

## Maya Childcare Trust Bulletin

A charity based in the United Kingdom which is dedicated to supporting the work of the Centro Infantil Bellota (which is the Spanish for "Acorn Childcare Centre") - a childcare centre for disadvantaged children living in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

Welcome to the first Maya Childcare Trust newsletter of 2008! The most significant development in our work is that Rachael Ker, who founded the Trust and was key to setting up the Centre in Guatemala, has handed over the management of the Centre to her Guatemalan colleagues and returned to the UK. You can read about what's she's up to and how the work of the Centre continues without her below.

### Fundraising News

In February I had the opportunity to visit Farnborough School Technology College in Nottingham to meet some of the students who are leading the school's fundraising activities for the Trust. They've already held a number of successful events such as a non-uniform day, raffle and various Valentine's Day activities. Two of the school's Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme groups are coordinating the school's fundraising as the "service" element which they must fulfil as part of the scheme. In addition, all the students taking part in the scheme are seeking sponsorship for the hiking expeditions they will undertake in May (for the Bronze Award) and July (for the Silver Award). If you'd like to help them to reach their fundraising target, you'll find a designated page on our website by following this link: [www.mayachildcaretrust.org/sponsor](http://www.mayachildcaretrust.org/sponsor). We'd like to wish all the students good luck with the rest of their preparations and fundraising for their expeditions. We'll let you know how they got on later in the year.

On behalf of all at the Trust and the Centre, thank you for your continued support for our work in Guatemala.

Zoë

Zoë Rose - Chair of The Trust



Dressing up at The Centre

### News from the Centre

January saw some fresh beginnings for the Centre. In December, at the close of the year, the Centre held a wonderful Christmas party, which included a small graduation ceremony for several of the children and a leaving party for Rachael. It was a beautiful celebration of another successful year, and an appropriate time for Rachael to say good-bye.



The Centre reopened at the start of this year with Marielos as director and Ruben as the education co-ordinator. The Trust is very grateful for the experience, care and commitment that they bring to these roles. The Centre is also fortunate to have an excellent team of children's workers who are continuing to fill the building with warmth, colour, creative ideas, and affection.

At the start of March, the Centro Infantil Bellota celebrated its second anniversary. Children who have left were welcomed back to share in activities, and representatives from the local police, the children's tribunal, and other significant local organisations were invited to learn a little more about the Centre's work. The event was a great success and the work of the Centre was recognised in an article in the local paper. The Centre is now operating at its full capacity of 20 children.

*We would like to know if you have plans to raise money to support the work in Guatemala. Please contact us at [info@mayachildcare.org](mailto:info@mayachildcare.org)*

*For more information visit our website [www.mayachildcare.org](http://www.mayachildcare.org)*

You have received this Bulletin because you are listed on our database as a supporter of the Trust. The Trustees believe that this communication is an important way of letting you know how your donations are being used. If you would prefer to be removed from our mailing list please either email us at: [info@mayachildcare.org](mailto:info@mayachildcare.org) or write to our Secretary, Mr Andrew Ker, 24 Ravensdale, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim BT36 6FA.



**Rachael Ker has returned to the UK after 3 years setting up and running the Centre in Guatemala. We asked her about her time there.**

***What are some of the memories that stick with you from your time in Guatemala?***

After all the initial leaping through hurdles to legally establish the Centre, it was exciting to have children come and enjoy the place. They had so much enthusiasm. I remember being with a group of them on a Wednesday, when the focus was on music and movement, and watching them bouncing up and down and dancing about with so much energy and such delight. Then they collapsed in giggles on the carpet.



During the first year that the Centre was open, I was with the children all day every day and I shared so many special moments with them. The following year we had a slightly larger staff team and I spent much more time doing administrative work, but I was still often called out of the office because 'my help was needed'. I would somehow find myself with a pair of tights tied round my waist, weighed down by a lime that I had to swing against another lime to score a goal. Around 'Carnival' I was summoned and came unsuspecting onto the patio where all the children descended on me and smashed eggshells filled with confetti over my head. On another day a similar thing happened with water balloons. It was certainly never dull.

I also have some unsettling memories of visiting the homes that the children came from. Two young children were regularly locked into one small dark room with no bathroom while their mother was away. This was in an effort to keep them safe. The man who rented another room in the same building was often drunk and unpredictable in his behaviour. It felt a very threatening and unpleasant environment and such a contrast with the happy and caring atmosphere at the Centre. We saw huge progress in children at the Centre and I hope that their positive experiences there strengthened them to deal with the more difficult situations they faced. We are increasingly developing our work with parents to provide greater support for children and to help to integrate children's lives inside and outside of the Centre.

***What are you doing now?***

I am now working with adults with learning difficulties in Edinburgh, Scotland, and I am looking forward to marrying Adam in the summer.

***Are you still in touch with the Centre?***

I am still regularly in touch with staff at the Centre by email, and over the phone (though my Spanish may be getting a little rustier). I recently received a DVD from the staff with clips of children's activities and video messages from all the staff, which was really wonderful and made me miss them terribly. I developed a close working relationship and strong friendship with Marielos, the director of the Centre, while I was in Guatemala and that helps us to keep up good communication, despite the distance. I love hearing all their news and I am happy that I can still support the work that the Centre is doing. I am really looking forward to having an opportunity to go back and visit sometime to see all the new developments. The staff there are doing really good work and I know that they really appreciate all the support provided by people here. I am also extremely grateful to all those who haven't had the opportunity I've had to go and be hugged by these children but who still continue to raise money to help them. I know that the kids there would give you a heart-melting grin and a huge hug for all that you do!

***David***



David is 4 years old and started at the Centre last year. He arrived with bruises and scars and his front teeth missing from an attack by some

older boys. He previously spent his days at a busy, littered market in a more dangerous part of town while his mother served food there. He had a severe lung infection and seemed frightened of most people other than his mother.

David cried a great deal during his first couple of days at the Centre, but with patient care from staff he began to settle in. The other children also helped him to feel welcome. They greeted him warmly in the mornings and took him by the hand to show him where they were playing. Soon, he did not want to go home at the end of the day and his mother said that he woke early in the mornings really excited about going to the Centre. David has made friends and is affectionate and caring towards them. He has extremely limited speech, and a speech therapist is helping staff to develop his communication skills. He recently had a couple of severely infected teeth removed as part of the free dental care arranged through the Centre. He has put on weight, and looks very much healthier and happier. He loves to play and recently both he and his mother laughed and laughed as he invited her dance with him to the music playing when she came to collect him at the end of the day.