



USAID
DEL PUEBLO DE LOS ESTADOS
UNIDOS DE AMÉRICA



CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL

ALIANZA JOVEN REGIONAL USAID - SICA

QUARTERLY REPORT JANUARY 11 - MARCH 31, 2008

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I. OVERVIEW OF PROJECT START UP AND INITIAL IMPACT

This report covers the period of activities from the signature of the Agreement on January 11th to March 31, 2008 for the Regional Youth Alliance project (Alianza Joven Regional – AJR) also referred to as the Gangs Prevention Alliance for Central America and Mexico. In this initial phase efforts were focused in project start-up and in approaching alliance partners and potential partners in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, which included SICA, UNICEF, Government entities, NGO's, faith based organizations, private sector organizations and Rotary Clubs. The purpose of these meetings was to introduce the program, develop working relationships and reaching participation agreements. These visits were also useful in identifying potential candidates to participate in the Working Groups to be formed in each country.

Project Start Up

Creative Associates mobilized its quick deployment operation immediately after the agreement with USAID was signed. The project's initial base of operation was in a hotel and initial office equipment such as computers, printer and other basic items were brought in by the project start up team. During the initial 45 days of the project the following actions and impacts were achieved:

Actions	Impact
Project start up team mobilized	Project launched
Additional project staff hired and mobilized	Project staff mobilized
Project office temporarily established and later moved to permanent site	Office opened
Initial field visits to Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador	Contact made in key countries to announce the project's implementation period
Project staff met with previously identified alliance partners and other new contacts	Established contact with key stakeholders
Coordinated with the USAID/El Salvador bilateral gangs prevention project	Exchanged information and prevented project overlap

Harold Sibaja, Regional Director, Salvador Stadthagen, Project Director and Juan Jose Hernandez, Senior Program Officer arrived in-country on February 3, 2008, to participate in the kick-off meeting with USAID on Monday, February 4, 2008. Present at the meeting were the Cognizant Technical Officer (CTO) Ms. Jennifer Link, USAID Agreement Officer Ms. Tracy Miller and other relevant Mission officers.

A quick deployment operation team member arrived on February 6th, proceeding to speed up the requirements for operation, such as a NIT (Tax ID) number, bank accounts procurement and legal issues. An office was rented at Colonia Maquilishuat (Calle El Almendro 20A) as of February 18, 2008 and revamped, equipped and furnished accordingly. IT equipment purchased in the United States was shipped. Since the Project's vehicle is awaiting custom's tax exemption and clearance, it was required to rent a vehicle.

Creative's team traveled to Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, Honduras from February 10-15. In Tegucigalpa the team met with Deputy Director Larry Brady, Mr. David Thompson and the members of Municipal Development and Democratic Institutions Office (MDDI). Creative presented the program and received inputs from the Mission, including a list of organizations working in prevention. The team was requested to not visit Government of Honduras officers in such a short notice, except for the National Prevention Program (PNP). The team met with the PNP and several Civil Society Organizations. With the PNP it was agreed to cooperate in developing a program to increase journalists' awareness in order to influence mass media.

During the visit to San Pedro Sula a preliminary agreement was reached with Paz y Convivencia (the Inter-American Development Bank financed prevention program in the Valle de Sula) for a joint program to be implemented in this industrial city. The agreement consisted in the opening of two Outreach Centers, the development of a reality show to raise awareness about former gang members and a program to find employment for them through the private sector.

In El Salvador, several meetings were held with counterpart officers at SICA. An introductory meeting took place between USAID, Creative Associate's team and SICA, to present the project, discuss coordination issues and decide on the exact name that will be used to present program formally. Presentations were made to the Technical Sub-Commission and the Security Commission of Central America on February 15th and 16th respectively. A meeting to introduce the program also took place with Mr. Eduardo Cáliz, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador, who heads the Security Commission of Central America during the present Semester and who expressed firm support for AJR.

The Regional Director and Project Director traveled to Guatemala from February 22 to February 27, 2008 where they visited the USAID-DG Office as well as the Outreach Centers operated by Creative Associates in Guatemala. Potential alliance members, including the Secretary for Executive Coordination of the Presidency, Rotary Clubs, civil society organizations and UNICEF representation office were visited.

Project management personnel positions were interviewed, vetted and contracted.

- Social promoter and driver was hired on February 29 – Francisco Burgos
- Seasoned Administrative Assistant was hired on March 10 – Norma Frances
- Financial and Grants Manager was hired on March 24 – Carlos Coto
- Program Assistant hired short-term to start on April 1 – Patricia Galdamez

The AJR team scheduled appointments and met with relevant government authorities in El Salvador. Meetings took place with the Deputy Minister of Public Security and Justice, Astor Escalante; Mr. Oscar Bonilla, head of the Council for National Public Security, who is responsible for the government's prevention efforts nationwide; Francisco Rovira, the new Director General of the National Civilian Police; and with Commissioner Angel Miguel Barquero, the Executive Secretary of the Police and its representative before the Association of Chiefs of Police of Central America. They all expressed full support for the program.

In El Salvador, AJR visited a number of think tank organizations, NGOs, and individuals who are considered key to further all aspects of the program. Additionally in El Salvador conversations were held with groups like REMAR, HOGARES CREA and the Red Nacional de Pastores y Lideres para el Desarrollo de El Salvador "Torrefuerte", to identify possible partners and to understand their rehabilitation programs. These potential partners could be instrumental to develop shelter and rehabilitation facilities for gang members wanting to exit gangs. A working meeting with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) was held to present the program and to understand the work that CRS has been doing in the prevention field. CRS has formed a conversation group with 13 other like-minded groups working in prevention and offered to include AJR in these meetings.

The Regional Director was invited to a luncheon by one of the Guatemalan businessmen that supported *Desafio 100*, where he had the opportunity to introduce the AJR program at length to the Foreign Ministers of Guatemala and El Salvador. The Foreign Minister of El Salvador was very impressed and formulated an invitation for him to present the program in early April at the Preparatory Technical Meeting of the *XVIII Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government* (the theme of the meeting will be youth and development).

In Guatemala, AJR approved a \$20,000 grant to the Asociación Alianza Joven (AAJ) to support its start up and transition after the USAID Youth Alliance Program ended and the new USAID/Guatemala bilateral program starts. AAJ is a local organization established in December 2007 by business owners and Rotary Club members to ensure that the crime prevention initiatives started by the USAID Youth Alliance Program were expanded. The goal of the AAJ is to continue supporting the 7 existing Outreach Centers (one of them paid entirely by the Rotary Club), develop 6 new ones in 2008, and continue the efforts of the *Desafio 100* program providing jobs to new former gang members.

The AAJ grant expects to cover minimum operational costs (a 3 people office, rent, utilities, and other direct costs) for up to 2 ½ months. The grant will support the development of the AAJ's strategic planning (including its vision and mission), the development of a proposal to the Swiss Embassy and to other donors and the identification and recruitment of key personnel.

Nicaragua and Mexico were not visited by the AJR team during the initial days of the project and the project's involvement in these two countries remains tentative and subject to further discussion and USAID's instructions.

A coordinating meeting was held at RTI with Project Director Aldo Miranda and Deputy Director Allan Quinn who are in charge of USAID's bilateral El Salvador gangs prevention program. A collegial exchange took place about the particulars of both programs and ideas for future interaction between the projects. As example of the relationship Creative is attempting to build with RTI, it was recommending an influential pastor who contacted AJR and wanted to participate in prevention activities in the Alta Vista area as the more logical implementer of an activity.

The information collected from the visits to four cities in three countries provided useful input to formulate the Action Plan which was submitted to USAID on March 16, 2008.

The main accomplishment of this quarter has been a relatively seamless start up and initiation of office operations, the successful introduction of the program in three countries with various interlocutors at all levels, the initiation of a working relationship with SICA and linking alliance partners' objectives with those of AJR.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE SECURITY IN THE REGION

A look at the 2007 statistics in the different countries of the region, continue to reflect alarming homicide rates and juvenile violence. In Guatemala from a total of 5,364 homicides, 417 were minors (statistics provided by the PNC). In Honduras, within that same year there were 3,394 homicides, 504 of those were young victims, 118 of them minors. Of the 504 homicides committed, 307 were committed in Tegucigalpa and in San Pedro Sula. In El Salvador, 288 minors lost their lives out of a total of 3,491 homicides.

Within this context, juvenile and gang violence normally stands out as the most visible problem and a major cause of social violence in Central America, although it is by no means the only problem facing the region. According to international donors, organized crime, drug trafficking and common delinquency, are also other forms of crime which are generating most of the violence in the region. Among all of the countries, there are more than two million unregistered, small firearms. This scenario turns the Central American region (all countries) into one of the most violent in the continent, were there is an average rate of 22 homicides per one hundred thousand inhabitants. Within the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) there is an average rate of more than 40 homicides per one hundred inhabitants. As a contrast in Nicaragua and Costa Rica the homicide rate does not exceed 10 per one hundred thousand inhabitants. According to police experts, within the Northern Triangle and Mexico, there are more than one hundred thousand young people involved in gangs. According to official statements, in Honduras and El Salvador around 50 percent of gang members are in the penitentiary system.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states in its documentation that the consequences of this violent atmosphere generate a feeling of instability, leading to the creation of uncertainty among foreign and local investors, promotes brain drain in the different countries, weakens democracy and deters tourists from visiting the region.

Responses to this scenario are both multiple and extensive. A prominent and important response to the juvenile violence phenomenon will take place later this year in El Salvador during the *XVIII Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government*. In the

summit the different countries will be addressing "Youth and Development". One of the preparatory meetings, which will take place in April, will address various topics including: the current state of youth, youth in public policy, global challenges, migration and violence prevention.

The government of the United States in a special session of the Committee on Hemispheric Security of the Permanent Council of the OAS, presented the project "Strategy for Combating and Prevention of the Gang Phenomenon in the Region." This project will provide a range of actions ranging from diplomatic efforts, repatriation, law enforcement, and improvements in the field of judicial training and prevention. The project also refers to the need for comprehensive responses that combine efficiency in the application of the law to prevent juvenile delinquency, as well as options and opportunities for young people to get out of gangs. Among the early warnings mentioned in the document, is the displacement of gangs into rural areas in the region. The document also outlines the collaboration by SICA and the OAS to coordinate the strategy.

Also important to mention, is the "International Convention on Youth, Security and Justice in Central America" which took place in March 2008 in Guatemala. More than 200 people assisted this convention including civil society organizations and international cooperation agencies. Its purpose was to establish an inclusive agenda as an alternative to the authoritarian and suppressive policies of the governments in the region (Mano Dura). The three main conclusions of the event were: 1) Make joint efforts to break the dominant discourse against youth; 2) Promote more initiatives for the involvement of youth; and 3) Construct alternatives to those proposed by the "Plan Merida", which are viewed mainly as law enforcement and security initiatives.

The gang phenomenon has become an issue of great concern in the Central American region. As such, the phenomenon that persists, in which young people are often victims and are victimized, is being addressed by organizations, entities and individuals. An important perspective that has not yet been addressed region wide, is the inclusion of restorative justice and reinsertion opportunities for juvenile offenders.

III. ACCOMPLISHMENTS THIS QUARTER

Result I: Jump Start Public-Private Initiatives for Gang Prevention Awareness, Rehabilitation and Reinsertion

The initial phase for the implementation of the prevention methodology anticipated by AJR has been accomplished in Guatemala, El Salvador and partially in Honduras. The phase has been implemented by identifying locations with the conditions and needs for developing Outreach Centers, identifying local potential partners associated with the locations and explaining the model to them. AJR has held discussions with USAID to develop and issue sub-grant RFAs next quarter. The project sub-grants will be for long-term prevention

grants, awareness media campaigns to motivate gang members to leave gangs, insertion grants/job placement supports services, and small quick impact grants. The following components describe progress and advances made this quarter in the three phases of youth targeted by AJR for assistance.

Component I: Efforts aimed at preventing at-risk youth from joining gangs

Activities

El Salvador

- Potential locations and partners have been identified and program presented in places like La Chacra in San Salvador, Colonia Montreal and Argentina in Mejicanos and Chalchuapa in Santa Ana.
- An introduction of the program was made to Mr. German Vega and Mr. Daniel Martinez of the El Salvador Rotary Clubs, who enthusiastically embraced the project's methodology and were motivated by the efforts of the Guatemala Rotary Clubs. They pledged their assistance to open doors at the Rotary Clubs and develop a partnership with AJR for supporting Outreach Centers
- Meetings were held with the National Pastors Network (*Red Nacional de Pastores "Torrefuerte"*), a network of 12,000 churches in El Salvador to present the program and establish their interest in participating in prevention and rehabilitation activities.
- A working meeting was held with Catholic Relief Service in El Salvador, which coordinates a group of 13 local PVO's that are involved in youth violence prevention and advocacy issues and exchange ideas through a "Discussion Group." The meeting resulted in an invitation to AJR to participate in their meetings. This group of PVOs represents potential partners for the development of Outreach Centers and as advocacy partners for the goals of Result II.

Guatemala

A grant was approved for the *Asociación Alianza Joven (AAJ)* to assist in its start up process, develop proposals, and continue overseeing the initiatives developed by the USAID Youth Alliance Program that ended on January 31st. During that period, a member of AAJ's board traveled to Costa Rica to attend a project fair in order to obtain funds to develop new Outreach Centers. Also during that period, the AAJ developed a proposal for PRONACOM, a Government of Guatemala program to support competitive efforts among the Outreach Centers. A second proposal was submitted to the Municipality of Guatemala to support the efforts of three Outreach Centers in zone 18. AAJ also submitted three proposals to three Rotary Clubs in the United States through contacts made at the project fair. The Regional Director facilitated two sessions with the board of directors of the AAJ to develop a strategic

plan (including the vision and mission of the AAJ) to focus the efforts of the association as a local entity working for Guatemalan youth to reduce violence in country. Also, the Regional Director facilitated three sessions with the three pastors and three coordinators of the zone 18 Outreach Centers to standardize the operations of the centers, including developing new guidelines and procedures. Finally, during the quarter the AAJ continued the supervision and monitoring of the seven Outreach Centers developed by the USAID Youth Alliance Program; visited several communities to identify new sites to develop new Centers; and prepared conditions to hire the new AAJ's director and other staff. The grant provided to the AAJ is key in allowing the association to remain operational until the new funds of the Guatemalan USAID bilateral program are made available.

- A meeting was held with CEIBA, an NGO that offers technology-oriented, employable solutions for at-risk youth and former gang members. AJR considers that CEIBA is a strategic ally in providing future outreach centers with technological capability and solutions. One particular program we will explore will be the possibility of CEIBA repairing and/or refurbishing hundreds of used computers we are attempting to obtain through donations in the US. These computers could be used in outreach centers in Guatemala and other countries and/or to support the expansion of other prevention programs around the region.
- A meeting was held with Mr. Salvador Gándara, the Secretary of Executive Coordination of the Presidency of Guatemala. Secretary Gandara is responsible for coordinating all social programs and activities with governors and mayors all over the country. As Mayor of Villanueva, Mr. Gandara had an important supporting role at the Outreach Center that was developed by the recently completed USAID Youth Alliance Program in Ciudad del Sol. Gandara is in charge of overseeing all government programs that deal with water, health and security and oversees funds of up to Q2,000 million (US\$ 263 million). Mr. Gandara believes that the concept of the outreach center could be replicated at a larger scale and plans to make a presentation regarding this matter to the First Lady of Guatemala. He agreed that this model will only have the necessary strength if it is not seen solely as a government-sponsored program but rather one in which the government acts as one of the many partners in fostering the centers. Alianza Joven Regional will supply Mr. Gandara with ideas to work on an outreach center expansion program fostered by the Presidency.
- We discussed with Mr. Emilio Gobaud of APREDE, the relationship between Interpeace and SICA. Interpeace has obtained a mandate from SICA to request funds from the international community for a prevention, youth policies, and rehabilitation framework.

Honduras

Activities

San Pedro Sula

- In San Pedro Sula the team identified and visited the communities of Chamelecon, Rivera Hernandez and Satellite among the target communities to operate Outreach Centers.
- Apart from faith based partners, a potential NGO partner that has local presence and some prevention experience in those San Pedro Sula communities is the organization *Jovenes Hondurenos Adelante (JHA JA)*. There is a particular opportunity to work with them by utilizing AJR's Outreach Center methodology, either to open a center, improve existing centers, or develop vocational alternatives through a low cost vocational school located in the heart of the gang infested community of Chamelecon.
- In San Pedro Sula the team met with IDB funded *Programa Paz y Convivencia (P&C)*, the President of the *Maquila Association* and with *Generacion X*; a group of former gang-members. The successful *Desafio 10*, *Desafio 100* and Outreach Centers concepts developed in Guatemala under the USAID Youth Alliance Program were so well received by P&C's Director Jacobo Regalado and Mr. Jesus Canahuati, President of the Association of Maquiladores of Honduras; that they both requested to form an alliance with *Alianza Joven Regional (AJR)* and a preliminary agreement to open two centers and develop learning and work opportunities for "EX" (former gang members) programs was reached.

Tegucigalpa

- Visits were made in Tegucigalpa to present the program to Civil Society Organizations and to identify potential partners for prevention programs and advocacy work. Visits included the *Asociación de Jóvenes Cristianos*, *Proyecto Aldea Global*, *Xibalbam* and *Alternativas y Oportunidades*.
- A meeting took place with Rev. Ricardo Sevilla-Chiang, who heads the Youth Ministry (*Pastoral Juvenil*) at the Archdiocese of Tegucigalpa. The program and the Outreach Center model were introduced, generating a good deal interest on behalf of Rev. Sevilla. He agreed to explore ways that some Catholic priests could participate in the RFA sub-grant proposal development and submission to obtain assistance from AJR to operate centers, as a way to generate more interest among Catholic priests to work in prevention activities.
- In Tegucigalpa, talks with different audiences led to the initial identification of the "Flor de Campo", "Colonia Cerro Grande" (Sectors II, III and IV), "Colonia

Mayangle” and *“Divino Paraiso”*, as the communities with some of the worst incidence of gang violence and with the underlying conditions to set up Outreach Centers.

- A meeting with the National Prevention Program (PNP) led to a preliminary agreement to work jointly with the Media Association (*Asociación de Medios de Comunicación*), to hold workshops to inform media groups about the situation of former gang-members and the relevance of youth violence prevention programs. Small AJR sub-grants to support this effort are being considered.
- The meeting with the PNP helped AJR staff understand that the main problem apart from underfunding for prevention programs by the Honduran Government (PNP, for example has a modest annual budget of \$300,000) is the obvious lack of coordination among the different government institutions that are legally bound to be involved in the issue. Other issues preventing involvement are problems between those institutions and CSOs. Two civil society coordinating groups exist and warrant follow up from AJR -- FOPRIDE and COIPRODEN. The PNP provided AJR staff with a useful list of organizations to which they provide funds or work with in some manner. AJR will follow up with the organizations listed. PNP operates a tattoo removal machine, which is apparently the only one accessible to former gang members. This machine is taken every six weeks to work in San Pedro Sula. One of the initial AJR findings is the urgent need to seek a way to have a laser tattoo removal machine permanently based in San Pedro Sula. AJR staff is aware that although youth can leave gangs permanently they may still be vulnerable to gang retribution or being ostracized by society due to their visible tattoos.

Component II: Encouraging gang members to abandon gangs

This is an innovative component that presents uncharted challenges. Creative Associates has accumulated significant experiences in prevention initiatives (Outreach Centers) and insertion/work opportunities for rehabilitated gang members (Desafio 100). A designed and controlled methodology to help young gang members abandon their gang associations and avail themselves to rehabilitate, recuperate and reconstruct their lives does not exist. This gap continues to prevent the majority of former gang members to successfully transition into mainstream of society through work or other opportunities.

Among the actions that AJR is or will develop under this component are:

- Seek mechanisms to encourage involved parties to place the gang prevention issue on their agendas
- Solicit and receive feed-back on strategies that can be used

- Identify those actors and stakeholders who can have influence active gang members
- Identify actors or institutions that would be willing to shelter young people that want to leave gangs to help them transition from to a more stable existence
- Establish patterns of reoccurrences on successful modalities of attention for the youth that decide to leave gangs
- Work with potential partners to design and share ideas to construct rehabilitation methodologies for youth

AJR has not evaluated the level of risk that a concerted initiative like this would imply for youth, operators or the program, but will start investigating expected impacts and repercussions related to of these kinds of actions.

AJR has been able to assess that pastors and priests, as churches are one of the only relatively safe passages for gang members to leave the gangs. Churches have been confronted with an avalanche of desperate youths who come to them without any place else to turn. There is anecdotal evidence that many churches in gang affected areas have many more of these cases than they can handle. These churches do not have structured rehabilitation programs and can offer very few employment opportunities to these youth to help complete the transition cycle into a productive citizen.

Under the current approaches available, it is difficult for social leaders, such as pastors and priests, to launch active campaigns to convince young people to leave gangs. This departure from gang life will only occur on a replicable scale when mechanisms exist that can channel willing “converts” into a planned methodology and systematic approach. The goal is to guide each youth toward the next steps in the succession. AJR will further investigate current approaches and will attempt to identify a process that could be followed. Examples of the possible succession of steps could be:

1. Faith-based Counseling - An initial step is taken by each youth when they decide to seek moral and spiritual healing with the help of pastors and priests. A “transition” facility that supports this approximate three-month period is required. Sometimes churches attempting to lead youth through this difficult period rely upon their priests and pastors to make it happen without any resources. This can lead to youth living in deplorable conditions while they are clinging to the hope of survival and a new life.

2. Structured Rehabilitation for Lower Risk Youth – A program approach is needed for youth considered at-risk but at a manageable level. This group needs a structured rehabilitation that could last from 12 to 16 months. During this time each young person will be tasked to face the challenge of preparing for and successfully obtaining job opportunity. During this phase some vocational education and life-skills training are indispensable for a successful transition that minimizes the risk of falling back into gang life.

3. Structured Rehabilitation for Higher Risk Youth – Programs such as Desafio 10 and 100 have proven that developing social acceptance is possible, but these approaches by themselves are not enough. Surveys and polls show that a high percentage of gang members are willing to abandon gang life (figures of up to 50 percent were reported by CSOs in Honduras). Some churches, particularly evangelical, shelter these young people and offer ad-hoc rehabilitation services. The idea would be to channel these young people to more structured rehabilitation programs. AJR staff has encountered support groups that operate drug rehabilitation programs and are willing to explore developing programs for former gang members; where these youth can be sheltered to prevent them from being killed by their former gang during this vulnerable period. During this step, as outlined in the previous step for lower risk youth, vocational and life-skills training would be provided in preparation for employment opportunities. During this step, priests and pastors would be encouraged to take a more active role to help pull young people out of gangs and refer them to rehabilitation programs to continue the transition to a new life. Groups in El Salvador such as REMAR and CREA (CREA offers tattoo removal services) and the Torrefuerte pastors (this group offers drug rehabilitation programs) and the Nicky Cruz Foundation in Guatemala expressed an interest to work with AJR on pilot programs for exiting gang members.

4. Tattoo Removal Services - Tattoo removal is also another important tool as an incentive and a facilitator for reintegration into society and also to guarantee preservation of their lives. Any comprehensive program to encourage young people to abandon gangs has to contemplate how to extend the availability and cost effectiveness of this service. AJR has identified a particular need for the service in the Valle de Sula area in Honduras and in Guatemala City.

5. Mass media campaigns to motivate gang members to leave gangs - Mass media strategies and well targeted campaigns to encourage young gang members to leave gangs can and will be implemented, but they will only be effective in as much as the proper mechanisms are ready to support this transition.

Activities

El Salvador

- Chapters of organizations such as CREA and REMAR and faith based initiatives exist in all the three countries where AJR is programmed to carry out prevention activities. These groups operate at extremely low costs.
- In El Salvador we have encountered evangelical pastors that formerly were gang members. They are constantly approached by active gang members looking for opportunities to abandon their gangs.
- There is indication that an inexpensive “electro-cauterization” process has been adapted by a faith-based organization working in Mejicanos, El Salvador. This service is operated by five volunteer dermatologists and is reported to cost less than

laser treatment but results in far more scarring than some of the infrared solutions that are in use in the region. AJR will investigate, document and disseminate its findings.

Guatemala

- A meeting was held with the Nicky Cruz Foundation to explore their ability to accommodate gang members who want to leave the gangs. The Foundation has agreed to participate in the AJR strategy and is awaiting definition of next steps.

Component III: Job opportunities for rehabilitated former gang members

Job opportunities for former gang members represent a key component for integrating these youth into society. This component offers the light at the end of the tunnel and provides an incentive to leave the gang. Many of the young people naively joined gangs for the glamour, excitement and being able to belong. Later, due to their involvement in criminal activities they found themselves trapped in a closed system with seemingly no way to escape.

Creative's experience from the recently completed USAID Youth Alliance Program in Guatemala indicates that, of the participating former gang member candidates selected to benefit from Challenge 100 program, 70 percent of the participants are still working and more than 90 percent of them have been verified as staying away from gang life. Creative cannot verify that 100 percent have stayed out of the gangs because seven are unreachable.

The biggest challenge that most of these youth face is finding an employer who will accept them, for who they are, not who they were. Firings are more frequently due to prejudice because of visible tattoos or unjustified wariness because they are former gang members rather than based on failure to perform a job.

Among the actions that AJR has completed to commence the implementation of this component are:

Activities

El Salvador

- A meeting was held with the ANEP Security Initiative (Tomas Contreras) to discuss a future formal presentation of the program and a collaboration agreement proposal to develop job opportunities activity for former gang members by the Executive Council. Some ANEP leaders have indicated that they want to go forth with the implementation of the *Desafio 100* approach, with a *Desafio 10* reality show. AJR has been in contact with influential leaders such as Ricardo Simán, Ricardo Montenegro, Elena de Alfaro and Juan Daniel Alemán to create momentum for the program. The formal presentation and discussion of the plan with the Executive Council has been scheduled for May 5th.

- A visit was made to Father Jose Morataya to understand his work in study/work prevention activities.

Guatemala

Through the grant approved for the *Asociacion Alianza Joven* (AAJ), the AAJ developed a proposal for the Swiss Embassy to continue the Desafio 100 Program. The Swiss have shown interest in supporting the AAJ with funds to hire a coordinator of the Desafio 100 program in order to continue evaluating and placing former gang members with jobs offered by the private sector and to cover the costs of a full time psychologist to assist former gang members and their families to cope with the new environments. In addition the psychologist will be expected to support the business in the program with issues that may come with those participating in the program. During the period the AAJ continued assessing former gang members and identifying new job opportunities. The grant allowed the AAJ to continue monitoring the youth in the program and leasing with the businesses on any particular issue that arises.

Honduras

- Preliminary Agreement reached with *Paz y Convivencia* to develop *Desafio 10* and *Desafio 100* programs.
- The team also made a presentation to Mr. Oscar Galeano, President of the Honduran Private Sector umbrella organization (COHEP), who reiterated the desire of the private sector to work with AJR in the development of a Desafio 100-type program.
- A working meeting took place with “*Cooperativa Multiservicios*”. *Cooperativa Multiservicios* was formed by rehabilitated former gang members from the *Generacion X* group to provide services such as painting and landscaping services. Support to these groups in the form of donations and management assistance and the possibility that elements the cooperative model could be replicated regionally.

RESULT II: Assess regional legal/justice frameworks and practices and promote multi-country policy and legal reforms to improve the treatment and rehabilitation of youth

The intensive meeting schedule carried out in San Salvador, Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula and Guatemala with individuals and groups involved in issues related to juvenile violence, has also been very useful for the initial identification of potential members of the Working Groups that will be formed in the short term to initiate a process of identification and discussion of the most relevant issues regarding Juvenile Justice in each of the three countries. These groups will be provided input by and will validate the work of consultants hired to evaluate laws and processes. The result of the analysis, evaluation and inputs from consultants and the Working Groups will be an essential tool to develop a policy

framework to be presented to SICA. The building of regional consensus around the issues is a complex process that would benefit from a high level Regional Forum specialized to be held in conjunction with integration institutions such as the Central American Court of Justice and the Association of Supreme Courts of the region. There have been preliminary talks with SICA about the organization of this Forum in 2008, with other SICA programs absorbing most of the costs. The presentation of the results of the of Working Groups and the participation of its members at this Regional Forum would give a particular impetus to the formation of regional consensus leading to a more coherent regional framework. These consensus should be eventually reflected in the agendas of the Security Commission of Central America and the Presidential meetings and declarations. These high level expressions of commitment will in some cases be reflected in national policies, but also can be useful to reinforce the advocacy efforts of civil society and in particular of the Working Groups, that will need to continue to advocate so that they are truly reflected at the national level. Another opportunity to advance to this regional consensus is already being planned – the International Conference on the Origin of Violence in Central America. AJR will be able to influence the inclusion of our approaches into this Conference agenda.

As AJR continues to expand activities under Result 2, it will report in greater detail on the three components – Fostering Regional Consensus towards Legislative and Policy Coherence, Coordination and Integration within the Juvenile Justice enforcement/administration system and Promotion of prevention and rehabilitation for juvenile offenders.

El Salvador

- Meeting with FESPAD (*Fundacion de Estudios para la Aplicacion del Derecho*), an important source of information and analysis on juvenile justice and a possible partner for the working group and advocacy efforts in El Salvador.
- On the Civil Society side, working meetings were held with Benjamin Cuellar at the Central American University (UCA); Jeanette Aguilar, the Director of *Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica* (IUDOP);, and Elin Ranum, the new Director of the Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Youth Violence (CCAPVJ),. This CCAPVJ is hosted for a year at IUDOP. It acts as an umbrella organization to some of the main Civil Society prevention actors in the region and has been showing interest in collaborating with AJR. We are considering a donation to support CCAPVJ's activities in relation to their work in public policy and advocacy.
- The team met with Supreme Court Magistrate Mirna Perla, who distinguished herself in the role of Judge in charge of juvenile justice and with Mr. Jaime Martinez, head of the Juvenile Justice Unit of the Supreme Court of Justice of El Salvador. The work in Juvenile Justice and the existence of this Unit in the Supreme Court can be viewed as a best practice in the region and much can be learned from this experience in the rest of Central America. They are very ready to work with AJR to share experiences in the region and participate in working groups to improve aspects of the application of the law in this matter.

- A meeting took place with Rafael Jordan, a young former gang member, who is presently the President of an “alternative” organization, the Central American Youth Parliament. The group has met three times to discuss issues related to youth violence, narco-activity the region and youth issues. They see themselves a base organization formed by young people to advocate for the rights of young people. This group can be useful for advocacy efforts in the region. We are discussing with them options to facilitate a strategic planning process for them, so they may better define the goals of the organization.

Guatemala

- A meeting took place with Dr. Justo Solorzano, the UNICEF Youth Justice Expert in Guatemala, to explore an official, collaborative relationship with UNICEF through its Regional Office based in Panama. Part of the rationale is to have UNICEF officers in the region support the AJR with experts, documentation, and possibly advocacy work. Mr. Solórzano offered to recommend the most suitable of UNICEF’s Youth Justice experts in each of the four countries (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua) and to help explore the possibility of a formal partnership with the regional UNICEF office.
- A meeting took place with Luis Ramirez, Director of the Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencias Penales de Guatemala (ICCPG), to discuss becoming part of the working group in Guatemala.
- A meeting took place with Jennifer Echeverria, consultant on juvenile penal justice, to discuss contracting issues for the purpose of implementing this result.

Honduras

- A visit was made to the prison of Tamara through Xibalbam, a local NGO working on the rehabilitation aspects in the Honduran penitentiary system. The challenges facing the region in this subject are reflected in the inefficiencies of this prison system. Violence and corruption have made the prison a center of operation for the gangs’ leadership.
- A meeting took place with the association, *Unidos por la Vida* of San Pedro Sula, presided by Monsignor Romeo Emiliani of the Catholic Church. *Unidos por la Vida* has been committed to the issue of youth violence and has been in the process of developing a rehabilitation center assist youth

RESULT III: Collaboration and Assistance to SICA to catalyze regional policy reform and harmonization; gather relevant stockholders to spur development of policy initiatives and implementation of reforms

- An introductory meeting took place between USAID, Creative Associate's team and SICA, to present the project, discuss coordination issues and decide the exact name that will be formally used for the program.
- On February 15, 2008, a presentation of the program was made to the Technical Sub-Commission of the Security Commission of Central America, who recommended and included in the agenda a formal presentation at the meeting of the Security Commission of Central America (CSCA) next day.
- On February 16th, an official presentation of the program was made to CSCA, where all of the Vice Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Security Defense and senior representatives for the police and militaries of the region were present. The presentation generated substantial interest, including from countries such as the Dominican Republic and Panama where there will be no implementation.
- Regional and Project Directors met with Mr. Erich Vilchez, Legal Director and Political Director of SICA and Ms. Claudia Castro, Assistant to Mr. Vilchez for security issues. Mr. Vilchez clarified that he and Ms. Castro will be the points of contact for the project, and that regular monthly meetings will be held.
- Mr. Vilchez requested AJR's assistance in organizing an International Conference on the Causes of Violence in Central America currently being planned by SICA, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras in June 2008. SICA plans to bring experts from the US, Europe and the region. SICA will invite nearly 500 guests to attend the conference. Involvement in this conference presents a particular strategic opportunity for advancing the goals of the program. As the conference agenda develops, the AJR will be able to influence the themes of the panels, guests and prevention approaches. This opportunity will help to position AJR and USAID as main regional players in the area of prevention policies. SICA is not expecting a financial contribution from USAID to cover conference costs, as they have already secured \$50,000 and may secure \$100,000 more from other donors. If needed, AJR however, may benefit from making strategic investments in helping host one or two participants or speakers who otherwise could not be present. While recognizing that this involvement may signify substantial time investment, it may be well worth it. The Conference is planned for October 2008.
- Mr. Oscar Bonilla requested support from AJR for the organization of a regional meeting of OCAVI (Central American Crime Observatory). As OCAVI is a

mechanism that has been made an official SICA instrument, support for this meeting reinforces SICA's role in the crime prevention arena.

- The Project Director had a meeting with Mr. Eduardo Cálix, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador to introduce the program. Mr. Calix, who heads the Security Commission of Central America during the present term ending in June, pledged full support to AJR.
- The enthusiastic response that both the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador and Guatemala gave to the presentation of the program by the Regional Director, gives important political backing to AJR in the framework of SICA

IV. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

- The upcoming electoral phase in El Salvador creates a framework in which it will be difficult for AJR to make the private sector organizations focus on longer term prevention issues. Substantially larger efforts will have to be made to get them involved.
- SICA is officially supporting a prevention program promoted by INTERPEACE, similar in nature to AJR. INTERPEACE is seeking funding from the international community with SICA's support making it difficult for SICA, to stay focused on the AJR program. AJR staff will discuss strategies and approaches with USAID to encourage SICA to remain focused on the program and to coordinate activities

with the other programs if they materialize.

V. LESSONS LEARNED

- The vast multiplicity of actors in the field of juvenile violence in the three countries of our focus, the different agendas, approaches and projects, makes the environment more complex than expected. To keep the project relevant and staff informed in this environment, more effort will need to be placed on making information available to these actors about the program and AJR staff will need to participate to in coordinating activities with them.
- During the many meetings between AJR staff and the various actors involved in issues of youth violence in El Salvador, we have concluded that there is an essential difference as to how gang members, who have abandoned active gang life view themselves, and how society views them and their actions. When we compare processes followed to leave a gang in El Salvador with Honduras and Guatemala we observe many subtle but important differences. In El Salvador, former gang members do not use the word "ex" or refer to them as "former" gang members. They say they are "*calmados*" (or at ease). There is a view in El Salvador that a gang member is always a gang member and they continue to have some type of link to the gang or "owe" the gang. This concept originates from how the gang member

views themselves and the gang culture. Regrettably, this image of the former gang member has also been adopted by Salvadoran society. In Guatemala, a gang member requests to leave the gang, and he/she has to suffer the consequences. Sometimes they are killed or possibly something is requested in exchange (payment, to return a weapon, to kill someone, etc.). In all cases, this person has to have an alibi or plausible excuse to request leaving: a commitment to faith or religion (if it is discovered that this is a false alibi, the gang will kill the person), the birth of a child, marriage or some other but equally compelling reason. In Honduras active gang members do not request to leave the gang; they just slip away and hide, normally at a church. AJR staff believe it is important to deepen their understanding of the differences and similarities associated with this phenomenon (motivation, exit procedures, etc.) in the three countries to be able to develop the most appropriate responses for these youth across the region. The better we understand this phenomenon the more targeted our approaches and strategies can be to motivate youth to leave gangs. This lesson learned highlights one of the greatest challenges facing the AJR program. Creative Associates believes that its previous work in Guatemala with former gang members and society was successful in achieving the marker that society recognized the existence of the “ex” as a human being with rights, aspirations, a history and a family and with the potential to be rehabilitated and reintegrate back into society. The challenge is to replicate this impact throughout the region and on a large scale.

VI. NEXT STEPS

- Signing an MOU with Paz y Convivencia in Honduras. Once the IDB has given them the “no objection” to finance the activities that they will work jointly with us.
- Making a formal presentation of the program and an agreement proposal to ANEP in El Salvador on May 5th. This includes the specifics to develop jointly Desafio 10 and Desafio 100 programs.
- Develop relationships with the Rotary Clubs of El Salvador to encourage them to support establishing Outreach Centers. Encourage coordination of actions among the Rotary Clubs in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala so that they may jointly approach Rotary Club International for support to a possible regional approach (explore the application of the GDA agreement between Rotary Club International and USAID).
- Discuss a working relationship with UNICEF to work jointly on aspects of Result II. UNICEF of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras will be approached formally to build consensus. AJR plans to approach the regional UNICEF office in Panama at a later date.
- Select consultants who will work in Result II from those already identified by Creative Associates and from the consultants suggested by UNICEF. Hold a

meeting in El Salvador with one consultant, and in some cases two consultants, per country (and if agreed with the UNICEF officials of each country) to discuss scope of work and strategy to establish the Result II Working Groups.

- Develop the Terms of Reference for the DC Bar Association to collect donated, used computers from member law firms in Washington, D.C.
- Agree with the National Prevention Program in Honduras the terms to carry out workshops with media in Tegucigalpa and perhaps in other cities.
- Finish and discuss with USAID the Terms of Reference for the RFA template that will be used to request proposals from faith-based organizations willing to compete for Outreach Centers sub-grants in El Salvador (initially) and Honduras (later).
- Organize a meeting with faith-based leaders to explain and hand out the Terms of Reference to interested pastors and priests. Send invitation letters to the Catholic Church hierarchy, Evangelical Churches networks and PVOs to invite them to a meeting to explain the RFA process and to distribute the RFA Terms of Reference. This meeting will first occur in El Salvador on April 30th and the selection and award process is planned from completion by the end of May. Timing for a similar event in San Pedro Sula will depend on the speed of AJR alliance partner, *Paz y Convivencia*, but initial estimates expect completion during June.
- Discuss with SICA the terms for our support to the International Conference on the Causes of Violence in Central America that is tentatively planned for October 2008.
- Discuss with SICA the terms and possible financial support from other SICA related projects to organize a Regional Forum on Juvenile Justice. This Forum could take place in November 2008 with the Central American Court of Justice and the association of Supreme Courts of the region.
- Create a one-page electronic monthly newsletter that will be distributed to the relevant AJR stakeholders. The newsletter will help keep the different audiences and actors in the field of prevention informed.
- Complete the acquisition and delivery of the project vehicle. Actions include release of the vehicle from customs and purchasing insurance.
- AJR will report on the PMEP next quarter.



La Alianza Joven Regional iniciará este año con participación de padres de familia, maestros, jóvenes, policía y organizaciones de la sociedad civil.

TEGUCIGALPA.- Representantes de la Agencia de los Estados Unidos para el Desarrollo Internacional (USAID) y del Sistema de Integración Centroamericana (SICA), analizaron con autoridades de gobierno un acuerdo de cooperación para reducir los índices de violencia y el uso de drogas en jóvenes.

La secretaria ejecutiva del Programa Nacional de Prevención, Rehabilitación y Reinserción Social de Personas Vinculadas a Maras o Pandillas, Nolvía Alvarenga, dijo que mediante la aportación internacional se pondrá en marcha un proyecto denominado “Alianza Joven Regional” que abarca a los países de Centroamérica.

Alvarenga destacó la [serie de reportajes](#) informativos y preventivos publicados por **LA TRIBUNA**, donde se pone al descubierto la vulnerabilidad de la juventud por medio de la influencia de las drogas y alcohol en escuelas y colegios de las principales ciudades de Honduras.

En ese sentido, Alvarenga dijo que el programa “Alianza Joven Regional” iniciará este año con modelos de intervención en zonas consideradas como de riesgo social, incluyendo un programa integral con participación de padres de familia, maestros, jóvenes, policía y organizaciones de la sociedad civil que existen en las comunidades.

Se creará además una red de voluntariado a nivel nacional, en la que ya están aportando su contribución la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH) y Secretaría de Educación, con asistencia de directores de centros de segunda enseñanza y otras organizaciones como el Fondo de las Naciones Unidas por la Infancia (Unicef), precisó.

Mientras, el director del Proyecto Alianza para la Prevención, con sede en Washington, Salvador Stadthagen, explicó que la idea fundamental de esta iniciativa es coordinar junto a gobiernos, representantes de la sociedad civil y la empresa privada una propuesta encaminada a reducir los índices de violencia en la región.

Asimismo, se pretende proporcionar una serie de oportunidades a jóvenes con el objetivo de alejarlos de la influencia de las asociaciones ilícitas que están generando mucho daño en el área centroamericana.