

LOCATION: SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA



- The country is bordered by Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south
- Costa Rica means “rich coast” in Spanish
- The country's motto is “PURA VIDA”, which means PURE LIFE

Costa Rica constitutionally abolished its army permanently in 1949. The intention was that the “army would be replaced with an army of teachers.” Costa Rica's literacy rate today is about 95%, one of the highest in Latin America.

- Costa Rica is currently ranked as the happiest place on the planet by the New Economics Foundation.
- Costa Rica is also ranked as the greenest country in the world by the New Economics Foundation.



RETO JUVENIL INTERNACIONAL (RJI)

Reto Juvenil Internacional (RJI) is highly committed to youth development and empowerment. For 20 years, the organization has facilitated opportunities for over 7500 young men and women from Central America, Canada, Australia, and the United States of America to be active global leaders by providing them with life-changing experiences and personal growth through full participation as volunteers in over 540 communities within the Latin America and the Caribbean regions. The result is that communities benefit from the work of these volunteers and the volunteers in turn gain valuable insights about issues around the world. RJI has established partnerships with communities located in Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, Mexico, Guyana, Surinam, Trinidad, and Tobago.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION & JUSTIFICATION



There is currently a lack of learning institutions in Costa Rica and Central America dedicated to developing life skills for our youth population in order for them to become responsible citizens and positive role models.

- 70% (11.5 millions as of 2005) of the Central America population is composed of young men and women under the age of 25 years old who have the potential to build a better future for our world.
- Modern media outlets often portray youths as 'victims of poverty' and 'problems in society', the team at RJI wants to act as adult allies who view our youths as resources and “competent citizens with a right to participate and a responsibility to serve their communities”.
- Participation in leadership roles is linked to increased self-efficacy and development of life skills that are relevant to success in adulthood as well as in the workplace (such as decision-making and teamwork capabilities).

RJI's “Leadership and Life Skills Education Centre” will be a pioneer program dedicated to the youth development process in Central America and is predicted to engage youths critically as well as empowering them to understand that they are viable agents of social change inside each and every one of their communities.

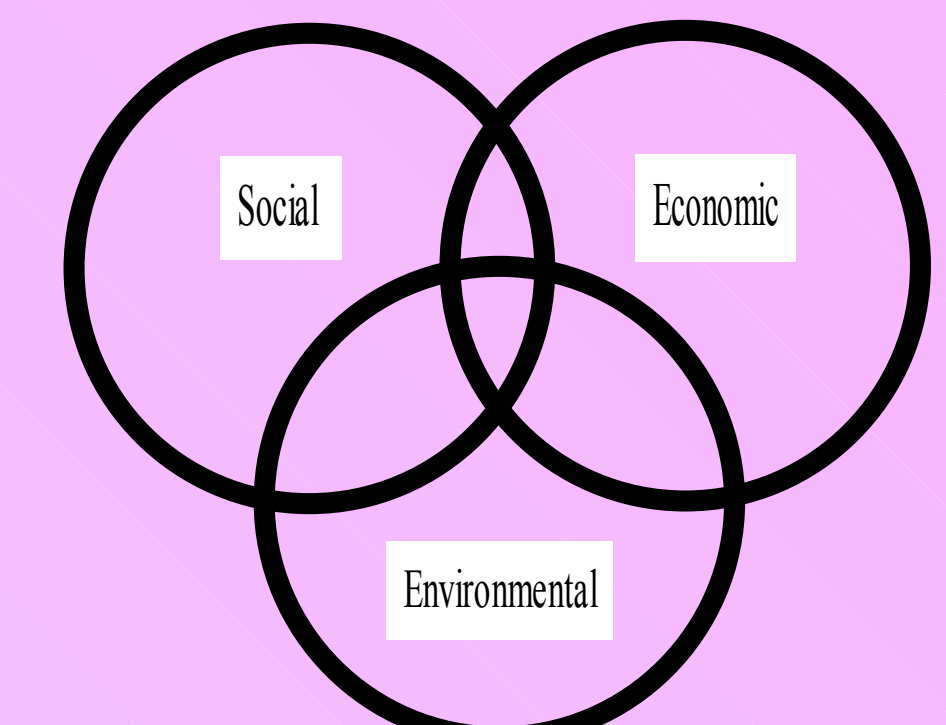


- We want the young men and women in Central America to believe that they can make a positive difference by taking control of their overall future as well as having a stake in the future of this world.
- We want to invite local and international youths to participate in this vision for them to foster genuine contribution to society.
- We want to offer a space for young people to receive training in becoming positive global leaders.

Investing in our youth is the best way to improve the quality of life for our communities as young men and women are the most vibrant population of the society and they contribute significantly to the world's economy.

PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

RJI follows a model that takes (1) social conditions, (2) economic opportunities, as well as (3) environmental standards into account to create the most well-rounded strategy for community well-being and community change.



The program's initial design also takes on the Experiential Education framework. Below are some examples of activities:

Check-in: Something Valuable

This activity can be done indoors or outdoors. Have each participant share one thing that they learned (through an activity, through going to a training, through talking to someone...) today and how they can take that knowledge then apply it to their own community back home. This self-reflective exercise challenges the participants to not only appreciate what they are learning at the “Leadership and Life Skills Education Centre”, but also how the learnings are applicable to everyday life within their most immediate environments back home. In addition, RJI can learn from the participants what things are working and what things are not working as well, thus improving the curricula accordingly.

Icebreaker: Gauging Expectations

This activity can be done indoors or outdoors. Ask the participants to share: (1) What I want to experience here, and (2) What I want to try/explore/achieve here. Remind participants that this is a safe space and that group norms will be followed. This is a good way for RJI as well as participants to share and learn about other people's goals for attending the training session in a respectful manner. Remind the group that LISTENING is as important of a leadership skill as SPEAKING. Since every person's goals and expectations may differ, this allows RJI to move certain curricula around in order to cater to each specific training session's participants better.

Group/Interactive Activity: Solving Community Conflicts Through Role-Play

Each youth attendee will get a piece of paper to write down a scenario that has happened (or is a common occurrence) in his/her own rural community before. The scenario can be a personal conflict, a conflict as witnessed by the youth attendee, or a problem/challenge that is often faced by his/her rural community. A random scenario is picked and read aloud to the group, then have the youth attendees to volunteer and act out the scenario through role-play. The role-play participants can improvise how he/she would react in a particular situation or how he/she would solve the specific conflict. Through this exercise, we challenge the youth attendees to be creative and mindful of how he/she can solve problems/conflicts as a leader. In addition, the group should debrief and discuss the scenario after the role-play has taken place to offer any additional suggestions/thoughts to further the group's learning progress.

REFERENCES & INSPIRATION

I want to thank PROFESSOR BOB MILLER for overseeing this Special Studies project as the instructor. I also want to thank OGA for its funding and support. Last but not least, I want to thank RJI for providing this learning opportunity.

- SW 790 – Adventure / Experiential Therapy, a mini course
- SW 799 – Youth Empowerment, a mini course