



GLOBAL GRANTS COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Use this form to report community assessment findings to The Rotary Foundation when you apply for a global grant. Assessing the strengths, weaknesses, needs, and assets of the community you plan to help is an essential first step in designing an effective and sustainable global grant project. See [Community Assessment Tools](#) for full instructions and helpful tips.

This form will help you report the results of your community assessment, and it's required when you apply for any humanitarian or vocational training team grant. Complete a separate form for each beneficiary community (e.g., school, health care system, or village), using information that is both current and specific to each community. Remember, you can't use global grant funds to cover the cost of doing an assessment, but you can use district grant funds.

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Describe the characteristics (such as geographic information, main sources of income, population size, and access to education and health services) of the specific community where this project will take place.

Paraiso is a Canton in the Province of Cartago, Costa Rica. With an elevation of 4,347 feet, and a population of almost 40,000 it is known for attracting tourists to the volcanos, mountains, and nature reserves. Situated between the cities of Cartago and Turrialba, many residents are farmers or small local merchants. Paraiso is four miles from Cartago so residents can easily commute to offices, schools and retail jobs there.

There are three elementary schools and two high schools in Paraiso. The nearest colleges are the Costa Rica Institute of Technology and Florencio del Castillo University, both in Cartago. Both universities have outreach programs that support educational, medical, and mental health facilities in the Paraiso community.

Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social (CCSS) is Costa Rica's socialized medicine system. Under this plan citizens and permanent residents have 100% coverage for all medical procedures, appointments, hospital visits, and prescription drugs. Paraiso has a hospital, several walk-in clinics, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

COLLECTING COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT DATA

When you conducted the assessment, who in the community did you speak to? At least two different community representatives and beneficiaries who are not involved in Rotary (such as teachers, doctors, or community leaders) should be included in the discussions.

Our community assessment was conducted by the Rotary Club of Cartago, the Host club and the Rotary Club of Denton, Texas USA, the Sponsor Club.

Interviews were conducted with Carlos Efrain Sandoval Astua, Director of the Asociacion de Autismo (The Center) as well as faculty members from the Special Education Department at the University of Florencia del Castillo. We also interviewed 12 mothers whose autistic children ranged from ages 3 to 17 years old.

To learn more about autism in Costa Rica, we also reached out to Regional Ministry of Education personnel, located in Turrialba, to the Turrialba hospital and directly to a private school that has an unusually high number

of children with autism enrolled. See [Attached doc: Autism in Costa Rica](#)

When in the last year did the discussions occur?

Exploratory meetings with the Director of the Center- October and November 2023.

Two Community Assessments meetings November 2023

Further investigation to obtain more details about the community needs , November and December 2023.

Meeting with mothers who have children attending The Center to make sure we understood the sustainability of this project.

Interviews with the Director General and Director of Special Medicine of William Allen Taylor Hospital, Turrialba. Also 2 pediatricians at the hospital (in a separate interview). April 2024.

Interviews with Regional Directors, and Special Education therapists from the Ministry of Education, Turrialba r. April 2024.

Interviews with faculty at Centro Educativo Jorge Debravo, a private school, grades 1-12 in Turrialba with 260 students, more than 10% being on the Autism Spectrum. April 2024.

What methods did you use to collect information from community members (such as community meetings, interviews, or focus groups)?

For purposes of this global grant, “The Community” is defined as the Director and his staff at the Asociacion de Autismo Paraiso, parents and extended family members of children that are on the autism spectrum, and the special education psychologists, and therapists from the Universidad Florencio del Castillo.

We began with an extensive interview with the President/Director, Efrain Sandoval Astua. He provided a history of The Center, the improvements and accomplishments that have been made and his vision of the future to improve the services and opportunities for the children. He has a plan to continue to educate the parents of children with autism in the areas of mental health, financial management, their legal rights as Costa Rican citizens as well as the legal rights of their children. This also includes areas of physical and educational rights.

Tour of the facility and conversations with staff. Discuss 3-year plan for expansion.

Observed a “Organizing Your Child’s Schedule” Workshop for parents led by a Child Psychologist from the university.

Structured interviews and casual conversations with 12 parents, psychologists and therapists during a “graduation” event in November for parents who completed a series of 10 Saturday workshops.

We followed up the original assessment to learn about the sustainability of The Center. We learned that they have signed an agreement with the Universidad Florencio del Castrillo to support The Center and provide services to the growing population of parents who have children with autism. There will now be physical education therapies in the university swimming pool, and faculty members from the Law and Business schools to help families address legal rights and how to manage their finances. Later in 2024, The Center plans to open 2 small satellite centers in Cartago to assist families not able to bring their child to the Paraiso Center. These centers will focus on evaluating children and helping families integrate the child into the school system and general community.

TARGET POPULATION

Who will benefit directly from the project? List the groups that will benefit (such as schools, hospitals, vocational training centers, cooperatives, or villages).

After interviewing parents and reviewing test results of the child to understand where they are placed on the autism spectrum, The Center may accept children from the greater Paraiso, Cartago areas. Except for a small number of preschoolers, all the children attend public school in their communities. The programs offered at The Center are after school programs. They accept only children diagnosed as Level 1 (*requires some support with focus and social skills*) or Level 2 on the autism spectrum (*requires substantial support with focus, socialization, behavior*). They have recently started (off-site) workshops for 18 children on Level 3 which require (*very substantial support*). The purpose is to see if they are able to interact with other autistic children and, if so, to prepare them to be integrated into the regular programs at The Center.

There are Eight Direct Beneficiary Groups to this project.

1. Children Currently Receiving Therapies at The Center: There are 65 children with ASD Levels 1 or 2 currently in The Center's program. The children attend school during the day, and then go to The Center after school. When they arrive at The Center after school, they have a schedule that includes help with homework, reading/writing comprehension, and math tutoring, followed by sessions with the special education intern and the psychologist intended to focus on the child's specific autism challenges. Current therapies include Language, Psychological, Physical and Occupational.
2. The Forty-five+ Parents with Children Attending The Center: Having a child diagnosed with autism is often traumatic for parents, especially if there are other children in the family. Mothers are most affected because they are often the only caretaker of the autistic child. The Center offers workshops and other resources to help them. Having a network of peers and professional therapists that lead the workshops educate the family and community to alleviate the stigma of having a child with autism. Often, due to the culture and stigma, of having a child is diagnosed with autism, the male parent may leave the family.
3. Parents & Children - The kitchen is in the main building where community events, meetings and workshops for parents take place. Plans include more food preparation and meals for the students, parents and possibly the larger community. The kitchen needs to be compliant with the guidelines for food preparation and service by the Costa Rican Ministry of Health.
4. Mothers - Basic Food Handling course for up to 15 mothers (2 days). When the course is completed, the women will each receive certification to prepare food from the Instituto Nacional Aprendizaje (INA). Then, upon approval of the (refurbished) kitchen and with the certifications from the women, the Ministry of Health can issue a permit to operate as a restaurant. This opens opportunities for the women to transition from volunteer to paid worker. This course includes a 119-page workbook.

5. Parents & Children - Nutrition for the Autistic Child course for parents (6 months). This bi-monthly course explains how to prepare meals for the entire family while managing the food sensitivity of autistic family members. Health challenges resulting from improper nutrition and ways to encourage children to "try" foods before they decide they don't like them are also covered.
6. Parents - Journey to Independence (12 months) course for parents. This is a 25-module series of videos

and webinars designed to provide parents with the basics of applied behavior analysis, so they have tools to work with their autistic child at home, address challenges as they move from child to teen to youth and young adult. The videos are demonstrations of actual home situations and how the parents address the variety of behaviors of their child. Importantly, there are frequent discussions about “triggers” for over-stimulation and how to recognize the signs.

7. Regional Ministry of Education/Department of Special Education - Behavioral Support Teachers. They are special education therapists working in the schools with disabled and neurodiverse children. See attachment: Special Education in Costa Rica

8. William Allen Taylor Hospital in Turrialba – Opened in June 2023, it is just one of two hospitals in Costa Rica approved by the Ministry of Health to diagnose children with autism. It is about the same distance from Paraiso as the Children’s Hospital in San Jose but is easier to reach by car or bus. Current plans are to open an autism therapy center on the hospital campus. They will be training employees in ABA. This grant will offer two scholarships for International Qualified Behavior Analysts (IQBA) to pediatricians and PhD Therapists. IQBA’s oversee applied behavior analysis technicians (ABA). The hospital will fund their own ABA programs.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS, NEEDS, PRIORITIES, AND PROJECT DESIGN

Describe what members of the community said matters to them during the assessment.

In the last 8 years, families of children with autism have used The Center as a place to find resources for their child, information about autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and a place for their child to receive extra help after school. Every family member we interviewed indicated that workshops and peer to peer sessions gave them some skills to understand the behavior of their autistic child and methods to help the other children in the family.

PRIORITIES

1. They want advanced workshops to learn therapies they can use with their children at home. Suggested areas were positive discipline, managing emotions and disruptive behaviors, and socialization techniques.
2. They want to learn how to be prepared for challenges their child will have as they get older. They are asking for training in abstract thinking, strategies for learning math, sensory stimulation.
3. They want a “toolkit” to help them talk to their family and community about what autism is, so they can help reduce the stigma attached to it. With this information, they can advocate for more child therapy services. Many families with children on the autism spectrum get no therapy for the child because they cannot afford it.
4. They want a wider range of programs offered for their children that are age appropriate. Example: Physical activities such as learning to swim, and music lessons.

NEEDS:

1. Additional Therapists: Two Psychologists and two Speech Therapists donate their services to The Center. There are 10 Special Education undergraduate students who rotate every three-month to satisfy their internships. This global grant will provide scholarships to train and license 10 Applied Behavior Analysis Technicians (ABA) to provide therapy to children with autism. This specialized practice is greatly needed throughout Costa Rica.

2. An improved space for food preparation: The volunteer mothers rotate working in the kitchen to prepare lunch for students arriving from school. They also prepare afternoon snacks for all the children daily. This facility does not work with proper government health code compliance certificates or permits.
3. Improved Handicap Access: Due to its location, The Center's buildings are positioned at different levels on a hill. The first level is the parking area. Below is the kitchen/community building. The third level is the building that houses the administrative offices, therapy rooms and doctor/dentist offices. Access is through multi-level concrete stairs that are difficult to navigate for pregnant mothers, small children, people with disabilities and the elderly. In Costa Rica, all public facilities must comply with Regulation 7600 set by the National Rehabilitation and Special Education Council (CNREE). to provide handicapped access to everyone.

Describe the community's strengths and resources.

1. **STRENGTH:** The Director of The Center, Efrain Sandoval Astua, is a well-respected member of the larger Paraiso community. He has twice been Mayor and is known in the community for his social and political activities. His daughters are active both at The Center and at frequent social events in Paraiso.
2. **STRENGTH:** Under his leadership, The Center, once a dilapidated and abandoned government drug rehabilitation center, has become the Asociacion de Autismo Paraiso. The 5-acre property was bought by a large non-profit from Cartago and donated to The Center with a 50-year legal occupancy clause.
3. **RESOURCE:** The work that has been done for the remodel is funded by events in the larger Paraiso community, private donations from businesses and labor from community volunteers. Recently, to prepare for this global grant, a third building has been cleaned by volunteers from the greater community to make way for eventual classrooms, a computer center and more therapy rooms.

Describe any challenges and gaps in the community's behaviors, skills, and knowledge.

1. This active community of 45-50 families is connected through the thread of autism. Knowledge is their biggest gap and closing that gap is what the global grant will accomplish. The advancement and global recognition of the science of applied behavior analysis as well as the connection between diet and autism appears not exist in Costa Rica.
2. A Special Education degree from the university does not assure the graduate will be equipped with tools unique to treating autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The interns at The Center use the techniques they learn in their Special Education courses. These are the same techniques that are used in the public and private school system. There is a disconnect between these therapies and ABA autism therapies. This global grant will connect The Center to programs in the United States like the University of California, Davis MIND Institute and to private groups such as Special Learning, Inc, to offer students opportunities to further their education, through scholarships, and mentoring by certified autism specialists (ABA, BCBA, IQBA). This Introduces them to global standards for autism that do not currently exist in Costa Rica.
3. The Costa Rica government has regulations that The Center is either not aware of or has been delaying the implementation of. These activities will need to be corrected through the global grant. They are not expensive, so we think the community simply lacks knowledge. Local Rotarians who work for the government will help The Center complete the documentation to gain legal operation. The Center's food services certificate for the kitchen and correcting the disability walkways/ramps are the two most important compliance activities.

What issues will the project address, and how does the community currently address those issues?

1. Provide certified Autism Therapy programs for the children and family: Not currently addressed.
2. Assisting the Asociacion de Autismo Pariso in becoming compliant with Costa Rica’s Ministry regulations. Specifically, the kitchen and handicapped access. Not currently addressed.
3. Technology additions and upgrades. They are currently working with outdated or non-working computer systems, limited broadband and no large screen monitor to address training and workshop needs.

Provide the specific details of the project design and how it will solve these issues.

1. ABA Level 1, 2, 3 Training – Certificate and license to become an Applied Behavior Analysis Technician. to train education professionals who are likely to be a long-term part of this project (+5 years). Assures the autism program moves forward by having ABA professionals provide oversight and support.
2. Parent and Caregiver Training: Specifically designed for the parent(s) caring for the autistic child. Group video based training (25 modules once or twice/month) will continue to bring new concepts for at home therapies. Includes Board Certified moderator for Q&A after each session. Build the network of community caregivers and let them train others with the training materials supplied by Rotary and our partner, Special Learning, Inc.
3. Build Handicap Ramps: The Center needs to be compliant with regulations set by the National Rehabilitation and Special Education Council (CNREE). This project will build two handicap accessible ramps. One is 54 feet long with a level “resting” area. Attached to the resting area is a second ramp that is about 150 feet long. Both are four feet wide. Each building will be connected to its respective ramp by a short access entrance that is already in place.

4. Technology Upgrades: Update broadband / wi-fi for a computer network. Install computers, and a printer in the admin area. A large screen television for use during workshops in the main building. This ensures smooth transition for training and educational workshops with community.
5. Refurbish kitchen, repair, or replace non-working appliances. Women in the community will set up the kitchen according to their needs, gives them a “voice” in organizing what they want.

5. Schedule INA Basic Food Handling Course Training: Using the refurbished kitchen. Giving the women control with tools, training and certification will ensure they create a business and steady income for the future. They can also be instructors/trainers for older children with autism who want to learn the culinary arts.

Describe the long-term plan for the project (such as oversight, financial responsibilities, and expected behavior change) after Rotary’s involvement ends.

1. Ultimately, the long-term plan is to introduce autism behavior therapies throughout Costa Rica. Executives from the Education (MEP) and Medical (CCSS) systems are receptive to introducing applied behavior analysis into their processes. The global grant will help them get started with a plan to fund their own internal training.

Nonprofit centers like Asociacion de Autismo Paraiso (The Center) would benefit by having access to ABA Technicians who are required to do volunteer hours before receiving their licenses. They could also expand their reach by offering world class ABA training for everyone in their greater community. The model exists for small operations like The Center to become an Autism Agency, specializing in ABA and using the tools to monitor, measure and analyze the child's progress.

2. Oversight on the front end will be regular Rotary Host club communications with The Center. This will be part of the project management 3-year plan.
3. Members of the Host club already have a solid working relationship with the Director of The Center. We believe this will continue as other opportunities for Rotary support (outside of this grant) are identified. Because of the Director's influence in the community, more business and private financial support will become involved as this project gets a wider focus. With greater community involvement, more opportunities for employment in the field of mental health may open, as well as career training for children with autism when they are older.
4. Financial responsibilities for all grant funds are managed by the current Host Club Treasurer with added support from the Past Treasurer who has had experience managing TRF earlier global grants. Host Club Rotarians will be making and paying for purchases directly from the dedicated bank account set up for this project.
5. The reputation of The Asociacion de Autismo Paraiso, and its director, assures The Center has many opportunities to gain experience, to offer more therapies and to be linked to organizations, Rotary clubs and partners who will continue to support them with training and ABA professionals in Costa Rica. .

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (FOR ALL ENVIRONMENT AND WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE PROJECTS)

What are currently the greatest environmental threats to local land, air, water resources, and the ecosystem?

List any cultural practices that are relevant to the project (such as agricultural techniques or traditions).

What positive and negative environmental changes do you expect to result from the project?