



# News from CESESMA

Promoting and defending the rights of children and young people, through awareness-raising, reflection and action in partnership with rural children and young people, and other members of the community.

Issue 2, July 2004

## Contents

- Editorial 1
- Theatre with a message 1
- Training tomorrow's leaders 2
- Skilled, structured, sustainable: the CESESMA team 3
- More youth theatre success 4
- How you can help 4
- How to contact us 4

## Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of the CESESMA electronic newsletter.

In this issue we have not one but two success stories from CESESMA's youth theatre groups; young people dealing with painful issues in a positive and creative way – and winning the recognition they deserve.

We also take the opportunity to present the entire CESESMA team – or at least the adult part of it. The three area teams also include young people, and we will hear more from them in the next issue.

If you read our last issue you'll know about the dynamic young team that runs our children's radio project, so we're pleased to say that since the last issue, the project has received a donation from Ragdoll Ltd. in the UK that has made their big plans an exciting reality. Thanks, Teletubbies!

We're still working on the CESESMA website. With any luck, the next Newsletter will be posted on it.

We hope you like the Newsletter, and look forward to hearing your comments.

Harry Shier

CESESMA, Matagalpa



## Reaching out from the Communities – Theatre with a message

The 25th of May was a big day for the La Dalia youth theatre group. They were invited to perform their self-devised original play "La Cara Oculta del Café" (The Hidden Face of Coffee) on the main stage of Managua's Rubén Darío Theatre (Nicaragua's National Theatre).

The occasion was a prestige event organised by the United Nations' International Labour Organisation to mark the close of its three-year anti-child-labour programme in Nicaragua; a programme in which CESESMA has been a key regional partner for the past three years.



There were Government Ministers and United Nations officials in attendance, but the loudest cheers came from the young actors' own family and friends; country people, dozens of whom had made the long journey to the capital to participate in this special day.

### The story of Benito

The play tells the story of Benito, an eleven-year-old labourer on a Matagalpa coffee plantation, who dies from the combined effects of overwork and malnutrition. His friends hold an "investigation" of the case, and discover a chain of responsibility involving parents, teachers, plantation foremen, absentee landlords, and even the government, all of whom are found to have played a part in causing Benito's tragic death.

Although the story is told in dramatised form, everything in it is based on the young people's personal experience of life and work in Nicaragua's coffee zone, based not on one case, but many. The cast, ranging in age from 10 to 18, developed the work through a participatory process of experience-sharing, reflection, and improvisation, leading to the eventual storyline and script. There are original songs and powerful elements of physical theatre; all contributing to a moving and provocative experience.

Created for presentation to local audiences in rural schools and community centers, the work translated well to the big stage, and it was a new experience for the young actors to perform with professional lighting, microphones and even a smoke machine.

The ILO officials were impressed too. They have invited the theatre group to perform at a major international event in the Costa Rican capital, San José in November.

## Training tomorrow's community leaders

Seventy-six young people aged 10 to 18 are enrolled on CESESMA's new training course for Promotores and Promotoras, known as FOCAPEC (from its initials in Spanish: "Formación y Capacitación de Promotores/as Educativos/as Comunitarios/as"). There are course groups in each of the three areas where CESESMA works: La Dalia, Samulalí and Yasica Sur, all situated in the hill country East of Matagalpa.

The new course marks a change in direction for CESESMA's pivotal training programme, the "Escuelita Comunitaria". Early this year the team decided that it no longer makes sense for us to try to get the young people through their basic primary grades at the same time as training to be Promotores/as.

"At the time it was necessary as a response to local needs", says co-ordinator Guadalupe Ruíz. "There was no fifth or sixth grade in the local schools. The Ministry (of Education) has had to respond to the demands from parents and students, and now that they offer fifth and sixth in most of the local schools, it makes more sense for us to get the kids into school, than to continue providing an alternative".

The dropping of fifth and sixth grade studies has opened up new spaces for the young people to focus on communication and organising skills, as well as getting a better grasp of the underlying issues: children's rights, participation, non-violence, gender equality, health and environment.

This core curriculum of key skills and issues is shared by all the students in an intensive two-day workshop every three weeks. A alongside this they can opt to join learning groups in their particular area of interest, which may be food-growing, craft skills, traditional dance, theatre, radio or reading promotion.



I spoke to one of the course participants, 17 year-old Eveling Herrera, from the community of Samulalí No. 2. Eveling told me she is already studying third year of secondary school in San Ramón. I asked her how she became involved with the FOCAPEC course:

"I'm already involved in knitting and macramé groups in my community. Marisol invited me to participate in the course and I decided to join to gain more knowledge. So far it's a very good experience; we're learning about the Children's Rights Code, and about how to be a promotor. The group gets on well together; everyone relates to each other and most participate. I enjoy everything, above all the communication within the group.

"As for future plans, I'm interested in theatre, because I think it would help me to communicate and say things in a different way. I already share my knowledge with other children and young people in my community. I can do this through the knitting group as well as theatre. I hope in the future I can promote their participation more; explaining things to them, helping them to organise, helping them put their ideas into practice."

### What is a Community Education Promotor?

**On completing the FOCAPEC course, the Promotor /Promotora will be a person:**

- with high self-esteem, who respects him/herself and those around him/her;
- who recognises him/herself as a member of society, and a possessor of human rights;
- with knowledge of the legal and social framework of children's rights, environmental protection, health and nutrition, non-violence, gender and sexuality, among other things;
- who puts their learning into practice in their personal life, family and community;
- capable of promoting the organisation of children and young people in the promotion and defense of their rights;



- capable of forming groups and facilitating learning processes of action-reflection, promoting participation, resolving conflicts, planning and evaluating group-work;
- capable of communicating with all sectors of the community, children and adults, in their own community and beyond;
- capable of involvement in decision-making at different levels, and in the development of their community;
- with tools for analysing the issues facing their community, and working in partnership with other community members to find solutions;

In addition, every Promotor/a will have an area of skill or special interest, with tools and techniques for passing on these skills to other children in their community.

*(Extract translated from the FOCAPEC course folder)*

## Skilled, structured and sustainable

With a new financial support package from Development Cooperation Ireland (formerly Ireland Aid), CESESMA has embarked on a three-year organisational development programme. The programme has three linked elements:

### 1. Developing and strengthening the professional team:

This element is enabling CESESMA team members to undertake professional studies at university level in different disciplines. It's a huge personal commitment, involving travel to Managua every weekend, and many hours of home study alongside their normal work. Other colleagues are developing capacity in the use of information technology, and others in technical studies linked to CESESMA's crafts programmes. There is also an in-house team-based policy-development programme, and training on conflict resolution and violence reduction.

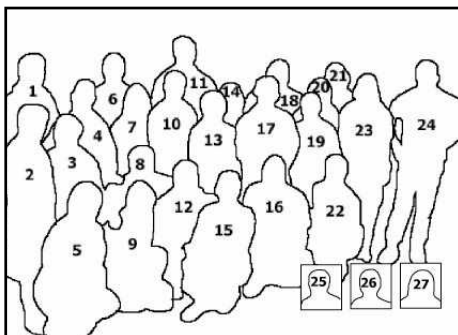
**2. Strengthening the organisation:** CESESMA started twelve years ago as a loose-knit group of ex-teachers, testing out new ideas in environmental and health

education in local schools. Now it's a multi-disciplinary team of 27, divided into three area teams and a central support unit, promoting dozens of different activities, and developing a strong national profile. The second element of the organisational development programme will enable CESESMA to establish the new management systems, decision-making structures and office base it needs as it enters a new stage of development.

**3. Building sustainability:** Self-sustainability is an unrealistic goal for an educational organisation like CESESMA which works with children and young people from some of the poorest and most marginalised communities in the western hemisphere. While CESESMA will always depend on outside funds, we are committed to an ongoing process of expanding our national and international support networks, developing funding relationships based on long-term strategy rather than short term projects, and, within three years, earning a percentage of our income through the provision of training services and educational resources to other agencies at home and abroad.

## The CESESMA team

La Praga, May 2004



1. Stefan Maier, Environmental Educator, La Dalia Team
2. Nohemí Molina, Trainer, Educator, Central Support Team
3. Blanca Rugama, Cook, Housekeeper
4. Ricardo Pérez, Community Worker, Yasica Sur Team
5. Martha Padilla, Trainer, Educator, Central Support Team
6. Allan Espinoza, Agricultural Educator, Samulalí Team
7. Amy Aráuz, Trainer and Development Worker, Girls' Network
8. Omar García, Agricultural Educator, Yasica Sur Team
9. Coco Molinares, Youth Theatre Co-ordinator, Actor, Producer, Musician.
10. Francis Blandón, Radio Project Co-ordinator, Girls' Network Facilitator



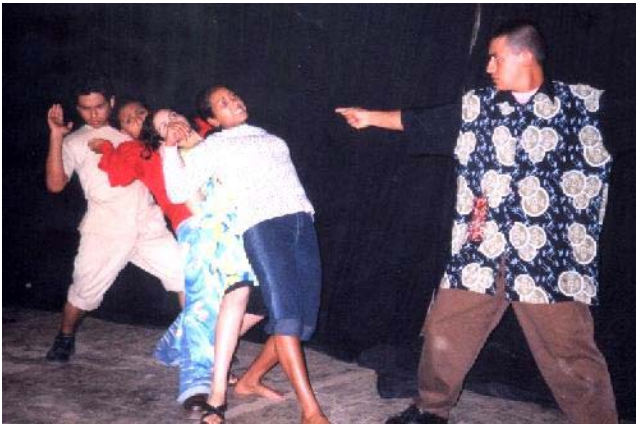
11. Jasón Kittles, Education Volunteer, US Peace Corps
12. Donald Zelaya, Co-ordinator, La Dalia Team, Children's Reading Project, Puppeteer
13. Guadalupe Ruíz, Co-ordinator, Yasica Sur Team
14. María Haydée Bello, Development Worker, Inclusion and Integration
15. María del Pilar Romero, Administrator and Accountant
16. Moisés Molina, Driver, Musician
17. Everth Ocampo, Educator, Youth Worker, La Dalia Team
18. Guillermo Medrano, Co-ordinator

19. Sandra Calero, Co-ordinator, Organic Agriculture Project
20. Marisol Hernández, Co-ordinator, Samulalí Team
21. Harry Shier, Trainer, Educator, Central Support Team
22. Flora López, Trainer, Educator, Central Support Team
23. Catalina Varela, Textile Crafts Trainer
24. Alex Petersen, Driver, IT Technician
25. Ruddy Calero, Agricultural Educator, La Dalia Team
26. Vicente Peralta, Construction Supervisor, Craft Trainer
27. Sara García, Finance Assistant

## More youth theatre success

(Continued from page 1)

CESESMA is currently supporting three established rural youth theatre groups, and in the process of forming five new groups. The La Dalia group is not the only one to have had success recently on the national stage. On 4th June, the Yasica Sur group presented their play "Golpes en el Alma" (Blows to the Soul) to an appreciative audience in Managua's Justo Rufino Garay Theatre, as part of an event organised by Save the Children Canada to celebrate the launch of a new book "Chavalos y chavalas promoviendo y defendiendo sus derechos" (Kids Promoting and Defending their Rights).



The play deals with the issue of physical and emotional child abuse, and like the La Dalia group's play on child labour (see page 1), it is based entirely on the young people's local knowledge and experience.

After the performance, I talked to one of the young actors, Byron Gámez (18), who told me he had been in the theatre group 18 months. I asked how he felt, acting on a metropolitan stage for the first time.

"I was a little tense, because we didn't sleep much last night! But it was an experience! It's given us the urge to do more shows in more places. This show was important, because a lot of invitations to take the play to other places could depend on it."

So, what are the group's plans for the future?

"A new play, to keep on raising people's awareness. We're thinking of doing a play on the theme of deforestation, because it's such a big problem in the communities where we live."

Footnote: It looks like Byron was right about the importance of the Managua show. In the days immediately after, the group received at least two firm invitations to take the play to different parts of the country, so they'll be on the road again soon.

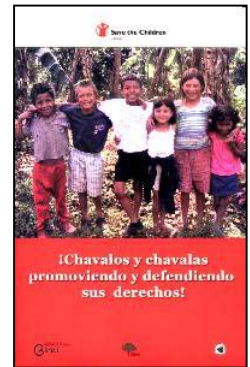
### NEW PUBLICATION

**¡Chavalos y Chavalas Promoviendo y Defendiendo sus Derechos!** (Kids Promoting and Defending their Rights)

Save the Children Canada, Nicaragua 2004

This new book offers a systematic analysis of three successful projects promoting children's rights and participation in rural Nicaragua: CAPRI, CESESMA and Acción Médica Cristiana (AMC). For readers of Spanish, it offers a thoughtful and detailed account of CESESMA's work during the period 1998-2001.

If you would like a copy, email CESESMA for more details.



## And so much more

The work featured in this newsletter is just a fraction of what we get up to at CESESMA. We now have eight youth theatre groups and a successful children and young people's radio project. Young Promotores/as are running dozens of organic gardening groups, traditional dance groups, craft groups, reading and story-telling groups. We support young people in campaigns around children's rights, non-violence, free education and environmental conservation. We've almost completed the building of a rural community training centre in La Dalia (special thanks to the UK Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign for their help with this). We're active in national networking, with increasing participation of children and young people in regional and national initiatives. We participate in the International Reflect Network, the Positively Global project with partners in Europe and Africa, and the International Association for the Child's Right to Play. All this and more you will be able to read about in future newsletters.

## How you can help

If you would like to support the work you have read about in this newsletter, there are several easy ways to send money. Drop me a line at the email address below and I'll send you details.

## How to contact us

**E-mail:** [cesesma@ibw.com.ni](mailto:cesesma@ibw.com.ni)

**Phone:** + 505 612 5842, but remember we are six hours behind GMT. If you don't speak Spanish, just say to whoever answers the phone, "¿Está Harry?" (Is Harry there?), and if I am, they'll give me a shout.

**Postal Address:** CESESMA, Apdo. #316, Matagalpa, Nicaragua

**And you can visit us at:** CESESMA, Finca La Praga, Km137½ Carretera La Dalia, Matagalpa ("La Praga" Farm, Km 137½ on the road to La Dalia, Matagalpa).