



**Caracol**  
Youth Community  
Development

SUMMER /  
WET SEASON  
**2013**



## DAILY LIFE AT LA CASITA

The Caracol newsletter tells our friends and supporters of the important events that have happened during the previous months.

Every day La Casita is a busy place where children and young people have a safe space to develop, experiment and to learn.

La Casita in Arenal opens five days a week for chess, homework club and games

for the younger Caracol members who arrive in the afternoon and evening.

During the mornings the coordinators prepare their plans, reports, manage accounts, make purchases, work on personal projects, visit parents, communicate with other groups locally and in the region and participate in their regular preparation meetings.

# CREATIVE EXCHANGE

Caracol continued with the process of Creative Exchange, on Saturday 16th February 2012. Belizean and Guatemalan children gathered in the space where they were invited to jump around, laugh and learn. They exchanged knowledge creatively with happiness and joy. This programme has now been running for 4 years thanks to the support of the Organization of American States who lend us the space and the House of Culture which coordinates the Belizean participants.



The chess club in Caracol is growing with the most experienced children travelling to San Ignacio for training every Saturday in the company of coordinators Rodolfo Marroquin and Hugo Sanchez. In the afternoon they join the rest of the group in Arenal for their chess classes. On Tuesdays we also have an after school club at the Benque Library for the children from local schools and Hugo Sanchez and Maritza Barrera are responsible for this activity. In Arenal there is a new chess club for children from Arenal Guatemala who visit La Casita every Thursday afternoon to receive classes from coordinators Dina Marroquin, Aidé Sanchez and Arjelia Barrera.

# GENDER EQUITY

For over a year now Claudia Orantes has been working with the youth coordinators on issues of Gender Equity using a material called “Between Wishing and Needing”. This weekly activity provides us with the skills to analyze situations that affect us directly - situations that have always been there but we haven’t been able to identify them as they have become naturalized in our society and culture.

## GUATEMALAN & BELIZEAN WOMEN

### ONE VOICE FOR OUR RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

## 2012 / 2013



Between November 2012 and March 2013, youth leaders have been gathering in Guatemala City to talk and analyse the past and present context of women in Central America and how we can improve the future.

In these meetings we have talked of self-esteem, how society views young women, and the rules that we have to follow just for being women. We also talk of the discrimination and how the media portray women as objects.

These workshops, called 'Women Empowering Ourselves', have given the opportunity for us to know more and to strengthen our understanding of the expected role of women in a male dominated society.

These workshops are necessary for us to find and transmit our feelings of being mothers, daughters and friends.

## CHITIC 2012

For thousands of years our ancestors the Mayas danced on stilts to invoke the heart of the rain so that their corn fields and other plantations would receive the water that was needed for it to grow. According to the Popoluh Book, Hunaj Puj and Ixbalanque also danced on stilts to defeat the spirits of the underworld. So to continue with that tradition, between 29th November and 2nd December 2012 La Danza Chitic was held. This is a three day Festival held every two years in different regions of Guatemala. On this occasion the group that hosted all the stilt walkers from Central America was EPOEDEP of Ciudad Quetzal, San Juan Sacatepequez, Guatemala. EPRODEP was the winning group at Chitic 2010. Eight Caracoles and two students from Tumul K'in Collage from Toledo, went to represent Belize and we took the prize for the best costumes that represented the festival theme.

At these encounters children, young people and adults from different parts of Central America take advantage of being together and debate laws that protect, support and also hinder young people's development.





The Playing Fair activity has now become a popular tradition of Caracol in Arenal and once every eight weeks it invites children from Arenal Belize-Guatemala to gather at our famous 'international' football field.

Every Playing Fair has a topic; one month it is for children's rights and the next promotes environmental protection. During the activity up to 80 children participate and discuss different topics while they play and compete in their four teams.



## INTELLIGENT GROUPS

Being a group is more than gathering people to work together and achieve their goals. A group must develop its own intelligence and have the capacity and the possibility to understand and manage the difficult situations of every participant. In this way we can work fairly, with equity, intelligently and with humanity. The Intelligent Groups sessions, held every Tuesday at the Caracol Office in Benque Viejo teach us how to work better together while being aware of and sensitive to the needs of each member.

# TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

When people think of the Mayas, almost everyone thinks of the archeological sites. But the Mayas had highly developed systems of traditional medicine, economy and trade, mathematics and astronomy. For the second time a Caracol youth coordinators participated in the two-week course in Traditional Knowledge run by the Institute of Sustainable International Studies (ISIS) in Belize. This time, Aide Sanchez took the course designed for university students visiting Belize from foreign universities. It was a good experience having another perspective of what being Maya is all about. Caracol always tries to give opportunities to the youth coordinators to participate in courses that will benefit not only them but their process of formation in Caracol.

This course seemed to motivate Aide's desire to return to formal education and, together with youth coordinators, Dina Marroquín and Argelia Barrera she is now enrolled in a sixth form equivalent program on Saturdays. Aide is now sure she would like to study for a university degree and intends to explore other areas of life in Arenal, in order to support women's development in the



community. Aide's desire to know more about traditional medicine motivated her to visit Doña Jilberta (pictured), traditional healer and midwife from Arenal Guatemala.

## NETWORKING & YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN CENTRAL AMERICA

In recent years governments throughout Central America have been publishing their national youth policies with a view to creating programs that promote youth rights and responsibilities. In December 2012, Caracol participated at the 'Central America Methodological Encounter' in San Antonio Los Ranchos, El Salvador. Young people from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize discussed and analyzed where we are as youth and where we are going. During the encounter there were forums and Aide Sanchez was on the table of Restorative Justice, where problems were presented and participants had to propose solutions. Aide Sanchez represented the Guatemalan Community Art Network.

## EIGHT YEARS OF CARACOL IN ARENAL

Eight years ago Caracol founders Claudia Orantes and Jon Ottley started working with 12 young people from Arenal Belize on photography, arts and crafts and creative writing. One year later 12 young people from Arenal Guatemala joined the group. Three of the participants who started in that first year are still in Caracol and they are Aide Sanchez, Maritza Barrera and Dina Marroquin. In the last six years Caracol has grown and the coordinating group, which, in 2008, was made up of three young people, now has seven full time youth coordinators. This year, 2013 brings us more challenges and a new working structure



focused on our group's sustainability and networking. Our physical working space has also grown as we have a new building and a site improvement project. This means we will have more responsibilities to use it as much as possible and of course to maintain and keep it clean. Since August 2012, Caracol has partnered with various donors including the British High Commission, Belize and the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives who have both helped finance the new building. We have also signed a new two-year grant with the CARSJ project of the US Embassy in Belmopan, Belize.



## CARACOL IN ARENAL: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

On the 10th April 2013 Caracol took a big step forward for securing our work in the border area when key stakeholders signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a 25-year renewable lease on the land where the Caracol youth centre is located. The essence of the MOU states that while Caracol "continues to promote its core values of youth development" it will have a home in Arenal. The signing of the document by Caracol Youth Coordinators, Arenal Village Chairman, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, the School Manager and Caracol is the end of a negotiating process that took nearly two years. Everyone is happy with the achievement, which is seen as a stepping-stone to further success.

As well as the MOU Caracol has received recent support from the British High Commission, The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives and the CARSJ Project. These grants have helped guarantee work in the base of Arenal but also in outreach communities.

