

# Performers without Borders



## Nicaragua 2013 tour Evaluation

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September 2013

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# 1. Summary

*“A little girl called Mary, she learnt to do so many things, and I’m really amazed because now she’s even dancing. I’m really amazed in the way she has improved.”*  
Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)<sup>1</sup>

Performers Without Borders (PWB) teaches performing arts to orphans and vulnerable children. It does this by taking teams of volunteers to countries of high child poverty and spends about a month doing an outreach project with between 2 to 3 partner organisations. At the end of the month the children put on a performance for their local community.

The performing arts is a great means through which children can explore their potential, boost their: confidence, learn creativity, develop team building skills and increase empowerment. Through working with local partners over several years it is hoped that the transfer of skills and knowledge from our volunteers becomes sustainable. The aim is that our partners become centres of performing arts - teaching all of the children that they care for.

To fully fulfill this vision it is important that PWB learns from its experiences and puts this learning into practice. Learning is best done through structured evaluation that listens to stakeholders in a methodical way that allows for subsequent analysis. It is also important to document the work through recording quantitative data, stories, photos and videos - this way it is possible to track the progress of the children over time and to assess our impact.

Overall the evaluation of the Nicaragua Tour 2013 was very positive. So much so that all our partners want us to return next year for another tour. The children have continued to practice and learn after we left. Our partners are organising more shows for the children to present and they are working on new ways to improve their performance.

We have also been able to review the impact that participating on a tour has on our volunteers and the results are also very positive. All of our volunteers consider it to be a significantly important event in their life. Most of these positive aspects are attributable to the following main benefits of doing a tour with PWB: skill development, personal growth and/or career development.

Despite this lack of formal method this evaluation still contains much qualitative information in the form of anecdotes, interviews and some questionnaire results that support our main conclusion that PWB tours have a very positive affect on all those involved: orphans and vulnerable children, volunteers and staff at our partner organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> The names of the children in all quotes have been changed.

# 2. Introduction

*"[The PWB team] were perfect. It seems they knew this kind of children since years. The problems the children have. There is a girl who is always very shy and at the beginning she didn't want to do anything, but on the day of the show she was there with everyone and enjoying and smiling. George who is always very angry with everyone, but he was smiling."*

Zalinda, Los Quinchos, San Marcos (through interpreter)

In early 2009 Performers Without Borders (PWB) conducted an evaluation of its second tour of India which started in late 2008. That evaluation, and the subsequent organisational learning, led to changes in tour and project design. The evaluation also helped to begin the building of a framework with which we could measure the impact our work has on beneficiaries.

In January 2013 PWB started its first tour of Nicaragua. The tour comprise month long projects and a shorter 2 week project. It was the first extended tour that PWB have conducted outside of India. It was therefore the perfect opportunity to reevaluate our work in a new context.

As part of the programme design an evaluation was timetabled for shortly after the end of the tour completion. This evaluation has been designed to support and build on the previous one, by broadening and improving on the data collection methodology.

## 2. 1 About PWB

PWB started teaching orphans and vulnerable children performing arts in 2007. Since then it has conducted multi-month long tours in India during 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013. It has also undertaken shorter tours of Central Asia in 2008 and Eastern Turkey in 2012. For more background on the history of PWB please click on these links:

- [The back story](#)
- [PWBs tours in archive](#)

### 2.1.1 Our vision

PWB works towards giving vulnerable children the opportunity to **explore their potential**. We understand that, through teaching performance skills an individual's **learning, creativity and team working skills** are developed. Further, it helps to build **confidence, develop empowerment** and **overcome social barriers**. PWB's methodology of following the tradition of travelling show, and the principle of fostering long-term relationships, is ideal in not only engaging children, but also ensuring community trust in the project.

PWB envisages a world where all children are able to **realise their full potential**, and have: **an understanding of different cultures, the complexity of development issues** and **the importance of personal action**.

## 2.1.2 Our mission

PWB will work with partners who engage with vulnerable children in their community to **develop centres of performing arts around the world**. These centres will act as a means by which **international development issues are explored** and **cross cultural understanding is promoted**.

## 2.1.3 Our values

- Education should provide the child with a wide range of life skills and contain aspects of fun and playing.
- Self confidence development is key for the vulnerable.
- Learning and developing performance skills has great rewards.
- Fostering cross-cultural community links benefits all involved.
- Sustainability of the work through long-term contact with communities.
- The community is the main actor in development.

*“It was something really, really exciting. Because I have seen different circuses, but I’ve never seen what they did here. It was amazing to have them here and very close to us. And the most important was they were transmitting the knowledge. It was not that they were just showing something but they were teaching how to do it too.”*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

## 2.2 Evaluation objectives

There are six objectives of this tour evaluation:

- To listen to our partners and volunteers to ensure PWB stays aligned with its vision and mission.
- To ascertain if PWB projects are valued by our project partners in Nicaragua.
- To demonstrate that PWB projects are effective in more than one context.
- To discover differences and similarities between working in Nicaragua and India, so as to better inform project and tour implementation in other contexts.
- To establish whether volunteers who participate in PWB tours benefit through increase in skills, experience and career development.
- To test an impact assessment methodology which will measure the benefits generated to our beneficiaries from PWB projects.

Each of the methods of data collection in this evaluation was aimed to provide evidence to one or more of these objectives.

## 2.3 Monitoring

We also conducted monitoring of the quantitative outputs of the tour and projects. This helps us define the scale of any perceived benefits and feeds into the broad metrics of PWB achievements. We measure our outputs along the following dimensions:

## 2.3.1 Engagement with the broader community

By performing publicly where the team are based and with local organisations beyond our core partners, the PWB team are engaging positively with the local community. Not only are we providing entertainment, enabling people to have fun and creating happiness, it also helps to build trust within the community. This in turn helps ensure the continuity of PWBs work, but also helps raise the profile of our core partners. It also helps the local community see the children, and the organisations that help them, in a different and more positive light, by associating them with new positive skills and a well planned executed show.

## 2.3.2 Project design

PWB projects range from one day to 4 weeks. Conceptually however there are two distinct project types:

### 4 weeks

The longer projects, or full projects, are core to PWBs mission of working towards developing performing arts centres. These engagements are designed to better sustain the children's interest and build confidence. A full PWB project comprises of an introductory show by the PWB team, up to 4 weeks teaching and culminates in the children putting on a show on for their community.

### 2 weeks or less

Shorter projects, however are also important in PWB fulfilling its vision. Even engagements of one day can bring positive feeling and benefits to the children to the children. They also act as the beginning of a potential longer relationships which increase the possibility of closer and longer relationships in the future. Further, with repeat engagements with the same partners the benefits are multiplied, so returning to the same organisations several times should be seen as important. PWB can also potentially become an inspiration for new relationships between local organisations who may otherwise not realise the potential to collaborate with each other.

It is therefore important to track different engagements that PWB has with beneficiaries; from the one day projects to the full 4 weeks. Equally important is to record the number of children who perform in the PWB children's shows.

## 2.4 The audience

The audiences of this evaluation are:

- **Internal:** to ensure PWB keeps itself aligned to its stated vision and mission.
- **Partner organisations:** to demonstrate that we are listening to feedback and improving our work.
- **Potential partner organisations:** to provide a better idea of the work we do.
- **Supporters and volunteers:** to demonstrate the impact of the work they are supporting.
- **Potential supporters and volunteers:** to show that we are a learning and improving organisation.

# 3. The context

## 3.1 Why circus

*“They thought only of the circus. They didn’t think anymore about the tragedy of their lives.”*

Zalinda, Los Quinchos, San Marcos (through interpreter)

It is not the scope of this paper to detail the theory behind the positive effects of teaching performing arts to vulnerable children. However as a way of introduction it would probably prove useful to the reader to understand some of the theory that has led to, what is now, a very large number of organisations using performing arts in their methods with the aim of social benefit.

Although the work of PWB crosses a range of different disciplines in performing arts, it is through the lens of circus that most of the partners, children and communities we engage with, see our work. This is both a hindrance in broadening the appeal of our work, and an asset as it is an easy ‘big tent’ that has cultural relevance around the world in which we can bring in more and more art and artists.

Further, there is a growing movement of ‘social circus’ that has been very successful in achieving a range of benefits. This has spawned a body of theory behind the benefits of teaching circus, especially for children. It is hoped that this document may help to build a body of evidence proving, not only that teaching performing arts (and circus specifically) has great benefits to the individual but also the broader community. This has been defined as ‘community circus’.

## 3.2 Our partners in Nicaragua

### 3.2.1 Proyecto Barrilete, León

An after-school project for poor children in Guadalupe, León. These children often come from families with drug or alcoholic problems, or have parents in prostitution or working on the streets, and for this reason can not help them with their homework after school. The children come to Barrilete to eat lunch, learn, play and to get help with their school assignments. In addition to supporting them with funds, we also help them by collecting clothes and food and by coordinating volunteer work.

Barrilete is a fast-growing project that supports over 150 poor children, and they are therefore in great need of volunteers and support.

Quote from: <http://journeynicaragua.org/social-projects/proyecto-barrilete/>

### 3.2.2 Los Quinchos, San Marcos

Founded in 1991 in Nicaragua by Zelinda Rocca, an Italian woman, the ‘Los Quinchos’ project gives hospitality to abandoned and mistreated children. It has an articulate and dynamic structure based on the passionate work of around forty

people counting educators, psychologists, craftsmen, assistants and administration personnel, all of whom are Nicaraguan.

The project is supported by basic solidarity, through the Italian Committees and Associations of the Adda, of Bolzano, Brescia, Cagliari and Florence, whose volunteers are engaged in spreading the word about the project and promoting a culture of peace and solidarity between Nations. Enthusiastic contribution from volunteers and international groups from various Countries helps the Project grow, as a shared battle against injustice.

The goal is to reinsert children in their own society offering them access to human rights they have been denied up to now: the right to a peaceful childhood and the knowledge of their rights and duty as future citizens.

Quote from: <http://www.losquinchos.it/>

### 3.2.3 Escuela de Comedia y el Mimo, Granada

"The School of Comedy and Mime is an innovative project to educate young people of Granada who are in precarious family situations where poverty, drug abuse, physical/sexual abuse, gangs and other criminal activity are an unfortunate part of daily life. Nicaragua is the second poorest country of Latin America.

Through theatre, clowning, mime and circus skills students will discover how to respect themselves and others when taught that they can make a living through this art."

Quote from: <http://www.escueladecomedia.org/>

## 3.3 The tour narrative

### 3.3.1 Bootcamp and festival - week 1

The tour started in January on the Pacific coast of Nicaragua with a week long bootcamp. PWB bootcamps are designed to allow the PWB team to get to know each other better, and to prepare for the tour by: creating a show, developing the teaching syllabus and learning other applicable skills.

From the bootcamp the team travelled to Granada where they participated in the El Berrinche festival which was hosted by the **Escuela de Comedia y el Mimo**. This proved a great opportunity for the team to meet performing arts practitioners from around Latin America and practice their Spanish. The PWB team participated in 5 shows during the festival.

#### Media

[Photos from the bootcamp](#)

[Video of the bootcamp](#)

### 3.3.2 León - weeks 2-6

The team moved on to León where it undertook its first project with **Proyecto Barrilete**. With our partner organisation the team worked with a core group of 60 children, 45 of



which performed in the end of project show. During this time the team also performed 6 times with other local organisations through outreach work with engagements lasting half a day or a whole day.

#### **Media**

- [Photos from León](#)
- [Video of the project](#)

#### **Blog posts**

- [Blog post 1 by Emily](#)
- [Blog post 2 by Jess](#)
- [Blog post 3 by Jacob](#)

The team then took a short break between projects: [a inter project blog post by Jacob](#)

### **3.3.3 San Marcos - weeks 7-11**

From León the team moved to San Marcos where they worked for 4 weeks with **Los Quinchos**. Teaching was split between 2 core groups totaling 52 children. 40 of which performed in the end of project show. During this time the team also performed 10 times with other local organisations through outreach work with engagements lasting half a day or a whole day.

#### **Media**

- [Photos from San Marcos](#)
- [Video of the project](#)

#### **Blog posts**

- [Blog post 1 by Moira](#)
- [Blog post 2 by Emily](#)
- [Blog post 3 by Steve](#)
- [Blog post 4 by Emily](#)

### **3.3.4 Granada - weeks 12-13**

Returning to Granada and the **Escuela de Comedia y el Mimo**, the team spend 10 days teaching and performing. Teaching was split between the younger children and the school's core group of performers and volunteers. The team also brought a couple of the older boys from Los Quinchos to learn and perform alongside the core group. This was to help build their confidence and skill set. It was the beginning of a new relationship between the school and Los Quinchos. Additionally there were 3 older boys from Estelí who also participated in the classes and performed alongside everyone else. A series of 4 fundraising shows were conducted in a venue in the town centre.

#### **Media**

- [Photos from Granda](#)

#### **Blog posts**

- [Blog post by Jess](#)

To conclude the tour Rob wrote a [final blog post](#).

# 4. Evaluation

We have a few different sources of data:

- the numbers,
- the staff of our partner organisations,
- the volunteers on tour,
- our old volunteers, and
- finally, but most importantly, the children.

## 4.1 The numbers

*“Chikka boom, chikka boom boom. Cha la-la la-la. The children still do the call and response [from the warm up game].”*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

Through approximating the number of people watching the PWB shows and keeping track of the number of children at our workshops we came to the following totals:

### **Engagement with the broader community**

- 26 shows in which the PWB team performed.
- 3895 people watched a show from the PWB team.

Given the figures from previous India tours, this exceeded our expectations.

### **The number of beneficiaries and the length of projects with beneficiaries**

- A total approximately 150 children were engaged through one or half day workshops.
- Over the tour 112 children participated in a full 4 week project.
- 85 children performed in two end of project shows.

Given the figures from previous India tours, this was on par with our expectations.

## 4.2 From our partner staff

It is key to solicit the opinions of our partner organisations so that they have input to the development of future tours, and to ensure that we are listening to their concerns and opinions. It is particularly important as our partner’s staff have a richer and longer relationship with the children and therefore can provide insights in to the success of the project to which we only have a relatively brief exposure to.

Interviews were conducted by an experienced PWB volunteer, but not someone who participated on tour, and the questions were put to the directors of the partner organisation. A set of questions were developed to guide the interview along specific areas of interest. Interviews were recorded to allow transcribing and direct quotes. Translators were used if the partner staff did not speak fluent English.

## 4.2.1 Impact on the children

The best guide for measuring the impact of the beneficiaries is to look to PWB's mission of developing an individual's learning, creativity and team working skills. Our aim is to also to build confidence, develop empowerment and overcome social barriers. These goals should therefore be used to measure the impact through the eyes of our volunteers, partner organisations and the beneficiaries themselves.

The following are some general statements, that relate to some of our state goals, accumulated from a reading of the partner organisation interviews.

An increase in confidence was identified as a strong impact by all of the partner organisations.

*"I feel they are becoming famous because now there are many people asking for them to make some performance."*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

*"There was this guy with the unicycle who was going through some chairs and he was with a little [child] on the shoulders... [It's] amazing how self confident they are now"*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

*"I see it also in the guys from Estelí they are also having a great time. I've seen them that they are very confident. I saw them before... and now I see them they are really really confident."*

Diego, Escuela de Comedia y el Mimo, Granada

Skills that the children learn were identified as being useful to them generally and helpful in building trust and responsibility - key for overcoming social barriers.

*"It was having fun but at the same time getting some knowledge and now if kids keep practicing they'll never forget and it's something that will be helpful to them. And I can see it also like a profession... And now in the future they want to use it, they want a career or a profession and that's something that is going to be very helpful to them. Because we've got some little circuses here that come to our neighbourhoods, just to make some money and make a living. So in the future if they don't do so well in their studies this could be an alternative for them."*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

*"I enjoyed the show so much because I was really wanting that idea of exchanging a big experience. And I think that this is something we have to keep on doing. Because for the kids to perform with another group especially their teachers who are performers. For them it's great. It puts them up, because I have seen them; when the kids start performing they change. Their attitude is more confident, they feel part of the school, because we start creating responsibility with that too."*

Diego, Escuela de Comedia y el Mimo, Granada

## 4.2.2 Continuing practice and performing

PWB can only claim to be successful if the children we teach continue practicing and learning once the team has moved on. Both Maria at Proyecto Barrilete and Zalinda at Los Quinchos were quick to mention future shows that the children were practicing for.

The following are some general statements accumulated from a reading of the partner organisation interviews:

*"There was a special occasion there was some guys from Canada so they asked to the kids from Barrilete to come and make a presentation and they did a pyramid, a big one, and it was very big and they were waving a flag of Canada. They were all amazed."*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

*"They all want to live for the circus. Now on the 19th there is the general assembly of the association with the Italian who are the committee. For them the kids will make a spectacle, a circus."*

Zalinda, Los Quinchos, San Marcos (through interpreter)

The children and partner organisations were also looking for more resources and opportunities to improve their learning and their performances.

*"Lazaro and Miguel are two older boys and they went to Granada with them [the PWB team] and they are practicing. And one day I went to the farm and I saw him on the internet downloading exercises."*

Zalinda, Los Quinchos, San Marcos (through interpreter)

*"Now I was thinking that in getting some fabric so we can make some pants so they could look nice. We're just trying to find some sponsorship to buy the fabric... and then we can have them for future presentations."*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

### **4.2.3 Impact on organization**

Success is not only dependent on the children learning and continuing their practice but also in providing support to our partners in the services they provide.

The following are some general statements accumulated from a reading of the partner organisation interviews:

*"There were many children who had just arrived from the street and they didn't want to make bread, didn't want to do the market, they didn't want to do anything. I told them if you don't do this [the chores] you don't get to do the circus. So through the circus I could get them to do the other things. Because it was a way to convince them to do other things also. Because when they come from the streets it is very difficult."*

Zalinda, Los Quinchos, San Marcos (through interpreter)

*"I think the kids would love to have you for a long, long time. It's for the core group to learn because the Raphael is so busy with so many things [that he can't teach as much]."*

Diego, Escuela de Comedia y el Mimo, Granada

More important is the institutional learning and change that the PWB team can instill.

*“Our teachers also learned that before starting with a class it’s very important to do something like singing with the kids first, do like a warm up first, so they are more relaxed and will do better in the class.”*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

*“Something that also made me feel happy, but happy and sad at the same time; the team were making presentations in the neighbourhoods and the team were making the presentations we got more kids coming to the project. So now we have more kids coming. That’s good because now we know we are helping more kids but what’s not so good is we need more resources because we need to feed those kids too.”*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

## **4.2.4 The team**

We then asked the partners what they thought of the PWB team.

All partners were glowing in appreciation of the professionalism and dedication of the PWB team.

*“They were teaching kids, teenagers and young people - which is difficult. It is easier to teach kids but when you have groups of different ages its more difficult. I could see that first they were just trying to practice, then I see different groups - one group of kids doing this, another group doing something else. And then when I see everyone was doing something; so for me that was something amazing.”*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

*“They improved a lot because every day Robert and the others were going in the morning to the Finca or in the afternoon. They worked a lot. Very serious. I wanted to cry for how much they worked. They wanted to show that they did a good job with all of them. The older and the small ones. Because in the end they made a show with all the children and it was really good. It was really moving. You will have been proud of these girls and boys.”*

Zalinda, Los Quinchos, San Marcos (through interpreter)

*“They worked very hard. I was very impressed. This thing about morning, afternoon, evening. I said wow, well yes, you know.”*

Diego, Escuela de Comedia y el Mimo, Granada

## **4.2.5 Improving the tour**

Improvements to tour were hard to tease out of our partners. However it is clear that the syllabus of teaching will need to change, with perhaps a stronger focus on music and clowning.

*“Teaching them more things, more tricks... More equipment.”*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

*“Some more clowning. One girl played the accordion and I would like if new people came to have a trumpet and percussion.”*

Zalinda, Los Quinchos, San Marcos (through interpreter)

A lack of fluency in Spanish from the team could have been seen as a problem.

*“Most of the time I was talking more to Rob and Moira; I was talking to them because they were the ones that understood more and they were just telling them to the other guys.”*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

## 4.3 Asking the PWB team

*“They were really professional. It is not very easy here because for 2 or 3 days there might not be any water. It seemed that they enjoyed. They really love their work.”*

Zalinda, Los Quinchos, San Marcos (through interpreter)

As part of the standard PWB tour evaluation every volunteer is provided with an evaluation form. This form is designed to help us improve project design and implementation based on their experiences. It also is designed to help volunteers think about their personal development during the tour. However this standard evaluation form doesn't specifically ask questions about comparing and contrasting our work in different contexts. Therefore interviews were conducted to draw out any thoughts, feelings and conclusions, regarding working in Nicaragua contrasted to working in India. They also provided the opportunity for volunteers to vocalise some of their more general and practical opinions on the tour.

### 4.3.1 Did the tour achieve?

A great deal of the results of the evaluation form are outside the scope of this document, as they deal with the very practical aspects of the tour. However the areas of specific interest for this evaluation are:

#### **The depth of understanding by volunteers of PWB's vision**

- Do volunteers understand why we do our work?
- How aligned are our volunteers with our vision?

Although volunteers bring their own motivations and reasons for participating on a tour, it is important that they understand PWBs vision and mission. Only through a shared vision can the team of volunteers work together effectively and help PWB achieve its mission.

From the feedback on the evaluations and interviews it seems that there was not a strongly shared vision within the team. This lack of shared vision lead to inefficiencies in decision making and affected the tour outputs and create tensions. The feedback clearly identified that the pre-tour communications where not effective enough in communicating PWBs vision and some of the day-today practicalities. Further, the bootcamp was too busy to help rectify any misalignment of the shared vision. Stronger messaging and leadership around the vision and how this translates to tour objectives should prove enough to ensure similar issues are minimised in the future. Additionally a lengthening of the boot camp might be required to allow time for focus on the PWB vision.

#### **Perception of PWB's success towards objectives**

- Do our volunteers feel that our work meets our vision?
- How can we improve our work to better meet the vision?

Despite a lack of coherence in the vision from the team, each of the volunteers was emphatic that the tour was a success according to their own terms. Typically these terms

were not far from PWB's vision, just slightly different in emphasis and priorities. For example, should we focus on fun for all, or work only with the older children? Is it important to ensure that any equipment built by the team is of the highest possible quality, or should the team engage in more outreach work? Through a stronger shared idea of the objectives of the tour these, and other similar debates, should become less of an issue of differences in personal opinion about what is best and more about what helps the team meet said objectives.

The feedback also brought out the issue of the syllabuses focus; what would be most effective within the Nicaraguan context to engage and enthuse the children. This was different from what the volunteers had assumed before the tour and PWB must learn from this experience and tailor its syllabus according to local factors in future tours. One clear feedback from the partner organisations is that music and clowning are both strong interests in Nicaraguan culture and should be emphasized more on future tours.

With regards to the impact on the children along the dimensions of learning skills, self confidence, interacting with new people, taking on and meeting those challenges, the following points were made:

- **Most of the volunteers could identify specific examples where the children had exceeded their expectations in learning new skills. Below are various quotes from our volunteers.**

*"One of our older students learnt to pass cubs in under 3 weeks!"*

*"Seeing a younger kid excel a diabolo and teach older ones."*

- **All of the volunteers saw the confidence of the children, and quality of interaction with the team, grow over the duration of the projects.**

*"A shy girl learning to juggle and juggling on stage and loving it!"*

*"A new girl arrived in San Marcos, it was interesting to see how circus influenced her interactions and how quickly she got involved and even performed in the show after only a week!"*

It must be conceded that this growth in confidence could be due to extended contact with the team, as well as because they were enjoying learning new skills. A point which also emphasizes the simple benefit of cross-cultural interaction for the children.

- **There were some clear and concrete examples given by the team of children who took on the challenge of learning new skills and succeeded.**

*"It was amazing to see children try slack lining and learn what it means to be calm and focused in order to achieve something"*

*"I was told that a boy in San Marcos had (during the time PWB were there) decided that he wanted to involved more in the other workshops like bread making and hammock making"*

## • Personal growth during the tour

- Do our volunteers feel that they are getting what they want from participating on a PWB tour?
- Do our volunteers feel supported in making the most of the opportunity?

The feedback around personal growth during the tour was split. Those who felt that they didn't grow enough personally had typically identified their personal objectives before the tour. They felt disappointed that they didn't have enough time, or space, to pursue these objectives. However, typically these objectives were not directly related to the work of PWB. Those who had aligned their personal objectives with the work of PWB (for example, improving teaching skills or creating a new performance) were much happier with the personal growth that they had achieved.

It must be noted that the evaluation forms and interviews were conducted directly after the tour had finished. Often it takes some time and distance to realise the personal growth one has gone through. However, it is felt that PWB could help people set more realistic and achievable goals. This could be done explicitly through taking some time during the bootcamp for the volunteers to think about and discuss their personal goals for the tour. Then after the first project these goals should be reviewed and potentially changed based on the success to date.

A number of the volunteers felt that a lack of 'structured fun' and theatre games meant that the team didn't bond as effectively as it could have. They felt that this adversely effected the quality of interactions within the team and reduced the potential for personal growth.

## 4.3.2 In context

### Circus in culture

Within the team there was a feeling that circus is more instilled within the culture than India. Further, the circus in Nicaragua is more like the circus we have in Europe - more focused on human skill than the spectacle. Personally I saw young people busking with juggling balls and devilsticks at the traffic lights in Managua (the capital). The circus economy includes larger, often international, circuses from other Latin American countries, and approximately 70 smaller local circuses.

There is a history of social circus within Nicaragua; as opposed to India where only a few organisations use circus in their social programmes. A number of organisations already use it in the methodology, including PWB's partners in León and San Marcos. At least one organisation, PWB's partner in Granada, is predominantly focussed on social circus. So in contrast to in India where PWB is building from a very low base, in Nicaragua it is felt that we are building on top of something already existing. Therefore the team felt that it would be more likely that the children would continue with their skill development independently and that there would be more of a practical application of employment.

### Teaching children

Generally it was felt that the teaching was very similar between the children of India and Nicaragua - "kids are kids". It was felt by some that teaching could be done with broken Spanish and that this language was picked up easier than Hindi, Bengali or Nepali.



However a couple of the volunteers felt that the children of Nicaragua having a shorter attention span and can be distracted easier. They also felt that the children were more 'giggly' and found it difficult to take things seriously. This was of particular issue when undertaking potentially dangerous activities such as stilt walking.

One volunteer analysed the difference between children in Nicaragua and India through the lens of caste and social rigidity. They perceived that the young people that PWB work with, and especially the girls, in Nicaragua are freer from social restrictions to participate in the activities they want. So while it means that they are more likely to engage with the work of PWB, the potential of social change within is diminished slightly.

Another issue that was commented on that has some bearing on teaching is that sexuality within the children is less repressed than India. This could lead to some distractions during class, however the children would be more comfortable working in mixed classes. Having said that it was felt that acrobalance should still be taught in single sex groups.

### **Partners**

Time keeping and communications were identified as weaknesses within partner organisations. However it could be that much of this should be down to language based misunderstanding.

One volunteer identified that there was a striking resemblance between SKCV, a partner in India that PWB did 3 projects with, and Los Quichos, San Marcos. Both of which work with children without guardians and separate their living space between a 'farm for the boys, a home for the girls and a drop-in/feeder home for new children.

### **Motivations of volunteers**

The motivations of volunteers wishing to join a PWB tour of Nicaragua, as opposed to India could be different. In the UK culture India is much more prevalent and some felt that this would be more of a draw for potential volunteers. On past tours of India visiting and exploring the country has been identified as a high priority for involvement. The team felt the 'draw' for volunteers to work in Nicaragua would be more around working with more 'advanced' children and in developing Spanish speaking skills.

### **Language**

In contrast to India, where English is a common language to know and a popular language to learn, in Nicaragua Spanish is almost exclusively the language of communication. All of the volunteers felt that having strong Spanish speaking skills within the team are a must. It was made clear that all of the volunteer should have a good grasp of Spanish prior to departure; this was felt important in engaging with the children. It was also thought that a fluent Spanish speaker is required to allow better working with partner organisations.

## **4.4 What do the alumni say?**

*"It was one of the things I love from the warm up. I learnt that, through observing them teaching, I really want to build a team like PWB. A lot of integration."*

Diego, Escuela de Comedia y el Mimo, Granada

One of PWB's key values is that building inter-community links and taking a team of volunteers on tour, benefits all involved. This means that not only the orphans and vulnerable children benefit from PWB's work but also the volunteers themselves. In PWB's language those who have volunteered for PWB on a full tour are described as alumni. Indeed the motivations of volunteers are typically a mixture of wanting to give, but also a thirst for new experiences and opportunities to learn.

So the questions important to PWB are:

- Do our volunteers find the experiences and opportunities to learn that they were looking for? and;
- Do the experiences and learning make a difference to the volunteers lives?

### 4.4.1 The survey

A survey to test these questions was sent to all of the PWB alumni - those volunteers that had completed a PWB tour more than a year ago. 14 people responded to the survey and all figures below are related to those responses. The respondents could have toured between 1 and 6 years ago. Some of the respondents have toured more than once. The areas of focus for the survey were:

#### **Skill development**

The development of performing and teaching are integral to the activities of volunteers and should be part of the benefits. However there are a number of other key activities that are involved in a PWB tour and these are often particularly useful skills to have.

#### **Personal development**

It is a challenge to participate in a PWB tour. It will often put our volunteers outside of their comfort zone and ask them difficult questions about themselves and the things they see. In such environments personal development, in a supported environment, is very likely.

#### **Career development**

The career of a performer and/or performing arts teacher is one that many young people are eager to follow. We hope that the skills and experience of participating in a PWB tour helps our volunteers along their chosen career path.

### 4.4.2 The answers

The questions are a mix of qualitative and quantitative. For quantitative questions the following dimensions were used:

**Degree:** very significant, significant, neither significant or insignificant, insignificant, very insignificant

**Difference:** much more, more, neither more or less, less, much less

#### **Skill development**

*"I came home having not only as a more experienced teacher but also having learnt immeasurable amounts from the amazing young people we met along the way."*

All quotes in this section are from anonymous PWB alumni

We asked how significant the volunteer's skill development was and the percentage responses were:

%	Physical	Teaching	Team working	Comms.	Working with partner organisations
<b>Very significant</b>	28.6	21.4	14.3	35.7	28.6
<b>Significant</b>	64.3	35.7	64.3	57.1	35.7
<b>Neither significant nor insignificant</b>	7.1	35.7	21.4	0.0	35.7
<b>Insignificant</b>	0.0	7.1	0.0	7.1	0.0
<b>Very insignificant</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

The difference in degree of skill development could be due to the fact that all volunteers perform and teach, however not all are involved in communications and working with partners.

In their own words some of the skill developments our volunteers felt were important:

- Working with partner organisations and managing teams effectively.
- Working and performing as a member of a troupe was a great part of my performance development.
- The most important skill I developed on tour was communication.
- Play and clowning brought the most satisfaction and enjoyment to me and others.
- Having the chance to perform again and again to enthusiastic audiences.
- Project management - have increased my ability to work with a team in a foreign country hugely.
- Improvisation in clowning/acting - to learn how to make fun out of "mistakes".

### **Personal development**

*"independence and empowerment brought about through creating positive change in communities."*

We asked how significant the volunteer's personal development was across 7 competencies:

- Receiving the strongest response was **developing integrity** with 43% saying this was very significant for them.
- Next were **establishing identity** and **managing emotions** both with 64% saying their personal growth was significant.
- Then came **developing competence** - 57% significant.
- Followed by **developing mature interpersonal relationships** and **developing purpose** - 50% significant.
- Lastly with 42% responding significant was **achieving autonomy and interdependence**.

In their own words some of the personal developments our volunteers felt were important:

- My own strengths and weaknesses.
- Insight into the inner workings of being part of a team.
- People skills.
- Establishing my identity.
- Independence.
- Thirst for knowledge and a drive to learn.
- Really helped my confidence.

- Helped me to value the skills and creativity.

## **Career development**

*“My confidence as a performer increased significantly and I returned back to the UK hungry to make a career for myself within the performing arts.”*

We asked if our volunteers had ever requested PWB to be a reference for a job application. To which 58% responded yes. Of those who haven't asked PWB for a reference, only one person stated that this was because it was relevant for their sector. Only one of the responders doesn't include their PWB tour on their CV. Just under half of the responders said that their main source of income was through performing arts, and of those the average number of years receiving income from this source was 5 years.

*“I was given such a boost of confidence by being on tour that I found myself landing on my feet and was getting paid work as a performer in no time. Now, 2 years on, my sole income is from performing and teaching drama at mainstream primary schools.”*

An important question we asked was: ‘What would you say was the degree of career development that you have made whilst on tour with PWB?’

To which 36% responded ‘significant’ and 29% responded that this was ‘much more’ than they expected. So participating in PWB is potentially very important in career to a about a third of our volunteers. However given the number of people that have requested references from PWB perhaps there has been a broader affect beyond people's careers as performers and teachers. This should be a future avenue of questioning.

*“Many opportunities have been made available to me in the professional contexts of 'youth work' and 'circus skills', on the basis of my experience with PWB.”*

## **Importance**

Question: ‘To what degree would you say that participating on a PWB tour was an important experience in your life?’

To which 100% of our volunteers responded ‘very significant’ of which 86% felt that this was more significant than they were expecting. Quite succinctly one responder wrote in explanation *“life ambition, dream etc”*. Another wrote:

*“It made me reconsider my personal direction and opened up new possibilities for what I could achieve.”*

Participating in a PWB tour has been an important experience in the lives of our volunteers and is thought of in very high regard.

## **Summary**

The alumni survey has been a very enlightening exercise and the results can be used to help us improve the support mechanisms so our volunteers can make even more from their experience. PWB will therefore undertake this survey once a year to track longitudinal trends and continue learning.

*“The other thing worth mentioning is that through my involvement in PWB I have gained some very dear friends who I still keep in regular contact with and this is*

*something I will always treasure. It feels very lovely to be part this wonderful family.*  
“

## 4.5 The kids

*“At the beginning they were a little afraid and they were usually saying ‘I cannot do it’ or ‘it’s really hard to do it’. But now when they saw that some of them were beginning to do it they were all motivated and they said ok ‘I can do it too’ and they would start doing it.”*

Maria, Proyecto Barrilete, León (through interpreter)

### 4.5.1 Some history

In the first PWB evaluation of the 2009/10 tour it was first proposed that as we have a unique model of conducting social circus, we would have to develop our own model for evaluating the impact of our work. Research was made into the available resources that provide guidance and inspiration in the field of impact assessment of provisions to vulnerable children. This research helped to develop a questionnaire that formed the basis of some quantitative research in to impact.

In 2011 this questionnaire was translated into Nepali and given to the children of Edith Wilkins Street Children Trust (EWSCT), Darjeeling, India. Employees of EWSCT would available to help the children complete the questionnaire, although there were significantly more children than employees and most children didn’t have any support in responding. The children were asked to complete it twice; once before the project, the first with this organisation, and once after the project. The questionnaire had 13 questions broken into three sections: learning skills, building confidence and developing empowerment. The response was between 1 and 5 - where 1 was a frowny face and 5 was a smiley face. Names were asked for to compare data before and after. Age and gender was taken to see if there was a difference.

Of the 104 children asked only 43 children filled in both the before and after versions. Of these children there was no statistical difference along any metric between either the before or after responses.

At the time I wondered if I was not asking the right questions and I had some doubt about the method of the written questionnaire. Perhaps verbal questioning would be a more supportive method. This would be invariance to the literature but I felt that cultural context could affect this.

### 4.5.2 A new method

The Percentage Of Potential Improvement (POPI) method is used by the UK charity The Challenge to assess changes in perception of 16 year old British children who participate in a 3 week summer project. A set of questions with quantitative answers, on a scale of 1 to 10, are asked of the children both before and after a project. The differences in responses are used to calculate an overall affect.

From the set of questions suggested by the POPI method we isolated those that were designed inline with the vision of PWB to develop an individual’s learning, creativity and team working skills. And build confidence, develop empowerment and overcome social barriers.

## **The Questions**

- Name<sup>2</sup>
- Age
- Gender

One a scale of 1 to 10:

- I am good at learning new skills
- I feel confident speaking in front of a crowd
- I am good at working with a group of people from different backgrounds
- I am confident taking on new challenges in my life
- I can succeed in whatever I decide to put my mind to

## **The questioning**

For the baseline, at the beginning of each project the tour coordinator asked the partner organisations to find a 3 mixed-age groups of 15 children. He then asked them to respond to each of the questions and tracked the responses. Then for the end line the tour coordinator was to ask the same questions to the same groups of children.

## **The results**

For the baseline the children responded to the questions with answers a majority of 9s and 10s, and some 8s. This meant that any end line questioning would effectively be redundant as any improvement would be indiscernible. It seems that there is a flaw in the methodology and is likely to do with cultural differences; the POPI method is designed for UK children. Further research and development is required to find a means for PWB to truly measure the impact of its projects in the eyes of its beneficiaries.

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<sup>2</sup> Only included to allow comparison between baseline and end line.

# 5. In conclusion

*"I saw the kids were really, really into the workshops and I asked - they said 'they're great you know' and 'why are they leaving so soon?' and they are having a great time. Which I think is very positive. We have never had a team teaching them...and I think that it really worked out very, very well."*

Diego, Escuela de Comedia y el Mimo, Granada

Our partners in Nicaragua want us back to do projects with them again. They can see a great boost to the confidence of the children they care and provide for. They have seen their children having fun and learning at the same time. They were surprised by the skill and creativity in the performance the children created at the end of project. Working with PWB has benefited them as organisations and their staff has learnt new things. The children are continuing to perform and they, and our partners, are working on ways to continue the learning and improve their performances.

The volunteers on the tour had an amazing time. They learnt a lot about Nicaragua and about themselves. They were challenged by working in an unfamiliar context and culture, and by the other members of the team. And, although they may not realise it yet, they have developed new skills and grown personally.

Our alumni feel great about participating on a PWB tour; many return to do future tours. All of them feel that touring with PWB has been a significantly important event in their lives. They can all point to skills it helped develop, personal growth they underwent, and many have seen benefits to their careers.

We still haven't found a workable method to measure the impact of our work through the 'voice' of our beneficiaries, i.e. the orphans and vulnerable children we teach performing arts to. However this is more a problem of finding a suitable empirical way to measure it quantitatively through the voice of children, rather than there being any doubt to those involved that our work is very beneficial. Instead what we do have are the stories, the photos and videos of the fun the children had, the skills they learnt so quickly and the shows they performed. If we are right then this is not the end, this is just the beginning.

*"[The children's show was] sensational, beautiful. All the children, from the youngest to the oldest, were telling me 'you will see, you will see'. And I know that they can make a big surprise, but the biggest surprise was to see that really everyone was a protagonist. Even those who at the beginning were saying they weren't interested. The show lasted more than 2 hours and everyone was there and they wanted to go on and on. I am very happy because my father was a director of a circus so I am very happy that the children are involved. It was a priority for me."*

Zalinda, Los Quinchos, San Marcos (through interpreter)