

The Mexico Child Link Trust

CHARITY REFERENCE NUMBER XO 354 / 92

ANNUAL REPORT 1997

CHAIRPERSON

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TREASURER

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

SECRETARY

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TRUSTEES

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

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

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

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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. During 1997, funding was secured which will enable Fundación Trébol to improve the quality of care of abandoned children with learning disabilities who live in large institutions in the city of Puebla.

PROJECT STAFF

The project staff comprises a team of eight people:

Guadalupe Anaya Walker, Project Director

Cristina Ramos, Support Houseparent

Angélica López Romero, Houseparent

Rosalba Mota Osario, Houseparent

Jovita León Saldaña, Helper

Delfina Sánchez Figueroa, Helper

Lorenzo Segundo Cuatle, Farm worker.

Enriqueta Palestino Aguilar Office Administrator (part-time.)

The following staff were appointed in November 1997 and commence work in January 1998:

Beatriz Benítez Sánchez, Co-ordinator of "Programme to Support the Street Child."

Enriqueta Palestino Aguilar, Special Education Worker in institutions (part-time.)

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

1997 has been the most successful year to date with £ 74,800 raised. (includes £24,483 from the National Lottery Charities Board) This funding was raised through street collections, donations, school fundraising, 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.

FUNDING RECEIVED FROM NATIONAL LOTTERY CHARITIES BOARD.

In 1997 the National Lottery Charities Board approved funding to Mexico Child Link, within its International Grants Programme for U.K. based charities working abroad. The Trust considers this support to be an endorsement of our work to date, and an opportunity to expand the impact of our work with abandoned children with learning disabilities in Mexico. The funding was granted to support 4 distinct areas of work:

1. Meeting existing project commitments such as staff wages, children's food and clothing.
 2. The appointment of a speech therapist/special education worker who will work with the children with learning disabilities in large institutions in Puebla.
 3. The appointment of a farm manager who will organise a series of productive projects based upon sustainable agriculture as well as educational and training activities for the children.
 4. The appointment of a life skills worker who will help to prepare the children for a more independent way of life as well as liaising with local employers with a view to finding work for them.
- The funding is for a period of three years.

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 in order to research a number of issues relevant to the work with children and young people with learning disabilities in Mexico. We are indebted to the following:

Mena Wilson, South & East Belfast Trust, Ian Rendle, Muckamore Abbey Hospital, N. I. Volunteer Development 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. As a result of our successful funding application the work of Mexico Child Link featured in the National Lottery Charities Board Magazine (N.I.).

REPORT OF WORK IN MEXICO

Two representatives of the Trust spent eight and a half months working in Mexico during 1997. The project is progressing very well and the children seem settled and content. The staff are very committed and have learned a great deal about working with children with learning disabilities.

CHILDREN

The project currently provides a home for 11 children, aged between 5 years and 17 years. All have been abandoned and are under the legal guardianship of the D.I.F., (the government department responsible for abandoned children.) They 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. The children take part in household activities, learn to 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. Two of the older boys spend more time working on the farm in preparation for employment. Children participate in the decisions which affect them. Weekly children's meetings are held where they are given a chance to express their views. When possible the children are involved in their individual assessments of what they need to learn to do, in order to increase their independence, and improve their quality of life. During 1997 the children participated in an informal programme of sex education and protection from abuse. 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*. Five of the children were given "god parents" whose role will be to visit and befriend the children. All the children attend a local special school where they have settled in well. They participated in the many extra curricular activities organized by the school throughout the year. Unfortunately the school experienced various problems during 1997, which had negative consequences for the children i.e.. regular suspension of classes, staff changes etc. Three of the older children are learning to use public transport unaccompanied so that they can attend training workshops at the school. Fundación Trébol experienced considerable difficulty in finding a suitably trained and experienced speech therapist to work with the children. In November a speech therapist assessed and devised a programme for the youngest child and has expressed interest in working with other children who live in the project.

STAFF APPOINTMENTS AND TRAINING

In consultation with staff an in-depth review of staff terms and conditions was carried out and resulted in a number of changes in the staff structure. The new arrangements reflect the need for the staff to have sufficient time to relax and rest, so that they are able to respond to the demands of a very difficult job. A review of all job descriptions and specifications was carried out and these were changed and updated where necessary. New contracts were also drawn up for all staff. Guidelines were drawn up for the use of volunteers within Fundación Trébol. There were a number of staff changes. The process of staff selection is carried out in conjunction with members of the Management Committee of our partner organisation Fundación Trébol. A strict selection procedure is used in the appointment of all staff and involves interview by a panel of five, a detailed evaluation system, thorough verification of references as well as psychometric tests. Fundación Trébol has an ongoing commitment to staff training and supervision. A system of regular, recorded supervision is in place. It has proved important in staff development and helps to ensure a good quality of care for the children. Staff meetings are held weekly and each member of

staff also takes turns to prepare a personal development session once monthly. Staff training was carried out in the following areas of work:

Sexuality, Use of Procedures, and the Use of the Assessment System.

Staff also participated in the following training, conferences and workshops:

The Director is being funded to take a year Diploma in "Working with victims of rape, ill treatment and sexual abuse."

The Director and a member of the project staff attended the "Third Conference on Down's Syndrome and Learning Disability", in Puebla. The president of the management committee of Fundación Trébol, Erika Godínez won a scholarship to attend "The International Conference on Down's Syndrome" in Madrid. She also attended the "Second International Conference on Disability" in Mexico City and a "Workshop on Protected Employment Schemes in Cataluña" also held in Mexico City. The Director and Office Administrator took part in weekly computer training sessions which covered word processing, database management and E-mail. The Office Administrator also participated in practical training in the preparation of funding applications. The Office Administrator was invited to participate in a municipal focus group to consider values in education. A number of visits were made to consult the CONFE Information Centre in Mexico City.

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM ABUSE.

Guidelines and reference material on the "Protection of Children from all kinds of Abuse and "Disabled Children & Abuse" were translated and adapted for use in the project.

EVALUATION

Project. A detailed evaluation of the overall functioning of the project was carried out in April 1997. In general the project was found to be functioning very well. A daily routine has been clearly established. The children seem content and there is a warm atmosphere in the houses.

Preparation for independence is being carried out in all aspects of the children's lives. In general there is a healthy respect for children's rights with an associated emphasis on their responsibilities. Children participate in the decisions which affect them. The children have an excellent diet and much care is taken to respond to their many medical needs. The children work well on the farm and have learned a great deal. Staff have made excellent progress and are much more confident and self assured. A detailed report with explanations and recommendations was drawn up and presented to the Director and staff of the project and to the management committee of Fundación Trébol. A meeting was held with staff to hear reactions and clarify doubts. Without exception the response was very positive and professional. Staff accepted the recommendations with a genuine willingness to examine their practice and change it where necessary. This is a clear indication of the level of professional development of the staff team and is encouraging in a culture where it is unusual to accept criticism or admit errors. The majority of the recommendations were carried out by the end of the year.

Director In response to a request from the Project Director on completion of two years in post, an in depth evaluation of her work was carried out. This showed that the Director had made considerable progress in many aspects of her work. Nevertheless many recommendations were made.

Assessment System In April a review was carried out of both the assessment system which had been put in place in 1996 and of the individual programmes devised for work with the children. It was discovered that this part of the work had been neglected for a number of months. In response to recommendations the assessments were carried out and individual programmes designed with the children to respond to their needs. In November 1997 a further review was carried out. Staff were found to have a clear understanding of the functioning of the assessment system and the individual programmes, and were convinced that they were a very useful tool in helping the children to learn new skills. Most of the children had made excellent progress in the specific areas of individual skills. Further recommendations were made to help staff to remedy a number of errors and to make the individual programmes more effective for a number of children.

PROCEDURES

In general terms, procedures were found to be respected although there were a number of exceptions, especially in the area of recording and record keeping. An initial reluctance to accept the need for procedures and guidelines introduced in 1996 has been replaced by a better understanding of their importance. Work continues to ensure that procedures are respected. In consultation with staff a review was carried out of the following procedures and guidelines which were put in place in 1996: "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". Where the procedures were found to be unduly restrictive or impractical they were changed accordingly. New guidelines and procedure were put in place "in the event of complaint of abuse".

COMMUNICATIONS

Lines of communication and accountability within Fundación Trébol are clearly established which ensure that decisions are taken in an informed and clear manner. Mexico Child Link and Fundación Trébol now communicate regularly via E-mail. This facilitates the quality and frequency of communication and minimizes the international telephone bills.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS.

Work in institutions in Puebla which care for abandoned children with learning disability.

An investigation carried out by Fundación Trébol in 1994 which was supervised and funded by Mexico Child Link, showed that there were a large number of abandoned children with learning disabilities living in the 22 institutions which participated in the research project. The immediate response to this investigation was the establishment of the residential project which is home to 11 children. In 1997, Mexico Child Link secured funding from the National Lottery Charities Board for a Special Education Worker to work in these large institutions. This work will commence in January 1998. This is an exciting new development in Fundación Trébol's work, because it aims to improve the quality of care of the children with learning disabilities identified by Fundación Trébol in the investigation in 1994, who were "left behind" when the residential project opened. The Special Education worker will provide advice and training to the staff who work in the institutions, plan individual programmes where necessary, and find school places for children.

SUPPORT FOR STREET CHILDREN.

In November, "*Quiera*" a charitable foundation run by the Association of Mexican Bankers chose Fundación Trébol as one of five Mexican organisations to participate in their three year "*Programme to Support the Street Child.*" In November, there was extensive coverage of the launch of the programme in the national newspaper "*La Jornada*". The four main objectives of the programme are:

- (a) to improve the quality of care provided by organisations working with street children,
- (b) to strengthen the organisations through an analysis of their experiences and methods of work, with a view to developing more efficient ways of working,
- (c) to carry out detailed follow up studies of individual children
- (d) to facilitate communication, exchange of ideas and experiences and coordination between the various organisations that work with street children in Mexico. (Fundación Trébol will thus have an invaluable opportunity to help to improve the quality of care of a much greater number of street children with learning disabilities through regular contact with other organisations within the programme.)

In practical terms, the support provided by Quiera is extensive. Fundación Trébol has already

received a Pentium 166 computer system, scanner and specialist software. *Quiera* will also pay the salary of the programme coordinator for three years. The coordinator has been appointed and commences work in January 1998. *Quiera* also funds an organisation called *Thais* to provide supervision, training and technical support for our partners in Mexico. *Thais* concentrates on working directly with the care staff. At least one member of staff, as well as the programme coordinator will attend fortnight training sessions for a period of five months. Mexico Child Link is confident that the work of *Thais* will continue and develop the commitment to training and professionalism which has been a key contribution of the Trust to our project partners since the initiation of the project. The support of *Quiera* and *Thais* is a very positive indication of the development of the project within Mexico.

As part of a separate programme *Quiera* has awarded Fundación Trébol- training scholarships for two of the older children within the project. This will give them an opportunity to gain work experience and will support their preparation for a more independent life.

FARM

The Mexico Child Link Trust and its partner organisation have a commitment to run their project in a way which is environmentally sustainable.

The project is situated in a 2 acre farm which is based on a system of sustainable agriculture. The farm serves as a training resource for the children and supplies organically produced vegetables, eggs and meat to the project.

FUNDING

Significant new funding for the farm was acquired during 1997.

1. Part of the grant from the N.L.C.B. will be used to pay the salary of a farm manager and farm worker. Some funding will also be used to develop a series of productive projects on the farm.
2. A grant from SEDESOL, the Mexico Government social development agency, has been used to buy a 10 HP diesel rotavator and build a new store. The funding will also support the production and distribution of a report into the establishment of small productive projects based upon sustainable agriculture.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

A 45m² store/workshop was completed in December. The building will be used to store farm produce and machinery, animal vaccines, medicines and reference material. It also incorporates an adobe oven which will be used for baking bread.

A 10 HP diesel rotavator and associated agricultural tools have been purchased. This machine can plough and cultivate soil, pull a trailer or pump water. It is the ideal machine to work two acres and is much cheaper to buy, maintain and run than a tractor.

A further 1000m² of alfalfa has been sown.

The number of chickens, rabbits and sheep has been increased.

The vegetable garden has been increased in size and now has 2 distinct production areas, (a) raised vegetable beds and (b) inter-cropping of vegetables with alfalfa. (nitrogen fixing)

A rocky area of the site has been terraced and converted to pasture.

35 fruit trees were purchased and planted.

120 Casuarina trees were planted as a wind break.

VISITS

A number of fact finding visits were arranged throughout the year.

A 15 hectare working farm and environmental regeneration project run by *Proyección Humana* near Matamoros, Puebla, was visited in June.

A visit was made to a dairy farm near Atlixco, Puebla, run by Alvaro Quirós, Puebla state representative of CONARAO, the Mexican confederation of organic producers.

UNCADER, a training, research and resource centre for sustainable agriculture in Coatepec, Veracruz was visited in July.

An organic coffee plantation near Briones, Veracruz was visited. A production area for worm

compost made from coffee bean husks was seen.

Regular visits to neighbouring farms in Tenextepec were made throughout the year.

A course on mushroom production in Axocopan, Pue. run by a government rural development agency was attended in September.

CONFERENCE ON ORGANIC AGRICULTURE WITHIN MEXICO, JALAPA, VERACRUZ.

In July a 2 day conference on organic agriculture in Mexico was attended. Presentations were given on the following themes: The development of markets for organic produce, the production and marketing of worm compost, agricultural techniques of the Aztecs, comparative studies of chemical/non chemical fertilizers, biological control of pests. Several useful contacts were made.

WORK GROUPS.

The children are divided into three work groups; (a) vegetable production, (b) care of animals, and (c) independence training.

The different activities which make up these groups have been broken down and graded according to level of difficulty. Children have been allocated duties according to their capabilities and staff help children with the tasks which cause them difficulty. Children spend an average of 1 hour per day in these activity groups and are fully supervised at all times.

MEETINGS.

Regular meetings were held with staff to discuss children's progress in their work groups as well as other issues associated with the development of the farm.

FUNDRAISING WITHIN MEXICO.

Our project partners had their most successful year to date in terms of securing funding and support within Mexico.

Tax deductible status; after numerous applications during the past three years, Fundación Trébol was granted tax deductible status in August 1997. This will permit our partners to follow a more effective fundraising strategy within Mexico. The tax deductible status is also a legal requirement to receive donations from U.S. funding organizations.

SEDESOL, the government agency for Social Development awarded a grant in August for use on the farm. *SEDESOL* also donated a number of trees which were planted on the project site.

QUIERA the charitable foundation of the Mexican Banker's Association donated new computer equipment and will fund the salary of the Programme Co-ordinator of the Street Child programme for a period of three years. Quiera also awarded Fundación Trébol training scholarships for two of the older children.

MONTE DE PIEDAD DE MEXICO a Mexican Charitable Foundation awarded Fundación Trébol a substantial cash grant in December.

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 claim an extra 12% on all funds received from abroad.

A number of individual donations were received in money and in kind, including milk, drinking water, and school materials.

The neighbours in the rural area where the project is located have been very supportive of the project in many practical ways.

MEMBERSHIP AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENTAL AND NON GOVERNMENTAL 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. Fundación Trébol is a founder member of FOPEC, which incorporates twenty five Non Governmental Organisations from Puebla who work

together. Excellent working relationships have been maintained with the D.I.F. and with many other child care organisations in Puebla. In 1997 Fundación Trébol became a member of the *Junta de Instituciones de Asistencia Privada*, a government supported organization which supervises charities and allocates funding. Fundación Trébol maintains contact with a number of universities in Puebla.

KEY OBJECTIVES FOR 1998

Section (a): Continuation of existing commitments

General

- (a) 2 trust workers will supervise, evaluate and develop the project.
- (b) An in depth annual evaluation of all aspects of the functioning of the project will be carried out.
- (c) 12 children with learning disabilities will be provided with a home education and training in 2 houses in Texextepec, Atlixco, Mexico.
- (d) Existing project staff will receive further development and training.
- (e) A wide range of crops will be sown and existing productive systems based upon a system of sustainable agriculture will be maintained

Section (b) New commitments

N.L.C.B. proposal

The plans for 1998 outlined in the N.L.C.B. project will be implemented.

- (a) an investigation and new programme in 22 institutions in Puebla
- (b) A life skills/employment worker will be appointed to : (i) devise independence training programmes for 12 resident children and children in the local special needs school, (ii) seek out employment for adequately trained young people with learning disabilities and provide backup support in the workplace, (iii) work with the farm coordinator to organise appropriate practical training for 12 resident children and children from the local special needs school.
- (c) Joint programmes and activities with the special needs school in Atlixco will be investigated and initiated where possible.
- (d) A speech therapist will be employed to work with all the children living in the project who need help with communication.
- (e) A manager for the farm will be appointed and supervised.
- (f) Further farm infrastructure will be put in place.

In addition, it is planned to carry out the following

(Mexico)

- (a) The appointment of a General Director to oversee all aspects of the functioning of the project.
- (b) The planning, research and development of a report/document on the establishment of productive projects based on sustainable agriculture. (part funded by SEDESOL)
- (c) An evaluation of the use of youth training scholarships awarded by Quiera.
- (d) The establishment of a procedure for employee salary reviews.
- (e) develop fundraising strategy within Mexico.

(Ireland)

- (a) Increase the amount of regular monthly donations to the trust by 20%.
- (b) Encourage existing monthly donors who do not donate in a tax efficient way to switch to tax efficient schemes such as covenanting.

THANKS

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	St. Dominic's High School
St. Bride's Primary School	The Eric Stonehouse Trust
Corranny Primary School	Royal School, Dungannon
Monaghan Lions Club	Longstone Special School
Mt. Lourdes Convent Grammar	The Hilda Laing Charitable Trust
The Ulster Bank Ltd.	Peter Mc Ginnity
Fermanagh Masters Football Team	City of London Freeman's School
St. Michael's College Enniskillen	St. Mary's Grammar School
Dunmurry High School	Annie Mc Ginnity
Digital Equipment International B.V.	Pat Mc Cabe
St. Tierney's Primary School	Dawson Cunningham Ltd.
The Paget Charitable Trust	Dean Jack Shearer
May Blair	Parkview Special School
St. Aloysius' Primary School	Antrim G.A.C.
Killyclogher G.F.C.	Hazel Dickson
J.W. Russell & Co.	Tanya Mc Ginnity
Roslea & Derrygannon Charity Fund	Edgumbe Training & Resource Centre

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.

57 donors who support the Trust monthly through Bankers Order.

The many people who supported us through individual donations which varied from £5 to £10,000.

FINANCE

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 1997

INCOME

Donations	£15,628
Fundraising	£ 1,028
Give as you Earn	£ 1,977
Bank Interest received	£ 717
Street collections	£11,481
Bankers Order	£ 6,131
Grant making trust	£ 3,300
Schools	£ 7,698
Covenant	£ 130
Sundry income	£ 3,360
N.L.C.B. funding	<u>£24,483</u>
	£75,933

EXPENDITURE

Grant aid to Fundación Trébol	£15,522
N.L.C.B. funding to Mexico	£ 8,871
Postage, printing, stationery	£ 909
Telephone & Fax	£ 265
Travel Expenses	£ 367
Expenses incurred abroad	£ 4,525
Accountants fees	£ 59
Salaries	£ 9601
Sundry expenses	£ 500
Bank interest	£ 5
Depreciation Office equipment	£ 354
Exchange loss	£ 536
Pension scheme	<u>£ 643</u>
	£42,157

Funds held as of Dec. 31st 1997 £48,431