

Funding Proposal:

Organization Description:

Inspired by Canada's diverse mental health support systems, from hotlines to community-based organizations, especially the organization "Vent over Tea" which is a confidential mental health listening service from Montreal, I felt a calling to bring a similar model to my hometown, Panama City. Desahógate, meaning "Vent Away," is a non-profit organization that provides accessible emotional support through active listening, offering individuals a compassionate, non-judgmental space to be heard. Our mission centers on building a supportive community focused on mental wellness and health education. Desahógate operates with a team of trained, certified volunteers who practice active listening under the supervision of professional psychologists. This ensures a safe, confidential environment where individuals can freely express themselves. Sessions are held in welcoming local coffee shops, offering a comfortable, relaxed setting where people can share their thoughts over a warm drink. We also provide virtual sessions for those who prefer or need remote support. In addition to offering listening sessions, Desahógate is committed to reducing the negative perception around seeking mental health support and advocating for the importance of nurturing well-being. To bring this to light I plan to collaborate with wellness professionals across different domains to inspire and highlight the importance of prioritizing our health. By leading through example, we aim to spark interest and create awareness around mental health. Desahógate's mission is to transform the perception of mental health, by fostering a culture that values and actively supports mental health. Through accessible resources, mental health education, and wellness activities led by professionals, the organization aims to reach individuals who might otherwise face barriers to receiving support. By building a community that engages with these emotional support resources, educational opportunities, and wellness activities; Desahógate seeks to spark a cultural shift to how Mental Health should be prioritized

Problem/Issue/Community Need:

My experience with being exposed to a variety of accessible mental health resources in Montreal gave me a clear contrast with Panama, where such services remain both costly and limited, particularly for those who cannot afford what is often seen as "luxuries.", as well as how the vast population doesn't take into consideration accessing these services due to negative social stigmas in getting help. Witnessing this gap, I feel a sense of responsibility to raise awareness and improve access to mental health resources in Panama, especially given the barriers posed by economic challenges and social stigmas. The need for such services could bring such potential to bridging a closer step toward accessible mental health services and advocacy, and a nonprofit such as Desahogate could draw a leading example that emphasizes a shift in the cultural mindset that could create big changes in society and further on, political wise to take mental health as a top priority in Panama.

Firstly, The United Nations and World Health Organization (W.H.O) report the urgent need for mental health care in Panama, with 62.9% of the population reporting mental health impacts, especially among women and the unemployed, after the COVID-19 pandemic (*United Nations "W.H.O"*, 2020). In such an environment, individuals often lack the time, resources, or emotional support to focus on their mental health, resulting in a cycle of isolation and self-reliance. Another critical barrier to mental health care in Panama is the stigma associated with seeking help. A qualitative study on Panama's mental health stigma (Sanders, 2023) reveals that societal norms and family expectations frequently discourage individuals from seeking support. Many fear being labeled "crazy" or being ostracized for deviating from traditional views. As a result, many Panamanians struggle in silence, unable to access the help they desperately need. By establishing Desahógate, a nonprofit that centers around active listening, we aim to create a community of empathetic support, where individuals can safely express their emotions without fear of judgment. The goal is not to offer therapy or "solve problems" but rather to provide a platform for people to express themselves, or feel accompanied by a reliable

trained individual. The approach from the venting sessions to all the educational, events, and activities that bring in professionals from the fields of health focused on the core message to making emotional support accessible, as well as advocating for the importance of taking care of our mental health, and hoping to promote an impact to shifting societal perceptions to viewing mental health as a vital aspect of overall well-being, and as a strength, rather than a weakness.

Project Description & Execution Plan:

Desahógate ("Vent Away") aims to create a supportive environment through the practice of active listening, offering a safe space for individuals to express themselves and alleviate emotional burdens. The initiative will focus on building a strong foundation of trained volunteers, led by a dedicated team of professionals, to ensure high-quality support, consistency, and reliability of this organization. The first step in setting up Desahógate involves assembling the heads of department and their roles for this nonprofit to execute their responsibilities effectively:

To begin with, a licensed psychologist(s) who will coach and supervise the volunteer program, ensuring that all active listeners are properly trained will be needed. Another important pillar is having an accountant, to manage the organization's finances, track expenses, prepare budgets, and identify potential funding opportunities. Last but not least a project manager would be responsible for organizing events, fundraising activities, and any special projects to sustain and expand our services. The volunteer recruitment process will be a key focus and will start by targeting psychology students in Panamanian universities and individuals interested in gaining experience in mental health support, to gain initial interest in participating, and if possible by discussing potential gains in credit hours or gain relevant experience through our program, later on recruitment could expand upon through Social Media Campaigns; by launching Desahógate's social media channels to raise awareness about the initiative and attract potential volunteers. The core mission is free active listening services, the volunteers will undergo a rigorous selection process, including an initial assessment and interview conducted by psychologists, to ensure the quality and assertiveness of our services. Following selection, volunteers will receive in-depth-training in presenting in a non-judgemental form of listening, providing empathetic and unbiased support to participants, they also will be executing "reflective questioning" to encourage deeper reflection and expression. Confidentiality is another important element to our organization to ensure trust within our audience using our services; privacy and trust create an invaluable safe space for participants. The training will consist of workshops, mock sessions, and continuous feedback to ensure volunteers are well-prepared to handle real-life scenarios. Accessible Service Delivery To make our services as accessible as possible, we plan to offer two options: Online Sessions: where users can book appointments through our website or app, providing a convenient option for those who prefer to talk from the comfort of their own home, and secondly In-Person Sessions at Local Cafés: We will collaborate with local coffee shops, creating a relaxed and welcoming environment for individuals who seek face-to-face support. We aim to accommodate these different modalities to reach a wider audience and suit different preferences when discussing mental health. The second phase of the non-profit includes creating events, activities, and educational workshops by bringing professionals and people related to the field of health to foster a resilient community in Panamá that sees the greatness in taking care of its mental health through these initiatives and the power of knowledge. To bring this vision to life, I plan to apply for grants, starting with the "Supporting Distress Centers During the COVID-19 Pandemic" grant from the Government of Canada. This grant aligns with our mission to address the emotional and economic impacts of the pandemic on mental health, particularly in Panama. Drawing inspiration

from successful Canadian models, this grant could help establish Desahógate as one of the few accessible mental health resources in Panama. Additionally, we will seek funding through crowdfunding campaigns, local donors, and potential partnerships with businesses that share our commitment to mental health advocacy. With these funding strategies, we aim to make a lasting impact, providing free, accessible mental health support for those who need it most.

Expense Outline:

To establish and sustain Desahógate, various expenses must be accounted for to ensure the organization's quality and effective delivery of services. The main costs involve compensating the head of the department team, which includes licensed psychologists, an accountant, and a project manager.

For in-person active listening sessions, we intend to have partnerships involving agreements or small rental fees if host an event also by awareness of our presence, creating a safe and comfortable space for participants. Additionally, expenses will be incurred for hosting educational workshops and community events, requiring the booking of suitable venues that are accessible and can accommodate participants.

Training resources for volunteers are another critical expense. This includes the cost of educational manuals and supplementary materials necessary for professional training on active listener volunteers to demonstrate the techniques, confidentiality, and empathetic support they'll need to learn along the way. In terms of technology, a monthly/yearly subscription to Zoom is required for virtual sessions, ensuring that online appointments are secure and reliable. Building and maintaining a website is also essential, as it will be the primary platform for scheduling sessions, sharing information, and promoting upcoming events.

Marketing and outreach efforts will also incur costs. Investment in promotional materials like pamphlets, flyers, and digital campaigns is crucial to raising awareness about the services offered by Desahógate. Supplies for fundraising events and activities will be needed to effectively present the organization to potential donors and the community.

To fund these activities, Desahógate aims to secure a grant from the Canadian government, specifically the COVID-19 grant, which supports mental health hotlines and services. Additional sources of income we aim to benefit from will include donations, crowdfunding, and sponsorships. These various funding sources are designed to cover initial and ongoing expenses, ensuring the non-profit's long-term sustainability and impact in Panama.

Impact Measurement:

To measure our impact, we will use multiple methods to assess the effectiveness, strengths, and weaknesses of our organization to ensure we know how our active listening services are performing:

1. **Website Engagement:** We will track user activity on our website, focusing on the number of individuals signing up as volunteers and those seeking active listening sessions. Additionally, we will monitor recurring bookings for sessions, workshops, and

other events. Analyzing this data will help us understand user engagement and interest levels, allowing us to evaluate the demand for our services and identify popular activities.

2. **Social Media and Community Outreach:** We will assess social media engagement using metrics like likes, shares, comments, and follower growth. By analyzing statistical data from these interactions through the business option to view analytics, we can gauge the effectiveness of our awareness campaigns. We will also look further into audience engagement with our posts and stories, as it likely reflects growing community interest in mental health resources.
3. **Feedback:** To evaluate the quality of our services, we will conduct anonymous user surveys through our website and social media channels. Feedback and reviews will always be essential and an integral part for identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Key areas to analyze will include participants' experiences, whether positive or negative, during active listening sessions to identify what we can improve upon and maintain. We will also assess participants' enjoyment and level of deepening the importance of showing up for our mental health through workshops via these occasional surveys posted on our website or social media.
4. **Long-Term Impact:** This will be assessed through anonymous surveys rating individuals' satisfaction and shared experiences, as well as through reviews left on our website, email, or social media, tracking how often individuals access the site, use the services, or log in to events. By maintaining a statistical record of these activities, this data will help us understand the lasting effects of our services on the community and ensure that "Desahógate" continues to meet the needs of those seeking mental health support.

Resources:

World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Mental Health Atlas 2020 country profile: Panama*.
World Health Organization.

<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/mental-health-atlas-pan-2020-country-profile>

Sanders, A. (2023). *Mental Health Stigma as a Sociocultural Complex Within Panamanian Culture*. Journal of Vinectian Social Action.

<https://scholar.stjohns.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=jovsa>

Canada, P. H. A. of. (2024, October 18). *Government of Canada*. Canada.ca.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/funding-opportunities/grant-contribution-funding-opportunities.html>

Need to talk to someone? we're here to listen. Vent Over Tea. (2024, April 23).

<https://ventoverttea.com/>