

## NORWICH CITY COUNCIL

TWINNING COMMITTEE – 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2010.

### REPORT OF NORFOLK AND NORWICH – EL VIEJO FRIENDSHIP LINK

#### 1. LINK'S 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY – 2011.

Arrangements are well in hand for the celebrations in El Viejo, as reported at the last meeting. Activities will be carried out by children from all of the scholarship project schools, both in their own communities and in the City of El Viejo itself.

The Link will send a small delegation to El Viejo in March 2011 to further consolidate the twinning. We have three members of the delegation at present and are looking for a fourth. Members of the delegation will have to make a substantial contribution towards the cost and we anticipate making an application for assistance to this committee. We are also looking at ways to promote the Link here, in its home city. In view of our involvement in children's education in Nicaragua we are investigating involvement from local schools here in some way.

#### 2. SCHOOL GARDEN PROJECT

The school garden project which was piloted in one of the schools last year has now been launched in the other six schools. The Link has provided cash grants for the purchase of tools and seeds and, despite the problems caused by heavier than usual rainfall (if it isn't drought, its floods!) the prospects are looking good.

Crops from the gardens will supplement the basic meals already provided and any surplus will be sold in the local market to provide funds for the schools. The Link is looking to couple this practical activity with teaching about the environment.

#### 3. COMPUTERS FOR SCHOLARSHIP SCHOOLS

Following lengthy discussions in our committee, the Link did agree last year to provide each of our schools with a PC. It was argued that despite possible problems of security and protection from damage, particularly by dust, the schools should be given the opportunity to have at least minimal experience in the use of computer technology for educational purposes. This would make up in some small measure for the lack of sufficient traditional teaching material. It would also help the teachers to explore far wider facilities and material at present denied to them.

One of the conditions attached to the decision was that at least basic training in using computers should be undertaken by the teachers. The local council agreed to organise a training programme and two teachers from each school now attend a training course for four hours each Friday afternoon. The course will last six months and cover everything they need to know about how to get the best out of the equipment. From reports, the teachers are very enthusiastic and are anxious to get their computers and to start using them in their schools. No doubt we shall also be asked to help to provide printers and internet access as well.

One computer in a school may be seen as being very minimal compared to the extremely sophisticated installations now common in schools in this country. However, if they can use the internet to expand their knowledge and expertise, and open the eyes of their pupils to what is possible, it will be a step, albeit a small one, to improving the standard of education in a very deprived part of the world.

#### 4. VISIT TO EL VIEJO BY LINK MEMBER

One of our members, a retired teacher, will make a personal visit to Nicaragua in November and has agreed to spend a few days in El Viejo. She will meet our representative and is planning to visit the scholarship schools. She will observe the activities of the schools from her professional perspective and report her findings and conclusions to the Link on her return. Arrangements have been made for her to meet with the local Mayor and the Municipal Council, and the local representative of the Ministry of Education.

#### 5. REGISTRATION AS A CHARITY.

The Link has agreed to apply to the Charity Commission for registration as a charity. We have received legal advice about the application and necessary amendments to our constitution have been agreed.

Registration will help in two ways; it will give additional legitimacy to our activities in the public's eyes, and it will also enable the Link to take advantage of the 'Gift Aid' provisions which will help our fundraising.

#### 6. FLOODING IN EL VIEJO

Since preparing our report I have received alarming information about serious flooding affecting northern Nicaragua, including El Viejo. The area has been affected by much heavier than normal rainfall during the current rainy season, a result of the El Niña phenomenon which is the opposite of the drought conditions caused by El Niño.

Reports say that many homes have been affected and all schools are closed, many of them being used as refuges from the floods.

Information is sketchy at the time of writing and I have asked our representative to seek a report of the situation from the local Mayor but I have no doubt that he is heavily engaged in dealing with the problem. If I hear more before I leave Norwich on 5th October I will send a supplementary report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ralph Gayton', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Ralph Gayton  
Link Secretary.