

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



Programa Velasco
Educate & Empower

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Dear friends,

For so many of us, in various aspects of our lives, the uncertainty created by the pandemic continued to ebb and flow throughout 2021. Uncertainty was magnified for our participants due to the poverty, violence, and gender inequities they endure. At Programa Velasco, while this uncertainty loomed, it caused us to second guess the possibilities and limits of what we could do and be for our participants. While still being urgently needed, uncertainty also made planning that much more ambiguous and challenging.

Nonetheless, **in the Salvadoran spirit of grit and resilience, and through your generosity, we turned uncertainty into opportunities.** With much reflection and discussion, we utilized our available resources and created possibilities that didn't exist to be able to persist, pivot, and move forward.

- We took on challenges to review our previous **strategic plan** and initiate the process of creating a new one.
- To better serve current and future participants in our rural community of Tepecoyo, we constructed our first brick and mortar space, **a mental health clinic.**
- **Our 6th cohort of entrepreneurs** in our Women's Empowerment Project began their two-year journey of business development and personal growth.
- **For the 14th consecutive year,** families at our partner organization's Child Development Center had the financial stability of knowing that their children could access their education and mental health services throughout the year and April onward, in person.

With these and other **opportunities that you helped to create, you enabled our participants to have and feel more certainty in their lives.** They could consistently rely on our programs and services when so many other sources in their lives weren't able to provide such stability.

A transformative legacy gift of over \$250,000 from a longtime generous supporter, Judy Dunbar, strengthened our ability to respond to unprecedented need and provided sustainability in a time of uncertainty. This gift fuels our efforts to grow towards our potential while also helping our participants to do the same.

We will not tire from valuing and honoring your partnership with us. We're heartened and grateful that our mission aligns with the impact you want to have in our world. As we enter a new year, we ask for your continued involvement in making a collective and positive impact on the women entrepreneurs, children, and families we serve together.

Thank you for your partnership and generosity,

Annie Boyd-Ramirez

Co-Founder and
Executive Director

Juan Velasco

Co-Founder and
Board President

Women's Empowerment

During the past year, 48 entrepreneurs from the urban area of San Ramón and Tepecoyo, a rural community, finished their first year in the sixth cohort of our training program, the [Women's Empowerment Project \(WEP\)](#). With women still suffering the effects of the pandemic, there was no better time to be in the Project, to give to a lot of them a chance to move forward and keep growing.

5↓

Thanks to the new and more precise selection process, the number of entrepreneurs who dropped out of the WEP in the first year decreased by 5.

93

Hours of counseling for 30 women entrepreneurs between the two communities.

50%

Half of the entrepreneurs say they feel more financially independent at the end of the first year of the WEP. They notice because they don't need to ask another person for money so often.

\$100↑

The amount of seed money available to each entrepreneur increased by \$100.

You can create your own opportunities



Verónica, like many Salvadoran women, was raised to be a housewife. She grew up in a humble family: her parents raised cattle and chickens, and her mother sold fruit at the town's central market.

From an early age, **Verónica's mom taught her and her sisters how to cook so**, as her mom would say, they wouldn't "suffer when they got married."

Sure enough, after she and her partner got together, Verónica found herself doing all of the housework as well as working outside the home. **After their second son was born, she quit her job** to stay home and take care of her family. **This made her financially dependent on her partner.** She started looking for ways to contribute to her family's income. She decided to apply what she had learned from her mother: every week, she made and sold *panes con pollo*, a traditional Salvadoran chicken sandwich.

That was five years ago, and Verónica has learned a lot since then. At the beginning of 2021, **she joined the Women's Empowerment Project, which has allowed her to formalize and grow her business.** She began to keep detailed purchase and sales records, which gives her the information she needs to make important business decisions. She set goals for herself, which she is already surpassing. Initially, **her goal was to earn \$300 in monthly revenue, but that number has already doubled: Verónica's financial records show she's now bringing in \$600 per month!**

Verónica's business continues to grow. She now invests \$100 per week on supplies to make the panes con pollo she sells at weekly entrepreneurial fairs hosted by the city of Mejicanos. **Selling at the fairs has given Verónica a chance to sell outside of her neighborhood, gain new clients, and network with fellow entrepreneurs.** And she couldn't have done it without **the seed money she received from Programa Velasco, which allowed her to invest in chafing trays, a canopy, and other utensils she needed to begin.**



...Saving guarantees my business' performance will improve over time and, as a result, my family's economic situation will improve too.



The WEP also introduced Verónica to the Savings and Lending Groups (SLG) that are a big part of the WEP. Verónica requested a \$100 loan from the SLG so she could buy ingredients to fulfill a particularly large order.

Verónica says, "Saving is very important to me now that I understand it's a safe investment in my business' future. Saving guarantees my business' performance will improve over time and, as a result, my family's economic situation will improve too."

On a personal level, Verónica finds refuge in the WEP, saying, *"I want my positive and proactive attitude to motivate other women. I think that's the key to them becoming entrepreneurs and, like me, deciding to carry out their own business ideas."* Verónica added, *"I've learned that being an entrepreneur is about adapting to and understanding your clients' needs and preferences."*

Verónica now contributes a substantial portion of her family's income. However, **she knows her accomplishments go beyond money. She's given herself what was once hard to find: the opportunity to work and be financially independent.**

The Strength of Women: More Real Than Ever

Founded in November 2019, *"The Strength of Women"* (La Fuerza de las Mujeres) is a Savings and Lending Group (SLG) made up of twelve entrepreneurs who graduated from the Women's Empowerment Project (WEP). **When they started, any of them could not imagine what they were going to face and achieve.**



The goal of the Savings and Lending Group is for the entrepreneurs to practice saving money and to make microloans in their community. **This savings-lending cycle strengthens the group's collective economic situation, as well as each of their individual businesses.**

Programa Velasco (PV) Economic Empowerment staff gave a workshop to the WEP entrepreneurs on how SLGs work and then handed out a step-by-step guide that explained how to start an SLG, and how to select group members to fill key leadership roles.

After a board of directors was selected, PV's staff actively participated in the SLG's first few meetings until the group understood the core principles. Since then, the staff has taken a hands-off approach, merely observing while the entrepreneurs control every aspect of the group. **Although the staff can answer general questions about SLG methodology, they refrain from making any group decisions.**

The Savings and Lending Group fiscal cycle lasts about nine months, running parallel to the WEP activity calendar. When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, El Salvador went into a strict quarantine. The sudden humanitarian crisis caused **the entrepreneurs to distribute their savings sooner than they originally intended, as they needed the funds to buy provisions and supplies during a time of global uncertainty.** It was a big hit for them and their work as a group.



Six months passed before the entrepreneurs could restart their meetings. In support of this effort, Programa Velasco awarded seed money to the SLG as well as each of the individual entrepreneurs.

This money was used to make loans to purchase ingredients, equipment, or materials the entrepreneurs needed to jumpstart their business and start saving again.

The entrepreneurs haven't looked back since.

"Now I feel really confident in my ability to save. I put the money I make cutting hair into the fund and I know I can't spend the money I put away."-
Carolina, President



To compensate for having almost no in-person contact with the entrepreneurs in 2020, the PV staff met with the SLG three times in 2021. In these meetings, staff members provided guidance on what the group had done independently over the previous year, reviewed the SLG account ledger, and resolved some lingering doubts about how to calculate interest.

At the close of their last fiscal period, the entrepreneurs **counted almost \$4,000 in their cash box**. Of that total, \$3,000 was savings and **\$767 was accrued loan interest**. According to their transaction records, the least amount an entrepreneur saved was \$99 and the most was \$600. **Considering that the SLG required a minimum savings of just 25 cents per week, these figures represent incredible progress.** *The SLG members wouldn't have believed it if someone had told them they'd save that much money- they might've even laughed at the thought!*

The entrepreneurs have come up with ideas to raise money for the SLG. For example, **throughout 2021, they held numerous food sales, with all proceeds going directly to their fund**. The entrepreneurs have expressed how gratified they feel by achieving goals only possible through saving:

"Even though we graduated from the WEP, our group continues to meet and this has allowed us to stay united. I always save part of my sales now so I can contribute it to the fund."- Isabel, Key Holder

"It's hard to save on your own at home, I've only been able to save as part of this group. But now at my house, everyone's started saving, even my daughters."- Claudia, Money Counter

"I'm grateful to Programa Velasco for teaching us how to save. These savings reflect my daily effort selling chickens. I feel happy that I will be able to expand my business with what I've been able to save."- Verónica, Key Holder

It goes without saying how proud we are of these entrepreneurs. It's a privilege to walk with them on their journey of learning, growth, and empowerment, and none of it would be possible without our supporters. Thank you!



Children and families

Families that PV supports have access to scholarships for their children, counseling services, and learning opportunities for caregivers. In 2021, they started coming back to the Center and trying to feel normal again. The generosity of donors kept providing children and their families another year of access to mental health services to address some struggles that started during because of 2020 situation...

100%

Of all 79 children received access to two medical checkups.

50

12 month partial scholarships for children

12

The child psychologist conducted 12 workshops about knowledge and control of emotions in each classroom.

20

Out of 27 children who participated in counseling services, 20 received mental health kits to put in practice when they learn in each session.

It's about children.. and much more!



Here at Programa Velasco, **we're always looking for ways we can make a long-term impact in the lives of children and their families.** An impact that, in turn, will generate new experiences and goals that transcend what we set out to do.

Over the years, we've seen poignant, inspiring, and exciting personal stories unfold at our partner organization ANADES' Child Development Center.

Of the many incredible children and families that have come through the Center, **Sophie and her mother Erika stand out for their determination and strength.** After five years at the Center, Sophie graduated from the Center's kindergarten at the end of last year. We've watched Sophie grow since she came to the Center as a two-year-old, and we're delighted to see her begin a new chapter in her life.

In 2017, Sophie's mom Erika was recently separated and had to go back to work to support herself and her daughter. However, as a single mom, **Erika didn't have anyone to watch Sophie. Erika immediately thought of the ANADES Child Development Center** because she had gone there herself when she was a girl. Erika wanted Sophie to follow in her footsteps, but Erika wasn't earning enough money to pay the Center's monthly tuition. Erika applied for and was awarded a Programa Velasco scholarship to cover Sophie's tuition.

"Thanks to the Center and Programa Velasco, I almost always had time to take my son to physical therapy. I'm so grateful to have had the Programa Velasco scholarship all these years. We always needed the help, and the Center and Programa Velasco have supported us the entire way."

Over the years Sophie attended classes at the Center, **Erika was quite active in her daughter's education: she joined the parent committee and stepped up to help whenever she was asked.**

In return, the Center served as a huge support to Erika when her son Andrés was born: Erika had labor complications that caused Andrés to be born with *hypotonia*, a syndrome that causes low muscle tone.

Caring for Andrés and his condition demanded a lot of Erika's attention, and she had less time for Sophie. **The Center's teachers and child psychologist were able to support Sophie and Erika through this big change.** Erika says, *"Thanks to the Center and Programa Velasco, I almost always had time to take my son to physical therapy. I'm so grateful to have had the Programa Velasco scholarship all these years. We always needed the help, and the Center and Programa Velasco have supported us the entire way."*

This was a difficult time for the whole family and, like all children with younger siblings, Sophie had to adjust to sharing her mother's attention. Being an older sister also meant that sometimes, Sophie had to help Erika take care of her younger brother. On top of that, Sophie's final year at the Center was a challenge due to COVID-19 quarantine restrictions. However, Erika reflected positively on Sophie's time at the Center:

"I'm incredibly grateful for the last five years at the Center, as they give children the best holistic education, support, and care. Sophie always had everything she needed and more: healthy meals, medical check-ups, and even mental health counseling for both her and I."

Also, I was able to make good friends with some of the other moms, and I learned so much from them over the years. Thanks to the Programa Velasco scholarship, my daughter had the opportunity to attend the same preschool I did, and we're taking so many special memories with us. Sophie has learned a lot and we feel blessed!"

In 2022, Sophie will attend a new school near her house. Erika hopes that Sophie will continue to grow and learn new things there. As one chapter ends, another begins, bringing with it new challenges, goals, and dreams.

We're proud that Programa Velasco continues to make a positive impact on children, and that our impact extends to their families. Our goal has always been to help families access the Center's services as a way to help the entire community. Because when children receive a high-quality education, their parents are able to seek employment and improve their quality of life.

But we know we're not in this alone— just like Erika and Sophie, **we're grateful for your support, and we hope we can count on you to make an even bigger impact this year.**



A safe and dignified space for women entrepreneurs in Tepecoyo



Back in September, we inaugurated our mental health clinic and celebrated this milestone with our entrepreneurs, staff, and partners who have been integral to this initiative's success.

Our staff now has a **clinically-appropriate, peaceful space to provide free counseling sessions to the 22 entrepreneurs currently in the Women's Empowerment Project-Tepecoyo**, as well as generations to come! The clinic is small but mighty, comfortable, and surpasses the needs for each session.

The clinic is Programa Velasco's first brick-and-mortar facility. **Building a safe and welcoming space for entrepreneurs' counseling sessions has been our priority rather than an administrative office space.** Inaugurating this mental health clinic fulfills a dream our organization has had for years, a dream we started moving toward when we incorporated counseling services into the fabric of each of our programs.

Since inauguration day, Gloria, our clinical psychologist, has been providing back-to-back sessions to meet demand. **Participants feel very happy and appreciative that this space is for them**, and that they can access these necessary services in the heart of their rural community.

In a country like El Salvador where merely 1% of the already resource-deprived national health budget is used for mental healthcare, it is our aim to ensure women and families with the most need can access these vital basic services.

Thank you to our donors and supporters for making this accomplishment possible: we couldn't have done it without you! Thank you for believing in our mission and for believing in the impact mental health has on an individual's success and growth.

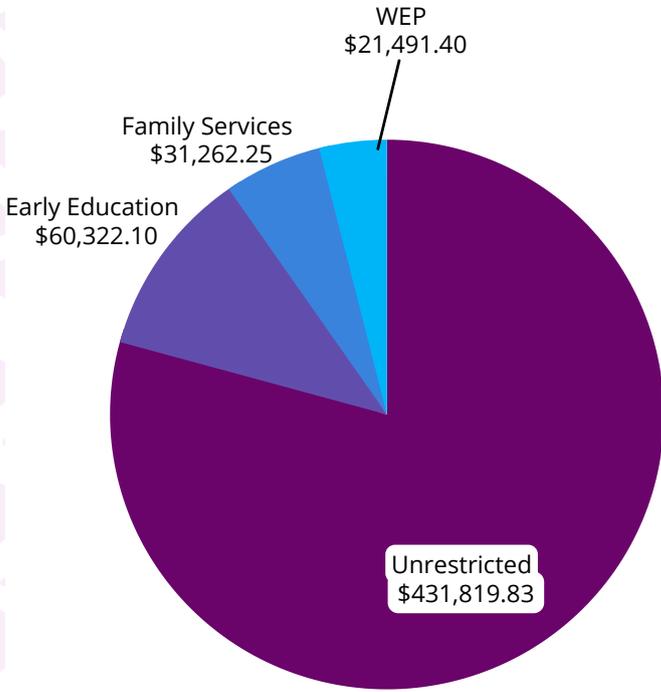
We'd like to also thank the Municipality of Tepecoyo for donating the land for the clinic, Buruca Design for their pro bono architectural services, and Forix Foundation for providing a portion of the funds to construct the clinic.

We hope to keep providing mental health services to Tepecoyo families for years to come, and this milestone is just the first step on that journey.



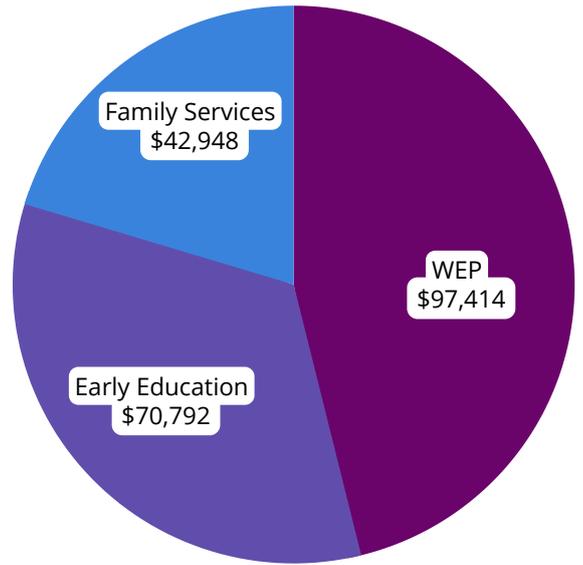
Financials

Income



Total Income: \$544,895.58

Program Expenses

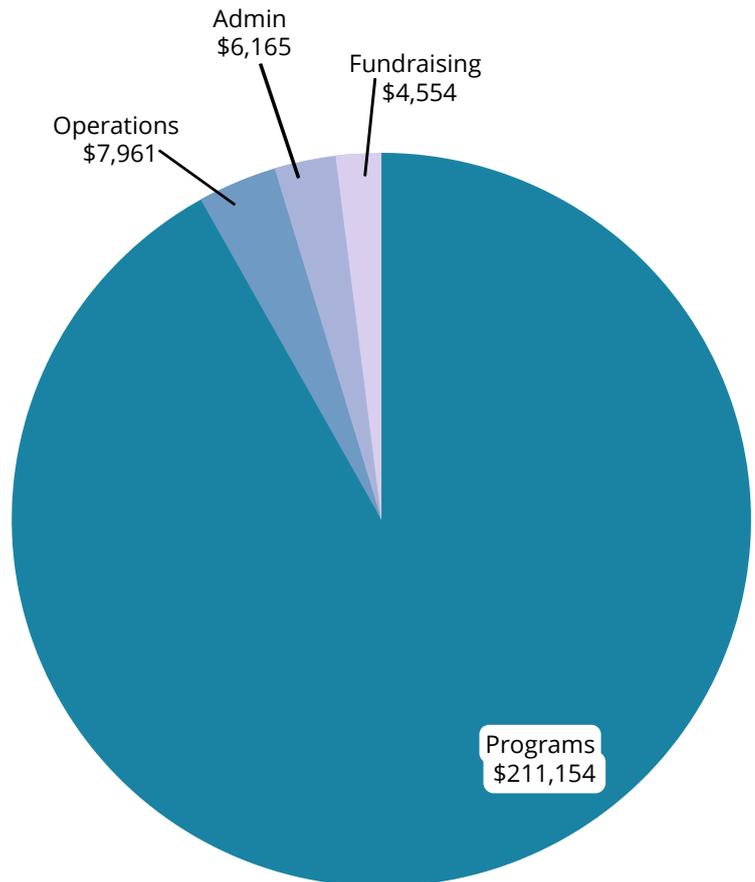


Total Program Expenses: \$211,154

All Expenses

- Programs
- Operations
- Admin
- Fundraising

Total: \$229,834



Thank you is just not enough!

Each person's name below *represents hours and hours of time, extraordinary efforts, and passionate dedication to sharing their unique gifts and talents to meet our participants' and our organization's unique needs.* Their work may not always be front and center, but it fuels and propels us up and over obstacles and closer to meeting our collective goals. Our volunteers make deeper and more sustainable impacts than we could alone. Their partnership and active involvement in our work truly fills us with gratitude!

- **Alicia Fleming Hamilton, M.S. CCC-SLP, Bilingual Speech-Language Pathologist**
- **Carrie Todd**, Bookkeeper, and Finance Extraordinaire
- **Angela Bustos**, MA, Language Services
- **Interns:** Hannah Ingersoll and Michelle Mehmud, graduate students from the University of Chicago, Georgina Molina and Neyda Padilla, undergraduate students from the University of Central America, Raquel Torres, an undergraduate student from the Center for Peacemaking at Marquette University
- **Clinical Mental Health Mentors:** Megan Raimondi-Musser, MSW, LCSW, and Laura Hershberger, MSW, LISW-S
- **Research Committee Members:** Anne Farina Ph.D., LCSW, Kat Saxton Ph.D. MPH, Laura Hershberger MSW, LISW-S, Portia Bajwa, MSW
- **Ongoing guidance from** Allison Ramirez, Erica Olson, Raquel Arana, Sergio Ceron Perez, and Julio Perez in El Salvador.
- **In-kind donations from** Jaime Ayala at Buruca Design for architecture services to build our Mental Health Clinic; Geoffrey Hennies from Lowthian Design Works for technical and website services; Santiago Bunce from Secoya Strategies and Angela Smith from Chispa Strategies for program, leadership, and strategic planning guidance.
- **Students and staff from** Monica Herrera School of Communication, Santa Tecla, El Salvador, and Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, PA.
- **All those who hosted virtual gatherings:** Sister Peggy O'Neill S.C., Journalist Danielle Mackey, Chef Carmen Sabia from Ghosted Concepts, Celine Janin from Xocolatisimo, Marcela Figueroa from LaFiroa Tea, Chef Victor Flores from Biscuit Factory
- **CRISPAZ staff** and university, high school, and faith community delegations.
- **Board Members:** Jenn Dunneback, Katy Erker-Lynch, Gary Neustadter, Jean Reidy, Elizabeth Sanchez, Marisol Sanchez, Nancy Svoboda, Juan Velasco
- **Staff Members:** Annie Boyd-Ramirez, Christian Morales, Elizabeth Hawkins, Eli Lemus, Fernando Mendoza, Flor Castro, Gaby Martinez, Gloria García, Katherine Cornejo, and Pamela Ramirez



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