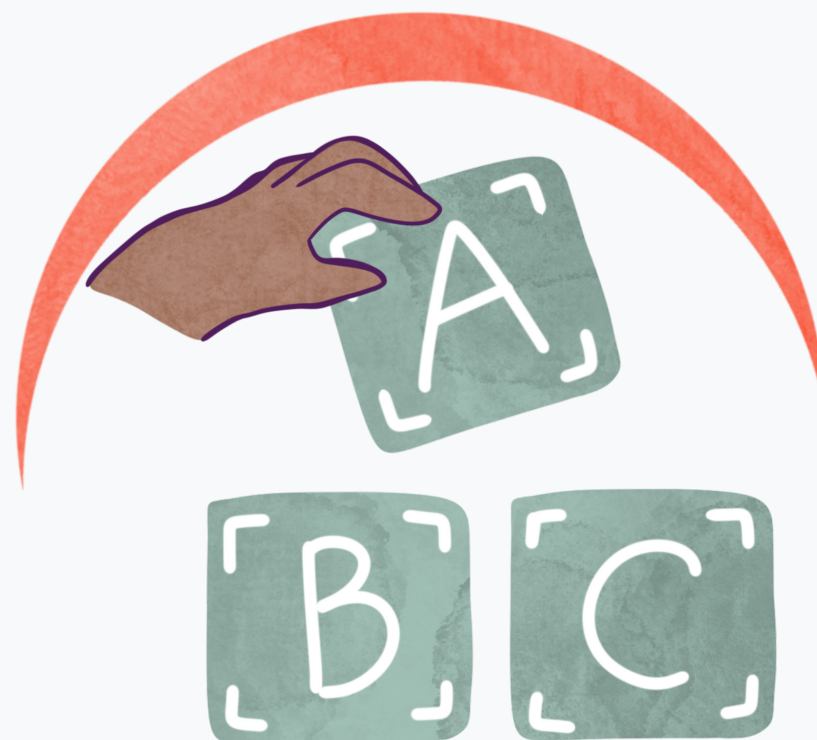


Case study

ETAPPA

An in-depth analysis of the trajectory, organisational structure, service model and the groups supported by ETAPPA, with thoughts on its impact and the main lessons learned



ETAPPA



City Aldea el Eden
District Santa Cruz de Yojoa
Country Honduras
Region Central America



Organisational profile

Team size Very small
(1-10 people)

Age of organisation 10+ years



Key aspects of our work

Primary contextual issue Neurodivergencies

Life stage Children, adolescents and young adults

Gender focus All

Level of intervention Prevention + promotion
Evaluation and direct attention

Annual Reach 1,100+ people

We believe in inclusive education. We believe in education for everyone and in all settings.

Contextual problem

ETAPPA is the only organisation providing specialist care and support to children and young people with special needs in a mountainous region of Honduras that spans more than 30 rural communities.

Against a backdrop characterised by limited access to health, education, and psychosocial support services, the organisation plays a fundamental role in promoting the educational and social inclusion of children with disabilities and other diverse needs. However, families face multiple structural and cultural barriers that hinder access to timely and continuous support. Persistent misconceptions, a lack of awareness around disabilities, and social stigma lead to exclusion, limiting the participation of children and their families in community and educational spaces. Compounding these issues are the vast geographic distances between communities and available services, transport difficulties, and financial constraints—factors that heighten family isolation and restrict access to specialised care.

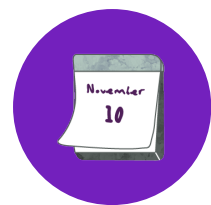
As a result, many children remain excluded from inclusive educational settings and lack opportunities to fully develop their potential. Despite these conditions, there is a growing need to strengthen community support networks, raise awareness, and foster inclusion to improve the quality of life and social participation of these children and their families.

Objectives

ETAPPA works to bridge the significant gap in access to support services for children and young people with special and diverse needs across a rural, mountainous region of Honduras, through early, continuous, and inclusive interventions. The organisation provides psycho-pedagogical support to children aged 1 to 16 with mental health, developmental, and neurodivergent needs, whilst also offering support to their families and schools to foster more inclusive and understanding environments.

Its services include early stimulation, support and guidance for teachers, equine therapy, and other interventions tailored to the needs of each child. The work is carried out both from a specialised centre and through visits and community actions in more than 30 rural communities. The care offered by ETAPPA is supportive and accessible to all families who require it. Furthermore, the organisation drives awareness-raising and youth participation to build more inclusive communities and nurture agents of change committed to defending the rights of children with disabilities.





WHEN?

When was the organisation created?

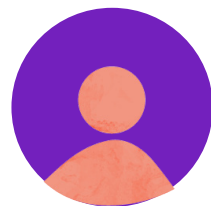
The organisation was started up in 2015 by three people who dreamed of transforming their own lives and the lives of children and young people with disabilities.



WHY?

Why did the organisation begin its activities?

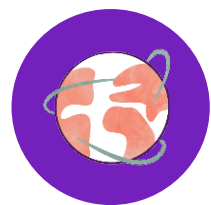
The founder began working at municipal level, addressing the needs of children with conditions such as deafness, dyslexia, Down's syndrome, autism and attention deficit disorder. Throughout this process, she identified a significant need for support in the region, as many families had to travel long distances to receive care.



WHO?

Who founded the organisation?

The work was driven by Esperanza Gómez, founder and director of the project, who has a background in pedagogy and psychology. Drawing on her experience, she identified the need to provide support to families with children with disabilities.



WHERE?

Where did the organisation begin implementing its activities?

The project began in El Edén, a village in the municipality of Santa Cruz de Yojoa, Honduras. Initially, a rental house was sought that could serve as a care space.



WHAT?

What did the organisation do in its early days?

During its first five years, the organisation evaluated children on an hourly basis and offered therapy sessions on separate days. Later, psychology interns joined the team, expanding service coverage and support.



HOW?

How did the organisation's work begin?

The work was initially built on volunteer efforts, local partnerships, and seed funding from regional networks, gradually evolving into more structured programmes that integrate psychosocial support into community-led climate adaptation initiatives.

Organisational structure

Esperanza is the founder and director of the organisation, and she currently handles most of the administrative aspects.

The team also includes two people who receive a small salary and support the provision of interventions and services.

The organisation also has a board of directors made up of parents and teachers. This board meets periodically to contribute to decision-making.

Financial management

At present, **the organisation has a small budget that allows it to cover the team's salaries.** It also receives small contributions from families and supplements its income with contributions from the founder.

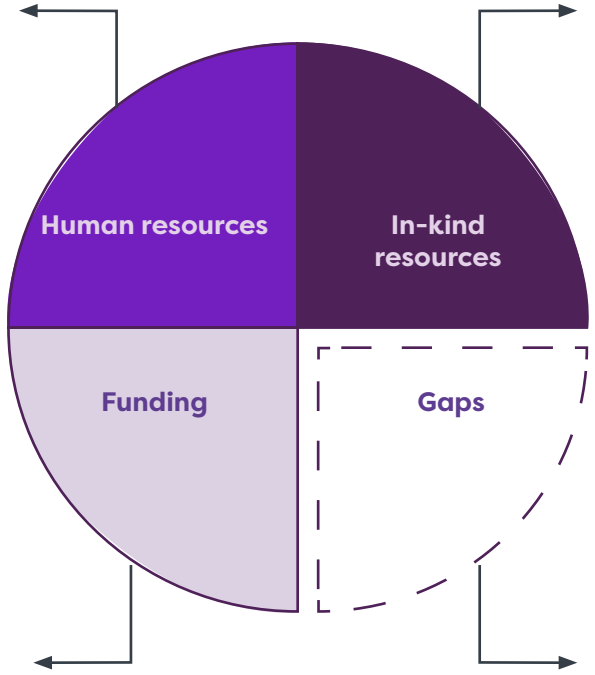
The organisation usually manages its activities based on available funds; however, they estimate that they would require around US\$20,000 to implement all of their key activities.

Financial management is handled by an external accountant.

Resources

ETAPPA has a core team of three full-time staff members, including a psychologist, a high school graduate assisting with operations, an equine therapy handler and executive leadership.

The organisation receives in-kind support for its family meal project. Additionally, through partnerships with local universities, student interns contribute to implementing organisational activities. The municipal government also supports them with a tax waiver, which has been granted for two years.



The organisation operates on an annual budget of around \$10,000 USD, sourced from small grants, regional foundations and partnerships. To expand its programmes and broaden its geographical reach, ETAPPA estimates that an annual budget of \$20,000 USD is required.

The primary gap is in staffing, as an administrative professional is required to support the organisation's management and administration. Additionally, hiring a special education specialist would help better distribute the heavy workload.

Model and activities

Target population

ETAPPA works with village communities that are overlooked by other NGOs or the State, focusing on early childhood—from infants up to 4 years old—and children with disabilities. Its primary target population includes smallholder farming families and communities working on chicken farms as well as those cultivating maize and beans for household food security.

Our mission as an organisation **prioritises people with limited access to mental health services**, including those who live in remote or underserved areas.

Services or interventions



ETAPPA's work consists of a variety of services:

Equine therapy is primarily aimed at children with autism, attention deficit and language difficulties, including non-verbal children. Each session lasts approximately 30 minutes. Through contact with the horse, the therapy aims to foster affection, stimulate tactile, visual and auditory sensitivity, improve posture and balance, build self-esteem and self-confidence, promote a sense of well-being, enhance muscle tone, and support motor coordination and movement perception.

At the **Early Childhood Development Centres**, boys and girls attend for two hours. Activities take place in community spaces, such as the village field or the yard of a mother who offers her home. This programme targets five developmental areas: fine motor skills, gross motor skills, communication, problem-solving, and socio-individual development. Furthermore, it includes a key component aimed at empowering parents, strengthening their ability to support their children's development during early childhood.

The **inclusive education programme** supports neurodivergent children who have

been refused entry to the mainstream school system due to their conditions. The aim is to support them, help them catch up with their peers, and, where appropriate, facilitate their transition into mainstream education. Children attend from Monday to Thursday, following a curriculum tailored to each child's individual pace and needs.

Psychological interviews are a service aimed at the adult community. Sessions are tailored to each individual's reasons for seeking support and are available four days a week, or more frequently if required.

Mental health support for young people seeks to support their needs and the situations they experience at this stage, building a support and follow-up plan with them.

Finally, the **teacher well-being initiative** is designed around the core principle of 'caring for the carers.' By strengthening the well-being of teachers, the aim is to positively impact the treatment, support, and development of children. This programme has been made possible thanks to the contribution of Ember and the institution's own funds.



Impact

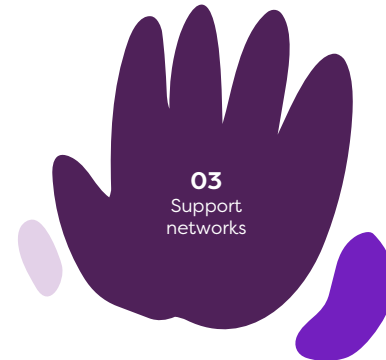
Desired key results or changes



The expansion of psychology and mental health programmes has yielded visible impacts among the children served, with some who were previously non-verbal now starting to communicate verbally.



The role of mothers has also been strengthened in supporting their children's therapies both at home and at the centre.



In addition, ties between families and support networks within communities have been strengthened.

Methods

ETAPPA adopts a **mixed methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data**.

- Quantitative data are collected through baseline assessment reports conducted prior to intervention, which identify diagnoses and evaluate problem severity, well-being and perceived social support.

Information Systems

The organisation uses a **combination of digital and paper-based systems**, employing simple digital tools when Internet connectivity allows, and paper forms in remote areas.

Thoughts on the impact so far

Since its creation, ETAPPA has reached more than 30 communities and, month by month, the number of participants continues to increase.

Learnings

Strengths

ETAPPA has undergone significant organisational strengthening, particularly through the growth of its professional team and the launch of new programmes. These include teacher well-being initiatives, mental health provision, support for early childhood development, and support for teenagers. Furthermore, the team views looking after its own mental health as a core strength, recognising that internal well-being is essential to support local communities effectively.

Limitations

The organisation's work is constrained by its small team size and early-stage systems, particularly in monitoring and evaluation. Limited clinical capacity restricts its ability to address more severe mental health needs, while reliance on short-term funding impacts continuity and long-term planning. Data collection systems remain basic, which limits the scope for conducting more comprehensive impact analysis.



Partnership journey with Ember

Initial assessment

ETAPPA's initial assessment showed that the organisation had a solid foundation of community work, built from strong links with families, schools, and communities in a mountainous region of Honduras. The organisation provided services to more than 30 communities and was one of the few, or the only one, that offered specialised psycho-pedagogical support to children and young people with diverse developmental, mental health or neurodivergent needs in this area. Its work included direct therapeutic care, early stimulation, support for teachers, equine therapy, awareness workshops and support for families and schools.

- One of its main strengths was its ability to respond to very specific community needs, even with limited resources. ETAPPA had successfully built trust with families and schools, helping some children access education while increasing awareness among mothers, family members, and teachers regarding developmental disorders, enabling them to identify and refer cases to the organisation's services. It also benefited from a strong network of schools and local stakeholders, including municipal networks that provided tailored support.
- At an organisational level, ETAPPA had a small yet highly committed team. Although most of the administrative tasks fell to the founder, there was a support structure that included the technical team and a board made up of parents and teachers. However, the health check also identified the need to further strengthen the organisational structure, systematise internal processes and clarify roles, ensuring that operations become more sustainable and less reliant on a small number of individuals.
- Another key area for growth was the articulation of its vision and operational model. ETAPPA had clear programmatic objectives and a documented vision, but it needed to develop a broader and more integrated perspective that better reflected the evolution of its work: from its origins in caring for children with disabilities towards a broader model of psychology, mental health, educational inclusion and community support. The need to better document and communicate its intervention model was also identified.
- In terms of impact, ETAPPA collected some process data and testimonies, but did not yet possess a formal monitoring and evaluation system. The next step identified was to develop simple tools to track the journey of each child or young person, record progress, and better communicate results.
- Finally, needs were identified across communication, funding and well-being. The collaboration sought to support the rebranding, website development, social media strategy, storytelling, and visual materials; implement more strategic financial planning, including salaries and infrastructure; and continue prioritising team self-care, which is crucial in a high-demand emotional context.

Notable achievements

Over the course of the partnership, ETAPPA made progress in several areas. Firstly, it strengthened its organisational vision and was able to communicate its work more clearly, comprehensively and visually. The support in articulating its vision and mission, the rebranding process, the website, social media and other storytelling materials helped the organisation to better showcase its identity, its evolution and the scope of its work. A photography project was also launched to increase the visibility of the organisation's work, team, and the communities it accompanies, highlighting the importance of its efforts.

- Following this collaboration, ETAPPA was also able to reflect on its own evolution with greater clarity. While it originally emerged to address the needs of children with disabilities, over the past 11 years it has expanded its scope into broader areas of psychology, mental health and support for various community stakeholders.
- Progress was also made towards more strategic financial planning. The team worked on an ideal budget that clarified key needs, such as salaries, infrastructure, and welfare activities, helping to visualise what resources would be needed to sustain and expand their work in the future more clearly.
- A core pillar of support was helping ETAPPA place the care team's mental health and well-being at the heart of its operations. This made it possible to recognise the importance of caring for the care-giving team, particularly in a context of high emotional demands and limited resources. The organisation began creating more intentional spaces for self-care and developed greater awareness of the importance of caring for caregivers, particularly in a context of high emotional demands and limited resources. This was a major achievement for the partnership. Furthermore, thanks to the Ember well-being fund, ETAPPA was able to accompany teachers across five local schools.
- As an area for development, impact monitoring and evaluation could still be further strengthened. The organisation is currently at an early stage in this regard, and it would be beneficial to establish simple systems to track the journey of each child or young person from their initial arrival through to the progress achieved. This would enable better recording of observed changes and allow ETAPPA to communicate its impact more clearly to communities, partners and potential funders.

