Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA): Examining the impact of the POETA program on the lives of People with Disabilities

Research Project. Final Report

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Abstract.

This project was funded by International Research Development of Canada (IDRC) and managed by the Trust for the Americas, a nonprofit affiliate of the Organization of the American States –OAS.

Based on a Collaborative Action Research and Evaluation (CARE) and using a realist methodology it was possible to investigate the underlying mechanisms and contextual factors that have the most direct impact on the successes and challenges of the POETA program.

The results of the interviews suggest that in the areas of social support and inclusion, personal growth and employability, the POETA program plays an important role in impacting the lives of participants. Based on the research results, it seems that the three main program components are the key elements of the POETA efforts and that each component has definite social mechanisms that drive positive change towards desired outcomes.

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Key words: training, social inclusion, employability, people with disabilities, Information and Communication Technologies.

Glossary

CARE: Collaborative Action Research and Evaluation (CARE) is a methodology that simultaneously implements and investigates change through a series of iterations, stages of action, and reflections to guarantee that outcomes are relevant.

Dynamics of Change: Mechanisms and the conditions which seem most effective in relation to identified outcomes and impacts.

Mechanisms: Term used by realists to signify the key elements or processes that contribute to the dynamics of transformative change.

Realist approach: An approach grounded in realism that considers both the material and the social worlds to be 'real' and to have real effects.

Semi-structured interview: A flexible interview that uses open ended questions focused on general themes.

List of Acronyms

IDRC - International Research Development of Canada

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

OAS - Organization of American States

POETA – Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA)

PwD - People with Disabilities

Trust - The Trust for the Americas

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Introduction and Background

Fostering decent livelihoods for People with Disabilities (PwD) in the Americas is a major development challenge. PwD comprise approximately ten percent of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean (Duzdik, Elwan & Metts, 2002). They are a community of people who face significant levels of poverty and unemployment. Moreover, there are few initiatives and little research in place to address the needs of PwD living in the region.

The Trust for the Americas (the Trust), a non-profit affiliate of the Organization of American States (OAS), has been addressing the social and economic exclusion of PwD through its program Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA). This initiative, which began as a small pilot project in Guatemala in 2004, partners with local organizations to establish community technology centers that provide job readiness and technology training to PwD. The POETA program recently celebrated its 8th anniversary with continued growth and geographic expansion that now includes 20 countries with different target populations (people with disabilities, youth at risk, and persons affected by violence, among others) and different program components. The program aims to provide technology and job readiness training to increase employment and social opportunities for vulnerable communities by building capacity among local partner organizations. The research project reported here takes a look at the performance of POETA Accesible which is focused on People with Disabilities in four countries: Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, and Peru.

As the POETA program expands, it is important to understand how it works in order to scale-up components that create high impact and to identify areas for program improvement. Therefore, the Trust proposed a project involving three components: 1) research to examine the impact of the program on the lives of PwD; 2) design and implementation of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework; and 3) capacity building of the local partner organizations serving PwD. The project will undoubtedly benefit the POETA program but will also serve as an important source of knowledge for organizations using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to facilitate the inclusion and development of PwD. This report deals with the first and third components. The second component, the monitoring and evaluation framework, is described separately in a different report.

As the Trust moves forward, it also recognizes the important work done by other actors within and outside the four countries studied which have addressed the situation of PWD - particularly through training in ICTs. Across the hemisphere, governments, civil society and the private sector are implementing programs to serve the important PwD population. The Trust sees the need to learn from the experiences of these actors as it undertakes a review of the POETA program and moves forward with a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation framework.

Project Goals and Objectives

General Goal

The purpose of the research component is to understand the perception of the beneficiaries of the POETA program and its impact on their lives.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives are:

- To explore the experiences of PwD who have engaged in the POETA program
- To explore the impact of the POETA program on the lives of PwD

Methodology

General description

A collaborative action research and evaluation methodology (Hills & Mullett, 2000; Hills, Mullett & Carroll, 2007; Hills & Mullett, 2005) was used to conduct the research. Collaborative Action Research and Evaluation (CARE) plans and then simultaneously implements and investigates change through a series of iterations. The CARE process ensures that all those who are interested in the outcome of the research and evaluation participate and collaborate in every aspect of it from initiation to conclusion. CARE creates evidence upon which to base practice and catalyzes changes to the practice. CARE is collaborative, participatory, empowering, systematic, and transformative.

Unlike most traditional methodologies, CARE encourages change while simultaneously investigating it. This methodology requires full participation of both local partners and researchers (together, referred to as the inquiry group) in all aspects of the project. The methodology is iterative as the inquiry group cycles through stages of action and reflection to develop the research thereby ensuring that outcomes are relevant. The inquiry team cycled through several iterations, each time considering propositional knowledge in relation to practical knowledge.

A "Realist" (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Pawson, 2002) approach underpinned the research. This approach resulted in "dynamics of change" being identified and examined as part of the research process with the resulting benefit that the inquiry team was able to synthesize evidence across programs – evidence based particularly on "candidate mechanisms" that are related to the effective (or ineffective) delivery of the program. 'Mechanism' is the term realists use to signify the underlying drivers of change: What are the key elements or processes that contribute to the dynamics of transformative change? Likewise, this allowed for the systematic monitoring of these "dynamics of change" (mechanisms) and the conditions (context) under which they seem most effective in relation to identified outcomes and impacts.

During the first stage, the inquiry group (researchers, local partners, research assistants and Trust staff) met in Bogotá, Colombia, in February 2011 to receive training in the CARE research methodology and jointly define the objectives of the research and the main issues to investigate. Then, local partners went back to their countries and presented to their organizations the work developed in Bogotá in order to get feedback and make them aware of the importance of carrying out this study. It should be noted that participation of local partners was voluntary and in some cases they had to wait for the agreement of their directors. However, those that volunteered were required to have implemented the program for a certain period of time. This is the reason why the most recent local partner in Peru, ASSOLI, was not able to participate. Appendix C contains a complete list and short descriptions of all participating organizations.

Once the main program components to be surveyed and the research questions were defined, the research assistants coordinated with local partners for the interview process. Some interviews were conducted virtually through Skype, others through social media, and others in person. After conducting the interviews and processing the information, the research assistants, with the

support of the researchers, proceeded to analyze the main results. At first, the analysis was done by country and, subsequently, a global analysis that took into account the results of all the countries was completed.

Using an iterative and participatory methodology, this data was returned to local partner organizations for their input and feedback. An initial report was presented to the local partners in a meeting in Bogotá in late September 2011 with the following objectives: to share results and to get feedback from local partners. All the comments and suggestions of local partners were taken into account and incorporated into the report. In June 2012, a final version of the research document was presented to local partners and POETA participants to share results, get final feedback from local actors, and to develop capacity in the organizations - thereby highlighting paths to development that arose from the research.

In addition, existing monitoring and evaluation documents were reviewed in the last meeting in Bogotá and a draft framework was developed by the main researchers. The iterative process will be applied again to refine and finalize the framework by exchanging it between the inquiry group and the local partners. The participatory nature of this interactive project develops capacity within the local organizations.

Process of data collection

Through a collaborative and iterative process, local partners and the inquiry group developed criteria to identify the POETA participants who could provide insightful and valuable information about POETA. For the selection of participants, the following criteria were established:

- POETA program graduates (more than 6 months of training)
- Able to communicate their thoughts in Spanish
- Participated regularly in the activities of the POETA program
- Agreed to participate in the interview (through a consent form)

The recruitment of respondents was organized as follows:
- Selection of participants: local partners made an initial selection of participants who met the criteria. Those considered more viable and relevant in terms of meeting the criteria were selected to be contacted.
- Contact with participants: local partners called potential selected participants to tell them about the Project and our interest in their participation.

Next, local partners contacted those who agreed to participate in the study to coordinate the day, time, and place for the interview. Local partners carried out these tasks on behalf of the inquiry team and their role was very important in starting the process of data collection.

Research leaders selected the techniques and prepared tools for data collection. Research assistants were in charge of applying these with participants. The techniques applied for data collection were semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (see appendix A). This type of interview allowed us to understand respondents' views as they described their experiences in their own words. Although there was a starting interview format, during the interview respondents were free to develop each topic in the most convenient way for him/her. Semi-

structured interviews resemble regular conversations and these allow for the emergence of unexpected themes.

Each participating country (see above) was asked to select 10 participants from all of their POETA centers for a total of 40 interviews, 10 per country. However, due to extenuating circumstances, the inquiry team interviewed 17 participants in Guatemala (not 10) in order to address the needs of the POETA sponsoring organizations. Of those 17 interviews, 3 were removed from the analysis because the PwD did not meet the required criteria to be part of the study. As a result, the inquiry team conducted a total of 44 interviews that met the criteria for the study (see Appendix C for Characteristics of Interviewees).

Interviews were audio-recorded and the average time for the interviews was 40 minutes. All interviews were transcribed for later analysis. Prior to the interview, each of the interviewees was asked to review the consent form (appendix B) and if he/she agreed to participate, he/she was asked to sign it. All the participants who were interviewed had previously signed the consent form. To safeguard the privacy of respondents and to ensure confidentiality, the real names of participants were replaced with fictitious names and codes were used in the description of their responses. All interviews were conducted in an atmosphere of privacy between the research assistant and the interviewee.

Data Analysis

Two strategies were used to organize and understand the data: a strategy to collate the raw data into a useful structure and a thematic analysis to analyze the data.

- ***Collating the Raw Data***

A protocol template (see Appendix A) was created to collate all the raw data from the interviews. Data from each country was summarized using this template (presented in a separate document and available by request). Summarized data was presented and discussed with the local partners by teleconference. They reported that they found this information very useful for understanding perspectives on the POETA program in each country.

- ***Thematic Analysis***

The method applied to the analysis of interviews was the thematic analysis which is introduced below. This report is a synthesis of the application of the thematic analysis to the interviews for all countries included (thematic analysis reports by country are in separate documents which are available by request).

Thematic analysis (van Manen, 1997) is a reflective activity of textual labor. *Theme* refers to an element that occurs frequently in the text (in this case, interviews' transcriptions). *Thematic analysis* refers to the process of recovering the themes that are embodied or dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the transcriptions. While there are now computer programs that claim to do the thematic analysis for the researcher, thematic analysis, according to van Manen and as used here, is not an unambiguous mechanical application of frequency counts or of coding of selected terms in transcripts of texts or of the breakdown of the content of protocol or documentary material. Rather, the thematic analysis used here is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure.

Grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of "seeing" meaning. Theme gives control and order to our research findings and to the reporting of results. Phenomenological themes may be understood as structures of experience. So when we analyze a phenomenon (in this case a participant's experience of the POETA program), we are determining what the themes are and the experiential structures that make up that experience. It might be tempting to think of themes as conceptual abstractions but this is an oversimplification. Lived experiences cannot be captured as conceptual abstractions. Lived experiences are concrete and contextual. We are attempting to "mine" experiences for the meaning that is embedded in the participant's report of his or her experience. (Adapted from van Manen, 1997, p. 87 - 89).

Protocol for conducting the thematic analysis

The thematic analysis conducted by the inquiry group had a more specific purpose than just the identification of general themes. The group also tried to identify mechanisms related to three components: training, employability and social support, which were identified at an early project meeting in Bogota. The research assistants were instructed to review these three components before reading the transcriptions. They were also instructed to keep in the back of their minds, as they read the transcripts, "candidate mechanisms" that might be identified as the "drivers of change". These drivers of change were described to them as factors or events that seem to make the component effective or ineffective.

The research assistants were provided with the following instructions:

1. Read the transcriptions of the interviews to get a general sense of the content and context of the participant's experience.
2. Read each interview again, trying to identify themes. Are there any phrases that stand out? What statements or phrases seem particularly essential or revealing about the experience described?
3. Highlight and make notes (or use sticky notes) to note your first impressions of what stands out as significant.
4. Read the transcripts again and note similarities between themes.
5. Read the transcripts again, noting themes that seem less significant than others but seem more to be sub-themes.
6. Identify example responses from the transcriptions that best articulate "evidence" of the theme that you are trying to describe. Two or three examples are sufficient evidence of a theme.

In preparation for this report, a second thematic analysis was conducted by looking across the thematic analysis reports by country in order to search for similarities and differences in the themes that arose in all reports. Van Manen's method was again used to conduct the analysis of data across the four countries. All country reports were read several times. The themes that emerged are discussed in the following Results and Discussion section.

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis revealed 3 overall themes - the first having 3 sub-themes; the second, 5 sub-themes, and the third, 2 sub-themes (see Table 1). The themes presented below are the common themes that were significant for all four countries. The examples provided are direct quotes of participant responses and are also reported below.

Table 1: Emerging Themes

Theme One: Social Inclusion through ICT Training	Theme Two: Impact of the organization and the POETA program on personal growth.	Theme Three: Labor Inclusion from the POETA experience
Sub-theme 1.1: Learning and Motivation	Sub-theme 2.1: Personal Growth Motivation	Sub-theme 3.1: Training Enhances Job Opportunities
Sub-theme 1.2: Social Networking	Sub-theme 2.2: Family Support	Sub-theme 3.2: Organization's Support in Creating Opportunities Through Partnerships
Sub-theme 1.3: Knowledge Sharing	Sub-theme 2.3: Group Support	
	Sub-theme 2.4 Organizational Support	
	Sub-theme 2.5: Teacher Support	

Theme One: Social Inclusion through ICT Training

Participants, in general, felt that learning ICT programs such as Excel and PowerPoint was a significant advance for them. Some noted a larger impact because they had not previously had the chance to complete a basic level of education or to achieve further studies. The act of gaining more knowledge made participants feel that they were no longer being left behind. Rather, they felt they were making significant advances towards their own social inclusion.

Their responses demonstrate that their experience in the POETA program increased their self-esteem, self-determination, and self-confidence. This was especially notable for PwD who mentioned feeling cut off from the outside world because of their disability. The participants believed that gaining ICT knowledge and skills leads to economic independence and social integration. As such, most of the participants were satisfied with the ICT training; they suggested that they would like to continue training in new technologies because it helps them enhance their personal growth and integration. For instance, participants said employment opportunities were particularly complicated for people with disabilities, and ICT training significantly increased the number of employment options. They believe that training in new technologies is a basic prerequisite to getting a job or starting a business.

Some interviewees noted that it is important to plan this training based on the interests and the abilities of each participant. They also suggested creating advanced levels of training with corresponding certifications. They recommended that this training should be more technical and

professional in order to obtain a better job and attain real social inclusion. Moreover, they expressed their desire to have POETA centers permanently working in their communities. These comments indicate that participating in the POETA program represents an experience of social inclusion for PwD that responds to certain crucial demands.

These responses are congruent with both general work on the effect of social exclusion on health and well-being (Popay et al., 2008) and the more specific findings of how social exclusion affects PwD in Latin America (Hernández-Licona, 2005). Social exclusion has multiple related dimensions: social, political, cultural and economic (Escorel et al., 2007; Levitas et al., 2007). It is clear from the participants' responses that, through their POETA experience, several of these dimensions were addressed. PwD are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, making this a significant issue for the POETA Centers to consider and on which to focus through a reflexive practice.

Sub-theme 1.1: Learning and Motivation

In gaining knowledge and learning about computers and computer software, the participants gained confidence and motivation to engage in the learning process in the long term and to continue acquiring valuable skills. As one respondent said: "*Because of the technological training I received, I learned a lot, and felt the desire to improve my situation in life. The basic foundation that the courses gave me motivated me to continue learning. I made it a goal to learn these more advanced skills, and it has clearly made a difference in my personal life.*" (P12, Fundabiem, Guatemala)

In many cases, participants already had a strong motivation to engage with POETA from the time they joined the program: "*I was willing to learn, I wanted it. I spent a lot of time doing nothing, then the opportunity to come here and learn something was something good, and something that I was looking for*" (P5, Carvajal, Colombia). On the whole, participants clearly linked their gains in knowledge to feelings of self-esteem and self-worth: "*for me it was an important outcome, a personal growth, a growth in communication with others, relationships, and the issue of what it is to learn something new.*" (Viviana, CILSA)

Some interviewees had basic knowledge about the use of new technologies which was a strong motivation for them to update and enrich their skills. Those who had no previous knowledge of informatics were similarly or even more motivated towards learning, improving their quality of life, knowing other PwD living in similar situations as they did and, perhaps more importantly for them, achieving autonomy through various job opportunities. These expectations arose from the experience of being part of a program in a particular training space. As another respondent said: "*POETA helped me a lot. I learned a lot… the program helped me move forward. After finishing with POETA, I had more time to spend with my family, but was able to keep practicing. I never forgot my experience with POETA, because of the way I was treated. When they told me there was going to be an interview, I was surprised and proud of myself because they remembered me. Maybe it was because of my grades, or something else, but they remembered me, and I felt proud of myself, I felt loved.*" (P1, Fundades, Peru)

It is important to note that the motivation to keep engaged with a learning process is not necessarily restricted to POETA or to a specific period of time or place. Most participants showed an interest to keep learning beyond the ICT training offered through POETA in fields and areas such as technologies, languages, management, and others. Likewise, they were willing to be part

of longer, more rigorous and certified courses and considered the POETA centers as key organizations that give them access to these opportunities. Many participants voiced that they were not restricted to POETA for training while some pointed out that there were few other opportunities to access informational technology and training outside the program.

Sub-theme 1.2: Social networking

Learning to use the internet allowed many respondents to communicate and build social relationships with other people through chat or e-mail. This was particularly relevant when taking into account each specific context of a participant's disability that was often marked by issues and processes of social exclusion and discrimination. Learning the uses of ICT and the internet has been identified in previous studies as a key lever for overcoming some of the social exclusion faced by PwD (Waddell, 2012). Waddell quotes Dr. ZhangXu from China as saying: "*If anybody asks me what the Internet means to me, I will tell him without hesitation: To me (a quadriplegic) the Internet occupies the most important part of my life. It is my feet that can take me to any part of the world; it is my hands which help me to accomplish my work; it is my best friend - it gives my life meaning.*" (Waddell, 2012: p.63)

One respondent from our interviews said: "*I have ten contacts on my Facebook page and there I publish several things. I have foreign friends and all tha*t. "(P8, Carvajal, Colombia). Another said: "*I didn't even want to get close to a computer because I thought I would not be able to use it and I felt very sad. But now I know how to use it, even how to use a social network. I have a lot of friends through the internet. Sometimes I have friends that I contact through the internet and I write to family members who live far away who we can't see often. And with these adaptations I am happy because now I know that in the future I will find a job and I can now use the adaptations to perform a job.*" (P2, Fundabiem, Guatemala).

These responses demonstrate how access to the internet overcomes many communication barriers and reduces feelings of isolation for PwD. With some respondents, this new access to others goes beyond simply reducing isolation: it seems to have direct impact on personal growth and even adds therapeutic benefits. For example, one person said: "*…for me it's useful even as personal growth, although I don't have a job, because I have a computer and I can connect with other people, sometimes with the same problem of disability. I chat with them for hours and it is a kind of therapy that we do mutually and we encourage mutually. We bring strength to each other, we send nice things, [we are] able to move forward.*" (Norma, CILSA)

Sub-theme 1.3: Sharing knowledge

In many cases, participants shared their newly found knowledge with their families and friends. Respondents felt empowered to take on new challenges such as helping others with complex tasks. For instance, one person stated: "*I think that I learned a lot like how help people with fewer opportunities than me. For example, I have a friend who has a business, and I explained to him how to make different things. With some guides that I got, I taught him. It's important not just to keep for yourself the knowledge; you have to share what you know with other people. That's important and I like to share what I know.*" (P8, Fundación Arcángeles, Colombia).

In other cases, participants expressed their interest in having greater participation and responsibility in the POETA program so that they could transfer their knowledge to other PwD. For

example, one participant asked to be a POETA program teacher: "…*but I would say, what if just like the diplomas are valid (...) if there were other class levels that I could complete and pass... So that I could have, let's say, a diploma to teach someone else. I would say that if I had been given the opportunity and said 'if you complete the following five programs and the sixth one will allow you to teach a class', then I think that would help too.* (P7, Fundabiem, Guatemala). Hence, this appeal opens spaces for promoting synergies and generating inclusive opportunities that may allow participants to become models for learning, guides, and even educators within their communities.

Theme Two: Impact of the Organization and the POETA Program on Personal Growth

The experiences of participants during POETA training are not only influenced by internal factors such as a participant's personality or motivation to learn. These are also influenced by external factors that include family support and the relationship the participants have with their immediate surroundings, their disabilities, the organization, the training, and especially the relationships they develop with their classmates and teachers. Moreover, the desire and motivation of participants to learn are influenced by social and cultural perceptions of PwD determined by each particular context. Society in general is not prepared to integrate PwD because of a negative perception associated with their inability to assume a socially successfully role (Dudzik et al., 2002).

Society needs to change this mind-set and overcome these stereotypes to really integrate PwD. To achieve this, it is crucial to understand that social stereotypes and paradigms are influenced by individual perceptions. In this sense, there are many factors that can contribute to achieving greater social changes in favor of PwD - such as family support, peer support and institutional support. Many researchers have also noted how changes in laws and social policies can be a determining factor in changing society's perception of PwD (Dudzik et al., 2002; Escorel et al., 2007; Hernández-Licona, 2005; Popay et al., 2008; Waddell, 2012).

Sub-theme 2.1: Personal growth motivation

Motivation towards personal growth is a necessary factor in a participant's learning experience. Most participants said that their motivation was based on the desire to learn something new and useful with which they could get ahead, which was in turn reflected in increased levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. For example, one respondent working as teacher said: "*Something that had the greatest impact for me was the idea of learning about yourself, because you are working all day with young people, and you need to be innovative. This was one of the reasons that made me learn, because I have a commitment with my family, and every day I want to be a better person*." (P9, CIREC Tibú, Colombia)

The experience in the training program has the potential to change PwD's own perceptions of their disabilities and, thus, it is an important support in overcoming negative feelings such as loneliness and fear of not being able to do or achieve anything. One person said: "*Yes, they lifted my self-esteem a lot. Yes, I felt bad; like I said, I went to look for a job in two places. They turned me down. Now I feel like a useful man (...) Thanks to God and POETA, and Fundabiem. This is a constant battle. A disability is present everyday and all of your days should be happy... because if you don't do anything, then who will?*" (P4, Fundabiem, Guatemala)

In general, participants showed commitment, attitude, and willingness to have a satisfactory experience in the program. Furthermore, there was the significant fact that the participants did

not want their life merely pass by. Rather, they took an active role in changing the situations, activities, tasks, and conditions that affected them. Some PwD reported greater autonomy in their daily life and, particularly, a decreased reliance on others mostly with respect to computers but, for some, also economically. They also said that after the POETA program, they were more informed and more capable of working with computer programs than some of their non-PwD peers such as family members and friends. Today, some of them have their own businesses which include some PwD engaging in training initiatives. Others apply their knowledge to search for jobs, expand their knowledge base, and find their own means of subsistence.

Sub-theme 2.2: Family support

Family support is a key aspect in PwD's lives and plays a significant role in the learning and personal growth processes of participants. Most participants stated that their families are the most important support in their lives. Furthermore, a supportive environment at home offers spaces for sharing experiences which, in turn, is reflected in increased self-esteem and confidence. In some cases, family members learned with the participant and they had the opportunity to share their knowledge by practicing together. As one person said: "*Well, I value my family a lot. [POETA] has helped me a lot because it allows me to explain things to [my family] that they did not know about computing. I don't presume to know everything, but my personal experiences along with my POETA training allow me to pass these skills to my family.*" (P7, COPEME, Peru)

On the whole, family support impacts PwD's lives in several ways. For instance, it motivates participants to find further study or job opportunities by supporting and guiding them in achieving a better quality of life. As one person told us: '*(...) my family is proud of me and happy to see me like this, (...).*" (P11, Comité Prociegos y Sordos, Guatemala) Absence of this support can be detrimental for personal development. However, even in cases where there has been little or no family support, participation in formative spaces such as this program has been a valuable way to overcome certain personal limitations.

Sub-theme 2.3: Group support

Many of the respondents did not expect direct social support from the training program. Rather, they simply expected training or the opportunity to find a job. However their social experiences at the centers where generally characterized by positive experiences creating new relationships as well as giving and receiving affection. Some respondents had not had previous affectionate or social relationships with other PwD. They felt alone and were frequently recipients of social rejection and discrimination.

In this sense, the POETA Program provided participants with new contacts, friendships, and relationships with others often because of a shared condition or disability. One respondent said: "*Look, my disability it's because of an accident, so I didn't have so much contact with other persons with the same problem. But then I saw people in same conditions as me, I started to develop some relationships, and there are some classmates where we have a good relationship; we're more than partners, it is friendship*" (P6, Fundación Carvajal, Colombia). Therefore, the social group formed within each POETA program fulfilled functions related to emotional support. Moreover, the support given by fellow students provided some encouragement to attain further achievements over the course of each participant's life. Moreover, by seeing others with their own projects or goals, they felt entitled to carry on with their own efforts.

The group provided respect and listened to participants. This is an important motivational factor in the learning process since they felt supported by their peers. The group gave participants the opportunity to more widely interact with other PwD and to find similar aspects in their life stories which led them to develop a positive view over their particular situations. For example, one person felt that the social interaction at the center allowed them to feel more comfortable when relating to others outside the center as in the case of their workplaces. In other words, it helped them improve their relationships in general: "*(...) I feel I was antisocial. I mean, I was always quiet; I liked to observe people and then give them my friendship. But in POETA I related more with young people, and I was more social. In that sense it helped me a lot and now, for my job, it helps me a lot. There are people you find that in spite of being professionals, they can go through hard moments; thus it has helped me to be able to talk with people*." (P5, COPEME, Peru)

Sub-theme 2.4: Organization support

The centers provided different benefits and reflections related to the social interactions that PwD experienced there. The centers became spaces where inequalities were left behind and participants enjoyed the opportunity to improve their social skills and values by relating to other PwD, to staff and to external stakeholders, directly or indirectly. This experience helped them to develop a renewed concept about their social spaces and social interactions, giving them inputs to develop a new way to portray themselves in society. Some of the participants felt that they found not only a place to learn but, also, a place of belonging where they built relationships. For example, one respondent said: "*(...) here in the Foundation they make us feel that this is your home… it is a nice place where you don't want to leave and because of that maybe I am still here, and I am always with the excuse that it is Office 2010, I will learn it, and I never leave; so I think that if one stays here it is because you feel good (...)*" (Martina, 41 years old, Fundación PAR).

The commitment of the organization to the progress of participants is necessary and relevant since it has been proved to be a key factor in furthering individual and group development. Indeed, in many cases local leaders at POETA centers have offered services beyond the formal lessons - including integration activities, psychosocial support, and physiotherapy, among others. Nonetheless, participants also identified weak aspects in the training services provided. For instance, the main request is related to having better and more IT materials (computers and software), extended training programs (in terms of time and specialization areas) and even teachers better trained to cope with the learning needs of people with different disabilities. Other suggestions seem to be more related to the economic limitations that PwD regularly experience: they are related to covering expenses such as transportation, further studies, and implementing or improving job search and placement services.

In spite of the aforementioned demands, respondents have, overall, highlighted the extended support of organizations. One of them noted how the POETA program provided resources in a sensitive way to PwD by contrasting the experience with POETA with that at other institutions which were not patient enough to take the time necessary to truly help them: "*Well, we have received a lot of support from the people working there [at POETA] from teachers and the coordinator that have a lot of knowledge about how to train a person. They understand the situation. In my case, I went to several institutions but those were not the same as POETA. Those did not have a way of explaining something to someone blind, most of all. It is like if they were seeing, they explain this and that, but we need them to train us, to be taught. In POETA, the*

teacher was always there...when I was no longer in the program, I went back. Even the doctor (POETA center representative) came to my place to install some programs I needed. They put a lot of effort into my case to help me move on. When I was no longer studying in POETA and there was an available machine, I could enter. They did not tell me you cannot get in, you are not in the program, but instead, if you want to learn, come in, this is for you to learn. The teacher always told us you are not an invalid, a useless person, you are like anybody else, you can regularly develop but with very different abilities." (P10, MecVida, Peru)

Sub-theme 2.5: Teachers support

Teachers' expressed concern for the overall development of participants and the support given by teachers was one of the most meaningful experiences for the participants. For example one person simply said: "*Yes, I think that support from teachers is very important, especially their patience because they explain things again when we don't understand something.*" (P1, Fundabiem, Guatemala)

Teachers were highly valued. They were perceived as having a calling to teach, having great listening skills and willing to answer questions and concerns. Furthermore, they were perceived as guides and motivators and their empathy with participants played an important role for the progress of the latter. Many respondents reported that they perceived teachers as having a deep dedication and commitment as well as infinite patience to pass on their knowledge - especially considering that the learning process for PwD can be more complex. One person noted: *"(the teacher) was very approachable, a person that had the patience to explain something you did not know. He took his time, maybe because we were few, and he told you this is like this, and he explained things.*" (P7, COPEME, Peru)

The participants noted that teachers gave them support and motivation to learn and to improve their personal skills. In most cases, they reported that, by the end of the course, they felt secure with the conviction that the contents had been properly taught. In some organizations, more than in others, the personalized work of teachers was acknowledged - in particular their capacity to understand particular situations and address needs and capacities thereby promoting skills development and enhancing the development of participants.

Interviews revealed that the kind and dedicated treatment that participants received from their teachers was important to them. The participants described that teachers, in addition to providing the computer training, were also supportive in the process of learning. This way, enhanced interpersonal relationships, life skills, self-determination, and other components of resilience were found to positively impact on the personal development of participants.

Theme Three: Labour Inclusion from the POETA Experience

The participation of PwD in the POETA program positively impacted the labor market prospects of participants. They widened the scope of employment opportunities that they could achieve on their own and, in most of the cases, could count on the support of POETA staff. Jobs were described by participants as a central means for social inclusion. Research has demonstrated how inclusion in the labor force can be a crucial aspect for overall inclusion of PwD (Hernández-Licona, 2005). In this sense, increased knowledge about computers was considered a basic tool for daily activities and with, more job opportunities; this meant more possibilities to achieve a better

quality of life especially in economic terms. This potential for ICT training to empower PwD in the labor market is now becoming widely recognized and has strengthened the appeal for greater attention in the way training services are delivered (Waddell, 2012).

Furthermore, the centers, and particularly their leaders, were regarded as key agents to reach higher employment opportunities. Participants had great confidence in the center leaders and believed that they could influence the creation of these kinds of opportunities for PwD. Participants commented that these leaders could give evidence of a participant's capacities to the community and, moreover, could provide connections to stakeholders, mainly public authorities, that PwD find hard to reach on their own.

However, participants perceived that current job offers in their communities were not adequate for them and better living conditions were still hard to achieve. The kinds and number of positions available for PwD, as well as the accessibility of the workplace, were some of the aspects identified as restrictions to the ability of participants to find occupations that could match their needs, skills and interests. This implies that it is necessary to change the perception that most social stakeholders (from individuals to representative institutions) have about disability. The notion of disability being synonymous with uselessness and the general belief that PwD do not have enough capacity to work are real and permanent challenges that they have to face every day. There is a need to increase employment opportunities where PwD could show and develop their potential and feel useful and included in society. This has also been widely demonstrated by international research in this area (Hernández-Licona, 2005; Waddell, 2012).

Sub-theme 3.1: Training enhances employment opportunities

Training, in general, has been regarded as a potential strategy to enhance PwD's abilities thereby allowing them to compete for employment with others in a more equitable way. In particular, training in new technologies was noted as a key tool in accessing new opportunities where participants can develop and demonstrate their abilities and achieve more in their lives.

Participants identified computer knowledge as a fundamental tool for labor inclusion. As one person said: "*Well, it helped me because, without the computer training I would not... have my current job*" (P1, Fundabiem, Guatemala). They acknowledged this technology as being essential in any type of employment because it was seen as highly demanded by employers while the lack of it was perceived as being a great limitation in employment selection processes. Thus, the acquisition of computer skills gave participants a sense of confidence when facing the labor market since they considered these skills as minimum requirements for any type of work. For them, it was one of the most important assets the POETA program provided.

Additionally, the training not only allowed participants to access new employment opportunities but it also encouraged them to meet people in similar conditions which, in turn, provided extra motivation to succeed. For instance, those participants who were already working believed that training was important because it gave them many other tools to apply in their workplaces and that they had stronger competencies to improve their performance. In some cases, this knowledge allowed them to improve their quality of life. Furthermore, many participants gained confidence and skills to become economically and socially independent, which had not been possible for them before their POETA experience. As another participant said: "(...) *after finishing here, the aim of this program is to continue with the subject or to have a company…We, myself and some*

classmates, have created a foundation, UNETE. The Foundation is about.... having projects and programs for people with disabilities too. So in that foundation I work as treasurer: managing payroll, management bills; management of Excel sheet, to fill out an Excel sheet. I did not know how to do it before and now I'm using it." (P5, Fundación Carvajal, Colombia)

Particularly in terms of employment, they learned about the possibilities of working independently and about ways to respond to employer discrimination. However, many participants expressed that, although training was useful and a good introduction to informatics fields, the courses were still too basic to compete for higher employment opportunities. Further professional or technical training is still missing in all the POETA centers and it is a component that needs to be explored in the future.

Sub-theme 3.2: Support of organizations in creating opportunities through partnerships

Most PwD entered the program hoping to receive support in finding a job and even after their training maintained a close connection with the centers and local leaders. They expected future job opportunities. Thus, centers were regarded as highly potential providers of jobs or internships for PwD. Many participants commented that some of the organizations responded to their demands of labor inclusion and those who managed to find a job post were grateful to the organization because of the efforts made. For example, one person described this intermediation: "*Through the Comité, who were the ones that knocked on the door of different businesses… and took our resumes to lots of places, and they even got us an opportunity in the company where we now work and that was a big benefit because of the knowledge we had, and that is why they gave us a job opportunity.*" (P3, Comité Pro Ciegos y Sordos, Guatemala)

Some respondents, however, had a negative view of their chances to integrate into the labor market. They attributed this to their age, disability and lack of educational opportunities. Many respondents described the types of jobs they can currently get as being neither challenging nor motivating and, in many cases, not requiring them to apply new technologies. Those job offers are not tailored to PwD's needs and skills. Thus it unveils a general need to develop partnerships with diverse stakeholders to create opportunities for them.

In spite of their still limited social impact, POETA centers are seen as trusted organizations that can give evidence to different social stakeholders of the abilities of the participants when applying for a job thereby enhancing their possibilities to be hired. As a participant said: "*it is thanks to this (POETA) that I am working (…) the local center where we were trained does not exist anymore, which is an inconvenience (…) When it was still here in Sicuani, it was almost like a part of my family,. A place where I could go when I had any doubts, I could go and discuss it, and receive orientation, but now, there is no other program like this (...) Maybe there could be an agreement with other public institutions. Within the public sector, within the municipality, it could be this agreement and include people to be trained according to their learning and according to their capacity they can be included in a job post, evaluating their capacity.*" (P9, MecVida, Peru)

Conclusions

The results of the interviews suggest that in the areas of social support and inclusion, personal growth and employability, the POETA program plays an important role in impacting the lives of participants. Based on the research results, it seems that the three main program components are the key elements of the POETA efforts and that each component has definite social mechanisms that drive positive change towards desired outcomes. Although the research approach itself has limitations, given its purpose as an initial exploratory device in an overall process leading to the development of a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework, we can be confident that it has served that purpose well.

Furthermore, the results of this research suggest the importance of the particular approach taken by the project in its development of the M&E Framework. The combination of the CARE approach and the realist methodology meant that it was possible to repeatedly investigate the underlying mechanisms and contextual factors that have the most direct impact on the successes and challenges of the POETA program. This type of information is much harder to elicit using traditional quantitative survey methods. We have unearthed not just certain technical issues that constitute themes for POETA participants but, also, their cognitive, emotional/affective interaction with the program and how these interactions led to concrete outcomes for the participants.

The first theme - how ICT Training enhances social inclusion for PwD - shows us that giving PwD access to sensitive and inclusive approaches to ICT training can create a virtuous circle of increased social inclusion. As confidence and self-esteem is gained through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, PwD gain further motivation to learn. This then enables them to access and take advantage of the social networking opportunities the new ICTs offer. Finally, PwD move to a whole new level of growth and feelings of self-worth when they can competently share their new knowledge with other PwD and even with friends and family members who don't have knowledge of or skills to use ICTs.

From both emerging research findings (Waddell, 2012), as well as from these results, it is important to highlight that access and the ability to use ICTs can totally transform the lives of PwD from persons who are almost completely socially isolated to people who now have multiple online contacts and consistently interact with other people on a daily basis. While there are still major hurdles for PwD to become more socially included, training in ICTs can remove many of the physical, mental, and emotional barriers to their social inclusion. The impact of the training likely has varied results depending on the type and severity of the disability a person lives with but even a small positive impact can make all the difference. Some respondents expressed that they had very depressed feelings, even suicidal feelings, before they entered the POETA program. That the program can be seen as literally a lifeline for some PwD is itself a profoundly positive outcome.

The second theme of how the POETA program impacts the social interactions and personal growth of PwD is crucial. Respondents spoke again and again of how the support of teachers, other students, family and the POETA Center's welcoming environment had a positive impact on their capacity for social interaction and personal growth. Often, the impacts were caused by subtle things a teacher did or said that demonstrated their caring attitude toward the students. For

people so used to suffering from social stigma, being treated with respect and as equals was transformative and emotional experience. Knowing that other people were going through the same types of challenges, both personally and socially, was also a comfort for many participants.

A key finding was that opportunities for further advancement offered by POETA made a step-change in how students perceived themselves and their potential for growth. Another key finding was how POETA programs could transform the relationships PwD had with their families, who now respected and praised them for their new found knowledge and skills. A fascinating discovery was the indirect effect the environment or atmosphere of a POETA Center had on personal growth and social interaction.

Finally, the third theme about labor inclusion showed us how varied the impact may be of the POETA program on employability. Some respondents were very pleased with what POETA training offered but noted that the level of competency in ICTs that they acquired was not quite advanced enough to really give them a competitive opportunity in certain labor markets. However, it should be noted that many participants in the POETA training started from having no knowledge or skills at all with computers, let alone ICTs. Thus, the impact of the training, while not always guaranteeing a job, made their prospects for future inclusion in the labor market exponentially better than they were before the training.

Another key point is that, even if PwD acquire the necessary knowledge and skills, continued societal discrimination had a profound impact on their employability. The local labor market may just be negative in general - thereby affecting employability negatively with contextual factors outside the control of the PwD or the POETA program. Most importantly, we learned some of the underlying, sometimes subtle and indirect, ways POETA had a positive impact on PwD and that, if anything, PwD wanted the program enhanced and expanded.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

What are the interview objectives?
To explore the impact that the POETA program has had on the lives of PWD.
To explore the variables and factors which have contributed to the results in item 1 according to perception and opinions of the beneficiaries particularly in relation to 3 areas: training, employability and social relationships.

Who will be interviewed?
PWD who have graduated from the POETA Program within, at least, the last 6 months. The aim is to have 10 graduates from each country participate in this interview. Graduates of the program will be invited to volunteer to be interviewed.

What are the criteria for selection of participants?
Those PWD graduated from the POETA that:

    a. Have remained in the program for at least 6 months
    b. Are able to communicate properly their thoughts in Spanish
    c. Have participated regularly in most of the activities planned by the POETA organization
    d. Are willing to & accept to participate in the interview by signing a Consent Form

How will the results of the interviews be managed?
All the data gathered from the interview will be managed following the ethical principles of confidentiality, anonymity and volunteerism. These principles will be explained by the research assistants to the participant. Once the research assistant is sure that these principles are understood by the participants, the participants will be asked to sign a letter stating their willingness to participate. Once interview data is analyzed and interpreted, it will be presented to the PWD either individually or for group discussion in order to expand or complement it with additional information.

How will the results of the interview be used?
The information will be used for different purpose:

    1. *To make decisions to improve the POETA Program in order to achieve its objective of improving quality of life for PWD*
    2. *To reorient the implementation process of the POETA Program according to participant identification of factors (dynamics of change) that make a difference*
    3. *To develop the evaluation and monitoring framework.*

What are the Procedures used in conducting the interview and analyzing the data?

   a. **Recruitment:**

   - Apply the selected criteria described above
   - Local Partners will draft a letter to invite graduates to participate in a one-hour interview which will be conducted in person or by Skype (Marcia & Ligia will support them in this task).
   - Research assistants will distribute the invitation letter to graduates of the POETA program selected as participants
   - PWD will confirm their participation through RA

   b. **Interview Schedule:**
   - Contact each respondent to find a mutually agreed upon time & place for the interview.
   - Explain the purpose of the interview and how the results will be used.
   - Arrange for a follow up session to share the research findings.

   c) Interview Questions:
Overall question: what impact has the POETA Program had on the lives of the beneficiaries?

The interview will be a semi-structured interview which addresses the three components of the POETA Program. This implies that there will be defined questions that will be followed based on the respondents' answers. The key criteria for follow up questions will be based on participant responses.

Component 1: Training

   1. What did you hope to achieve (expectations) when you began the program?
   2. Have you achieved your expectations?
   3. If yes, how did the program help you meet your expectations?
   4. What are the key elements of the program that were most helpful to meet your expectations?
   5. What change(s) would you suggest to improve the training? In the short and long terms?
   6. What additional aspects do you want to mention about training?

Component 2: Employability
   1. What expectations did you have about employability when you entered this program?
   2. How did the program help you achieve these expectations?
   3. What particular aspects of the program helped you feel more employable?
   4. What change (s) related to employability would improve the program?
   5. What additional aspects do you want to mention about employability?

Component 3: Social Support and Interactions

1. What did you hope that the POETA program would provide in terms of social support and social connections
2. How has the POETA program provided this type of support for you?
3. What particular aspects of the program stand out for you in meeting these expectations?
4. What change would you recommend to strengthen this aspect of the program?
5. What additional aspects do you want to mention in the session about support and interaction?

Context

1. Were there particular circumstances that you faced in your life that made a difference to your experience in the program?

2. Were there particular financial, political or personal factors occurring that you felt impacted your experience in the program?

Appendix B: Consent Form

RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT PROGRAM OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT THROUGH TECHNOLOGY IN THE AMERICAS (POETA) IN ARGENTINA, GUATEMALA, COLOMBIA AND PERU

As it was explained at this time and place XXXX, the institution XXXX that implements the POETA Program (Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas) is conducting research to identify the impact that POETA is having on the quality of life of the participants.

Please read the following sentence and sign if you are in agreement:
This consent form was read to me and the information about this study was explained to me. I ACCEPT and will voluntary participate and answer the interview questions.

Name_____

Signature_____

Appendix C: Characteristics of Interviewees

Table 1

Name	Age	Type of disability	POETA Center	Year of participation	Country
Javier	48	Motor	CILSA	2010	Argentina
Norma	49	Motor	CILSA	2010	Argentina
Matías	30	Motor	CILSA	2010	Argentina
Leticia	18	Mild Intellectual	CILSA	2010	Argentina
Viviana	30	Motor	CILSA	2010	Argentina
José María	36	Speech	Fundación PAR	2009	Argentina
Aníbal	28	Motor	Fundación PAR	2009	Argentina
Martina	41	Motor	Fundación PAR	2010	Argentina
Adrián	33	Hearing and Speech Impaired	Fundación PAR	2008	Argentina
Paula	32	Motor And Intellectual (Mental Problem)	Fundación PAR	2008	Argentina
P1	-	Physical and Cognitive	Corporación MATAMOROS	2011	Colombia
P2	-	Physical	Corporación MATAMOROS	2011	Colombia
P3	-	Physical	Fundación CARVAJAL	2010	Colombia
P4	-	Physical	Fundación CARVAJAL	2010	Colombia
P5	-	Physical and Cognitive	Fundación CARVAJAL	2010	Colombia
P6	-	Physical	Fundación CARVAJAL	2009	Colombia
P7	-	Physical	Fundación ARCANGELES	2010	Colombia
P8	-	Physical	Fundación ARCANGELES	2010	Colombia
P9	-	Physical	CIREC Tibu	2010	Colombia
P10	-	Cognitive	Universidad Tecnologica de Bolivar – UTB	2009	Colombia
P1	19	Paraplegia	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala
P2	14	Spastic Quadriplegia	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala
P3	23	Total Retinal Detachment	Comité Pro Ciegos y Sordos	2010	Guatemala
P4	29	Cerebral Palsy	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala
P5	24	Quadriplegia	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala

P6	22	Marie Charlot Toot Dystrophy	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala
P7	31	Left Hemiplegic	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala
P8	31	Muscular Dystrophy	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala
P9	20	Right Hemiplegic	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala
P10	25	Retinitis Pigmentosa	Comité Pro Ciegos y Sordos	2005	Guatemala
P11	23	Blindness Due To Gunshot Wound To The Skull	Comité Pro Ciegos y Sordos	2010	Guatemala
P12	27	Left Hemiplegic	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala
P13	21	Muscular Dystrophy	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala
P14	23	Paraplegia	Fundabiem	-	Guatemala
P1	23	Psychological -Mental- Behavioural Disorders, Convulsions	Fundades	2009	Peru
P2	25	Psychological-Severe Depression	Fundades	2010	Peru
P3	17	Sensorial-Blindness	Fundades	2009	Peru
P4	33	Physical-Lameness	COPEME	2009	Peru
P5		Sensorial-Blindness	COPEME	2009	Peru
P6	31	Physical -Locomotor Disability	COPEME	2009/2010	Peru
P7		Physical -Feet Abnormalities	COPEME	2009	Peru
P8	25	Physical -Lameness/Leg Abnormalities	MecVida	2007	Peru
P9	56	Sensorial-Blindness	MecVida	Oct-Dec 2007/Oct-Dec 2010	Peru
P10	29	Sensorial-Blindness	MecVida	May-Jul 2007/3-month period 2008	Peru

Appendix D: Characteristics of Local Partners

Argentina

CILSA – Centro de Integración Libre y Solidario de Argentina (Santa Fé, Argentina)
CILSA is an NGO whose mission is to promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities and at-risk youth. Its main goal is to overcome ideological barriers so as to form a society that does not discriminate or marginalize and which gives all individuals equal opportunity for personal development. CILSA started working with POETA in 2007 at their office in Santa Fé. Last year they opened POETA centers in Rosario and Córdoba.

Fundación PAR (Buenos Aires, Argentina)
Fundación PAR is an NGO whose mission is to promote the inclusion of disabled people in society and to strengthen their rights to equal opportunities. Fundación PAR focuses its efforts on training, on integration into a competitive labor market, on inclusive education and on the promotion of the human and civil rights of people with disabilities. They started working with POETA in 2006 at their office in Buenos Aires.

Guatemala

Fundabiem (Mixco, Guatemala)
Fundabiem is a National Professional Rehabilitation System that offers physical rehabilitation to people with physical disabilities so that they can attain maximum integration with their family, school, labor market and/or community through respect for their human dignity. Fundabiem opened a POETA pilot center in 2004.

Benemérito Comité Pro Ciegos y Sordos (Guatemala, Guatemala):
The Comité is a not-for-profit, social and educational organization created on December 3, 1945. It offers medical, educational and rehabilitation services to the people of Guatemala through 36 programs that are possible thanks to the funds generated by the Santa Lucia Lotto ticket sales. Among the Comité's programs is the Integral Rehabilitation Center whose responsibility is to provide services to blind people (or those with limited vision) in order to provide them with the knowledge that permits their integration into society. The ultimate goal of the rehabilitation process is labor insertion. This has been achieved with the support of Guatemalan companies and institutions that believe in the potential of people with visual disabilities who have received training in the Information Technology Center (CENTIC) where, in 2005, the POETA pilot project started with support from Trust for the Americas and Microsoft. In 2006, the Comité and the Trust renewed signed an agreement to open a second center in Quetzaltenango and in 2011 both contracts were renewed.

Colombia

CORPORACIÓN MATAMOROS (Bogotá and Cartagena, Colombia)

Since 1986, the Corporación Matamoros has brought support to soldiers and police officers injured while in combat, to the families, widows and orphans of heroes fallen in combat and to the families of kidnapped or disappeared military men. The Corporation works to build new life projects by providing them with the tools for their physical and emotional rehabilitation, their education, and access to work. In 2006, POETA expanded the curricular framework with diverse programs designed to improve the preparation of soldiers for their integration into civil society. The Corporation accompanies the community during three stages. The second one, called Formal Education, is formed of three programs: Primary and Secondary School, Educational Support and, also, Supplementary Education in which POETA is the main component. POETA Matamoros operates two centers in Bogotá, both opened in September of 2006, and a third center in Cartagena which was opened in 2007.

GRUPO SOCIAL EMPRESARIAL ARCÁNGELES (Bogotá, Colombia)
Arcángeles is a not-for-profit foundation that develops models of inclusion for vulnerable populations in the country with an emphasis on care for people with disabilities. Arcángeles develops social inclusion based on an approach to rights which utilizes sports, work, self-employment, public policies, and the empowering of base communities. This is accomplished by using a process of communication that permits the breaking of mental schemes. This, in turn, transforms social paradigms that lead to equity approaches, access to rights, as well as environmental, social and financial efficiency. They started working with POETA in 2009 at their office in Bogota. In 2011 another POETA center was opened in Villa Nueva, although it has since been moved to Soacha.

FUNDACION CARVAJAL (Cali, Colombia)
Carvajal Foundation is a not-for-profit organization created in 1961. The aim is to promote the improvement of the quality of life for the poorest communities in the Valle del Cauca (Colombia). Currently the Foundation works in the Aguablanca District (Comunas 13, 14 and 15) and in Zona de Ladera (Comuna 18 and the Montebello region) of the city of Cali as well as in 14 municipalities of Valle del Cauca. Its programs generate income, education and housing. They are being implemented through alliances with the public and private sector. They started working with POETA in 2008 at their office in Cali.

CIREC – Centro Integral de Rehabilitación de Colombia (Bogotá y Tibú, Colombia)
Founded in 1976, CIREC is an organization dedicated to providing medical services such as orthopedics and physical rehabilitation and to foster education in order to improve quality of life by strengthening functional and social capabilities. With technical assistance from Trust for the Americas, a POETA center was opened in Bogotá in 2006 and in Tibú in 2008. In 2011, both contracts were renewed and the centers are still in operation.

Universidad Tecnológica de Bolívar (Cartagena, Colombia)
Founded in 1970, this university has become one of the most modern educational centers in the region and a regional driving force for social programs. Its POETA center, opened in 2006 in Cartagena, provides training in ITC to people with disabilities. The POETA center also serves as a computer center and allows access to the internet and the use of training resources for the greater community.

Peru

MecVida - Mejorando la Calidad de Vida (Cusco, Peru)

MecVida is an NGO that works for the representation of groups at risk in Cusco and is currently part of a working network for People with Disabilities in the same region. This not-for-profit institution started its POETA program, and the first POETA office in Peru, in the city of Cusco in the year 2005. In 2007 they opened a POETA center in the Sicuani district, Cusco department, which operated until 2011 under an agreement with the Sicuani municipality. Beginning in 2012, MecVida with OMAPED (Office that serves people with disabilities) to open a new POETA Center in the municipality of Cusco.

COPEME - Consorcio de Organizaciones Privadas de Promoción al Desarrollo de la Pequeña y Microempresa (Chiclayo, Peru)

COPEME is a not-for-profit civil society organization that includes more than 50 NGOs and private institutions in the country. It was founded in 1990 as an entity that promotes opportunities for and the development of the abilities of union representations and local and regional governments. The institution promotes the efforts of its affiliate organizations to take advantage of the synergic effect which allows better results and higher impact in the sector of micro and other small companies.

COPEME has affiliates at the interior of the country in Arequipa, Cusco, Junín, Trujillo, San Martín and Lambayeque. In this last region, in 2009, in the city of Chiclayo, Trust for the Americas started the POETA program (Lambayeque). This program helps vulnerable groups such as PwD, their families, and women that are in charge of their families.

Fundades - Fundación para el Desarrollo Solidario (Lima, Peru)

Fundades is a not-for-profit organization that seeks to improve the quality of life for vulnerable people – especially PwD – through the promotion and execution of activities and social projects related to health, abandoned children, education, employment, sports and the environment. Their programs are done directly or through affiliate institutions that form the FUNDADES group: ARIE – Center for the Rehabilitation of Children; NFP – New Future Homes, Peru; APRODDI – Sports for PwD; PROLABOR – Employability and Technical Training; and ALEA – Education and Culture.

They have two operations centers – one in the north and another in the south of Lima. In the north cone (Comas) a Technological Center, equipped by different leading companies in the field, has been created. Their relationship with POETA started in 2009 and the POETA Center operated by Fundades was the third POETA center opened in Peru. It provides ICT training with the objective of labor inclusion.