

Mexico Child Link

CHARITY REFERENCE NUMBER XRI8919

DECEMBER 2000

Mexico Child Link and its partner organisation Fundación Trébol have enjoyed another successful year.

Our main achievements this year have been successfully completing a three year programme funded by the National Lottery Charities Board, and obtaining new funding for the further development of our work next year. In addition two members of our partner organisation visited Northern Ireland during September to study good practice in the field of learning disability. Our current aim is to strengthen existing programmes and develop a range of additional services for children and adults with learning disability in Puebla State, Mexico.

News from Tenextepec



Emmanuel

The Department of Education in Mexico has recently adopted a policy of integrating children with disabilities into mainstream schools. Two of the children in

the residential project have left special education and are continuing their studies in regular local schools. Rodolfo transferred to a local secondary school in September and Emmanuel started in a nearby Primary.

Although the routine is much more demanding, this will give both of them an opportunity to socialise with children of their own age who do not have a learning disability. They are both very content and have made new friends. This is in line with our policy of promoting as normal a life as possible for the children resident in the project. In addition four of the young people are currently receiving training scholarships funded by the Mexican Bankers Association.

Sewing Skills

A Singer sewing machine has been purchased and a number of the children have started learning to sew.



The carpentry workshop is to be further developed

Carpentry Workshop

Throughout the year eight of the children attended a weekly carpentry workshop at premises provided by a local businessman. Tools and equipment was purchased with a grant from the Mexican Government Social Development Agency (SEDESOL) The children have learned a range of skills, such as varnishing, sanding and sawing. There is strong emphasis on safety and the children all wear protective clothing, helmets and goggles. The carpentry workshop has proved very popular with the children. A number of them who have

limited

abilities in other areas have demonstrated ability at specific skills such as sanding. This is very important for their confidence and also for their chances of securing employment. The programme is to be further expanded with new lottery funding next year.

Horticultural Training Programme

The Farm Manager and Independence Training Worker supervise a training and education programme to teach agricultural skills in the special school in Atlixco. The programme takes place twice weekly. Training is given on the recognition and use of tools, listening and following instruction, co-operating in a small group situation, recognising seeds and plants, as well as distinguishing useful plants from weeds. A large vegetable garden has been prepared and maintained. The director and staff of the school have been very co-operative and the programme has the support of the parents of the children who participate, and of the education authorities.

Farm

During the year three new sheep and goat corrals were constructed on the farm. A new sheep shelter was built,



using wood and bamboo obtained locally. The sheep herd has grown to about 40 from the eight animals purchased originally. A pure bred Alpine goat was purchased and it is hoped to improve the quality of the livestock by crossing the new animal with the goats in the existing herd.

A small electric grinding mill was purchased. This is used to grind corn flour for making tortillas. It is also used to grind other grain for making animal concentrate. The project is now almost self sufficient in staple crops such as maize, wheat, sweet potato and peanuts.

Training Programme in Institutions

In 1994 an investigation was carried out by Fundación Trébol and Mexico Child Link in 22 residential institutions in the Puebla area. This showed that there were a large number of abandoned children with learning disabilities living within these institutions, who were not receiving any special care or attention. An N.L.C.B. funded programme in the institutions has been in operation for over two years. This programme is carried out by Queta Palestino, Special Education Worker. During this year programmes were implemented in 7 institutions in and around the city of



Puebla. The success of this programme has surpassed expectations. The work has four main areas: (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, (iii) work with individual children, (iv)

assessment of possible candidates for admission to Fundación Trébol's residential project. Staff in the institutions have indicated that they now feel more confident working with children with learning disability, and also that the training has helped them in their work with children who do not have learning disability.

National Lottery Programme

Mexico Child Link is currently operating 4 distinct programmes with its partner organisation, Fundación Trébol, in Puebla State, Mexico. These are:

- (a) Residential centre for 12 abandoned children with learning disability in 2 adobe houses on a small farm.
- (b) Horticultural training programme for children from the local special needs school in Atlixco.
- (c) Training programme for key staff in institutions where there is a population of abandoned children with learning disability.
- (d) Small farm based on sustainable agricultural techniques, which acts as a training resource for children with learning disability and members of the local community.

Our plans for 2001 include the establishment of three new programmes. The work is to be supported by a grant from the National Lottery Charities Board.

1. A free advice and information centre regarding learning disability for parents and professionals. (This will be carried out with help from CONFE Puebla, a national member organisation which seeks to promote services for people with learning disabilities.)
2. The further development of a carpentry workshop and

other practical job training opportunities such as a sewing skills workshop.

3. A programme to support young adults with learning disability with particular emphasis on accommodation and independent living.

This new two year programme includes funding for five new posts. These include a General Director, Farm Advisor, Carpentry Workshop Trainer, Senior Special Education Worker and an Information and Advice Centre Worker.

Visit from project partners

We invited two members of our Mexican partner organisation to Northern Ireland during September, Erika Godínez, President of the management committee, and Queta Palestino, Co-ordinator & Special Education worker. The purpose of the visit was to study and learn at first hand examples of good practice in the area of learning disability. Queta was especially very enthusiastic about the visit as it involved her first air travel and her first trip out of Mexico. They visited 13 organisations and learned a lot about how services are run in Northern Ireland. The visits to the organisations provided our partners with many ideas and food for thought, in relation to the work of Fundación Trébol. They also provided an opportunity for an exchange of information about our work in Mexico. A number of the organisations were very impressed with the high level of independence achieved by the children and young people living in the project run by Fundación Trébol. It was thought provoking to think that in some ways the general lack of resources in Mexico fostered independence, as the children and young people were obliged to do much more for themselves. Several organisations expressed an interest in establishing closer links with Fundación Trébol, possibly through a twinning arrangement. Erika and Queta gathered ideas which will be used in setting up the advice and information centre and the independent living options programme in Puebla, during 2001. Both appreciated the very warm welcome and generosity extended to them by the organisations which they visited. Representatives of the organisations visited showed great patience, while explanations were translated into Spanish for the visitors and their questions and comments were translated into English. The visitors were especially grateful for all the tea, coffee, scones and lunch provided during their stay. They were very appreciative of the effort made to make them feel welcome. Thanks go to Lisette Kroes and friends who raised a considerable part of the funding for the trip.

Mexico Child Link would like to thank the following organisations who received our project partners: Muckamore Abbey Hospital, Camphill Community Glencraig, Parkview Special School, Mencap, Edgcumbe Training & Resource Centre, Down's Syndrome Association N. I., Downe Residential Project, Ardcora Residential Home, Carraigfoyle Pediatric Support Unit, Kilcregan



Erika Godínez and Queta Palestino

Homes, 1 Shaw's Avenue, Orchardville Bottlesorting Plant, Orchardville Business Centre and Compass Advocacy Group Ltd. Erika and Queta also had lunch in a number of cafés which train and employ people with learning disabilities, including the Camphill Café Hollywood, Stepping Stones, Lisburn, the Edgcumbe, Cregagh Road, and Gaslight Ballymoney. They met the trustees of Mexico Child Link and other supporters of the project work in Mexico. The visitors were very keen to get to know the country and visited among other places, Fermanagh, Dublin,

Sligo, the Antrim Coast, the Bushmills Distillery, Carrickfergus Castle and the Linen Centre in Lisburn.

Presentation of project work

A slide presentation of the work of Mexico Child Link, and Fundación Trébol took place on 21st September in Knockbracken Healthcare Park, to coincide with the visit of Erika and Queta. The theme was the promotion of a more independent way of life for children and young people with learning disability. Jonathan Getty, Colette Mc Ginnity, Erika Godínez and Queta Palestino answered questions following the presentation. This provided an opportunity for individuals and organisations to find out more about our work in Mexico, and to personally meet members of our partner organisation. Over 60 people attended, including interested individuals, representatives and members from organisations working with people with learning disability.

Promotion of the work of Fundación Trébol

Fundación Trébol is becoming recognised in Mexico for its professional, progressive and creative work with children and young people with learning disability. Fundación Trébol has been asked to do presentations of its work at a number of national conferences in the field of learning disability. Ararú a Mexican Learning Disability magazine for parents and professionals has published an article about the residential project and the organic farm. Dr. Patricia Noonan Walsh, Director of the Centre for the Study of Developmental Disabilities at University College Dublin



Erika Godínez and Queta Palestino meet the Compass Advocacy Group in Ballymoney

visited the residential project in August. Three members of our partner organisation attended a national conference on learning disability from 17th -19th November. Queta Palestino and Angélica López (Residential Project Director) each did a presentation on the work of Fundación Trébol. Over 800 people attended from all over Mexico. The conference was opened and addressed by the Mexican President elect, Vicente Fox, who subsequently took office on December 1st. Expectations of progress are currently high in Mexico as the new President is the first to come from outside the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which ruled Mexico uninterrupted for the last 70 years. There is an expectation that the new Government will be less fraudulent than some of the previous administrations, although cynicism regarding politicians remains high. Our Project Director Angélica is giving him the benefit of the doubt for the moment, after having personally shaken his hand at the conference.

Thanks

Thanks are due to the following organisations and individuals that gave support throughout the year: The National Lottery Charities Board, June Getty, Dawson Cunningham Ltd, Prontaprint, Lisburn Road, May Blair, Dean Jack Shearer, The Ulster Bank, Connswater, Russells, The Solicitors, Prof. Roy Mc Conkey, I.T.S., Project VOTE, United Response, GOLD Project, Berni Kelly, V.O.Y.P.I.C., Catherine Valentine, Promote Action, Action Mental Health, St. Ronan's Primary School, Muckamore Abbey Hospital, Alan Hutchinson,

The Orchardville Society, Margaret Anderson, The Paget Trust, Mount Lourdes Grammar School, Stepping Stones, Lisburn, Drumbeg W.I., Water School Choir, Lancs. S.&E. Belfast Community Trust, North and West Belfast Community Trust.

In addition, thanks are due to all our regular donors who support Mexico Child Link through Banker's Order and Give As You Earn and the many people

The Mexico Child Link Trust is a small registered charity based in Belfast. It is governed by a group of seven trustees, professional people with an interest in development work and the plight of abandoned children with learning disabilities (mental handicap.) It supports direct action projects which make a visible and direct improvement in the quality of children's lives.

Mexico Child Link works in partnership with a Mexican organization, Fundación Trébol de Puebla A.C., which we have helped to fund and develop.

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