



Caracol  
Youth Community  
Development

# Friends of Caracol Newsletter

## Annual Newsletter, April 2019

Best wishes for 2019 to all Friends of Caracol and many thanks for your continued interest and support to the activities in Central America. Caracol continued delivering workshops in Belize and in Guatemala during 2018. Caracol of JADE opened La Casita mid week and on the weekends for similar activities to those given in the past; arts, stilts and Playing Fair. Claudia continues providing training to organisations working with children, young people and women. She also works collaboratively with networks developing exchanges through the region as part of a continental wide movement of Living Community Culture. Jon continued administering Caracol Belize and liaised with the UK Trustees to ensure they are able to effectively report back to the Charity Commission of England & Wales.

The Caracol Trustees hosted numerous fundraising events in and around Chesham throughout 2018 and, despite the decision to "do less" they still managed to fundraise enough to support activities in Central America. As funding levels reduce, the opportunities for large projects become fewer, however we do not regret the decision to not depend on project funding despite income reducing from £95,000 in 2017 to £10,600 in 2018. Caracol and JADE continue to be blessed with chances to exchange and collaborate and 2019 looks as if it will bring exciting opportunities to all those involved.

Once again, many thanks for your continued support. Our Trustees will keep you informed of the events coming up during the year, especially the Plant Sale and Christmas Coffee Morning.

## Caracol of JADE

JADE sent out a separate newsletter in July last year so below is a summary of some of their activities and collaborations in the second half of the year. For 2018 Caracol Trustees supported JADE with a grant to meet all the operational overheads and maintenance of La Casita Youth Development & Community Arts Centre. Caracol established the centre 10 years ago and in recent years, JADE have been managing the centre and opening it on a weekly basis.

### Stilts and Presentations

The youths of the stilt walker program continue with their practices every Saturday. This activity has helped strengthen their friendship and support with each other. They constantly visit each other to remind them of their practice hour or just as friends.

For the annual celebration the Battle of Saint Georges Caye that took place on the 10th of September in San Ignacio Town the stilt walker group was present. They paraded on the main streets of San Ignacio and Santa Elena.

During the year of 2018 four stilt walkers were invited by the Belize Tourism Board to participate in their Christmas Welcome to tourists entering Belize through the Western Border at Benque Viejo del Carmen.

Four stilt walkers also participated in the National Carnival of Belize, they paraded together with the group that, for the last four consecutive years, has been named Carnival Champion for their creativity and costumes. The participation of the stilt walkers was organized and coordinated by Maritza.



## Playing Fair

Now delivered every four months the Playing Fair took event place in Arenal with participants of Arenal Belize and Arenal Guatemala. During every event the number of participants varies due to personal and family activities of participants and the last Playing Fair was organized and delivered by Delcy and Aide with the support of active youths of the Leadership Program.

## Alliances - Friends for Conservation & Development

As JADE we keep up our alliances with different organizations for the benefit of JADE members and for the community of Arenal in general. For the last two years we have collaborated with the organization of Friends for Conservation Development and have been participating with them in reforestation for the Vaca Forest Reserve. We have helped organize cleaning campaigns in Arenal village and we also have plans to do a reforestation along the Mopan River in Arenal for the month of February. We received a formal invitation from FCD to be part of a local network they are organizing with the purpose of increasing national alliances with groups involved in the conservation of the environment.

## International Service Learning

International Service Learning is an organization that works with medical students and volunteer doctors who travel the word offering their community service through medical facilities to the public in communities most needed. During this year's visit Aide worked with the volunteers, doing home visits taking blood pressure and blood test. In the afternoon they visited La Casita to work with the children playing games and on themes around personal hygiene.



## Community Health Worker

A year ago Aide Sanchez, a member of Caracol of JADE, started a new journey in the Public Health Area. She recently received her Certificate that accredits her as a formal Community Health Worker. It is important to share this news because she always had the aim to serve the Community in this way. Being in Caracol and learning the importance of serving the community, following your dreams and believing in one's possibility has helped Aide keep going and to serve Arenal not only as JADE.



## Mount Carmel High School, JADE & CELA

We believe in the importance of education and as JADE we keep looking for opportunities for children of Arenal. On this occasion we were given a space for four children of La Inmaculada RC primary School to participate in a workshop on Games and Leadership at Mount Carmel High School. Students of the University of Denver delivered the workshop and the Arenal students from Arenal had the opportunity to interact with students from MCHS and to experience the ambience of a High School. They were happy and at the same time shy as it was their first time out of school interacting with high school students. The opportunity was possible with the support of Center of Engaged Learning Abroad (CELA).



## Some words from Claudia about the projects coordinated by Caracol

### Networking in Guatemala

Ser Niña/Niño, Xenacoj and the Tecomates and Q'anil Centre

It was sixteen years ago that Jon and I left Guatemala, where we met and lived at the time, to move to Belize. Five years later our dreams had been surpassed with the creations of hundreds of children, their own dreams and witty smiles. It became clear that a new language, a new method, and new ways to share were needed and the Caracol methodology began. Looking back, all the paths walked were valuable and necessary.

Following big changes to our personal lives in 2017 that moved the centre of Caracol away from the Cayo District of Belize, 2018 was a year of new opportunities to explore.

For the previous years my work had focused on strengthening the Caracoles of JADE and after twelve years of injecting resources fulltime into our beloved Arenal Villages it was time to share somewhere else. The years of providing training to Caracol youth leaders, teachers, social workers and facilitators were an invaluable experience to be shared with other trainers in different areas of work.

Last year three very different organizations and community spaces working with children and women opened their doors to the Caracol methodologies and I delivered processes focused on Training of Trainers and Community Resource Management.

### Ser Niña/Niño

Ser Niña/o is a program serving communities near Antigua Guatemala. It was originally a Canadian and USA initiative where young women work with girls in sexual education and drug abuse prevention. Ser Niña/o was launched in 2018 together with the implementation of a training program delivered by Caracol over eight months in half or full day sessions. The training program shared the methodology inspired by the 2015/16 Diploma Courses in Ludo-Pedagogy with 17 women and 2 men from 5 different institutions working locally with children, youth or women.

The results of the workshops were encouraging and Erik Pocasangre, Ser Niña/o coordinator, who was key to making the link with Caracol, will share any further impact.

In order to maintain the enthusiasm gained during the months of growth and exchange I will continue offering support to the Ser Niña/o facilitators, and keep upgrading the new games and reflections that came out of the experience. I have also been asked to join the Board.



## Tecomates Collective

Another satisfactory exchange was with three creative workshop facilitators and a permaculture specialist, nutritionist and vegan chef, all members of the Tecomates Collective. All facilitate workshops for children in Santo Domingo Xenacoj, Chimaltenango, also near Antigua Guatemala. Tecomates is the name of an initiative of environmentally conscious young entrepreneurs who produce healthy foods and sanitary items, and who share from a wide range of disciplines including theatre, psychology, agriculture and agronomy, social work, dance and therapy among others.

Tecomates have a social side offering workshops, practical trainings and production in renewal energies, creativity, social transformation, arts and well-being. Guatemalans mainly compose the Tecomate's community, but there are also

members from Honduras, Italy, Mexico, the US, UK, Germany, Norway and other countries. They share a community home that has been working, transforming and developing for almost a decade and includes a garden and food-processing laboratory named "La Casa de los Sueños".



## Q'anil

Lastly, 2018 brought Caracol close to Q'anil again. The capacities I gained in Japan with the FACT (Facilitative Actions for Communities in Transition) training found a new nesting space and are coming to life with the completion of a training program with the team at Q'anil Centre for Research and Transpersonal Healing. Professionals from four different fields, the team is composed by five women working part-time giving therapies and offering courses on human development, feminisms and violence prevention among others. The centre also invites social scientists from around the globe to deliver conferences, training and workshops. Once this process is over, the team will be better able to articulate the range of Community Resources Q'anil attracts. This is an important part of the presentation when applying to funding streams and the path to sustainability.



## Biodanza

After many years working with creative, expressive and healing processes it has been necessary to retrain in order to continuously offer new experiences when working on expression and transformation. In my different learnings I have discovered BioDance, a system developed by Chilean Anthropologist, Psychologist, Poet and Painter Rolando Toro Araneda. Presently I'm training to become a professor in this field. I am already applying the training in my workshops at a basic level. This is an evolving methodology that can only be learned or shared by regularly practising and integrating it into one's life.



## Other Routes - Expanding Horizons

As in the past, when Caracol grew from being an annual Arts Culture Environment Summer Camp, into Spanish Classes and supporting a Women's Group, followed by a school Football Team, to Photo-Clubs, Youth Leadership Programs and Regional and Continental Exchanges, Festivals and Trainings, Caracol now projects itself as a pool of experiences, tools and capacities to be shared with facilitators in a wide diversity of spaces of social transformation and well-being. For the last five years our objective has been to train trainers and access a wider population of young people and children, and offer them a more integrative, healthier and happier living experience.



## CVC and Caracol-YCD

For many years the work we did with Caracol in the Central American Region was to link the creative expressions of young Belizeans to other youth initiatives in the Isthmus. The Central American Community Arts Movement (MARACA) was a platform that helped Caracol enable young people, who otherwise couldn't have participated in exchanges, to leave their creative footprint in seven countries - Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama and Mexico. Years later, the regional movement joined a Continental platform and we went to Brazil, Argentina and Ecuador, representing Belize by participating in Congresses, Festivals and Forums to "make Belizean youth visible".

As a result of representing Caracol in Ecuador in October-November 2017, I continue working with a group of women from different countries on the production of a document for the next CVC Congress in Córdoba, Argentina. I am currently interviewing women from different social contexts, and will be sending material to include Guatemala as part of a continental video.

Exchange continues to be one of the most effective ways we've found to learn and grow; to expand horizons and open opportunities for sharing with people from all over; to make achievements and concerns visible and to learn new ways to improve each community's experience. Exchanging was also a very powerful tool for the youth of Caracol to value and understand their strengths and cultural richness, and to make intergenerational connections between children and adults; learning from each other in a sensible, respectful way that honours each person's life experience.

Caracol hopes to continue boosting Belizean participation in the Living Community Culture movement and we will keep trying to link Belize with Guatemala or Mexico activities. Currently, JADE does not participate in international exchange but Caracol continues making visible the valuable work of other Belizean communities.



## Identities and loving oneself

### Young women, and LGBT BELIZE & LGBTIQ GUATEMALA

#### Women's workshops

One of the constants in Guatemala has always been violence against women. The need of working together in order to offer safe spaces for reflection and wellbeing is not new. Sharing and discussing issues of concern was the motivation to create "Nosotras" in Arenal, as well as for creating a similar space in Guatemala for young women. The intentions are still there, but a number of violent events and other issues made it difficult for some of the initial participants to continue meeting. A couple of us continue to meet regularly and have planned some activities for early 2019.

## Social Transformation and LGBTIQ GUATEMALA

I have, myself, gone through challenges along my life sometimes struggling with finding ways to integrate myself into the different social and cultural scenarios I've lived as a migrant. Both, Belize and Guatemala are territories populated by migrants, both local and foreign, who are forced to move due to a number of social issues, mainly economic but also socio-political; and this can be devastating for families, but also for the construction of an individual's identity. Both Belize and Guatemala are multilingual and mainly rural, which can make it difficult for anybody of any age or background; one of the hardest things to learn seems to be to love oneself.

Having motivated the integration of the LGBTIQ to the Guatemalan Cultura Viva Comunitaria Movement the next step was for me to offer creative workshops to the '4th of November LGBTIQ House of Culture' in Guatemala City. Having met Javier Niño, training coordinator in the prevention of HIV and AIDS, a Creative Writing initiative was designed and delivered with the support of Tairy Sarmientos, a young member of the LGBTIQ community and a student at the Superior School of Arts (ESA) of the San Carlos University of Guatemala (USAC). We delivered a 16 week program to motivate young gay and lesbian members of the LGBTIQ community in Guatemala to express themselves in a conscious loving way; to identify themselves beyond fear but also to be aware of the origin of their struggles as a preventative measure. Violence against diverse young people is often used as a warning to other youth, hence the importance of informing all of society about basic human rights including the gender diverse communities.



## Belize Youth Empowerment for Change

Simultaneously, the LGBT community in Belize has been suffering high rates of violence. I met Kevin Mendez, a community activist who works for the Belize National AIDS Commission and coordinates the Belize Youth Empowerment for Change, an NGO that advocates for LGBT rights, women's rights and youth empowerment, and he asked me to help guide the young members to lovingly and respectfully relate to a world that will constantly judge and attack them for being who they are.

June 2018 was the first time we were able to join efforts in the field with BYEC, and for this I delivered a one-day workshop near Belmopan and hosted twelve young Belizeans who established dialogues with new peers and created individual and collective pieces about who they are as LGBT young Belizeans, their possibilities and constraints in a society they need to adapt to and respect, their responsibility as role models, recognising and not reacting to provocations, being considered "second-class citizens", understanding that an aggressive view on homosexuality comes from fear and general aggression in society.

When work finished around these reflections, the rest of the day was dedicated to games, swimming and sharing in a natural environment. As a result of our encounters and understanding the integration of all youth under a diverse umbrella, the Caracoles of JADE linked with BYE Change youth leaders and joined them for the LGBT Pride Parade 2018. We hope to be able to have some of the group members participating in the 2019 Caracol activities in Arenal.



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