: first, the initial training included trauma-informed, nature-based mindfulness techniques in a safe, calm environment away from the participants’ usual domiciles, which enhanced the experience and improved learning. Second, technology and social media were used to reinforce what is learned in person, and this approach was 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 planted trees in the Bosque de las Madres Biological Corridor in honor of someone they love; in this way they built 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 was an alternative to more traditional top-down approaches, because it empowered trainees to become mentors and instructors.

This project gave vulnerable young people skills in gender-based violence prevention and turned 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 was 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.