

Mexico Child Link

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Dear Supporter:

I am writing to you on behalf of Mexico Child Link to give you a project update and ask for your continued support.



Revolution Day Parade in Mexican Schools

The Mexican Revolution was a period of political, social and military conflict which began with the call to arms made on November 20, 1910 by Francisco I. Madero. *Emiliano Zapata* was a leading figure in the Revolution against the dictatorship of *Porfirio Díaz* which led to the death of more than one million people. Díaz was overthrown and new agrarian laws were passed to give land back to the people. November 20th is a public holiday in Mexico and it is celebrated in schools through *desfiles* – public parades. The children dress up as revolutionaries and carry placards about land reform. The parade this year was especially important for Mario, who has been in the Mexico Child Link project for just over three years. He started a new school in *San Juan de los Laureles* in September and for the first time has been well accepted by his teacher and his



peers. His classmates put on a gymnastics display during the parade and Mario (pictured above) was selected for the top of the pyramid as he is very agile, and is also small and light. If possible, we try and integrate the children



from the project into mainstream education rather than special education, but many schools are unable or unwilling to make the effort for pupils with special needs. One of the main problems is that teachers simply fail to turn up for work, or cancel classes for spurious reasons. Many children only attend school three or four days per week for this reason. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has just published a study showing that Mexico is 29th out of 30 member nations in terms of the educational attainment of 15 year olds. Mexico has fallen behind many of its peer Latin American countries in terms of educational achievement.

New project Director

Karina Durana was appointed Director in June



2007. She has been working as a houseparent in our partner organization for over five years and was the senior member of staff at the project site in Tenex-tepec. She is 35 years old and is from Atlixco, the nearest large town

to our project. I asked Karina why she had been motivated to take on the job of Project Director.

“I see it as a personal challenge and I want to see how far I can go working in a project like this. I have been here for a considerable time and I know the children and young people well. I would like to try and make the project more independent in terms of what the farm produces and I would also like to try and create a source

of employment for those who find it difficult to work outside the project. With regard to the general running of the project, I think it is important to emphasize that this work is very important and has to be carried out with professionalism, within a structured format. Although there has been some increase in awareness of the problems faced by people with learning disability, there is still widespread discrimination in the community. There is legislation in Puebla which states that people with disability should travel free on public transport but most bus drivers drive on past when they see a group of disabled people waiting at the bus stop. The local bus drivers in Tenex-tepec insist that the children and young people pay a fare and there is nothing we can do about that”

Lucero’s activities

In last year’s Mexico Child Link newsletter we highlighted Lucero’s 15th birthday, an important milestone in the life of a young person in Mexico. Lucero has now left the special school which she attended in Atlixco. Although she is still too young for a full time job, she has a very full and active life outside of the project where she lives.

From Monday to Wednesday she takes part in a carpentry workshop in Atlixco. On Monday afternoons she participates in a programme of *equinoterapia*, horse-riding for people with a disability. She very much enjoys this and it has helped to boost her self confidence. She also trains with a team of hearing impaired athletes and takes part in national competitions. On Thursdays she has speech therapy in Atlixco and on Fridays she attends a computing course for hearing impaired people in Puebla.

Local elections

Puebla State held municipal elections on 11th November. The *Partido de Acción Nacional* (PAN) lost control of the town hall in Atlixco for the first time in 12 years. Several of the activities which the children access are funded or subsidised by local authorities in Atlixco. We are hoping that these services will not be cut on the arrival of the new administration in February. Rodolfo, Esteban and Marisol were able to vote in the elections. However, this is not due to any enlightened government policy



regarding the rights of people with learning disability. They were taken along to a local office during a campaign to update the electoral register and were able to get their voting ID cards without any questions being asked.

Excursion to Popocatépetl volcano

It is important for the children and young people to have a life outside of the project site in order to widen their horizons. We try and organise excursions and outings in their neighbourhood as often as is practical. They frequently attend local fiestas and similar events.

On November 18th we organised a day out on the slopes of the volcano Popocatépetl. The

volcano, only 15 miles away, is an ever present landmark in the life of the project and has been active on and off since 1994. Lorenzo Cuateco, the farm manager was our driver for the day. It's important to make an early start because of the afternoon heat. Lorenzo arrived at the project site at 6.00am with his eight year old daughter Montse on the back of his bicycle. The children and young people had packed their rucksacks the night before with a generous supply of bread rolls and water bottles. Some of the older ones had been to the volcano before, but it was the first trip for Israel, (6) and his brother Mario. (9) The first stop en route was Atlixco where Lorenzo collected Karina, the Project Director, Khaled,





an ex project volunteer, as well as Colette and myself. The smaller children travelled in the front of the pick-up and the older ones stretched out in the back; some of them sleeping. The sun was just over the horizon as we headed for the lower slopes of the volcano via the villages of *Axocopan* and *San Pedro*. Montse played a version of “I spy” which involved counting stray dogs by the roadside and had counted to 75 by the time we reached *San Pedro*. This road was a dirt track until recently, but has been resurfaced to provide a faster escape route in the event of a volcanic eruption. Every now and then we had to slow down for a flock of sheep or goats scavenging along the roadside in search of greenery. The rains in this part of Mexico stop in October and the countryside is already looking parched. In contrast, the volcano is covered in Pine and Oak forest, and remains green all year round. The first part of the climb is the most difficult, as the lower slopes have been deforested and eroded by the mule-drivers who drag logs



along the track from the dense forest higher up where they fell larger trees. In some places the erosion is so severe that the paths resemble tunnels with ten feet high walls on either side. This area is a national park, where logging is strictly prohibited, but we met a steady stream of mules dragging logs or rough cut planks down the mountainside. Others were making the same journey up; struggling in the volcanic dust of the steep track with a chainsaw and a plastic water container straddling their back. Thankfully there is no access for vehicles in this part of the volcano or the logging problem would be considerably worse. Local people from the village of San Pedro are divided between those who seek to protect the national park and those who wish to exploit it unchecked. The loggers attempted to lynch two park wardens earlier this year and they were rescued from the mob in the nick of time by police. After a three hour climb we came to a spring where the mules were drinking and loggers

were refilling water bottles. The smaller children stopped here with Karina and the rest of us climbed further up where we were able to see trees felled by the loggers. Rodolfo counted tree rings on large Pine trees which were over 100 years old.

By early afternoon we were heading back down the lower slopes to the pick-up, the children collecting bags of acorns and pine cones as a memento of the day out.

Young people in employment

The last year has been stable for the older residents of the project who are in employment. Paty (pictured below) left her job in CINIA last



December but in February, she started a new job within walking distance of the project in a launderette. Although she is paid less than some of the others, she saves more money as she has no travel expenses. The job suits her much better as Paty has problems using public transport on her own and this option is much less risky. Rodolfo and Marisol are still working in CINIA, an organization for people with disability on the outskirts of Puebla.

Esteban is working in San Lorenzo ranch where he has been for the last six years. He carries out heavy work mucking out byres and feeding animals. He has been having some problems with his back and we are monitoring the situation. His job is the centre of his world and he would hate to lose it, as he has made so many friends there. If necessary we will lobby his employer to see if he can be transferred to lighter duties. He has recently received a pay

rise so he is obviously held in high regard. 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.

Escúchame (Listen to me)



This is an activity which allows the children and young people to make an individual life-book, 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 and did further work in November.

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. The project staff have shown a good understanding of how the programme works. The programme is particularly important for Oscar (pictured above) as he has just left the special school which he attended and is finding it hard to

adjust to the extra free time. It is a priority for the project to find him a range of activities commensurate with his level of ability so that he has a full and active life.

Farm

The farm is short of labour at the moment as most of the older residents at the project are working elsewhere. Lorenzo the farm manager looks after a flock of over 30 sheep and the children help to feed and care for them. Nine lambs were born recently and the younger children in particular are very interested in helping out. We have been unable to find work outside the project for Argelio and he has been helping Lorenzo on the farm for the last year. Although he gets bored with the work at times, he has learned to carry out a wide range of tasks such as filling water storage tanks for the 2 houses, harvesting maize, cleaning out stables, maintaining the vegetable garden and feeding alfalfa to the sheep.

Update on young people living outside the project.

Josefa (pictured with Luis) moved back to her home village of Coyay in March 2004. In July



this year, Karina Roldan the new project director organised a trip to Coyay to check up on her welfare and bring her some basic provisions such as rice, flour, and beans. It is a 6-7 hour journey depending upon road conditions. Karina was able to report that

Josefa and her partner are now living in a small house of their own. Previously they had to share with six other family members. They were able to construct the new house with building materials supplied through a Government aid programme. Josefa has an 18 month old child, Luis, and both are doing well. Josefa has work in the village but her partner, also called Luis, is currently working away. When he returns, Karina is planning to bring the family to Atlixco so that the baby can be baptized. As usual in Mexico, it will be an excuse to organise a party and the children and young people at the project are looking forward to seeing Josefa and her child.

Alma is now living in Amozoc, a small town about 10 miles from Puebla. She shares a house with a friend from CINIA where she used to work. She is currently working for a contract cleaning company and has a job cleaning in DIF (Social Services) premises in Puebla. She has had some difficulty holding down a job and managing her finances, but she is getting support and advice from both Social Services and Fundación Trébol.

Website

A new page about Volunteering criteria was added in January 2007.

Accounts, Newsletters and Annual Reports from 1992-2006 were added as PDF files in December 2006. It's interesting to read the first few annual reports to get an idea of how far things have moved on.

Background information on Mexico about Piñatas and the Quinceaños celebration was added in December 2006.

A postcard facility was added in December to allow users to "tell-a-friend" about the site.

The 2007 annual report and accounts were added during August 2007. This newsletter can also be found on the website.

Fundraising Concert

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 Mc Gurgan, Owen Lamont and Bunkbed. A painting by local artist Fra McCrory was auctioned and made £1,500.

The City of London Freemen'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.

Fundraising within Mexico

The main fundraising in Mexico is through contacts with local businesses who donate in kind. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the project vehicle calls at the new Walmart store in Atlixco to receive a donation of fruit, vegetables and bread which are approaching their "sell by" date. I accompanied Lorenzo and Karina on a recent trip to Walmart and we received 30lbs of pears, 20lbs of lemons, carrots and potatoes as well as fruit and a considerable amount of bread. The project has also made contact with a local vegetable supplier who is going to provide a regular donation of vegetables to the project.

Sincere thanks are due to the following people and organizations who have supported our work throughout 2007.

The City of London Freemen's School
The Spalding Family Foundation
Corranny P.S., Roslea
The Paget Trust.
Brackville Parish Church, Coalisland
Bertrand Pritchett Foundation
Edgecombe T.R.C.
Wallace High School, Lisburn
Davis High School Spanish Club
Tettenhall Wood School
Newell Stores Dungannon
Parkview, Lisburn
Bev Pedley
Andrea Goffee
Lockington C.E. Primary School
MKB Russells
June Getty, May Blair and friends
Bob and Pearl McClean
Maurice Dawson
Fra McCrory
Coopers Technology College Interact Club
St Tierney's P.S., Roslea
Roslea Choir

Rory Nellis
St. Vincent de Paul Soc., Roslea

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

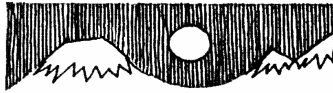
Fundraising appeal.

Last year was relatively stable from a financial point of view, although we were helped by the exchange rate, with Sterling gaining considerably against the Mexican Peso. We 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. Several of the young people with learning disability who are in employment make a contribution towards overheads. Mexico Child Link sends funds to Mexico every three months in order to cover the most significant running costs of the project, mainly staff salaries. We still need to raise our annual income by at least 10% in order to avoid short term cash-flow problems. If you are a current supporter of our work, we would appreciate it if you could let friends, family, or work colleagues know about our project in Mexico. We feel that we achieve a tremendous amount on a relatively low budget and this should appeal to potential donors who increasingly ask questions about how efficiently their donation is spent.

Thanks again for your continued support.

Jonathan Getty
(Co-ordinator, Mexico Child Link Trust)





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.

