



GIRLS FOR THE WORLD

Summer Update 2014

Forging Solidarity Among Shipibo Girls GFW Returns to Peruvian Amazon



"Now that I have lived this experience, I have solidarity with other girls and I am not shy anymore. I'm a leader and I am happy!"

- Karen, 14 years old

by Lily Hollister (Reprinted with permission from author)

Last week, fifteen girls in Puerto Firmeza community participated in a special rite of passage ceremony. After five days, the timid girls who arrived were completely transformed into self-aware, strong, confident, young leaders. For the second year in a row, Alianza Arkana partnered with Shipibo Joi and Girls for the World (GFW) to offer this coming-of-age experience to Shipibo girls between 12 and 19 years old. We continue to be amazed by the transformation we witness in these girls each year.

The girls enjoyed discussing labels and nicknames that have been given to them in the past, and identifying those labels as positive or negative.

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Rebeca Melendez (left) was so inspired by last year's program in the Shipibo community of San Francisco in Pucallpa, Peru, she and three friends have begun a project in which she travels to various Shipibo communities to talk with the girls about values and Shipibo identity. See article above.

GFW Returns to Peruvian Amazon (from pg. 1)

Donning silly glasses that made it difficult to see clearly, we talked about the lenses through which we view ourselves and others. They learned that interpreting their world and themselves with clear eyes, open ears, and an open heart helps to recognize helpful or hurtful messages for what they truly are. They discovered that with clear self-awareness, they have the choice to reject hurtful messages and set healthy boundaries.



They also increased their emotional intelligence through a game to build awareness about accepting feelings and finding constructive outlets for expressing, not repressing, them. The girls offered each other great suggestions for dealing with difficult emotions: crying, bathing, reading, journaling, climbing a tree, taking a walk, singing, washing clothes (while trying not to rip them!), and listening to music were some of the strategies they suggested.

Two young Shipibo women, Katy Lomas Maldonado and Rebeca Melendez Rengifo, helped us facilitate this workshop. Rebeca, who works with Alianza Arkana part-time, participated in the GFW workshop last year in the San Francisco community. It had such a huge impact on her that she started her own NGO called Xontakobaon Nete, which translates as Young Women's World.

Rebeca and Katy were instrumental in leading the section of the workshop where we discussed puberty, hygiene, and topics relating to sexual education, harassment, and

abuse. They led the entire discussion in Shipibo and created a relaxed, safe atmosphere where the girls could to ask questions free from judgment or

embarrassment. We were fortunate to have them with us.

While we were carrying out exercises to practice saying "no," a mother who was accompanying us throughout the workshop was inspired to share a story about a teacher who harassed her as a girl, how she dealt with it, and what she would recommend to girls in this position. Her example inspired others to share their own experiences about times in their lives when they have confronted these issues. It was clear that there are very few safe places and resources for these girls to get help and seek out confidential support within the community. As a young Shipibo woman close to these issues, Rebeca hopes to address this need through Xontakobaon Nete, and Alianza Arkana [and Girls for the World] will be supporting her, as well providing follow-up health workshops for young women and their mothers.

Moving into the final days, the young women learned about collaboration and solidarity, proudly sharing dances and songs from their culture, and making art and crafts to symbolize their togetherness. In our closing circle, each girl shared how the workshop had affected them and was presented with a mirror inside a frame that they had decorated. They were then told, as they gazed at themselves in the mirrors, "we want you to see what we see: beautiful, strong leaders; girls who know who they are and what they want. Thank you for being a part of our circle here. Now you are a part of the global community of Girls for the World."

We all returned to our homes mutually-enriched by the experiences we shared in that 5-day ceremony. It was such an honor to learn with these girls, and we're excited to continue building their self-awareness, self-esteem, knowledge, and empowerment in the year to come.

(Article may be found in the Intercultural Education, Alianza Arkana, blog dated March 6, 2014, at alianzaarkana.org/media-room/bloglatest-news/entry/forging-solidarity-among-shipibo-girls)

Elizabeth is one of the mothers who participated in last year's program. We visited her village again this year, and she shared how much the program enabled her to understand the issues faced by her daughter and other girls in the community. She told us that she is a better mother as a result of her participation, and that she is now an advocate for the girls in her village.

From Our Executive Director

It is such a pleasure for me to look through the photos in this issue of our Newsletter and to remember the joy in the girls' faces as we initiated Girls for the World circles in India, Peru, and in the United States.



The girls and mothers in each workshop eagerly awaited each session, excited and inspired by their growing confidence and leadership. As you will read in Lily Hollister's article, *Forging Solidarity Among Shipibo Girls*, the transformation of the girls from the beginning of the workshop to the end was evident!

The happiness and gratitude that I feel witnessing the transformation of these girls and their mothers is tempered, however, by the reports and articles that appear nearly every day describing the host of horrors faced by many girls in their young lives. Some of these articles illuminate the practices of child, early, and forced marriage. On July 22, 2014, Unicef reported that current data suggests that more than one in three women in 2014 (some 250 million) were married before they were 15. Some 700 million women alive today were married before they were 18. Participation in our programs has prompted many girls to return to school, thereby delaying marriage.

The unique vulnerability of adolescent girls has ignited and fuels our passion in our work with Girls for the World.

With a fresh perspective and a new understanding of their own worth, our girls are speaking up in ways they never had before. And we are grateful and encouraged that the girls and mothers who participate in our programs are finding their voices and standing in solidarity and mutual support of one another. Indeed, the ripple effect of our work is being felt at both the family and community levels.

Please know how grateful we are for your continued support of this important work.

Peace,
Karen Hanson, Executive Director

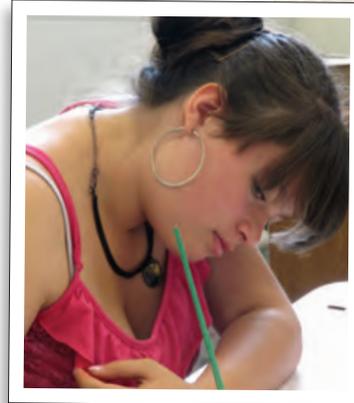
India

During our trip to India in May and June, we conducted two workshops for new participants and mothers, plus a follow-up program for girls who had previously participated in our workshops. We also met with girls in the tea gardens of Assam, an area known for sex trafficking and indentured servitude.



North Carolina

GFW was invited to work with the inner city middle school girls of nonprofit DREAMS of Wilmington, NC, over spring break. The girls appreciated learning about the difficulties faced by girls around the world and discovering the ways they can impact their families and communities by using their voices and gifts. Tracy Wilkes, Executive Director of DREAMS, remarked "The GFW program is not just another generic girls' empowerment program but rather a thoughtful, wise and deeply effective program that truly helps girls – no matter where they are or what age – find their authentic voices."



Stay Tuned...

Stay tuned for information on our trip to Ouanimthe, Haiti, where we worked with high school girls at Institution Univer. We will also provide an update on Nicaragua in our next newsletter!



Creating a Culture of Confidence through Girls' Circles

The “circle” is an integral part of the Girls for the World (GFW) experience. Since time immemorial, women have gathered in circles; to share stories and keep council, to mourn and heal old wounds, and to dance with joy in celebration of life and sisterhood. GFW uses the circle to represent and commit to our equality, inclusiveness, unity, shared leadership, and our mutual respect, support, and responsibility. Our circles are sanctuaries; safe places for the girls to bring their stories, their joys and their difficulties. There is a bond that is strengthened in our shared experience, and as a result, we are empowered.



Girls for the World is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping adolescent girls envision themselves as powerful agents of change in their lives and communities.

Help make a difference!

Your tax-deductible donation will help change a young woman's life with the remarkable transformation that comes as a result of knowing, loving and trusting oneself. Thank you for your generous support of our work!

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