

The Mexico Child Link Trust

CHARITY I.R. REFERENCE NUMBER XR18919

ANNUAL REPORT April 2007 – April 2008



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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 a monitoring and evaluation visit to the project in Mexico during November 2007. The visit involved the monitoring of the programmes funded by Mexico Child Link and the continuing development of the project.

AIM

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 7-26. Work continues to develop a small farm based on a system of sustainable agriculture. The Coordinator of Mexico Child Link maintains regular contact by E-mail and SKYPE telephone and also made a project evaluation visit in November 2007.

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 Trust project has been providing accommodation, education and training for children and young people with learning disability since 1995. Eleven residents currently live in two purpose built houses. They range in age from seven to twenty six years. 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 majority of them have lived together for over ten years, and in many ways they have a relationship more like siblings than that of children in a residential home. Minimizing the institutional trappings of a project such as this has been an aim since the very beginning.

The annual report contains the following sections:

- a) **The project residents**
- b) **Project management**
- c) **Promotion of our work**
- d) **Thanks**
- e) **Finance and fundraising**

a) **The project residents**

The two youngest children are brothers aged nine and seven. They will soon complete four years in the project. The older brother started at 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. He has learned to read and write and has integrated well. He found it difficult to adapt to schooling in the past, due to very large class sizes and his teacher's lack of understanding of learning disability. 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. He has been enrolled in dance classes and other activities and 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. The younger brother has made very good progress and will also be attending the same primary school from next September. His speech and language have improved greatly and he is popular and sociable with his peers. He also attends dance classes in Atlixco.

Two teenage boys aged sixteen and seventeen have a greater level of disability than their peers. They are long term residents of the project having arrived in 1996 and 1997. Enquiries had been made with regard to a possible transfer to another project. However, it has been decided that they are to remain for the moment as a suitable alternative has not been found. Karina Durana the project director has had the older boy evaluated by a doctor from DIF (Social Services) *Casa de Angeles* who has suggested that many of his problems are behavioural rather than medical and are typical of someone with his level of disability. The current focus is on attending their needs within the project and also trying to find appropriate activities for them outside. They attend a range of activities in Atlixco provided by *Centro de Rehabilitación Infantil* (CRI) – an organization which provides rehabilitation and therapies for children.

A more able seventeen old boy attends a local school in *San Juan de los Laureles* and will be finishing in June 2008. He was more unsettled at school last year, mainly due to a change of teacher who did not show as much interest in him. He will be taking a course this summer which includes workshops on food preserving, carpentry and computing.

A sixteen year old girl who is hearing impaired has now left the special school which she was attending 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.

Two young people aged twenty two and twenty three have been given jobs in gardening and ground maintenance through CINIA, an organization which provides opportunities for people with disabilities. One has been selected as a team leader and gets extra pay for the responsibility. He is sent to work in the grounds of different companies in the city of Puebla and can operate a range of gardening equipment such as lawnmowers and trimmers. He has learned how to use different bus routes and can travel freely around between different places of work. He is confident and has complained directly to his employer when he feels that he has been given too much to do. This can happen as he is one of the more able employees of the company.

They have the opportunity to earn a living and very much appreciate the chance to socialize with people of similar age and interests. The young woman aged twenty three has a boyfriend who also works in CINIA. Staff are working with her with regard to relationships. Her boyfriend's mother is very keen for them to get married and been quite demanding and challenging to deal with. It has been difficult for her to understand the possible complications for the young woman concerned but fortunately the situation has been resolved in conjunction with DIF. Fundación Trébol has made it clear that it will advocate strongly with regard to decisions which affect young people in their care. Her boyfriend has visited the project where she lives a number of times and the other children and young people are getting to know him.

A twenty five year old woman is working in a launderette near to the project site. Her place of work is within walking distance. Although she earns less than some of the others, she saves more money as she has no travel expenses. The job suits her much better as she has problems using public transport without supervision and this option carries fewer risks.

The oldest resident aged twenty six continues his long term employment as a farm worker in San Lorenzo Ranch. 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 is obviously held in high regard. He is very interested in looking after fruit trees and he has planted lemon trees, mandarins and avocados on the project site. We are still trying to raise funding to construct a small house on our project site for him and another of the residents. Both of them have expressed a desire to live more independently and would be well capable of this with a little 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.

The twenty four year old who would share the house with him does not have a job outside the project at the moment and he helps the farm manager during the day. He has expressed through his *Escúchame* (Listen to me) lifebook that he would like to work outside the project. We are actively looking for viable employment options for him.

A twenty six year old woman who lived in the project for nine years returned to her home village of Coyay four years ago where she lives with her partner. Coyay is an Indian Totonac village and most of the residents speak little or no Spanish. She has a two year old child and a baby of 3 months both of whom are doing well. She has work in the village but her partner is currently working away. The project provides a degree of support for her in her community through the supply of basic provisions. In July 2007 the project director organised a visit to her village 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. The director was able to report that she and her partner now have 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.

Another woman aged twenty three is living in a municipal hostel in Puebla. She is no longer under the jurisdiction of either Social Services or partner organization Fundación Trébol although we keep in touch and give support where possible. She has employment working at a car wash.

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.

b) Project management

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. She knows the children and young people very well and has a great personal commitment to the project. She has managed to keep a stable staff team throughout the year with very few changes, which has benefitted the residents. She speaks very highly of the current staff group and is impressed by the effort they have made.

Project evaluation visit

Jonathan Getty carried out a Project evaluation visit between 5th November and 7th December 2007.

The Project Director Karina Durana was given some training in IT, fundraising, and use of the *Escúchame* (Listen to me) programme. An evaluation document titled "Observations and Recommendations" was left with her. This will be reviewed before the next project visit. Good progress has been made with the implementation of the "*Escúchame*" programme. The administration of the project has improved since the previous visit, both in the office and at the project site in Tenex-tepec.

Social Life

As well as formal programmes, Mexico Child Link makes a big effort to ensure that the children and young people can participate in local community and cultural events. Several of the older residents often go to see a film at the local cinema on a Sunday afternoon. They often get invitations to birthday parties or a local *fiesta*.

Cluni

This is a new legal requirement for charities and non profit organizations in Mexico. Charities will be required to be listed on a central database and will be obliged to submit annual reports and a summary financial statement to the relevant government dept. every year. Fundación Trébol is currently undertaking the necessary steps. This will make charitable organizations more accountable and will also be a prerequisite for applying for any state or local government funding within Mexico. It will also enable participating organizations to take part in policy discussions.

Childhope package

Mexico Child link was in contact with Childhope, a UK based international NGO which works to strengthen the capacity of partner NGOs to defend and promote the rights of marginalised children and young people. We have received a copy of Childhope's "*Child Protection Policy and Procedures toolkit*." We plan to adapt aspects of the document with our existing policies and procedures in order to create a more child safe organisation. Childhope has plans to produce a copy of the same document in Spanish which would greatly cut down on translation time.

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. Two of the young people are still working there. They work long hours and are sometimes asked to work overtime which can be very demanding for them.

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.

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.

Farm

The farm is still being managed by Lorenzo Cuateco, a long term employee of Fundación Trébol. He is currently undertaking a course in compost production using composting worms. The farm is short of labour at the moment as most of the older residents at the project are working elsewhere. Lorenzo looks after a flock of over 30 sheep and the children help to feed and care for them. The younger children in particular are very interested in helping out with the lambs. 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. The farm also grows a wide range of crops such as maize and alfalfa and a large vegetable garden is maintained.

c) Promotion of our work

Newsletter

A Newsletter was posted to over 500 donors and supporters in mid December 2007. This elicited a significant number of donations, as well as 3 new monthly donors. The newsletter is also available online via the website.

Website

The website continues to generate useful contacts such as people interested in carrying out fundraising activities or offering their services as a volunteer. A project resident celebrated her 15th birthday in September 2006 and we put up a page on our website explaining the Mexican traditions associated with the Quinceañeros. This was seen by Adam Taub, a US film maker who sent the project a DVD of his documentary on Quinceañeras which records the preparations leading up to a girl's 15th birthday in Mexico City. We are grateful for his kind thought.

Courses attended

Our partner organization actively participates in any courses related to childcare, learning disability or fundraising which become available.

d) Thanks

We 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 in support of our work.

The City of London Freeman's School,
Teahouse group
Corranny P.S., Roslea
Brackville Parish Church, Coalisland
Edgecombe TRC
Adam Taub
Newell Stores Dungannon
Richill Supervalu
June Getty, May Blair and friends
Maurice Dawson
Roslea Choir
Estate of Molly Smyth
Davis High School, CA.
Bev Pedley

Tettenhall Wood School
Brackville Parish Church
The Paget Trust.
Bertrand Pritchett Trust Fund
Wallace High School, Lisburn
Pat Blake
Willy Brown
MKB Russells
Bob and Pearl McClean
St. Vincent de Paul Soc., Roslea
St Tierney's P.S., Roslea
Ulster Bank Charity Fund
Lockington C.E. Primary School
Coopers Tech. College, Interact Club

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

e) Finance and fundraising

Last year was excellent from a financial point of view, mainly due to a single donation of 50,000 Euro which we received in February 2008. Several of the young people with learning disability who are in employment make a contribution towards overheads.

Like many small charities, we find it difficult to raise funds but fortunately we have been able to maintain our core programmes to date. Over £78,000 was raised last year.

Mexico Child Link Trust sends quarterly funding to Mexico on consideration of a cash flow estimate supplied by our project partners and last year we granted over £42,000. Mexico Child link can receive tax deductible donations from the US through CAFAmerica. Last year we received donations totaling US \$1012

Walmart/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, Walmart and Superama.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

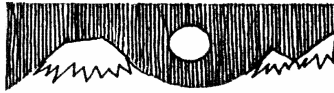
INCOME & EXPENDITURE 2007-2008

(12 months to 5th April 2008)

All values are in £ Sterling

INCOME	£
Street Collections	14,273
Donations	42,129
Website donations	636
Give as you Earn	1,282
Banker's Order	11,677
Schools	2,350
Grant Giving Trust	600
Gift Aid	3,191
US Donations	463
Church groups	200
Fundraising	1,240
Bank Interest Received	98
Total	78,139
EXPENDITURE	£
Salaries	12,082
Grant to Mexico	42,417
Pension scheme	960
Printing, postage & stationery	1,103
Telephone	282
Expenses incurred abroad	1,744
Audit	140
Bank interest and charges	8
Sundry expenses (petty cash)	570
Depreciation	156
Total	59,462
Funds held as of April 5th 2008	29,996

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.

