

# *The Mexico Child Link Trust*

CHARITY REFERENCE NUMBER XR18919

**ANNUAL REPORT 2004 - 2005**



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## **OFFICE BEARERS AND TRUSTEES**

Chairperson

Mrs. A. R. Mc Murray, B.S.Sc., M.S.W., M.Sc. (Management Consultant)

Treasurer

Mr. R. P. Yarr, B.Sc., (Financial Adviser)

Secretary

Dr.M.G.A. Mc Ginnity, M.B., F.R.C. Psych. (Consultant Psychiatrist, Learning Disability)

Trustees

Mr. G. F. Mc Elroy, Ll.B., (Solicitor)

Mr. N. Mowbray, B.A., P.G.C.E., (Special Education Teacher)

Mr. John Donaghy, B.A. M.Sc., Dip. H.S.M. M.H.S.M. (Management Consultant)

Prof. Roy Mc Conkey, B.A. Ph.D. (Chair of Learning Disability, University of Ulster)

### **Una Brennan**

The trustees of Mexico Child Link would like to pass on their thanks to Una Brennan who resigned during the year. Una was a founder member of the trustee group and had been involved in the management of Mexico Child Link since 1992.

## **EMPLOYEES**

Jonathan Getty, B.Sc., P.G.C.E., Project Co-ordinator

## **STAFFING**

The Trust is a small organisation with one salaried employee. Our low level of staffing enables overheads to be kept to a minimum. Mrs. June Getty works as a part-time volunteer in general fundraising and administration. Mexico Child Link also relies on the help of voluntary collectors and supporters, who organise fundraising events on our behalf throughout Northern Ireland.

During 2004-2005 Mexico Child Link made three visits to Mexico, in April-May 2004 July-August 2004, and March-April 2005. The visits involved the monitoring of the programmes funded by Mexico Child Link and the continuing development of the project.

## **AIMS.**

Our main aim is to improve the quality of life of abandoned children and young people with learning disabilities in Mexico. We work in partnership with a Mexican organisation called Fundación Trébol de Puebla A.C., which we helped to develop and now partially fund and advise.

## **FUNDACION TREBOL – Our partner organisation in Mexico**

The Mexico Child Link Trust has a long-term partnership with Fundación Trébol, supporting its work and programmes in the state of Puebla, Mexico. This includes a residential project in Atlixco, Puebla for abandoned children with learning disabilities. Two houses constructed on a 2.5-acre site during 1995 are home to 12 children and young people. Work continues to develop a small farm based on a system of sustainable agriculture. A carpentry workshop has provided training for over 50 children and young people.

## **Management of funding**

Assets in Mexico are owned by *Fundación Trébol de Puebla A.C.*, a tax-deductible Mexican charitable organisation. Their accounts are published monthly for inspection and are subject to an annual audit from an independent auditor, in accordance with Mexican law. Mexico Child Link has put many systems in place for internal control and accountability such as a fortnightly spreadsheet for income and expenditure of the two houses (food, medicine, clothing etc.) There are also systems in place to safeguard the income of the young people, some of whom have a poor understanding of money management.

## Introduction

Last year was one of consolidation, with new director Angélica López concentrating on the basic areas of our project work such as; children's health and welfare, diet, training programmes and employment. She faced the usual problems with staff turnover and recruitment. It seems to be difficult to maintain a stable staff group in the project, which is not an ideal situation, as skills are lost and new team members have to be given training. Too many changes can cause disruption for the children and young people. It is thought that the high staff turnover is partly a cultural matter, as other organizations have reported similar experiences. In addition, the workload and the difficulties inherent in working with adolescents and young people can cause staff to reach saturation point relatively quickly. Only someone with a vocation for this type of work can make a long-term commitment.

There is a need to look at some of our objectives with regard to independence training within the context of Mexican society where, there is a lot of instability and a lack of community support on occasion. 2006 is an election year in Mexico and the run up to voting is often a fraught period with opinion becoming polarised and pressure being applied to NGOs to associate with one political party or another.

We are also finding it difficult to fundraise in order to maintain our commitments in Mexico. Charitable giving is a very competitive marketplace and larger charities have dedicated fundraisers and fundraising departments; a luxury beyond the scope of a small organization such as Mexico Child Link. In spite of this, as in previous years, there is a considerable amount of good news to report. John Donaghy, one of our trustees, was able to visit the project in December 2004 and report back on the achievements of the children and young people.

## Mario and Israel



During July 2004 we had the exciting news of two new arrivals, Mario (pictured), aged five, and his younger brother Israel who is still only three. Both have some learning disability and were subject to serious neglect before being abandoned and taken into care. Their hometown is *Ciudad Serdan* in the State of Puebla. Ana Sandoval worked with the children for six months to prepare them for the move to the project. Although they are city children, they have adapted quickly to life in the country and they really enjoy the space, freedom and opportunity to help look after the farm animals. Both

of them attend the local special needs school in Atlixco and are very enthusiastic about it.

## Transition to more independence

Josefa Garcia, who left the project a year and a half ago, has had a baby boy. The project Director and one of the houseparents went to visit her in April in order to check on her wellbeing and bring her long-life milk and other provisions. She lives with her partner in a very poor village seven hours away from the project site. Angélica was able to report that mother and baby are doing fine.

Juan and Oscar have been making limited progress in the project due to their level of learning disability and other physical problems which they have. We have discussed this issue with all concerned and it is thought that the focus on independence training may not be the most

appropriate for their needs. We are actively seeking another project which can provide long-term permanent care in keeping with their needs and level of ability.



Esteban and Argelio (pictured, with his wage packet) are still in full time employment on local farms and we have received good reports from their employers. Rodolfo is currently seeking a new employer and Marisol and Paty are still working as house helpers in the project. The project has a new carpentry trainer, Patricia Pincle who has is confident of being able to set up a productive carpentry project.

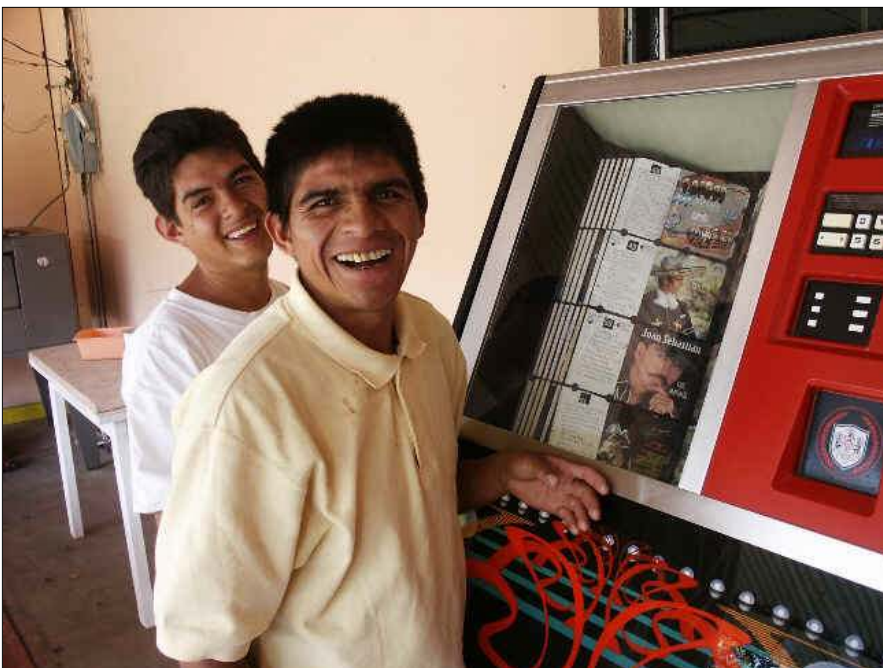
### Excursions

The highlight of last summer was a short trip to Veracruz to give the children and young people a well-earned break. None of them had ever seen the ocean, as Puebla State is landlocked and a long way from the coast. Veracruz, a huge port on the Gulf of Mexico, is about six hours away from the project site in Atlixco. Highlights of the holiday included a trip to the aquarium where the children were able to see sharks, manta rays, turtles, and other marine life. Four of the group went on a boat trip to *Isla de Sacrificios* and *Cancuncito*.



(pictured Lucero, Argelio and Esteban) They enjoyed shopping near the harbour and were able to watch the Marimba bands and performers in the Zócalo. However, the most popular part of the trip was the beach, and the opportunity to swim and play in the water. The funding for the holiday was provided by the Mexican Bankers Association (Quiera) so it is good to see our project partners raising some finance for themselves.

In March, Lucero, Rodolfo and Emmanuel went on a hike up the slopes of the volcano Popocatepetl with Jonathan Getty, co-ordinator of Mexico Child Link, Lucy Ramirez, the treasurer of Fundación Trébol and her sister Laura. The youngsters had a great day out and climbed from 2450 metres to about 3,100 through scrubby mixed oak woodland on the lower slopes to pine forest further up. There was a prairie of *Maguay* cactus with 20 foot flowering stalks at 3000 metres and lots of migratory birds which the youngsters were able to observe through binoculars.



Another of the regular outings is the trip to a local open air pizzeria which has a juke-box with Mexican music. It is within walking distance of the project and it provides a great opportunity for mixing with local people as well as being a great day out. We are hoping to find a number of local people who are prepared to accompany some of the young people on trips such as these.

### Fundraising within Mexico

During the March–April visit to Mexico, Jonathan Getty,

co-ordinator Mexico Child link and Ana Sandóval, Director of Fundación Trébol prepared a fundraising and information document which is to be used as the basis for fundraising applications within Mexico. It is difficult to raise free funding in cash within Mexico but our partners have had some success during the year, especially with donations in kind such as food and clothing. They received a grant for a summer scheme from the Mexican Bankers Association (Quiera) as well as monthly training grants for two of the children, Emmanuel and Oscar. Fundación Best gave a monthly donation of basic provisions, and Walmart donated electrical goods, clothes and Christmas presents. The children received free medical and dental checkups and a visiting delegation from a Norwegian company (Mineberget) made a cash donation.

### **Project Infrastructure – what our funding supports.**

The project in Mexico consists of various programmes. The main project is based around two specialist adobe houses set in 2.5 acres of agricultural land where the children live and develop the skills they need in order to become more independent. The land is used to run a small farm with 50 sheep and goats and has a vegetable garden and other crops. The houses were originally constructed with a £30,000 grant, which Mexico Child Link obtained from the *Irish Department of Foreign affairs*. The site, which also cost £30,000, was paid for through funding raised by Mexico Child Link and its donors and supporters. The houses, which are now almost ten years old are in need of some maintenance and we our partner organization is currently looking for funding for repairs to the roof. The other main infrastructure is the advice and information centre and the office, which are both rented. Our main expenditure is the upkeep of the staff team, which number around ten people at any given time. This amounts to over 70% of the funding we provide to our partners, which was over £35,000 last year. The remaining funding covers children's food and provisions, medicines and healthcare, irrigation water for the farm, running costs such as telephone and electricity as well as the rent of the office and the advice and information centre.

### **Current childcare systems and programmes**



The Mexico Child Link project is more than just a children's home. We support other programmes such as:

- A programme for independence training which is used throughout the project, overseen by Angélica López the project director.
- A programme called Escúchame based on the *Listen to me* programme. This has been used effectively by Jovita Saldaña the independence-training worker, who has found it useful in getting to know the factors which make a difference to the quality of life of the young people in the project
- A Carpentry training workshop which takes place four times a week. The children and young people exhibited their wares in various events in Atlixco and Puebla.
- A Sewing Skills workshop.
- An Advice and information Centre, providing a service to parents, professionals and carers in the Puebla area, which has a population of over two million people
- A working farm with 50 sheep and goats

## **Farm**

Lorenzo Cuateco has returned to work on the farm. He is very popular with the children and young people and is a good influence and role model for the older ones.

In June, the project rented 3 acres of land to sow maize as winter-feeding for the livestock

## **Thanks due**

Mexico Child Link is still closely involved with a number of schools. The **City of London Freeman's School** has continued its long-term support, as have **St Eugene's, St Tierney's and Corranry PS** in Roslea, **Wallace High School, Lisburn** and **St Mary's Magherafelt. Himbleton Primary School** in Droitwich fundraised for us this year as did **Inkberrow Primary**. The senior rugby squad at **Methodist College Belfast** organised a **Buffalo Babies** fundraiser on our behalf and **Herne Bay High School** in Kent has also fundraised for Mexico Child Link.

**Ulster Garden Village Ltd.** has given a grant to fund house repairs. The **Paget Trust** kept up its long term support. **The Moore Trust** sent a donation and **Mena Wilson** organised a fundraising Barbeque on our behalf. **Edgecombe TRC** gave support, as did **Monaghan Lions. Roslea Choir** raised funds. **Edyth McConway** organised a successful fundraiser with her work colleagues.

Thanks also to **Makro**, Dunmurry and the **Tesco, SuperValu** and **Safeways** stores which allowed us to hold collections on their premises, **MKB Russells** provides payroll and personnel facilities and **ITS** allows the use of their premises for Mexico Child Link meetings. Thanks also to **Dawson and Co.**, Newtownards who carry out our annual accounts and audit. **June Getty** and **May Blair** raised more than £12,000 during street collections. They were helped by: **Hazel Dickson, Carmel Holland, Ross Workman, Isobel Colvin and Millie McCullough. St. John's Parish Church, Moneymore** took up a collection on our behalf and **Holy Cross Church Shrewsbury** also supported our work. **Bob and Pearl McClean** also raised funds for the children, as did **Mary Faulkner. Libraries for Life** in the U.S. is donating Spanish children's books to the project.

In addition the Trust would like to thank:

16 donors who support us through the Give as You Earn Scheme, 70 donors who support the Trust monthly through Bankers Order, and the many people who supported us through individual donations, which varied from £5 to £500.

## **PROMOTION OF THE WORK OF MEXICO CHILD LINK**

Over 600 people and organisations received a copy of the Mexico Child Link Newsletter in December. Over 150 individuals and organisations received a copy of the 2003-2004 Annual Report. The regular street collections were used to promote our work to the general public.

The web-site is a platform for our work and helps achieve our aim of spreading good practice. The web-site elicits many enquiries for both individuals and organizations who are interested in getting involved with our work in some way. We had contact from a Mexican Restaurant chain in England (**Chiquito**), and a company in Norway which provides supported employment opportunities (**Mineberget**.) Several schools made contact in relation to their curriculum work on the Aztecs. There is also a profile on Mexico Child Link and a latest news section on the **Charities Aid Foundation** website **www.givenow.org**. The CAFAmerica site at **www.allaboutgiving.org** has been established as a donations portal for the US. Mexico Child Link carried out talks in several schools and spoke to the committee of the **Common Grounds Fair Trade Café** in University Avenue during November 2004. Mexico Child Link took a stall for two days during the **Early Years and Primary Teaching** Exhibition held in the Ramada Hotel, Belfast in order to promote the work we carry out in schools. Contact was made with an organization called **Mexico Amigo** which is based in London and supports projects with Mexico. We sold cards at Christmas depicting life at the project site in Mexico.

## FINANCE

### INCOME & EXPENDITURE 2004-2005

(12 months to 5<sup>th</sup> April 2005)

All values are in £ Sterling

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>£</b>
Street Collections	12,002
Donations	4,379
Website donations	449
Give as you Earn	1,560
Banker's Order	9,816
Schools	2,169
Grant Giving Trust	600
Gift Aid	2,643
US Donations	134
Bank interest	174
Church groups	425
Fundraising	1,345
Total	35,696

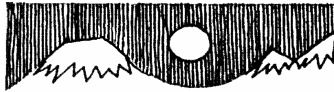
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£</b>
Salaries	7,435
Grant to Mexico	35,445
Pension scheme	960
Travel Insurance	65
Printing, postage & stationery	764
Cards	800
Telephone	579
Expenses incurred abroad	3,412
Audit	130
Sundry expenses (petty cash)	283
Depreciation	209
Exchange gain	(38)

Total £ 50,044

Funds held as of April 5th 2005 £16,429

Mexico Child Link accounts are audited by *Dawson & Company*, 1 Conway Court, High St. Newtownards, N. Ireland BT23 4GW.

There is a need to increase our income by approximately £15,000 per annum if we are to maintain our commitments at the current level. It is hoped to do this by maximising the monthly income from existing supporters as well as developing relationships with more schools. If this increase in our annual income is not feasible, we will have to reduce our level of support.



## What is Mexico Child Link?

The Mexico Child Link Trust is a UK registered Charitable Trust, governed by a group of seven trustees with an interest in learning disability.

Mexico Child Link is an independent charitable organisation, not linked with any religious or political group. UK donations are fully tax deductible through the Gift Aid programme and US donors can ensure their donations are fully tax deductible by supporting us through CAF-America.

Mexico Child Link was founded in 1992 by Jonathan Getty & Colette Mc Ginnity, in response to the needs of abandoned & orphan children with learning disability in Puebla State, Mexico.

Mexico Child Link works in partnership with Fundación Trébol de Puebla A.C., an independent Mexican charitable foundation, which we helped to set up and now partially fund and advise. This close relationship allows the project in Puebla to be run efficiently by Mexican staff trained in the field of learning disability.

Mexico Child Link provides a range of services for people with or affected by learning disability. The core project is a home for abandoned & orphan children with learning disabilities, near the town of Atlixco. Many of them are ex street children. The children live on a small farm in 2 specially built adobe houses where they are cared for in a family setting. The farm, based upon sustainable agriculture, provides a degree of self sufficiency for the project and allows the children to learn practical skills.

If you would like to get involved, or support our work, please get in touch. We are particularly interested in getting involved with local schools and making contact with individuals who have fundraising experience.