



January 2017

Welcome once again to the latest edition of the Caracol Newsletter. As we start a new year we wanted to let you know about the work we have been doing during the last few months.

Thanks to our excellent support network in Belize, Guatemala, Central America and the United Kingdom, Caracol continues working and growing in the communities where we have built relationships over many years. We continue to get amazing support through people's willingness to volunteer either as facilitators, workshop production or at fundraising sales and events. Moreover, we proudly hold the trust of a number of communities, groups and institutions with whom we work.

Caracol's intention to grow sustainably has enabled us to maintain a quality of work focussed on the

participant and the person with a leadership role. Learning is a permanent process and learning together in a safe and healthy environment seems to Caracol to be an effective way to contribute to the social fabric in the communities where we operate.

Having established La Casita Youth Development and Community Arts Centre in Arenal, it was a logical step for us to give the youth coordinators of JADE (Youth of Arenal for Development and Equity) the responsibility of running the centre themselves in their own community. This transference of responsibilities to JADE was something desired by the youth coordinators and has been managed over the last few years with support from Caracol. A key benefit of JADE's taking responsibility has been the opportunity for Caracol to invest time in new activities.



Sixty-Seven Trained in Ludo-Pedagogies in the Adjacency Zone

In 2015 thirty-five teachers and social workers graduated from our Diploma course in "Education Through Play and Artistic Expression". With sufficient funding in place, a second course was produced during 2016 and on 22nd October 2016 another thirty-two teachers graduated. During 2017 Caracol will further develop the training programme for the sixty-seven graduates while continuing to support JADE and ensure the group continue to maintain their enthusiasm and the core values they have aspired to.

Over the years we have passed through a number of watershed moments and this is true once again. Caracol has been operating in Belize as a Non-profit Organisation since 2003 with most of the administrative responsibilities being maintained by the UK Trustees. At this juncture the administrative responsibility is being passed to Caracol Belize. Caracol continues to be registered with the UK's Charity Commission supporting the work in Central America, mainly through fundraising. Funds raised in the UK will continue to be used to produce programmes and activities in Belize and Guatemala, always focussed on improving the learning and personal development opportunities for children and young people.

Best wishes for 2017 from Claudia and Jon in Belize-Guatemala and from the UK Trustees.



Teacher Training

Background

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As mentioned earlier, Caracol's strategy for improving the educational environment for Belizean and Guatemalan children has, for the past two years, been focussed on helping teachers make learning more child centred and child friendly. This has been achieved through our diploma course.

The course is made up of eight modules including Identity and Body Consciousness, Public Play and Parading, Music, Drawing & Painting and Theatre. The national curricula in both countries (Belize and Guatemala) require that teachers deliver regular arts lessons. More recently, the Ministries of Education have acknowledged the value of using games and play in all subject areas. However, teacher-training courses are often unable to instil the required methodologies. Most training workshops for teachers are delivered as lectures during holidays and do not include practical elements.

The Caracol diploma courses delivered over the past two years are almost entirely practical with some theoretical background. Participants are required to complete assignments where they apply what they have learned in their own classrooms. Pre-school, primary school, secondary school and university teachers who took the course expressed that they found the methodologies useful in their daily work.

Each course was delivered over nine months and the participants originated from 18 communities, towns and villages in Belize and Guatemala. Each year 20 schools had at least one teacher on the course and, collectively, graduates work with over 3000 children and young people on a weekly basis. The course is accredited by Superior School of Arts of the University of San Carlos, Guatemala and validated by both Ministries of Education.



Public Play and Parading

All schools participate in various public events during the academic year both in Belize and Guatemala. Such events celebrate Children's Day, Independence Day and Education Week amongst others. This module was designed to help teachers bring greater colour and dynamism to these activities as well as helping to share a message or theme in a public space. Encouraging greater creativity during public play can help the students and the audience feel engaged by the activity.

Participants learn to produce masks, parade props and bamboo puppets. They combine the props with a basic choreography and songs or chants. These elements are created around a theme and brought together to produce a parade in a local public space.



Theatre and Collective Creation

In the area where Caracol works, the Belize-Guatemala Adjacency Zone, there is not a culture of Theatre production so most people do not get the chance to see plays. The nearest experience children will have is of short "skits" that form part of a community cultural night. These modules are designed to provide teachers with theatrical techniques that can be used in the classroom to help generate discussions around any subject area, making learning more dynamic, fun and memorable. Where teachers do use the expressive arts for productions such as skits, these same techniques can help with production of skits but also help bring creativity to the teaching of any subject.

Using exercises for character development, story telling and improvisation this module uses techniques from the world of Theatre to enable teachers to work with their students in pairs and groups. Exercises are also included that help participants breathe, relax and focus which enables a greater connection with the body, a conscious interaction with peers and the creation of an environment of collaboration, trust and expression.



Plastic Arts - Drawing and Mural Painting

This module allows participants to overcome the fear of expressing through drawings, learning that this primal exercise is not exclusive to great artists, but can be performed by any person no matter their age or cultural background, and is a transforming experience itself. One of the strategies to create child friendly schools is the beautification of spaces. By using games this module also sparks the imagination of participants who learn techniques that can be used in their classrooms without the need for expensive materials. The end of the module involves everybody in the production of a mural in a public space as a demonstration of an activity that can involve pupils in school beautification.

This course takes participants from basic drawing techniques, from pencil through to mural production. During discussions of issues within the education system or wider society, themes are identified that are combined to produce a positive public message in the form of a mural in a public space.



Expression & Movement

The curricula in both Belize and Guatemala require that expressive arts are taught and this module provides simple exercises for teachers to have a basic understanding of body movements as well as how to create and stage a "choreography". The module is not a pure dance workshop but encourages understanding of how the body moves, its flexibility and how to use symbolism in movement to convey a message.

Participants learn games where they work in pairs and groups to communicate messages with the body. The historical and cultural significance of movement as a form of expression is also explored which helps teachers be more creative when producing cultural presentations in their schools.

What the Participants Say



Ida Puc,
Belizean

I now feel more able to perform in my role as educator. The diploma has provided me with new tools to use in my class and with youth groups. The games motivate a positive attitude as well as tolerance with our peers and a connection with others in our community. I think this is especially important when young people are exposed to so much violence. Culture and the arts help young people open positive paths for their expression and creativity.



Jose Duenas,
Belizean

All of the courses promoted the importance of mutual respect as well as community arts and culture. The course emphasised core values that help to reduce violence.



Rosa Polanco,
Guatemalan

I have learned many new things and my own attitude has changed since I started the diploma course. Through my enthusiasm for this opportunity I have managed to integrate each activity of every course into my work. With my students we have had a lot of fun when working through each module and I have always gained positive results.



Carmina Guzmán,
Guatemalan

I have realized, when I share my new learning with my students, that they learn more effectively, respond in a better way and achieve the learning objectives with greater ease.



Adelita Moh,
Belizean

During each diploma session I have developed new learning to share with my students and, more than this, I have learned new skills to help me create really fun activities. I feel that the course has helped with my personal development because I now see things in a different light, with more interest. I have greater confidence in myself and I appreciate things with greater care.



Maritza Torres,
Guatemalan

To have participated in the diploma course has been of great benefit because everybody is equally included and this helps create a very agreeable environment between the teacher and the student. The course also helps influence family and community relations as well as helping the child to develop different life skills which help reduce violence.



Ruperto Cowo,
Belizean

My students are demonstrating more enthusiasm to participate in class activities, much more than before, and are always looking forward to find out what new activities I will share. I feel greater motivation as a teacher.



Stephanie Torres,
Belizean

I am happy that I have been able to be part of this diploma course. I have learned a lot of things, which I am definitely going to use frequently in my class. I have gained so much from this course.



Marleni
Monterroso,
Guatemalan

The facilitators were people who helped us forget many types of fear. They gave us knowledge that was new for us and which has been so useful for improved educational and social development. I am grateful for having had this opportunity.

Maximizing Resources – Multiplying The Diploma Course

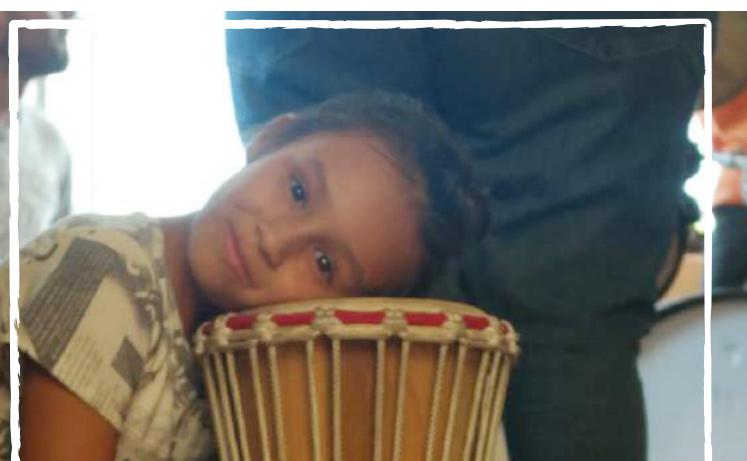
Having produced the first course in 2015 and with funding in place for the 2016 course we found a way to stretch resources and offered to replicate the diploma course at a centre of learning in the town of Amatitlán near Guatemala City. The centre, Infancia con Futuro (Childhood with a Future), supports the social and educational development of children in the local area through programmes promoting learning, creativity, hygiene and nutrition.

Together with Caracol's new staff member, Rigo Chicoj, Caracol volunteer Alejandro Rendon and Maritza Barrera from JADE, Claudia led a group of nine staff through the entire nine-month diploma course. We also had the support of two young actors to complete the process, Victoria Zuleta (R.I.P.) and Claudio Padilla who facilitated Theatre and Collective Creation. The feedback from the participants was positive and for Caracol, having produced all modules without the need for external facilitators, has provided valuable experience going forward.



Going forward with Teacher Training

Claudia and Rigo are currently planning a series of advanced courses to be held in 2017 for the graduates of the two courses. It is important for us to maintain contact with the participants as the majority have expressed their wish to continue learning and developing their own methodologies along the lines of arts and play. Caracol is currently negotiating with both Ministries of Education over how best to deliver further training for teachers in the Department of Petén, Guatemala and in the Cayo District of Belize where a pilot course is planned for the near future.



Caracol Exchanging within the Region

For many years Claudia has been Caracol's representative to regional community arts and youth development initiatives, participating in forums, festivals and, most recently, contributing to the design of a Central American Community Arts Curriculum. Caracol has been a member of MARACA (Central American Community Arts Movement) since 2009 and, through Claudia, has participated in a number of regional projects that have focussed on the exchange of methodologies between community groups. MARACA comprises of at least one organisation in each of the six Central American countries and in Costa Rica and Nicaragua the counterparts represent local networks working on Living Community Culture (CVC for its acronym in Spanish). MARACA is currently integrating members from Mexico and possibly the Caribbean and is part of wider movements across the continent having participated in conferences in Brazil and most recently Argentina. Through these exchanges Claudia, and on occasions, the young Caracol members, have been able to share the success and learning of the Caracol methodology and experience.

Scholarships

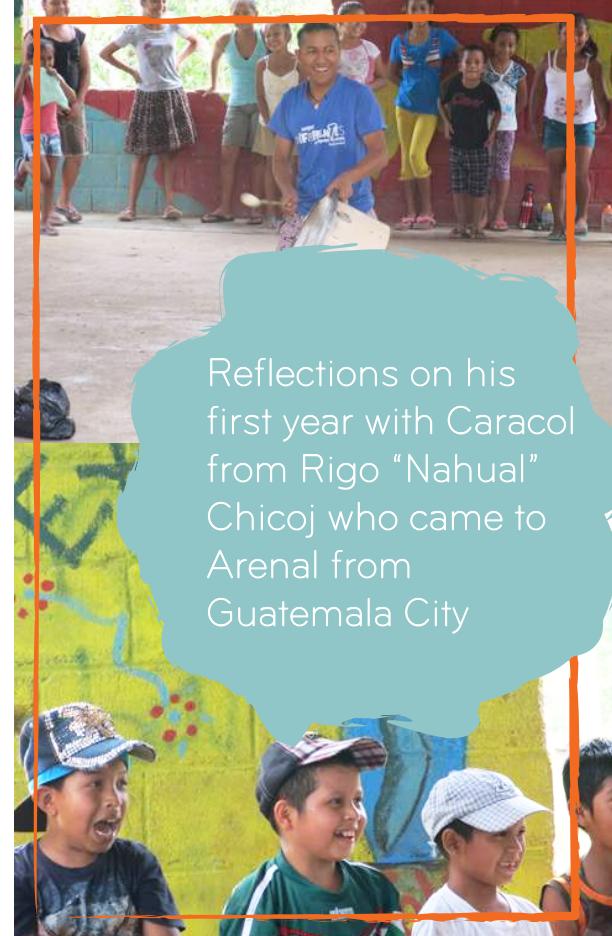
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Caracol has run a scholarship fund in Arenal for ten years and in that time local access to schooling has improved including a fund for school fees and a school bus. However, for some families, the cost of books, uniforms and school supplies remains a challenge. Thanks to money raised in the UK, Caracol maintains a fund for school support. The application process is managed by JADE who receive letters from children, sign commitment agreements with parents and distribute books and supplies to successful applicants. Most years we are able to support ten children and young people with supplies and text books for Primary and Secondary schooling.

Reflections from Rigo "Nahual"

Working together with Caracol over the past year has helped me both personally and in my participation in the community of Arenal, where I live. I have grown and been able to draw on years of experience which was just waiting to be shared. The friendship that I have been shown has been growing through shared moments, jokes and hard work.

One of the activities that I have been accompanying since starting with Caracol has been the Diploma in Education Through Play and Artistic Expression. As a team, we are very much aware of the importance of teachers having a chance to continue learning as a way of avoiding a repetitive and stale education in the classroom. We have aimed to promote an alternative education based on equality of access and, with each session, participants and facilitators have gained and learned from the shared experience of working together.



News from Our Friends in Arenal JADE - Youth of Arenal for Equity and Development

In October 2016, JADE celebrated its second year of becoming an independent group, taking its own decisions and taking the reins of the youth centre established by Caracol. During this period the young founders of JADE have focussed on the community work with children in and around Arenal as well as on the internal relations of the group. One recent decision of JADE has been to fundraise through presentations, workshops and sales of carpentry products. As a group we are looking to put in practice what we have learned during the whole time that we were in training and generate the necessary income for our project through these methods. We intend to maintain the Casita Arts Program that includes Carpentry, Jewellery Making, Arts & Crafts, Youth Leadership, Stilt Walking and Sewing, Homework Club and Playing Fair. These activities are delivered to more than 100 girls and boys, young people and women from Arenal Belize and Guatemala.

In August 2016 JADE introduced a new pilot activity for pre-school children preparing to enter primary school. A young woman from Arenal Belize, Maily Sanchez, was contracted by JADE to run the program during various weeks leading up to the opening of school. After school had started, the Infant One teacher told parents that the children who had worked with Maily during the vacations had benefited enormously and recommended that parents inscribe their children for the following year.

As well as involving Maily, JADE coordinators have also started to train more young people from both sides of the community with a vision that, in the long term, will hopefully see them become part of the coordinating team of JADE. Best wishes from Aide, Delcy, Dina, Maritza, Rodolfo.



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