



Friends of Caracol Newsletter

August 2010

Caracol Working Scholars going from strength to strength

To all our friends and supporters we welcome you to our latest newsletter where we share with you news of recent Caracol activities.

Since June 2009 the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives has supported the Caracol Working Scholarship program and this funding came to an end in July 2010. However, Caracol will continue funding these stipends which enable young people to remain in their home villages rather than leaving to look for work in often risky conditions. They are able to contribute to their households and apply their newly learned skills to the benefit of their own and nearby communities.

Working scholars learn project methodology, develop creativity and practice leadership skills. They become role models and ambassadors for their group and their village. A youth leader stipend of £120 per month helps guarantee the expansion of all Caracol activities.

Since our previous newsletter the stilt walkers have been invited to perform at different festivals in Belize and are becoming respected for their enthusiasm to

entertain. The progress of the group is, in large part, thanks to our three Working Scholars who have worked hard on costume production, training and promotion.

If you would like to contribute to this programme please contact us at the addresses below. And now the latest from the Caracol working scholars Aide, Maritza and Julio who write these notes and select photos after each activity.

Best wishes, Claudia & Jon

The Caracoles keep people talking by honouring Caracol and our community. The number and variety of activities is growing all the time, as well as the sense of responsibility to continuously improve our work.

State visit of the Governor General of Canada to the Guatemala-Belize Adjacency Zone



Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean receiving her photograph

On the 12th December 2009 Her Excellency the Right

Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, visited the Adjacency Zone between Guatemala and Belize. Caracol gave a series of presentations including an extract from the Tale of Tales play, juggling and stilt-walking and a photographic exhibition. We offered her a gift of two hand-printed framed photographs taken by a girl and a boy from Arenal. After the presentation Her Excellency had a conversation with Los Caracoles about art, youth issues and life in the adjacency zone. Afterwards one of the delegates commented that the visit with Caracol had been the highlight of her state visit.

It was an amazing day for all involved and here we reproduce part of a personal letter Claudia recently received from Her Excellency:

...It was so wonderful to hear of the efforts that you and all those involved in Caracol are making to create a better understanding between the two countries [Belize and Guatemala]. We were particularly heartened to see young people involved in the program, bridging the gap between peoples using the arts. We have always maintained that the arts can be a universal language of peace and reconciliation, and we applaud you and all of these young people for your courage and innovation..."

Visiting the parents of Caracol members

In January parents were visited by Aide and informed

about the following: new *Caracoles* would soon be receiving their cameras; a Homework Club will start in September; English sessions will soon start for Guatemalan participants. Parents were also informed about the participation of three Caracol members in *El Berrinche Ambiental* youth encounter taking place in Granada, Nicaragua and those interested in the toilet project were told that it would be a priority for 2010. In this respect some expressed their enthusiasm to see the construction, using recycled bottles, finished.

Some parents commented that it is rewarding to see some of the original Caracol members in Arenal continuing so dedicatedly with the group and showing such eagerness to work for our community. They expressed their hope that new members, who are now beginning with the process, stay and grow with the same willingness. Parents asked to be kept informed about future meetings with sufficient time. Mothers and fathers confirmed their support and some asked for their younger children to be able to participate.

Encuentro El Berrinche Ambiental (Environmental Tantrum Youth Encounter)
With the soul overflowing with positive energies and the heart full of community arts young people from Central

America arrived at the encounter *El Berrinche Ambiental* in Granada, Nicaragua. Over 150 young people and adults participated in the event. Caracol arrived three days before the inauguration to give two days of pinhole photography workshops for our hosts, the members of the *Escuela de la Comedia y el Mimo* (The School of Comedy and Mime).



A Caracol pinhole photography workshop in Nicaragua



However, due to the amount of preparations, the workshops were postponed until after the festival and this gave *Los Caracoles* the chance to support the production of the event. We helped making props, coordinating cultural events, as well as documenting the festival. Living together, sharing and working

with young artists, each with distinctive tools of expression but with the same objectives, was an enriching experience. It was truly wonderful.

Creative Exchange at the OAS

During four days in February, March, June and August peace, harmony and friendship were part of the environment during the Creative Exchange Workshops. Held at the premises of the Organization of American States (OAS) 24 children and young people from Benque Viejo del Carmen and Melchor de Mencos participated. Using their creativity and imagination the participants worked on activities focused on Saint Valentine's Day, recycled arts and crafts and lots of games. At the end of each day everybody takes home items produced by them using recycled materials. Everyone participated fully including those who were with the group for the first time.



During Creative Exchange everybody helps to create a friendly and respectful environment

Parents Committee

On 8th March parents demonstrated their support to their children by attending a

meeting at the Caracol premises where the following topics were discussed using a Carrousel group game learnt at network meetings: responsibility with cameras for the new photographers, parental concerns about mistreatment of children at the Arenal Belize Primary School, exhibitions, the parent's committee, toilet & site improvement and the encounter in Nicaragua. On these occasions it is satisfying to see parents participating enthusiastically and showing their interest in Caracol

The Toilet Project and site improvement



Parents and Caracoles excavating for the septic tank



Measuring up

With the support of a group of parents the first stage of excavating an eight-foot deep hole took place. On the 13th & 14th March the parents worked for a whole Saturday and half a day on Sunday. Even though it was not possible to complete the work, it advanced well and was a real pleasure to share this work with the parents. We have now finished the septic tank part of the toilet and are currently collecting the bottles to construct the walls. Thanks to all those who have given their labour and donations for the materials, it will soon be ready!!!

Cameras for new Caracol photographers

On March 6th with their eyes full of joy, the new *Caracolitos* who didn't already have a camera arrived to receive theirs. A workshop was given on the good use of the camera and all were assigned photographic

and written homework. Meanwhile the intermediate members of Caracol participated in a review session and were also assigned homework. Crafts were produced using recycled materials.

Intercultural artistic exchanges with the Guatemala Community Arts Network (RGAC)

Exchanges with the RGAC took place in March, April and May. Workshops to improve the stilt-walkers performances are

now being delivered by Rigoberto Chicoj of Aguja, a member organization of the RGAC. "Spikey Wig? What's that?" was the question the boys and girls asked in the wig production workshop, but when finished, the surprise was profound.



Making purses from milk cartons and flowers from tin cans helped *los Caracoles* broaden their knowledge of recycled arts.



A new friend of Caracol, Maria Garcia, came to share with us

The May workshops were dedicated to carnival and included body expression, dance, percussion, juggling and production of carnival props. These workshops were a great suc-

cess because they represent a strengthening of the Guatemalan Network of which Caracol is a member.

Central America Community Arts Movement (MARACA)

From the 12th to the 15th of March members of the MARACA network met in Tegucigalpa, Honduras where host organization *Arte Acción* received representatives of organisations from four countries; Caja Lúdica from Guatemala, Relajo in Nicaragua, GuanaRed from Costa Rica and Caracol, from Belize. The objective of MARACA is to strengthen processes of artistic-cultural formation amongst Central American youth as a contribution to human development and promotion of a culture of peace throughout the region.

Women in Art Exhibition

A touch of black & white made all the difference at the Women In Art exhibit in Belize City. Two young artists from Caracol took part in the collective exhibition with pictures taken with a pinhole camera and a series of self-portraits. The experience was excellent as it gave us the chance to meet more artists working in Belize and be invited to perform at the Festival of Lights in Cristo Rey.

Festival of Lights

On the 20th of March the Festival of Light took place in Cristo Rey Village, Belize. A stilt walker and a clown from Caracol performed for the public and, according to

comments made after the show, had a great impact on the children, young people and adults alike. During the celebration new friends and contacts were made with groups and individuals participating in the Fest. It was a success for Caracol as it gave exposure to our work. Caracol has since met with event organisers, The Winsom Foundation, who invited our group back for the 2011 festival. In October an exchange programme will start for children from Caracol and The Winsom Foundation.

Pin Hole photography for Crooked Tree children

*A surprise is to be shared.
Eleven children painting their
tins wait and wonder.
Creativity flows and captures a
photograph!*



***Making Cameras in
Crooked Tree***

In order to make their own pinhole camera and take photos with it the Crooked Tree children showed up once again for their monthly workshops.

Everybody produced their camera and made at least one clear negative using natural light. This process

served as an auto-evaluation on themes from previous classes.

Since January 2009 monthly workshops have carried on in Crooked Tree for Caracol's photography group at the village government school. This 18 month programme ended in June.



Pin hole image by Chelsea Jex

Costa Rica University & The Palabra de Mujer TV programme

Ana Lucia and Enrique from the programme *Palabra de Mujer* of the University of Costa Rica's TV channel visited Belize to make a documentary about the Women in and around Caracol. During the visit they interviewed Caracol coordinators, mothers of members, two young girls as well as the Coordinator of the Benque House of Culture



***Ana Lucia of 'Palabra de Mujer' at the
Crooked Tree Workshop***

Nayelli Trujillo. A Reporter and A Cameraman! We thought they would be very serious but after just a short time these friendly people gave their hearts and left wishing to return soon to Caracol. Apart from being dedicated to quality in their work they both found the child within and shared with *Los Caracoles* with great affection.



Enrique the Cameraman shares a game

Stilt walkers at the Chess Olympiad, Belmopan

With fresh motivation to be *Caracoles* to the max the stilt walkers came back to Arenal after giving their all in their presentation at the Chess Olympiad held in the capital of Belize, Belmopan.

It was a wonderful experience as it gave greater meaning to



Excellent Ambassadors!

the group's hard work which was rewarded by them being "treated like kings for a day" by the event organisers. They also received a payment which they divided between themselves, Caracol and their group. Before the day was over the group had been asked to participate in the 2011 event! Here we reproduce part of a letter to the group from Ian Anderson of the Belize National Chess Foundation:

...Everyone...and I repeat EVERYONE was thrilled with your performance. It is important for your parents to know that each and everyone of you conducted yourselves as excellent Ambassadors from your village. Your

parents, and in fact your entire village, should be honoured to have such a group representing them.

This letter really shows how the arts build self-esteem and help change stereotypes and perceptions.

Within the general public Arenal is considered as a place of trafficking (arms, drugs, people, contraband, cash), however, public performances help change negative ideas showing that young people are doing something positive. This is a very important part of our work.

RGAC Youth

Encounter - 13-15th May

Caracol coordinators were present helping out with pre-production of a youth encounter at the Community Arts group *Aguja* in Guatemala City. The themes evaluated by the young people were: local political incidence, exchanges realised & Chitic Stiltwalkers Encounter 2010. Caracol presented a proposal to the group, which was unanimously accepted; to produce a RGAC youth encounter arts festival in 2011 showcasing the work of all member groups. The young people decided that the festival will take place in June 2011 in Huehuetenango, Guatemala and each group will meet their own costs of participation. Caracol coordinators will support the production of the festival.

Opening the National Festival of Arts



The opening of the National festival of Arts in Belize City took place on the 25th May and Caracol was present with our friends from the Guatemala Community Arts Network. We all participated in the *comparsa* (carnival parade) using new skills learned

during recent workshops such as playing drums made from recycled bottles. At the invitation of the National Institute of Creative Arts, Caracol took 25 participants and it was a great chance for new members to integrate more fully into the group.

Caracol participates in Cirque du Monde Pedagogy Workshop

When her Excellency the Governor General of Canada visited Caracol she promised to arrange for some circus training. Seven months later (between the 1st – 8th August) Claudia, Aide and Maritza flew to Mexico City for training in The Pedagogy of Social Circus with the hosting group *Machincuepa Circo Social* (part of the *Cirque de Soleil Social Circus Foundation*). After the training the Caracol coordinators will outline what they have learned and how that new knowledge will be applied to the work in Belize and Guatemala.

We take this opportunity to thank Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean Governor General of Canada, Ambassador Leeann Mckechnie and the staff at the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala City for their invitation, great support and efforts in making this training happen.

More High School Graduates from Caracol

At the end of this school year Caracol members Gudiel Ruiz and Alejandro Fabian graduated from high school. Gudiel received a full scholarship during four years of high school funded through the Trustee’s Basket Scheme.

Alejandro received a partial scholarship, and ex-Caracol member Dany Ramos also graduated.



Gudiel and Alejandro - High School Graduates!



Arenal village has three new high school graduates a great achievement for this isolated community. Dany and Gudiel will be starting sixth form in mid-august and Alejandro will take a year off to work and save money for the 2011-2012 academic year. Gudiel and Alejandro had taken a rest from Caracol to dedicate fully to their studies but at the end of July both reaffirmed their commitment to Caracol and will be helping with photography clubs, site improvement

and homework clubs.

Art in Vacations and the New Caracol Groups

Aide and Maritza have been facilitating a series of summer workshops for young *Caracoles* in Arenal. For thirty-eight children who have been on the waiting list for the past few months, this is their first taste of working with Caracol and they have shown great enthusiasm to learn.



Maraca penguin!

Activities have included making maraca penguins out of plastic bottles, origami jumping frogs, games, paper crafts and DVD cinema. This activity continues during August and will end with a parade through the village.

Thank you for your support,
Aide, Maritza, Julio and
Los Caracoles

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