



Dear friends. Seasons greetings to you all and thank-you once again for your support of our work with children and young people in the Belize-Guatemala Border area. In past publications you may have seen photographs of *La Casita*, our community arts centre in Arenal, this time we share with you a photo found recently by Aide Sanchez of her father, Don Melesio Sanchez, helping with the construction of what was originally the village school. The school was built by community volunteers in the 1970's and was used until 2008 when the Canadian government funded a new building. With permission from the local Parish, we have rehabilitated the old building and continue to develop the site. Future plans include a new workshop space, rain-water catchment and improvements to the adjacent park.



Best wishes from the Caracol Youth Leaders, Claudia and Jon

National Festival of Arts

The Caracoles were invited for the second consecutive year to participate at the National Festival of Arts in Belize City celebrated on the 30th of May. The festival showcases a variety of artistic expressions and gathers artists from Belize's six districts. Caracol was present for the opening parade with four participants who shared their happiness with a colorful display for the spectators who responded with smiles, applause and plenty of enthusiasm.



Central America Community Arts Movement (MARACA) - Annual Assembly

This year's MARACA Assembly took place during June in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. We evaluated the performance of each member group, defined future actions and responsibilities and shared opinions on the integration of new groups to the network. Claudia Orantes director of Caracol and Aide Sanchez youth coordinator represented Caracol. Some significant decisions were taken which means that Caracol now forms part of the MARACA Coordination Team.

MARACA Planning Meeting in San Salvador

The MARACA production team recently formed in Tegucigalpa gathered in San Salvador in July. We planned strategies, activities and proposed agendas for this network which brings together the methodologies of member groups to promote non-violence in high risk communities using arts.



Caracol at the National Chess Olympiad

The national chess Olympiad took place in Belmopan, the capital of Belize. For the opening ceremony the Caracol stilt walkers joined the players from the different districts.

We performed a theatrical choreography with characters on stilts and on the floor dressed in costumes representing the chess pieces, the presentation ended with a check-mate! For our

afternoon presentation two of the tournament players were invited to play using

the human pieces. The Caracoles had produced their own costumes and internet research has shown this to be the first recorded game of chess on stilts in the world! Two Caracoles, Kevin and Hugo put their mental abilities to work as competitors for the Cayo West Team.



Spelling Bee National Finals



The Spelling Bee is an oral contest where the participants spell words that are not used on a daily basis. The participants have to spell the words correctly to become Spelling Champion of the Year. Once again the Caracol stilt walkers accompanied the competitors during the opening ceremony and also gave a presentation that included acrobatics, juggling and a group choreography. The stilt walkers performed for nearly five hundred people who were cheering for their favorite participants. The majority of the public were children from different primary schools throughout Belize.

Mango Fest, Hopkins Village

June began with our first visit to the Mango Festival in Hopkins, a Garifuna village by the Caribbean Sea. Three stilt walkers and three dancers performed for an audience of villagers and visitors. The experience gave the stilt walkers their first chance to interact with some Garinagu children who played drums with their Afro-Caribbean rhythms. We closed our participation by offering balloon sculptures and giving them away in exchange for a smile.



Caracol at the 1st Festival-Encounter of the Guatemalan Community Arts Network, San Ilfonso Ixtahucan

This was an important event for Caracol because we were involved in the process from initial proposal to final evaluation. The festival was designed to showcase the art of member groups together with forums on issues of environment and violence. A team from

Caracol worked for a week on pre-production; preparing dormitories for 175 young people, building showers and toilets, putting up lighting, and promoting the event. We were also in charge of the cultural agendas.

For twelve months Caracol youth leaders coordinated with counterparts from JoVi (Youth for Life), DeJuIxta (the host community), and Caja Lúdica to organise the event. During the 11-day stay in San Ildefonso Ixtahuacan, where the first Encuentro-Festival of the RGAC took place, all participants were assigned to a commission: lodging, catering, environment, health and safety, production and communications. One major achievement was a visit by 150 young people to an open-cast gold mine high



in the mountains. The mine is causing severe contamination of essential sources of fresh water in the area. The visit was followed by presentations about the environmental impact of this type of mining to better inform the participants about what

they had seen first hand. The groups that took part in the cultural night presented dance, poetry, theatre and music. If you would like to know more about this and other RGAC events you can visit the RGAC BlogSpot (In Spanish):

<http://redartecomunitario.blogspot.com>

Pin Hole Camera Workshop at the Festival for Life, JoVi (*Jóvenes por La Vida*), Guatemala

In the settling of Las Islas, Villa Lobos 1, Guatemala City, between June 16th & 17th seven young people between the ages of fourteen and twenty-eight played with recycled materials, photographic chemicals and natural light. They each made their own Pin Hole Camera from milk tins and with the help of Maritza Barrera they took pictures. The results were so good that they held an exhibition during the Festival For Life where Kevin Guerra and Hugo Sanchez gained valuable experience working in the festival's production team.



Summer Programme

During July and August children and young people from Arenal Belize-Guatemala participated in this years summer program where we used recycled material for arts projects. We played with respect and responsibility so that everyone enjoyed getting to know each other in a positive way. We had participants from the age of four to seventeen years old. In early September we ended the program with a parade around the village so that parents could also enjoy the activities. The stilt group gave a

presentation of acrobatics and Dorita Avelar and Aziel Sanchez were presented to everyone as our newest stilt-walkers.



Pedagogies on Social Circus Workshop, Machinupea Social Circus, Mexico City

Two of us from Caracol participated in a second training facilitated by Cirque du Monde in Mexico City. The experience of enriching the bonds between the participants will allow us to form the links for the first social circus network in Mexico and the process has already started! We were excited at being there and to be able to share, once again, with old and new friends. We came back home with our hearts full of intense experiences and a greater understanding of how arts can be used in child development. The hugs and life experiences that were shared have helped to extend our connections throughout Mesoamerica.



XI Youth and Community Arts Encounter

Networks and arts organizations from different parts of Guatemala and the region participated at the IX Youth and Community Arts Encounter. During the Encounter's Youth and Culture Public Policy Forum we debated the implementation of 5 out of 12 strategies that use arts, education and culture to prevent violence related to youth and adolescents. Representatives from the government, artists, national and international youth networks and cultural workers participated in the forum. The representatives facilitated working groups and together with the participants created working proposals.

Art in the Classroom: The Art of Teaching



Claudia Orantes was invited by the vice principal of Our Lady of Mount Carmen High School in Benque Viejo to deliver a workshop for the teachers. The workshop was optional and 15 teachers from different year groups attended. As we do in every workshop

the participants started by positioning their bodies correctly and exercising their hands. The teachers then shared their experiences and knowledge of art and some expressed

their desire to learn different ways to be creative in the classroom. At the end of the workshop they expressed their happiness at feeling like children again and understood that creativity in the classroom can facilitate the learning process. These sessions for teachers will take place once a month.

Playing Fair for Children's Rights and for the Rio Mopan

On 22nd October the football field of Arenal Belize-Guatemala was taken over by more than seventy children from both communities who had gathered to play, sing, shout and run in the sunshine that followed the rain and mud brought by recent tropical storms. Jugando Limpio for the River Mopan is the name of the activity that raises awareness of the importance of protecting the river. Our community is located beside the Mopan River.

During the event we used recycled materials for the games. At the beginning and at the end we joined hands in a circle of connection, a practice we use for every Caracol activity. The circle of connection gives us the chance to recognise each other and to share our smiles. At the end of the series of games and challenges each participant received a gift of school supplies and a piece of traditional sweet bread made by Caracol mums. We ended by inviting the participants to join us for the next event that on December 9th was dedicated to children's rights: Jugando Limpio por Tus Derechos (Playing Fair for Your Rights).



Homework Club and Chess Club

Every day primary school students visit *La Casita* to do their homework. The children have access to all necessary materials and receive support from the coordinators who have already studied the topics. The Chess Club is becoming very popular and children quickly build their confidence as they develop complex strategies to win games. They feel pride while helping other children to learn the rules of the game that they enjoy so much.

In the last months Caracol members have participated in national tournaments bringing home gold, silver and bronze medals for victories and sportsmanship. On the 18th November Kevin Guerra (17) received his Junior Chess Coach Diploma from Grand Master Maurice Ashley.



Caracol Youth Leaders Graduate from High School

One important change that has occurred in Arenal in the past three years has been the establishment of a secondary school in Arenal Guatemala. The Guatemalan government have set up *Telesecundaria* Schools in villages where young people are not able to continue studying. In Arenal for example parents refuse to send their children to Melchor de Mencos (the nearest town) for economic and security issues.

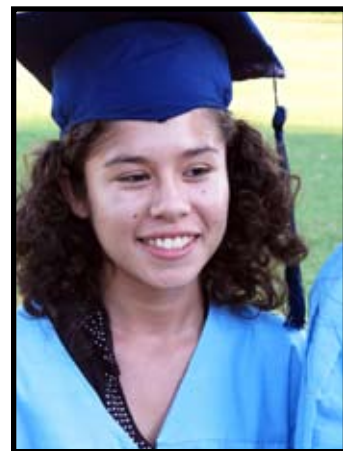
Caracol is proud to announce that this December three of our youth coordinators Dina Marroquín, Rodolfo Marroquín and Arjelia Barrera graduated from the Telesecundaria



Dina Marroquín



Rodolfo Marroquín



Argelia Barrera

They will continue working under the Caracol Working Scholarship programme where they manage project activities and learn accounting, administration, communications, site maintenance and community liaison. The coordination team in Arenal continues to strengthen and has become a model example of youth development that we are promoting in order to motivate a local network of youth oriented organisations in Belize.

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