

The Mexico Child Link Trust

CHARITY I.R. REFERENCE NUMBER XR18919

ANNUAL REPORT April 2008 – April 2009



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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 8-27. 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 January-February 2009.

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.



Some of the children and young people on a day trip to the volcano Popocatepetl

Eleven residents currently live in two purpose built houses. They range in age from eight to twenty seven years. 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 well over ten years, and in many ways they have a relationship more like siblings than that of children in a residential home. Minimizing the

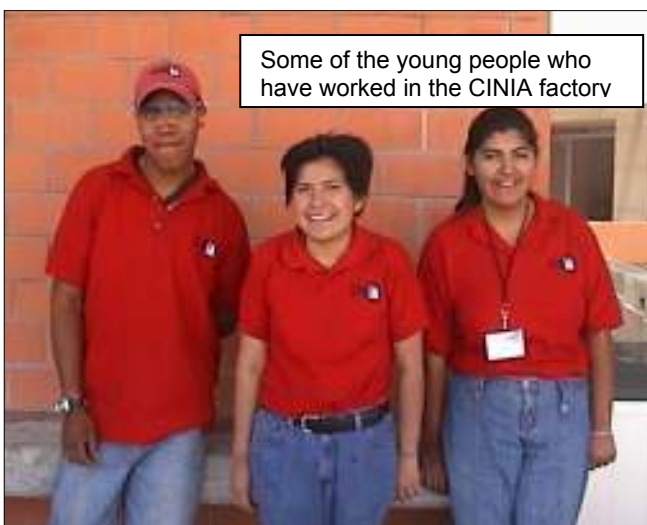
institutional trappings of a project such as this has been an aim since the very beginning.

The annual report contains the following sections:

- a) **Employment**
- b) **Growth and development of our partner organization**
- c) **Project evaluation visit**
- d) **Other news**
- e) **Thanks**
- f) **Finance and fundraising**

a) **Employment**

One of the continuing success stories of our project had been the ability of some of the young people in the project to stay in paid employment. This is due to a long term investment in independence and skills training, coupled with a great effort and enthusiasm shown by the residents themselves. We have been consistently surprised by their achievements. Some of those who were thought unable to use public transport on their own are now confident travellers. One young woman aged 23 travels 20 miles on her own to her place of work every day and this involves a change of bus as well. Training someone to use public transport can take years and involves a step by step approach coupled with a risk management strategy as the young person grows in confidence. An eighteen year old has just started his first part time job at a



Some of the young people who have worked in the CINIA factory

car wash. In Atlixco and he travels to and from his work unaided. The oldest resident aged 27 walks a mile and a half to the ranch where he works every day. He has many friends who he stops and chats with en route and the local people know him well. There can occasionally be problems with co-workers trying to exploit a worker with learning disability, especially one who is fit and able,

with a disposition to work. The independence training worker has had to liaise with employers on occasion to stop some employees letting our resident do their work for them. A person with learning disability with a poor concept of time and money can also be vulnerable to working extra hours or being exploited economically. Fortunately we have forged a very good relationship with employers and when problems have arisen they have been dealt with. The alternative would be to deny the young people the opportunity to be a part of the workforce and restrict their independence and that is not what they want. The more able project residents want a life like any young person with the risks and freedoms associated with that.



Project Director Karina Durana

b) Growth and development of our partner organization

Mexico Child Link was instrumental in helping to establish our partner organization, Fundación Trébol de Puebla, in 1993. It was set up as a charitable foundation within Mexican law and has tax deductible status. Like the project residents themselves, as an organization Trébol has taken time to find its feet and grow in confidence. For several years now it has been functioning effectively, taking its own routine decisions independently of Mexico Child Link. It took time for this to develop as in the early years Trébol lacked confidence and always looked to Mexico Child link employees for guidance on even the simplest decisions. The relationship has now changed, but is still very close. The project director takes the day to day decisions and reports periodically to Mexico Child Link via a standard format. Advice can still be sought at any time if there is a crisis or a difficult decision to take. The role of Mexico Child Link has become more that of external assessor and policy advisor to our partners. Trébol had a staff team of nine

and a management committee with several very active and dedicated members. It has been pleasing to see how they deal with the day to day problems associated with Mexican bureaucracy, paperwork, banking and audits. Trébol currently has a very good director, Karina Durana, and she has been effective in training and holding together a dedicated staff team as well as keeping the project moving forward. There were minimal changes, and one staff member who left was replaced by another who spent two years working for Trébol in a previous spell of employment. Fundación Trébol continues to forge links with donors and local groups and had received considerable help from a membership group of local NGOs and charities known as RIA, which organizes training courses and other events for local organizations. A contact in RIA put Trébol in touch with a group known as Mex17. This is made up of about 10 young professionals who sponsor a project and make a long term commitment. During the recent evaluation visit Trébol received 2 new gas boilers, a new gas cooker, roof repairs, a new stable roof, ten mattresses, a stud ram and various other items via this group which could be a very useful long term support.

c) Project evaluation visit

Jonathan Getty carried out a Project evaluation visit between 30th December 2008 and 18th February 2009.

He participated in staff meetings and a meeting of the management committee and also visited local projects and employers such as CINIA where Trébol has young people in employment.

The Project Director Karina Durana was given some training in IT, fundraising, and use of the *Escúchame* (Listen to me) programme. A considerable amount of time was spent at the project site talking to staff and residents and getting a feel for the general atmosphere.

On each evaluation, a document entitled "Observations and Recommendations" is left with the project director and the management committee. This is reviewed at the subsequent project visit. Most of the recommendations from the previous evaluation were found to have been implemented. The children and young people living in the project were in good form and very significant progress had been made in some cases.

A ten year old boy who had been failing at school has now learned to read and write since he changed school two years ago.

Two eighteen year olds who we had considered moving to a project more able to cater for their level of disability have settled down a lot socially and emotionally and now seem to be very

happy where they are. One of the recommendations from the previous evaluation visit pointed out the need to find them more stimulating and varied activities and routines to fill the vacuum left after they left special school. This had been implemented and the benefit to them was apparent. They have a speech therapy class one day a week, as well as attending courses run by DIF (Social Services) in Puebla. The courses include occupational therapy, dance therapy and some use of computers. The trip into Puebla, a city of 2 million about 25 miles from the project site, is very popular and they can pick out landmarks and places of interest en route.

A recommendation was made with regard to one eighteen year old who is a good reader but who has serious problems with regard to number concept. This is likely to restrict his employment opportunities unless he can improve. He needs to be given an opportunity to participate in practical activities involving weighing, counting and estimating. He was given the responsibility of weighing and recording the weekly fruit and vegetable donation from the local Walmart. This killed two birds with one stone as the treasurer had insisted that accurate records of all donations in kind should be kept.

Staff are formally supervised by the project director on a regular basis and the project director receives weekly supervision by a member of the management committee. A weekly staff meeting takes place, but it was found that night staff and some others were not attending due to rota arrangements. It was recommended that a general meeting involving all the staff be held at least every two months. Night staff were also found to be receiving insufficient supervision. Recommendations were made regarding routines of the night staff and the weekly children and young people's meetings which they chair.

The houses and grounds were found to be clean and tidy and the children and young people had plenty of new clothes and were taking pride in their appearance.

Finance and expenditure was checked and found to be without major problems. Four of the young people who are in employment had accumulated some savings in personal bank accounts. Some recommendations were left regarding record keeping and monitoring of petty cash expenditure. Administration in general was much improved and the overall impression of the project was very positive.

d) Other news

Photo policy guidelines

Mexico Child hope has developed a policy with regard to the use of images and photographs of people with learning disability on the website and other publications. The policy is based on similar policies used by Mencap, Childhope and Glenraig. Some of the main points are:

- Make sure that people are happy to show their images to the public
- When someone is not able to consent to the use of their images we need to involve their carers, and advocates in the decision. A senior staff member will authorize the use of photographs in the case of those unable to give informed consent.
- An appropriate level of explanation should be given to the person in the photograph regarding its use.
- Photographs and videos that are going to be shown to the general public should always portray the person in a positive and respectful way.
- The person in the photograph should receive a copy of it.
- The consent form is valid for five years from the date it is signed.
- Only appropriate images will be used.

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. Additional training was given and it was agreed that profiles should be updated every 6-12 months. It is a very useful tool for gaining an insight into the likes, dislikes and perspective of one of the project residents.

Website

The website continues to generate useful contacts such as people interested in carrying out fundraising activities or offering their services as a volunteer. It is regularly updated with the latest news, documents and photographs. It has an archive of past annual reports and newsletters as well as a lot of general information about the project. There is a link to the Charities Aid Foundation online donation portal where donors can give support to Mexico Child Link.

Farm



The farm is still being managed by Lorenzo Cuateco who is a long term employee of Fundación Trébol. The farm grows a wide range of crops such as maize and alfalfa and a large vegetable garden is maintained. The children and young people help to look after a flock of 40 sheep.

Newsletter

A Newsletter was posted to over 500 donors and supporters in December 2008

The newsletter is also available online via the website.

Walmart Atlixco

Our partner organization Fundación Trébol continues to receive a donation of fruit and vegetables twice weekly from the local Walmart in Atlixco.

e) 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 Freemen's School
Corranny P.S., Roslea
Paul Vander Schalie Memorial Fund
Edgecombe TRC
Newell Stores Dungannon
MKB Russells
June Getty, May Blair and friends
Maurice Dawson
Roslea Choir
Estate of Molly Smyth
Moore Trust
Loughrey College

Thomas & Pedro Hughes
The Paget Trust.
Bertrand Pritchett Trust Fund
Wallace High School, Lisburn
Willy Brown
Cookstown High School
Bob and Pearl McClean
St. Vincent de Paul Soc., Roslea
St Tierney's P.S., Roslea
Ulster Bank Charity Fund
Fitzroy Presbyterian Church
Stewarts Magherafelt

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

f) Finance and fundraising

Last year was another good one from a financial point of view, helped by a legacy of £15,287 from the estate of the late Molly Smyth. June Getty, May Blair and friends raised nearly £9,000 organizing street collections for which we are very grateful. In Mexico, several of the young people with learning disability who are in employment make a contribution towards overheads and the project also received a lot of donations in kind such as clothing, fruit and vegetables.

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 £53,000 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 just under £30,000.

Mexico Child Link received a donation of \$1000 from the Paul Vander Schalie Memorial Fund which was used to buy equipment for the farm such as wheelbarrows, chicken wire and tools for the farm. The Paget Trust continued its long term support with a grant of £1000.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

INCOME & EXPENDITURE 2008-2009

(12 months to 5th April 2009)

All values are in £ Sterling

Incoming Resources

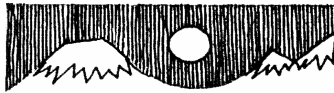
Street collections	8,964
Donations	6,052
Website Donations	1,072
Give as you earn	1,217
Bankers order	12,100
Schools	1,245
Grant Making Trust	2,117
Gift Aid	3,549
US Donations	284
Fundraising	983
Legacy	15,287
Bank Interest Received	510
Total Incoming Resources	53,380

Charitable Expenditure

Salaries	11,166
Grant to Mexico	28,930
Pension scheme	960
Printing, postage and stationery	1,006
Telephone	296
Expenses incurred abroad	3,241
Audit	140
Depreciation	122
Total Charitable Expenditure	(45,861)

Funds held as of April 5th 2008 (37,216)

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.