

ARAJUNO ROAD PROJECT



2012

Annual Report

The Arajuno Road Project was created in 2008 with the goal of supporting the schools and improving the opportunities available to the children living along the road located between the small city of Puyo and the rural community of Arajuno in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The program has impacted over 500 children and their families to date by providing quality English instruction, improving the infrastructure and learning environment of their schools, and working on community development and conservation programs, such as school gardens and reforestation.

Arajuno Road Project

ANNUAL REPORT

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



A little over a year ago, my husband and I received a request that we consider taking over management of the Arajuno Road Project – quite a pleasant surprise – a proposal that we happily accepted due to the wonderful mission of the organization, positive history and well-developed structure of the Project. And in the year that has passed since we began directing the Project, we have enjoyed nearly every minute.

First off, in looking back at 2012, the Project is very grateful for all of the wonderful coordinators and volunteers – all of whom have continually exceeded expectations in their service to the children of Arajuno Road. We are a volunteer organization, which means we are dependent on you, the volunteer. You carry out our mission – as I always say, ‘getting to do all of the fun stuff,’ which in our case is also the important ‘stuff.’ Thank you!

The year of 2012 has indeed been a big year. It has been a year of constant changes and adaptations, in part due to the nature of working in Ecuador, but also because of Project transitions. As we have navigated both the successes and challenges of the year, one thing has repetitively been made clear – the significance of the Project. With these experiences we are moving forward with an ever clearer path of not only how to continue the Project’s success, but also a strong vision of how to increase our positive impact.

I am exceptionally proud of the cultural exchange and understanding opportunities the Project has made available this year, and not just for the Project’s schools, but also for our volunteers and others beyond Ecuador’s borders. The schools the Project serves have jumped at the opportunity to share their lives and their culture with volunteers and schools abroad. They have excitedly exchanged letters, photos, videos, art, and video chatted online for the first time with children on other continents. We look forward to continuing the integration of cultural exchange and understanding into our work.

We have also seen the importance of the Project’s mission increase as Arajuno Road, which serves as an interface between developing Ecuador and the intact Amazon rainforest, is being promoted as the gateway to Yasuni National Park (one of the most biodiverse spots on Earth, a hallmark of conservation efforts worldwide) – likely a double-edged sword as more attention and, subsequently, more development comes to the area. Increasing opportunities available to the children and communities of Arajuno Road is more vital than ever – we can help to serve as a catalyst toward more sustainable economic activities, an excellent quality of life and reinforce the importance of protecting the amazing and invaluable environment where we are lucky enough to live.

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TEACHING PROGRAM

It all began with the primary schools along the road, and the Teaching Program remains the keystone of the Arajuno Road Project. English – a major world language mandatory for many of those wishing to engage in opportunities related to business, electronics/IT and tourism – is seldom taught in rural schools in Ecuador even though it is status quo for their urban counterparts. The majority of the schools along Arajuno Road do not have the capacity or the resources to conduct English instruction. The Arajuno Road Project fills this void for over 250 students. Schools served by the Project in 2012:



Escuela Simon Bolivar -
km 6



Escuela Republica de Argentina -
km 10



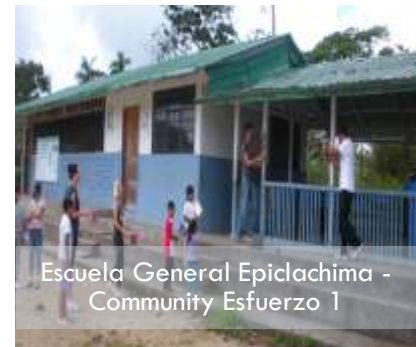
Escuela Gran Colombia -
Community San Carlos



Escuela Machinaza -
Sector San Ramon



Escuela Jose Maria Urbina -
km 17



Escuela General Epilachima -
Community Esfuerzo 1



Escuela Angel Manzano -
km 22



Escuela Vencedores de Pichincha -
Community Independencia



Escuela Juan Leon Mera -
km 35

2011-2012 School Year

The excellent documentation, well-developed structure of the Project and excellent volunteers allowed the transition to new management come online relatively smoothly in January. Staff and volunteers quickly found the primary schools and their administrators to be inviting and open to further collaboration. While few Ecuadorians master English and the majority of students have very little exposure to English outside of the Program, we could immediately see a clear progression of the students' language ability between the grades – a testimony to the value of the Project's history in the area.

As the school year progressed, Project coordinators and volunteers worked to help update, expand upon and otherwise improve our materials - the all-time favorite being flashcards and games. Aside from teaching materials, they have also added helpful administrative tools, such as a semester tracking and pacing spreadsheet, helping us to keep an ever-watchful eye on continuity.

The Teaching Program started the year serving in six schools. As the year progressed, we found that - at times - we had the capacity to do more. After sharing this desire with the school district administrators, they asked the Project to expand into additional schools. Subsequently, the Teaching Program expanded into 3 additional schools on an informal basis to start working on introducing the students to English with the hope of permanently bringing these additional schools on board in the future.

While the students are almost always wonderful to teach, the Program did have disciplinary problems at one school during the 2011-2012 school year. The issue was brought up to the school director and both he and Project staff held a meeting to bring the issue to the attention of the parents. By the end of the school year, the students had improved and even had some of the strongest grades among the schools on the final exam of the year. (Note: The teaching environment of this school has continued to improve during the 2012-13 school year, likely due to a lower student-to-teacher ratio at the school and improved continuity of the Teaching Program.)

The Teaching Program closed out the 2011-2012 school year by distributing and recollecting feedback forms among the school directors. The evaluation aimed to collect some basic demographics, asked if the school directors agreed or not or had no opinion regarding a series of statements addressing the Project as a whole, its directors, coordinators and volunteers, and had open-ended questions regarding comments/suggestions and opportunities for further collaboration. The Project was met with overwhelmingly positive feedback from the school directors, as well as some excellent ideas for the future.



2011-2012 School Year

Summer Camp

The Teaching Program switches gears when school lets out. Summer Camp operates as an informal and fun atmosphere for the children during school vacation. Camp is planned around a weekly theme which is replicated weekdays at school locations spread out along the Arajuno Road. Each theme is broken down into multiple skill building segments such as art, English, team building, etc. This year's themes included the 2012 Summer Olympics, music, climate change, food and nutrition, animals of the world and recycling. The volunteers put a lot of wonderful creativity into making each week special. Approximately 60-80 children attended weekly from 6 different schools.

Summer Camp is especially rewarding in that it provides constructive activities when school is out. Many of the children spend little time under the supervision of their parents during the day – passing time with other relatives, siblings, friends or neighbors as their parents work out on the farm or in the city – leaving many with little adult supervision. Many children also depend on the schools for alimention during the school year. The Project found that during vacation, this gap was not being filled for some. Thanks to donations and a quick reprioritization of the Program budget, we were able to provide snacks this year.



2012-2013 School Year

The Program started the academic year strong, including all nine schools in regular instruction with dedicated coordinators divided between two teaching teams. English and computer workbooks were once again donated by the oil company that affects the region. A diagnostic test covering the topics of the first few months of instruction was administered at the beginning of the year and again in November to monitor student progress. The pre-test showed almost no English comprehension in students that had not previously received formal instruction and low-to-medium comprehension levels in those that had previous formal instruction as some topics overlap between grade levels. When the diagnostic was readministered as a post-test, comprehension levels had increased several points on average, serving as a baseline in verifying student progress.

In efforts to improve the quality of education the Ecuadorian education system has been undergoing extensive changes since the beginning of the current academic year that impact everyone

involved in education – changing the school semester system, grading system, and the format of the daily school schedule – with more changes to come. Unfortunately, some of these changes have negatively affected the Program’s plans for the year, throwing off the coordinator schedule and decreasing the time of each class period. In order to keep instruction going during the holiday down-times and give the children more unlimited time with the subject matter, volunteers have made and distributed English video modules for the students to use with their workbooks under teacher supervision, which have been well-received by students and school directors. This is a great tool to add to the Program toolbox – one that we hope to keep building on, but ultimately the Program will need to modify its commitments in order to adapt to the changing education system.



Special Projects

Thanks to energetic volunteers and donations, the Project had the opportunity to carry out several Special Projects in 2012. This year’s special projects fell into three categories: non-formal English instruction, international exchanges, and school improvements.

The Program incorporated several non-formal English opportunities into the workload. For the vast majority of the year, a weekly highlight was community class – held one afternoon a week at km 28 along Arajuno Road - open to children and adults alike; several children attended community class on a regular basis. The Project was also invited to present a session on pronunciation at a workshop for the province’s urban English teachers, after which the Project began holding weekly teach-the-teacher sessions to provide an opportunity for the local urban English teachers to practice speaking and improve their comprehension levels. From this teach-the-teacher concept, the Program also offered an open-hour to the teachers of other subjects from the rural school network the Project works within in an effort to indirectly increase the Program’s primary students’ exposure to English. The Project also helped to pair several volunteers who wanted to improve their Spanish with Ecuadorians wanting to improve their English in language exchanges – teaching one hour of English in exchange for one hour of Spanish instruction.

The Program facilitated several international exchanges this year. The exchanges took place in various formats - emails and letters, photos, videos, art work, and Skype calls. The international art exchange was particularly fun for the students as they sent out and received artwork to and from every

inhabited continent. Students also lit up for Skype calls with U.S. students – sharing music, foods and eager questions - the calls were the first time the Arajuno Road students had ever chatted online.

The Project participated in school improvement activities when possible. The Project painted a world map mural – a great teaching and cultural exchange tool - early in the year and the school directors liked it so much, that they want the mural replicated at all of the schools. Two of the murals have been completed so far. Volunteers were able to lend a helping hand painting and cleaning up the km 35 school before the kids came back from vacation. Due to donations, the Project was also able to present the winners of the annual school soccer – the dominant sport of Ecuador – tournament prizes, and purchase bookshelves for three of the schools to store English materials. The Project also donated two white boards and various school supplies to the schools and students as needed throughout the year.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & CONSERVATION PROGRAM

The need for the Community Development and Conservation Program has emerged organically out of the Project's presence in the schools and Project leadership has been working to identify and carry out initial steps of the Program over the last couple of years, which have in the past included efforts in reforestation and assisting in school/community gardens. In 2012, two initiatives were defined as the current focus of the Program due to past successes and needs within the communities.

School Gardens & Nutrition Initiative

School gardens, often also called “family gardens” here, are truly a community effort with community-wide impacts. Through the Project's presence in the schools, it quickly becomes evident that the food the students receive at school is often the primary source of their daily alimentation – many students frequently received both breakfast (upon arrival) and lunch (during mid-morning recess) through the schools. Luckily in recent years, the national government has been providing some basic staples, granola bars/cookies, and powdered mix to make oatmeal drink. However, perishable foods - valuable sources of protein, vitamins and minerals - are sometimes donated by a school's director or community member but more often are left out altogether.

The Project formally adopted the Initiative into our workplan, devoting 2012 to assessing the current state of the nine school gardens, helping when and where possible (largely during group work days), and outlining steps and goals moving forward (*report available upon request, currently in Spanish only*). The state of the school gardens vary widely from having no established garden whatsoever to implementing a multi-faceted agricultural project. Some schools are waiting for legalization of their garden plots, some schools have limited space or resources to work with, other schools have let their gardens go, and some schools have their gardens and/or other agricultural projects (chickens, guinea pigs, etc.) up and running.

The Project has prioritized the areas in which each school needs the most support to guide collaboration in the short-term. (We are happy to share that as of this report, the Project has secured the donation of literally tons of nutrient-rich soil – one of the biggest needs currently in the gardens - as well as the means to transport it – scheduled to be delivered before the end of the year.) The long-term goal of the Initiative is to see the majority, if not all, school gardens producing enough to supplement the students and teachers' diets, if not other community members, with the Project ultimately incorporating education on nutrition and cultural events to reinforce a healthy food culture. Thank you to our 2012 Community volunteers for helping to build a roadmap forward on this important topic!



School Gardens & Nutrition Initiative

Community Development MiniProjects Initiative

As a small organization with limited funds, the Project recognizes that we must take a piece-by-piece approach to collaborative projects in the communities. Our volunteers also often have a limited window of time in which they can facilitate projects. Keeping these realities in mind, the Project launched the Community Development MiniProjects Initiative. The schools have been given first priority in submitting their requests for small project collaborations. The goal of the Initiative is to branch out to other small projects in the communities once the first round of school needs have been met.

The first steps of the Initiative that have been completed in 2012 include the collection of MiniProject requests from the schools, which range from repairing rainwater catchment systems to painting to repairing electrical systems. The Project received a generous donation of tools to carry out the work and the beginning seed funds for a dedicated Community MiniProjects Fund. The Project now aims to line up these identified Community MiniProjects with volunteer skills and interests.

OUTREACH, PARTNERSHIPS & SUPPORT

Arajuno Road Project calls on the global community to give back to an important and amazing corner of the planet. To create and connect this international culture upon which the Project depends, outreach, partnerships and support are vital to the Project's success. The Project has striven to improve communications and ties in 2012 and will continue to do so into the new year.

Improvements in Communications

At the end of 2011, the volunteer house was moved from a remote, rural location to the outskirts of the provincial seat. One of the advantages of this move has been accessibility, and not just physical accessibility – communications accessibility – strong cell signal, conventional phones, and Internet. The Project also received a much-needed donation of two laptop computers. These improvements have facilitated communications between team members, the international Project community and those interested in joining it.

Arajuno Road Project's Internet presence:

- Original website: www.youvolunteer.org/ecuador, over 7,000 unique visitors in 2012 (as of mid-December)
- New website (official launch 2013): www.amazonvolunteerecuador.com this dedicated site makes it easier to find the Project when web browsing
- Facebook page: www.facebook.com/ArajunoRoadProject created in March 2012, the page serves to keep the Project community connected, 78 likes (as of mid-December)
- Twitter: @amazonteaching 36 followers

Continued Partnerships

The Project has teamed up with several organizations with similar interests. Through the transition in leadership at the Project, we have maintained those relationships. Special thanks to the collaborative efforts of the schools of Arajuno Road and school network of Triunfo, Great Aves/YouVolunteer, Hostal Casa Grande, OneWorld Classrooms, RealGap, and the Simon Bolivar Foundation.

2012 Honor Roll

The following people, organizations and businesses donated time, resources and/or financial support to the Arajuno Road Project in 2012. Thank you so much for giving back to the community, whether it be global or local, and supporting the Project's work!!!

AGIP Oil Ecuador	Christina Harrison	Emily Oliver
Isaac Ahern	Tal Hawkins	Gary Rose
Nikolaos Angelou	Alice Hutchinson	Wenche Samuelsen
Arboriente, SA	Philip Inman	Seddon Group
Alex Babilian	Georgina Jackson	Frances Skolnick
Loella Bakka	Gillian Johnson	Hannah Smith
Natasha Baring	Nicola Kelley	Guro Sole Berg
Corinne Callahan	Louisa Kershaw	Tonje Sole Berg
Zoila Cartagena Reino & Family	Catrin Le Rendu	Danielle Spencer-Davis
Zoe Clayton	Micaela Ledesma & Family	Anca Stoiciu
Consejo Provincial de Pastaza	Lucy Mei	Sarah Szymaniak
Richard Curtecka	Kate Miers	Jessica Webster
Emma Donaldson	Julia Moss	Sophie Welbourn
Reidun Eckhoff	Eliza Moss-Horwitz	Emilia Zamora
Caroline Engvik	Bismark Navarro	Alex Zeiler
Chloe Erritsos-Dulson	Alex Navas	Brita Zeiler
Great Aves	Sarah Nicholson	

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

At the Project, we feel it is important to facilitate the most productive, comfortable, and safe learning and working environment as permitted by Project location and resources. Volunteering at the Project is a life experience – an opportunity to both teach and learn, give and receive. Each volunteer comes to the Project with a different background, different expectations and different goals – Project staff takes these differences into consideration to the extent possible to maximize the positive impact of the Programs on the children and communities served.

Volunteer House

At the end of 2011, the volunteer house/Project headquarters was moved from a remote, rural location to the outskirts of Puyo – the provincial capital – located closest to Arajuno Road. While this change of settings is less romantic, volunteer and staff access to basic services is exponentially improved. Many of the Project's fellow Ecuadorian teachers, students and their families live in Puyo due to the convenience a small city brings and volunteers often see many familiar faces in the neighborhood and on the bus to school in the mornings.

The Project is renting the new volunteer house from a well-known and well-respected community member, who lives downstairs from the volunteer house with her daughter (an Ecuadorian English teacher – one of the Project's most helpful collaborators) and granddaughter creating a friendly environment for those who wish to mingle and an extra layer of safety and security. Project space is limited by this arrangement with space to sleep up to only eight and one bathroom, however, the owner has been very responsive to Project needs and has improved and created additional space in the house. As of mid-December, the upstairs patio is now covered and tiled, serving as a lounge with a view. Earlier in the year, the owner collaborated with the Project to create a downstairs patio area and spruced up the front gardens. Upon sharing volunteer feedback that the bathroom and kitchen were constantly being rated lower than the rest of the house, the bathroom has received a facelift and a new coat of paint is on its way for the kitchen. Plans are also being made to put in another sink, if not an additional bathroom altogether.



Volunteer Feedback

One tool the Project utilizes to gauge the quality of the volunteer experience is a feedback form – filled out during the last days of service and left for staff to review after volunteer departure. This tool has been incredibly helpful in determining what is working well and what areas could use attention. The Project has made several changes during 2012 as a result of feedback left through the forms or other avenues of communication. For example, the house improvements mentioned above. We thank volunteers for their honesty and assistance in the continual evolution of the Project.

2012 Volunteer Feedback Summary

Category	Average Rating*
Accommodation overall standard	8.5
Food ratings average	8.9
Staff/Coordinator ratings average	9.4
Volunteer work ratings average	8.6
Overall experience	8.8

**10-point scale; average of all ratings on file; forms collected from 38 volunteers during 2012*

STAFF

DIRECTOR

Laura Hepting, MSc

Ms. Hepting has over 10 years of professional work experience in both government and non-profit settings in rural and urban locations. Environmental and human health connections have traditionally been a primary focus of her work. Ms. Hepting holds a B.A. in Environmental Sciences and a M.Sc. in Interdisciplinary Ecology both from the University of Florida where she focused her advanced studies in the areas of Latin American Studies and Tropical Conservation and Development. Ms. Hepting came to live in Ecuador as a Peace Corps volunteer in 2009. She is married with one daughter. Her ultimate goal is to help promote healthy lifestyles and quality of life on both the individual and community-level.

SUB-DIRECTOR

Rodrigo Engracia

Mr. Engracia was born and raised in the coastal region of Ecuador in a province with fewer opportunities than most. After reporting and serving for military duty in the Ecuadorian Army, he found a more promising future on the other side of the country where he has now lived for nearly a decade. Mr. Engracia has a true passion and contagious energy for helping others and strong social skills. Along with his work at the Project, he plans to continue with his education.

COORDINATORS

Lia Hulit

Aidan Maguire

Monika Pasztor

Henley Phillips

Agi Szabo

ADVISOR

Nick Greatrex, Founding Director

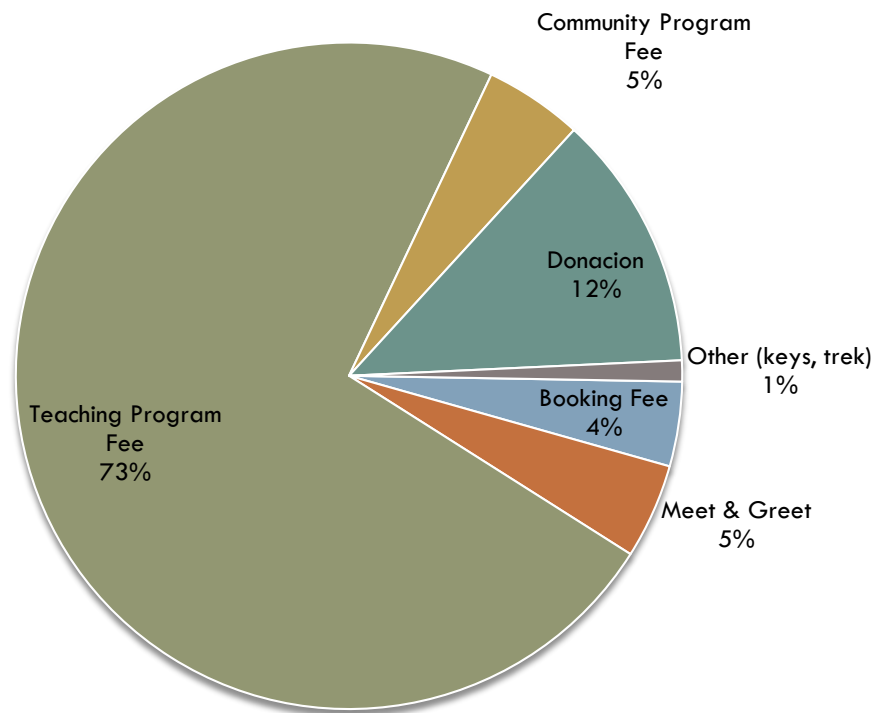
FINANCIALS

As with any transition, the Project has had to regain momentum in 2012 and this process applies to finances as well. In the interest of keeping the Project in a healthy state, the budget has been frugal in 2012, small increases in fees have gone into effect and staff has accepted reduced pay until transition costs subside. We are very grateful for key donations that have kept the Project going as well as to our volunteers who understand that while the Project is low-cost, it must charge participation fees to keep the Project running. Please refer to the following tables and graphs for a breakdown (information from December 2011 – December 2012 (accounts projected for the second half of Dec. 2012)).

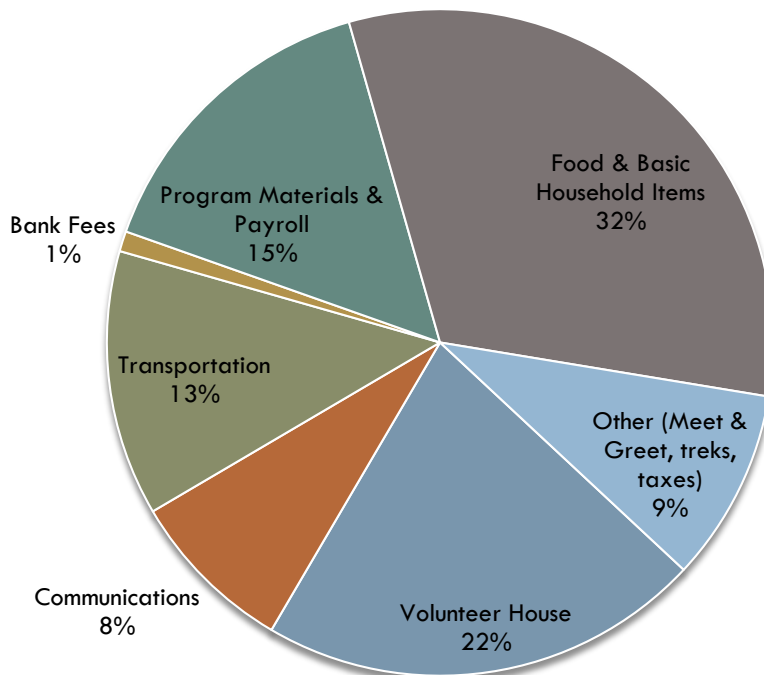
ARP 2012 Financials (Dec. 2011 - Dec. 2012)

	Year Total
Income	18998.09
Booking Fee	780.00
Meet & Greet	875.00
Teaching Program Fee	13876.00
Community Program Fee	906.00
Donations	2367.59
Other (keys, trek)	193.50
Expenses	18705.17
Volunteer House	4021.42
Communications	1514.84
Transportation	2409.79
Bank Fees	183.47
Program Materials & Payroll	2840.15
Food & Basic Household Items	5987.46
Other (Meet & Greet, treks, taxes)	1748.04
Balance	292.92

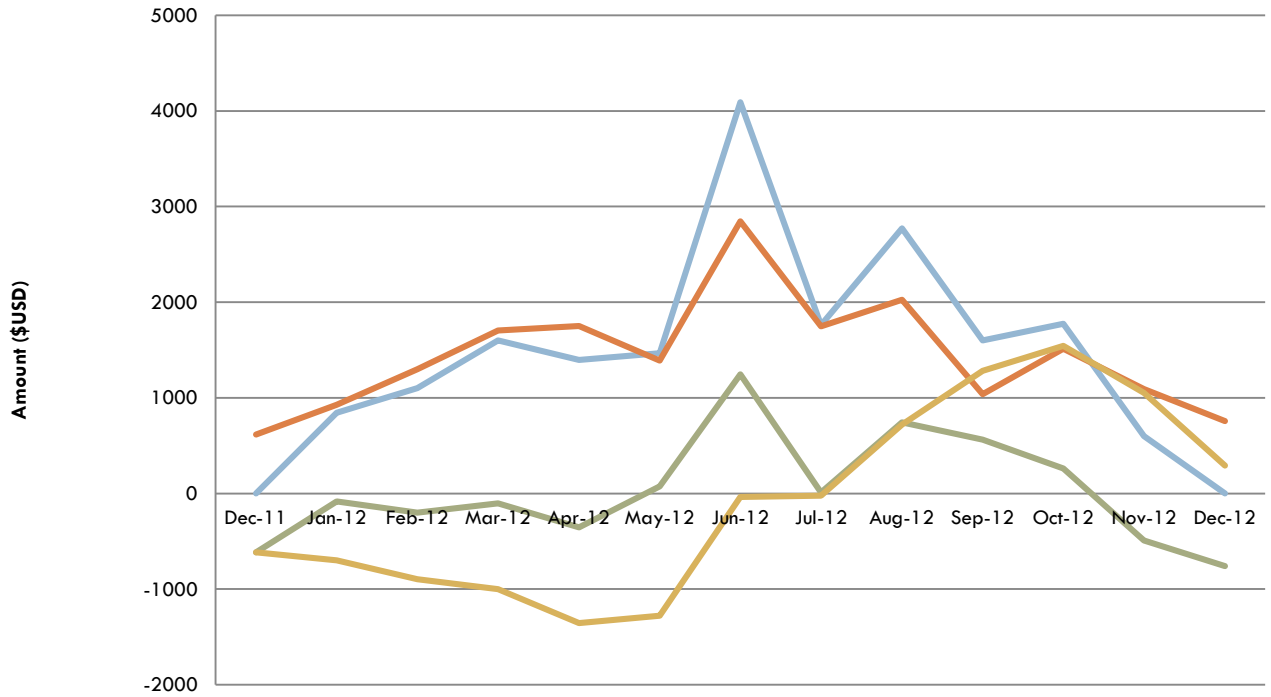
Income Sources



Expenses



2012 Monthly Balances



	Dec-11	Jan-12	Feb-12	Mar-12	Apr-12	May-12	Jun-12	Jul-12	Aug-12	Sep-12	Oct-12	Nov-12	Dec-12
Income	0	845	1100	1599	1396.5	1465	4089.29	1760	2770.8	1599	1773.5	600	0
Expenses	614.95	927.77	1299.5	1703.06	1750.21	1389.65	2844.53	1749.08	2026.61	1037.32	1513.34	1091.03	758.12
Monthly Total	-614.95	-82.77	-199.5	-104.06	-353.71	75.35	1244.76	10.92	744.19	561.68	260.16	-491.03	-758.12
Monthly Balance	-614.95	-697.72	-897.22	-1001.28	-1354.99	-1279.64	-34.88	-23.96	720.23	1281.91	1542.07	1051.04	292.92

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT THE ARAJUNO ROAD PROJECT

Volunteer

Whether you have served with us or not, we always need more hands and more fresh ideas. Can't travel right now? The Project can always use help on a variety of tasks you can do at home in your spare time.

Donate

The students and schools the Project works with are constantly short of basic school and teaching supplies. School infrastructure is in need of repair. The Project needs a permanent headquarters. What may seem like a little money goes a long way in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Donations can be made through:

Fundrzr: <http://fnd.us/c/cP4E5>

YouVolunteer.org: <http://www.youvolunteer.org/donate.html>

Don't have money to spare? Hold a fundraiser or fundraise for us using Fundrzr above. We've seen some creative fundraising done by volunteers – if you or your family work for a company, ask about their Corporate Social Responsibility program or if they contribute matching funds for employee donations.

Tell people about us

Simply tell a friend, family member, colleague and/or fellow traveler about the Project. We are happy to share fliers that you can post at universities, workplaces, hostals, etc. Make it a cultural exchange opportunity and present a slideshow at school or work. Let us know if you think we should be outreaching to any particular groups or organizations.

Keep in touch

The Project is only as strong as its volunteer community. How to contact us and interact with the Project:

Arajuno Road Project

Puyo-Pastaza, Ecuador

Cell: +593 (0)99 85 11 638 / (0)98 91 13 112

Skype: arajunoroadproject

Websites: www.youvolunteer.org/ecuador/

www.amazonvolunteerecuador.com

Follow us on twitter: @amazonteaching

Like us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/ArajunoRoadProject