



Interview with Juan Carlos Chavarría, Rialengo, and Felipe Vega Costa Rican Artists Working in the Prison System



The metaphor of transforming weapons, destroying them, and refurbishing them into art led **Juan Carlos Chavarría** to create workshops in prison centers. This inspired a team of artists, including **Rialengo** and **Felipe Vega**, to join the cause with their own artistic approach: theater, photography, literature, music, painting, language learning, yoga, and meditation.

The workshops that emerged from this collaboration were a cause of impact and inspiration for the inmates as well: humanizing art to use it to sow seeds of hope in people who didn't have much.

In the beginning, participants were singing cover songs with drums and backing tracks. With time, they had to face the fear of playing real/live music with a variety of instruments as a a full band.



In a prison environment, inmates are almost always fighting for space, it's the law of the prison. However, these workshops treated them with respect and dignity. This generated an environment of trust, and mutual care, and the need to find peaceful solutions to their conflicts and leading them to explore concepts of harmony. Feelings of sorrow are diminished when we listen to an uplifting rhythm like **cumbia**. People can find natural coherence; connecting their self-image to nature.



They understood this concept and started translating it into their lives. The way they used to play and interchange was completely different at this moment so it works - it really works, and we know it!

In the Costa Rican prison system, those workshops were the only source of reformation. That's why it made a big difference for the inmates. The results achieved by the original band 5 years ago were surprising. For example, it was even possible to arrange a concert in which the audience included judicial judges and Ministers of Justice from various countries of the American continent. Later, both musicians and the audience shared dinner.



Some of the participants still work with us, and most of them call us after achieving freedom. Two of those ex-prisoners help us in the development of workshops. It is not the same to listen to the narrative of a person that has experience first hand, from inside, the prison system.

We would like to bring this experience and opportunity to as many musicians born in the prison system to become part of a musical group and maybe, also provide them with means to generate an economic income by making music.

These programs are funded with our resources and not by the government. We have achieved it with volunteers but we want to obtain funds to pay the team. We hope to take this project to as many prisons, hence impacting a higher percentage of this community. Contact us and share your best practices. We look forward to connecting and collaborating with other artists that aim for social transformation.

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