

# EAG TALK

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS GROUP

## Ocean Love: No plastic, no waste – West Indies Sail Heritage Foundation

By Natalya Lawrence

Aboard the Carriacou Sloop, New Moon, youngsters busily prepare for a day of sailing. They are evidently excited, but their discipline keeps the morning preparation running smoothly. Billy Gernertt and Charlotte Hooijdonk, founders of the West Indies Sail Heritage Foundation (WISH Foundation), fell in love with the Caribbean, living in Antigua for parts of the year, and wanted to give back to the islands.

“Oh, Billy is great with the kids,” Charlotte smiles and says, as she tosses a glance back at the bustling group, monitored by Billy.

In June 2020, Charlotte approached the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP) seeking funding for their Ocean Love, No Plastic, No Waste Project. She animatedly explained the details of the project – an initiative to teach young people to sail, and to appreciate the marine environment. The children would go on Ocean Love Sailing Days, launching from Falmouth Harbour, and would visit nearby coastlines collecting litter, particularly plastic. They would learn about the dangers of improper disposal of single use plastic, about microplastics, and how pollution, particularly plastic pollution ultimately nega-



Site visit to WISH Foundation's sail days (Photos by Natalya Lawrence).

tively affects life on Earth. They would be encouraged to follow the 4 Rs – Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

Following funding approval in late 2020, we antic-

ipated that the wonders of the ocean would open up to young people in Antigua. However, school trips were on hold due to the pandemic. This was an instant

challenge for the project, but instead of throwing in the towel, Charlotte and Billy made a hugely important alliance with Contours Kids. This allowed WISH Foundation to be a part of Easter and summer camps, catering to groups of four children at a time, who, while respecting pandemic protocols, would be treated to a course in sailing and learning about the coastal and marine environment.

As successful as this phase was, there was more excitement ahead. Phase 2 entailed upcycling of waste plastic bottle caps to make



useful items such as bowls, seed pots, combs, and key chains. Another important link established before the start of the project proved indispensable during implementation. The Antigua and Barbuda Waste Recycling Corporation (ABWREC) provided blue and white waste bottle caps that would go on to form WISH Foundation's signature blue-white swirl coloured products.

It's worth mentioning that the team at WISH Foundation researched their upcycling machinery very carefully, having them crafted by PlasticPreneur to suit their needs. Charlotte and Billy always said that their groups needed to be small, and machines needed to be child-friendly, to allow the participating children to be highly engaged in production. They also visited a school in the Netherlands, that had already successfully established a plastic-upcycling project.

The equipment arrived, and Phase 2 began. Again, the excitement of the children as they handled tools, filled their moulds and finally revealed their end products. This excitement was immediately transferred to their adult chaperones who were equally eager to make their own products!

As Antigua and Barbuda moves to become a Plastic-Waste-Free Island, this message was never lost in the

efforts of WISH Foundation. The ideal situation is to reduce or eliminate single use plastics from the value chain. However, until then, WISH Foundation will continue to teach children how to responsibly handle the plastic that is already here.

Wish successfully completed this project in June 2022. However, expansion and upscaling are in the works. This summer, WISH Foundation will be launching the Barbuda version of this project. Further, with a recently acquired Manta Net, WISH Foundation and the crew of youth, are conducting testing to show the children how our habits can impact water quality. Additionally, once additional funding is secured, they will be partnering with GEF SGP-St Vincent and the Grenadines and a group in Guyana to replicate the upcycling work done here.

WISH Foundation did face challenges during the implementation of their project – operating under pandemic conditions, and because the foundation was new, all working relationships had to be made at the same time as implementation. Despite this, the project did enjoy success, conducting 13 sailing days with 34 children, 10 plastic upcycling workshops, 16 production days creating six products, some of which can be found on sale at Posh Pirate and



Assembling the machines (Photo courtesy WISH Foundation)

Arie's Fish Shop. In total, they upcycled 31,026 bottle-caps and sold 484 products.

The project also garnered immense coverage, with a surprise feature on ABS, the creation of a short documentary, and from a very successful social media campaign reaching 106,359 people on Facebook and 29,440 people on Instagram. On a global level, this project is supporting Antigua and Barbuda's achieving several of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 13 – Climate Action,

Goal 14 – Life Below Water, Goal 15 – Life on Land. Congratulations to WISH Foundation on a job well done.

GEF Small Grants Programme is a programme implemented by the United Nations Development Programme and offers funding in Antigua and Barbuda under the Focal Areas: Biodiversity Conservation, Climate Change Mitigation, Land Degradation/ Sustainable Land and Forest Management, Chemicals and Waste Management, and International Waters.



Loading machine to make upcycled plastic products (Photo courtesy WISH Foundation)



Ocean Love Sailing (Photo courtesy WISH Foundation)