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# 6 month Grant Report

Project supported by the British School Charity.



*Holiday project activities*

## **ACER Brasil**

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The mission statement of local NGO, ACER Brasil aims to support and inspire young people of the local community of Eldorado, Diadema to pursue pathways of a positive and safe nature. To do so, ACER provides a space for the community to access extra curricular activities at all times of the day, both encouraging children to learn new skills and participate in sports and also to provide a safe environment for them to explore their interests and develop their interpersonal skills away from negative influences.

I have several personal aims and objectives for carrying out my voluntary work here in Eldorado. Firstly I wish to facilitate sessions of a safe and supportive nature, where the children can find consistency within their otherwise very volatile and uncertain home environments. I believe this is necessary to provide children with a foundation to explore and learn. Secondly, I aim to deliver art and English sessions in a creative way to encourage the children to use their imagination, build their confidence and giving them a means of expression through art. This is to show the children the vast forms of learning and communication, and to not only accept but encourage difference and diversity in their creativity. Lastly I also aim to learn and develop my own practice in working with vulnerable children, as well as learn about their individual experiences in this environment of extreme poverty and different cultural practices and norms.

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## Eldorado, Diadema

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The socio-economic environment within the neighbourhood of Eldorado is largely one of struggle; income is low and facilities are inadequate. The temporary nature of a favela community are a result of being close to large cities with the promise of new opportunities and a better quality of life. However, this creates a dense, overpopulated community; housing here are jam-packed between and on top of hundreds more of the same basic shelters, an entire family living within a few square metres. School education here as a result aims at quantity, not quality; classes of more than 40 children sit in the same classroom for hours at a time. Children attend school either in the morning, afternoon or evening and outside of school, children are seen roaming the neighbourhood at all hours. The neighbourhood itself holds many problems; drug dealing, substance abuse, domestic violence and the children here are experiencing these issues in their family home environments as well as on the streets they play on. Their diets are insufficient and incredibly unhealthy, leading to malnutrition affecting their physical growth and mental development. Children in my classes often appear much younger than they are, and many struggle to write their own name. The psychosocial effects of these problems are evident in the children, with some as young as 5 showing violent and defiant behaviour, lack of emotional control, distrust in adults and difficulties concentrating and following directions. The behaviour cycle in a community such as this is hard to break, as children learn from their environment and follow the behaviour modelled by their caregivers. In Eldorado, this often leads to getting drawn into gangs with the lure of making quick money, abusing drugs and alcohol and sky high teenage pregnancy rates.



*'Clube de Artes'*

### **'Clube de Artes' and 'Inglês e Artes'**

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The activities I am carrying out here at ACER are namely four classes a week of Art Club (Clube de Artes) and English and Art (Inglês e Artes); all planned, evaluated and delivered by me. The Art Club sessions include lots of different creative practices, allowing the children to learn crafts and skills as well as free undirected art-making, where the children are free to explore and have creative autonomy. In English and Arts, I am teaching basic English language classes with the use of games, arts and music. The children come to the English classes eager to learn, but with varying levels of academic ability and some showing signs of having 'special educational needs'. In Eldorado, these needs are not recognised within formal education, and so I aim to encourage these students within a fun, dynamic learning environment that education can be engaging to challenge and positive. I have also taken the children on trips to exhibitions to enrich their learning, travel away from the neighbourhood and explore new areas in the city.

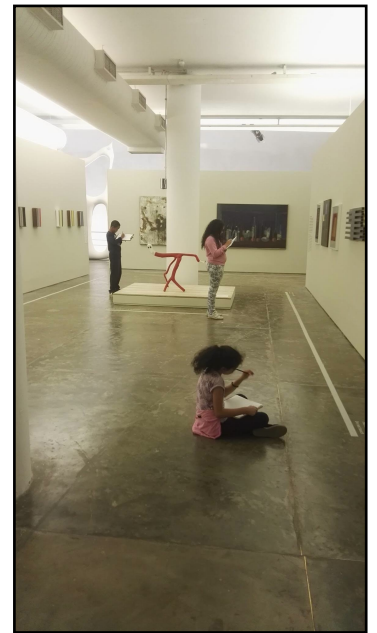
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## ACER Activities

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ACER's other activities include dance, capoeira, percussion, guitar, karate, toys and games, embroidery and a variety of sports; football, rugby, handball, volleyball. These sessions are led by seasoned staff who have been working at ACER for years, building strong relationships with the children and in many cases, filling the role of a consistent caregiver.

In addition to the regular sessions, ACER has a kinship care program called 'Família Guardiã' (Family Guardian), facilitating the foster care of children within their extended family to maintain family bonds in light of parental neglect. ACER also holds larger events for the community to provide celebrations of special national holidays. These have included 'Festa Julinha', a national celebration in June and July commemorating the harvest where ACER held a fete for all the children and their families, hosting tombola games, winning prizes and feasting on popcorn and hot dogs. Soon, ACER will host 'Dia da Brincar', a closed street party providing over 800 children with games and activities. Furthermore, ACER also has partnership links with organisations and schools within the city of São Paulo for fundraising opportunities and hosting inter-organizational sports games to challenge the barrier and segregation of class in São Paulo. They have also recently partnered with the Erasmus+ programme, and have provided exchange trips for both staff and youth from ACER. This incredible opportunity allowed individuals to leave the country and experience a new culture for the first time.



*Museum exhibition trip*

In these past six months I have been able to participate in wider ACER projects; I have organised arts activities for sports days, volunteered at a fundraising school fete and at Festa Julinha celebrations, and helped paint a mural in a local football court in Eldorado. I am also currently working with a group of teenagers who will embark on a youth exchange to Australia in November, meeting regularly to develop their team dynamics and prepare them for their exciting adventure ahead!



*Festa Julinha*



*Rugby Festival*

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## The Impact

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Even in just six months, it is very evident to see the impact of ACER's work here. For the children in my sessions, over the months of working with them I have seen consistent positive changes in behaviour. They show more respect for each other and increased ability to focus and concentrate on the task at hand. This is exemplified in a six-year old student in Art Club, who began our sessions struggling to sit still in one spot without constant attention and encouragement. He is now very happy to make art independently and often tells me how his work will be 'more creative than anyone else!'. Initially quiet, disengaged students have become more confident, excited to share ideas

and get involved in games, while other initially loud, domineering students have built a rapport with me and are becoming more responsive to direction. I feel that within my classes, the children create a dynamic with each other and myself, developing a safe, consistent space for them to enter into every week. This provides an environment for quieter students to feel comfortable and for louder students to be familiar with the rules and boundaries of the space.

Some groups of children have also been consistently coming to ACER for years, and the impact is years in the making. One sixteen year old student has been attending ACER since he was eight years old, initially taking capoeira lessons. He struggles with severe special educational needs, yet has found a talent for percussion through ACER and is dedicated to practicing almost daily. He is one of the 7 teenagers who will be taking part in the youth exchange to Australia in November, and they have been chosen to perform a group percussion piece. While he struggles with literacy and has been held back in secondary school, ACER has given him the skills and the opportunity to embrace other aspects of his intelligence and provide a space for it to develop. The group of teenagers are composing their own musical pieces, self-motivating to rehearse in their free time and have been working hard with me in team-building sessions to prepare for the culture shock ahead. The impact ACER has had on all the teenagers in this group is in providing a true sense of identity and belonging, empowering and inspiring them with a passion for percussion, creating strong friendships and teaching them core values for working as a group.

As well as for the children, all the staff here at ACER are from the local area, many having grown up in this very neighbourhood when the danger was at its worst. ACER has given the staff a place to teach their passions and earn a steady wage whilst giving back to the youth of the area. Even more so, some members of staff attended ACER as a teenager, and have followed a positive pathway away from crime to jobs in a field of their choice. It's clear to see that ACER is as much a home to the staff as it is for the children, continually providing opportunities for them.



*Regular 'Clube de Artes' students*

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## Evaluation

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In this evolving neighbourhood, the children are always facing change and inconsistency, and this is evident in the fluctuating attendance in ACER's sessions and the children's lack of commitment. For my classes, this makes it difficult to teach longer term projects as children may not be consistently present or new students will arrive at any time. Also, class dynamics differ with varying combinations of students, and this can affect their ability to engage in the sessions. This could be improved with implementing a more effective system to ensure attendance, however children here lead very disruptive lives. By providing an open-door policy supports children to always have access to ACER at any point as external factors preventing their attendance can be out of their control.



Initially in my sessions, having a very basic level of Portuguese upon arrival also hindered me greatly and it has taken several months to feel fully comfortable in conversation with the children as they speak at fast speeds and use a lot of informal slang. For my first three months, I was partnered with another volunteer in the classes, giving me the chance to learn and settle into the language, however I still struggle to have longer discussions with them and it can take time to understand a new student. While this inadvertently teaches the children patience and persistence and encourages an acceptance of our differences, it can restrict the children's understanding and some can struggle to communicate with me. While I plan my classes to suit my language ability and arrive equipped with translated words and phrases, this could have been improved by having a partner Portuguese speaking teacher with me in my sessions.

Whilst the work carried out in ACER is positive and very significant to the beneficiaries who attend, as you walk around the neighbourhood of Eldorado it is overwhelming how vast the problems are here in this one favela. The number of children living in the neighbourhood is immense, and a number of issues are very deeply rooted within the culture; sexual violence is something joked about and sung in the popular favela 'funk' music with crotch-thrusting dance moves, male dominance is shown in the disrespect children have for female staff and gender inequality is rife in the way children treat one another. This behaviour can be difficult to tackle in sessions, and the children do not respond well to discipline. ACER does not currently have a universal behaviour management strategy across all activities, or facilitate communication about children who show specific concerns between staff. While staff are vigilant at behaviour management, methods and styles of management can differ. This could be improved by implementing an universal framework to support staff and ensure the children have a clear understanding on appropriate behaviours with consistent consequences for misbehaviour. As this behaviour is often accepted in the children's home environment and perhaps where it was learnt, it is important for ACER to tackle this and provide secure boundaries for the children to learn from.



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## The Future

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For my next six months here at ACER Brasil, I hope to implement Art-Therapy practices and activities within Arts Club, focusing on providing the children with a space to discuss and explore their emotions and encourage them to use art as a way to do so. This will develop as my language skills develop, and has taken unexpectedly longer to work in this way with the children. Despite this, it has also taken time to build a relationship with the children and to assess their needs. Further, I also hope to continue teaching English in a way that provides the children with a fun learning environment, and take them on more trips to new locations within São Paulo, hopefully with external support from other organisations.



*Trip to the British Culture Centre*

I will also look at holding short-term projects in other locations affiliated with ACER after the success of holding arts activities at the sports events and community events. I will explore an opportunity to work within a centre of juvenile detention where teenagers are detained who have committed a crime within neighbourhoods like Eldorado. This would provide me with the opportunity to work with individuals who have grown up without the support and encouragement of an institution like ACER, but still surrounded by influences and negative situations, and try to provide art workshops to encourage self-reflection and empowerment for them.

For ACER, the future of their work is highly dependent on funding support in order to pay the running costs of the organisation. As they forge more partnerships with companies in São Paulo, they are currently seeking out options for locally based volunteers as a longer-term sustainable source of support in sessions and provide continuity for the children. ACER currently accepts a number of international volunteers and also has support internationally from organisations based

in the UK. This hopefully will ensure the children continue to learn about other cultures and countries, as they show great interest in volunteers' home countries. Overall, the projects are renewed based on funding, and the future of ACER is promising as they continue to grow. The future of the project on an individual level is also strong, as attendance in core ACER activities such as capoeira, percussion and football is continuously growing. For Arts Club and English and Arts, the future of the project is to continue after my departure in April, with the arrival of a new long-term volunteer in January.



*Painting a mural at the football court*