The Mexico Child Link Trust

CHARITY REFERENCE NUMBER XO 354 / 92

ANNUAL REPORT 1996

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

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

AIMS.
Our main aim is to improve the quality of life of abandoned children with learning disabilities/mental handicap in Mexico. We work in partnership with a Mexican organisation known as Fundación Trébol de Puebla A.C. which we helped to develop and now fund and advise.

THE PROJECT
The Mexico Child Link Trust supports a residential project in Puebla, Mexico for abandoned children with learning disabilities. This project has the support of local government in Mexico as well as a number of Non Governmental Organisations. Two houses constructed on a 2.5 acre site during 1995 are now home to 11 children. Work continues to develop a small farm based on a system of sustainable agriculture.

PROJECT STAFF
The project staff comprises a team of eight people:
Guadalupe Anaya Walker, Project Director
Carmen Rivera, Houseparent
Cristina Ramos, Support Worker
Enriqueta Palestino Aguilar Office Administrator.

The following staff were appointed in 1996:
Martha León, Houseparent
Dora Valderrábano, Support Worker.
Angelica López Romero, Part-time Support Worker
Isabel Flores, Farm Manager

STAFFING
The Trust is a small organisation and our low level of staffing enables overheads to be kept to a minimum. Jonathan Getty and Colette Mc Ginnity both receive a basic salary. 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.

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

REPORT OF WORK IN IRELAND

FUNDRAISING

1996 has been another successful year, with £ 34,440 raised. This funding was raised through street collections, donations, specific fundraising events and monthly contributions through bankers order, the *Give as you Earn* scheme and covenants. Some support was also received from Grant Giving Trusts.

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
Jimmy Lynch
Jacqui Reynolds
Corranny Primary School
Monaghan Lions Club
Mt. Lourdes Convent Grammar
St. Michael´s College Enniskillen
St. Fancheas Secondary School
Loreto Convent Primary School,
The Paget Charitable Trust
May Blair
St. Ronan's Primary School
Liverpool University, Latin American Soc.
J.W. Russell & Co
Annie Mc Ginnity
The Ulster Bank Ltd.
Alan Bell
Ulster Garden Villages Limited
Liam Mohan and Alice Carey
Royal School, Dungannon
Longstone Special School
I.T.S. Limited
St. Mary's Grammar School
Camphill Communities Trust
Rose Cummings
Dean Shearer
Parkview Special School
St. Mary's Primary School
Michael Hewitt
Hilary & Alf Mc Creary
Dawson Cunningham

In addition the Trust would like to thank:

21 donors who support us through the *Give as You Earn Scheme*.
2 supporters who covenant to the Trust.
51 donors who support the trust monthly through Bankers Order.
The many people who supported us through individual donations which varied from £5 to £300.

DEVELOPMENT WORK AT HOME

Talks and slide shows were given in schools and other organisations throughout N. Ireland. This helped to raise awareness about Mexico and the issue of learning disabilities in developing countries.

Visits were made to several organisations and individuals in N. Ireland and in Eire, in order to research a number of issues relevant to the work with children and young people with learning disabilities in Mexico. Contact was also established with a number of organizations in the U.K. We are indebted to the following:

Disability Action, Graham Mc Clure, Mrs. Mc Clure, The Orchardville Society, CLASP, Mencap, Edgcumbe Training and Resource Centre, South & East Belfast Trust, Sense, Dr. B's Kitchen, Hospitallier Order of St. John of God, Kare, Down's Syndrome Association, N.I., Jigsaw Partnerships, Lancashire, Jordanstown School for Children with Auditory or Visual Handicap, Muckamore Abbey Hospital, National Association for the Protection from Sexual Abuse of Adults and Children with Learning Disabilities, Royal National Institute for Deaf People, Brothers of Charity, Borders Region, The Beeches Aghalee, Camphill Communities at Clanabogan and Glencraig, Health Promotion Agency.

PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

The numerous street collections carried out were used as a platform to explain the work of the Trust to the general public. A Newsletter was sent to over 600 supporters in September and December.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE TRUST

Michael Barbour resigned from the trust for personal reasons. Anne Mc Murray stepped down as Chairperson of the Trust but continues as a trustee. Carmel Lewis was elected as Chairperson at the A.G.M. on 13th February.

REPORT OF WORK IN MEXICO

Two representatives of the Trust were working in Mexico from 21st February to 6th August 1996. 1996 was a year of consolidation. Work focused on assessments and programmes for the children, staff training and development, procedures, evaluation and the development of the farm. The project is generally running very well and the children seem settled and content. The staff group is very committed and have learned a great deal about working with children with learning disabilities.

CHILDREN

There are now 11 children living in the project. All the children are totally abandoned and are under the legal guardianship of the D.I.F., (the government department responsible for children.) The first 5 children, all aged 12-13, moved in during August/September 1995. The second group of six children moved in on 21st February 1996. The new group of children include a four year old girl who is deaf and a five year old boy. The other children are between 10 and 12 years old. All the children suffer from the consequences of abandonment, neglect, and abuse. Much emphasis is placed on the children learning to do things for themselves, to prepare them more a more independent life as adults. With the exception of the youngest boy, all children take part in the household activities, look after their own clothes and rooms, help to collect the milk, carry water from the well, go to the market and help on the farm. Children participate in the decisions which affect them. Weekly children's meetings are held where they can express their views. When possible the children are involved in their individual assessments of what they need to learn to do, to become more independent, and to improve their quality of life. All the children attend a local special school. A good working relationship has been established with the Director and the teachers in the school. The children have many opportunities to mix with people in the neighbouring rural community, through everyday activities associated with the farm and the houses. They also use public transport, attend church services and are regularly invited to local *fiestas*.

STAFF APPOINTMENTS AND TRAINING

Staff for the second house were recruited and selected in February. A part-time member of staff was appointed in July, to cover staff holidays, sick leave and to provide extra support at week-ends. Detailed job descriptions, job specifications and terms and conditions were drawn up for all posts. The selection procedure involves interview by a panel of five, a detailed evaluation system, thorough verification of references as well as psychometric tests. The process of staff selection is carried out in conjunction with members of the Management Committee of our partner organisation Fundación Trébol. Staff received four days induction training in preparation for their work with children with learning disabilities. Fundación Trébol has an ongoing commitment to staff training and supervision. A system of regular, recorded supervision was set up. It has proved successful in terms of staff development and helps to ensure a good quality of care for the children. Staff meetings are held weekly. Staff training was carried out in the following areas of work:

"Use of the Assessment System", "Problem Behaviour", "Preparation for a more Independent Life", "Recording Skills," "Supervision of Children", Use of Language in Work with Children", Viewing the World from the Child's Perspective", "Putting Limits on Children's Behaviour", and "Protection of Children from Abuse".

Staff also attended a course on nutrition given by a nutritionist from the children's hospital. A member of staff attended a course on preparation of young people with a learning disability for work. In August, the Farm Manager attended a week long course about sustainable agriculture.

STAFF CONDITIONS

Staff are well paid in local terms and are enrolled in the state social security system (Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social.) This entitles them and their immediate families to comprehensive medical care and sickness benefit as well as housing and other benefits. All staff have signed yearly contracts based on their job descriptions.

EVALUATION

A detailed evaluation of the overall functioning of the project was carried out in March. At this stage the first group of children had been in residence for six months. In general terms the project was functioning well but recommendations were made in the following areas: Contracting farm labourers and volunteers, Preparation of the children for a more independent way of life, Protection of the children against all forms of abuse, Hygiene, Diet, Medicines, Recording, Procedures. By August the vast majority of these recommendations had been carried out and had greatly improved the functioning of the project.

An analysis of expenditure was carried out in April. This revealed a lack of formal planning and control. Recommendations were implemented immediately. Since then, the Project Director and Office Administrator submit a quarterly categorized estimate of expenditure to Mexico Child Link. A quarterly report of actual spending is also submitted. Financial control has been improved and the project has kept spending within its quarterly projections.

On completion of one year in post, an in-depth evaluation of the work of the project director was carried out in July. The Director achieved much in the first year of the project. She is exceptionally committed and hard working. The recommendations made in the evaluation of her work concentrated on practical suggestions about how she could improve her practice and consequently the quality of care of the children. Many of the recommendations were carried out within a month and the remainder were carried out throughout the year, with very positive results in many areas.

PROCEDURES

Procedures and guidelines were drawn up and are in place for the following: "supervision of the children", "risk-taking in relation to the children", "prevention and management of a violent or aggressive outburst", "use of physical restraint to control a child", "in the event of a child running away", "in the event of accident", "in the event of an untoward incident", "in the event of fire", "visitors", "alcohol", "use of the pick-up truck" and "use of the telephone".

Procedures were also drawn up for "Budgeting within each house", "Quarterly application for funding from Mexico Child Link" and "Use of the FAPRODE scheme" (This is an aid programme supported by the Mexican government which allows Fundación Trébol to increase the value of any donations in foreign currency by 12%.) Staff experienced difficulty in accepting the need for procedures and guidelines. On-going work continues, to ensure that they follow procedures.

COMMUNICATIONS
Lines of communication and accountability within Fundación Trébol were clearly established to ensure that decisions are taken in an informed and clear manner. An E-mail account was set up in July. Mexico Child Link and Fundación Trébol now communicate regularly in this way. This has improved the quality and frequency of communication and has considerably reduced the international telephone bills.

FARM
Sonia Cabrera resigned and Don Isabel Flores was appointed farm supervisor in April.

The children were organised into supervised groups and allocated different duties on the farm. Children were given a chance to try a wide range of activities in order to ascertain their strengths, weaknesses and interests.

In the course of the year the following work was carried out:
(a) A water storage pond was constructed and stocked with carp.
(b) The vegetable garden was extended.
(c) An acre of land was manured, ploughed and planted with a wide range of crops.
(d) A sheep corral was constructed and a ram and 4 ewes were purchased.
(e) Chickens and rabbits were bought and reared for meat and egg production.
(f) Additional fencing was put in place.
(g) An area of land was reforested.
(h) The farm supervisor attended a 1 week course on sustainable agriculture.

The farm is based on a system of sustainable agriculture which is highly productive, and avoids the use of pesticides and chemicals.

FUNDRAISING IN MEXICO
Desarrollo Integral Familiar, the Government Department responsible for childcare continued to supply some medicines and made a number of donations in kind.
An aid programme called ***FAPRODE*** supported by the Mexican Government allows Fundación Trébol to make an extra 12% on all funds received from within Mexico and abroad.
A number of individual donations were received in money and in kind, including milk, drinking water, and school materials.
A lot of work was undertaken to further the application made by Fundación Trébol to obtain tax deductible status. This is still pending.

MEMBERSHIP OF ORGANISATIONS IN MEXICO
Fundación Trébol, our partner organisation, is a member of CONFE, a national organisation that works on behalf of people with learning disabilities. A delegation of representatives from the organization visited the project in April and were impressed with the location, the houses and the innovative work being carried out with the children. Queta Palestino the Office Administrator attended the CONFE Annual Conference in Mexico City in November. Fundación Trébol is also a member of GLARP, a Latin American organisation which works to rehabilitate disabled people. Fundación Trébol is a founder member of FOPEC, which incorporates twenty five Non Governmental Organisations from Puebla who work together. The Director of the project attends monthly meetings of Directors of residential units organised by the D.I.F. Excellent working relationships have been established with the D.I.F. and with many other child care organisations in Puebla. The Mexican branch of the ARC organization agreed to carry out an annual external

evaluation of the project. Fundación Trébol maintains contact with a number of universities in Puebla and children and staff have been invited to attend events. A university student visited weekly to do sporting activities with the children.

KEY OBJECTIVES FOR 1997

Section (a): Continuation of existing commitments

General

(a) 2 trust workers will spend 5 months in Mexico supervising, evaluating and developing the project.

(b) An in depth annual evaluation of all aspects of the functioning of the project will be carried out.

Children

(a) 12 children with learning disabilities will be provided with a home education and training in 2 houses in Texextepec, Atlixco, Mexico.

Staff

(a) Existing project staff will receive further development and training.

(b) An evaluation of the terms and conditions of service will take place.

Farm

(a) A wide range of crops will be sown and existing productive systems maintained, based upon a system of sustainable agriculture.

Section (b) New commitments (priority)

Children

(a) Policy, procedures and training to protect children from all forms of abuse will be put in place.

(b) A programme of sex education and relationship training will be introduced within the project.

(c) An evaluation will be carried out to ascertain the effectiveness of the assessment system currently in use. We shall investigate the possibility of other organizations using this system.

(d) Joint programmes and activities with the special needs school in Atlixco will be initiated.

Farm

(a) An evaluation of existing productive systems will be carried out.

(b) An evaluation of the organisation of the children's work groups will be carried out.

(c) An evaluation of the introduction of further productive sub-projects will be carried out.

Staff.

Training courses will be organised in the following areas for the co-ordinator and director

(a) Use of Information technology.

(b) Fundraising strategies and database management.

(c) Presentation of reports.

(d) The planning, preparation and dissemination of a newsletter.

Fundraising Ireland

(a) The amount of regular monthly donations to the trust will be increased by 25%.

(b) Existing monthly donors who are not tax efficient will be encouraged to switch to tax efficient schemes such as covenants.

Objectives if significant new funding becomes available. (1997 and beyond)

Three further project workers will be appointed:

(i) A speech therapist/special education worker will: (a) improve the speech & language of the 12 resident children in our 2 houses, (b) train and advise staff in up to 22 children's homes and other institutions in Puebla, (c) find places in appropriate schools for children with learning disabilities resident in these institutions in Puebla, (d) organise interorganisational training and development courses.

(ii) A life skills/employment worker will: (a) devise independence training programmes for 12 resident children and children in the local special needs school, (b) seek out employment for adequately trained young people with learning disabilities and provide backup support in the workplace, (c) work with the farm coordinator to organise appropriate practical training for 12 resident children and children from the local special needs school.

(iii) A farm coordinator will be appointed to set up further productive systems based upon environmentally sustainable agricultural practices. The farm will comprise a series of sub-projects such as intensive vegetable production, beekeeping, cheese-making and other practical activities. These sub projects will have a low capital cost so as to be within the reach of local peasant farmers. The farm will provide a skills training area for 12 resident children as well as providing a resource for children from the local special school.

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FINANCE

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 1996

INCOME

Donations	£ 5,925
Fundraising	£ 4,354
Give as you Earn	£ 2,416
Bank Interest received	£ 327
Street collections	£12,124
Bankers Order	£ 4,092
Grant making trust	£ 1,556
Schools	£ 3,328
Covenant	£ 318
	£34,440

EXPENDITURE

Grant aid to Fundación Trébol	£21,200
Postage, printing, stationery	£ 1,599
Telephone & Fax	£ 390
Travel Expenses	£ 2,260
Expenses incurred abroad	£ 983
Accountants fees	£ 59
General expenses	£ 307
Salaries	£ 9317
Depreciation Office equipment	£ 354
	£36,469

Funds held as of December 31st 1996 £14,242

Jonathan Getty — Co-ordinator

Carmel Lewis — Chairperson