

CASA MARÍA AMOR FOUNDATION

FINAL ROTARY GRANT REPORT PREPARED BY CASA MARIA AMOR/MUJERES CON EXITO
Translation: MediaLocate, California – reviewed/ edited by Irmgard Lafrentz, Rotary Club,
Cupertino
November 11,2022



BACKGROUND

The María Amor Foundation—and its services within the framework of the “MARÍA AMOR ROTARY GRANT #1874116 project—provide specialized care to women and their children in situations of gender-based violence.

According to the second survey on family relations and violence, violence against women has worsened. The survey showed that 8 out of 10 women in Azuay have suffered violence. Femicides have also increased alarmingly, with 1,247 registered in the country between January 2014 and September 2022, and 2022 is proving to be the deadliest of those years, with 206 femicides already registered. This means that every 28 hours a woman is murdered for gender-based reasons.

At the same time, the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic (SARS-CoV-2 being the cause of Covid-19 disease) had an enormous impact on our organization, affecting physical and mental health as well as social and economic situations. We had to adapt and reorganize our care team, our schedules, our times and our resources in order to respond to and support the female victims of violence sheltered in Casa María Amor, as well as the female survivors of violence being integrated into independence-based processes who saw their economic situations severely affected, and this has had a negative impact on each family group.

In this context, the organization was able to maintain the services and processes being put into operation. However, we had to rethink and modify our actions so that, while continuing to provide care, we needed to avoid spreading the virus in the community we work with.

OBJECTIVES

Since July 2019, the María Amor Foundation has used the Rotary grant to care for women, children, and adolescents who are survivors of intra-family violence, for which it received funding from:

- ✓ Cupertino Rotary Club - District 5170
- ✓ Rotary Club of Chennai K. K. Nagar - District 3230
- ✓ Modesto Sunrise Rotary Club - District 5220
- ✓ Caritas – Austria
- ✓ María Amor Foundation

The main objectives of the project were:

1. Recovery and healing from post/traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) through alternative therapy focusing on a harmonious relationship with nature.
2. Nutrition education to achieve a healthy and balanced diet.
3. Purification of the water supply to make it drinkable.

STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS

To implement the project:

- An agreement was signed with the University of Cuenca and its faculties of Hospitality Sciences, Psychology, and Agronomy for the process of connecting students with the shelter – our community.
- Initiatives were coordinated with the public utilities company (ETAPA) and other entities involved in water purification.
- A permaculture advisor was assigned to oversee establishment of the farm.
- We had the support of the Community of American Expats residing in Cuenca.
- Ongoing coordination was done with the Tomebamba Rotary Club and the Cupertino Rotary Club.
- The Inter-American Foundation provided support to bolster some of the activities.

RESULTS OF THE PROCESS

During the project implementation period, 138 women sheltered in Casa María Amor and around 240 children and adolescents were cared for using the processes outlined in the project.

1. RECOVERY AND HEALING FROM TRAUMA THROUGH HORTICULTURAL THERAPY

Horticultural therapy activities were set up during the project implementation period that combined productive areas with healing (psychology) through weekly planned activities that drew on a harmonious relationship with nature. Although the sheltered women deal with issues related to emotions, self-care, and personal development, they also learn planting and agroecology techniques for growing vegetable gardens, considering that *while women “are reclaiming forests and natural resources” they can also “heal and reinvent their relationship with nature.”*

The women use all of their senses, with touch being used the most, and this is necessary for healing processes, especially for victims of violence. It has been observed that in some cases, they have had no connection to the earth, and that with these processes, all of the women participating now know about working the earth—including seedling production, soil preparation, transplanting, sowing, and crop management with an agroecological approach. At the same time, they have been relating these activities to the healing processes for the violent situations that they have experienced.

In the preparation area, they learn through practice how to do these things for each crop, and they learn the importance of fertilization and protection through agroecological techniques such as crop rotation and diversification. [Both] the women and the technical team learn about land management techniques using an agroecological approach, gaining practical knowledge of the importance of relating to nature through the production of healthy food and the recovery of customs such as “minga”, i.e. the coming together of community for the betterment of all. The project has been a space for raising awareness of environmental protection and learning how to grow crops.

Now the 138 women who participated in this process know how the Nina Huasi house functions, specifically by using a specific permaculture modality and a circular-economy approach that contribute to environmental management by generating a viable and sustainable space.

The activities completed prior to holding the horticultural therapy workshops are detailed below:

a) Purchase of tools

To start the healing process through horticultural therapy, it was necessary to get the creation of the organic vegetable gardens underway, so we bought the tools required to begin the work. These included but were not limited to wheelbarrows, shovels, pickaxes, rain ponchos and boots.



The team and the women jointly prepared the first spaces for vegetable gardens in the area behind the laundry and so far, we have produced seven harvests.

b) Formation of terraces and soil preparation

For the vegetable gardens in the upper area (behind the laundry) and the lower area (behind the biofilter), equipment and labor were hired to prepare terraces for crops.



Following preparation of the land using equipment, it was necessary to hire a worker for two and a half weeks. They were in charge of cleaning up the grounds, installing the wood, cleaning the canals for the irrigation system, and setting up pathways.



c) Implementation of the irrigation system

An irrigation system was acquired and implemented in the greenhouse, which facilitates agricultural activities by reducing the time it takes to get water to each area, and a sprinkler irrigation system was installed for greenhouse crops.



Sprinkler irrigation system for upper-area gardens.



Drip or infiltration irrigation system for lower-area gardens.



d) Cutting of trees

It was necessary to cut down some eucalyptus and alder trees in the crop area in order to facilitate access to sunlight, which in turn will allow for better growth and development of current and future plants.



e) Repair of the greenhouse

Although the greenhouse had been built prior to the grant through a cooperation agreement with the Tomebamba Rotary Club, years of use and exposure to weather conditions meant that it was necessary to repair the greenhouse structure.



f) Horticultural (garden) therapy activities, agroecological production, and animal husbandry

During the project implementation period, horticultural (garden) therapies were developed weekly through a methodology in which topics on self-care and personal training were addressed. These are institutionalized and developed as far as possible on a weekly basis in coordination with the psychologist who works with the sheltered women. Results at a personal level are evident. We see a greater predisposition to working in the fields, understanding that direct contact with nature provides benefits at a sensory and emotional level. In addition, the results motivate them because they have participated in agroecological agricultural production from the planting of seeds to the harvest; this has been the biggest motivation to get involved and participate actively in the therapy.





g) Healing through storytelling

Another activity developed through the training workshops carried out by the students was to write down stories and experiences and develop them with the children and adolescents as well as the women in the shelter, resulting in the book “My Voice, My Story”.



2. EDUCATION FOR HEALTHY NUTRITION

a) Cooking workshops

In coordination with the Faculty of Hospitality Sciences of the University of Cuenca, four cycles of cooking workshops have been developed. The first was held in person with members of Mujeres con Éxito [Women With Success], and we completed the established modules with the support of the Mujeres con Éxito team.

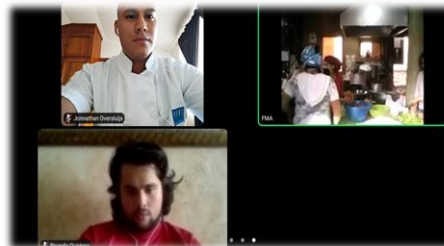


The second workshop cycle was held at Nina Huasi with sheltered women and the support of the shelter team.



As a result of restrictions due to the pandemic, the third workshop cycle had sheltered women and hospitality-degree students attending in person for a full week from Monday to Sunday and two gastronomy students conducting the workshops virtually, a process that took a full month, with the following modules:

- ✓ Oreo Cheesecake (no-bake refrigerated); chocolate chip cookies
- ✓ Sweet and savory breads
- ✓ Shrimp ceviche with patacones (fried plantains)
- ✓ Basic techniques: cooking with seafood (encebollado fish stew)
- ✓ Fruit kebabs, fun sandwiches
- ✓ Fast food pizza





The fourth workshop cycle resumed face-to-face sessions, both theoretical and practical, and incorporated cooking workshops with children and adolescents, some of the topics covered being:

- ✓ Theory class - "Culinary processes", diagnostic test, and practical class - "3-course lunch."
- ✓ Theory class - "Production costs", practical class - "Ecuadorian food - envueltos, humitas, and tamales."
- ✓ International cuisine - "Lasagna."
- ✓ Ecuadorian food - "Cerviche, and a dessert of crepes with fruit and blackberry coulis."
- ✓ Theory test and
- ✓ "How to make pan de chocolate and pan de leche."



b) Adaptation of countertops and sinks

As part of applying the knowledge acquired in the workshops, including hygiene and safety standards in food handling and preparation, the old cement countertops and sinks in the shelter kitchen were replaced by new ones made of granite and stainless steel.



c) Acquisition of kitchen utensils and refrigerators

In accordance with recommendations for proper and adequate food handling, as well as storage, it was necessary to acquire one refrigerator, one freezer with greater storage capacity than the ones that were in place, and kitchen utensils such as chopping boards, knives, pans, glasses, measuring spoons, bowls, jugs, among others. Similarly, a mixer was acquired for the bakery venture to be established with Mujeres con Éxito in order to generate income for female victims of violence.



d) Improvement of the internet connection system

One of the difficulties that arose as an effect of the pandemic was not being able to do cooking workshops in person, as well as the impossibility for children and adolescents who were sheltered with their mothers of attending educational centers. For this reason, the activities of the child/youth category team were adjusted so that they took on a supporting role for the development of directed tasks and/or school reinforcement so that children and youths could advance in their academic training.

Due to difficulties with the virtual connections required by the educational center students and the women taking the cooking workshops, it was necessary to improve the IT and internet connection system in the Nina Huasi. New and additional antennas were set up, and internet quality was also improved by changing from ADSL to fiber optics.



3. CREATING A SAFE WATER SUPPLY

a) Implementation of the water purification system for human consumption

A water purification system for human consumption was installed, and now purified water is available throughout all areas of the shelter. This will ensure improved health for women, children, adolescents and the team that stays at the shelter house.





b) Repair and maintenance of wastewater treatment plants (WWTP)

Since a harmonious relationship with nature is one of the focal points of our work, it was necessary to repair and maintain the wastewater treatment plants available to the María Amor Foundation shelter.





4. SELF-CARE PROCESS FOR THE MARÍA AMOR FOUNDATION TECHNICAL TEAM

With the aim of creating a conceptual and operational space for support, reflection, and creation of daily self-care mechanisms, a training and self-care process was implemented for the technical and administrative team of the María Amor Foundation. This was done in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a team of professionals from the Foundation. It contributed to awareness development and grew to support individual and group processes that are aligned with the institutional mission. The workshops complement the self-care initiatives that have been developed with the MAF technical team over the course of several years.

Once the team received this self-care process, it was replicated through workshops with sheltered women and children as well as women under external monitoring.



5. ADAPTATION OF THE PLAYGROUND

The methodology for supporting children and adolescents includes supporting them in accessing their rights, one of them being the right to recreation and leisure. Although not foreseen at the beginning of the project—and thanks to the understanding of Rotary Tomebamba and Rotary Cupertino —we were able to adapt the children’s/youth playground so that children and adolescents have a space where they can enjoy each stage of their childhood. The playground area was thus adapted, and through the support of the grant project, we were able to add playground equipment.



The strategic alliance with—and the support provided by—the Rotary Clubs of Cupertino, Modesto, Chennai and Tomebamba have contributed significantly to the MAF and to the processes of healing and comprehensive care for women, children, and adolescents in the shelter, as well as female survivors of violence.

The education and training processes developed have led to reevaluation of spaces that sustain life, and that provides opportunities for women to start a life free of violence.

The recovery of women's voices, with the process strengthened by their children, as well as decent spaces, healthy and nutritious food, the playground, the garden, the water, etc., have given life new meaning and made it possible to dream of a life free of violence for everyone.

Cuenca, October 12, 2022

THANK YOU

MARÍA AMOR FOUNDATION