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## The Nicaraguan Children's “Defending our Right to Play” campaign as it happened, 2009 – 2012

Harry Shier's article “The Right to play in Nicaragua” appeared in *Playwords* Issue 37 in Winter 2008, and marked the start of Common Threads' support for the Nicaraguan children's “Defending our Right to Play campaign”. The Common Threads team started things off with a generous financial contribution to the campaign.

As the campaign developed over the next three years, each subsequent issue of *Playwords*, from issue 38 to issue 44, contained an update on the children's activities, and *Playwords* continued to encourage its readers to support the Nicaraguan children's efforts.

This document brings together the seven updates.

### Contents

- Update 1 from *Playwords* 38, Spring 2009
- Update 2 from *Playwords* 39, Summer 2009
- Update 3 from *Playwords* 40, Autumn 2009
- Update 4 from *Playwords* 41, Winter 2010
- Update 5 from *Playwords* 42, Autumn 2010
- Update 6 from *Playwords* 43, Spring 2011
- Update 7 from *Playwords* 44, Spring 2012



Harry Shier's original article “**The Right to Play in Nicaragua**” can be downloaded from:

[http://harryshier.comxa.com/docs/Shier-Right\\_to\\_Play\\_in\\_Nicaragua.pdf](http://harryshier.comxa.com/docs/Shier-Right_to_Play_in_Nicaragua.pdf)

The complete back issues of *Playwords* are available on CD-ROM from Common Threads at:

<http://www.commonthreads.org.uk/resources.htm>



# Defending the Right to Play



**Harry Shier of CESESMA reports on the launch of the 'Right to Play' campaign in Nicaragua.**

We kicked off the project on 30 January 2009 with a week-end workshop for our young promotores and promotoras. "Promotores" and "promotoras" are young volunteers (boys are "promotores" and girls are "promotoras") typically aged 12-18, who run out-of-school activity groups with younger children in their communities. These include arts and crafts, cultural and media activities, and organic farming. At the same time children learn about their rights and issues such as gender equality, prevention of violence and environmental protection. The training, development and support of these young activists is one of CESESMA's main work programmes.

The workshop focused on using games and creativity in informal education, and I took the opportunity to make a presentation about our Right to Play Project. Fifteen promotores/as immediately signed up (boys and girls, ages 15-19), and they will be the ones who take the lead in organising the children's action groups in their communities. We already have ideas about what the children's action groups will do, which include:

- ◆ researching how, where, when and with whom children play in their communities: identifying the factors that encourage play and the obstacles that deny children their right to play
- ◆ learning about Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- ◆ recording and photographing traditional games and play activities in their communities
- ◆ interviewing old people about their memories of play in their childhoods
- ◆ developing awareness-raising and campaign materials, aimed at both adults and children. These could include banners and posters, badges, radio messages, and collaboration with the children's theatre groups that CESESMA already supports in the area
- ◆ preparing to becoming advocates for the right to play.

If you work on a play project in the UK and would like to have your kids link up in solidarity with ours, please drop me an email. It would be wonderful if each of our children's action groups could have a UK partner.



ALL PHOTOS: HARRY SHIER

We will have another update in the next *Playwords*. Meanwhile the CESESMA team would like to say a big thank-you to the Common Threads team for their generous donation of £500 which got our appeal off to such a solid start; to the *Playwords* readers who have already supported our campaign with a donation, and to all those who are thinking of doing so, but haven't got around to it yet. What better time than right now? Please see the box below for information on how to make a donation.

## **How to make a donation to the Nicaraguan Children's Right to Play Campaign**

It is easy to make donations via the Friends of CESESMA charity. As this is managed with voluntary support, we have zero administration costs so every penny goes to CESESMA in Nicaragua, and on top of that we can claim Gift Aid tax relief on your donations.

Cheques payable to Friends of CESESMA should be sent to:  
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Suite 5 Ormeau House  
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Alternatively, if you have internet banking you can pay direct to our account:

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Friends of CESESMA is a charity registered in Northern Ireland, No. XT8739.

For further information **E:** [harryshier@hotmail.com](mailto:harryshier@hotmail.com)



For more information on Common Threads support of this vital initiative see the last issue of *Playwords* Issue 37 Winter 2008 – available on our website  
**W:** [www.commonthreads.org.uk](http://www.commonthreads.org.uk) – where you will also find a dedicated area to this project.



# Defending the Right to Play



## An update from Harry Shier of CESESMA on the 'Right to Play' campaign in Nicaragua.

The "Defending the Right to Play" children's action group from Samulali met on 23 April to plan the first stage of the campaign. The group is made up of 16 girls and boys, aged 8 to 12, supported by teenage Promotores/as.



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

To start with we asked them why play is important, and they came with plenty of answers including the following:

- ◆ "Because it's our right – and not just children, also big people"
- ◆ "Because it makes us feel good"
- ◆ "It helps us share and express our feelings"
- ◆ "It helps us make friends and not be shy"
- ◆ "It helps kids relate to older people and feel respected"
- ◆ "It helps boys and girls relate to each other with respect"
- ◆ "We learn to share games, because not everyone knows the same games"

And on the idea of a campaign to defend the right to play, they commented:

- ◆ "They should give us the freedom and the confidence to play freely"
- ◆ "A campaign is great because that way we'll get lots of people's opinions"
- ◆ "It's not every day you have a campaign to defend the right to play!"

It was agreed that the first stage would be to research the current situation of children's play in their community, talking to other children and adult community members. They formed four research teams with specific topics to research:

- ◆ The current state of play in the community: Where, when, how and with whom children play.
- ◆ Is there discrimination against girls in relation to play opportunities? What factors limit girls' exercise of their right to play?
- ◆ What do old people remember about children's play in the community in times past? How has it changed?
- ◆ What traditional games, rhymes and songs do children in our community know?



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

After another meeting to share their findings, they plan to call a public meeting to present their ideas to the whole community. CESESMA will help them produce their report, and make banners and posters based on their

own slogans and drawings. The next stage will be to take the campaign to the District Children and Youth Committee.



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

We will have another update in the next Playwords. Meanwhile CESESMA would like to thank ACLAIM in Dublin, who held a quiz night that raised £770 for the campaign. However, as we get to the district-wide, and then national campaigning stage, we want to turn the children's words and designs into banners, poster and badges, and this means increased costs, so if any Playwords reader still hasn't got round to making that donation you were thinking of, this would be a good time. See the box below for information on how to make a donation.



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# Defending the Right to Play



## An update from Harry Shier of CESESMA on the 'Right to Play' campaign in Nicaragua.

There's been a lot happening since our last update. Both children's action groups completed their initial research. Among their findings were:

- They listed all the traditional children's games known in their communities, including some that the old people remembered that are not played any more. They plan to follow this up by recording the games with their traditional rhymes and songs, especially those in danger of extinction.
- They explored the different factors that prevent children enjoying their right to play. The Samulalí group focused on sex discrimination:

*"Our parents believe that boys have more rights, and they give them more freedom than the girls. Parents tell girls, 'Go and find a job to do, and don't be playing'. Also women take on more responsibility in the house. In many houses the girls look after their young brothers and sisters while the boys play. This is unfair because we are all equal and we all have the same rights."*

- The Yasica Sur group, many of whom live on coffee plantations, focused on the problems facing working children:

*"A lot of kids work on farms and plantations and they come home worn out, so they don't get to play. At harvest time the kids work all day and there's no time to play".*



Children playing in the river, San Ramón

Both groups first presented their reports in community meetings in their own villages. On Santa Martha coffee plantation this coincided with the visit of a delegation of young people from Fermanagh Youth Council in Northern Ireland, who were impressed at how the children had planned and carried out their own research.



Clapping game, Santa Martha

Subsequently both groups were invited to present their reports to the Municipal Children and Youth Committees in their districts. On hearing the children's presentation, both Committees agreed that the right to play should form part of their future agenda. They also agreed that if the children design banners for their campaign, they will arrange to have them put up in the main streets of both Matagalpa and San Ramón. What excited the children most, though, was the Matagalpa Police Chief's offer of a donation of sports equipment to their group.

Playwords readers may be aware that the International Play Association: Promoting the Child's Right to Play (IPA) is currently producing a global position paper on the right to play. The Samulalí children's report was submitted to IPA as an input to this process, and the kids were proud to see themselves



Warm-up game, Samulalí children's action group

the Common Threads website.

acknowledged as part of the project's International Resource group. They're now waiting for the Spanish version, so they can produce their own child-friendly version.

The English version of the PowerPoint presentation of the Samulalí children's action group's report – as submitted to IPA – is available to download from

We will have another update in the next Playwords. Meanwhile we are still counting on Playwords readers' support (this means you) to keep up the momentum in our campaign. We now need to fund at least four banners, as well as posters and other materials, and we also plan to start a third action group in the Tuma-La Dalia district. If you've been following these updates in Playwords, you'll know that these kids mean business, but they are very poor, and without your support can't do much beyond the confines of their own village communities.

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The Common Threads team has helped with some of the cost of banners for the Right to Play Campaign – please add your donations to get the next stage of the children's campaign up and running!

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# Defending the Right to Play



## An update from Harry Shier of CESESMA on the 'Right to Play' campaign in Nicaragua.

Since our last update a third children's action-research group has been formed in the Tuma La Dalia district, made up of 24 boys and girls aged 8 to 13, supported by nine young Promotores/as (community education volunteers), from four rural communities. This makes a total of 66 children and 21 teenagers now involved in the three action groups.

The La Dalia group has researched children's play in their communities, including interviews with their grandparents about how things have changed. According to the elders, play, especially boys' play, was rougher and tougher in the old days, and shop-bought toys were unknown. What hasn't changed is that parents still tell their children to find some useful work to do instead of wasting their time playing.



Circle game La Dalia

PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

This group has just completed their final report, and early in the New Year will present their findings, first in their home villages and then to the Municipal Children's Committee in La Dalia town.

The Samulali and Yasica Sur action groups are moving ahead too. A donation from Common Threads in the UK (publisher of this magazine) enabled the production of four giant campaign banners based on the children's designs. These have just come from the workshop, and will be going up in the main streets and village roads in the next few days. The banners read "Children and Young People Defending our Right to Play, for health, education, development, happiness, and a life without violence".



Right to play banner

Although it's early days yet, the children's campaign is starting to attract national attention. The Samulali action group have written the lead article in the current issue of Nicaragua's children's rights magazine "Arco Iris" (Rainbow), where they offer this wonderful summing-up of why they consider play is important:

1. For rest, relaxation and recreation.
2. To have fun and feel good, with joy and excitement.
3. For healthy development, and the growth of our body and mind.
4. For physical and emotional health.
5. For our creativity and imagination: to create, invent and dream.
6. To be able to communicate and share with confidence and not feel shy.
7. To experiment, learn and develop new skills.
8. To relate to one another with friendship, equality and respect: boys and girls, big and small.

9. To have a space for ourselves where our opinion matters.
10. **And because it is our right:** We must defend it and make it a reality."



Cuartel (Den) La Dalia

PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

We will have another update in the next Playwords. In the New Year we want to hold a regional gathering for the three action groups to share their experiences and start organising the national campaign. This implies more costs, so we are still counting on Playwords readers' support (this means you) to take the campaign to the next stage.

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PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

# Defending the Right to Play



## An update from Harry Shier of CESESMA on the 'Right to Play' campaign in Nicaragua.

Since our last update, Common Threads-sponsored "Defending our Right to Play" banners have gone up in Samulalí and Yasica Sur, and also outside the central primary school in San Ramón town. Children from all three action-research groups have continued to promote the right to play through local events in village communities and the Municipal Children and youth Committee in San Ramón has responded positively to the children's message; developing its own action plan for a more playful municipality.



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

*Trompo - spinning top La Dalia*

At the same time CESESMA, with a small grant from the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, has been running workshops for local teachers on how to make the primary classroom a more playful learning environment.

Over the past few months, however, our focus has shifted from the local to the global, as your correspondent has been working closely with the International Play Association:

Promoting the Child's Right to Play on the global consultation on children's right to play. IPA has organised national consultations in eight countries: Bulgaria, India, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, South Africa and Thailand, with the aim of identifying the many infringements of children's right to play around the world. At the time of writing (middle of August) the final report is just about to go to the printer. It will also be sent directly to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva to back IPA's proposal that the Committee should issue guidance to the world's governments on the actions urgently required to promote and protect the right to play.

The findings of the global consultation echo those of the Nicaraguan children's action-research teams featured in previous updates. Worldwide, the biggest obstacle to children enjoying their right to play is the negative attitudes of adults, from parents and teachers to politicians and bureaucrats, and their near universal failure to recognise the importance of play in children's lives. The global consultation also highlights the problems of child labour and sex discrimination; the other two main factors identified by the Nicaraguan young researchers. Whilst these global findings confirm the credibility of the Nicaraguan children's work,



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

*Mirón mirón La Dalia*



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

*Crows and Cranes La Dalia*

the truth is we haven't been able to achieve our local objectives in the past few months due to lack of funds. The children's campaign has had some success locally, but now they want to take it national, and we just don't have enough resources to do this. As always, we are counting on Playwords readers' continuing support to keep the campaign moving forwards. We will have another update in the next Playwords.



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

*Research team La Dalia*



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

Banner designed by children's action-research team outside the central primary school in San Ramón town. The banner reads "Children and young people defending our right to play – for health, education, development, happiness and a life without violence". This is one of four banners sponsored by Common Threads in the UK.

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# Defending the Right to Play



## An update from Harry Shier of CESESMA on the 'Right to Play' campaign in Nicaragua.

### Son of the Dragon of Violence

Looking back on 2010, a highlight was the national festival organised by CESESMA to celebrate the Day of Action against Violence towards Children and Young People in La Dalia on 19 October. Although this was the fourth time the festival had been celebrated in Nicaragua, this year's was the first to be held outside the capital, and even with substantial help from Save the Children it was a challenge for a local organisation like CESESMA to take on such a big national event with over 5,000 children and young people attending.



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

As the focus for the festival, local children chose the slogan "Believe Me and Protect Me: It's time to act for our rights". When they met to start planning one of their first ideas was that "The Dragon of Violence" should take to the streets again during the festival. The original dragon, adapted from the Chinese style, was made two years ago to draw attention to the problem of

violence during a Children's Festival in San Ramón, and although it had had several outings since, it was in bad shape and not up to another parade. So a group of young women from Samulalí got together and created a new dragon based on the original design. The new dragon led the street parade that launched the Festival in La Dalia.



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

Amongst the other highlights of the festival, the children's theatre group "Los Colibrís" (the Hummingbirds) from the community of La Lima in Yasica Sur put on a play called "Blows to the Soul" about the issue of domestic violence. Facing an audience of over 2,000 in the huge arena the young actors had to use microphones for the first time, but they managed superbly. There were also quizzes, dancing, story-telling, face-painting, craft workshops and more. It was a great day for all who were there, and a big success for us the organisers.



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

The experience of the festival made me reflect on play and playfulness. As regular readers will know, our campaign, supported by Playwords, is about helping Nicaraguan child workers defend their right to play (new readers: check the Common Threads Website to learn how the campaign has developed over the past two years).

But here we see another aspect of the right to play: the impulse to be playful; to find room for playfulness in everything you do. Despite their tough lives working on coffee plantations and the many challenges they have to face, this impulse is unstoppable in the children we work with. The festival dealt with a grave issue: the fear and suffering caused by violence in children's lives, but the children found so many positive and playful ways to promote action against violence, that the festival turned out to be a day filled with joy rather than sadness.



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

Starting in January, we'll be getting back into campaigning mode, with "Right to Play" forums and other awareness-raising actions spearheaded by our three children's action-research teams. We'll have an update on this in the next Playwords.

And finally, thanks to two friends in solidarity who have something in common; namely the Common Grounds coffee shop in Belfast who raised £2,000 for our campaign last year, and the Common Threads team for another generous Christmas donation.

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# Defending the Right to Play



**An update from Harry Shier of CESESMA on the 'Right to Play' campaign in Nicaragua.**

On 30 April 2011, 41 child researchers and six teenage volunteers from three districts in the coffee-growing area of northern Nicaragua gathered in San Ramón for Nicaragua's first children's forum on the right to play, with a mixture of experience-sharing, analysis, future planning and, of course, play.

PHOTO: HARRY SHIER



In between the games, there was a programme that managed to be both serious and fun at the same time. The teams started off sharing their experiences of researching the right to play through an ingenious quiz where they saw a small part of various photographs taken during their research projects last year, and in each case had to try and work out where it was taken, who was involved and what they were doing, before the full photo was revealed.

PHOTO: HARRY SHIER



Next they explored the way gender difference affects girls' and boys' right to play, as this was one of the big issues that had come up in their earlier research.

When they analysed the causes of these differences, many felt that they were due to natural differences between boys and girls ("You can't have mixed groups because women can't take a punch"), but in general they identified how these things are learnt: "It's down to the values and customs of our parents", "As soon as he's born they tell the boy he's 'the man of the house'". As one girl said, "It's cool to play baseball, but the boys make fun of you".

After another game, the young researchers learnt about the Global Consultation on Children's Right to Play carried out last year by the International Play Association: Promoting the Child's Right to Play, which discovered fourteen major violations of the right to play around the world. They considered which of these violations most affected the right to play in their communities. They concluded that the overall number one was "Discrimination against girls, rooted in traditional culture and reinforced by machismo" (Latin America's own style of overt sexism). The negative attitudes of parents and other adults who don't understand the importance of play came a close second, followed in third place by their heavy burden of other responsibilities, including for most of them

the need to work on coffee plantations or family farms, leaving little or no time to play.

The young participants went away full of enthusiasm to share what they'd found out with other kids in their communities, and to organise new play opportunities where boys and girls could play as equals. They were also clear that they wanted CESESMA's help to spread the word amongst parents and teachers, who they felt still had a lot to learn about the importance of play.

Here's an example of children's initiative and willingness to take advantage of any new play opportunity (not to mention Nicaraguan-style DIY risk-management). When the rains came in May, holes resulting from the excavation of sand from dry river-beds quickly filled with water, providing an improvised swimming pool for local children.



PHOTO: HARRY SHIER

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