REPORT DATE: November 2018  
LOCATION: Asheville, NC  
CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS: LEAF International Mexico & Costa Rica  
CULTURAL EXCHANGE DATES: Oct 13 – 22, 2018  
LEAF INTERNATIONAL REPORT BY: Schree Chavdarov, Global Engagement Director

“We look forward to having LEAF residencies at our school every year. It’s such a joy that you travel to our school because we are so isolated.”

- Leslie, Pisgah Elementary School teacher

Overview of Bringing It Home with Mexico & Costa Rica:

LEAF International Mexico & Costa Rica brought ceremonial spirit to Asheville. Culture keepers and youth from Mexico joined the festival for the first-time ever! International Costa Rica was represented by Isaac Montero Morera, a member of Proyecto Jirondia, a LEAF International partner. Together, this group created dynamic Mayan ceremonial experiences using traditional and indigenous instruments. Starting with a 5-day residency at Pisgah Elementary School, to several cultural exchanges with LEAF Schools & Streets programs to ending with a stream of festival performances that enriched hundreds of people.

“It’s an honor for me to be back in Asheville sharing a culture that shaped who I am today.”

- Isaac Montero Morera, LEAF International Costa Rica
“We had such a great time teaching our culture in Asheville and seeing people respect us as Mexicans.”
-Mirna Rodriguez, LEAF International Mexico

Cultural Exchange Week at a Glance:

October 15th -17th, 2018:

- The group started the week with their 5-day residency and a cultural art showcase for LEAF Schools & Streets youth at the Wesley Grant Center, a center dedicated to providing a variety of creative programs for all ages. The showcase included belly dancing by Lisa Zahya, Mayan Ceremonial traditions by International Mexico, and an instrument learning journey by International Costa Rica.

- LEAF International Mexico visited the Pisgahview Schools & Streets program creating a fun, interactive cultural exchange. The group shared their spiritual ceremony history with the youth while the youth shared their break-dancing skills with Mexico. LEAF International Costa Rica visited the Christine Avery center where the kids learned the history of indigenous instruments. The Christine Avery youth are a West African drum & dance group called the LEAF Djembeso. These students returned the favor with a beautiful dance performance dedicated to welcoming guest in Ivory Coast culture. The above cultural exchanges ended with a dinner hosted by LEAF member, Cantina, which brought everyone together under one roof – collecting laughs, smiles, & love.

- The popular Burton Street cultural change was a mid-week highlight. Many LEAF visiting artists participated in sharing their culture with the Asheville community. Mexico, Costa Rica, Dr Nativo, Nex Millen, Kia Kater, Richard Wood and Gordon Belsher - All of these artists shined their lights and brought positivity into a cultural center that has experienced so much change over the past couple of years. From Hip hop GuateMaya music to Canadian Celtic virtuosos, the room was luminated with good vibes.
October 18th – 22nd 2018:

- The festival week took off starting with the **LEAF Member’s Jam** at Lake Eden. This spontaneous performance by **Mexico & Costa Rica** gave thanks to all the members that help to make LEAF International programming happen. This performance set the tone for a weekend full of exchange, music immersion, and fun festival times. LEAF International performed at Mainstage with Pisgah Elementary, at Mountain Stream for the Donor Gathering, and at the Barn for the Member’s Coffee House Jam. The group paid homage to the **4 directions** creating a cleansing environment that respected the past (the ancestors) and the future. Their performances expanded on the importance of saving the cultures of the world and bringing awareness to countries that are passionate about cultural preservation. The opportunity for Mexico to experience the 47th LEAF Festival for the first time really tied the theme together, “Bringing It Home.”

- **LEAF International Mexico & Costa Rica** did 5 cultural exchanges impacting more than 300 youth throughout Asheville. Check out some of their fun performances below:
Fun Facts:

- The group enjoyed outings, photoshoots, and bonding time at the Biltmore Estate
- Isaac played at 5 Walnut with the band Les Amis, led by LEAF International Ivory Coast culture keeper Adama Dembele
- Isaac participated in the first Global Hub Summit where he added his input of how the hub can accurately relay information of indigenous cultures

Special thanks to ALL the hands on deck that helped to create magical experiences for LEAF International Mexico & Costa Rica!