

The Mexico Child Link Trust

CHARITY REFERENCE NUMBER XR18919

ANNUAL REPORT 1998

CHAIRPERSON

Mrs. C. Lewis, T. Cert., Dip. Sp. Ed., (Teacher)

TREASURER

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

SECRETARY

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

TRUSTEES

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

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Dr. T.B. Anderson, B.Sc. Ph.D., F.G.S., (Senior lecturer, Queen's University Belfast)

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

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

EMPLOYEES

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

Colette Mc Ginnity, B.A., C.Q.S.W., Dip. T.E.F.L., Project worker

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.

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 12 children. Work continues to develop a small farm based on a system of sustainable agriculture. During 1998 a new programme started which will enable Fundación Trébol to improve the quality of care of abandoned children with learning disabilities who live within large institutions in the city of Puebla.

PROJECT STAFF

The project staff comprises a team of twelve people:

Angélica López Romero	Project Director & Houseparent
Patricia Durán López	Houseparent house 1
Gabriela González Rojas	Support Houseparent
Martha Salvador León	Support Houseparent
Maura Lima Ramírez	Helper house 1
Rosalva Mota Osorio	Helper house 2
Jovita León Saldaña	Independence training worker
Lorenzo Cuateco Segundo	Farm Manager
Nicanor Torres Pérez	Farm Helper
Norma Méndez Puente	Speech therapist
Enriqueta Palestino Aguilar	Co-ordinator & Special education worker in institutions
Marco Antonio Flores García	Co-ordinator of "Programme to Support the Street Child."

OFFICE AND MAILING ADDRESS

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FUNDRAISING

1998 was a successful fundraising year. £ 60,092 was raised. (includes £30,303 from the National Lottery Charities Board.) The remaining 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.

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 December. The project was visited in January by Rodney Rice as part of an RTE series on street children.

NATIONAL LOTTERY CHARITIES BOARD PROGRAMME

In July 1997 the Mexico Child Link Trust began a three-year programme funded by the National Lottery Charities Board. (N.L.C.B.) The main aim of the programme is to consolidate existing work and develop new joint programmes with local institutions such as children's homes in the city of Puebla and a special needs school in Atlixco. Two representatives of the Trust spent nine months working in Mexico during 1998, working closely with Fundación Trébol with regard to the

implementation of the N.L.C.B. programme. The first year evaluation was completed and approved in November 1998 and funding has now been released for year two.

The programme covers 4 distinct areas of work:

- Meeting existing project commitments such as staff wages, children's food and clothing.
- The appointment of a speech therapist/special education worker who will work with the children with learning disabilities in large institutions in Puebla.
- 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.
- 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.

N.L.C.B. PROGRAMME.

In general terms, the project is advancing well. All of the children continue to make excellent progress, with emphasis placed on individual programmes to improve their skills and increase their independence. The three youngest children in particular have become much more self confident. Their ability to communicate has increased tremendously. There have been difficulties in certain areas, mainly due to staff turnover and difficulty in finding adequate replacements. The project director left in June at short notice for personal reasons which left the project understaffed until a new director could be appointed at the end of September. In addition, one of the original houseparents left to continue in further education. These changes unsettled the children and the remaining staff team was put under a lot of pressure. There has been great difficulty in filling certain key posts, such as project director, farm manager and speech therapist. It is becoming apparent that the necessary skills and abilities are not widely available in the workforce. Recently, some of the best appointments have been internal promotions. It may be more realistic to employ people at a lower level and train them over time to take on more responsibility within the project. Some of the best project workers have a modest amount of formal education but have learned a great deal in post. Fortunately, these vacant posts have now been filled (see list of personnel above) and the team is functioning well. Internal problems in the special school in Atlixco have caused delays. It had been hoped to begin joint programmes and offer agricultural skills training to children from the school. However, classes have often been suspended and the disruption throughout the year has been considerable.

WORK IN INSTITUTIONS IN PUEBLA

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 new programme 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 post of speech therapist/special education worker was split as we could not find a suitable candidate to cover both areas of work. Work began in January 1998 with the appointment of a part time special education worker (Enriqueta Palestino) to design and implement this programme.

Although the programme started 6 months late, the response from institutions has surpassed expectations and they have now made Fundación Trébol aware of their specific needs. 25 children

with learning disabilities have already been assessed in 5 different children's homes. A needs database of children has been set up which is regularly updated and expanded. A particularly good relationship has been established with the children's home run by Desarrollo Integral Familiar, the Government agency with responsibility for abandoned children. This state run children's home acts as a conduit for placing children in other institutions. The Special Education worker has a timetable of weekly visits to each institution and has unlimited access to the children. She has advised staff and devised programmes in the following areas: toilet training, problem behaviour, autism, speech and language problems and sex education. She has also been investigating protected employment opportunities and associated training scholarships for a number of young adults with learning disabilities who live in the children's homes. She has assessed a number of children as possible candidates for admission to the residential project.

SPEECH THERAPY

A speech therapist (Norma Méndez) was appointed in September. At the moment she is working exclusively with the resident children in the project. She is also working with the project staff in order to increase their understanding of speech and language problems.

The speech and language abilities of the 12 children in our direct care have improved. The progress has been assessed using the system "Planning For Life" which has a section on Communication. A member of the care staff attended a course on Speech Therapy in Puebla in April. 1998.

EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS & INCREASED INDEPENDENCE

A measure of success is that we now have three young people in employment. The employment is supported by the independence training worker. (Jovita León) She talks directly to the young people's employers at least once a fortnight, to identify problems and offer help and advice. Topics discussed include; defining appropriate work, attitude, punctuality, employer supervision, the nature of learning disability as well as general working conditions.

Esteban (17), and Josefa (16), are both receiving training grants from Quiera, a charity run by the Association of Mexican Bankers. Esteban is working as a farm hand with one of the neighbours in Tenextepec. The job suits him as the farm is only half a mile away and he can walk to work. (Esteban still has problems using public transport alone.) His duties include minding 60 sheep, weeding, planting maize, moving irrigation tubing as well as other general farm chores. His employer has indicated that in spite of his limitations, he is more than capable of coping with his job. Josefa works three days on the farm with Esteban and another three days at a fast food stall in Atlixco. Both her employers have given positive reports about her commitment and attitude to work. Her job in Atlixco highlights some of the problems faced by people with learning disability. Josefa has had to learn how to use public transport, manage money and deal with customers. Luis, (18) has recently found part-time employment with another neighbour in Tenextepec who has started up a mushroom cultivation business. His duties involve general cleaning and maintenance work.

Esteban, Luis, and Josefa travel unaccompanied the 7 miles to Atlixco every Sunday morning to buy their provisions and personal items. The independence training worker meets them at the bus stop and helps them with their purchases in the general store opposite. She ensures that the young people board the right Combi to return to their home in Tenextepec.

STAFF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Staff training included an in-depth and updated course on the use of the system "Planning for Life" which is used for the design, implementation and recording of the individual programmes of the children. In response to staff requests, a 25 hour course on sexuality, sex education and sexual abuse was given by a psychologist from Mexico City who has a great deal of expertise in this area of work. Two members of staff attended fortnightly training courses run by "Quiera", The Mexican Bankers Charitable Foundation. Staff also participated in their monthly programme organised on site. An evaluation of staff supervision was carried out. Changes were made to the format and the recording of supervision. Care staff receive fortnightly supervision whereas the project director and the co-ordinator are supervised weekly.

PROCEDURES

A review of accounting practices and record keeping was carried out in March and recommendations made. The system is now much more simple and transparent.

SUPPORT FOR STREET CHILDREN PROGRAMME

Our partner organisation participates in a programme funded by "*Quiera*" a charitable foundation run by the Association of Mexican Bankers, which started in January 1998. The programme is co-ordinated by Marco Antonio Flores.

The 3 objectives for year one have now been completed and approved; compiling the history of the organisation, recording activities carried out and comparing the original aims of the organisation with current practice.

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 co-ordination 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.

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 2.5 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.

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.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Lorenzo Cuateco who previously worked as farm helper was appointed manager in October 1998. During 1998, the project entered into a sharecropping arrangement with a neighbour to grow an acre of maize. Apart from the benefit of receiving half of the harvest, this allows the project to promote its aims of organic agriculture by showing neighbours that chemical free agriculture is feasible.

The project now has 18 sheep. A new shelter roofed with palm leaf was constructed in May just before the rainy season began.

Further tree planting took place. Approximate 200 nitrogen fixing trees (Guajes and Acacias) were planted around the entrance to the project site.

In general, crops were much less affected by plagues, suggesting that the change to a system of organic agriculture is beginning to work.

Main crops of maize, peanuts and wheat were planted and harvested.

A rotavator funded by a Mexican Government agency allowed for more land to be cultivated. It has also decreased the projects dependence on borrowing equipment and draft animals from neighbours.

A new store constructed at the end of 1997 was used to guard equipment, seeds and crops harvested.

FUNDRAISING WITHIN MEXICO.

The Government matching scheme (FAPRODE) which paid 12% to our partner organisation for any funding raised overseas was suspended in May due to the ongoing economic crisis. It is hoped that the scheme will resume in 1999.

KEY OBJECTIVES FOR 1999

1. All existing programmes and commitments will be maintained.
2. Our partner organisation will extend the programme which it is carrying out in 5 institutions to reach a total of 11.
3. The special education worker will collate, produce and distribute a series of written programmes in non technical language for use by staff in children's homes and other institutions in the Puebla area.
4. A training and education programme to teach agricultural skills will be planned and implemented with pupils from the special school in Atlixco.
5. A practical guide outlining costs, advantages and disadvantages of sub projects based on sustainable agriculture will be researched and produced.
6. Remaining farm infrastructure will be put in place. (construction of a greenhouse, construction of water storage tanks, fruit trees planted, beehives.)

7. An evaluation of options for young adults with learning disability will be carried out, specifically to look at the possibility of setting up a half way house.
8. An evaluation will be carried out with regard to the feasibility of a visit to facilities in N. Ireland by representatives of Fundación Trébol.

THANKS

Thanks are due to the following organisations and individuals that gave support throughout 1998.

The City of London Freeman's School
The National Lottery Charities Board
June Getty
May Blair
The S. & F. Goodman Trust
St Ronan's Primary School
Corranny P.S.

Nuffield College, Oxford
Dunmurry High School
St Mary's P.S., Maguiresbridge
St. Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt
College Freight Services
The Ulster Bank, Connswater
Dungannon Royal School

In addition the Trust would like to thank:

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

14 supporters who covenant to the Trust.

43 donors who support the Trust monthly through Bankers Order.

The many people who supported us through individual donations which varied from £5 to £300.

FINANCE

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 1998

INCOME

Donations	£ 3,362
Give as you Earn	£ 2,130
Bank Interest received	£ 1,948
Street collections	£ 8,820
Bankers Order	£ 6,051
Grant making trust	£ 2,150
Schools	£ 4,278
Covenant	£ 90
Sundry income	£ 960
N.L.C.B. funding	<u>£30,303</u>
	£60,092

EXPENDITURE

N.L.C.B. funding to Mexico	£31,572
Postage, printing, stationery	£ 201
Telephone & Fax	£ 166
Travel Expenses	£ 1,626
Expenses incurred abroad	£ 1,545
Accountants fees	£ 60
Salaries	£ 9600
Sundry expenses	£ 250
Bank interest	£ 0
Depreciation Office equipment	£ 341
Subscriptions	£ 25
Pension scheme	<u>£ 1,920</u>
	£47,306

Funds held as of Dec. 31st 1998 £60,250

Mexico Child Link accounts are audited by *Dawson Cunningham Ltd, 30 Castlereagh Street, Belfast BT5 4NH*

Full accounts are available upon request.