

Fairtrade Producer Visit March 2011

Feedback Notes for Steering Groups

Our visitor was Jitzy Centeno from Nicaragua, a Fair Trade and organic coffee grower from a tiny, remote rural community, El Jocote, in the NW of the country. Unusually, she has worked at weekends to achieve secondary and now a university level education, but remains a grower with her own area of coffee trees, the size of a football pitch

The visit was arranged by Bristol Link with Nicaragua (BLINC).

It was supported by the Coop and Bristol City Council but most of the cash funding came from the schools (£1425), at the rate of £150 day. BLINC, however, also made significant input of organisational time, including that of Jessica Randall, a talented American postgrad volunteer. She not only interpreted, but at most schools led classroom sessions where requested to great effect. She also helped greatly with the preparatory organisation. The Bristol Network organised the non teaching events and facilitated the Bristol school participation, and the South Gloucestershire Fair Trade group launched the scheme to South Gloucestershire schools with the support of the Children and Young Person's Department.

We visited 13 sites, involving 20 schools of which 7 were feeder primaries. Jitzy spoke to approx 2,200 children as well as another 400 people at public events. Whilst most students were yr 6 7 or 8, we covered the entire age and ability spectrum from yr 4 to sixth formers, and including a SEN school (Culverhill), a SEN class at Brislington, and a morning with the Pupil Referral Unit at Mangotsfield. This was, we believe, a first, and it is very pleasing to report that these sessions with less able and troubled children worked very well. It is of course, in the nature of Fair Trade that it enables participation at any academic level. The informal sessions with small groups of sixth formers were also very interesting for both us and the students, enabling them to get a first hand picture of life in a rural community.

Activities included a range of well known Fair Trade games- chocolate, banana and coffee games, word search, poster making as well as showing beans before and after roasting. Most schools had done some preparation, and students clearly benefited more where this had been done. Some had very good questions indeed. A few had rehearsed "Goodbye" and "Thank you" in Spanish, which was pleasing. Many classes were planning to follow up by completing posters or in other ways, and some schools had included the visit as part of a wider Fair Trade or citizenship programme.

Feedback from schools has been very positive, with all schools saying they would like a repeat next year. A number of staff had Spanish or had visited Nicaragua and a couple of schools were interested in an ongoing contact. The impact on staff was considerable, one teacher was kind enough to say it was inspirational. At the PRU one boy, normally withdrawn, became a quite active participant.

Schools and Centres

South Gloucestershire Pucklechurch, St Marys Thornbury, Castle, Winterbourne, Downend, Kingsfield, Culverhill, Mangotsfield PRU, Mangotsfield Secondary + Mangotsfield and Tynings feeder primaries

Bristol Ashton Gate, Sefton Park, St Patricks, Brislington Enterprise College + 5 feeder primaries

Grand Total Sessions **2577** Children **2184**. (Some children went to an assembly and then a workshop, so had two sessions) . For most schools the average cost per session was

under 50 pence /child session which is very cost effective in hard times.

Jitzy also visited the Bishops Brew, the International Women's Day event , spoke to Bristol procurement officers and at the Burgess Salmon fashion show. She attended but didn't speak at the Fair Trade fashion show in the Galleries, which she found fascinating.- she had never even seen a large shopping mall. There were also a few private social events.

Press coverage and publicity

Bristol Evening Post : We had brief duplicate entries at the start of the fortnight from the joint Councils' press release, and a good photo and accurate report on Saturday 12th from the final "coffee roasting" session at Mangotsfield. An impression was given that Fair Trade isn't news unless something offbeat, like actually roasting the coffee, takes place.

All the schools plan a newsletter feature, which should take the news reach of the project into many thousands.

There were 3 different articles in the local press about the Bishop's Brew event, including one written by the Bishop himself.

For some schools the programme contributed significantly to a bid for Fairtrade school status.

Lessons Learned and Future plans

1. Presentations can be to any size group ,(our largest was almost 300) but a PA system is helpful.in large echoey halls.(we hadn't asked for this, and with a interpreter two mikes are needed). The standard of student attention was very high. Even one group we had been warned were restless were sitting in rapt attention for 20 minutes of talk and Q&A.

2. It is a mistake to try and do workshop games with a large 30 + group altogether in a large hall. If schools want this in future they need to have breakout rooms available.

3. Coffee beans should be in a sealed container . We realized rather late in the day they could potentially be a nut allergy risk.

4. Ideally, the interpreter and activities leader should be two people, making it easier for the visitor to participate in classroom activities. It is also important that the visitor is an active grower, children have an acute sense of the real deal.(Jitzy does work for the cooperative, but she still has her own plot to pick)

5. Getting sixth formers to lead group activities is an attractive idea, but they need close briefing . It would be better to do this well in advance.

6. The programme was very intensive, and tiring for all three participants- the constant change of venue imposes an additional pressure on volunteers who are not experienced in the classroom. A future plan would try harder to avoid switching schools in the middle of the day, allow more time for visitor jetlag recovery, allow some slack in the programme to accommodate any illness. (Jessica had lost her voice by the end of the programme) and allow a bit more time for local tourism.

7. Whilst we met several Heads and Jitzy presented bilingual certificates to the schools, the opportunity to engage Governors, parents and the wider community in attending assemblies or presentations seems to have been entirely missed. Perhaps this was understandable caution, and another year we may see some movement on this.

Lessons about Fair Trade

Jitzy's community of 300 scattered smallholdings has neither mains electricity nor running water, and is an hour from the nearest town on a dirt road. Local transport is on foot or horseback. It is however, well watered, and people bathe and wash clothes in the river. There are wells for drinking water. Coffee picking is very hard work, from 6am to 6pm day in day out, in 30 degrees, for the 3 harvest months, November - February. Most food is home grown, and chickens are kept for eggs and meat, and Rosa de Jamaica (a species of hibiscus) is grown for herb tea and artisan products.

Plots of land are usually well under 1 hectare, which yields a very modest income for most families (estimated an average round £ 270) for households which are large (Jitzy's "small" family is 7), living in small, usually mudbrick houses. She belongs to the Tierra Nuestra cooperative of 30 women, one of six similar coops that are part of a larger umbrella coop called La FEM.

As we progressed with questions and discussions, we gained a clearer picture of how these women's cooperatives worked. It had previously been unusual for women to grow cash crops and secure an independent income.

One of the very clear lessons was that Fair Trade can sometimes have a far greater impact than the modest social premium might suggest. Because it is normally a Fair Trade requirement to buy from a cooperative or community group, the coop the women set up was, with the others, able to fill a container and sell green coffee directly to a Fair Trade roaster in the US (Just Coffee) and gain over twice the price that local dealers paid (which would be well below the global market price). They also roasted and sold some coffee locally at urban markets, again securing a much better price in return for the considerable work extra.

The extra income so far has been spent on crop improvement, training for women in new skills, education (including finishing primary education for previously illiterate women) and a little on health. Tierra Nuestra also had arranged loans for very small (75 w) solar panels, enough for a couple of lights, for 5 households. (not from Fair Trade money, but the cooperative is able to access loans). The higher coffee price makes repayment possible.

The coop also encourages all the women, not just its members, to secure land title jointly with their menfolk so that they can access government loans for improvement.

We were told that after initial hostile reactions, the men in the community have come to accept the role of the cooperative, no doubt influenced by the higher price for the coffee. One of the organisational standards of Fair Trade is respect for human rights, and the women used this to try and curb domestic violence which is a huge problem in a very *machismo* society.

We learned that the FT certification process is expensive and needed the umbrella FEM organisation to achieve it and arrange contracts and coffee shipment to the US.

We learned that as growers, the women were very proud of the quality of their product and the close relationship they had with the buyer in the US (Jitzy had visited them 4 years ago, and some of their staff had come to the village)

More generally, the Fair Trade programme allied to the cooperative gave the community hope and a willingness to plan for the future. - the same story as in so many other FT projects. When asked a very perceptive question by a student, *Will you stay in your community or go to town?* Jitzy said she hoped to stay, and would certainly do so if power and water eventually came.

One boy with the directness of youth asked Jitzy *Are you rich or are you poor?* She replied

that in material things she was poor, but she had a wonderful family and friends, and lived in beautiful surroundings, and didn't think she was poor at all.

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Photos: www.seftonparkschools.bristol.sch.uk/news_68.htm