



The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

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STATUS:
Laureate

Organization name:
Trust for the Americas

Organization URL:
www.trustfortheamericas.org

Project Name:
Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA)
Accessible

What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?

In 2004, there were approximately 50 million people with disabilities in Latin America. In developing countries, 80% to 90% of persons with disabilities of working age are unemployed (UN Enable). People with disabilities suffer from historic discrimination and exclusion and their condition is universally linked to poverty through lack of access to rehabilitation, education, training, and employment. Recognizing the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to empower people and provide them with meaningful opportunities, the Trust for the Americas, a 501(c) (3) non-for-profit organization affiliated with the Organization of American States (OAS), implemented Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA). Created in 2004, the program started as a pilot project in Guatemala for people with disabilities (PwD) utilizing Microsoft Corporation's Unlimited Potential digital literacy curriculum in an effort to use information communication technologies to fight poverty, increase social inclusion and improve competitiveness. Today, the program continues to develop as an innovative multi-sectorial tele-centre initiative in 20 implementing countries and 110 active training centers that foster the development of people with disabilities and youth at risk through effective public-private partnerships, reinforcement of local ownership and sustainability in addition to promoting social inclusion awareness efforts. Through partnerships with local organizations ranging from NGOs to vocational training centers, the POETA Accessible centers provide the necessary training for preparation and participation of PwD in the competitive employment market. Metrics used to measure the program's success include: participants trained

in ICT skills and job-readiness skills per quarter; graduates per term; graduates who have obtained employment; staff from the center trained in ICT training methodology; the effectiveness of publicity campaigns and partnerships to promote the center; number of community users during non-training hours; impact on the lives of participants and effect on the community as a whole.

Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.

The Trust equips each POETA Accessible center with the most up-to-date adaptive technology that enables persons with disabilities to utilize and take full advantage of the program's digital literacy curriculum. The adaptive technology available at the centers include but is not limited to voice recognition and screen reader software, adaptive keyboards and mice, electronic pointing devices, sit-and-touch systems, and hand wands and mouth sticks, to name a few -- all of which have proven extremely useful for PwD in their professional as well as personal lives. We use traditional ICTs, as well as adaptive technologies and other applications to provide access to technology and training. These technologies include a model of virtualization and multi users in the centers to amplify the number of users per computer without affecting the individual access. One important benefit of the centers is the promotion of adaptive technology to enable PwD to use a computer and therefore have just as much of an increase in employment opportunities as any other individual. Using a range of technologies, POETA far surpasses any other ICT training program for PwD, which, in reality, were virtually nonexistent. Additionally, there is no other program that uses the same combination of technologies to benefit persons with disabilities in the region. Through such innovative application of technology, POETA is filling a gap in informal education for marginalized communities all over the hemisphere. During the course of the program's implementation, a major challenge is the placement rate of POETA participants in jobs and further education. To address this, the Trust requires its local partners to conduct targeted analyses of the job market in their communities in order to complement digital skills training with the development of new curricula that responds to workforce demands in program countries.

Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.

Since its inception in 2004, POETA has achieved many milestones and contributed significantly to facilitating inclusion and reducing the digital divide for PwD in the Americas. To date, the Trust for the Americas has 110 operational POETA centers in the following Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Dominican Republic and Venezuela. To date, more than 76,652 people were trained, increasing employment and education opportunities for PwD and vulnerable populations across the Americas. Partnerships with more than 200 private and public sector entities were established. POETA modules are designed to respond to employment needs resulting in placement rates of up to 30%. The number of community members who have benefited from services at POETA centers: 604,000. The number of local partner organizations whose staff has been trained in the use of information and communication technology for organizational purposes and training purposes: 70. Supported by the United Nations Convention on Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, ratified in 2007, and the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, ratified in 2001 by almost all countries in Latin America. Recognized by the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) as a model best practice program in promoting social and economic inclusion for people with disabilities. Recognized among the first regional initiatives serving persons with disabilities in Latin America, and because of the increased awareness due to POETA Accessible and other pioneering programs, the use of technology for social inclusion for PwD is becoming more important to policymakers in Latin America.

Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.

Jessica Montserrat Santeliz Granados, 22, POETA Center, Guatemala City: At a young age, I was diagnosed with Glaucoma, a disease that affects the nerves of the retina and causes progressive loss of vision. As a young girl, I studied in Committee for the Blind and Deaf of Guatemala, St. Lucia School for Blind Children, and afterwards I enrolled in rehabilitation courses at Committee's Holistic Rehabilitation Center. While I was studying at the rehabilitation center, I heard about POETA's computer lab and computer classes, but I thought that it would be like all other computer labs, and that it would be very difficult for me to learn anything there. But soon I realized that this center had tools that allowed people with visual disabilities to access the world of technology. This adaptive technology made learning much easier, and I enjoyed the training and acquiring the skills that help me greatly in my new job. I'm now working as a customer service representative in a call center, and I can perform at the same level as my coworkers. I'm very happy now because I can get around with more independence without needing a family member to accompany me, and I have more freedom to develop personally. I've expanded my circle of friends, and I want to continue studying and then share my experiences with others, to support them and motivate them to press on towards their goals. I'd like to encourage my friends who are in the process of rehabilitation to trust in themselves, and to take advantage of the opportunity to take part in the program. You'll encounter difficult challenges along the way, but with persistence, you can overcome these obstacles and create a better life for yourself and your families.