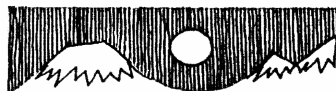


The Mexico Child Link Trust
CHARITY REFERENCE NUMBER XR18919

ANNUAL REPORT 2003 - 2004



80 Locksley Park, Belfast, BT10 0AS. Tel (028) 90622239
www.mexico-child-link.org/

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

Mrs. U. Brennan, S.C.T. Cert., D.A.S.E. Sp. Ed., (Vice Principal)

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)

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 2003-2004 Mexico Child Link made two visits to Mexico, in July-August 2003, and December-January 2004. 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 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 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

The last year was one of the most challenging yet for Mexico Child Link. Queta Palestino, our project director and longest serving staff member, left our partner organization due to ill health, and there was a lot of additional staff turnover. The security situation in Mexico has deteriorated, and Tenex-tepec has suffered a considerable amount of burglary, livestock theft, and even kidnappings. There were also problems with local youths starting fires in the dry season. These problems have affected our neighbours as well as ourselves and we have been in regular contact with the police, who are taking measures to improve security in the area, mainly through extra patrols.

There were also difficulties associated with the increased independence of some of the young people in the project, with regard to finding a balance between supervision and independence. To some extent, this goes with the territory in this type of work.

We have also been debating the impact of spending less time directly supervising the project in Mexico in relation to the quality of care provided. A higher level of direct supervision does help to keep standards up. However, this is not ideal development practice as it could create a dependency with the partner organization in a developing country such as Mexico.

In spite of this, as in previous years there is also a considerable amount of good news to report.

Employment

Good progress has been made on the employment front, although the young people still need a higher level of supervision and support than first anticipated. The living arrangements were changed earlier in the year and the older children, and young people are now living more independently in one of the two houses. This is a natural development, in keeping with our desire to give them more responsibility, as they grow older.

Esteban has a full time job on a local dairy farm, which he has held for approximately 2 years. Rodolfo, is helping out on the project farm. Argelio held a full time job in a tomato producing market garden and then gained another on a local ranch working with the sheep. Paty and Marisol are working as house-helpers in the project, having replaced a member of staff who was employed previously.



Esteban Ortega



Argelio Avila

Esteban in particular has been a huge success story for the project. In spite of his limitations, such as inability to use public transport or manage money, he has held down full time jobs near the project site for six years. Personally, it has been very rewarding to see him grow from a thirteen year old with little or no language or social skills,

into a responsible young adult. Young people with learning disability like Esteban have now had the benefit of 9 years of education and training in the project.

Transition to more independence



Two of the young people are now living more independently outside of the project

Josefa (24) is back in her home village of Coyay, a Totonac Indian village in Puebla's *Sierra Norte*, one of the most inaccessible and poorest parts of Mexico. Many people there speak little or no Spanish. Although it is only 150 miles away, Coyay is a seven-hour drive from Atlixco. Josefa lives with her partner Luis in a house which is also occupied by Luis's two sisters and his mother. The elder sister has a 2 month old baby. Josefa is now speaking mainly in Totonac. She has the fluency and confidence of a native speaker, and

appears to be returning to her indigenous roots. In the nine years she was in our project she never had the opportunity to use the language of her village; it had remained dormant until she was reunited with her own people. For many years we had suspected her indigenous origin, as she was prone to make the kind of gender and grammatical mistakes of someone who does not have Spanish as a first language. There is little or no linguistic overlap between Spanish and Mexico's 60 or so Indian languages. We have set up a regular programme of monitoring visits to ensure that she is properly supported. Fundación Trébol took over the guardianship of Josefa several years ago, so this is an independent arrangement, which does not involve local authorities. Although the village is very poor and Josefa's house is badly constructed, it is a viable option for her, as the alternative would be living on the streets, or in an institution such as a psychiatric hospital. Neither of these are good options for her. She now has a lot of independence back with people from her own culture. She also has an acre of coffee plantation, which had been tended by an uncle of hers in her absence, so this may provide her with a source of income.



Rodolfo (19) has also moved out of the project. In contrast to Josefa, he has been given the use of a small gatehouse only 200 yards away from the project site in exchange for 8 hours of gardening work for the owner of the main property. He is still working in the project and gets his meals there. He goes to his house at 8.00 in the evening and returns to work at 8.00 am the next day. He divides his time between the house and the project and he has free time at weekends for recreational activities such as football and other sports. He is very pleased with this arrangement, and it is being closely supported by Jovita Saldaña, the independence-

training worker.

New project Director



Enriqueta Palestino, our Project General Director, resigned in March due to ill health. We are very fortunate to be able to welcome back Angélica Lopez. She knows the children and the management of the project very well and this has enabled a smooth transition. Angélica previously worked as Project Director for 3 years and has worked in Trébol for 6 years altogether. Angélica is 37 and has spent her entire career in childcare projects. She is a psychology graduate from a local university in Puebla. Angélica knows the programmes used in Fundación Trébol and will be able to carry out staff training, including the use of the independence training system, which she used in her

previous spell as director.

Enriqueta worked for Fundación Trébol for eleven years and we wish her all the best for the future.

Fundraising within Mexico

Fundraising responsibilities passed from Queta Palestino to Ana Sandóval, the advice and information centre worker. This proved to be successful and a considerable amount of donations were received such as:

- 100 Bathroom Towels donated by TOWEL SA. DE CV
- A new cooker donated by Fundación Best
- General provisions, beans, rice, flour etc. donated by Fundación Best and SICOM radio
- Two new solar water heaters donated by the Volkswagen Foundation
- A grant for a summer scheme from the Mexican Bankers Association (Quiera)
- Half price bus tickets to Veracruz donated by Autobuses Unidos
- Mexican Bankers Association (Quiera) is also paying monthly training grants to Emmanuel and Oscar
- New sheets were donated by a local business, Zermatex
- a grant of £3,000 from SEDESOL to better equip the advice and information centre



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 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 as well as vegetable gardens 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 almost £39,000 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.

Arrival of new children



Two new children, Mario (5) and his brother Israel (2) are expected to arrive at the project shortly. They are currently in the social services referral centre where they have been assessed by Ana Sandóval. They are lively children and will be the first new arrivals since Emmanuel four years ago. The places have become available since the departure of Rodolfo and Josefa recently.

Mario's has a little more learning disability than his younger sibling but it is well within the limits of the type of child the project can accept. They have been under the care of social services since the start of the year. Their hometown is Ciudad Serdán in the

State of Puebla. Ana has been working with these children for six months and considers them very suitable candidates for the project.

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.
- A programme called Escúchame based on the *Listen to me* programme
- A Carpentry training workshop
- A Sewing Skills workshop.
- An Advice and information Centre

Independence training programme.

This is now being more regularly used throughout the project and it is being overseen by Angélica the new project director.

The *Escúchame* programme has been used effectively by the independence-training worker, who has found it very useful in getting to know the factors which make a difference to the quality of life of the young people in the project.

The carpentry workshop



The workshop was rearranged to take place twice a week instead of every day and the trainer was allocated other duties such as supervising a sewing skills workshop and working with the two youngest children Juan and Oscar who are in need of more individual attention. The children and young people exhibited their wares in various events in Atlixco and Puebla.

The **Horticulture programme** in Atlixco Special School has been suspended due to lack of support from the school authorities.

Advice and Information Centre

Our project partners have received a grant of £3000 from SEDESOL to re-equip their learning disability advice and information centre. They were able to purchase, a Compaq Pentium 4 computer, a brother laser Printer, a canon Photocopier and 30 books on the theme of learning disability

Website

Mexico Child Link set up a new website in June 2003. It contains information about the project work being carried out, such as the carpentry workshop, independence training and the residential project. There is up to date news on the progress of Josefa and Rodolfo as well as information on the new arrivals. There are links to the Mexico Child Link annual reports and financial statements, and there is also information on how to donate online, or set up a monthly standing order. There is a lot of background information on the area of Mexico where our project is located, and an information page on the Aztecs for schools.

There is also an online photo album with dozens of recent photographs of the project. The website can be accessed at www.mexico-child-link.org/

The site produced an anonymous donation of £1500 and has generated a lot of interest from potential volunteers and those interested in street children and the general situation in Mexico.

Farm

A local Vet has agreed to buy selected lambs for their genetic potential. If this can be developed, it could be a new source of income for the project. The project currently has a flock of about 40 sheep and goats. About 20 animals were stolen earlier in the year.

Rodolfo (19) is now the sole worker on the farm and he has managed reasonably well since he took on the sole responsibility earlier in the year. We are renting land from a neighbour in order to sow maize as animal fodder in order to avoid any shortage of animal feed during the dry season, which runs from November to May.



Thanks due

Magheralin Parish Women's Group organised a very successful fundraising event on our behalf, with over £1,200 being raised. The cross community event involved a fashion show featuring the latest styles from 4 shops in Moira. The *City of London Freeman's School* has continued its long-term support, as well as *St Eugene's* and *St Tierney's*, Roslea and Wallace High School, Lisburn. Ulster Garden Villages also continued its long term support with a donation. *Coranny Old School Reunion Committee* gave a donation, as did the *Paget Trust*. Toby Wolfe ran the Berlin marathon to raise funds on our behalf. We also received a substantial donation from the Estate of the late Sybil Brian through *Russells, The Solicitors*. *Edgecombe TRC* also gave support. Thanks are also due to Paul Arthurton for his suggestions regarding fundraising as well as *St Tierney's PS*, Wallace high school, CMS Cameron McKenna, and Harmony Hill Presbyterian Church women's group and Kilcreggan Homes who gave support. Thanks also to Makro, Dunmurry for the

successful annual collection held at their premises.

In addition the Trust would like to thank:

17 donors who support us through the Give as You Earn Scheme

68 donors who support the Trust monthly through Bankers Order.

The many people who supported us through individual donations, which varied from £5 to £1500.

Thanks are also due to I.T.S. for the use of their premises to hold our Trustee meetings.

PROMOTION OF THE WORK OF MEXICO CHILD LINK

Over 500 people and organisations received a copy of the Mexico Child Link Newsletter in

September. Over 100 individuals and organisations received a copy of the 2002 Annual Report.

The regular street collections were used to promote our work to the general public. The new website is a platform for our work and helps achieve our aim of spreading good practice.

FINANCE

INCOME & EXPENDITURE 2003-2004 (Accounting period 1/1/2003 – 5/4/2004)

We have changed the end of our accounting year from 31st December to 5th April in order to coincide with the tax year. This has simplified the record keeping and paperwork involved in our Gift Aid reclaim. Our Gift aid reclaim this year reached a record level of £2,434.

2003-2004 was a successful fundraising year with over £71,000 raised. The funding was raised through street collections, individual donations, school fundraising, and monthly contributions through Bankers Order, *the Give as you Earn* scheme and *Gift Aid*. Support was also received from Grant Giving Trusts, as well as online donations from the website, which included a single anonymous donation of £1,500.

All values are in £ Sterling

INCOME	£
Street Collections	11,127
Donations	8,920
Website donations	1,648
Give as you Earn	1,963
Banker's Order	12,330
Schools	5,858
Grant Giving Trust	1,700
Gift Aid	2,434
US Donations	31
Legacy	25,000
Bank interest	251
Church groups	237
Total	71,499

EXPENDITURE	£
Salaries	9,835
Grant to Mexico	38,910
Pension scheme	1,360
Printing, postage & stationery	593
Telephone	507
Expenses incurred abroad	3,883
Accountancy	130
Bank interest & charges	20
Sundry expenses (petty cash)	300
Depreciation	264
Exchange gain	(21)

Total £ 55,781

Funds held as of April 5th 2004 £30,777

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