

# Facilitating a Network of Rescued Schools in Puerto Rico

## Abstract

Over the past 16 years, the Puerto Rican government closed over 600 schools. School closures have negatively impacted surrounding communities in myriad ways which led community groups to "take back" and repurpose abandoned schools into community centers. Our project collaborated with Taller Comunidad La Goyco, a community center in San Juan, to learn about and support these rescued school projects. Through a multi-method approach, we identified 161 repurposed school projects (35 are non-profit "rescued school" community centers), interviewed 10 schools, and hosted 2 community meetings. Our results identified common motivations, services, and challenges faced by rescued school projects and generated a framework and initial resources for a solidarity-based rescued school network.



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## Executive Summary

### *The Phenomena of Closed Schools in Puerto Rico*

Between 2007 and 2019, 673 public schools were closed in Puerto Rico. These closures were due to a combination of complex and interlocking crises, including Puerto Rico's debt crisis, a series of natural disasters including Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and emigration, all of which led to lower school enrollment and the rise of vacant school buildings across the island (Hinojasa, 2018). In response to Puerto Rico's economic challenges, the United States established the Puerto Rican Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) in 2016 to oversee Puerto Rico's financial decisions. A key figure in this new political and economic arrangement was Julia Keleher, the newly appointed Secretary of Education. As a part of a series of austerity measures, Keleher, supported by PROMESA, approved the closure of hundreds of schools across the island. These school closures, many of which happened in areas where enrollment was still high, have negatively impacted surrounding communities in many ways. Closures have decreased community involvement and damaged the social and academic experience that schools provide for children (Abizeid, 2020). Schools that remained open quickly became overcrowded with thousands of relocated students and did not have the resources to educate such a high volume of children (Martinez, 2018).

Due to the rapid decision-making in closing the schools, little attention was given to what would happen to the school buildings and

properties. In an executive order, Governor Ricardo Rosello stated the following about the vision the government had for the closed schools: "It is encouraged that those real estate properties that are currently in total disuse can be dedicated to activities for the common welfare..." (Exec. Order No. 2017-032). Despite this claim, there have been few resources for community groups trying to repurpose schools and bring this vision to life. In response, a growing number of community groups have begun ambitious projects to repurpose schools to meet community needs through extensive volunteer work and non-governmental funding. While each repurposed school initiative is unique, there are several common challenges faced by each project. Establishing a network between these repurposing initiatives would enable communities to share knowledge and resources. Our goal was to identify rescued school projects and explore a network for information and resource sharing. To achieve these goals, we developed three objectives:

1. Identify, collect, and summarize information on repurposed schools.
2. Explore the common challenges rescued schools face as well as the desires and hesitations of forming a network.
3. Build preliminary infrastructure for a sustainable network of rescued school communities.

### *A Systematic Approach to Identifying and Connecting Rescued Schools*

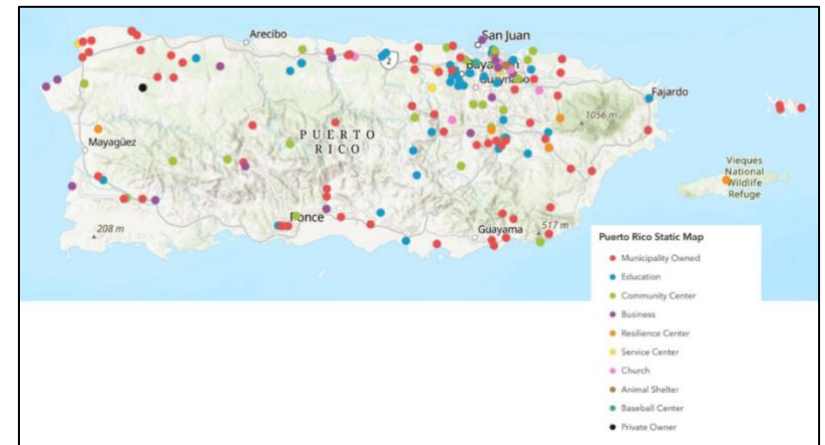
To achieve these objectives, we employed a multi-method approach. First, we contacted several government offices to see if they

had information on repurposed school projects. This included all 78 municipality offices, the Department of Education, and the Real Estate Evaluation and Disposition Committee. In addition, we used a snowball sampling technique to ask each organization we spoke with if they knew of other rescued school projects. Second, we summarized information on rescued school projects through an internet search and interviews. We conducted semi-structured interviews with leadership members from ten rescued school projects to learn about their background information, main goals, services they offer, challenges, and their interest and reservations about a rescued schools network. Finally, we hosted two preliminary meetings with rescued school project leaders where we facilitated introductions and discussed their interest in forming a network.

### *Information about Repurposed Schools*

We identified 161 closed schools whose ownership had been transferred to a new entity. These repurposed schools were categorized as follows: 64 owned by the municipality, 39 educational facilities, 15 businesses, 5 churches, 1 privately owned, 1 baseball organization, and 1 animal shelter. There were 35 repurposed schools that were deemed “rescued schools” because they were non-profit organizations that had goals to serve the community. Within this, there were 24 community centers, 6 resilience centers, and 5 that offer other specific services. While we categorized these by their focus, there are many different

services that rescued schools offer. Most of the repurposed schools are in and around the San Juan area, while one is on the island Vieques, and others are spread across the island (see Figure A for a map of all the repurposed schools).



*Figure A: A static map of the closed schools that were sold from DTOP and renovated for a new purpose.*

The motivations for the emergence of these rescued school projects are based around community needs. Trends in community needs were identified when organizing the projects by location, as different geographic locations present different challenges for the community members. For example, rescued school organizations in the mountains on the west side of the island, such as La Coordinadora Paz para la Mujer and Fundación Bucarabón, aspire to create diverse job opportunities and establish trust and protection throughout the

community. Organizations in urban areas, such as Taller Comunidad La Goyco and La Conde, experience gentrification and creeping industrialization coupled with poor urban planning, leading these groups to emphasize culture, so they do not lose the customs of their community.

Varying motivations shape the substance of these community center projects. One theme that two community centers emphasized in their programs was education, an aspect that was lost when the schools were closed. Piñones Aprende y Emprende (PAYE) prioritized education when they established their services. Tanisha Clemente, director of PAYE, wanted to develop educational, social, and professional opportunities for the youth in Piñones. In addition to education, disaster resilience was also a focus for certain organizations when rescuing the closed schools. Long Term Recovery Group, a resilience center in Juncos, distributes food to those in need (see Figures B&C). They also offer other emergency services such as housing, a medical facility, and a radio station to establish contact around the island (see Figures B&C below). These projects are unique in their journey, but they have one common goal of bringing their community together in a safe space.



*Figures B and C: Our IQP team working with Long Term Recovery Group to package food for community distribution (right); Long Term Recovery Group's community kitchen (left).*

Despite the significant differences between these rescued school projects, they all face several similar challenges related to ownership of the building and barriers to advancing the facilities. Blockades to reaching their goals are caused by obtaining and maintaining ownership of the school building, insufficient support and volunteers, and barriers to funding. In the initial stage of gaining ownership, these organizations had to prove the necessity of the project. The resiliency center Fe Que Transforma had to create a plan to prove they were the best choice for the ownership of the school. Gaining access was a long and strenuous process, and sometimes only resulted in temporary contracts. Once the organizations obtained the school, they were often working without sufficient resources. Since building repairs are expensive, insufficient funding is a barrier to

improving the facilities. Many organizations also struggle with having enough manpower to complete their goals. Since the organizations are non-profits, many of the workers are volunteers and therefore not full-time dedicated staff who can commit their undivided attention to the project.

We found that many of the rescued school organizations were interested in participating in a network. They reported that being able to ask questions in a large group would be beneficial, as one of the key challenges reported was a lack of support and funding. Many of the organizations expressed interest in applying for group grants and collaborating on events. However, a program of this size does not come without difficulties. Common reservations from organizations regarding the network were related to time restrictions and the purpose of the network. If events are too frequent and have poor focus and direction, momentum could dwindle. They wanted the network to have a clear direction and goals so they could maintain motivation for a prosperous network.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations for a Network of Rescued Schools*

Several organizations reported that a network could help facilitate essential support and information exchange to benefit communities facing similar challenges, as well as provide power in numbers when conversing with the government regarding decision-making for the closed schools. To combat the reservations reported by the organizations, our recommendations are to have meetings with direction and purpose when requested by the organizations in the network. There needs to be action during these meetings so they will be worthwhile. To ensure the progression of the network, consistent communication is needed through social media like the Facebook group and other accessible platforms. We suggest other IQP teams continue our work to expand the movement and maintain momentum. It would be beneficial to research more about funding and group grants which can be valuable information to share in the network. Raising awareness for the movement of rescued schools is crucial, as these organizations need support.

## 1: Introduction

*“How can we rebuild when they take everything away from us, refuse to fix things, and then blame people for leaving?”*

- Pierette Hidalgo, a frustrated teacher from one of the many abandoned schools in Puerto Rico (Martinez & Lee, 2018)

673 schools have closed in Puerto Rico since 2007. The justification for these school closures includes the combination of Puerto Rico’s debt crisis, a series of severe natural disasters, and emigration (Abizeid, 2022). The debt crisis led Puerto Rico’s Secretary of Education to close many public schools to save money between the years 2016 and 2019 (Brusi, 2022). Along with Hurricanes Maria and Irma in 2017, these factors devastated livelihoods across the island, leading people to leave and find new opportunities elsewhere (Hinojosa, 2018).



Figure 1: Escuela Carlos Conde Marín after being closed.



Figure 2: Escuela Carlos Conde Marín after being closed.

School closures led to a multitude of negative impacts in their communities. These challenges resulted in lower school enrollment across Puerto Rico (Abizeid, 2022). This also led to many students having to relocate to different schools that were often further away, which lacked the resources needed to effectively accommodate and educate the influx of new students. At one time, these schools held communities together and were an integral part of student’s lives, but what were once centers for the community are now dilapidated and abandoned buildings. Since decisions regarding the closures of schools were made by United States (U.S.) politicians with little opportunity for Puerto Rican citizens to voice their opinions, these closures led to a severe lack of trust between local communities and the government (Dols, 2018). With no apparent plans for the future of these closed schools, there was a void in many Puerto Rican communities where vibrant centers of education once stood.

To “revive something that [their] street has lost,” organized community groups throughout Puerto Rico have reclaimed abandoned schools and transformed them into community centers (Donnelly-Deroven, 2019). Closed schools that are reclaimed by the community, which we refer to as rescued schools, are not only bringing communities together; they also serve as centers for culture, education, and health, among other services. Taller Comunidad La Goyco (or La Goyco) is one rescued school operating out of the previously closed Pedro G. Goyco elementary school in San Juan, Puerto Rico.



*Figure 3: Taller Comunidad La Goyco, a community center based out of the old Pedro G. Goyco Elementary school.*

They empower their local community and offer a variety of art and cultural programs. However, these herculean tasks demand many volunteers and funding, both of which are difficult to secure. La Goyco is not the only organization that struggles on these fronts, as

dozens of other rescued school projects lack the necessary resources to achieve similar tasks. These organizations are often left on their own, as the government does not provide sufficient aid to support their work. Our project worked to identify rescued school projects and explore a network between them to collectively confront these issues.

With these challenges in mind, our objectives were to:

1. Identify, collect, and summarize information on repurposed schools.
2. Explore the common challenges rescued schools face as well as the desires and hesitations of forming a network.
3. Build preliminary infrastructure for a sustainable network of rescued school communities.

Although closed schools are prevalent across Puerto Rico, many people are taking the initiative to create positive outcomes from an otherwise unfortunate situation. This project was designed to support those efforts. In the following section, we discuss the reasons for school closures in Puerto Rico, the state of Puerto Rico’s abandoned schools, the services the rescued schools offer, and the challenges they face while repurposing them. We then describe our multi-method approach where we identified rescued school organizations, conducted interviews, and determined what organizations wanted from a network, including what the infrastructure for the network would look like and how it would function over time. Rescued schools are spread throughout Puerto

Rico, so a robust network that connects them across broad distances would help facilitate essential support and exchange of information, including lessons learned for communities facing similar challenges.



## 2: Closing and Rescuing Schools in Puerto Rico

### 2.1: School Closures in Puerto Rico

Public school closures in Puerto Rico have progressed incrementally and have been spurred by various forces. The closures began in 2007 due to increased emigration from Puerto Rico (Hinojosa, Meléndez, & Severino Pietri, 2019). From 2007 to 2011, approximately 20 schools were closed each year as a result of the decreased student population and lack of funding (Abizeid, 2022). In 2014, the Puerto Rican government declared bankruptcy which contributed to a larger series of closures. Roughly 80 schools closed before the 2015 school year, with rapidly increasing closures in subsequent years. Within the next few years, around another 100 closures occurred. This was followed by 263 schools that were closed before the 2018 school year due to the impact of Hurricane Irma hitting the island on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017, and Hurricane Maria on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017. These school closures amounted to a staggering 44% of Puerto Rico’s public schools, leaving the students of Puerto Rico feeling displaced (Abizeid, 2022). Not only were homes disrupted, but the haven that schools provided faced the same fate (Dols, 2018). In what follows, we unpack the various forces that led to the mass abandonment of Puerto Rican Schools.

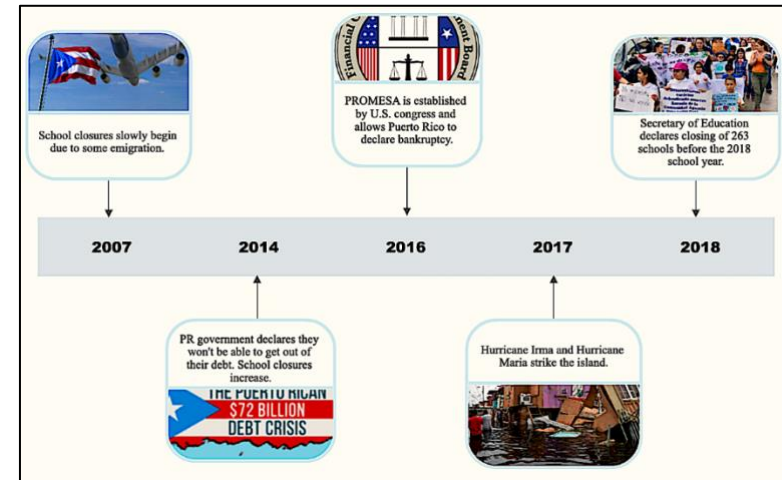


Figure 4: Timeline of the Puerto Rico school closures ranging from 2007-2008.

#### 2.1.1: The Debt Crisis

Puerto Rico’s debt crisis is the principal reason for these school closures. As stated by Brusi (2022), the Puerto Rican government is drowning in debt, not getting enough support from the United States, and is unable to make decisions about the island’s affairs and status. This debt was attributed to the island falling into a recession when Section 936 started getting phased out in 1996. Section 936 of the federal tax code began in 1976 and granted U.S. corporations a tax exemption on income originating in U.S. territories (Schoen, 2017). Section 936 sparked U.S. corporations to start foreign investments in Puerto Rico, resulting in the growth of Puerto Rico’s economy. However, when this tax exemption was fully phased out in 2006, the

Puerto Rican economy began crashing. Rather than cutting government spending to make up for the declining tax revenue, they instead began borrowing money. In 2011, bankers noticed that Puerto Rico was financially failing and accumulating too much debt to pay back. But the debt kept increasing and bonds kept getting sold, until 2013 when bond prices dropped, and more loans were taken out to cover them (Sullivan, 2018). In an interview with NPR and Frontline, Governor Ricardo Rosselló of Puerto Rico (2017 to 2019) stated: "What you had was essentially a black box of a government running, that had no clarity as to what was being borrowed and or what was being spent" (Sullivan, 2018).

The debt overwhelmed the Puerto Rican government. In 2014, the Puerto Rican government announced that they could not pay back their debt, which had accumulated to \$72 billion – nearly 70% of the island's gross domestic product (GDP) (Stojanovic & Wessel, 2022). The average debt-to-GDP ratio of U.S. states around the same time was 17% (DePersio, 2022). As a result, the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), signed by President Obama, was established and aimed to help Puerto Rico restructure and reduce their debt by 80% (Stojanovic & Wessel, 2022). PROMESA permitted Puerto Rico to declare bankruptcy (DePersio, 2022). PROMESA ushered in a series of austerity measures, one of which involved saving money through closing schools; Julia Keleher, the Secretary of Education of Puerto Rico from 2017 to 2019, carried

this plan out as an "education reform" initiative (Keierleber, 2019). The law involved implementing charter schools and reconstructing the public education system. According to Ravitch (2019), the limited amount of education funds the Puerto Rican government owned should have gone into repairing existing school buildings as opposed to introducing charter schools. The communities of Puerto Rico saw Julia Keleher's plans as an indication of how little she knew or cared about the Puerto Rican people (Ravitch, 2019). She followed what the PROMESA board directed her to do rather than supporting the teachers and students she was elected to protect.

This reform policy negatively affected many Puerto Rican citizens, especially lower-income families, since they could not afford private education (Moore & Yedidia, 2019). The school closings, or "consolidations" as the government called them, were part of an overarching plan to pull Puerto Rico out of debt, but data shows that it only resulted in minimal savings (Investigativo, 2022).



Figure 5: The department of education headquarters in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

“No savings, just pain” said Rumi Brusi, a former faculty member at University of Puerto Rico and a lecturer of Human Rights and Peace Studies at CUNY-Lehman College (2022). The board of the Puerto Rico Department of Education (see Figure 5) admitted that the school closures failed to secure cost savings. The board stated, “To date, [the Puerto Rico Department of Education] PRDE has struggled to capture these additional operational savings. The Department has not provided a clear view into how the consolidation of 255 schools has resulted in lower utilities and other operating costs” (Renta & Bhatti, 2021). Rather than improving the educational system and saving money, the school closures sowed distrust among Puerto Rican citizens. Puerto Ricans believe that “people have to be considered before the debt” (Kunichoff, 2017). Community members, specifically parents, and teachers, had little say in a decision that heavily impacted their lives. Many discovered this over television only a couple of weeks before their school closed (Moreno, 2018). The teacher unions and parents requested to have a voice in which schools would be closed and asked to be kept informed about decisions that directly affected their lives, but this request was denied (Ujifusa, 2018).

### *2.1.2: Hurricanes and Emigration*

When Hurricanes Irma and Maria hit, emigration was heightened among Puerto Rican citizens (Hinojosa, 2018). The population of Puerto Rico in 2017 was 3,337,000. It decreased to 3,195,000 people in 2018, meaning 142,000 people emigrated after the

two major hurricanes (Glassman, 2021). Approximately 40,000 of these people were school-aged children (Hinojosa, Meléndez, & Severino Pietri, 2019). This led to public schools having lower enrollment, and without enough students, schools had to be closed. But the more schools that closed, the more people wanted to leave in hopes of finding a better education for their children, creating a vicious loop.

The decision-making process for school closures was fraught. Julia Keleher mainly accredited the closures to natural disasters and emigration. When she was asked what criteria were used in deciding which schools to close, her response was deteriorated physical facilities, low academic achievement, and low enrollment numbers (Brusi, 2022). However, upon investigation of the closed schools, it was clear these factors were not taken into consideration. According to Brusi (2022), many of the closed schools were in perfectly good condition, had full enrollment (and waiting lists in some cases), and had test scores showing that the schools were not underperforming academically. One example that demonstrates why communities were skeptical of these criteria was the closure of Luis Muñoz Rivera elementary school in Dorado, Puerto Rico. This school was in good condition and had high enrollment. The school’s enrollment in 2017 was almost 229 children, and the expected enrollment for the 2018-19 school year was 250 students (Dols, 2018). According to teachers, Julia Keleher arrived at the school and determined it should be closed albeit examining it for

only four minutes, never stepping inside or speaking to any of the educators (Dols, 2018).

School closures are disheartening for Puerto Rican citizens. In a letter to Keleher, Puerto Rican students from Yale expressed their disappointment: “You have relied on the emigration of families after Hurricanes Maria and Irma to justify your closing of schools, but basic logic dictates that closing schools would only worsen the conditions that made them leave in the first place” (Ravitch, 2019). In an interview with a social worker from Luis Muñoz Rivera elementary school, he said, “We are tired of the abuse. Our hearts are broken. Not for ourselves, but for our children. They come here [to the occupation encampment], and they suffer, because they want to see their school reopened” (Dols, 2018). Schools do not just serve as a place for education, they also connect community members and give youth a well-rounded set of skills to succeed.

## 2.2: The Impacts of School Closures in Puerto Rico

Adjusting to school closures transformed communities from more than just an educational standpoint; school closures in Puerto Rico had impacts on multiple aspects of the communities they serve. From directly affecting the students, their families, and teachers to completely readjusting the school system, few lifestyles were unscathed by these decisions. Closed schools forced remaining schools

to accommodate more students, while new charter schools began to restructure Puerto Rico’s education system.

Schools are the backbone of many communities in Puerto Rico. According to Moore & Yedidia (2020), schools offer economic, symbolic, and sociological influence. The economic influence of schools affects housing values, future earnings, and taxes. Schools offer a place of belonging, tradition, and identity, along with safe passage through the community and a network for businesses (Moore & Yedidia, 2020). Closed schools ruined important connections and bonds within communities that may not be able to be rekindled. Additionally, schools serve multiple roles within communities. Schools are not only used to educate the youth but they also “serve as polling stations during elections, shelters during hurricanes, and centers for emergency response during public health crises” (Rubiano Yedidia, 2020). School closures not only made access to education more difficult, but also cut the deep historical roots that communities have built around them.

The closure of public schools led to the disruption of various aspects of students’ and teachers’ lives, including access to the school and academic performance. School closures limited students’ ability to walk to school. One nine-year-old girl who receives special education commented that the closing of her school, Escuela Elemental John F. Kennedy, would leave the next closest available school 30 minutes

away (O’Leary, 2018). In a study by Rodriguez (2015), about 200 elementary students in San Juan no longer lived within a quarter mile of a nearby public school after closures. As a result, closed schools inconvenienced families with longer commutes to fulfill their children's education.

The major inconvenience of travel for students was not the only consequence. Some of the remaining open schools faced overcrowding. Workspaces and school supplies were insufficient for these “receiver schools”. Some schools had to request FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) trailers to facilitate the overcrowding of students (Martinez, 2018) manifesting those schools experiences difficulties adjusting to the larger student populations.

Closed schools also negatively impacted students’ academic performance. Standardized test scores revealed that receiver schools tested worse in nearly every subject (except for mathematics<sup>1</sup>) than schools that did not receive new students (Rivera Rivera, 2022). This study showed that closed schools undermined students’ academic performance. Lacking resources and having to adjust to a new school environment negatively impacted students’ education.

Teachers faced difficulties as well, as closed schools caused teachers to switch subjects and locations. According to one teacher, she had been teaching art at the same school for 13 years and was

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<sup>1</sup> Students were already falling behind their counterparts prior to moving schools. Afterwards, the students performed at a consistent low level for a year, then

going to be placed miles away as a kindergarten teacher (Martinez, 2018). In correlation to public school closings, budget cuts to the schools also meant cuts to the teachers’ salaries. Robles (2017) reported that “the government presented a fiscal plan that would freeze teacher salaries until 2021” where they were already frozen at \$21,000 since 2008. It is for this reason that teachers have better opportunities in the mainland United States. Instead of experiencing a freeze in salary, bilingual teachers can double their salary if willing to relocate to the mainland, resulting in a shortage of teachers (Lake, 2019).

Meanwhile, charter schools presented a different mosaic of challenges for the students, families, and teachers of Puerto Rico. Acevedo (2018) described how “charter schools receive public and private funds in order to operate, and their financial and operational models have been the center of many heated debates for decades.” Public schools are struggling with the new implementation of charter schools because the government is pulling from public funds for their creation. Additionally, charter schools are taking jobs and opportunities away from teachers. Teachers who are a part of the Department of Education of Puerto Rico were supposedly guaranteed to be hired (Acevedo, 2018). However, charter schools failed to fulfill this promise, which spurred protests from Puerto Rican teachers. Rafael Feliciano Hernández, the former president of the Puerto Rican

improved significantly two or three years after the displacement (Rivera Rivera, 2022).

Federation of Teachers, said “they wanted to close the schools for four months then to reopen them as charters... We fought. We joined forces with the community” (Baker, 2018). Although the governor at the time, Governor Rosselló, offered vouchers to cover half the cost of tuition for families, those in poverty still had difficulty paying for and attending these schools (Baker, 2018). As a result, the vouchers only benefited wealthier families.

However, charter schools present some potential opportunities for the students attending them. There are currently four charter schools open in Puerto Rico serving a total of 568 students (Public School Review, 2023). These charter schools are in Guaynabo, Dorado, Vega Baja, and Carolina. Charter schools are giving many children opportunities to learn and prosper. Additionally, some communities benefited from charter schools putting on events such as unemployment training, workshops, and support for basic job skills to help adults find employment (Charter School Capital, 2022). Nevertheless, the closing of public schools has teachers, students, and the surrounding communities concerned with the future of education in Puerto Rico.

### 2.3: Repurposing School Efforts in Puerto Rico

Each community felt the absence of its school, which played an important role in the residents’ lives. There are many different opinions on what should be done to abandoned schools in Puerto Rico.

Some believe it would be beneficial to keep them as a school or for educational purposes, while others think it would be beneficial for their municipality to remodel them entirely, creating more hotels, apartments, and shopping centers. Community groups are trying to obtain closed schools and repurpose them into community centers, but they have encountered many challenges along the way.

#### *2.3.1: Current State of Abandoned Schools in Puerto Rico*

Less than half of Puerto Rico’s closed schools are being repurposed into something else, and most of the remaining schools are still in disuse. Vacant schools are rundown and have potential risks such as construction debris, living animals, and human waste (see Figure 6). Some of the schools are painted with graffiti, some have squatters, and a few even have evidence of being used for drug purposes (Rubiano Yedida, 2020).

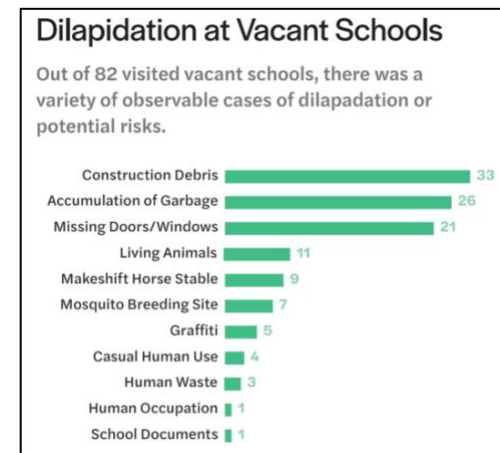


Figure 6: This bar chart shows the observable cases of dilapidation or potential risks in vacant Puerto Rico (Moore & Yedidia, 2019)

While some of the schools have been purchased or rented, many are unused and vandalized. Leaving these schools in dilapidated conditions could indirectly encourage illicit behavior throughout the community. If people see a rundown school (see figure 8), they are more likely to have biased opinions about the atmosphere of the community. This idea is based on the broken windows theory, which states that visible signs of disorder like graffiti (see figure 7), drug use, and rundown buildings can lead to the idea that a neighborhood is not cared for. Subsequently, this creates an environment that deems it more “acceptable” to commit more serious crimes (Kelling & Wilson, 1982).



Figure 7: Graffiti and debris at Escuela Emiliano Figueroa Torres, now being used by the organization PAYE.



Figure 8: A building on the grounds of La Conde Community Center before being renovated into a usable space.

With so many school closures, various organizations are trying to obtain and repurpose vacant school buildings. The process for obtaining a school through the Evaluation and Disposal of Real Estate Assets Committee (CEBDI, in Spanish) is long and confusing for many applicants. They must send in an application that the CEBDI reviews and either accepts or denies based on certain criteria. The application must show that the school will be used for economic or community development projects (Exec. Order No. 2017-032). This is more difficult for smaller organizations because they compete with larger groups that have more resources. Although the government committee claimed to be transparent about who would get the closed school buildings, this was not the case. Many applicants believed a school would go to them, only to find out that it was instead sold to another group, usually one with plans to transform it for commercial

use. For example, Tomas Carrion Maduro School in San Juan was promised to educator Joan Agosto who wanted to use it to expand EduSapiens, her non-profit organization. However, the school was bought by the Caribbean Cinemas chain (Ramos, 2020).

Unfortunately, this caused challenges for smaller organizations that want to rescue the school for their community.

### *2.3.2: Government Position on the Schools*

On May 9, 2017, Ricardo Rosselló, the Governor of Puerto Rico at the time, signed an executive order that outlined a new way to address ownership of abandoned property appointing a committee chaired by the Fiscal Agency and Financial Advisory Authority (AAFAF, in Spanish) responsible for the distribution of the schools to buyers. There was a subcommittee, consisting of officials from the following groups: the Department of Education, the Department of Transportation and Public Works, the Public Buildings Authority, the Office of Socioeconomic Development, the Infrastructure Advisor to the Governor's Office, and another appointed by the Governor (Executive Order No. 2017-032). The responsibilities of the group included receiving proposals from organizations that wants to purchase a school, establishing a priority system for the transfer of the properties, evaluating each proposal to make sure it coincided with the policy they put in place and maintaining an efficient and effective procedure. Rosello also stated the vision they had for the closed

schools, "...it is encouraged that those real estate properties that are currently in total disuse, can be dedicated to activities for the common welfare..." (Exec. Order No. 2017-032). Some examples include care centers for the homeless, shelters for abandoned animals, treatment centers for drug addicts, therapy and/or tutoring workshops, and shelters for those suffering from abuse and/or domestic violence. Although there seemed to be a plan for these abandoned schools, the government offered little to no help to these organizations attempting to repurpose schools, leaving them to do all the work as volunteers and with non-governmental funding sources.

### *2.3.3: The Roles and Challenges of Community Centers*

The repurposing of closed schools into community projects is a growing movement across Puerto Rico. Despite what the government planned for the schools, many organizations have been "rescuing" schools to be used as a resource for the community. The communities are empowered when a piece of their culture and history is restored since community projects provide a central hub for culture, resources, and community engagement. Community centers are critical as a centralized space for members to receive support.

Despite the impressive efforts of these community groups, they face many challenges while repurposing the schools. Rescued school organizations encounter political problems, a lack of funding, and a lack of resources. Organizations obtaining ownership of the closed



school buildings face a long, arduous process that includes negotiating with the Puerto Rican or municipality government. A lack of funding and resources also causes roadblocks. Smaller organizations often must work harder to rescue schools than larger, more supported organizations. The government has granted larger companies some of the schools believing it would be more beneficial for the community. A network of rescued school projects would open opportunities to combat the challenges these rescued schools face. With these researched challenges in mind, we established objectives and methods with the goal of facilitating a solidarity-based network of rescued school projects in Puerto Rico.

### 3: Methods

Our project had two main goals. The first was to identify, map, and collect information regarding the motivations and services of rescued school projects throughout Puerto Rico. The second was to explore and support a network of rescued school projects. From these goals, we established three main objectives (see Figure 9):

1. Identify, collect, and summarize information on repurposed schools.
2. Explore the common challenges rescued schools face as well as the desires and hesitations of forming a network.
3. Build preliminary infrastructure for a sustainable network of rescued school communities.

#### 3.1: Identify and Collect Summary Information on Repurposed Schools

We created a visual map to display where the repurposed schools are, interviewed them to learn more about their organization, and explored how a rescued school network would benefit them. Since 2007, there have been 673 school closures in Puerto Rico (Abizeid, 2022) and many are now being repurposed. Our first objective was to identify closed schools that were being repurposed to provide a scope of the phenomena. To identify repurposed school projects, we searched online, contacted municipalities, narrowed down a list of

closed and sold school buildings from the Real Estate Disposition Evaluation Committee, and used the snowball sampling method.

Through Google searches, we gathered initial information on schools that have been repurposed. Some useful online resources were blog posts, newspaper articles, websites, and social media pages (such as Facebook) that gave us information on these projects. We used keywords in English and Spanish such as “community centers” (el centro comunitario), “rescued schools” (escuelas rescatadas), and “closed schools”, (escuelas cerradas) to guide us in finding repurposing efforts.

Our second method involved contacting municipal government offices in Puerto Rico to find information on repurposed school efforts. We navigated the pr.gov directories and made a spreadsheet of all 78 municipalities with their phone numbers. We called each municipal government office to ask if they were aware of any repurposed school projects within their area. We were able to speak with 39 of the 78 municipalities in Puerto Rico. We recorded their responses including any new contact information given, including email suggestions and phone numbers.



Our third method involved contacting the Department of Education to acquire information on closed schools and their current ownership. They gave us a list of closed schools and who the

ownership was transferred to. This helped us identify a few closed schools that were bought by non-profit organizations, but most were

owned by the Departamento de Transportación y Obras Públicas (Department of Transportation and Public Works).

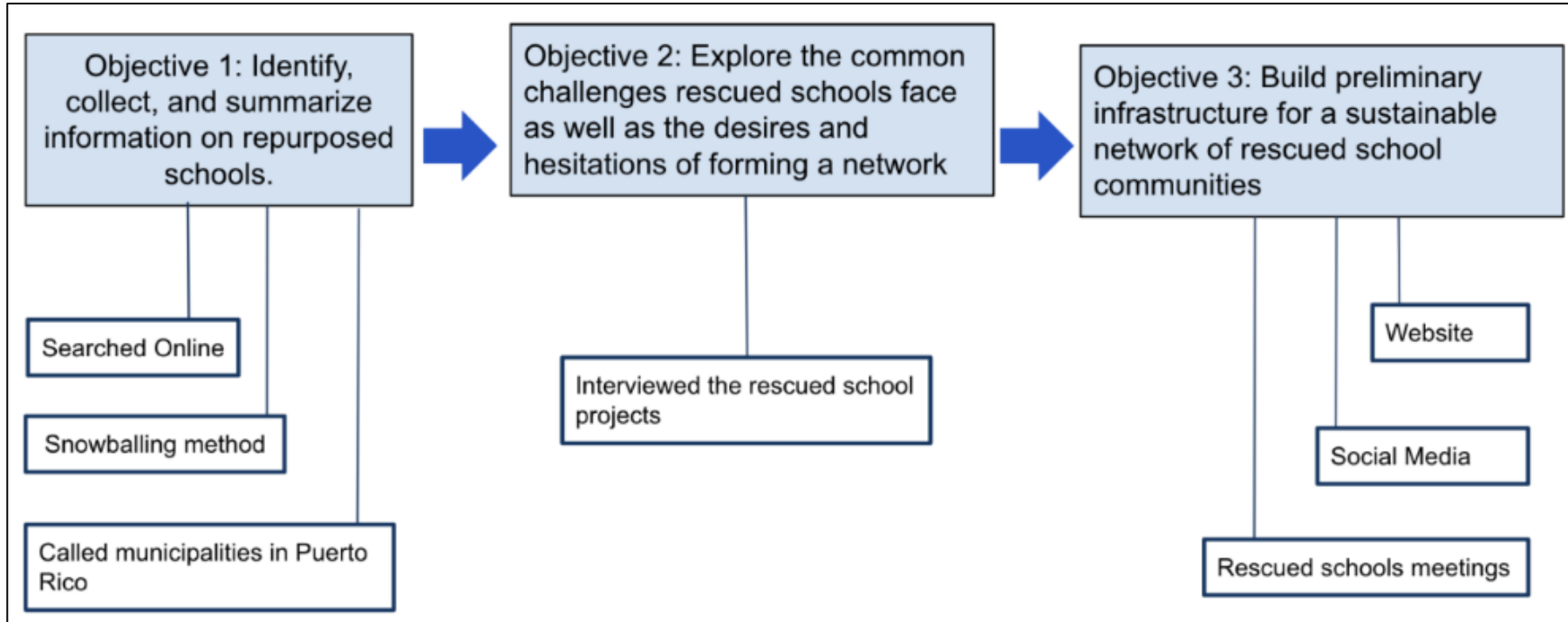
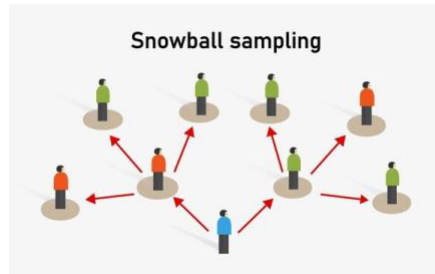


Figure 9: Flow chart of the team's objectives and methods to show how they correlate to each other.

We also emailed the Real Estate Evaluation and Disposition Committee, and a new list was given to us which had 303 closed schools as of 2022, with 131 of them having been either purchased or rented by a new entity.

In addition to the previous methods, we also employed a snowball method to generate additional leads by asking each repurposed school



project we interviewed if they knew of other projects. This method allowed us to identify projects that did not appear through our other methods. Identified repurposed school projects were organized in a spreadsheet (see Appendix B) with the following information:

- The name of the closed school
- The name of the repurposed school project
- A brief description of the repurposed school project (including who it serves, the programs and services it provides, and a brief description of the repurposed school project)
- The website link of the repurposed school project.
- Available contact information for the organization, including phone number, email, and Facebook page
- The address and GPS coordinates of the repurposed school.

There were some challenges and limitations surrounding the identification and compilation of repurposed schools. We were unable

to speak with a representative from every municipality, so we may have missed some projects within those municipalities. Also, the list given to us by the Real Estate Evaluation and Disposition Committee (AAFAF) indicated some schools were taken over by the municipality, but we are unsure what they are being used for. There also may be repurposed school projects that have yet to secure their school which was not found by our team.

There were a few limitations regarding the information we identified from the repurposed schools. Not every project had a website - some only had a Facebook page. Some of those that just had a Facebook page did not respond to our outreach, so we had little to no information recorded for them. Some projects also did not have a central leader to contact, rather just an email corresponding with the organization which made it difficult to contact them. In the master spreadsheet, we kept track of as much information as we could find but were unable to identify everything about each repurposed school effort.

### 3.2: Interviewing Rescued School Projects

After identifying repurposing efforts, our team narrowed our scope to the projects that were being used specifically for community needs (rescued school projects). To start the initial infrastructure for a network, we explored what value a rescued school network would have and whether it is something organizations would be interested in.

To answer these questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the leadership members for ten rescued school projects (see Figures 12&14). The interview questions explored three themes: 1) background information, 2) organizational goals and challenges, and 3) network questions (see Appendix A). Each interview with the rescued school project lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. Out of the ten projects we interviewed (see Table 1), five were conducted over the phone or on zoom and the other five were conducted in person.

*Table 1: Name, location, and description of the schools that were interviewed during our project.*

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Description</b>
Fe Que Transforma	Vieques	Resilience Center
La Conde	Carolina	Community Center
Id Shaliah	Canóvanas	Resilience Center
PAYE	Piñones	Community Center
LTRG	Juncos	Resilience Center
MAMEY Community Center	Guaynabo	Community Center
La Coordinadora Paz para la Mujer	Adjuntas	Women-Self Defense Coalition
Sociedad Sembry Planet	Barceloneta	Environmental Center
Fundación Bucarabón	Maricao	Community Center
Save a Sato	San Juan	Animal Shelter

We took notes for all 10 of our interviews and recorded two of the interviews. We had two designated note-takers and combined the

notes taken into a single document. We organized the data by identifying the keywords and phrases by coding the data into different categories that related to our interview questions. These categories included the motivations, services that the schools provide, challenges, and how they might benefit from a network. These ideas contributed to our goal of creating a preliminary infrastructure for a network.

The main limitation we encountered during our interviews was a language barrier which made it difficult for us to communicate without a translator. We had no group members that were fluent in Spanish (the primary language of the interviewed organizations). While using a translator was helpful, some information could have been missed through the translation.

### 3.3: Build Preliminary Infrastructure for a Sustainable Network of Rescued School Communities

While interviewing the rescued schools gave us insight into the goals, challenges, and preferred forms of communication, there was still a lack of a formally structured network available for those who desired. Using this insight from the interviews and considering organizations' opinions and concerns regarding the network, our group began building the initial infrastructure.

The first step was putting together a focus group of rescued school project organizations (see Figure 10). The organizations were invited to share their thoughts at a preliminary meeting on February 6,

2023. We hosted a meeting with the director (Mariana Reyes), the Vice President (Magali Carrasquillo), the treasurer, and other board members of La Goyco, Luis Figueroa from MAMEY Community Center, Javier Valedon and another volunteer from ID Shaliah, along with the advisors to our project (John Michael Davis and Alizé Carrère). It was a one-hour meeting where the goal was to establish the name of the network and key aspects that each group wanted to see out of the network. Each project shared their stories, what they are doing, and what challenges they face. It also served as a social event for the different organizations to get to know each other.



*Figure 10:* The first preliminary meeting hosted with rescued school projects.

By communicating with different rescued school project groups and asking for input on a network, we learned that many saw a social media page and a website as the best way to begin. A Facebook group that enables rescued school projects to spread information and stay in touch with others was created for these organizations. The

groups can use the page to coordinate future meetings as well as keep each other updated on challenges and successes of their projects. We also created a website which provided contact information for the groups involved in the network (see Appendix C). This provides the opportunity for people to get information about the rescued school network and learn more about individual projects.

We then held a second focus group (see Figure 11) on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023. During this one-hour meeting, we had the goal of presenting our findings and getting feedback on the preliminary network. The attendees were the representatives from La Goyco, Luis from MAMEY Community Center, Ivelisse Esquilin from LTRG, as well as our advisor John-Michael Davis. We presented our findings and the deliverables (maps and website) to receive suggestions on what the rescued schools thought we should provide and what purpose the social media platforms would serve. We continued to adapt the deliverables accordingly.



*Figure 11:* The second meeting held with rescued school projects.

There were limitations while achieving this objective. One limitation was our lack of experience with utilizing design software to create websites. Another limitation was facilitating the longevity of this network, as we have yet to determine who will oversee it. Whether this is the job for a future project group from WPI or an existing rescued school project, future administration is vital in sustaining the network. We created a handout to be given to future teams including the usernames, passwords, and where to find the mapping material to ensure the social media of the network can grow from the foundation we created.



*Figure 12: Conducting interviews at La Conde*



*Figure 13: Our group helping LTRG carry boxes out to be distributed to the community.*



*Figure 14: Mapenzi Nonó explaining the plans to advance the infrastructure at La Conde.*

## 4: Findings

This section describes our findings on repurposed school projects in Puerto Rico. We begin with a description of repurposed schools, segmented into three categories. We then share the motivations of the rescued school projects, the services they provide, and the challenges they face. Finally, we discuss the key considerations of the network of rescued schools and how they add value to these projects.

### 4.1: Identified Repurposed Schools

Of the 673 closed schools, we identified 161 that have been obtained by a company, non-profit organization, or the municipal government. 64 of the closed schools were given to municipalities by El Departamento de Transportación y Obras Públicas (DTOP). It was not stated what plans the municipal governments have for these schools. This was an important finding because it meant there was potential for the schools to be given back to the community and be used for purposes that would benefit them. 64 of the 161 schools were repurposed for uses other than non-profit community organizations. Of those 64, 39 were repurposed for educational purposes, 15 became businesses, 5 were transformed into churches, 1 is privately owned, 2 were repurposed for a niche audience: 1 baseball organization and 1 animal shelter. The remaining 35 repurposed schools were owned or leased to nonprofit organizations that had a common mission of

benefiting the community, qualifying them as rescued school projects. To further categorize these, we separated them into three more categories based on the services that they provide for the community. 24 are community centers, 6 are resilience centers, and 5 provide specific services for the community. These are the primary uses of the facilities, but the categorization is based on what appeared to be the focus or primary use.

To visualize the repurposed school efforts around Puerto Rico, we created two maps: (1) a static map with all the repurposed school projects (see Figure 15) and (2) an interactive map that shows only rescued schools (see Figure 16).

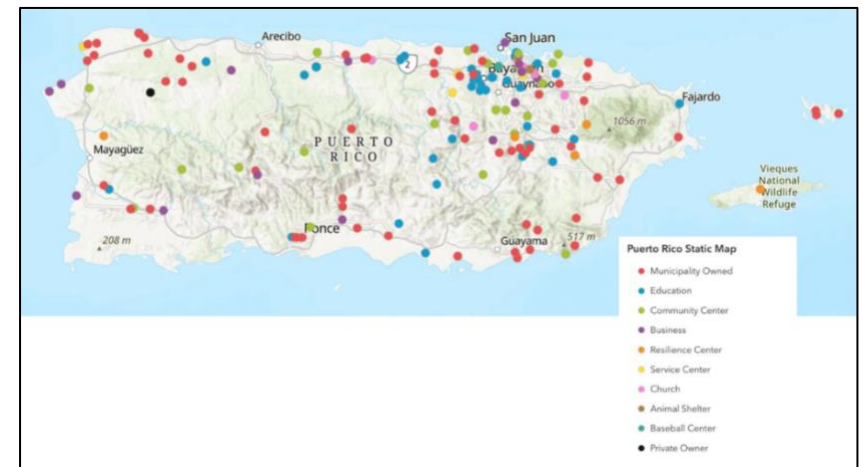


Figure 15: A map of 161 repurposed schools in Puerto Rico.





Figure 16: An interactive map of 35 rescued schools in Puerto Rico.

#### 4.2: Information on Rescued Schools Projects

Interviews with directors of 10 out of 35 of the identified rescued school projects conveyed the variety of motivations behind starting the projects and the programs they offer. These non-profit organizations' goals ranged from offering cultural workshops to saving homeless pets. We identified ways that projects differed based on motivations. This included communities having different needs due to various hardships that they face. We categorized common services of these rescued school projects, as well as identified common challenges that these projects face.

##### *4.2.1: Motivations for Repurposing Schools into Community Centers*

Different hardships faced by communities shaped the programs that the leaders of these rescued school projects decided should be

offered. The location had a significant influence on varying hardships. Communities in the mountains on the west side of the island faced challenges when it came to diverse jobs and trust in other community members. We interviewed two community center projects in this location: Fundación Bucarabón and Coordinadora Paz para la Mujer. Both projects identified one of their focuses as creating job opportunities for the members of the community. Coordinadora Paz para la Mujer has a marketplace that allows women to sell their products. These organizations also spoke about the difficulties they had gaining trust among the community members. Fundación Bucarabón talked about how people were naturally untrusting in the mountains, and this was an aspect of the community he wanted to change. This motivated them to start these projects and work towards a more trusting and united community.

Other community centers in rural areas also had concerns based on location. Luis Figueroa from MAMEY Community Center and Javier Valedon from Id Shaliah were both concerned about how far their community centers are from the nearest hospital. They were concerned about this distance, especially when it came to their elderly population. This motivated them to provide medical services of their own in hopes that they would have the means to save someone's life in a medical emergency. Another group in the mountains that shared this similar concern is the Long-Term Recovery Group (LTRG).

Community centers in more urban locations, such as La Goyco and La

Conde, tended to different community needs when starting their projects. La Conde identified one of the problems in their community as creeping industrialization. La Goyco also spoke about the gentrification that is taking place in their community. Both projects are concerned for the future of their community and want to combat these changes while holding onto their values.

Another reported motivation for starting these projects was a spiritual influence. Javier Valedon started his organization because of a dream he had. His cousin also had a dream where he and Javier were giving people food during the pandemic. Id Shaliah started because Javier interpreted the dream as his calling. Three other organizations mentioned a spiritual aspect of their projects, including the LTRG, Fe Que Transforma, and Sociedad Sembry Planet. Four closed schools were turned into churches. Religious influence emerged as a notable pattern in our conversations with different rescued school projects.

#### *4.2.2: Services Offered in Community Centers*

The common motivations that shaped these rescued school projects similarly shaped the services that they provide. We categorized the common services they offered and grouped them into four themes: (1) spiritual, (2) educational, (3) resilience, and (4) cultural.

**Spiritual:** As many of the community center organizations have a spiritual influence or are faith-based, there are many programs

amongst these repurposing efforts relating to religious teachings. Sociedad Sembry Planet has two main goals, one to promote environmental participation and the other to promote spiritual values for children. They integrate religion into environmental projects and show them how they can live a fulfilling life by caring for others. LTRG has an area designated for prayer and meditation. Fe Que Transforma is a resilience center that works with a church. Spiritual values in these programs were identified as an important aspect of these organizations by their project leaders.

**Educational:** Another word that frequently emerged in interviews with rescued school projects was ‘education’. Many of the rescued school organizations spoke about the importance of education and therefore made educational programs, such as tutoring. La Conde in Carolina held community meetings to make decisions about what programs their center would offer, and the consensus was that educational services were of utmost importance. Similarly, Tanisha Desiree Gaspar Clemente from Piñones Aprende y Emprende (PAYE) (see Figure 17) emphasized the importance of educational workshops and tutoring at her community center in Piñones. Her main goal was to “Develop the educational, social, communal, and professional capacities of children and youth in the long term” (T. Clemente, personal communication, January 16, 2023). These centers shared the similar goal of wanting to help children who lost their schools.



*Figure 17:*The organization Piñones Aprende y Emprende (PAYE).

**Resilience:** Resilience emerged as an important factor in the repurposing efforts of closed schools around Puerto Rico. With the constant threat of natural disasters, it is important for many community centers to have an integrated resilience plan. The LTRG and Id Shaliah provided food to community members in need, particularly around the time of natural disasters (see Figure 13). These centers both have community kitchens, as do La Goyco, PAYE, La Conde, and Fe Que Transforma. Another resilience mechanism that was spoken about was medical services. The LTRG has an infirmary and a radio to contact people across the island in case of emergency. Id Shaliah also offered a health clinic, as well as oxygen tanks for the elderly. Luis Figueroa from MAMEY community center wanted to start a network of medical facilities. This was a common desire among communities in rural areas that did not have convenient or affordable access to medical facilities. Other resilience aspects of these community center projects include power and water. During natural disasters, these two necessities are often challenging to access. Resilience centers like LTRG, Fe Que

Transforma, and Id Shaliah wanted to ensure that people can always get power and water at their resilience centers.

**Cultural:** Retaining cultural aspects is of high importance in two community centers we spoke with because culture influences behavior and results in strong connections among the members of the community. One example of this is La Goyco, which focuses on retaining the cultural aspect of its community as it continuously changes over time. Through art classes, music classes, and jazz performances, La Goyco brings people together to celebrate their culture. La Conde also focused on keeping the cultural aspect of their community alive despite hardships (see Figure 18). They worked to see all opinions and needs of the community to find the best ways for them to work together. They “recollect memories here to create narrative” (M. Nonó, personal communication, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023). Culturally focused community centers were less common compared to the focus areas of other centers we interviewed.



*Figure 18:*A parade for the passing of Tito, a beloved member of the La Goyco community.

Each of these organizations have unique areas of focus, but they are working toward a common goal. Whether it be Coordinadora Paz para la Mujer, whose mission is to protect women from gender-based violence, or PAYE, whose mission is to promote youth community development through educational workshops, these community centers in repurposed schools aspire to bring people together. In so doing, they find power and meaning in numbers. Luis Figueroa of MAMEY Community Center stated his main goal was to “rebuild the sense of unity that has been lost over the years” (L. Figueroa, personal communication, January 25, 2023). These projects all have strong-willed leaders who have faced adversity but who have not let that derail their work. Many closed schools that have since been turned into community centers are part of a coalition that represents the strength and solidarity of communities across Puerto Rico.

#### 4.2.3: Challenges of Rescued Schools

Repurposing a closed school is a massive undertaking. Many of the buildings were left vacant for years with no running water or electricity. Debris from plants and trees accumulated in the buildings, and time and weather eroded some of the architecture (see Figures 19&20). There is a lot of work that goes into renovating the buildings before the facility can be used (see Figures 21&22).

Rescued schools face many challenges that prohibit them from advancing their facilities and fulfilling their goals to serve the community. We identified three key challenges that were most

reported by the rescued school projects: (1) obtaining and maintaining ownership, (2) a lack of volunteers, and (3) barriers to funding.

Hearing common challenges of rescued schools helped us understand how a collective network of rescued school projects might provide resources to address them.



Figure 19 & 20: Cracked ceilings and plant overgrowth at La Goyco

**Obtaining and maintaining ownership:** The first challenge many rescued schools face is obtaining and maintaining ownership of the building. To get control of a closed school, organizations needed to “prove” they will put the school to good use. Fe Que Transforma, a resilience center, had to compete for the bid of the school by creating a plan to show the municipal government they were the right choice. As Luis reinforced, “The government will take the school back if [the organizations] are not actively doing something with the space” (L. Figueroa, personal communication, January 25, 2023). Many organizations were, and in some cases still are, in a constant battle

with the municipal government to obtain and then maintain ownership. This was also an issue for Javier Valedon of Id Shaliah. “The government requests things, then you give them papers, then they need more,” (J. Valedon, personal communication, January 26, 2023). Gaining ownership was a key step to starting his foundation, but the municipality made it difficult to gain permission to use the school facilities. In many cases, once organizations obtained ownership, they continued to negotiate with the government over the rights to the land due to short contracts. La Conde community center had an agreement for 5 years of ownership of the school. They argued about why people needed to pay for a contract for the land when the school was used by the community for generations and continues to serve the community. However, if they want to maintain ownership of the building past their contract, they need to further communicate with the municipality to negotiate a renewal. There is sometimes little motivation to make big renovations to the schools due to the short contract that many of the organizations have with the government. They do not see the benefit in putting money towards something that they won’t have ownership of in a few years.

**Lack of volunteers:** Another reported challenge was a lack of volunteers and community support. Large projects like these require a lot of volunteers to make improvements (see Figures 21&22). MAMEY community center learned this when they had to complete everything themselves. “It is a difficult process, and not a lot of

manpower”, (L. Figueroa, personal communication, January 25, 2023). Luis Figueroa said the community wanted the space but then did not put in the work to help. It was a shared challenge between multiple community centers to get enough volunteers to help repurpose the school. Since La Conde’s school was designated as a landfill after Hurricane Maria, they struggled to get enough people to clean up and get electricity since everything had to be reconstructed. This was a common problem with the schools that were closed or abandoned for so long; the state of the schools deteriorated and required a lot of work to renovate.



*Figure 21 & 22: A member of Sociedad Sembry Planet mowing the lawn after vegetation overgrowth (left); a member of Sociedad Sembry Planet redoing the ceiling (right).*

Fundación Save a Sato, an organization that rescues stray animals, was another example of a repurposed school project that struggled to find the manpower and volunteers willing to help. They even offered to pay people to help as part-time jobs, but they were still unable to get enough staff due to the high physical labor requirements. These rescued schools were struggling to get volunteers and maintain their facilities once they gained control of the land from the government.

**Funding:** The most reported challenge amongst rescued school projects was difficulty finding and securing funding. Projects of this size are costly, and in many cases, the organizations have to do everything on their own. This is unfortunate, as rescued school organizations have ambitious goals and sufficient funding would allow many to complete impactful community projects. Examples were abundant. LTRG said that they have an “economic need to be able to continue expanding the projects”. Tanisha of PAYE’s biggest challenge is financing and integrating the community; funding is needed to add solar panels to transform part of their community center into a resilience hub. Many organizations want to advance their facilities to prepare for natural disasters or establish new programs. Multiple directors expressed their struggle with the same challenge. Javier from Id Shaliah listed many things that could be solved with adequate funding, including buying paint, new doors, concrete blocks to fix rooms, paying for electricity, and getting a license to do carpentry.

In some cases, the municipal government did not provide sufficient support and funding for the projects beyond granting temporary ownership of the school. La Conde is in a difficult situation, as they are on the border of Carolina and San Juan, and neither municipality wanted to take accountability of helping the community project. La Conde turns toward private companies to help support them financially. This is especially difficult for organizations that had to renovate their once-vacant buildings (see Figure 23). MAMEY Community Center was in this same situation. “The government as an entity does not help, it comes from the neighbors, they paint themselves, their own electricity, their own budget, they got the water working themselves to get two bathrooms” (L. Figueroa, personal communication, January 25, 2023). Overall, most community projects reported that they have large goals in mind, but a lack of funding is a roadblock to completing their projects. A network of rescued schools could provide a space for the organizations to share advice and help each other overcome these challenges.



*Figure 23: Sociedad Sembry Planet's vacant facilities before proper maintenance was completed.*

#### 4.3: The Actions and Recommendations of the Network

The two groundbreaking meetings helped kickstart the conversation of what a network between these projects would consist of. The first meeting included representatives from three community center projects: La Goyco, Id Shaliah, and MAMEY. Each group shared their experiences setting up a community center in a closed school, as well as their goals. In the second meeting, members of La Goyco, LTRG, and MAMEY attended. By holding these meetings, we discovered ways a network of rescued schools would help facilitate the challenges.

##### **Goals of the network**

Through the preliminary meetings, we discovered that policy change, funding, and aid in renovations are all important aspects that the organizations want out of a network. Mariana from La Goyco

envisions one of the purposes of the network as having a say in the government and having proper representation regarding closed schools. Some of the immediate goals that were discussed during these meetings were how to obtain the titles of the school, how to secure funding, and effective communication with each other. The services that are needed throughout the organizations require professionals such as electricians, plumbers, or web designers. With the concerns raised during this first meeting, a follow-up meeting was held to discuss how to combat these issues.

In the second preliminary meeting, our team shared our findings and deliverables (website, Facebook, and maps). The maps were of great interest to the organizations because they displayed the location of rescued and repurposed schools, and they revealed potential sites for new rescued school projects. Another outcome from this meeting was creating a plan to aid the MAMEY community center by bringing a team from La Goyco and repairing their facilities. This includes fixing broken windows, recovering the conference room, and converting one of the rooms into a community kitchen. Once the meeting concluded, more members joined the Facebook page, and another meeting was scheduled for the following month. The network is progressing steadily and proceeds to address underlying concerns as they become more apparent.

## Concerns of the network

While a network helps facilitate multiple issues, there are some drawbacks including time concerns, longevity, and the challenges of meeting in person. Our interview with La Conde helped us understand their reservations for creating a network. La Conde voiced concerns about not wanting the network to be a waste of their time. If meetings are held monthly or bi-monthly, the organizations need an optimized action plan of what the rescued schools will do to assist each other. Additionally, traveling proves to be another challenge for some groups, such as LTRG which is a one-hour drive from La Goyco. If organizations are unable to meet consistently in person, virtual meetings can be held. Since not all the views and goals of the organizations align, it is important for them to find common ground between each other, appreciating the things they have in common while accepting each other's differences. Another concern was the longevity of this network. There needs to be someone to maintain the momentum of the network, and it needs to provide real value to the community centers for it to be a success.

From our discussion with rescued schools, there was a consensus that to ensure the longevity of the network there also needs to be a consistent stream of communication through a website and social media platforms. Spreading the word about the network is crucial for its expansion. Utilizing a Facebook page can increase publicity, thus raising awareness of the movement. It will also be

important to have a designated person to coordinate and manage network activities, both to maintain the progress that was made and to look for areas of expansion. Mariana Reyes said if these initial efforts fail it will be difficult to re-start them again later down the line.

## 4.4: Tools for the Network

With the suggestions and information gained from our interviews and the two preliminary rescued school network meetings, our team created several tools to support the network moving forward. The purpose of tools like the website, Facebook group, and interactive map are all aimed to propel this network forward and assist schools with baseline information and communication.

The first tool is a formal website for the network (see Appendix C). The website consists of a homepage, a community projects tab, an about us tab, contact tab. The homepage includes the maps of the repurposed schools for people to understand the scope of the phenomena. It also presents a video of the leaders of rescued schools talking about their projects and a background of the closed school crisis in Puerto Rico. The community projects tab lists the various organizations we interviewed and gives an overview of them. It also contains links that direct users to the organizations' websites or Facebook pages. The about us tab gives a summary of this project and our team. The last page contains contact information for the email and Facebook page associated with the network.



We also created a Facebook group for the network. While the information presented on the website is more formal, the Facebook group is for informal communication. It is a place where anyone can join and ask or answer questions. Although in-person meetings are an excellent way to keep everyone connected, they require a lot of time and energy and should be counted on as more specialized, structured meetings from time to time. For all other communication exchanges, a Facebook group is a great way to stay in touch and share ideas and events.

The last tool we created was an interactive map (see Figure 16 above). The map shows where every rescued school project we identified is located, and what they are being used for. The map is displayed on the website as a guide to see where these projects are and to learn more about them. When the pinpoint is clicked, the organization name, address, category, and a brief description of the rescued school is presented. This interactive map is a tool that should be updated to help portray the spread of these organizations and what their purpose is. We created these tools to assist in the longevity of the network.

## **5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

In the wake of hundreds of school closures, community groups and other private owners have repurposed these school facilities to revive an aspect of the community that was lost when their schools

closed. We identified 161 schools whose ownership was transferred after closing. There were 35 rescued school projects, and the leaders of the community projects determined which services were needed through various forms of community consultations. Even though infrastructure was established, the directors continued to collect feedback from the community about which services they would like to see in the facilities. To better understand these rescued school projects, we conducted interviews and hosted two preliminary meetings. The leaders of the projects discussed their challenges as well as the potential value the network has. After positive responses from the interviews and successful meetings, we created a website and a Facebook page to provide a forum for communication between the rescued schools.

In the future, we hope that rescued school projects not only connect with one another, but that publicity of the movement continues to grow. The recommendations below work to combat reservations reported from interviewed rescued school project organizations including the network being too time consuming as well as a lack of trust in the other organizations in the network. By consistently communicating and getting to know other organizations, trust will be built. Since many of the organizations are busy, social media is an efficient way to communicate without being too time consuming.

**Recommendations on expanding and supporting the network:**

- Continue to use social media to connect with more organizations.
- Update the website and social media with information regarding events being held, challenges and successes of organizations, new projects that are being started, etc.
- Reach out and visit more rescued school projects and have a team present the existing network.
- Schedule a collaborative event and it be sponsored by multiple community centers to raise publicity and get other schools involved.

**Recommendations on future research to better understand and support the organizations:**

- Research the public policy behind the decision-making process for determining what happens with the closed schools.
- Research grants and different financial resources to assist communities with their projects.

We encountered limitations with our project. While we managed to compile a list of all the repurposed schools, the list does not include any projects without a digital footprint. Also, we were unsuccessful in building a relationship with some of the rescued school organizations. Another limitation came from a language barrier. While calling municipalities, the language barrier made it difficult to exhaust this method to its maximum capacity.

*“We want to have a seat at the table. To have a say in the government, what happens to closed schools and how funding is distributed amongst them.”*

- Mariana Reyes of Taller Comunidad La Goyco

While the future of the network is yet to be discovered and a line of communication takes a long time to fully develop, it is important to envision the value of the network at its full potential. One important aspect of this network is policy change. Mariana Reyes from Taller Comunidad La Goyco spoke on the importance of having an alliance of these rescued school projects. This way rescued school organizations have power in numbers and have a voice in conversations regarding closed schools with the government. Not only will they be there to help support each other, but these organizations can work to fight the policy and work towards lowering barriers for ownership of projects that benefit society. The organizations provide many services that are beneficial for the community that are free of price, yet still are not getting support from the government. The government should be working for the people instead of turning their back on these projects when it comes to much needed funding and granting ownership. Also, if another round of closures were to take place, the alliance of organizations could fight so the decision-making process in closing these schools would not be fraught. This movement represents a group of people that face hardships and continuously persevere to reach the unique goal of their inspiring projects.

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## **Appendix A: Informed Consent & Interview Questions in English & Spanish**

Our names are Madison Brown, Jocelyn Bourgoïn, Evelyn Kellum, Francis Polito, and Jacob Abrogar. We are a group of third year students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute. We are completing a project on creating a network of rescued schools in Puerto Rico. We have been researching the abandoned school crisis in Puerto Rico, the impact that it has on communities, repurposing efforts and rescued school projects in Puerto Rico. We are working with Taller Comunidad La Goyco, a rescued school based out of San Juan. We are hoping this project will not only benefit them, but other rescued school projects as well.

With the information you choose to share, we will record the information and consider your recommendations and preferences when creating the network or establishing guidelines for them. We will be comparing the answers from other participants and identifying key words and common, unifying themes from the responses.

Some of the questions we are asking may be a sensitive topic. We are looking further into why the schools were closed, and we understand that this might be hard for you to talk about. With all of this considered, we wanted to make sure you were aware that participating in this is voluntary, and at any point if you would like to withdraw from communicating with us, you are more than welcome to.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to respond to this email or any of our other contact information. Our group email alias is [PR23schools@wpi.edu](mailto:PR23schools@wpi.edu). The email information for our university is [irb@wpi.edu](mailto:irb@wpi.edu).

### Introduction and Motivation Questions

1. Can you give us an overview of your organization?
2. In your opinion, what are the milestones of developing a rescued school project?
  - a. What stage in the development process would you consider your project to be at?
3. Did your organization begin prior to obtaining the school or did obtaining the closed school ignite the existence of the organization?
4. What are the main goals and community values of your organization and how does the closed school building that you are rescuing fit into your organizational goals?
5. How did this organization decide what services, events, and programs take place in this building? What are these services that you provide for the community?
  - a. Was there a systematic discussion of community needs that the services provided were based on?
6. What type of support have you gotten in the past (whether this is monetary support or nonmonetary support)? (e.g., help from volunteers, government branches, municipalities, private businesses, etc.)

### Network-Specific Questions

1. What challenges have you had in the process of repurposing the closed school?

- Do you think collaborating with other rescued school projects would help fix these issues? How and why?

Here the team should give a brief overview of the network: It is a draft idea, and we are working with Mariana to establish what different organizations would want out of this network and how these established aspects of a network would be beneficial.

2. Are you interested in participating in a rescued school network?
3. Would you be interested in a preliminary meeting with a group of other organizations on February 27<sup>th</sup> at 2 pm
4. Can you envision ways you might want to collaborate with other projects like yours and any ideas you have for the collective network?

#### Concluding questions

1. Do you know of repurposing efforts in other closed school buildings?
2. What does your community center mean to you?
3. Is there any other key information about your rescued school project that has not yet been covered?

#### Preguntas de introducción y motivación

1. ¿Puede darnos una visión general de su organización?
2. En su opinión, ¿cuáles son los hitos del desarrollo de un proyecto escolar rescatado?
  - a. ¿En qué etapa del proceso de desarrollo considerarías que se encuentra tu proyecto?
3. ¿Su organización comenzó antes de obtener la escuela o la obtención de la escuela cerrada encendió la existencia de la organización?
4. ¿Cuáles son los principales objetivos y valores comunitarios de su organización y cómo encaja el edificio de la escuela cerrada que está rescatando en los objetivos de su organización?
5. ¿Cómo decidió esta organización qué servicios, eventos y programas se llevan a cabo en este edificio? ¿Cuáles son estos servicios que usted proporciona a la comunidad?
  - a. ¿Hubo una discusión sistemática de las necesidades de la comunidad en las que se basaron los servicios prestados?
6. ¿Qué tipo de apoyo ha recibido en el pasado (ya sea apoyo monetario o no monetario)? (Ayuda de voluntarios, ramas gubernamentales, municipio, empresas privadas, etc.)

#### Preguntas específicas de la red

1. ¿Qué desafíos ha tenido en el proceso de reutilización de la escuela cerrada?



- a. ¿Crees que colaborar con otros proyectos escolares rescatados ayudaría a solucionar estos problemas? ¿Cómo y por qué?
2. ¿Está interesado en participar en una red escolar rescatada?
  - a. ¿Está interesado en participar en una red escolar rescatada?
3. ¿Puedes imaginar formas en que quieras colaborar con otros proyectos como el tuyo y cualquier idea que tengas para la red colectiva?

Las preguntas finales

1. ¿Sabe de los esfuerzos de reutilización en otros edificios escolares cerrados?
2. ¿Qué significa su centro comunitario para usted?
3. ¿Hay alguna otra información clave de su proyecto escolar rescatado que aún no se haya cubierto?



A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	organization	school									
2	Taller comunitario La Goyco	1783 C. Liza, San Juan, 00911	18.45202201	-66.05970084							
3	Acción Social de Puerto Rico, Inc.	13 A. Rafael Carden, Caguas, 00725	18.23271755	-66.03069659							
4	Acción Social de Puerto Rico, Inc.	8 C/E Estima, Ponce, 00716	18.02810202	-66.38784113	Ofrecen muchos programas para mejorar su comunidad, como 45.98932473 Ofrecen muchos programas para mejorar su comunidad, como 45.98932473 Ofrecen muchos programas para mejorar su comunidad, como						
5	Acción Social de Puerto Rico, Inc.	URJ Jardines de Courty Club Calle 17 Final Carolina, PR	18.42468111	-66.06949639							
6	Acción Social Luterana Sin Fronteras, Inc	Escuela Elemental Moreno Abad, 4688-0918, San Juan, Guaynabo 00926	18.32291914	-66.06949639							
7	CAM Las Carlinas	123 C/E Hormigas, Caguas, 00722	18.26142416	-66.06949639							
8	Caras con Causa	Caras 9433 PR, Caguas, 00963	18.42824115	-66.13803336							
9	Caras Juan Pablo II	Car 348 Km 8.2, 00988, San German	18.08333338	-66.07170112							
10	Centro de Bendición	PO Box 30903, San Juan, Puerto Rico	18.40430307	-66.01173021							
11	Centro de Desarrollo & Servicio Comunitario	Escuela Manuel Aguayo Letran, Carolina 00729, Puerto Rico	18.26198021	-66.08028663							
12	Centro para la Reconstrucción de Habitat	220 Calle Manuel Domínguez Unit #844, San Juan, PR 00918	18.43010949	-66.08182872							
13	Coordinadora Paz para la Mujer	PR 135 km 13.1, San Ysidoro, Carolina	18.42491684	-66.05500189							
14	Corazon Azul	CO3P-1966, Camélandia, Toa Baja 00949	18.43005965	-66.21173713							
15	Dynamic Learning Center - Proyecto CASA	Calle Rodiles #42, San Juan, Puerto Rico	18.46113365	-66.04841222							
16	Eco Recursos Comunitarios, Inc.	35 C. Georgetti, Caguas, 00725	18.22979789	-66.02324022							
17	Fa Que Transforma, Inc.	Barrio Pina Sector Los Chicos, Vieques PR, 00785	18.12844238	-66.44424163							
18	Fundación Buarabon	805 2do 1000 PR, Maricao, 00968	18.17622234	-66.81401064							
19	Guardianes Unidos por Patrimonio	Barrio Guadalupe Camerota #3 KM 112.8 Pailas, Puerto Rico 00723	17.97566118	-66.93920414							
20	Hogar de Ayuda el Refugio, Inc.	C. Magaña, Caguas, 00963	18.10372601	-66.14821154							
21	Hogar Práctico la Victoria, Inc.	IGOPF-569F, Toa Alta 00953	18.35897355	-66.22697988							
22	La Conde	Camélandia, San Antonio Sant Just Cam. 848 Km 2.4 Carolina, PR 00916a	18.38112591	-66.09830327							
23	La Fundación Casa de Salud Ven-Rose, Inc.	Jajaja	18.21877781	-66.02324018							
24	LTRK OF PR GRALP PRV CENTRO RESILIE	630M JHG, PR-9034, Juncos, 00777	18.20949172	-66.91580656							
25	Manny Community Center	HC 4 819 Barrio Maná y 1, Guaynabo, 00971	18.31910188	-66.11882074							
26	Musical Aid Disaster Relief	123 C/E Hormiga, Caguas, 00722	18.25245607	-66.06840439							
27	MARES	2633-7071 Pk Carlas, Toa Alta, 00963	18.45025761	-66.18736839							
28	PAVE	PRV-187, Carolina, Liza, 00943	18.45032213	-66.38449028							
29	Productora Angeles Del Fin, Inc.	San Ismael	18.22027474	-66.03319194							
30	Programa de Apoyo y Entace Comunitario	91029-099, Aguas, 00962	18.36914196	-66.27793124							
31	Programa del Adolescente de Naranjo, Inc.	Escuela Felisa Sánchez Cruzado, 7990-298F, PR-811, Conzatl, Naranjo 00783	18.28212678	-66.14816112							
32	Proyecto Alegre, Inc.	Car. 435 km 13o 3to, Ocaso, Alamo, PR	18.30334433	-66.0389884							
33	Puerto Rico Service Center	[Car. 435 km 13o 3to, Ocaso, Alamo, PR	18.29616999	-66.11224566							
34	Sociedad Sarmby Planet	Camélandia 682 Km 3 Hrs 4 Barro, Camélandia, Baniolares, 00817	18.45527327	-66.57017647							
35	Superheroes Foundation	El. Maricao, Calle Sevilla #66, Aguadilla	18.48989278	-67.16475446							
36	Asociación de Residentes Camino Pagan Inc	56124/FK, PR 131, Anjuncos, 00931	18.19042842	-66.98731819	The Camino Pagan Residents Association, Inc. is a non profit						

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	organization	address	school	use	profession						
2	Professional Career Training - Proyecto CASA	45 C/1 Fa. Caguas, 00727	BARBON BRIGUERAS	education center	private	Service					
3	Programa Educativo ALZANCE - Proyecto CASA	012-022 Callejón Sánchez, San SOFIA REJACH		education program	private	Service					
4	National Talent Academy - Proyecto CASA	BWV-C189, C/ Colectora Central, Victor Rojas B		middle and high school	private	Service					
5	Escuela Especializada St Barro Sabana Hoyos	CARR. 639 Km 4 KM 1, RD, SABANA FELIX ROSARIO RD5		private school	school	Service					
6	Centro de Estudio Casita Maria, Inc	Calle Ramón Flores #7, Abolombó, F Llanos Ardor		private education service	school	Service					
7	Escuela Bilingüe Hostos	Camélandia 684 km 0 1, Barceloneta, Jose A. Cortes Rosario		private school?	school	Service					
8	Red por los Derechos de la niñez y la juventud	83X4-HM, PR 181, Juncos, 00777,Agustín Duhalde				Service					
9	Bayamon Christian Academy	Herminia Davis, Calle C Esq. Carl Rafael Martínez Nadal				Service					
10	Centro Pre-Escolar Y Estudios Complementarios NM	Ave. Lomas Verdes 3G-7, Bayamo, Josefina Barroel				Service					
11	Centro de Evaluación e Intervención Paises	Ave. Rafael Cordero Final Esquina Nereida Alicia Cruz				Service					
12	Cagua Learning Academy, Inc.	Urb. Villa del Rey II Calle				Service					
13	Eco Recursos Comunitarios, Inc.	Poncequina esquina Kingston, Caguas PR 00725 Caguas, Puerto Rico	John F. Kennedy	private school?	school	Service					
14	Emmanuel Technological College Inc.	35 C. Georgetti, Caguas, 00725,Jose de Diego		community center??	school	Service					
15	Foundation Christian Bilingual School	Bo. Ana Honda Carr. 498, Camuy, Jose M. Hernández		college??	school	Service					
16	The New York Founding in Puerto Rico	Calle Capella # 11, Los Angeles, C. Julia De Burgos		private school?	school	Service					
17	Las Organizaciones Voluntarias Puertorriqueñas Activa en PA	Rosendo Malienzo Cebrin C		early education center	Service	Service					
18	Mi Mascara Academy	Rafael Hernández		early education center	Service	Service					
19	Nuestra Escuela	COGSA-297, C/ San Rafael, Rio Grande, Vieques		school	Service	Service					
20	Ponce Nueva & Education Academy INC	12 Calle Monserrate 00751 Salto Román Baldorioty de Castro		private school	Service	Service					
21	Nova Bilingual School & Sports Academy	Car 348 Km 8.2, 00988, San Germain Barrios Batlleiros B		school	Service	Service					
22	Case Juan Pablo II Inc.	Av. Simón Madera, San Juan, 00916,Las Virtudes		Church	Religious	Religious					
23	Centro Cristiano Fruto de la Vid - San Juan, PR	432 Calle Panagoya, San Juan, Pur'Dr. Isaac González Martínez		church	Religious	Religious					
24	Iglesia Bautista de Quintrana, Inc.	CWNB-292, Av. Guaynabo, San Segundo Ruiz Belvis B		bank	Other	Other					
25	Fundacion CAF	P.O. Dr. Jose Celso Barbosa, San A. Emilio Castellar		pediatric hospital	Other	Other					
26	Fundación Saveria & Bato, Inc.	C/ 40, San Juan, 00924	Balibar Pagan	private school?	Service	Service					
27	Corazon Azul, Inc.	CO3P-1966, Camélandia, Toa Baja, O'Manuel Padilla Davila		center for adults, volunteer	Service	Service					
28	Mi Pequeño Edén, Inc.	CO3P-HMX, Calle 1, Vega Baja, O'Manuel Padilla Davila		montessori school	Service	Service					
29	Other	CM 1 90 Cam. 165 C/da 104, Guaynabo		aparta center	Service	Service					


A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	type of repurposed school	organization	school								
2	community center	Taller comunitario La Goyco	Escuela Dr. Pedro Goyco (San J	18.45202201	-66.05970084						
3	community center	Acción Social de Puerto Rico, Inc.	Miguel F. Chiquete (Caguas)	18.23265766	-66.03064492						
4	community center	Acción Social de Puerto Rico	Las Montañas	18.03893388	-66.58748166						
5	community center	Acción Social de Puerto Rico, Inc.	Mario López Ponce	18.02862396	-66.97429687						
6	community center	Acción Social Luterana Sin Fronteras, Inc	Mariano Abad	18.31700439	-66.09218935						
7	community center	Asociación de Residentes Camino Pagan Inc.	Francisco Páez	18.19962842	-66.78871319						
8	community center	CAM Las Carlinas	Escuela María Montañez Gomez	18.26142416	-66.06949639						
9	community center	Caras con Causa	Puerto Blanco	18.42882415	-66.13683938						
10	community center	Casa Juan Pablo II Inc.	Carman Barrios Battalini B	18.08333336	-67.01720112						
11	community center	Coordinadora Paz para la Mujer, Inc.	José (Juan) Garmeztagal	18.42016954	-66.01862769						
12	community center	Eco Recursos Comunitarios, Inc.	Jose de Diego	18.22979789	-66.03224022						
13	community center	Fundación Buarabon	Sigunda Unidad Francisco Vice	18.17022234	-66.91401064						
14	community center	Guardianes Unidos por Patrimonio	Manuel Manda Mont	17.97354818	-66.93920414						
15	community center	Hogar de Ayuda el Refugio, Inc.	Ramón B. López	18.16379091	-66.14817154						
16	community center	La Conde	Escuela Carlos Conde Marin	18.38112591	-66.98030327						
17	community center	La Fundación Casa de Salud Ven-Rose, Inc.	Angela Cahard	18.21887781	-66.80330476						
18	community center	Manny Community Center	Jose De Diego	18.31910188	-66.11880874						
19	community center	MARES	Lorencia Ramirez de Arellano	18.45825781	-66.18758839						
20	community center	PAVE	Emiliano Figueroa Torres	18.45032263	-66.38449036						
21	community center	Productora Angeles Del Fin, Inc.	Quambrón	18.25027734	-66.03311964						
22	community center	Programa de Apoyo y Entace Comunitario	Maria Luisa Jiménez	18.36914196	-67.14898112						
23	community center	Programa del Adolescente de Naranjo, Inc.	Felisa Sánchez Cruzado	18.28212678	-66.14816112						
24	community center	Proyecto Alegre, Inc.	Arnold Mangual	18.30334433	-66.03898844						
25	community center	Sociedad Sarmby Planet	Escuela Primitivo Marchand	18.45527223	-66.57017647						
26	community center	Centro de Bendición	José Guaberto Padilla	18.40430307	-66.01173693						
27	community center	Corazon Azul	Emmanuel Juan Fontinas	18.46000366	-66.21427973						
28	community center	Dynamic Learning Center - Proyecto CASA	DR JOSE CELSO BARBOSA	18.40113355	-66.04841222						
29	community center	Hogar Posada la Victoria, Inc.	Jose de Diego	18.35897355	-66.22697988						
30	community center	Superheroes Foundation	José Avelino Alvarez	18.46992678	-67.16475446						
31	church	Centro Cristiano Fruto de la Vid - San Juan, PR	Las Virtudes	18.40528815	-66.01923639						
32	church	Iglesia Bautista de Quintrana, Inc.	Dr. Isaac González Martínez	18.42022491	-66.04788115						
33	church	Iglesia de Asistencia de Guaguapán Arriba, Inc.	Mulitas Alvaro	18.27913574320672	-66.1737925417						
34	church	Iglesia de H.O.Y., Inc.	Pedro J. Rodríguez Oquendo	18.35243419	-66.94238463						
35	church	Ministerio Buen Samaritano, Marc Marcos A. Rivera C/rd Centro Comunal Mza Kelly		18.43675415	-66.43185567						

## Appendix C: Website

### About Us

We are a group of third-year students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Every student completes an Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP), a project that intertwines technology and social science research into a project that benefits members of different communities.

We spent 7 weeks in San Juan, Puerto Rico identifying closed schools that were repurposed for community use. We visited some of these projects and interviewed them to hear their opinion on a network of rescued schools. The input from the projects helped us develop infrastructure for a network of escuelas rescatadas.



(Left to right): Evelyn Kellum, Madison Brown, Jocelyn Bourgoin, Francis Polito, Jacob Abrogar.


### Interactive Map

We identified 35 community projects and compiled an interactive map with contact information, including their addresses. All of these organizations are repurposed out of rescued schools. We based our mapping off of our research. We acknowledge this rescued school movement is ongoing, so if you have updates please visit the contact us tab and offer feedback.

Click the link below to view:

<https://arcg.is/Ouzizu>

### Rescued Schools



La Goyco      PAYE

Id Shaliah      La Conde

Locate our website at <https://reddeescuelasrescatadas.wordpress.com/>

ESCUELAS RESCATADAS

Home   Community Projects   About Us   Contact

### Home



### Background on Schools in Puerto Rico:

673 schools have closed across Puerto Rico due to natural disasters and emigration. The debt crisis in particular led Puerto Rico's Secretary of Education to close many public schools to save money between the years 2016 and 2019. Schools are not only a space for education, but a space for the community to maintain its culture. Organized community groups, as well as private investors throughout Puerto Rico, reclaimed abandoned schools and transformed them into various uses that include community centers, resiliency hubs, spiritual spaces, new education centers, and other private businesses.

### Contact

### Join our Facebook Group!

 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1396312007868062/>

### Email us:

 [RedDeEscuelasPR@gmail.com](mailto:RedDeEscuelasPR@gmail.com)