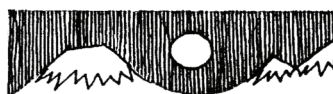


The Mexico Child Link Trust

CHARITY I.R. REFERENCE NUMBER XR18919

ANNUAL REPORT April 2006 – April 2007



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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

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

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., D.E.L.E. Project Co-ordinator

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.

Mexico Child Link made monitoring and evaluation visits to the project in Mexico during September 2006 and March 2007. The visits involved the monitoring of the programmes funded by Mexico Child Link and the continuing development of the project.

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 partially fund and advise.

FUNDACION TREBOL – Our partner organization in Mexico

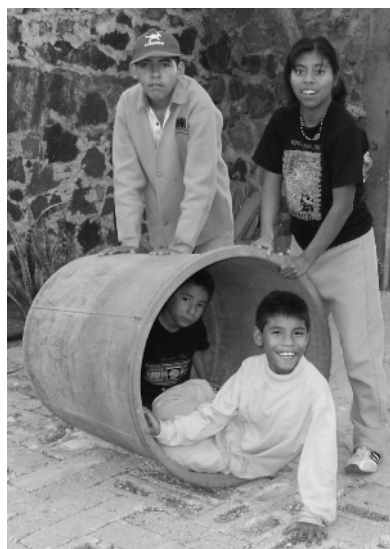


The Mexico Child Link Trust has a long-term partnership with *Fundación Trébol*, supporting its work and programmes in the state of Puebla, Mexico. This includes a residential project in Atlixco, Puebla for abandoned children with learning disabilities. Two houses constructed on a 2.5-acre site during 1995 are home to 11 children and young people aged from 6-25. 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

Management of funding

Assets in Mexico are owned by *Fundación Trébol de Puebla A.C.*, a tax-deductible Mexican charitable organisation. Their accounts are published monthly for inspection and are subject to an annual audit from an independent auditor, in accordance with Mexican law. Mexico Child Link has put many systems in place for internal control and accountability such as a fortnightly spreadsheet listing income and expenditure of the two houses (food, medicine, clothing etc.) There are also systems in place to safeguard the income of the young people, most of whom have a poor understanding of money management.

Introduction



The Mexico Child Link project has now been running for almost twelve years. Eleven children and young people currently live in the two houses. The age range is from six to twenty five. In the interests of privacy, the trustees have decided not to refer to individual children by name in this annual report. Instead, an attempt will be made to give a general profile of each person the project is working with. The current admission criteria is to accept children up to ten years old who have a mild to moderate learning disability and who suffer no major problems with mobility or general health. It is thought that this type of child benefits the most from the independence training and preparation for the world of work which the project offers. Most of the children and young people are long term residents, so places do not often become available.

The two youngest children are brothers aged eight and six. They will soon complete three years in the project. The youngest boy attends a regular primary school in the neighbouring village of Trinidad Tepango, and is making good progress, especially in the area of speech and language. His older brother has found mainstream schooling too challenging and he was withdrawn from his school in Atlixco earlier in the year. There were over forty pupils in his class and his teacher was unable to give him the individual attention needed. He is very active and has a poor attention span. He has been enrolled in dance classes and other activities and he also has the support of a psychologist. The aim is to give him access to activities where he is more valued, in order to avoid further damage to his self esteem. This also gives him an opportunity to socialize and interact with other children. An alternative would be to enroll him in the local special school, but AnaLuisa, the project director, is keen to see if he is capable of reintegrating into mainstream education, in spite of his special educational needs.

Two teenage boys aged fifteen and sixteen have a greater level of disability than their peers. They are long term residents of the project having arrived in 1996 and 1997. One is settled and happy, although his level of disability which includes epilepsy means that he can not benefit as much from independence training and preparation for the world of work as much as some of his companions. He has limited language and a lot of repetitive behaviour. It is inevitable that he will need a high degree of care and attention for the rest of his life. His roommate who is sixteen has been quite unsettled recently and his condition has deteriorated to some extent. He has no language and he also has epilepsy. Both of these children would benefit from a project which specifically caters for people with more demanding special needs such as theirs. (See report below on visit to project Acéptamecomosoy.)

Another more able sixteen year old boy attends a local school in *San Juan de los Laureles*. He has made friends there and is enjoying it. Staff have noted a significant change in his attitude and he is now much more cooperative.

One of the long term residents who arrived as a four year old in 1996, celebrated her *Quinceaños* (15th birthday) in September 2006 - a reminder for all of us that the children are growing up fast. An even bigger indicator is the fact that so many of the young people are now in employment. All but one of the young people (18+) have full time jobs outside the project. Our partners continue to have a strong relationship with CINIA, a local organization in Puebla which provides employment opportunities for young people with disabilities.

Through CINIA, two young people aged twenty one and twenty two have been given jobs in gardening and ground maintenance in a Golf Club and residential complex on the outskirts of Puebla. One has been selected as a team leader and gets extra pay for the responsibility

They have the opportunity to earn a living and very much appreciate the chance to socialize with people of similar age and interests. This continues to be a challenging situation with regard to risk management and other issues relevant to the young people. The use of public transport and workplace safety issues are ongoing concerns. In spite of these reservations, the benefit for the individuals concerned has been very significant, giving them opportunities to mix, some financial independence and increased self confidence.

A twenty four year old woman is working in a launderette near to the project site and the oldest resident aged twenty five continues his long term employment as a farm worker in San Lorenzo Ranch.

The money earned by the young people is carefully managed in individual accounts and each person contributes to the upkeep of the house according to his or her ability to pay. This can lead to friction on occasion when a young person expresses a desire to purchase an I-pod or a mobile phone rather than contribute to the gas bill. It's only to be expected!

Mexico Child Link maintains its close relationship with project partners Fundación Trébol. The Coordinator of Mexico Child Link maintains regular contact by E-mail and SKYPE telephone and also made project evaluation visits in September 2006 and March 2007.

Last year was relatively stable from a financial point of view. We have reduced our funding deficit from £14,000 in 2004-2005 to just over £1,000 for 2006-2007. This has been due to a combination of effective fundraising combined with cost cutting, as well as a more significant contribution from our project partners Fundación Trébol. A funding proposal for a new project vehicle was submitted to the Volkswagen Foundation in Puebla during March 2007 and has recently been approved. Several of the young people with learning disability who are in employment make a contribution towards overheads. Notwithstanding this success, the project would have a lot more financial stability if annual income could be increased by at least 10%.

We are still analysing the best options available for two adolescent boys who have more disability than their peers and will not be capable of working independently like most of the others. The main problem is finding a suitable project nearby which caters for their specific needs in a way we are comfortable with. AnaLuisa Sandoval the project General Director has been investigating several residential projects. She made an initial visit to a project in Oaxaca City during February 2007 and visited again with the two boys and Jonathan Getty the co-ordinator of Mexico Child link in March. We are currently evaluating the pros and cons of a transfer and the timescale involved.

AnaLuisa will be leaving the project in the summer of 2007 to live in the city of Veracruz. Her post will be filled by Karina Roldan, who currently holds the post of senior houseparent and has been an employee for seven years. Analuisa has been an effective and committed director and we shall be sorry to lose her.

Cemex work completed

In April 2006, our partner organization in Mexico, Fundación Trébol, was the beneficiary of a programme run by CEMEX, a Mexican Multinational Cement Company. The grant was significant and worth over twelve thousand pounds. It was used to build a wall around the project site and to make improvements to the bathrooms and the sewage system. The wall is very welcome given some of the security problems in recent years. The work was completed in June 2006.

House proposal for young people

We are still trying to raise funding to construct a small house on our project site for two of the residents aged twenty five and twenty three. The site is 2.5 acres approximately. Both of them have expressed a desire to live more independently and would be well capable of this with the requisite amount of support. We are hoping to raise extra funding to support the construction costs, as Mexico Child Link has insufficient regular income at the moment to develop additional projects such as this. The architectural plans for the house have been completed.

Young people in employment - CINIA

Our partner organization Fundación Trébol has now been involved with Centro de Capacitación, Industria y Artesanía (Training Centre for Industry and Craftwork) for two years. It is usually known by its acronym of CINIA. The relationship is proving to be very productive and this organization was established to provide training and employment opportunities to young people in Mexico who have a learning disability. CINIA has signed contracts with local employers and found permanent jobs for some of the young people from Fundación Trébol. The coordinator of Mexico Child Link visited the CINIA factory in September 2006 and March 2007 as part of the regular evaluation visits to discuss the progress of the young people in employment.

Lisa Fleming – photography project

Lisa Fleming, a community artist and freelance photographer, visited our project in Atlixco, on the weekend of 10th June 2006. She has wide experience of working with young homeless people in Scotland - currently in Fife and West Lothian. She uses photography and art as a tool to assist people in building their self confidence and communication skills. Lisa is currently working on a project called "The Invisibles" – This will be a set of portraits of people from all over the world who are on the margins of society. Her work is positive, and the viewer of the photographs should see hope rather than sadness or alienation. She gave some of the young people at our project disposable cameras with which they were able to record their world around them. They were given copies of their own photographs in an album. The photographs were displayed in Fife, as part of Lisa's residency with the Scottish Arts Council.

Visit to project Acéramecomosoy. (Accept me as I am)

On 2nd March 2007 Jonathan Getty and AnaLuisa Sandoval made an assessment visit to a project in Oaxaca where AnaLuisa has proposed transferring two teenage boys who have more demanding special needs. The two boys were brought along and assessed for suitability by personnel at the project.

Josefina Andrade is the project director is and we were able to interview her and ask questions about the ethos and management of the project.

In some ways it is similar to the Fundación Trébol project in that it is in a rural setting and attends exclusively to people with a learning disability. It has a significant number of salaried staff and has good buildings and infrastructure. It has some foreign support through Caritas Spain. The focus is on adults, although there are several residents who are under eighteen. Contact with this project is tentative and a decision regarding the future of the two boys is still at an early stage. If we decide that the project is suitable, a lot of preparatory work would be necessary before a move could be considered.

Escúchame (Listen to me)

This is an activity which allows the children and young people to make an individual lifebook, with the help of staff members. It allows the person involved to express likes and dislikes and also records the important people and activities in their life. It is a very useful exercise as we tend to make assumptions on behalf of people with learning disability and at times these can be at odds with what they really want. Colette McGinnity gave a half day training course on the Escúchame programme on 13th March 2007.

We have decided to prioritise this work for the children being assessed for transfer and a young person who is not currently in employment.

We sorted through old photographs and ordered 150 for use in the programme. They show the children and young people, staff past and present, as well as the many activities which they participate in. It will also be necessary to take current photographs at schools and workplaces.

Website

The Mexico Child Link website is found at www.mexico-child-link.org. Historical accounts, newsletters and annual Reports from 1992-2006 were added as PDF files in December 2006. It is interesting to go back and read the first few annual reports to get an idea of how far things have progressed. Background information on Mexico about *Piñatas* and the *Quinceaños* celebration was added in December 2006. An E-postcard facility was added in December to allow users to "tell-a-friend" about the site. A new page about Volunteering criteria was added in January 2007.

A page promoting a fundraising concert by Rory Nellis and friends was added during March 2007. There are links to the artists and their music.

Cadbury Adams

On Monday 18th sep 2006 a presentation was given to Cadbury Adams on their premises in Puebla They have a charitable budget focussed on education and ecology including the payment of salaries and we hope to get funding from them at some point in the future.

Cafamerica

Mexico Child link can receive tax deductible donations from the US through CAFAmerica.

The most significant donation we received from the US came from the Jim Spalding foundation in November 2006

Wallmart/Superama

Our partner organization Fundación Trébol received regular donations throughout the year of items such as cooking oil, toilet rolls, beans, yoghurt and general provisions from two local supermarkets, Wall-mart and Superama.

Project Visits

A Canadian woman, Judy Meynard visited the project in November.

Compass, Ballymoney made contact in January 2007 re. a possible visit in 2008

There were several enquiries via the website about possible visits or volunteering.

Farm

The farm is still being managed by Lorenzo Cuateco who is a long term employee of Fundación Trébol and a significant figure in the life of many of the children and young people. He has an easy going manner and gets on well with the residents in the project. He works closely with a 22 year old resident who does not have work outside the project at the moment. The farm is currently a little short of labour as several of the more able residents are working independently outside the project. Lorenzo looks after a flock of over thirty sheep and is involved in teaching the youngsters how care for farm animals and maintain a vegetable garden. The farm also has smaller animals such as chickens ducks and rabbits.

Thanks

Mexico Child Link would like to take this opportunity to thank those who fundraised on our behalf, or gave support in kind, as well as the many people who made a donation to support our work.

The City of London Freeman's School
Corranny P.S., Roslea
Brackaville Parish Church, Coalisland
Edgecombe TRC
Common Grounds Café, Belfast
Newell Stores Dungannon
Dorothy Arthur
Makro, Dunmurry
June Getty, May Blair and friends
Maurice Dawson
Khaled Faiz
Roslea Choir
Rory Nellis
Richill Supervalu

The Spalding Foundation
The Paget Trust.
Glycowell
Wallace High School, Lisburn
St Mary's Grammar, Magherafelt
Parkview, Lisburn
Lisa Fleming
MKB Russells
Bob and Pearl McClean
Aileen Dixon
St Tierney's P.S., Roslea
Ulster Bank Charity Fund
St. Vincent de Paul, Roslea
Fra McCrory

Retailers: Supervalu, Asda, Tesco, Makro, Safeway, Bow St. Mall, Lisburn
90 Monthly donors who give from £1 to £50

Finance and fundraising update.

Like many small charities, we find it difficult to raise funds but fortunately we have been able to maintain our core programmes to date. Despite this, Mexico Child Link has had another successful fundraising year with over £44,000 raised. The fundraising deficit for our programmes in Mexico was reduced to £1,000 compared to £4,000 in the previous financial year and £14,000 in the year before that. Sterling has strengthened against the Mexican Peso which also helped.

Mexico Child Link Trust sends quarterly funding to Mexico on consideration of a cash flow estimate supplied by our project partners.

On 28th March 2007 Rory Nellis organized a fundraising concert at the Black Box, Hill Street Belfast on behalf of Mexico Child Link. The concert featured music by John Cairns, John McGurgan, Owen Lamont and Bunkbed.

A painting by local artist Fra McCrory was auctioned and made £1,500

The City of London Freeman's school which has supported our work for ten years has unfortunately had to disband its fundraising committee and is unable to give further support. We are very grateful for their help over the years.

Fundraising information was sent to a number of schools and individuals.

FINANCE

INCOME & EXPENDITURE 2006-2007

(12 months to 5th April 2007)

All values are in £ Sterling

INCOME	£
Street Collections	12,073
Donations	6,115
Website donations	638
Give as you Earn	1,504
Banker's Order	11,415
Schools	3,040
Grant Giving Trust	1,170
Gift Aid	3,028
US Donations	2,298
Church groups	175
Fundraising	2,527
Bank Interest Received	78
Total	44,061

EXPENDITURE	£
Salaries	7,435
Grant to Mexico	31,098
Pension scheme	960
Printing, postage & stationery	831
Telephone	281
Expenses incurred abroad	3,765
Audit	140
Sundry expenses (petty cash)	532
Depreciation	209
Total	45,251

Funds held as of April 5th 2006 11,021

Mexico Child Link accounts are audited by
Dawson & Company, 171 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HR, N. Ireland.



What is Mexico Child Link?

The Mexico Child Link Trust is a UK registered Charitable Trust, governed by a group of seven trustees with an interest in learning disability.

Mexico Child Link is an independent charitable organisation, not linked with any religious or political group. UK donations are fully tax deductible through the Gift Aid programme and US donors can ensure their donations are fully tax deductible by supporting us through CAF-America.

Mexico Child Link was founded in 1992 by Jonathan Getty & Colette Mc Ginnity, in response to the needs of abandoned & orphan children with learning disability in Puebla State, Mexico.

Mexico Child Link works in partnership with Fundación Trébol de Puebla A.C., an independent Mexican charitable foundation, which we helped to set up and now partially fund and advise. This close relationship allows the project in Puebla to be run efficiently by Mexican staff trained in the field of learning disability.

Mexico Child Link provides a range of services for people with or affected by learning disability. The core project is a home for abandoned & orphan children with learning disabilities, near the town of Atlixco. Many of them are ex street children. The children live on a small farm in 2 specially built adobe houses where they are cared for in a family setting. The farm, based upon sustainable agriculture, provides a degree of self sufficiency for the project and allows the children to learn practical skills. The aim is to help them gain employment as adults.

If you would like to get involved, or support our work, please get in touch. We are particularly interested in getting involved with local schools and making contact with individuals who have fundraising experience.

