

THE ROI OF A CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAM

How Sealand Americas and Projeto Arrastão are helping Brazil's youth prepare for the future

Authors: John McCormick, PhD*, Viviane Rodrigues,† Katya Delfino,† Sabrina El-Chibini*
First published: May 16, 2019

This paper describes the result of a Sealand Americas (Sealand) collaboration with non-profit partner Projeto Arrastão (PA) in the Campo Limpo region of Brazil. Sealand has been working extensively with PA to improve employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people in Campo Limpo. One element of the collaboration was the design and administration of a program to provide customer service training to disadvantaged youths.



This paper summarizes the results of the training program and, in keeping with the principles of Transformative Community Involvement™, data on program outcomes was collected and used to quantify the subsequent business and social impacts. To demonstrate the “value” of the program, impact data was also used to estimate a Return on Investment (ROI).

[view video ▶](#)

Youth unemployment has become a major issue in Latin America impacting future social and economic development in the region. In some Latin American countries unemployment in this age group represents about 40% of the unemployed population and has a particularly large impact on youths at the lower end of income distribution.^{1,2} In addition, if young people do manage to find a job, in many cases (estimated at 60%) the jobs are informal with no contract or benefits.¹ The absence of stable employment opportunities means that youths may opt out of available education and training programs, exacerbating the risk of social isolation and its associated problems.^{1,2}

*The Collaboration Vector Inc.

‡Sealand Americas - A Maersk Company

†Projeto Arrastão

©The Collaboration Vector Inc.

Ironically, many companies in the region cannot find qualified people for available positions because they lack the necessary skills and this has been identified as a key factor in inhibiting economic development.³ In part this is due to an apparent disconnect between the skills developed in formal education programs, when they are available, and what employers actually need.¹ The World Economic Forum has suggested that solutions to this problem include, updating education programs so that youth are more prepared for employment and training students in the general skills required in applying for a job. In addition, they also stress the central role that corporations can play in providing vocational programs through apprenticeships, internships, mentoring programs etc. as a way to guide youth into the current workplace.¹

Community programs where businesses focus on interventions to augment existing public programs have been identified as a key component of expanding employment opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged youth. In many cases corporations work with non-profit organizations in different ways (direct donations of money, employee volunteering, pro-bono work) to promote community programs.^{4,5} Through this corporate collaboration, non-profits can promote and expand their societal programs and such partnerships have been shown to have a positive impact on local communities.^{4,5} However, from a corporate perspective, there is limited information available as to the “value” of the investments, i.e., while community program inputs are usually defined (money committed, volunteers recruited etc.) rarely is quantitative information on the program output and impact collected. As a result the true “value” of the corporate investment is unclear making it difficult to estimate the cost-effectiveness or ROI of the program or to develop evidence-based criteria for future program evolution.^{4,5}

Since 2015, Sealand Americas has been actively involved in extensive community programs in the Americas aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).^{6,7} With the support of The Collaboration Vector Inc.,⁸ these programs are based on Transformative Community Involvement™ (TCI™) principles⁹ where relevant stakeholders, including Sealand employees and non-profit organizations, work together to plan and initiate innovative solutions to societal problems through evidence-based initiatives. An essential component of TCI™ is the assessment of community program output and impact and the generation of evidence-based data for program development and evolution. Where possible, this may involve the monetization of output parameters allowing estimation of program cost-effectiveness or ROI. The TCI™ approach has been shown not only to benefit local communities but to have a positive business impact through increased employee retention and engagement.^{10,11}

Currently about 50% of the community programs within Sealand have evolved to a “skills-based” volunteering model. The latter is emerging as a productive way to address the increasing role of non-profits in providing societal solutions, particularly in developing countries.^{12,13} While historically employee volunteerism has been an important part of Corporate Social Responsibility programs with non-profit organizations, these collaborations have not always been productive or cost-effective. Skills-based volunteering attempts to match specific skills and experience of corporate volunteers with the identified needs and objectives of a non-profit organization.^{12,13} The

specificity of the volunteerism allows a more productive and directed collaboration benefiting social impact objectives of the non-profit and optimizing the value of the volunteers' contribution so that it produces meaningful results.^{12,13}

This paper describes the results of one such Sealand-based collaboration with Projeto Arrastão (PA) in the Campo Limpo region of Brazil.

Projeto Arrastão and partnership with Sealand Americas

Founded in 1968, PA is a non-profit organization that welcomes and supports families in the Campo Limpo region of Brazil who live in poverty.¹⁴ The organization works with local families to promote human and community development through programs in the areas of education, culture, income generation, housing and quality of life. In partnership with PA, Sealand developed a customer service training program designed to ready the youth of Brazil for the labour market and entrepreneurship. The main objectives of the customer service training program were to help PA students build relationships and better understand valuable work attributes, such as respect, understanding and caring.⁷



Sealanders at PA's Citizenship Race in 2017, launching the partnership

The customer service training program

The training program was designed and formulated by Sealand volunteers who were Customer Support Representatives (CSRs) working at Sealand's call center in Brazil. The actual training was presented to the PA students over two days at the end of August 2018. The training consisted of eight modules presenting information on fundamental aspects of establishing, maintaining and managing customer relationships; in effect students were trained over the eight sessions to recognize the benefits of listening, analyzing and making informed decisions regarding potential business/customer relationships. The training program was designed to provide PA students with the skills necessary to promote productive communication and proactive problem-solving abilities in a business environment. All the students were participating in PA educational and social activities in Campo Limpo at the time of the training sessions.

Measuring the impact of the training program

The business and broad societal impacts of the training program were assessed. This was achieved by online surveys of the students who took part in the training and Sealand volunteers who prepared and presented the training sessions.

Online surveys of the students were completed immediately after the training sessions and approximately four months later. The first survey requested basic demographic information and assessed overall satisfaction with the training and the immediate impact of the program. The second student survey four months later requested information on ongoing employment opportunities, household income before and after the training and asked students if they believed that their participation in the training program had helped them meet employment objectives.



Sealanders and PA youth at work during the customer training program

The objective of the Sealand volunteer surveys was to determine employees' level of satisfaction with participation in the program, perception of the impact of the program on PA students, and views on volunteering following the experience with PA. In addition, the surveys assessed indicators of employee engagement, retention, company culture and willingness to recommend Sealand Americas as a good place to work. All Sealanders involved with the program were asked to complete two online surveys, one during the planning and development phase of the training program and a second immediately after the presentation of the training sessions.

All online surveys were administered in English (Sealand volunteers) or Portuguese (PA students) using Survey Monkey. In both surveys quantitative data was assessed using five-point Likert scale responses. Data analysis was carried out in Excel.

Impact of the training program on PA students

Forty-one students participated in the training program. The students had a mean age of 17.7 (range 16 - 34), the cohort was 51.2% female, and 97.3% reported attending all the training sessions over the two-day period. As shown in Fig 1, based on a survey completed immediately after the training, the participating students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the program and agreed/strongly agreed that it would help them find a job (89.5%), and gave them hope for a better future (94.4%). Overall, 94.7% of the students reported that they were satisfied/very satisfied with the training program.

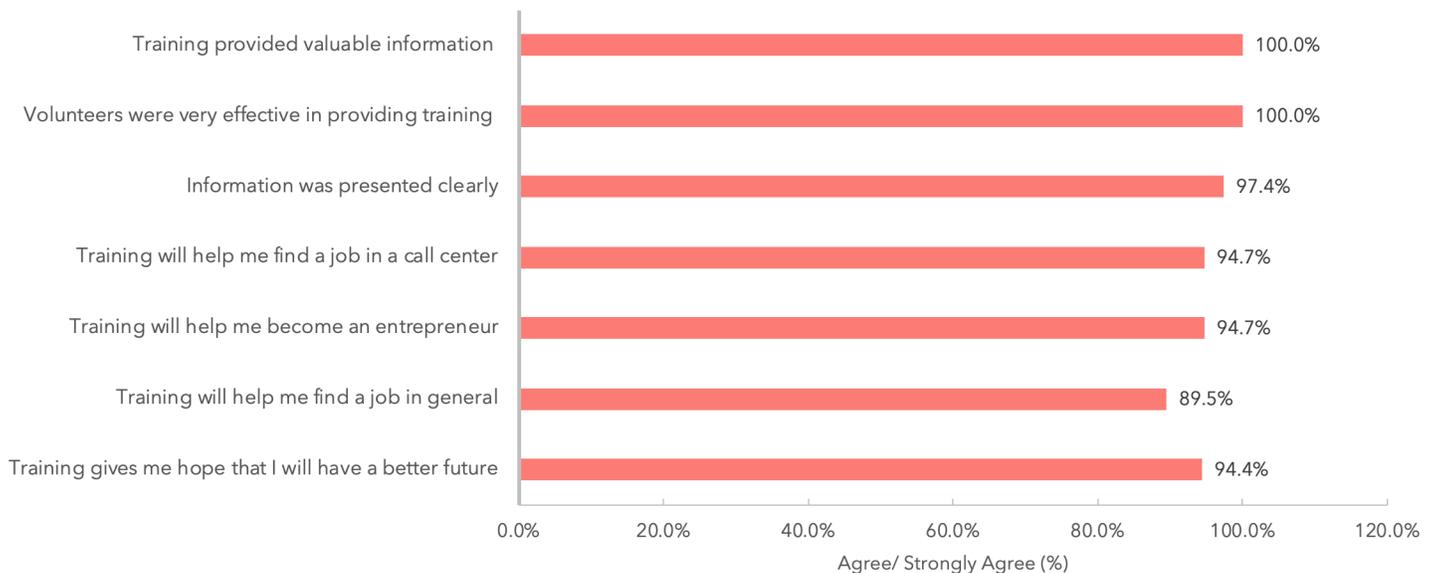


Figure 1: Student assessment of the impact of the training program. Survey was completed immediately after the completion of the training (data from 38 students)

Based on data from the second survey, over the four-month period after the training session, 26 students (63.4%) had applied for jobs (2.7 applications per student (range of one to seven job applications)). As shown in Table 1, of students applying for employment, 92.3% and 76.9% had subsequent interviews and job offers, respectively, and almost all (95.8% to 100% of students) thought that participation in the training sessions had helped them achieve these employment outcomes. Four students (9.8%) had started a new business and again indicated that the training program contributed to this outcome.

Outcome	Students with outcome (N(%))	Students indicating training helped achieve outcome (%)
Applying for jobs	26 (63.4%) [†]	100.0%
Job interviews	24 (92.3%) [‡]	95.8%
Job offers	20 (76.9%) [‡]	100.0%
Starting a new business	4 (9.8%) [†]	100.0%

[†]Percentage based on all students (N=41)

[‡]Job interviews and offers based on the 26 students who reported applying for jobs

Table 1: Employment opportunities for PA students over a four-month period after the completion of training and student assessment of the impact of the training on achieving each outcome

Although the program was mainly designed around potential employment in a call center, it is clear that the skills learned could be applied to any customer/employer-based interaction. Indeed, 89.5% of the students agreed that the lessons learned in the training sessions would help them find any job (Fig 1).

By the time of the second survey seven students (17.1% of the total) reported having secured a new job, with a salary, since the training. The mean age of the employed group was 20 (range 16-34) with four aged 16. The discrepancy between job offers and actual employment is a result of students still considering job offers in some cases, while in others, particularly among younger students aged 15 to 17, families prefer their children continue studying an additional year before entering the labor market. As has been recently highlighted by the World Bank,¹⁵ the full benefits of these programs may only unfold over the long term, emphasizing the importance of ongoing assessments to accurately quantify social impact.

New salaried employment reported by the seven students had a large impact on the mean annual household income of the total student group reporting income (N=39), resulting in an increase in annual household income of R\$123,288 (US\$33,288)[†] by the four-month assessment.

An approximate ROI for the training program was estimated by calculating the ratio of the PA student outcomes, expressed as the increase in annual household income four months after the end of the program, and the total Sealand financial investment (social contribution to PA for the customer service training portion of the whole program + cost of Sealand volunteer time during work hours). This assumes a direct link between the training program, student employment and subsequent increase in household income. As shown in Fig 2, on this basis an ROI of 4.97 was estimated for the Sealand program meaning that every \$US1 invested was associated with a return of \$4.97 four months after the end of the training.

[†]At the time of the study, the exchange rate was 0.27\$US to 1R\$

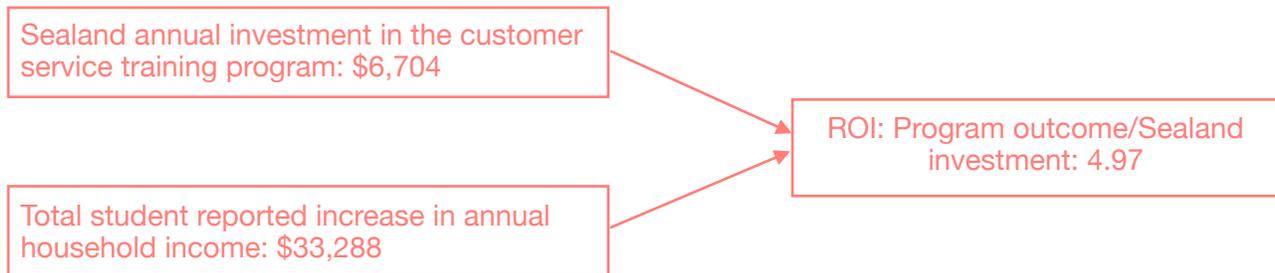


Figure 2: Estimated ROI of the Sealand investment in the PA training program. All costs are expressed in \$US. At the time of the assessment, the exchange rate was 0.27\$US to 1R\$.

Social impact of the Sealand training program: discussion and limitations

There is limited information on the cost-effectiveness/ROI of corporate community training programs.^{4,5} Kluge et al.⁵ recently published a systematic review on the impact of employment interventions on labour market outcomes for young people. They found that youth entrepreneurship and skills training programs in low and middle-income countries had the greatest impact, but that there was a high degree of variability in outcomes due in part to differences in program designs. Comparison of the cost-effectiveness of different interventions, which could provide a way to identify optimal program components, was not possible because of the absence of cost data in most published studies.⁵

However, Attanasio et al.,² using a study design where disadvantaged youths were randomly assigned to a job training program in Columbia, showed that women and men with the training earned 18% and 8%, respectively, more than those not offered the training. The program involved classroom and corporate on-the-job training phases, both of approximately 3-months duration, and benefits were greatest when individuals spent more time in the latter rather than in the classroom. This demonstrates the potential value of employer-based training programs for youths in developing countries where the training can be specifically geared to the current needs of the employer. The authors of the study estimated a cost-benefit/ROI of the program of 13.5% for women and 4.5% for men, although the ROI value was highly dependent on assumptions regarding the short- and long-term benefits of the program.²

Confirmation of a direct causal link between the Sealand and PA training program and employment opportunities at four months would in theory require an assessment of these outcomes in an identical “control” PA student cohort who did not participate in the training. This would confirm that the outcome would not have been achieved in the absence of the intervention, in this case the customer service training program. Though this data was unavailable at the time of

the study, PA is preparing to expand future program assessments in an attempt to confirm causal relationships between their community programs and student outcomes.

In the current study, almost all the students (>95%) agreed that the training helped them achieve each employment-related outcome, providing a proxy measure of correlation between the training and the student reported outcomes. This observation of student perceived benefit, supported by their satisfaction with the training program, also suggests that even a short training session (in this case two days) can be of substantial benefit to disadvantaged youth, provided it is presented in an effective manner.

Previous studies have confirmed that vocational training improves the labour market prospects of disadvantaged youth, particularly in low and middle-income countries.^{5,15} The data generated in this study, based on responses of the students receiving the training and not solely on changes in employment and income, strongly supports the benefits of such programs.



PA youth, PA team, Sealander and Sealand Americas executives at the training session in 2018

Impact of the training program on Sealanders

Sealanders involved in the planning and presentation of the training sessions reported a total of 109 hours were spent on these activities during work hours and 74 hours outside normal work hours. The actual training was delivered by Sealand CSRs. All volunteers who either provided the actual training or attended at least one of the training sessions agreed/strongly agreed that the PA students:

- Were interested and engaged during the training sessions, and;
- Asked questions and contributed to discussions during the sessions.

In addition, they all believed that the training sessions provided the students with a strong grounding in CSR activities. Confirmation of the impact of the training on PA students comes from comments by Sealanders on their experience with the students during the training. As shown in Fig 3, volunteers were impressed with the interest shown by the students and by the potential impact of the training on their future.

The pre- and post-training surveys of volunteers provided additional information on the potential business impact of Sealand's community involvement with PA. As the number of survey respondents was relatively small and there was a difference in the number of pre- and post-respondents to the same survey questions, the quantified change in scores represented too small a sample size to draw generalizable conclusions. Nevertheless, a reliable statement can be made that post-survey scores matched pre-survey scores in 2 out of 10 common questions and exceeded in the remaining 8, demonstrating the positive business impact resulting from participation in the PA training program. The biggest positive change was in the parameter: **"My participation allowed me to work effectively in a team with my colleagues"**. These results confirm similar employee survey responses in companies with strong community programs.^{10,11,16}

"Be better prepared for their future."

"Having contact with students made me think of how important it is to share a little bit of our time with them; they participated and were very interested; it was really motivating spending the day with them; I received a lot of hugs at the end of the training (very strong) and it made me feel that they really liked the training and appreciated the time we spent with them."

"They are more prepared to start their labour life with this training. They understood and realized that communication is the key to relationships and business, and how important it is to be proactive, to take ownership, to put yourself in the other's shoes, to focus, and to love what you do."

"Networking. Learning for career development. Hope."

Figure 3: Comments from Sealand volunteers on the impact of the training program on PA students

In the post-training survey, volunteers were also asked if they thought that participation in a student training program concentrating on customer interactions had an impact on their own day-to-day

customer service skills. All volunteers agreed that providing the training had a positive impact on their CSR performance and on their understanding of how to help their team deliver excellent customer service.



Next steps

The collaboration between Sealand and PA is ongoing with different programs that include social, vocational and educational elements, all based on the development of employment opportunities for disadvantaged youths in the Campo Limpo region.

One immediate off-shoot was the introduction of a 3-year apprentice program for two young training program participants. Each of them is now employed at Sealand Americas for a three-year term. One year will be spent training in customer service, a second in sales and a third in product management. Sealand Americas is as well providing English-language instruction to the apprentices and covering the cost of their university education.

Sealand and PA have begun scaling the customer service training program to reach more vulnerable youth in Brazil over the long-term.

Conclusion

The results of the present study indicate that a short customer serviced-based training session had important societal and business impacts and lays the groundwork for future programs with the same objectives. It reinforces the value of skills-based volunteer programs and the potential for companies to generate far-reaching impacts when employees thoughtfully design and deliver these types of educational interventions.

Acknowledgements

The authors extend a special thank you to Sealanders Danilene Martines, Luciana Zazue and Michelli Camargo for the leading role they played in the design and delivery of the PA student training program.



Left to right: Sealanders Michelli Camargo, Viviane Rodrigues, Luciana Zazue and Danilene Martines

Viviane Rodrigues, ECSA Cluster Top and co-author, recognizes her team of passionate Sealanders who are investing their time and energy in the overall Brazil community program and supporting its success.

	<p>Andre Gomes Layla Lazari Fabiola Armuch Fernanda Paiva Fernanda Peloi Jean Oliveira</p>	<p>Lara Thome Otto Ebenau Raphael Russo Samir Afonso Thiago Bertolucci Natalia Silva</p>	<p>Mariana Albano Marcos Cordeiro Sara Carvalho Fabio Santos Vanesa Amendola Rocio Calvino</p>	
--	--	--	--	---

To the whole team at Projeto Arrastão, thank you for your collaboration and wholehearted commitment to transformation. To Thiago Covre, Chief Line Officer and Executive Sponsor of Sealand Americas' community program, thank you for your commitment and support of Sealand's community initiatives throughout the Americas.

References:

- ¹ Herranz D. Youth unemployment is a huge problem for Latin America. Here's how to solve it. World Economic Forum. 2016. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/06/youth-unemployment-is-a-huge-problem-for-latin-america-here-s-how-to-solve-it/>. Accessed March 25, 2019.
- ² Attanasio O et al. Training Disadvantaged Youth in Latin America: Evidence from a Randomized Trial. 2008. National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper N. 13931. Available at: <https://www.economics.uci.edu/files/docs/recruitment/w08/kugler.pdf>. Accessed March 25, 2019.
- ³ J-PAL. 2017. "J-PAL Skills for Youth Program Review Paper." Cambridge MA: Abdul Latif Poverty Action Lab. Available at: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/documents/Skills%20for%20Youth%20Review%20Paper%20.pdf>. Accessed March 25, 2019.
- ⁴ KPMG International. Sustainable insight. Unlocking the value of social investment. 2014. Available at: <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2014/05/unlocking-value-social-investment.pdf>. Accessed March 24, 2019.
- ⁵ Kluge J et al. Interventions to improve the labour market outcomes of youth: a systematic review of training, entrepreneurship promotion, employment services, and subsidized employment interventions. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2017:12. DOI: 10.4073/csr.2017.12. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_508938.pdf. Accessed March 24, 2019.
- ⁶ Covre T, El-Chibini S. Transformative community involvement™: How Sealand and The Collaboration Vector Inc. connected business and social impact. 2017. Available at: <https://www.thecollaborationvector.com/social-and-business-transformation>. Accessed March 17, 2019.
- ⁷ Sealand. A Maersk Company: Changing lives in local communities. Available at: <https://www.Sealandmaersk.com/en/about-us/sustainability/community>. Accessed March 17, 2019.
- ⁸ The Collaboration Vector Inc. <https://www.thecollaborationvector.com/>. Accessed March 31, 2019.
- ⁹ El-Chibini S. Transformative community involvement: what it means, what it takes, what it gives. 2016. Available at: <https://www.thecollaborationvector.com/single-post/2016/09/06/Transformative-Community-Involvement-What-it-Means-What-it-Takes-What-it-Gives>. Accessed May 18, 2018.
- ¹⁰ McCormick J et al. Why Sealand and Humanity and Hope United are growing a business in rural Honduras. 2018 Available at: <https://www.thecollaborationvector.com/transformingcommunityruralhonduras>: <https://www.thecollaborationvector.com/transformingcommunityruralhonduras>. Accessed March 25, 2019.
- ¹¹ McCormick J, El-Chibini S. How Costa Recicla and Sealand boosted recycling in Panama: A case study of business, social and environmental impact. 2017. Available at: <https://www.thecollaborationvector.com/recyclingstudy>. Accessed April 29, 2019.
- ¹² Letts C, Holly D. The promise of skills-based volunteering. Stanford Social Innovation Review 2017. Available at: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_promise_of_skills_based_volunteering. Accessed March 17, 2019.
- ¹³ Skills-based volunteerism: A new generation of service. Corporation for National & Community Service. Available at: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/resource/Grantee%20TTA%20Calendar%202015%20for%20Posting.pdf>. Accessed March 17, 2019.
- ¹⁴ Projeto Arrastão. <http://arrastao.org.br/sobre/>. Accessed March 17, 2019.
- ¹⁵ The World Bank: Four ways to maximize the effectiveness of youth employment programs. 2017. Available at: <http://blogs.worldbank.org/jobs/four-ways-maximize-effectiveness-youth-employment-programs>. Accessed March 25, 2019.
- ¹⁶ Grenier A. Corporate Giving and Employee Engagement. 2017. Available at: <https://www.greatplacetowork.ca/en/resources/articles/215-corporate-giving-and-employee-engagement>. Accessed March 31, 2019.

