



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**
INTERNATIONAL



CASE STUDY ON COSTA RICA'S YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMME

This case study is done in the frame of the YouthCan! project and supports the sharing of experiences from member associations.



Content Information

For more information on this programme, please contact:

MS CHRISTINE TAVERNIER-GUTLEBEN

Youth Empowerment Advisor, Programme & Strategy

Innsbruck, Austria

Email: Christine.Tavernier@sos-kd.org

The work on this case study has been supported by Jana Humrich and Ulla Riedle.

Sources of Information

Interviews (April 2017) with:

- Carlos Sibaja, National Director, SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica ([watch the video here](#))
- Jessica Fallas, Programme Director Youth Employability Programme, SOS Children's Village San José ([watch the video here](#))
- Erick Barrios, Training Manager, Costa Rica Marriott Hotel ([watch the video here](#))
- Dany Cerdas, young YCI programme participant ([watch the video here](#))

Internal documents:

- Presentation about the youth employability programme in Costa Rica ([Spanish](#), [English](#)), April 2017
- [YouthCan! country assessment Costa Rica](#), December 2016
- [Intranet article on youth employability in Costa Rica](#), January 2017
- Webinar on the youth employability programme in Costa Rica: [recording](#) and [presentation](#); Connie Quesada, Milena Chacon, Alexa Cuello. May 2016
- [Document for corporate partners](#), SOS Children's Village San José (in Spanish)
- [Presentation to recruit NGO partners](#), SOS Children's Village San José (in Spanish)

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Abbreviations

CV	Curriculum Vitae
DPDHL	Deutsche Post DHL group (corporate partner)
FBC	SOS Family-based care
FD	Fund Development
FSP	SOS Family Strengthening Programme
PD	Programme Development
YCI	Youth Career Initiative (partner NGO providing links to the hotel sector)
YP	Young people/participants

1 Executive Summary

The employability programme of SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica was launched in 2013 and aims at supporting young people to construct their future, fulfil their potential and claim their economic rights. The programme targets disadvantaged young people in Costa Rica in general and is not only aimed at young people in SOS programmes. It builds on partnerships with several companies and NGOs and aims at developing the young people's employability skills and coaching them in building their life projects.

In 2016 the programme targeted 249 disadvantaged young people between 15 and 24 years. In a period of 3 to 12 months participants receive constant individual support and get trained in life skills, employability skills (including gaining some work experience in internships), and job hunting skills. In this way, the programme is not only a process of labour inclusion but also of personal development.

The success of the programme lies in an intensive cooperation with the different actors (young people, partner NGO'S, public institutions, and corporate partners). This requires some resources but ensures real success in empowering young people and strengthening their employability.

In 2016 249 young people were supported and 13 corporate partners involved. Across all participants,

- 37% found a job,
- 34% went back to formal education,
- 20% accessed to a new internship in 2016,
- 5% enrolled in University.

In 2015, SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica increased the scope of the programme (from 40 to 70 participants per year), by setting partnerships with other NGOs and also servicing the vulnerable young people those partners work with. At the same time, the corporate partnership development, was intensified, in a common effort of both the Programme Development and the Fund Development departments. All parties benefited from this change:

- SOS could complete the spectrum of different corporate partnerships and manage them more cost-efficiently,
- Corporate partners could fill up the capacity of their programmes with more suitable young people,
- Young people got access to a broader variety of economic partners and branches.

2 About YouthCan!

YouthCan! is SOS Children's Villages International's "lighthouse project" when it comes to fostering youth employability among young care leavers. YouthCan! works together locally and globally with companies and other

partners to support disadvantaged young people on their individual journeys towards decent and stable employment. Considering the individual situation, skills and interests of each young person, it aims at enhancing their employability and life skills by providing them access to trainings and mentors and by exposing them to professional work environments.

YouthCan! is piloted in 8 countries in 2017 and will be rolled out to further countries around the globe in 2018 to 2020. SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica is one of the 2017 pilots and a true pioneer when it comes to develop youth employability programmes together with partners. By looking into the details of this well-trying, experienced and successful youth employability programme within the SOS Children's Villages federation, YouthCan! seeks to inspire and support existing and future YouthCan! pilot countries.

Figure 1: SOS CV in Costa Rica



3 Evolution: from first initiative to independent youth programme

2013: Start with two partnerships

In 2013, SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica's youth employability programme was started to address a group of young people living in SOS family-based care (FBC): Their education level was low, they lacked skills to build their life projects. Many had dropped out of the formal education system and did not have a clear idea about their path to independence. As a consequence, they faced low chances to find decent employment and a high risk to fall back into the poverty cycle. At this time, only young people living in SOS

FBC were targeted and the Programme Development department was coordinating the programme alone.

Back then, the programme consisted of two pillars:

1. A partnership with the Youth Career Initiative (YCI), consisting in 24 weeks classroom and practical training programmes in hotels to teach life and work skills. Through its efforts, young people get valuable networking opportunities and entry level jobs with the hotels in which they were trained.
2. A partnership with Deutsche Post DHL Group, through the GoTeach programme. DPDHL employees provide support and guidance ranging from leading weekend workshops to serving as year-long mentors for SOS Children's Villages interns at DPDHL.

2014: The need is bigger

Within the next two years, it became clear that not only young people in family-based care were in need for this service. Instead all young people between 18-24 years are struggling with limited access to the job market, especially when they have a poor educational background.

2015: Increase the scope, the number of partners and the trainings offered

To respond to this situation, a new cross-functional programme was launched in 2015, coordinated by the Programme Development.

More corporate partners were involved and provided resources and internship opportunities. Hence, the programme was able to reach out to young people participating in SOS Family Strengthening Programmes (FSP) and young people referred by partner NGO's.

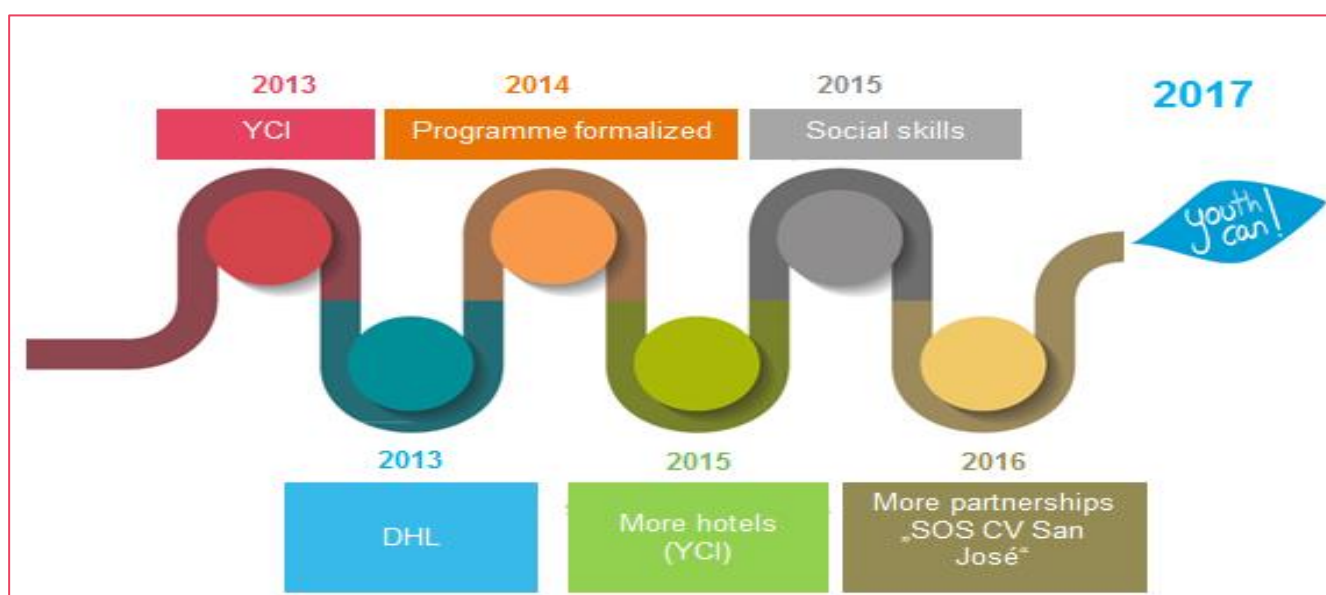
In order to reduce drop out and to prepare the growing number of participants to successfully start and retain their internships, a Life Skills Training was introduced in 2015.

SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica's initiative was in line with several programmes from the government to reduce poverty and to address youth unemployment (eg, President Solís Rivera's "Rescue Plan 2014–2018") and with a trend in the private sector to take on Corporate Social Responsibility. As a result, new resources were available from the government and from corporates to support initiatives strengthening youth employability.

2016: An independent programme

In 2016, it was decided that the youth employability programme would run as an independent programme, under the name of "SOS Children's Village San José". In 2017, with YouthCan! coming into action, SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica hosted the regional YouthCan! launch in Latin America, and took on a strong pioneer role within the project.

Figure 2: The evolution of the youth employability programme



4 Costa Rica's Youth Employability Programme

4.1 Aims of the programme

The overall aims of the programme are...

- ...to accompany and support young people in building their future life projects through an integral approach. Different training modules enable young people to develop their life and employability skills in order to get fit for the labour market.
- ...to look for corporate partners and civil society organizations which are committed to transform the reality of the young population by creating and implementing strategies that enable young people to enter decent employment.
- ...to generate inter-institutional, family, community and individual support for programme participants.

4.2 Modules of the programme

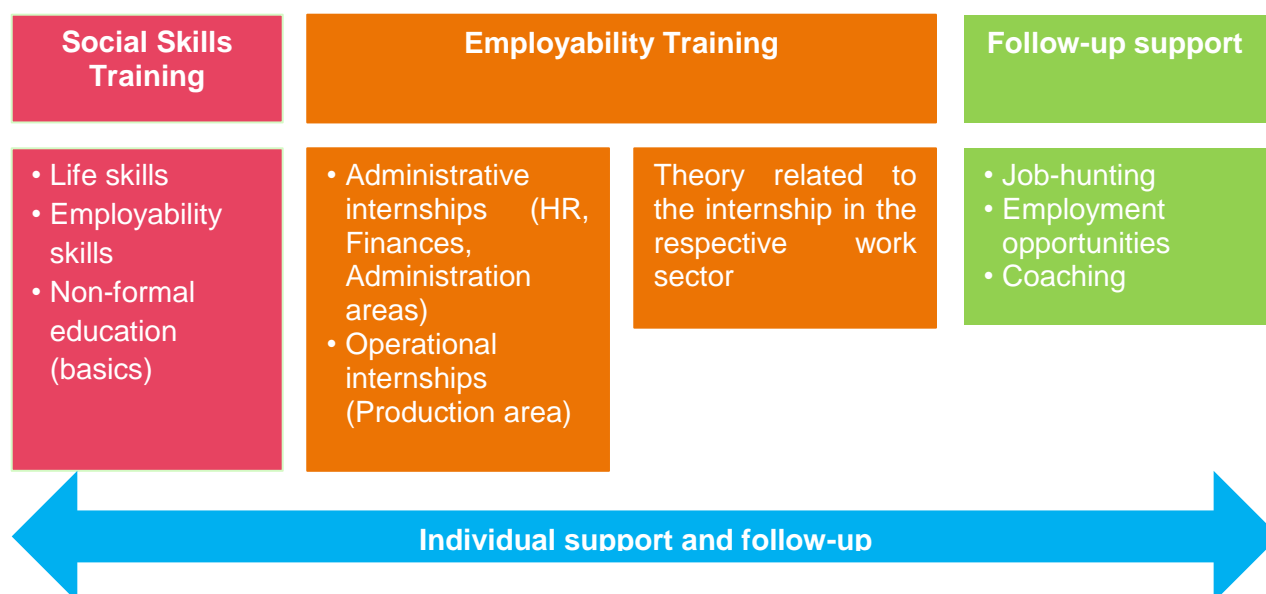
The programme lasts for 3 months to 1 year and consists of three pillars (see figure 3):

The first pillar is a life skills training. The second is an employability training, which can be divided in a practical part (internships, work exposure in different partner companies) and a theoretical part (theory related to the respective field of work). The third pillar of the programme is the follow-up: young programme participants get orientation in seeking a job and get advice on training opportunities.

Participants can choose between different modules, do several modules simultaneously or in an order that responds to their individual needs.

During all phases, there is ongoing individual support and follow-up by the youth coordinators.

Figure 3: Programme Overview



Life Skills Training

Holistic training based on the acquisition of life skills for adolescents and young people (YP) between 12 and 18. It comprehends a multidimensional development model for people at risk or in vulnerable conditions.

1. Recruitment

YP have to register online, undertake a psychometric test and present their CVs (their profiles)

2. Participation in Workshops

YP have to participate in 12 workshops, one 2,5h workshop per week, ludic-creative approach. In the first and the last session they do a test to evaluate the developments. Sessions in detail: 1. Introduction, baseline test; 2. Respecting oneself; 3. Respecting others; 4. Self-confidence and communication; 5. Interpersonal relationships; 6. Decision-making; 7. Problem-solving; 8. Creative thinking; 9. Critical thinking; 10. Managing emotions; 11. Conflict and stress management; 12. Conclusions, final test

3. Individual sessions

For YP with special support needs: min. 3 individual coaching sessions by volunteers from social science, to deepen the content of the workshops

4. Graduation

YP receive a diploma after completing the programme

5. Feedback and results presentation to partners

Employability Training

Empower young people to take informed decisions on their educational and career path, and strengthen their employability through internships and workshops in companies. It's an effort between the public and the private sector that promotes opportunities for a proper access to the labor market in the future.

1. **Recruitment:** Online registration, Interview with Employability Programme team, the referring organisation hands in a profile of the YP; YP hand in CVs, Interview with company: a training plan is developed with the YP, based on his/her individual needs and the opportunities of the company

2. Different basic training sessions

Basic skills such as computer and language skills are trained before YP enter the companies (according to needs). Trainings are provided by SOS or partners.

3. Internship

(min. 3 months, Monday to Friday, not more than 8h a day, end not later than 17:00) According to the training plan developed beforehand, young people rotate through different departments of the company or are trained in one department. Employees volunteer as mentors and accompany/guide the YP through the process.

4. Graduation

YP get a certificate after the programme

5. Feedback and Results Presentation to Partners

Follow-up support

- **Job-hunting:** Volunteer students from social sciences coach YP on how to write motivation letters, write CVs, do job interviews, how to dress, and help them look for jobs. If the YP has not reached the majority age, he/she is reoriented toward the educational system
- **Employment opportunities:** Partner companies communicate their immediate employment opportunities, these are forwarded to the young people
- **Psycho-social support for crisis situations:** It has turned out that the target group is particularly vulnerable in case of job loss. This service provides coaching to former participants of the programme once they have started to work but find themselves in crisis situations like job loss.

Ongoing support

- Objectives: keep motivation high and avoid drop-out, support the participants in challenging times
- Regular visits of young people and their families by co-workers and volunteers
- Career orientation, Coaching to develop vocational life projects and to find the internship that corresponds to participants' talents and interests

4.3 Policy framework guiding the programme

The following internal and external frameworks, policies or guidelines were considered:

1. Inclusive approach: some participants need special support due to their mental state or severe lack of social skills: treating them equally, helping them to choose the internship according to their skills
2. Life skills according to the WHO definition: The WHO developed workshops and activities to support young people to build healthy relationships, make right decisions in order to develop their life projects
3. National and international legislation is followed in all activities: regarding child labour, internships, dual education and social responsibility
4. [Child rights and business principles \(UNICEF\)](#), especially principle # 3: “Provide decent work for young workers, parents and caregivers”.

4.4 Human Resources of the programme

The SOS Children’s Village San José team consists of 5 full-time employees with programme and funding tasks: a director, an administrative assistant, and three coordinators, who take care of the partnerships with the corporates and the partner NGOs referring young people. For the set-up of the YouthCan! partnership, a professional advisor has been employed in addition.

The tasks and responsibilities in the programme area:

- Psychometric tests, interviews with candidates, recommendation on necessary trainings and internship opportunities
- Coordination and follow-up of volunteers
- Preselection of students for different trainings and internships, communication with the company and organisation of first interview
- Agreements with companies and partner NGOs
- Child safeguarding training for the company
- Guidance and support of interns and companies
- Link between the company and the referring organisation or SOS programme
- Regular meetings with companies and partner NGOs
- Coordination of final graduation of internships
- Recruiting of public and NGO partners, information sessions etc.

The team receives additional support from different areas:

Programme locations:

The team is supported by one coordinator from each SOS Children’s Village programme in Costa Rica, who identifies new participants for the youth employability programme and

takes care of their follow-up. In each partner company, there is also one coordinator taking care of the young interns and their mentors.

FDC department:

The search for and the acquisition of new corporate partners is done by the FDC department, together with the programme department. They also work together when it comes to making existing corporate partnerships sustainable.

Volunteers:

Furthermore, the programme works with a number of volunteers (students of Social Sciences, ten in 2017) who work 20 hours per week for one year and take care of the follow-up of young participants who do not come from an SOS programme or a partner NGO, but from the communities (2-3 young people per volunteer). One PD co-worker takes care of volunteer coordination: recruitment and training of volunteers, very tight follow-up (monthly meetings) as the task is difficult.

4.5 The programme’s young participants

Programme participants are always young persons at social risk/in vulnerable life situations and may have the following characteristics:

- Age: between 15 and 24 years
- Possibly experience of domestic violence, sexual abuse and physical or psychological harassment
- Young people who live in a single parent household, had or are teenage parents
- Young people who live in the large metropolitan areas
- Young people who have lost parental care or are at risk of losing it

In order to reduce drop-out, it is necessary to find out together with the young person what his/her plans for the future could be. Intensive support is key, as Jessica Fallas, programme director, explains:

“If we want these young people to stay in the programme we really have to take care of them, almost daily. We do this through the company they stay with, through our volunteers who contact them every week with a message or meeting – just to see how they are doing...”



4.6 Application process

Identification:

Young people eligible for the programme are identified by co-workers of SOS Children's Village programmes, by partner NGO's that work with young people, or by people who know them (e.g. other young people who have already participated in the programme).

Needs analysis:

Interviews are conducted to identify the characteristics of young people and if applicable, home visits are carried out to get to know the family and environment.

Registration and application:

To apply for the programme, the young people first have to register online. Afterwards the young people have to deliver their documents (psychometric test, motivation letter and CV) and attend an interview conducted by the team of the SOS Children's Village San José.

Individual planning:

The team analyses the results and recommends further processes and necessary trainings for the young person. The results and the proposal are sent to the SOS programme or partner NGO, the participant and the company. Basic trainings like computer or language trainings are organised and carried out by SOS and partner NGO's/institutions. Afterwards, the young people go through a regular recruitment process done by the corporate partner. Together with the students an internship plan is developed, based on opportunities of the company and needs of the young person.

4.7 Partners of the Programme

NGO's and public institutions referring young people to the programme are recruited through public information sessions. When they decide to refer young people to the programme, they nominate a coordinator whose tasks are to...

- ...follow up the students (motivate them to participate, fill in the registration form, gather necessary documents, inform the schools the YP are attending of potential absences, hold group sessions with young programme participants, do individual coaching sessions and report about the progress, do a final report),
- ...act as a link between the young people and the SOS youth employability programme team,
- ...participate in team meetings every 2-4 weeks,
- ...provide data on the young participants for the SOS Programme Database,
- ...participate in the graduation ceremonies.

Corporate partners supporting SOS Children's Village San José are recruited by the Fund Development department or through personal contacts of SOS programme directors, in close cooperation with the PD department. Before the young people start working in the company, the companies participate in a child safeguarding workshop that lasts up to 4

hours and improves their knowledge about child safeguarding topics. According to Carlos Sibaja, National Director of SOS Costa Rica, particular attention is given to the work ethics of the partner companies:

"Bringing the students to top class companies is very important... companies that have high standards of taking care of their employees. Like that they [young people] avoid later on going to companies that abuse them."

For medium- or long-term partnerships, 1- or 2-year contracts are signed with the respective company or NGO. Apart from that, the young person, SOS Children's Village San José and the respective partner sign a memorandum that regulates the duties and rights of each of the partners: duration of the internship, exact schedule, agreed training objectives, responsibilities of each of the partners, legal documentation. The responsibilities of the partners are:

- Interviews with the candidates,
- Coordination of the child protection training within the company,
- Participation in monthly meetings with the SOS Children's Village San José team,
- Reporting about the intern's progress,
- Follow-up of the interns.

SOS Children's Village San José is working intensively with the partners, in follow-up calls and meetings every 1-3 weeks. If challenges occur, the team members support, as Jessica Fallas, the programme director, explains:

"The companies are really willing to help. But the experience on how to work with disadvantaged young people is missing. So we have to help them with that. (...) We give all partners training on child safeguarding especially adapted to the context of youth employability. But we cannot solve all questions with this one workshop; it is a continuous process of finding individual answers to individual problems.... This is where all the resources of the programme go."

4.8 Funding of the programme

Currently (2017), human resources to maintain the programme are funded by SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica. Companies pay a fee per participant per programme (approx.\$300- \$350) to cover costs for insurances, transport, food and accommodation, special needs (eg, uniforms). It is up to the companies if they offer additional benefits (food, grants, additional employability-related trainings, etc) or a financial remuneration to the students.

As SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica is in a process of becoming financially self-sustainable and will have to work within financial limits in the near future, YouthCan! is seen as an opportunity to motivate corporates to finance overhead costs in future as well.

Most of the programme participants live in the urban areas where the companies are, so transport and housing are not a big challenge. In case young people come from very remote or highly rural areas they are offered an Assisted Living benefit, which consists of an economic support, for the period of training.

4.9 Impact and results of the Programme

Monitoring and evaluation of the programme show that there is a low drop-out level of participants. In terms of outcomes, employment of young people is not the only desirable positive outcome of the training; it is also seen positive if they start another internship or return to education. Programme participants were able to improve their self-sufficiency and social abilities, increased their educational level and developed their life projects. Many participants obtained jobs and they went back to formal education system after completing the programme. All in all, aftercare processes were improved. Young people who successfully graduated from the programme now refer other young people to the programme: they spread the word and promote the service.

2017, 22 partners in hotel, services, transport and IT sector

Preparation for work (2016)

- 80 young participants
- 9 projects
- 37% of participants found a job
- 34% went back to formal education
- 20% accessed to a new internship in 2016
- 5% enrolled in University
- → 96% improved their employability

Life Skills (2016)

- 169 young participants trained
- Two times per year
- 91 young people in the process
- 86% participants graduated
- 5 of 10 social skills improved within 2 months (according to psychometric tests)



"We consider that we have even more benefits than the kids from the partnership. (...) We try to create this culture with our employees on how to help someone else, how to engage with the employees

community. (...) All of our embrace them[young interns from the programme] already, they know who they are and how to help them." - Erick Barrios, training manager, Hotel Costa Rica Marriott



"Before joining the programme I was at home with nothing to do, but then I got this chance of my life and I used it. (...) I recently got comments, like if I continue on working like that, maybe I can stay in the hotel to work. That makes me

really happy. My advice for other young people: use the opportunity that you get, there might not come another one." - Dany, intern at the Costa Rica Marriott



"We cannot do this alone. Our partners are not service providers, but real partners, because they give a lot to the students. They provide not only a workplace to learn skills, but also an environment where they can grow." - Carlos Sibaja, National Director SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica

5 Success factors and learnings

For SOS Children's Villages Costa Rica, the **key to the success** of the employability programme is, on the one hand, **the follow-up given to young people**. Care, guidance and support are provided in an integral way, in order to strengthen their elements that empower them and decrease risk factors. Only through intensive guidance and coaching, motivation can be kept at a constantly high level and drop out can be avoided. Staying in the programme is very difficult for the participants, because they have not had contact with working life before. Therefore, co-workers and volunteers visit the young people and their families very often. They coach the young people to build their vocational life projects and to find the internship that corresponds to their talents and interests. On the other hand, **working with companies** on the needs and characteristics of the participants is crucial. Companies involved in the programme are usually very committed. However, the volunteer co-workers require training and support. SOS Children's Village San José has monthly meetings with the corporate partners and follows up immediately if problems regarding the internships occur.

The following challenges are mentioned:

Reaching out to the right young people: It turned out that not all candidates are eligible. Participating in the programme requires some previous skills and some education to cope with the training situation. Quite a sophisticated process turned out to be necessary to reach the right ones, specific HR recruitment tools were used to identify which were the key elements that a young person had to have to be successful in the internship.

In order to make sure the programme reaches the most disadvantaged young people, it is important to know the young participants' profiles. However, this becomes a challenge as soon as participants from the communities are involved. Therefore, SOS Children's Village San José should build up partnerships with non-formal civil society organizations that know the people who are part of the community in greater detail.

Lack of human resources: With more young people attending the programme and funding limits, SOS CV San José had to come up with new ideas. Working with volunteers from Social Science studies has turned out to be a good solution. Providing the volunteers with a good training on needs and characteristics of the target group and with intensive support is a key element to ensure sustainability of this measure. Besides, SOS Costa Rica would have more corporate partners at hand to expand the programme, and could also reach out to more young participants through new NGO partners and through communities. However, this would require a bigger team, which is not possible at the moment (the national association will become financially independent within the next years, financial resources are limited). Through

YouthCan!, international corporate partners could come on board which could provide the necessary funding for growth.

Financial issues: Young people do not get any money for their work – especially in longer internships this is a problem. By reaching out to more companies and also to public institutions, SOS CV San José is trying to make the programme financially sustainable and possibly to also provide a financial remuneration or other benefits (such as housing subsidies) to programme participants.

Time constraints in companies: Companies have to be very committed and to provide a lot of volunteer time to adequately support the young people in the programme.

6 What can YouthCan! pilots learn from SOS Costa Rica

- **Life skills training as a preparation for successful internships:** Experience shows that many young people cannot cope with the challenging new situation of an internship/training without proper preparation. It is crucial that their needs are well assessed and a preparative training programme is organized. Life skills training programme can already start at a young age (SOS Children's Village San José starts at the age of 12 sometimes) and strengthen skills that young people need in the working world.
- **Building a life project, finding the right internship:** To work on an individual career plan and a so-called "life project" helps the young people reflect on their interest and capacities and determine the right internship, thus avoid drop-out.
- **On-going coaching and support of young people and co-workers:** SOS Children's Village San José builds on coaching: young people are coached before even applying to the programme, when they prepare for the internship, during the internship, when they apply to their first job, even when they have already entered the labour market and face challenges. Co-workers and volunteers from SOS programmes and partners are trained and coached as well.
- **Commitment and adequate resourcing:** A team of 6 co-workers and 10 volunteers is needed to take care of a network of 20 corporate and 30 NGO partners. Fund development and Programme Development are working closely together, the National Director is highly committed. YouthCan! pilots, even if they are just starting, need to have a committed driver of the programme and support from all levels and functions of the association
- **A thorough selection and follow-up of corporate partners is necessary:** By choosing corporate partners with high work ethics and human resource standards, young people get to know a decent work environment. This allows them to benchmark further jobs.