

Title of Project: Mental Health Training for Peace: Building an Online Platform to Educate Families of Mental Health Patients in El Salvador

Country where project will take place: El Salvador; **Sponsoring college:** Trinity College

Project leader name: Suzanne Carpe Elias '22

Team member names and schools: Federico Cedolini '22, Trinity College (Pearson College UWC '18)

Date range of project execution: April – August 2022

Overview: “Mental Health Training for Peace” is a project that seeks to create a digital platform to train friends and family members of mental health patients in El Salvador on how to better assist and support their loved ones in their recovery process and help improve their mental health status.

Background: In recent years, mental health disorders have gained more visibility around the world – yet suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds and depression is still one of the main causes of disability. Even though there has been some progress on acknowledging and treating such conditions, people who suffer from them often experience severe human right violations along with discrimination and stigma¹. The national mental health systems in many countries around the world have serious limitations, especially in terms of qualified professionals and services that the public can access to². For instance, one of the smallest countries in Latin America – El Salvador – was the third country with the highest suicide rate in the region during 2017³. Mental health services are inaccessible for most of the population here: the public sector only counts with 66 mental health professionals for the entire country, and every year there are 6,600 new cases of depression. Therefore, the public system can't meet the demands for mental health services and the private sector is too expensive for the average per capita income of Salvadorans⁴. To address such limitations, non-profit organizations focusing on mental health have been founded in El Salvador. One such organizations is Fundación Continúa, which has been working to educate, reduce the stigma, and raise awareness about the way people view mental health; and provide easy and humanitarian access to mental health services since 2015. Fundación Continúa offers accessible therapy to Salvadorans who cannot afford private mental health services, which results in over 400 hours of therapy per month with an increase of around 20% more hours per month⁵. They work with six licensed psychologists in the country, and their services have increased exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic as the organization has been providing online consults.

Working towards peace: According to the World Health Organization, good mental health is intrinsically related to the stability and success of a population, as well as long-lasting peace in society⁶. Fundación Continúa has many patients currently in treatment, particularly because of the elevated levels of anxiety that Salvadorans live in due to the high incidence of gang violence in country —the aftermath of a civil war in the 1980s⁷. Most of the patients lack the support from family and friends because of the disinformation and stigma related to their condition. Research has shown that having a support system positively contributes to recovery from mental health illness⁸, for which the present project seeks to create a platform where friends and families of patients can learn more about mental health disorders and be trained how to better support their loved ones. Additionally, we aim to increase Fundación Continúa's reach through a short documentary of their initiatives, particularly this platform. We expect that, by addressing the mental health limitations in El Salvador, we can also contribute to the stability, success, and peace of this country.

Project Outcomes: 1) **Training the families and friends of mental health patients from Fundación Continúa:** we plan to create a digital platform similar to Khan Academy or Coursera which will feature videos, articles, and quizzes in which the families and friends of current patients at Fundación Continúa can learn about mental health, its importance, and get certified on how to better provide care and support to their loved ones who have been diagnosed and are in treatment for such conditions.

2) **Providing better care and support to mental health patients in El Salvador:** by helping develop positive support systems for patients, we aim to increase the mental health status of El Salvador. The digital platform could also be shared with other mental health professionals such as licensed psychologists and psychiatrists in both the public and private sectors, such as all mental health patients that would like to share it with family and friends are able to. In the long-term, the equipment purchased for this project would also help Fundación Continúa develop more resources to help their patients.

3) **Increasing Fundación Continúa's reach and visibility to aid their mission:** our project will expand Fundación Continúa's efforts and ability to help patients, and the short documentary we will be filming would give marketing content that can later be shown in social media to raise awareness of the services they

provide, and can also be shown in other places such as Trinity College to educate people about the importance of mental health and motivate others to organize similar efforts.

Qualifications: Suzanne: I was born and raised in El Salvador, so I am familiar with the language and culture in the country. I have also dealt with both anxiety and depression in the past and have been fortunate enough to receive treatment in the US, which has greatly motivated me to help people back home who do not have this privilege. Additionally, the founder of Fundación Continúa is my cousin, so we already have a close relationship, and I am familiar with the initiatives of the organization.

Federico: I was born and raised in a Latin American country and have visited El Salvador previously, so I am also familiar with the region. In addition to this, I have been part of Suzanne's support system these past couple of years, so I understand how important it is to be informed about mental health conditions. I am also studying computer science and have vast experience with technology and software design necessary for building the platform and editing the documentary.

Timeline:

April – Late May: Determine the specifics of the platform, taking into consideration the current needs of patients at Fundación Continúa, and how we can better train their families to provide help and support for them. Reach out to a selected group of mental health professionals to provide their expertise for the curriculum, and to software developers to start planning the platform.

Late May – Mid-June: Develop the learning curriculum (articles, videos, and quizzes), upload it into the platform, and create a training schedule. Travel to El Salvador to videotape the process and interview members of Fundación Continúa for the documentary and for marketing of the foundation.

June 15: Launch of platform and record the process for the documentary.

Mid-June – Late June: Monitor running the platform, finish the interviews, and launch a marketing campaign in Fundación Continúa's social media accounts to promote the use of the platform.

July – August: Continue communicating with Fundación Continúa to monitor the progress remotely, edit the documentary, and get it ready to present at Trinity College.

Sustainability: We will be working with Fundación Continúa, a well-established non-profit organization that already works with mental health professionals including licensed psychologists and provides affordable care to over 500 patients and over 400 hours of therapy per month in El Salvador. The success of this project will provide Fundación Continúa with an online platform to train the friends and families of their current and future patients, plus the necessary equipment to continue improving the site and catering it also to prevention and education of the general public. With this, they will be able to further train more friends and families and help more patients. Eventually, they can expand their reach and improve the mental health situation in El Salvador and potentially even other countries in Latin America.

Bringing it Back to Trinity College: This project will help raise awareness about the importance of mental health and the realities often faced in developing countries. We will videotape the main parts of the project (creating and launching the platform) as well as interview members of Fundación Continúa and mental health professionals. We will be putting the footage together and adding subtitles in English to later screen it at Trinity College, and we will both be available for a presentation. We will also be sharing this documentary with the Counseling and Wellness Center and the student-run organization Active Minds.

References:

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2. Nickels, S. V., Campos Tomasino, M., Flamenco Arvaiza, N. A., & Hunter, C. A. (2018). Access to mental health care in El Salvador: A case study of progress toward decentralization. *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública*, 42, e172. <https://doi.org/10.26633/RPSP.2018.172>
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4. *Dejar De Lado A La Salud Mental Es Costoso Para El Salvador—Fundación Continúa*. (2018). Retrieved January 26, 2022, from <https://fundacioncontinua.com/investigaciones/salud-mental-perspectiva-economica/>
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8. *The Importance of Having a Support System*. (2020). Mental Health First Aid. <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2020/08/the-importance-of-having-a-support-system/>

Name: Suzanne Carpe Elias '22, Federico Cedolini '22
Project Name: Mental Health Training for Peace
School: Trinity College

Note: all funds in US dollars.

Projects for Peace grant: \$ 10,000.00
 Additional Funding, if any:
Total funding available: \$ **10,000.00**

TOTAL FUNDS REMAINING:
 \$ -

TOTAL EXPENDITURES:
 \$ 10,000.00

Student Expenses					Project Expenses				
Travel (Including Airfare)	Lodging	Communications	Food (Biweekly)	Miscellaneous	Non-Student Travel and Lodging	Direct Equipment and Supplies	Marketing and Event Support	Staffing Costs	Miscellaneous
1,032.26	0	0	0	0	80	4587.74	350	3950	0
Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
\$ 1,032.26	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 80.00	\$ 4,587.74	\$ 350.00	\$ 3,950.00	\$ -

Total Student Expenses: \$ **1,032.26**

Total Project Expenses: \$ **8,967.74**