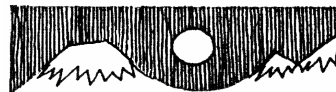


# *The Mexico Child Link Trust*

CHARITY REFERENCE NUMBER XR18919

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2002**



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[www.mexico-child-link.org](http://www.mexico-child-link.org)

## **OFFICE BEARERS AND TRUSTEES**

Chairperson

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

Treasurer

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

Secretary

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

Trustees

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

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

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)

Mr. John Donaghy, B.A. M.Sc., Dip. H.S.M. M.H.S.M. (Management Consultant)

Prof. Roy Mc Conkey, B.A. Ph.D. (Chair of Learning Disability, University of Ulster)

## **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 with one salaried employee. Our low level of staffing enables overheads to be kept to a minimum. 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. During 2002 Mexico Child Link made two visits to Mexico, in July and December. The visits involved the monitoring of the programmes funded by the Community Fund, as well as staff training and development.

### **Colette Mc Ginnity**

Colette Mc Ginnity has left paid employment with Mexico Child Link and taken up a new post as representative of a forum for carers of people with Learning disability in Down & Lisburn Trust. Colette has emphasised that she is as committed as ever to Mexico Child Link but felt that it was time for a new personal challenge after 11 years. She intends to visit the children in the summer of 2003. Colette & Jonathan Getty founded the project as a follow up to voluntary work with children in Mexico during 1990-1991. Mexico Child link recently celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a charitable trust. Colette's role has been to develop and oversee many of the programmes currently used in the project, such as the *Independence Training System*, which was adapted from a UK programme and translated into Spanish. She also organised many of the staff training programmes with our partner organization in Puebla. Colette brought a wealth of experience to Mexico Child Link in the fields of both childcare and learning disability. Although it is a challenge to Mexico Child Link to continue without a founder member, it is also indicative of our success. Colette has helped our partner organization to become much more independent and capable of taking decisions for itself. She also helped our project partners see the world from the point of view of the abandoned child with learning disability. Everyone involved with Mexico Child Link and Fundación Trébol wishes Colette every success in her new post.

## **AIMS.**

Our main aim is to improve the quality of life of abandoned children and young people with learning disabilities in Mexico. We work in partnership with a Mexican organisation called Fundación Trébol de Puebla A.C., which we helped to develop and now fund and advise.

## WORK IN MEXICO

The Mexico Child Link Trust has a long-term partnership with Fundación Trébol, supporting its work and programmes in the state of Puebla, Mexico. This includes a residential project in Atlixco, Puebla for abandoned children with learning disabilities. Two houses constructed on a 2.5-acre site during 1995 are home to 12 children and young people. Work continues to develop a small farm based on a system of sustainable agriculture. A carpentry workshop has provided training for over 50 children and young people.



Fundación Trébol works closely with a number of large institutions, to improve the quality of care and training of abandoned children with learning disabilities. It also provides horticulture training in the local special school. A free Advice & Information Centre on Learning Disability has been set up in Puebla. 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

Our partner organization, Fundación Trébol de Puebla, is governed by a management committee of 5 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. In 2002 Fundación Trébol employed a total of 16 people. All staff receive pensions, housing credits and access to the state healthcare system for themselves and their families.

### OFFICE AND MAILING ADDRESS

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Web: [www.mexico-child-link.org](http://www.mexico-child-link.org)

### CONTACT ADDRESS IN MEXICO

Fundación Trébol de Puebla A.C.  
Avenida San Baltazar 1820  
Colonia San Manuel  
Puebla, Pue. C.P. 72570  
Tel./Fax 00 (52) 2 22 44 81 29

## FUNDRAISING

2002 was a successful fundraising year with over £79,000 raised. This includes £48,500 from the Community Fund (formerly the National Lottery Charities Board), as part of the two-year programme, which began in March 2001. The remaining funding was raised through street collections, individual donations, school fundraising, and monthly contributions through Bankers Order, *the Give as you Earn* scheme and *Gift Aid*. Support was also received from Grant Giving Trusts. Mexico Child Link took advantage of the new *Gift Aid* programme, to reclaim over £1,800 from the Inland Revenue.

A significant development in Fundraising during 2002 was the establishment of a Mexico Child Link website. ([www.mexico-child-link.org](http://www.mexico-child-link.org)) It is hoped that this can become a powerful fundraising tool by allowing donors to support our work through credit card donations from the web site via a link to the *Charities Aid Foundation* (CAF), which provides a free fundraising portal.

In addition, both Mexico Child link and its Mexican partner organization have been able to gain tax-deductible status in the US through affiliation to *CAF America*, an organization set up by the Charities Aid Foundation to enable US donors to support non-US charities in a tax efficient way. US residents who wish to support our work can complete an online form available on the website.

We experienced some problems due to significant banking delays during the transfer of funds to Mexico. This has now been resolved by Ulster Bank who also made a £1000 donation to Mexico Child Link from their charity fund during the year.

### **Fundraising within Mexico**

Fundraising in Mexico is limited due to the ongoing economic difficulties and the lack of a dedicated fundraising co-ordinator in our partner organization. Quiera (the Mexican Bankers' Association) awarded Fundación Trébol funding for 2 training scholarships for young people. The residential project received donations in kind, including 48 litres of milk every week from a local dairy farm, which is used for making cheese. The same farm supplies 50 tons of manure annually, which has greatly improved the quality of the soil on the farm. The D.I.F. (Mexican Social Services) continued to donate long life milk, high nutrition biscuits and medicines. There were also donations of second hand clothes in good condition for the children.

Mexico Child Link regularly checks the Fundación Trébol accounts and advises on expenditure.

### **PROGRAMMES IN MEXICO**

- Residential project for twelve abandoned children with learning disability.
- A series of productive projects on a small farm based upon sustainable agriculture, which also provides educational and training activities for the children.
- A horticultural training programme operated jointly with the local special school.
- A special education worker to advise staff and work directly with children with learning disabilities in a number of large institutions in Puebla.
- A free Advice and Information Centre on Learning Disability.
- A carpentry workshop.
- Support for young adults with learning disability to live more independently.

### **RESIDENTIAL PROJECT**

The project aims to prepare the children and young people for as independent a life as possible, taking into account their individual level of disability. Children learn to do things for themselves with the help of individual programmes designed using the *Planning for Life* system, which Mexico Child Link translated, adapted and monitors. One child now attends the village primary school and two young people attend the local secondary school. The primary school was selected to participate in a pilot integration project and staff attended meetings with teachers and Education Department officials. The children and young people undertook work placements on a local farm, in a carpentry workshop, in a hairdresser's, domestic work and helping a nurse in a rural health centre. Intensive individual work was also undertaken with the young people in work-related skills e.g. following instructions and social interaction at work.

### **The transition to adulthood**

The project opened in 1995 and the first group of children have now become young adults. As such, their needs have changed and the project has attempted to respond to this. Esteban, who came to the project aged 14 in August 1995, is now 22, and has been working full time on local farms for 4 years. The transition to adulthood has been discussed at length by the management committee of Mexico Child Link and also with our partner organization in Mexico. The main conclusions have been:

- We will not compel anyone to leave the project solely on account of his chronological age.
- We acknowledge that this is likely to reduce the frequency with which places in the residential project become available.
- We will continue to promote independence training as the cornerstone of our methodology and practice.



- The departure of young adults from the residential project will be examined on a case by case basis and will depend upon what the individual young person wants to do and the skills that he has acquired.

A clear distinction is made between the younger children, and the adolescents & young people. They are given distinct rights and privileges when they reach the age of 15, a social rite of passage in Mexico. Many people treat adults with learning disability as if they were children, and it is an important goal of the project to treat everyone in an age appropriate way in order to help the children grow into well-adjusted adults.

The young people have considerable anxiety about leaving the project. This is understandable, as they have had 8 years of stability in a secure and caring environment. The transition towards independence will be gradual. The living arrangements have recently been adapted. Six young people with learning disability share one of the houses and the remaining younger children live in the other. The young people need less direct support, and have been given more responsibility for looking after themselves and keeping their house in order. This has allowed the project to reduce staffing levels during the day although it is still necessary to have a houseparent in the house during the night. The young people are very pleased with this new arrangement. Although they are anxious about having to leave the project at some point in the future, they do not want to be treated as children with more supervision that they feel is necessary.

The Independence Training Worker works closely with the young people in the areas of employment skills, use of money and public transport, budgeting, shopping and preparation of meals. She visits their places of employment on a regular basis to liaise with employers and help to resolve any difficulties. The project has tried to extend the skills base of the young people so that they can seek employment in areas other than agriculture.

### **Community Participation**

The involvement with the local schools has greatly enhanced the project's community participation. The primary school is a *de facto* community centre. Children and staff have got to know local people and have been invited to community events. Several of the young people and the farm workers helped to prepare the site for the new secondary school, alongside pupils and parents. The carpentry workshop has also helped the reputation of Trébol in the area. 25 local children and young people attend the free workshop twice weekly. The new Project Director has facilitated increased community involvement and improved the project's presence in the area.

### **HORTICULTURAL TRAINING PROGRAMME**

In 1999, Fundación Trébol set up a training programme to teach agricultural skills in the special school in the town of Atlixco, about 7 miles from the farm. 20 pupils participated and planted and harvested radish, courgette, maize, coriander, carrots and beetroot. The programme takes place two days a week for two hours, with each group of 5 pupils attending for a half hour session. The programme is supervised by the Independence Training Worker. Training was given on the following: recognition and use of tools, understanding and following instructions, co-operating in a small group situation, seed and plant recognition, caring for plants and distinguishing useful plants from weeds. The school principal and staff have been very co-operative and encourage the children to participate. The programme has the recognition and approval of the children's parents, and of the education authorities.



## SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN INSTITUTIONS

In 1994, Fundación Trébol carried out an investigation in 22 residential institutions in and around Puebla City. It found a total population of 1015 children in care. 68 children had learning disabilities and were not receiving adequate care and attention. A lottery funded programme in these institutions began in 1997, with the aim of improving the quality of care of the children. The programme is carried out by a Special Education worker, Ana Luisa Sandóval.



The difficulties of children with learning disability in institutions are made worse by the lack of trained staff. They frequently see children as lazy, bad-tempered and awkward and treat them accordingly. Ana Luisa, has been working actively in institutions and children's homes, which are home to a number of children with learning disability. Fundación Trébol maintains a database with details of each child who has been assessed. Ana Luisa helps to train the staff regarding practical issues about learning disability. She plans individual programmes for children and trains and helps staff to use them. She also works one-to-one with children who have specific problems.

The programme has three main areas of focus:

- Regular meetings with staff to identify the training they need to enable them to work better with children with learning disability, as well as the implementation of the training.
- Assessment of the needs of individual children.
- Work with children with specific problems and training staff how to work with them.

Through the programme, she has been able to bring about important changes in staff attitudes. Staff have become aware that children communicate with them through specific behaviours and are also more conscious of how their own behaviour can adversely affect a child's behaviour. As a result of the programme in the government home, staff now involve the children with learning disability in activities from which they were previously excluded. In another institution, staff have started to use the children's proper names rather than giving them nicknames.

## Carpentry Workshop

The workshop takes place in two sessions, five afternoons a week. Each child attends twice weekly. Over 50 children and young people have attended. The principal of the local primary



school identified possible candidates for the workshop and the majority of them come from a poor village near the residential project. The parents were pleased with this opportunity for their children, especially since it is free and does not imply the expense of bus fares. To date, the children have made: benches, beds, photograph frames, bookcases, tables, a cassette holders and Christmas decorations. The money raised was used to buy further materials. The workshop takes place in the store and an open-plan work area at the project site. The participants are very enthusiastic about the workshop and proud of their finished articles.

During the 1990s the Atlixco area developed as a major producer of Mexican rustic pine furniture, so the workshop provides the young people with very specific employment skills.

## Advice & information Centre

The Advice & Information Centre, which opened in September 2001, is located in the city of Puebla. The main aim of the Centre is to provide information to families and to direct them to the appropriate learning disability services. The Centre is also open for use by professionals and students. The centre has been used extensively in its first full year of use, with a total of 2185 beneficiaries. The users fell into the following categories:

Referrals to other services	5%
Parents and carers of children with learning disability	24%
Institutions	20%
Students	30%
Professionals	21%

It became apparent during the year that in spite of frequent advertising, the uptake from “drop ins” was low. It was decided to switch the focus to outreach work in order to maximise the number of beneficiaries. This strategy proved very successful and the advice centre worker was invited to provide assessment and guidance at many schools and institutions. The number of users was a huge improvement on the first year of the service and exceeded our target figures in the national Lottery programme.

This outreach work entailed

1. Dissemination of information on learning disability regarding courses, seminars, and literature, as well as the promotion of specific events such as special school Olympics etc.
2. Awareness seminars, mainly carried out in schools which are integrating children with learning disability. This work is supported and encouraged by the education board (SEP) and has been carried out in different municipalities such as Puebla, Cholula, Atlixco & Tenextepec.
3. Parental advice. This was requested by the schools in order to better inform parents about the nature of learning disability. It involved seminars with groups of parents and the dissemination of literature on learning disability.
4. Advice to students. This involved giving advice to students who were studying in the area of learning disability or undertaking a thesis related to the field of learning disability.

The learning disability advice and information centre was promoted extensively through local radio. The advice centre worker attended various relevant seminars and training courses throughout the year.

## FARM



The aim of the farm is to act as a training resource for children, young people and the local community as well as providing a degree of self-sufficiency to the project.

The farm is now well on the way to a more stable system of production, based on Permaculture and other elements of sustainable agriculture. The sheep and goat flock has now reached 55. Lambs are regularly sold and are also a source of fresh meat for the project. The Dorper/Romanov stud ram donated to the project in 2001 has now produced its first offspring. The improvement in size and weight gain of the lambs is significant. We plan to sell these lambs to local producers in order to help them improve the genetics of their flocks. The animals are well cared for and are subject to a regular vaccine and anti-parasite programme. A database of births, deaths and sales is regularly

updated. There has been careful attention to diet, with lambs in particular being given access to high quality forage and grain supplement. This is milled with grain from our own crops and delivered through a creep feeding system.

The project also keeps chickens, rabbits and turkeys. Crop production is divided into staples, forage crops, vegetables and fruit. Staples include maize, sweet potato, wheat, and peanut. The area set aside for vegetables has been increased in order to try and have a more continuous supply of fresh greens. Fruit production has started, although the trees are still young and a few years away from full production. Fruit produced so far includes banana, avocado, mandarin, lemon, pomegranate, papaya, guava, prickly pear, and squash.

### **Farm Work Groups**

The children are divided into two work groups, vegetable production and 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. The two youngest children have been incorporated into the farm work groups, learning simple tasks appropriate to their level of ability and concentration levels. There has been a considerable improvement in the skills acquired and in the level of responsibility of some of the children. A number of the young people can carry out many routine tasks with minimal supervision. The children have a more responsible and respectful attitude to the animals in their care than when they arrived at the project.

### **RESTRUCTURING OF THE RESIDENTIAL PROJECT**



The end of 5 years of almost continuous lottery funding has obvious implications for the project. In the medium term, Mexico Child Link will apply for more National Lottery funding to continue and develop current programmes. However, it

has been widely reported that lottery ticket sales are down, and this will have consequences for charitable bodies seeking funding. The number of charitable organizations remains constant whilst the size of the funding pot grows smaller each year. Mexico Child Link will continue to seek support from the lottery but has taken steps to ensure the stability of the project should continued lottery funding not be forthcoming.

Mexico Child Link held a series of planning meetings with partner organization Fundación Trébol during visits to Mexico in July and December. The greater independence of the young people with learning disability in the residential project has allowed staff numbers to be reduced.

We looked at ways to restructure our partner organization by combining some posts and eliminating others. We were able to eliminate one of the house helper posts by splitting the salary between two of the young people, who are able to carry out most of the duties with minimal supervision. We are happy with the changes made as it allows us to maintain all our existing programmes while at the same time reducing overheads. We have also decided to re-examine the issue of using volunteers.

### **PROMOTION OF THE WORK OF MEXICO CHILD LINK**

Over 500 people and organisations received a copy of the Mexico Child Link Newsletter in September. Over 100 individuals and organisations received a copy of the 2001 Annual Report. The regular street collections were used to promote our work to the general public. The new website is a platform for our work and helps achieve our aim of spreading good practice.

## **THANKS**

Thanks are due to the following organisations and individuals that gave support throughout 2001:

The Community Fund (formerly National Lottery Charities Board)

June Getty

May Blair

The Ulster Bank, Arches Retail Park

Dawson Cunningham Ltd.

Russells – The Solicitors

Wallace High School

Prontaprint, Lisburn Road

Corranny Primary School

City of London Freeman's School

St. Tierney's Primary School

N.I.C.V.A.

The Paget Charitable Trust

Mr & Mrs Bob Mc Clean

Marion Gibson Memorial Trust

Mount Lourdes Grammar School

The Toy Trust

Ulster Garden Villages

Hazel Dickson

Wallace High School

Edgumbre Training & Resource Centre

Canon Brian McCluskey

Hilda Laing Charitable Trust

In addition the Trust would like to thank:

17 donors who support us through the Give as You Earn Scheme

65 donors who support the Trust monthly through Bankers Order.

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

Thanks are also due to I.T.S. for the use of their premises to hold our Trustee meetings.

## **SUMMARY OF PROGRESS OF KEY OBJECTIVES FOR 2002**

The following objectives set in 2001 were achieved:

1. All existing programmes and commitments have been maintained.
2. Project work has been carried out in compliance with The Community Fund Terms and Conditions.
3. A small increase in the amount of unrestricted funding has been achieved, rising from £29,418 to £30,118. In addition the total number of monthly donors increased from 72 to 82
4. A Mexico Child Link website and fundraising portal has been established at: [www.mexico-child-link.org](http://www.mexico-child-link.org)
5. The young adults with learning disability resident in the project are living more independently in one of the two adobe houses built by the project after reorganization at the end of 2002.
6. Mexico Child Link has affiliated to CafAmerica, which allows it to fundraise in the US in compliance with IRS 501(c) 3 charitable status. Our partner organization Fundación Trébol has also affiliated.

The following objectives are ongoing:

1. Establish a twinning relationship between Fundación Trébol/Mexico Child Link and those organisations visited by our project partners, which expressed an interest in maintaining an exchange of ideas.
2. In conjunction with Quiera (Mexican Banker's Association), publish a manual on the use of the Planning for Life system.

## **OBJECTIVES FOR 2003**

- Maintain all existing commitments
- Continue to develop international links
- Continue to develop the website as a fundraising portal and a platform for our work and programmes.
- Submit a new proposal to the Community Fund.
- Update research in Puebla on abandoned children with learning disabilities.

## FINANCE

### INCOME & EXPENDITURE 2002

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>£</b>
Street Collections	7,067
Donations	2,568
Website donations	109
Give as you Earn	1,610
Banker's Order	8,402
Schools	2,864
Grant Giving Trust	5,348
Gift Aid	1,853
US Donations	297
Community Fund (formerly National Lottery Charities Board)	<u>48,500</u>
Total	78,618
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£</b>
Salaries	16,110
Community Fund Grant to Mexico	48,500
Grant to Mexico	16,140
Pension scheme	1,920
Printing, postage & stationery	1,198
Telephone	453
Expenses incurred abroad	4,747
Accountancy	130
Bank interest & charges	(10)
Sundry expenses	80
Depreciation	352
Exchange gain	<u>(15)</u>
Total	89,605
Funds held as of Dec.31 <sup>st</sup> 2002	14,155

Mexico Child Link accounts are audited by Dawson & Company, 1 Conway Court, High St.  
Newtownards BT23 4GW.

Full accounts are available on request.