



Friends of Caracol Newsletter - August 2012

Dear Friends, it has been 8 months since we sent out a newsletter and Caracol and Los Caracoles have been busy so read on if you wish to know more. This is our 10th year in Belize and our 8th in Arenal and we are seeing the fruits that permanence and innovation in youth development can stimulate. The youth coordinators in Arenal are now fully equipped to host facilitators within their community. This is an important achievement as it means time and resources can be invested in other communities, initiatives and movements. This newsletter is packed with descriptions of the activities the coordinators wish to share with you. If you would like a 'sound and vision' experience of this please see our latest video at <https://vimeo.com/47215009>. Best wishes, Claudia, Jon & Los Caracoles.

Playing Fair

On the 9th of December 2011, the football field and the streets of Arenal Belize and Arenal Guatemala were the stage for eighty girls and boys to play games, parade and watch a presentation on stilts. Using games throughout the day the participants learned about their rights and responsibilities, companionship and respect. In March 2012, the month dedicated to celebrate women, the youths from Caracol again organized the Playing Fair activity emphasising children's rights. The afternoon was full of games, happiness and



growth for everyone. Each team leader discussed with their group the topic of girls' rights and the situation in Arenal. For the first time we had a participant from Succotz and two from Benque Viejo del Carmen and the presence of four Caracol friends from Succotz who came to enjoy the afternoon. At the end of the games with stilts, juggling, face painting, costumes and drums we went out to the streets of Arenal sharing colours,

rhythm and smiles with the community. In this "Playing Fair" more families from both communities left their daily housework to enjoy the activity. To end each participant was given snacks and prizes of school supplies which they won by Playing Fair.

The Coordinator Group of RGAC in Caracol

During the second week of December the coordinator group of the Guatemalan Community Art Network visited *La Casita de Caracol* to evaluate the advances that, as a network, we have made and to identify the obstacles we have to overcome. The Caracol youth coordinators were present during the meeting and they contributed their ideas and at the same time they learned and understood more about the work we have been doing with the network. Four of the coordinators came from Guatemala City and stayed at the homes of the Caracoles to get know more of the lives of the people in Arenal.

Annual Evaluation and Planning

We started 2012 with our annual planning workshop, all Caracol youth coordinators were present. It was important for all of us to be there because now we are all more aware of the activities of Caracol and our responsibilities for the year. Participating in the activity gave us the opportunity to learn how to write this kind of document.



Youth Leadership Workshop

During the second week of January 2012 the coordinators of Caracol received a leadership workshop from Roxana Orantes from Guatemala City. The workshop was for us to continue discovering our abilities and to understand the importance of knowing the legal process that is needed to manage an organization, or a project, while bearing in mind its advantages and disadvantages. We worked on the objectives, methodology and the context of our project. During the workshop we also had the opportunity to learn a little yoga and natural treatments.

Theatre and Scriptwriting

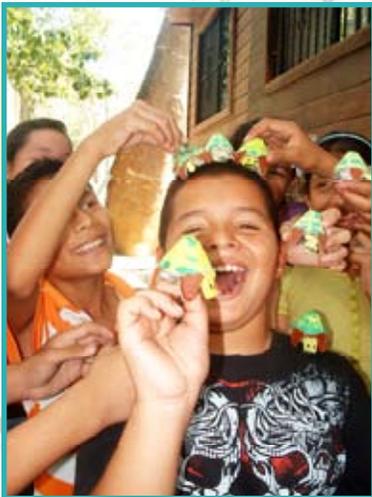
The Caracol youth leaders received two days of theatre and script writing workshops with the Theatre Association 'Soporte' of Guatemala City. During

these days we had the opportunity to express our feelings and memories by writing and optionally sharing them with the group. In every session we were motivated to transmit feelings through writing and also by acting them. After receiving the workshops we now have to share it with the rest of the Caracoles. These workshops were in preparation for the National Chess Olympiad presentations in May.



Creative Exchange

Once more smiles, happiness, games and art were the tools that gave the opportunity to children from Melchor de Mencos Petén, San José Succutz and Benque Viejo del Carmen to exchange their experience and knowledge on the 18th of February 2012. By recycling egg boxes and newspaper each participant gave life to a turtle figure. Each participant created and painted their turtle. They also produced two juggling balls each and started to juggle using 'the magic square' exercise. The second Creative Exchange of the year was delivered on the 14th of March, the three communities got together to play and work in harmony.



Each participant sewed pieces of cloth and created a bear, which was filled up with corn. They also continued juggling. Creative Exchange is now a monthly activity.

Chess and Juggling

During April 2012 we started to play chess in Caracol and now we have the Chess Club. We have Junior Coach, Kevin Guerra, leading the Chess Club in Arenal. Kevin is also a member of West Cayo Chess Association. At the elimination round for the National Chess Olympiad four Caracoles classified. In the middle of every



chess session Maritza Barrera, with the support of Esly Sanchez and Wilson Sanchez, delivers a Juggling class to the chess players. Juggling gives the chance to develop our learning process using both hands and at the same time we stimulate both sides of the brain.

Homework Club

The Homework Club is open for all the community who attend primary and secondary school. We have all the necessary materials for the children, which helps them get good grades in school by completing their homework. The homework club is also a support to the parents. The Caracol youth coordinators have responsibility for managing the homework club and each day two persons are in charge of preparing the materials and the working space.

Caracol-Tumul K'in-Maya Youth Coalition Camp, Exchange & Maya Day

During the first week of March we had the first exchange with indigenous



young people from Toledo, southern Belize. The camp took place in Jetzel farm in San Jose Soccotz, West Cayo. It was our first exchange with them and it was very special. Each group presented their organization and the students from Tumul K'in talked about a special activity they organized every year called Maya Day and their purpose was to learn

how to walk on stilts and present something new to their community. They did manage to stilt walk and learned a little of its history, they also produced two pair of stilts and took them home to practice. Some of us learned how

to do origami and to make recycled bracelets. Maya day is when indigenous people from the area gather to celebrate and promote their traditions by having traditional games and food. The Tumul K'in students gave their presentation and it was well received by their community. We were invited for the Maya day and three Caracoles went to support the stilt walkers with choreography, costume production and artistic makeup.

Caracol in Four Places and In Five Activities

Caracol was split into four groups during the fourth week of March. One group was representing Caracol at the XII RGAC Encounter in San Pablo la Laguna, Sololá, Guatemala. Another group was in San Ignacio Cayo at a chess tournament and, in the afternoon, this same group gave a stilt walking and fire spinning presentation in Benque Viejo del Carmen. The four



guys who went to San Ignacio to play chess classified to compete in the National Chess Olympiad in May. Ervin Ruiz won fifth place, Esly Sanchez fourth place, Hugo Sanchez second place and Rayner Naj first place. The last group supported the costume production and stilt presentation that the



Tumul K'in stilt walkers gave their community at Maya Day on the 25th of March.

Photography

Photography workshops were held on the 30th March, 4th and 13th April. We discussed our village of Arenal, its attractions (eg. a beautiful river and two currencies), problems and the things by which people identify it. We then had the task of documenting those elements. During the first workshop we were also given our photographs from previous classes.



During the second session we took photos that describe Caracol and we received our homework. The final

workshop was dedicated to remembering the basic rules of photography.

Presentation

On the 14th of April four Caracol stiltwalkers gave a presentation at the San Ignacio Fair at the invitation of the Town Council. The presentation included acrobatics on stilts and the organisers seemed very happy and impressed with the work. Lots of people congratulated the group.

Rebuilding Ourselves

On Wednesdays and Fridays the Youth Leader receive these workshops with Claudia where we discuss different situations that other young people have experienced. Themes include self-esteem, abuse and decision making. In Rebuilding Ourselves workshops we read and analyse stories that then encourage us to share our opinions and points of view. The base material used for these sessions is the book and study resources "Between Wishing & Needing" by photographer Michael Cozzi. Please visit the website - www.womenincommon.net - for more information on this project



Visit to the Caracol Archaeological Site

On the 21st of April, 55 Caracoles from Arenal Belize and Guatemala visited



the Caracol Archaeological Maya Site. We all learned some more about plants, our history and our culture. During the trip we visited various areas including those used for ceremonies and astronomy. The trip was made possible thanks

to the CARSI Project and a donation made by the late Glissy Urie of Barry, Wales

Tricletas

The Argentinian Company Tricletas, visited la Casita de Caracol from the 20th of May to the 1st of June. They delivered many workshops including recycling paper, percussion and shared basic techniques to create rhythms. Also they shared game, songs, juggling workshops, corporal expression activities exploring different possibilities of communicating with the body. From the workshop we created a plan for a parade which, at the end of the activities, we shared with the community.



Guatemala Network Encounter

In May two Caracol coordinators participated in the Guatemalan Network Encounter in Guatemala City, where the 12 Strategies for Youth Violence Prevention was once again promoted and discussed. During the encounter each group made a Political Agenda and each coordinator had the responsibility to go back to their organizations to continue working on it with their groups.



Group Work and Puppet Workshop

Braulio and Claudio Padilla of the Soporte Theatre Association came to La Casita on the 27th and 28th of June, they delivered workshops on group work, group coordination and puppets. Through games we worked on subjects of relevance to Caracol. In the puppet workshop we learned to play with objects that for most people might be garbage but we found a way to give them life and character.

The How and Why Of Caracol

Caracol supports the work of initiatives in other communities and as the project in Arenal requires less of Claudia and Jon's time we will offer more sustained support to programmes we consider innovative and successful.

We are working to establish a local Belizean youth development network for member groups to train and be trained through skill sharing. This strategy is low cost, low impact and will aim to improve the services available to young people throughout Belize.

We wish to understand the impact of our work so the youth coordinators speak with parents to gain their opinion about the programs being delivered. The following quotes are examples of why Caracol's approach benefits children, young people and community and motivate us to continue and improve:

"I like that my children go to caracol because they teach them crafts and more importantly they teach them to respect all people, everywhere. I can see that my children have improved their behaviour, sometimes they play up but they have definitely improved. It is clear that they enjoy participating because they don't leave me alone until it's their turn for an activity" - Loida Barrera

"They learn to do beautiful things and they are safe; while in Caracol it means they are not in the street where things can happen to them without me knowing. First my children have to help around the house and then I let them go. By being in Caracol they don't get involved in vices and the young women take better decisions and don't leave home at such a young age" - Sandra Marroquin

Since starting the newsletter other activities have been happening but we have to stop somewhere so will share that news next time.

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