

The Mexico Child Link Trust

CHARITY REFERENCE NUMBER XR18919

ANNUAL REPORT 1999

OFFICE BEARERS AND TRUSTEES

Chairperson

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

Treasurer

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Secretary

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

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

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

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

EMPLOYEES

Jonathan Getty, B.Sc., 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 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.

WORK IN MEXICO

The Mexico Child Link Trust supports the work of Fundación Trébol in the state of Puebla, Mexico. This includes a residential project in Puebla, Mexico for abandoned children with learning disabilities. Two houses constructed on a 2.5 acre site during 1995 are home to 12 children. Work continues to develop a small farm based on a system of sustainable agriculture. Fundación Trébol works closely with a number of large institutions and with the local special school to improve the quality of care and training of abandoned children with learning disabilities. The work of Fundación Trébol has the support of state and municipal government in Mexico, as well as a number of Non Governmental Organisations.

FUNDACION TREBOL

Fundación Trébol is governed by a management committee of 6 professional people. The committee supervises the running of all aspects of the organisation and works in close collaboration with the Co-ordinator of Mexico Child Link. The following staff comprised the team of twelve people in 1999:

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

OFFICE AND MAILING ADDRESS

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CONTACT ADDRESS IN MEXICO

c/o Fundación Trébol de Puebla A.C.
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Tel. / Fax. 00 (52) 22 44 81 29
E-mail 74751.20@compuserve.com

FUNDRAISING

1999 was a successful fundraising year with almost £60,000 raised. (Including £33,000 from the National Lottery Charities Board.) The remaining funding was raised through street collections, donations, school fundraising, and monthly contributions through bankers order, the *Give as you Earn* scheme and covenants. Some support was also received from Grant Giving Trusts.

PUBLICITY, PROMOTION & RESEARCH

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 500 supporters in December.

Visits were made to several organisations and individuals in N. Ireland to obtain information and ideas about the following issues: (i) current good practice in relation to independent living options for young people with learning disability, (ii) advice centres re. learning disability (iii) publication of work with our partner organisation. We are indebted to the following for their time and ideas:

S. & E. Belfast Community Trust, United Response, Down Residential Project, Jacqui Reynolds, Down's Syndrome Association, Mencap Family Adviser Service, Prof. Roy Mc Conkey, University of Ulster.

Fundación Trébol did a presentation of its work at a national conference entitled "Living options for people with learning disability" in Mexico City.

NATIONAL LOTTERY CHARITIES BOARD PROGRAMME IN MEXICO

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 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 5 months working in Mexico during 1999, working closely with Fundación Trébol, to implement the N.L.C.B. programme. The second year evaluation was approved in October 1999 and funding has been released for year three.

The programme covers 4 distinct areas of work:

- Continuation of the residential project for twelve abandoned children with learning disability which was opened in 1995. A speech therapist works on an individual basis with all the children in the residential project and also advises residential staff.
- A series of productive projects based upon sustainable agriculture are carried out on the farm, which also provides an opportunity for educational and training activities for the children. An agricultural training programme is operated jointly with the local special needs school.
- A life skills worker helps to prepare the children for a more independent way of life as well as liaising with local employers.
- A special education worker advises staff and works directly with children with learning disabilities in a number of large institutions in Puebla.

RESIDENTIAL PROJECT

In general the project is functioning very well. The children continue to make good progress and generally seem to be content. A new child was admitted to the project in December 1998 and after an unsettled period he has adapted well. Luis, who was 19, left the project to live with his sister. As part of the work with him to explore options for living outside the project he had expressed an interest in returning to live in his village. Fundación Trébol worked in close collaboration with the legal department of the D.I.F. (Mexican Social Services) to firstly locate his sister, and subsequently to negotiate Luis' integration with her family. This was a very favourable if unexpected outcome for Luis.

A new Director was appointed to the special school in Atlixco, with positive consequences for the project. General organisation and internal relations within the school were much improved. The number of school closure days was greatly reduced. Relations between the school and the residential project improved considerably. School continues to be a very important part of the lives of all the children who attend.

A qualified speech therapist attends the residential project one day a week. She works with all the children on an individual basis. She has a weekly meeting with the houseparents to discuss progress and give advice on the practical implementation of individual programmes. This process has had a marked effect on the communication skills of the children, especially the four younger children. The speech therapist has also been involved in reinforcing some of the work carried out in individual care programmes.

There were a number of staff changes throughout the year but the basic staff group remained unchanged. This provided more stability for the children than in previous years. There is now a core of staff who have considerable experience and expertise in working with abandoned children with learning disability.

A qualified P.E. teacher organised a programme of activities for the children during the summer holidays. This included sport's and games, special activities to improve the co-ordination and motor skills of the two youngest boys, and educational visits which were co-ordinated by the speech therapist, and were designed to maximise speech and language acquisition.

Increased Independence & Employment

The guiding principle of the residential project is to prepare the children and young people for as independent a life as possible, given their individual level of disability. Children are prepared for independence in all aspects of daily life.

Programmes which respond to individual needs are designed using the Planning for Life system which Mexico Child Link translated, adapted and evaluates. Much of this work focuses on the acquisition of skills which promote independence. The children actively participate in the process of assessment and also choose a specific skill which they want to learn. This is often a "fun" skill but it has been very encouraging to note that some of the adolescents have asked to learn specific social skills, e.g. to use the sewing machine and to use public transport. A clear distinction is made between younger children and adolescents, with each group having distinct rights and privileges. A further distinction is made after the young people reach 15, which is considered to be a social rite of passage in Mexico. This has facilitated the process of recognising and respecting the process of "growing up", which is especially important for young people with learning disability. Young people who are in employment travel to the town of Atlixco to do personal shopping. A number of young people can now use the local public transport unaccompanied. The project has a good relationship with the drivers and this has greatly facilitated the independent use of public transport. The children and young people have a clear understanding of the importance of learning to do things for themselves, and there has been a marked increase in their confidence as they have learned skills and have been given more responsibility. Weekly children's meetings in each house give children a structured opportunity to express their opinions.

The Independence Training Worker has worked closely with the young people in the areas of employment skills, use of money and public transport, budgeting, shopping and preparation of meals. Two of the young people were in full-time employment during 1999, and the Independence Training Worker visited their places of employment on a regular basis to liaise with employers and help to resolve any difficulties. Both young people continue to receive a training scholarship from "Quiera" the Mexican Banker's Association. A sewing machine was bought with funds donated by a Mexican grant giving Trust and a number of the young people are learning to sew. The project has tried to extend the skills base of the young people so that they can seek employment in areas other than agriculture.

Carpentry Workshop.

Since May, eight of the children have been attending a carpentry workshop, which is situated about 10 minutes walk from the project. The training is supervised by the owner of the workshop as well as project staff. This has been a very positive experience for the children as they have learned new skills and grown in confidence. They enjoy spending time with other children in the workshop who do not have learning disability. They have also had an opportunity to acquire work skills in an area distinct from agriculture. During the 1990s the Atlixco area developed as a major producer of Mexican rustic pine furniture, which means that the carpentry workshop will give the young people very specific employment skills. In August SEDESOL (Mexican government department of Social Development) awarded Fundación Trébol a grant of £2,407 for tools and materials for the workshop.

HORTICULTURAL TRAINING PROGRAMME

In February, Fundación Trébol set up a training and educational programme to teach agricultural skills in the special school in the town of Atlixco, about 7 miles from the farm. The programme takes place two days a week for two and a half hours, and is supervised by the Farm Manager and the Independence Training Worker. 13 children participate and they are divided into 4 groups; each group works for one hour and fifteen minutes. Training is given on the recognition and use of tools, understanding and following instructions, co-operating in a small group situation, seed and plant recognition and distinguishing useful plants from weeds. A large vegetable garden has been prepared and maintained and children have been able to grow and sell their own vegetables. The Director and staff of the school have been very co-operative and encourage the children to participate. The programme has the recognition and approval of the parents of the children who participate, and of the education authorities, (Secretaría de Educación Pública.) with whom Fundación Trébol signed a formal contract for the programme. In August, SEDESOL awarded Fundación Trébol £300 to buy more tools for use by the children in the training programme.

TRAINING PROGRAMME IN INSTITUTIONS

In 1994 an investigation carried out by Fundación Trébol (and supervised and funded by Mexico Child Link) in 22 residential institutions which cared for children with learning disability, showed that there were a large number of abandoned children with learning disabilities living in the 22 participating institutions. A N.L.C.B. funded programme in the institutions has been in operation for two years, with the aim of improving the quality of care of these children. The programme is carried out by a part-time Special Education Worker who during 1999, worked in 7 institutions in and around the city of Puebla. The success of this programme has surpassed expectations. This is largely due to the excellent relations established with all the participating institutions, especially the government institution, which currently houses the greatest number of abandoned children with learning disability. The work has three main areas of focus: (i) regular meetings with the staff to identify training needs in relation to working with children with learning disability and the development and implementation of staff training programmes to respond to these needs. (ii) assessment of individual children through close liaison with staff and the use of psychometric tests. (iii) work with individual children. The main bulk of the work takes place in the Casa de la Familia Poblana, a reception and referral centre operated by Desarrollo Integral Familiar (D.I.F.) the Mexican Social Services. A twelve hour training course was given to its staff, covering the following areas: (i) abandonment (ii) causes of learning disability. (iii) characteristics of learning disability, (iv) employment opportunities for people with learning disability. The following written programmes in non technical language have been produced by the Special Education Worker and are used by the staff in the participating institutions: (a) improving concentration span, (b) toilet training, (c) problem behaviour, (d) sex education, (e) speech and language problems, (f) motor control, (g) use of free time and social interaction and (f) working with children with autistic tendencies. In November and December, information and training packages about sexuality and problem behaviour were presented to staff in three of the institutions. A special needs database is maintained with details of the children with learning disability who live in the institutions. This is used to assess the suitability of children for transfer to the residential project or to other organisations, and to make recommendations re. training/educational needs and medical needs. In 1999, there were 51 children registered. In August, SEDESOL awarded a grant of £300 for educational games and toys for use by the special education worker with the children in the

institutions.

RELATIONS WITH GOVERNMENTAL & NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

In general terms Fundación Trébol maintains excellent relations with state and municipal government and non governmental organisations. Fundación Trébol has established a reputation at state and national level for innovative and good practice in working with children with learning disability. The change in state government in February had negative consequences for Fundación Trébol, as the new administration did not recognise all the agreements and arrangements made with the previous administration. By year end the new administration had still not renewed the agreement with the state Children's Hospital to provide attention to the children in the residential project. Most of the contacts established with the previous administration were also lost. Fortunately good working relations have now been established, largely due to the skill and perseverance of Queta Palestino, the Co-ordinator and Special Education Worker. In particular a relationship of trust and mutual respect has been established with the Director of the Legal Department of the D.I.F., which is very important for Fundación Trébol's plans for young people to live more independently on leaving the residential project. In October, the President of Fundación Trébol was invited to attend a national meeting between CONFE and I.M.S.S., (Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social) to finalise negotiations to enable people with learning disability to gain free access to the social and sports facilities of the I.M.S.S. nation-wide.

STAFF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

The Speech Therapist advises and trains care staff on practical issues relating to communication on a weekly basis. The Independence Training worker visited a protected workshop run by Fundación Down de Puebla in February. A weekly training programme relating to issues of professional development was carried out as part of the "Programme to Support the Street Child". 4 members of staff attended a three day seminar on evaluation systems, organised as part of this programme in May. One of the Helpers attended a nutrition course organised by the D.I.F. (Mexican Social Services.) In November, 3 staff attended a 2 day national conference organised by Fundación Down, which included the following themes: attention for people with learning disability at different stages in life, the profile of the professional who works with people with learning disability and sexuality. The President of the management committee is studying a Masters Degree in Education (Learning Disability) on a part-time basis. In January she attended a course on Education and Down's Syndrome. The Secretary of the management committee is studying a part-time Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology. The Farm Manager attended a three day course on building with natural materials in June. The Farm Manager and one of the Houseparents attended a 6 day residential course on sustainable agriculture in August.

Mexico Child Link carried out two evaluations of the use of the system "Planning for Life and discussed findings and recommendations with staff. Individual training with staff was undertaken in July re. specific difficulties with the use of the system. Guidelines for Staff supervision were drawn up by Mexico Child Link. Care staff receive fortnightly supervision whereas the project director and the co-ordinator are supervised weekly. In December, Mexico Child Link presented the findings of research into good practice in N. Ireland on the issues of independent living options, advice services and supported employment, to key members of staff and the management committee. Discussions took place with regard to the feasibility of adapting some of the key concepts to a Mexican context and budget, and staff made suggestions regarding this.

PROCEDURES/RECORD KEEPING

In December a review of record keeping was carried out by Mexico Child Link. New registers were designed to facilitate weekly reporting from the residential project to the President of the Management Committee.

SUPPORT FOR STREET CHILDREN PROGRAMME

Our partner organisation participates in a three year programme funded by "*Quiera*" a charitable foundation run by the Association of Mexican Bankers, which started in January 1998.

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.

FARM

The residential project is situated in a hectare (2.4 acres) 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, grains, eggs and meat to the project.

Farm Work Groups.

The children are divided into two work groups; (a) vegetable production and (b) care of animals.

The different activities involved have been detailed and graded according to level of difficulty. Children have been allocated duties according to their capabilities and staff work alongside the children to encourage and train them. Children spend an average of 1 hour per day in these activity groups and are fully supervised at all times. There has been a considerable improvement in the skills acquired and in the level of responsibility of some of the children.

New Developments and Infrastructure

In August the project decided to rent another 1 hectare (2.4 acres) of land for a period of 4 years. Maize, alfalfa, courgettes and coriander were sown. In November the Farm Helper Juan Sosa left the project to seek employment in the United States and he was replaced by Salvador Méndez.

The sheep herd grew to 30 during 1999 and the number of lambs lost was minimal. This was mainly due to the implementation of a "creep feeding system". New sheep pens were constructed to separate animals according to size.

Written records were kept of farm expenditure and income, which came from the sale of rabbits and courgettes. A tree inventory was produced which showed that almost 1000 trees have been planted since 1995, when the project was set up. Most of the trees were supplied by a Government Rural Education Brigade in Atlixco.

A system of Worm Compost was set up and is functioning very well, producing excellent compost for vegetable production. The food produced for consumption on the project includes a range of vegetables, sweet potato, rabbit meat and eggs. Harvests of maize, peanuts and wheat were stored. The sewage treatment system was modified which increased capacity from 2 to 12 cubic metres. New filtration chambers were also constructed. As a result of these changes the system is working much more efficiently.

Fundación Trébol was invited to participate in a new regional confederation of small producers based in the Atlixco Area.

FUNDRAISING WITHIN MEXICO

Fundación Trébol raised £6,866 through fundraising applications to both Government agencies and a Grant Giving Trust within Mexico. The residential project also received donations in kind.

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS OF KEY OBJECTIVES FOR 1999

The following objectives were achieved:

- All existing programmes and commitments will be maintained.
- 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.
- A training and education programme to teach agricultural skills will be planned and implemented with pupils from the special school in Atlixco.
- An evaluation will be carried out with regard to the feasibility of a visit to facilities in N. Ireland by representatives of Fundación Trébol.
- 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.

The following objectives are ongoing:

- All existing programmes and commitments will be maintained.
- A practical guide outlining costs, advantages and disadvantages of sub projects based on sustainable agriculture will be researched and produced.
- Remaining farm infrastructure will be put in place. (construction of a greenhouse, construction of water storage tanks, fruit trees planted, beehives.)

The following objective is no longer relevant (due to a change in the admission policy of the institutions):

- Our partner organisation will extend the programme which it is carrying out in 5 institutions to reach a total of 11.

NEW OBJECTIVES FOR 2000

- The agricultural training programme in the special school will be extended to include practical experience on the working farm at the project site.
- Independent living options will be investigated with the young people who are ready to leave the residential project.
- Visits to the project site will be encouraged and organised, with the aim of promoting sustainable agricultural practice.
- Two members of Fundación Trébol will visit learning disability projects in Ireland to gain first hand knowledge of current good practice.
- Mexico Child Link will comply with the rigorous monitoring and evaluation requirements of the N.L.C.B. as stipulated in the standard terms and conditions of the grant.

THANKS

Thanks are due to the following organisations and individuals that gave support throughout 1999:

The National Lottery Charities Board	Dean Jack Shearer
June Getty	Longstone School
May Blair	St. Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt
The Helm Corporation	Laganvalley Patchwork Guild
The Paget Charitable Trust	The Ulster Bank, Connswater
Corranny P.S.	Dungannon Royal School
Dawson Cunningham Ltd.	Prof. Roy Mc Conkey
Muckamore Abbey Hospital	Listed Kroes
Mexico/Pakistan Relay Team, Belfast Marathon	J.W. Russell & Co.
Prontaprint , Lisburn Road	Hazel Dickson
City of London Freeman's School	

In addition the Trust would like to thank:

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

14 supporters who covenant to the Trust.

45 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 1999

INCOME

Donations	£ 2,648
Give as you Earn	£ 1,904
Bank Interest received	£ 2,060
Street collections	£ 7,338
Bankers Order	£ 6,975
Grant giving trusts	£ 1,700
Schools	£ 3,738
Covenant	£ 668
N.L.C.B. funding	<u>£ 32,922</u>
Total	£ 59,953

EXPENDITURE

N.L.C.B. funding to Mexico	£ 34,518
Postage, printing, stationery	£ 570
Telephone & Fax	£ 572
Travel Expenses	£ 2,475
Expenses incurred abroad	£ 2,884
Accountants fees	£ 118
Salaries	£ 13,156
Sundry expenses	£ 400
Bank interest	£ 11
Depreciation Office equipment	£ 354
Pension scheme	<u>£ 1,920</u>
	£ 56,978

Funds held as of Dec. 31st 1999 £ 63,246

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

Full accounts are available upon request.