

GLOBAL CORAL REEF ALLIANCE

A non-profit organization for protection and sustainable management of coral reefs

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September 28 2007

CHILDREN'S CORAL REEF EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN SAGAY: PROGRESS REPORT TO THE SAGAY MARINE RESERVE, THE MUSEO SANG BATA SA NEGROS, THE SNORKEL BOB FOUNDATION, & THE GLOBAL CORAL REEF ALLIANCE

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The Sagay Children's Underwater Environmental Education Program was launched in August 2007 by the Global Coral Reef Alliance, the Museo Sang Bata Sa Negros, the Sagay Marine Reserve, the Snorkel Bob Foundation, and the schools of Molocaboc and Old Sagay, Negros Occidental, Philippines.

Upon arrival at the town of Old Sagay, The Museo Sang Bata Sa Negros held a ceremony, to accept snorkel gear, that was donated by the Global Coral Reef Alliance with great help from the Snorkel Bob Foundation, for Children's education programs. The Museo Sang Bata Sa Negros is believed to be the only children's coral reef museum in the world. Following introductions, and lectures by Marina Goreau and the Director of the Museum, about the goals for the Sagay Children's Underwater Environmental Education Program and protecting the marine habitat, the Global Coral Reef Alliance turned over the donated children's snorkeling gear to the Museum's president, Sonia Sarrosa, and the Director, Lilibeth La O'. The donation included 15 sets of children's masks and snorkels, and 10 pairs of child size fins, which were all provided by the Snorkel Bob foundation, which granted the GCRA a 77% discount on the top quality snorkeling gear. Many children from the Old Sagay School attended the ceremony, where they learned about the Coral Reef ecosystem and marine conservation; they also tried on the newly donated gear. As the ceremony ended, the children of Old Sagay performed a song about optimism and hope, to welcome the program into their community. A news article from The Visayan Daily Star about the donation ceremony is included in the appendix.







On August 1st the Children's Education Team traveled by boat to Molocaboc, an isolated small island fishing community, where wind and solar powered Biorock Coral Reef restoration projects were installed by the MIT First Step Coral Team, the

Global Coral Reef Alliance, and the Sagay Marine Reserve. The team gave a lecture to the entire 6th grade class at the Molocaboc School about corals and Coral Reefs, which explained why corals are so easily harmed, how the entire reef ecosystem and fisheries depends on corals, and the concept of sustainability. The children also learned about the correlation between disappearing fish and dying coral. All the children come from families of fishermen, whose livelihoods depend entirely on the sea. Many local fisherman resort to compressed air diving in order to maximize their catch, but because the fishermen are uncertified and untrained divers, many are crippled by nitrogen narcosis or decompression illness. With the disappearing number of fish threatening the continuation of traditional fishing practices, the main focus of the lecture was about marine conservation and restoration of damaged habitats.



After the lecture, thirty 6th grade student volunteers in three groups of ten came to visit the Biorock Coral Reef Restoration Projects, and learn how to snorkel. Almost all of the children, who participated, although they were excellent swimmers, had never before had a chance to use snorkeling gear to view the reef. This is often because they could not afford such equipment. The children were instructed that the snorkeling gear was to be used only to learn about the Coral Reef, and that they are not allowed to use the snorkeling gear to harm the marine ecosystem in any way. The masks did fit everyone, however in order to prevent the gear from being used for anything other than their original purpose of children's education, only small sizes of fins were provided, and some of the children were not able to fit into them and swam barefoot. Each group of children was taught how to use the equipment, and how to keep themselves and the reef safe while snorkeling. All groups of children readily took instruction to learn how to snorkel. Teaching the children to use the gear was

simple, because all children were fantastic swimmers. When the second and third groups of 10 arrived, they spotted the previous groups and became so excited to go into the water with snorkeling gear that they wanted to rush in as soon as the preceding group removed their equipment. When everyone learned about all their snorkeling gear, and was properly fitted, the small groups of children headed out to the Biorock Coral Reefs one group at a time accompanied by Marina Goreau, Dr. Thomas Goreau, and staff from the Sagay Marine Reserve. All children had a great time looking at the Biorock reefs as well as the surrounding reef, including many Sea Stars and the large Bat Fish population that had moved into the Biorock reefs.









In Sagay, the GCRA's work and the Sagay Children's Underwater Environmental Education Program drew a lot of media attention. In Negros, the project was covered by the Filipino press [see appendix], radio [disc available upon request], and television (copy not yet available).

In the future the GCRA hopes to expand their existing Children's program to other parts of the Philippines, such as Boracay, and expand the current programs with the Kuna Indians of Panama to other villages locations in Kuna Yala (San Blas), Panama. They also hope to extend their program to Ko Samui, Thailand, in conjunction with Chohnachakorn Anumart of Biorock Thailand. The GCRA's project goals remain to teach about corals and coral reef ecosystems, educate about marine conservation, and instill a love of the ocean in the children of island and coastal nations. The current Goal of the Museo Sang Bata Sa Negros is to maintain the Sagay Children's Underwater Environmental Education Program, start children's swimming programs, and continue bringing local children snorkeling to learn more about the ecosystem they depend on.