

Hip Hop 4 Peace
Guatemala

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www.hiphop4peace.net and <http://vimeo.com/28817748> for the music video of one of our groups

Using the power of Hip Hop to educate, raise awareness and empower children and teenagers living in a marginalized and violent context.

Through our website and a Hip Hop event (dinner and show) organized in Switzerland, we managed to raise more funds, amounting to 3300 CHF, equivalent of approximately 3745 USD.

The implementation of the project revealed a certain amount of difficulties, mainly due to the lack of reliability of local partners. The local partner Caja Lúdica withdrew from the project without providing any explanation. Negotiations were undertaken with various other entities in order to establish alliances and collaborate. However, all but one of these entities only tried to achieve financial gain or publicity from the collaboration without being willing to actually supply time and effort and work with and for the youth. This lack of commitment and effort on behalf of the local organisations and their outright personal interests were a significant disappointment. It also appeared that local organizations saw us as competition rather than as a potential partner despite our constant effort to establish positive links with them. We also encountered problems with a Hip Hop academy, also situated in the city center. They saw us as direct competition, despite insisting, during a number of meetings, that the Hip Hop 4 Peace proposal had a very different aim, as we were using Hip Hop as a means to reach our end (education, empowerment and awareness raising) and our goal was not to form Hip Hop professionals, unlike their group's objective. Unfortunately, I suspect that there were some sabotage attempts on their part. Finally, this project being led by a young woman was a major obstacle – a much bigger one than initially expected. Collisions with the strong local “machismo” happened on a daily basis with attempts of intimidation such as anonymous phone calls and on a few occasions, cars following me. Because of the lack of cooperation by local partners, the recruitment of the youth was particularly difficult and we ended up catering to only 20 children and youth instead of the sixty intended. We also had to extend the initial age-range and ended up accepting children as young as 7. Of all the local organizations contacted, La Alianza, a refuge for abused female teenagers, helped us out and sent us nine young women to benefit from the workshops. We also had problems with one of the local teachers stealing material from the center.

Despite some negative aspects, the program was a success with the youth we catered to. We weaved some very strong links with them and could feel the impact we had on them. They truly enjoyed the workshops and discovered a new way to express themselves on issues that affected them. They also discovered their own leadership capabilities and that the events that had affected them throughout their lives could actually serve as an inspiration and to help teach others. Even though we couldn't reach the intended amount of youth to cater to, we hope that those who actively participated in the activities will provoke a trickle-down effect, as they will demonstrate to their communities how their passion has contributed to empowering them and provided them with new tools to defend themselves – which is a realistic perspective. Indeed, two of the mothers told us that they kept practicing at home with their children and that they were teaching what they had learned to some of their friends or siblings. For their part, the educators testified that when the girls from the refuge arrived home, they were teaching what they had learned to the other girls who, for legal or psychological reasons, could not attend the activities. It is very sad that the project encountered so many difficulties and therefore could not be made sustainable. However I truly believe that the impact we had on the children and

teenagers we catered to will guarantee a mid- to long-term effect as they will continue to work with the tools we provided them with.

II. There are probably as many definitions of peace than there are people on this planet. Yet, the way I see it is that there will never be peace as long as there is injustice in our societies. People can only live in peace once they are freed from any form of discrimination or marginalization and when they are respected for who they are and their rights are not violated. Another major enemy of peace is ignorance. As long as people are not educated not only on their rights but also on other people's rights, we will keep witnessing violence and tensions on Earth.

In my opinion, the pacifying potential of the Hip Hop 4 Peace project rests on education and empowerment. Indeed, as children and young people learn about their rights and their value, they have the potential to become tomorrow's leaders. They also learn how to analyze things before acting and to understand others before judging. Guatemala has just had the first round of presidential elections: the candidate who received the most support is an ex-army general who is notably anti-youth, especially anti-poor youth. Despite this, it is urgent for new and more tolerant and educated leaders to emerge in the country. While giving the educational workshops, we also realized that the Guatemalan education system does not teach young people how to be critical and debate. Therefore, this is something we fought to instill in them. For these reasons, we think that on a mid- to long-term, the effect of this project will mainly be that these children and youth will have the tools to create a new local, progressive and tolerant leadership which, through a trickle-down effect, could positively influence the course of Guatemalan local politics.

The project has definitely influenced the way I see the world, both positively and negatively. Starting with the negative aspect, I was confronted on a daily basis by people who were not able to take me seriously as a young woman. The surrounding machismo in Guatemala is so strong that women are only marginally recognized as credible actors. I also was enraged by the inaction of important segments of civil society and was shocked by the fact that organizations who were supposedly working for the youth were reproducing discriminating schemes. I was also forced to recognize that among those working for the youth and children, only a few of them had the beneficiaries' interests at heart. On a positive note, it was truly incredible to see the impact we were able to have on this youth in as little as two months. They really put their hearts into the workshops and the result was amazing. The resilience of these children and youth was also truly impressive and inspiring. Something that has also deeply impacted all of us who worked on the project was the presence of a baby, the daughter of a thirteen-year-old girl who had been abused. Indeed, it was beautiful to witness how all the girls from the refuge were taking care of the baby and how her very young mother was fighting to provide her baby with a better life. Another positive aspect was also seeing international artists such as Lah Tere, Daniel Jodocy, Intikana and DJ Charlie Hustle, taking time from their busy schedules to work and share with the youth for free. They all created very strong ties with our kids, demonstrating how much they cared about them. To sum up, despite the important amount of difficulties, it was an amazing and life-changing experience that strongly impacted all of us: children, youth, their families, organizers and everybody giving the workshops.

In my opinion, this project was highly valuable as it allowed these children and youth to discover new ways of making positive and creative use of their free time while thinking outside the box, receiving a complementary education to the one they were receiving in school and empowering them to understand their own talent, resources and potential to become tomorrow's leaders.



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