



Mek arwe go pong tory

News from the Lacey family in Antigua

...a lot has happened since our newsletter... We have celebrated our first job successes and been through our first setbacks, experienced our first tropical storm, travelled on our first holiday in the Caribbean, hosted our first set of visitors and have recently learned about a new addition to our family expected to arrive in February 😊 More information to follow in later newsletters!

...i.t. training... One of my initial expectations of my role at GARDC was that I would be heavily involved in delivering IT training to the students enrolled in the Caribbean Youth Empowerment Programme (CYEP). As it turned out, the centre already has a great IT trainer who spends his days taking the guys through the intricacies of Word, Excel, and other elements that contribute to their “computer literacy”.

Some of the students, though - have showed themselves to be considerably further ahead in their IT knowledge compared to many of their peers, and so - at their request - I created a five-week Introduction to Programming course, in which we covered basic concepts and developed together some applications in Microsoft’s C# language. Whilst I probably tried to cram too much information in to a short period of time, and perhaps lost some of the guys along the way, I think that it’s given them enough of an introduction to know whether or not they would be interested in pursuing the topic further as a career. One student in particular was very keen, and is going forward to do further

training at the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of IT.

Together with the Centre’s Peace Corps volunteer, Rachel Hall, and our IT

trainer, we’re now working to put together an improved syllabus for IT courses, which will hopefully inspire more of our youth to consider careers in that area. In a small country, where the employment opportunities are limited yet the Internet infrastructure is sound, our hope is that individuals here can start to exploit the tendencies that US and European companies have for off-shoring/outsourcing software development and other IT functions. **C.**

...turtles and beads... Antigua is a birthplace and nesting place of critically endangered Leatherback sea turtles that attract a lot of visitors each year. Only about 1 in 1000 turtles survive into adulthood. Widecast (a Caribbean-wide marine conservation organisation) and EAG (a local environmental NGO) have introduced the idea of “turning trash into cash” into Antigua. The beautiful beaches of Antigua are not home just to the turtles but also to plenty of trash not always visible at first sight. Beach glass, i.e. broken-up bottles, are part of it. However this material does not have to end up on the beach but can instead be turned into beads that are used to make attractive jewelry. The unique “product with a message” is easily marketed to tourists visiting Antigua. The end result is that the beach stays clean, local artisans earn their living and the message gets communicated. Also, a proportion of the profit goes directly into sea turtle conservation projects. GARD Center has hosted the training project and later made arrangements to house all the necessary equipment (burners, gas and oxygen bottles, stock of materials) as well as to provide ongoing working space for the artisans. Currently we are undergoing a planning process for an extension to our “post harvest shed” in order to accommodate the needs of local artisans. **V.**



...cooperation with the Scouts...

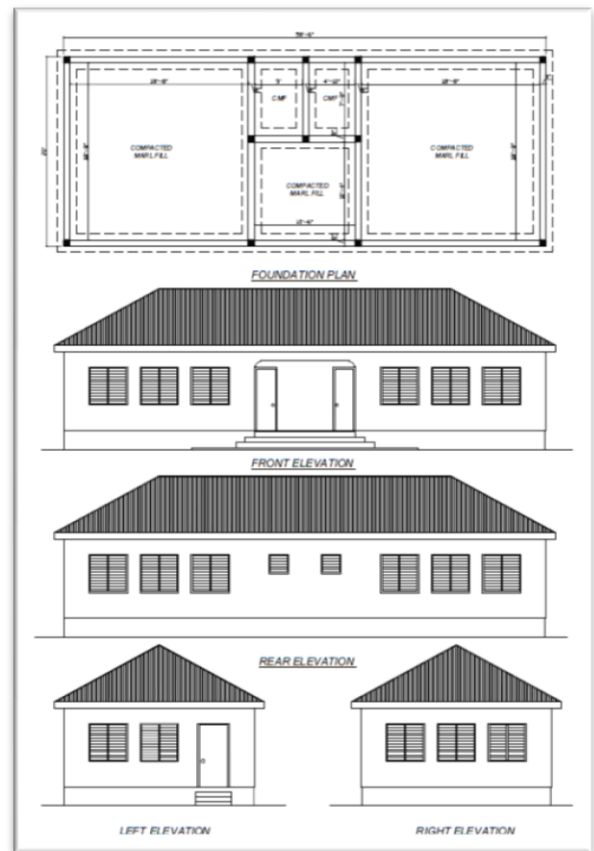
Following the recent use of the Methodist Ecumenical Centre (which adjoins GARDC) and its lands for a Scout camp, we were privileged to be invited for the presentation of two gifts, in the form of palm trees, as a gesture of friendship and confirming the commitment of the Scouts to work with both GARDC and the MCCA in the future. Rev George Mulrain, President of the MCCA, received one of the gifts, and I received the other on behalf of GARDC. After some fairly brief speeches from George and me, we were shown around the camp and introduced to all of the campers. GARDC depends heavily upon volunteers from other organisations, and we hope that our relationship with the Scouts will grow as healthily as the palm trees currently are!

C.



involved. The divine timing has again surprised me. Only last week after we have received the initial “yes” from the Japanese embassy and at the same time the GARD Center has received a donation of 7 brand new computers. Those machines will hopefully form a core of the newly proposed computer lab. You may think 7 computers are not very many - however, the clever IT people have managed to multiply that number by 4 by splitting each computer over a few monitors. Yes we still have monitors, keyboards, chairs, etc. to find funds for, but it looks like a good start to me. **V.**

...japanese ambitions... September and October have brought a lot of new project proposals on my desk. The most exciting one is the draft of a grant request addressed to the Japanese embassy. Our ambition is to extend the current facilities of the GARD Center. The existing facility consisting of two classrooms, one small computer room, tiny library and an office has proven insufficient in serving some 70 young students on a daily basis – not to mention all the other activities that go on as well. We are proposing to build an additional computer lab and a classroom, as well as two bathrooms, to enable us to serve more students and increase the variety or length of offered courses - as well as to provide sufficient working space for the staff and tutors



Architectural plans for the new building

...new computer lab... We were fortunate to receive an unexpected, and unsolicited, donation of seven brand new PCs last month - from CARICAD (The Caribbean Centre for Development Administration). After they inspected a number of centres and schools where they were contemplating providing the donation, they chose the GARD Center based upon the benefits it would provide the centre’s users, and the infrastructure we have in place in to maintain and manage them.

The timing couldn’t have been better - if Vera’s project proposal to the Japanese proves successful, we will have a new computer lab constructed in 2012, and we’ll extend these machines (using nComputing devices) to provide 28 terminals within it.

In the meantime, employees of the GARDC Nature Centre have worked hard to transform our smaller classroom into a second IT lab, laying a new floor and constructing some beautiful furniture. Several of our Graphic Design students are enjoying the increased performance that the machines provide with regard to their assignments, and some are starting to undertake “virtual” job placements in the form of seeking work for simple graphic design projects from the likes of oDesk.com, a site in which people the world over can outsource their requests. **C.**

...fundraising... Currently I am heavily involved in instigating new fundraising activities for the Center. During the summer, I conducted an online survey among the staff, board and friends of GARD to get an idea about the level and type of involvement as well as many individual ambitions in fundraising for the Center. I summed up my recommendations in a *Fundraising Action Plan 2011-2012* that I had a chance to present and get a “go ahead” for at the last board meeting. The board has been quite supportive and enthusiastic of the efforts so now we hope the actions will follow through just the same.

One of the first things we have been working on is to establish a good overview of all fundraising efforts. Chris has designed an easy-to-use database that enables all the staff to see whom we’ve contacted, what has been done so far, how much money a donor is willing to give, what are the preferred funding areas of a donor etc. That way the board as well as the staff has an instant and detailed overview of all the past, current and perspective donors.

Other things which we hope to accomplish are:

- establish online fundraising for the Center,
- target the large tourist market in Antigua by introducing fundraising gift cards
- develop a set of donor materials introducing all of Center’s programmes
- establish donor communications.

Given the multitude of recommendations and tasks in the action plan we have decided to form a task force of four people that will bear the primary responsibility for implementing the action plan. The current task force consists of a Peace Corps volunteer (American), a Mission Partner (Czech), Project Coordinator (Antiguan), and a representative of the board (Antiguan). The mix of nationalities, backgrounds and positions within the organization should ensure enough creativity as well as sufficient input.

Fundraising may sound like a dry topic or a necessary “evil” for any NGO. However, in this case it has also turned out provide for some enjoyable socializing with colleagues. In order to give the topic sufficient concentration we hosted a brainstorming session at our house one day. Not only was that extremely productive, it also seemed to help a good deal with staff bonding. We have discovered that it’s not all that common to have people around and our colleagues don’t tend to go out together outside of work - but we hope this “home work session” with shared lunch and coffee breaks may set a new precedent. **V.**

...STOP PRESS... We have just hosted Antigua’s Minister of Information for a formal handover of our new computer lab, and to introduce him to some of our Graphic Design students. He proved to be so impressed with the quality of GARDC’s programmes that he went on to commit to his Ministry accepting five GARD Center students in November for an internship programme, and to offer full-time employment to three students in January 2012. Even more excitingly, he stated his plans to hand over the layout and design of a prestigious governmental publication, due for release in May next year, entirely to the GARDC Graphic Design cohort. The students will work hand in hand with employees from the Ministry in producing an attractive, and entirely locally produced, publication. More information at:

http://ab.gov.ag/gov_v4/article_details.php?id=2161

...prayer points... Please pray for:

- The outcomes of our three project proposals in progress
- A healthy pregnancy for Věra
- The new Sunday School at our church, which Sofie has started attending.

October 2011

Mission Partners Chris and Věra Lacey are working at the Gilbert Agricultural and Rural Development Center in Antigua, providing IT and management support and training.

*Please get in touch if you're interested:
MCCA Belmont, PO Box 9, St John's, Antigua
clacey@gardc.org or vlacey@gardc.org*