



Friends of Caracol Newsletter

May 2009

Lots Happening at La Casita

Caracol and the Caracoles have been very busy in recent months so we felt it time for a Friends of Caracol Newsletter.

Caracol has become very important in the lives of our young members as it provides them with the opportunity to explore their creativity through art and develop new skills learned in training workshops. Caracol's long-term objective is to train the youth leaders to manage the project and be responsible for planning, delivery and evaluation of activities. In June of this year two Caracol youth leaders will graduate from high school - a great achievement - and we intend to employ them on a full time basis. This is another step towards Caracol becoming a youth-lead community arts project serving the needs of young people in Belizean and Guatemalan communities.

We are delighted that the established group of Caracoles continues to flourish. We are also pleased to have had the opportunity to develop new outreach programmes in the border area between Belize and Guatemala and are really excited to be working again in Crooked Tree Village. The following tells a little of what has been happening.

The Canada Fund – The financial support from the Canada Fund ends in June. This project has been key to Caracol's work since January 2008 and has funded the refurbishment of our building, two desktop computers and 100's of hours of creative workshops. During the Canada project two Ambassadors and the Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs visited Caracol. All were pleased to be supporting a project where young Belizeans and Guatemalans work together to promote a culture of peace and creativity.



La Casita de Caracol
in Arenal Belize

High School in Arenal Guatemala – Since Caracol began working in Arenal in January 2005 we have been aware that children have limited opportunity to go to High School. Transport and school fees are very expensive in Belize and for Guatemalans the road is too dangerous for children to travel alone. Recently the Guatemalan government contracted a teacher to travel to Arenal Guatemala to give secondary school classes to students of Guatemalan and Belizean origin. This is an exciting development for many Arenal children who often reach the end of their education at 12 years of age.

Creative Exchange, the Organisation of American States (OAS) and Caracol Youth Leaders

– Creative Exchange started as a pilot project funded by Canada. Caracol members invited twelve children from Melchor de Mencos and Benque Viejo del Carmen to participate in a four-day Youth Camp. Caracol youth leaders facilitated the activities, which involved arts and crafts, games, singing, writing etc. The response was very positive and workshops are now being delivered during a weekend once every eight weeks.

Creative Exchange takes place at the facilities of the OAS in the border area between Belize and Guatemala. The OAS assists the two governments in attempting to resolve an historical territorial dispute. Creative Exchange is a Confidence Building project that takes advantage of the friendship that exists between young Belizeans and Guatemalans in Arenal.



Participants during the Creative Exchange Workshops

Youth Exchange – In February of this year three youth leaders from the Guatemalan Community Arts Group Ixcan Creativo visited Arenal to give workshops on Theatre and an Introduction to Video. In June Caracol members will travel to the department of Ixcan to teach pin-hole photography.

Developing theatrical ideas for "A Tale of Tales"



Julio learning the video camera

A Tale of Tales – Belizean writer David Ruiz (a great supporter of Caracol) has written a short play for Caracol. The play draws on the oral traditions, fauna and flora of Belize and Guatemala to describe the damage being done to the environment by man. It ends by describing the hope embodied by the group of young people in Arenal who work together for their community and their environment. This play will form part of the Cultural Programme of the Organisation of American States who will be offering children workshops on Theatre, Painting and Music. Claudia will be facilitating these Theatre Workshops between May and September 2009.



Chitic – Nearly three hundred stilt walkers from Guatemala, Costa Rica, Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize met in the town of Rabinal in Baja Verapaz Guatemala in December 2008. During three days participants learned about the cultural history of stilts and their use by the Mayas of Central America. Workshops were given on acrobatics, juggling, clown, dance and music. During the final day participants put on their stilts and paraded through the town centre in a Comparsa (Carnival) entertaining the crowds with their costumes, dance and music. Eight Caracoles, Claudia and Jon participated in this event.

Los Caracoles at Chitic

British High Commission – In February Caracol was approached by the British High Commission to submit a proposal to continue our Confidence Building work in Arenal. The project was approved and the funding will be used for Creative Exchange at the OAS, arts workshops for teachers from Arenal Belize and Guatemala, training by Caja Lúdica of Guatemala (www.cajaludica.org) and Caracol's participation in international Community Arts Networks.

Trustee Visit and Spend a Penny – Earlier this year Caracol Trustees Liz and Brian Moulton visited the Caracol project in Arenal. Their visit coincided with the workshop by Ixcan Creativo and gave them a good idea of the benefits of youth exchange for Belizean and Guatemalan children. Liz and Brian were impressed by the mutual respect and confidence shown by the young people they met and were inspired to raise money to improve the facilities at the Caracol building. Spend a Penny aims to raise funds to build two toilets at La Casita de Caracol. This is a much-needed facility for children, parents, teachers and guests who visit Caracol regularly. Elsewhere in this Newsletter Liz and Brian have written about their visit.

Crooked Tree – A new outreach programme has started in Crooked Tree (the village where Caracol first began work in Belize). Once a month children at the Crooked Tree Government School participate in photography and arts-based classes planned and facilitated by the Caracol Youth Leaders from Arenal.



Participants in Crooked Tree learn to use their cameras



Rodolfo Marroquín

Photography – Photography continues at Caracol and we now have a darkroom and digital photography facilities at La Casita. Each Caracol member has a camera and older members process film, scan negatives and, are at the moment, exploring pinhole photography.

The black and white photos shown here are by new Caracol members.



Pirina Gutiérrez



Kevin Guerra

Networking – Caracol's work is, in many ways, unique; for example we are the only community arts group bringing young Belizeans and Guatemalans together. However, throughout Central America there is an expanding community of youth groups using the arts to build confidence and understanding. Caracol is a member of the Guatemala Community Arts Network and MARACA (the Central America Community Arts Movement.) Membership means we can offer workshops to other member groups and receive training. Caracol's youth leaders attend meetings of network coordinators and learn to apply project methodology such as activity planning and evaluation in their own community.

Youth Leadership – In July 2009 two Caracol members, Maritza and Aide, will graduate from high school. Opportunities for work are few and Caracol will offer them full time employment. This will enable the two young women to bring some money to their homes, allow them to stay in their village, offer educational opportunities to other children, and give them the opportunity to learn more about Community Arts and project management. While working for Caracol they will be responsible for administration, film processing and teaching/facilitating. They will also represent Caracol in international networks of community arts groups.

Caja Lúdica and Teachers Workshop – The funding we have received from the British High Commission will meet the costs of continuing to invite young facilitators from Caja Lúdica to Arenal. Part of the programme will see the same facilitators, assisted by Caracol youth leaders, give creative workshops to teachers from both primary schools in Arenal. Encouraging teachers from both sides of the border to teach arts and crafts in the schools is a powerful way by which Caracol can reach more children. We will provide materials so the teachers can replicate what they learn.



Guatemalan and Belizean primary school teachers finish an arts workshop at La Casita de Caracol

From Liz and Brian Moulton, Caracol Trustees

For us, it was the culmination of six years of fund raising for Caracol - a visit to Belize in late February this year. From the moment we crossed from Melchor, Guatemala, into Belize we felt very welcomed and at home. The country is beautiful and the people very friendly. We travelled from the Succotz area up to Crooked Tree and then to the coast at Hopkins. Every area was different but exciting.

Of course, our main aim was to spend some time with Jon and Claudia and the Caracoles. It was a real privilege to be with them all. Jon and Claudia amazed us by their commitment in time and energy and their lack of worldly goods. The Caracoles were warm and welcoming and incredibly appreciative of the fund-raising done in the UK. (So thanks to all our supporters who keep these projects going).

While we were in Arenal! we were lucky enough to witness a long weekend of inter-activity with a group of teenagers from Guatemala, who incidentally had travelled 12 hours in a public bus, on terrible roads, to be with the Caracoles. These young people taught video filming, computer work and drama with enormous confidence, while the Caracoles joined in with great enthusiasm. The older Caracoles Julio, Gudiel, Alejandro, Aide, Dany, Ofelia and Maritza, who have been in the group for five years, help the newer younger members, and are now beautiful, confident young people. We felt that all the hard work with plant sales, coffee mornings and quiz nights has been worthwhile.

While at the school in Arenal we couldn't help but notice that there are no 'loo' facilities. Holding on to ones bladder is a new skill we perfected! As a result, we have launched the 'Spend a Penny' project. We hope, over the next few months, to raise enough money to build an outdoor earth closet for the use of all Caracoles, facilitators and visitors. This will be a great relief to all! We also saw the need to fence off the play area, which, at present, is visited by village horses, pigs, dogs and chickens. Finally, we would like to improve the building now used for drama and stilt walking, which has no doors or windows and an inadequate roof. Our aim is to raise £1850 to pay for these improvements.

While we were watching the young people in their drama class, many of the younger children from the village were attracted into the room to watch too. There is much work for Caracol to do here!

We came home even more enthusiastic about raising funds for Caracol. Thank you for your support, which we hope will continue. Thanks also to Jon, Claudia and the Caracoles for all they do to improve the lives of families in Belize, and, also, helping to maintain peaceful relationships between Belize and Guatemala.

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