

Art in a Bag – Darien, Panama

The goal of the Art in a Bag - Panamá program, in alliance with Casa Taller Foundation, is to enrich the struggling Indigenous multicultural young community with learning through art, and consequently, providing much needed psychosocial aid.



Why we do it?

- The Darién province and the two autonomous Indigenous Territories are one of the most culturally rich areas in the Republic of Panamá, given it harbors five different ethnic groups.
- On the other hand, Darién is also the most inhabited, inhospitable and the poorest area in the Republic of Panamá; has the highest school drop-out rates, the lowest alphabetization rates and one of the highest malnourishments rates in the country. Child mortality rates are about 40 per thousand born, while the national average is 20. In the Emberá Territory, most of the communities don't have access to drinking water, and child mortality rates reach 55.
- Because Darién has the highest levels of poverty and malnutrition, the crescent loss of culture that is completely washing away its cultural richness has rarely been addressed; the situation has been identified as the Cultural Tsunami.

How we do it?

- Because of Darien's outstanding qualities and needs, it has been chosen as the next setting for the original "Art in a Bag" program that started in Banda Aceh, Indonesia; the initiative was first established as a psychosocial response to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.
- The Panama "Art in a Bag" project has already completed 20 culture-filled creative workshops with 500 children in the past two months. The response from the children has been one of transformation in their participatory attitudes, disposition and involvement in showing their creative potential.
- When the bags with art supplies are delivered, they will be introduced as vehicles of art and creation as well as a space for themselves, one which they can use for their free expression, creation, learning, and exploration of their and others' cultures.

Benefits for the children

In 2009, the "Art in a Bag" program will start in full throttle with the distribution of bags and art supplies, teachers' training, and schools' implementation of the program as part of their curriculum. The success of the program will be measure based on:

- Decrease in student drop-out rates, which in Darién and the Emberá and Wounaan Comarcas are currently the highest in the country.
- Stronger intercultural involvement among the students and with the local community.
- Psychosocial well being in regards to the environment's increasing level of violence.
- Increase in teacher's motivation and involvement with students.

