

Case Study: Diaspora Philanthropy and Fundación Origen

The Organization

Fundación Origen founded its accredited agro-industrial high school, Agroecológica de Pirque (EAP), in 1991 with a mission to provide at-risk students with both theoretical and practical training for better employment opportunities. This comprehensive learning institution, which is located in the low income community of Pirque outside of Santiago, addresses the academic and personal development needs of high school youth. It enrolls more than 470 low income at-risk adolescents as a priority – youths who are orphaned, abandoned, delinquent or recovering from substance abuse. 80% of its students live below the national poverty line.

Origen is a model program that confers both a high school and a technical degree. The course work covers the basics (Spanish, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, History, and Geography) and technical skills (Agro-Ecology, Animal Production, Horticulture, Economics, Agricultural Administration, Agricultural Machinery and Microenterprise). Students learn to use agricultural techniques that are compatible with the environment and protect natural resources. Origen encourages them to adopt positive personal values such as teamwork, honesty, respect, self-esteem and good work ethics. To that end, Origen developed a number of projects related to conflict management, mediation and personal growth in order to provide youths the life-skills to succeed in life. The youth attend full-time and free of charge; and, as part of the school curricula and in furtherance of their agricultural technician certificate, all students assist with income generation projects so that the school's operations can be sustainable. Such projects include canning the produce they grow and making jams; goat breeding and cheese production; production of free-range chickens and eggs; and working at Origen's hotel and training center.



Origen's results are extremely positive. The graduation rate is currently 98% within four years. Some students must work to help support their families and obtain their degree over a longer time period. In terms of employment, 35% of students obtain jobs upon graduation, 60% go on to university or post-graduate technical studies and 5% find seasonal or temporary work. The school has a 1% student pregnancy rate versus the national rate of 14%. Perhaps the most telling statistic is the 0% dropout rate that Origen has achieved, which is a testament to the commitment of both teachers and students. The Chilean Ministry of Education recently approached EAP to inquire about its notably high graduation rate, leading to Origen's current consultative role advising the government on the development of a national strategy to prevent school desertion.

Incubation and Leveraging Philanthropic Resources

Building upon EAP's impact on its students and the neighboring community, Origen began its Peer Mediation and Peace Training program in 2005. The methodology was sparked by a New York-based university professor of Chilean descent who had expertise in the mediation field. He conducted the first workshops and garnered the support of friends and colleagues from the Chilean diaspora in the United States, who provided financial contributions through The Resource Foundation. Following the professor's retirement, his visits to Chile became more frequent and longer in duration, allowing him to contribute to ongoing improvements to the mediation

program's content. Fundación Origen's own knowledge grew and these lessons were incorporated as the program moved from a pilot phase to becoming incorporated into EAP's curriculum.

What began with individual donor support from the Chilean diaspora community then led to grants from institutions, including both corporate and private foundation, which was facilitated by The Resource Foundation.



Thanks to these philanthropic investments, the use of mediation for peaceful conflict resolution has evolved to be one of the cornerstones of Origen's educational methodology and has led to documented behavior change. By providing students with the skills necessary to resolve conflicts in a constructive and harmonious manner, it has been possible to transform their hearts, minds and habits, thus changing their lives and enabling youth to have a positive impact in classrooms, families and communities. As a result of their communication skills, kindness and assertiveness, and their ability to promote dialogue, they help resolve conflicts peacefully. Students trained have proven to

significantly improve their relationships as well as their academic performance. They have become positive leaders and mentors by inspiring others and providing support to peers when they are in conflict or face personal problems. Their priorities have changed and they have taken a very active role in the community.

The Ministry of Education has supported the initiative in the hopes of replicating the program in other schools and ultimately including it in the high school curriculum throughout Chile. In 2007, thanks to a generous grant from a private foundation through The Resource Foundation, Origen expanded the program to the neighboring community of Puente Alto. Through this program, it trained teachers from local public schools, students who were identified as possessing leadership skills, and parents from the community to act as mediators in their schools as well as in the community. The program's inherent value was further validated in 2010 when participants previously trained were able to implement and use those skills learned in school and other settings with youth already suffering the stress resulting from the country's devastating earthquake. Overall, the program's success remains remarkable, as schools have expressed a marked improvement in the social interaction and conflict management techniques of students and teachers as a result of the project. Through its inclusion of parents and other community leaders, the program's effect has also extended to the community as a whole.

Scaling-Up and Expanding Reach

Due to the results of the program and Origen's educational model, the organization has been recognized by Natura, the Brazilian cosmetic company, with a grant to replicate the Peace and Mediation Training program, in 200 schools across Chile through the training of 500 teachers over a five-year period. In addition, Natura disseminates information about the program through its network of vendors throughout Chile, which serves to advertise the initiative and encourage teachers to apply.

Fundación Origen's experience is an example of the valuable role the diaspora community can play in the support of innovative programs in the region. Diaspora philanthropy takes many forms; expertise and experience, financial and in-kind, and relies heavily on the concept of partnership to make a lasting impact. Here, it was a member of the diaspora community, who wanted to contribute his time, skills and money to his country of origin that made possible the creation of partnerships between the Chilean diaspora community, corporate donors, private foundations, and ultimately facilitated the national replication of the program and increased its visibility.