

The Mexico Child Link Trust

CHARITY REFERENCE NUMBER XO 354 / 92

ANNUAL REPORT 1994

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Mexico Child Link is a Charitable Trust, recognised as such by the Inland Revenue.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Our main objective is to improve the quality of life of abandoned children in Mexico with special needs. We work in partnership with a Mexican organisation known as Fundación Trébol de Puebla which we developed and now fund and advise.

We are building three houses on a small farm which shall be home to up to fifteen abandoned children with mental handicap. This project has the support of local Government in Mexico as well as local Non Governmental Organisations. This year a suitable site for the farm was purchased. Funding has already been secured to construct the first two houses.

STAFFING

The Trust is a small organisation and our low level of staffing enables us to keep overheads to a minimum. The Trust Co-ordinator, Jonathan Getty is a full time salaried member of staff. Colette Mc Ginnity is paid part time to carry out general fundraising and development work, both at home and in Mexico. Mrs June Getty works as a part time volunteer in general fundraising and administration. Mexico Child Link also relies on the services of voluntary collectors and supporters who organise various fundraising events throughout Northern Ireland.

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The work of the trust can be divided into two categories, fundraising and development.

REPORT OF WORK IN IRELAND

FUNDRAISING

1994 has been our most successful year to date with a total of £60,477 raised.

The bulk of this income came from 22 street collections, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, 3 grant giving trusts, as well as our other fundraising efforts. (See income and expenditure analysis below.)

We are indebted to the following organisations and individuals who supported us generously throughout the year by giving their time or financial support.

June Getty	Alan Bell
Jimmy Lynch	Ulster Garden Villages Limited
Carol Phelan	Patsy Mc Phillips
Donaghadee Church of Ireland Men's Soc.	Coranny Primary School
Maze Primary School	Longstone Special School
Dungannon Royal School	St. Eugene's Secondary School, Roslea
St Fanchreas', Enniskillen	St. Michael's, Enniskillen
Loreto Convent Primary School, Omagh.	Loreto Convent Grammar, Omagh
Dungannon Soroptomists	Dean Shearer
May Blair	Nigel Mowbray
The Ericson Trust	Textflow Services Limited
I.T.S. Limited	Fitzroy Presbyterian Church
Hilary & Alf Mc Creary	Irish Department of Foreign Affairs
Lic. Enrique Figueroa	St. Mary's Primary School, Maguiresbridge

In addition the Trust would like to thank:

23 donors who support us through the *Give as You Earn Scheme*.

3 supporters who covenant to the Trust.

10 donors who support the trust through Bankers Order.

The many people who supported us through individual donations which varied from £3 to £500.

In 1994 as well as developing our traditional means of fundraising such as street collections and the *Give as you Earn* scheme, we also targeted several grant giving bodies. This proved very successful, as £30,000 was obtained from the aid budget of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as major grants from The Ericson Trust, Ulster Garden Villages Limited, and The Christmas Sit-out for Charities Appeal.

DEVELOPMENT WORK AT HOME

Talks and slide shows were given in ten schools throughout Northern Ireland which helped to raise awareness about Mexico and the issue of mental handicap in developing countries. Colette Mc Ginnity visited several residential institutions for children and adults with mental handicap in order to research potential difficulties which could occur during the setting up of the project in Puebla.

PUBLICITY AND PRESS COVERAGE

In general there was more media interest in Mexico during 1994 than during previous years. This was mainly due to an armed uprising in the south of the country in January and a financial crisis in December. The Mexico Child Link Trust obtained media coverage in all the main newspapers in Northern Ireland and it is felt that we were able to raise our profile as a new charity. The numerous street collections carried out were also used as a platform to explain the work of the Trust to the general public. Press releases were sent out to the local press before and after collections. Radio interviews with Downtown Radio, Radio Ulster and Northern Sound took place during the year. A Newsletter was sent out to over 400 supporters in June and December.

REPORT OF WORK IN MEXICO

Two representatives of the Trust were working in Mexico from February 28th to May 18th and from July 6th to October 27th 1994

RESEARCH PROJECT

The Trust provided assistance in the development of a research project being carried out by our partner organisation, Fundación Trébol de Puebla. This investigation has been funded by the Mexico Child Link Trust since October 1993. The aim of the study is to determine the whereabouts and level of provision for abandoned children with mental handicap in the Puebla area. Although this project took longer than anticipated to complete, some very interesting findings were produced.

- 6.7% of the children in Care (68 children) were found to be mentally handicapped.
- Two thirds of this group had no access to special education and had only basic facilities.
- 14 children with mental handicap are housed in a local borstal even though they are not offenders.

The results of this work have been disseminated to the directors of 22 children's homes in Puebla, universities, local Government Agencies, schools and individuals interested in the field of Mental Handicap. A report of the investigation is available in Spanish.

BIOLOGIST'S REPORT

A local biologist was contracted to carry out a social and biological analysis of the region before selection and purchase of a site. The report will be used as a reference work for future planning.

LAND PURCHASE

A database of potential sites for the project in the Puebla area was set up. Suitability was assessed according to criteria such as price, access to public transport, availability of irrigation water, soil quality and composition, locality, availability of electricity, as well as the form of land tenure. A site was chosen in Tenextepec, Atlixco, Puebla which met the above criteria. A price was agreed with the seller and after many delays, a 1 hectare piece of land was purchased for £30,000 by Fundación Trébol de Puebla using a grant from The Mexico Child Link Trust. This process was handled by Enrique Figueroa, a leading solicitor in Puebla.

PLANNING

Plans for the children's houses were drawn up and modified several times during the course of the year. The houses are to be 160 square metres and have 4 bedrooms. The design takes into account the special needs of our client group incorporating views from both Ireland and Mexico. Construction is expected to begin in January under the supervision of architect Jesús Salgado. A provisional plan for the organic farm was drawn up by agronomist Alejandra Caballero. The emphasis is on self sufficiency in vitamins and basic foodstuffs. It is hoped to plant fruit trees and other shrubs on the site during 1995.

FUNDRAISING

Several funding applications were sent to trusts in The United States through our partners in Fundación Trébol. The Mexico Child Link Trust provided assistance with these proposals which were submitted in English. A funding application was also submitted to the British Embassy in Mexico City.

PROJECT PARTNERS

It was ensured that the project co-ordinator in Puebla, Queta Palestino Aguilar, attended several training courses which covered areas such as fundraising and presentation skills. There was reorganisation within the group in Mexico with three members leaving, a new member joining and a new president being elected.

FINANCE

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 1994

Funds held as of December 31st 1994 £42,489

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS AFFECTING WORK IN MEXICO

The Peso went into freefall on December 19th 1994, losing 35% of its value against the pound by year end. This will have severe social and economic repercussions during the coming year with an inevitable rise in inflation and a general decrease in the standard of living for the Mexican people. It is also likely to complicate financial planning and budgets for the Trust as most budgets are planned in US Dollars, a currency which has also risen sharply against the Peso. The exchange rate moved from 3.4 to 5.0 Pesos per Dollar in the last fortnight of 1994. It is anticipated that budgets will have to be reworked extensively at regular intervals during 1995 to allow for increased inflation and labour costs. In the short term, capital held in Sterling will be worth considerably more. This vindicated the decision of the Trust to hold funds in Sterling as long as possible even though a higher rate of interest had been available in Pesos.

KEY OBJECTIVES FOR 1995

- One house will be constructed and furnished by the end of 1995.
- A project director will be named and staff appointed and trained through Fundación Trébol.
- Children will be selected based upon the results of the investigation carried out by our partner organisation, with priority going to the most disadvantaged.

CONCLUSION

1994 was a very successful year for the Trust, both financially, and in terms of objectives achieved. However, although the Trust has capital to build two houses, it would be prudent to avoid developing the project too quickly as we still have to secure funding for staff training and salaries as well as to maintain our current commitments. This may be offset to some extent by fundraising by our partner organisation Fundación Trébol, within Mexico. Staff time will be divided between development work and looking for other avenues of funding. It is proposed that current fundraising strategies such as street collections be maintained and that new proposals to grant giving bodies be submitted. A final factor to consider is the current deterioration in the Mexican economy and the possibility increase in social unrest.

Jonathan Getty

Co-ordinator

Anne Mc Murray

Chairperson