

Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas, **POETA**, provides marginalized populations with job-ready information and communication technologies (ICT) skills. POETA focuses on depth, with comprehensive training programs and substantial job-readiness skills training. POETA program graduates acquire ICT skills in a range of employable disciplines that improve their employability and empowerment.

WHERE IT ALL STARTED:

In 2004, The Trust for the Americas, an affiliate of the Organization for American States (OAS), developed a pilot project in Guatemala, through the Microsoft Unlimited Potential Program, to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through ICT skills training. In its first year, our two Guatemala centers trained more than 500 people. More than 25 local businesses became involved as partners in the program. As a result of the success in Guatemala, Microsoft agreed to expand the program, with twelve additional centers in other countries of Latin America. As part of the expansion, the General Secretariat of the OAS pledged to support and enhance the visibility of the program. This three way partnership became "POETA".

Today, with more than 200 public and private sector partners leveraging knowledge, goodwill, cash and infrastructure across a dozen countries, POETA serves as a model for public-private sector cooperation. The success of POETA in Latin America enabled the Trust to leverage support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), CISCO Systems Inc, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Microsoft to allow POETA's expansion to Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent & the Grenadines. This program is specifically targeted at at-risk youth in the Eastern Caribbean.

POETA – THE BASICS:

POETA Centers: Digital Opportunity Centers, (i) provide training in job-ready computer skills such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Access, Power Point and internet research skills, as well as advanced software applications; and wherever possible (ii) serve as after-hours community computer centers, providing both internet

access and additional skills training for the larger community.

Job-readiness and Job-skills training: This may be the first job opportunity for many people in the program. Like any first time job seekers, they need skills and information on how to dress, write resumes, and address particular issues faced by marginalized communities in the workplace. In addition, many centers offer specialized skills training programs, such as computer repair and maintenance and micro-enterprise training.

Civic Education: POETA Youth Training will incorporate civic education modules to address the social factors contributing to youth risk. HIV/ AIDS education and awareness, conflict resolution training, and other civic education components complement the ICT and job readiness training to make at-risk youth more employable and ready to confront the challenges that affect their daily lives.

Job placement and Business Development: POETA actively seeks job placement opportunities, creating spaces where local business and participants can meet to promote employment. Where applicable, POETA also works to improve business opportunities for our graduates by facilitating credit and connecting their businesses with potential customers.

Awareness and Visibility: POETA works to inform and educate local business and governments on the importance of giving fair employment access to marginalized populations. The greater public is also educated on the importance of equal access to economic opportunity for all.

Expanding POETA's reach and ensuring its sustainability requires strategic alliances with governments, the private sector, academia and other non-governmental organizations. New partners allow POETA to expand its current centers and open new ones.

