

# Norfolk & Norwich - El Viejo Friendship Link

*Registered Charity No 11567878*



## ANNUAL REPORT 2016

Submitted to the Annual General Meeting 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017



Dilapidated state of latrines at Rosario  
Mayorga School (See report Para 3)

Chairperson

**David Trevanion**

Secretary

**Ralph Gayton**

Treasurer

**Susan Thomas**

# NORFOLK AND NORWICH – EL VIEJO FRIENDSHIP LINK

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

28<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2017

## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

### 1. Meetings and membership

Your Committee met on eight occasions during the year since the 2016 AGM.

Attendances at the meetings were;

Anthony Bailey	4
Brenda Gayton	8
Ralph Gayton	8
Dr. Rhys Jenkins	7
Chris King	5
Cllr David Raby	5
Cllr. Vaughan Thomas	2
Cllr Vivien Thomas	2
Sue Thomas	7
David Trevanion	6

Membership amounted to 34 individual members and 4 organisations.

The Committee thanks all the individual members of the Link, and the four organisation members, for their continued support of our activity in providing access to education of children from some of the poorest families in our twin city. The importance of this support was demonstrated recently in written expressions of gratitude from each of the nine schools. (Note; we would like to circulate more of this sort of information we receive from El Viejo to our members but, unfortunately, we don't have the resources to provide reliable translation.)

We do need to try to increase our membership base to enable us to continue our activity in El Viejo. For example there is a Special School for handicapped children which we have supported in the past. Your committee will continue to encourage new members to join us.

Finally, in this section, we were delighted to welcome City Councillor David Raby into membership of the Committee. Cllr Raby represents the Green Party and he does have some personal experience of Latin America.

### 2. Carmela Hernandez

Carmela Hernandez has continued her role as our representative in El Viejo and has overseen the changes in funding the scholarship scheme as reported to the 2016 AGM. The changes, designed to save Link funds, were agreed by the Teachers' Committee in El Viejo. They were principally concerned with ceasing to provide school uniforms and to introduce changes in the contents of the schoolbags to reflect changes in students' educational requirements as they progress through the curriculum, as suggested by the teachers.

In April Carmela took time out to visit her daughter who lives in Iceland. Quite a change from the Nicaraguan climate! She also combined that trip with a visit to friends in Spain.

Carmela did suffer from some health problems during the year, and her mother also had a period of health issues. However, both now appear to have recovered. We are grateful to Carmela for her enthusiastic approach to the demands of the scholarship project.

### **3. School Latrines.**

Your Committee has become increasingly concerned and alarmed since 2015 about the poor state of latrines at the schools in the scholarship programme. Approaches have been made to the Alcaldia about our fears but, to date, we have not had any response to our concerns

In March 2016, Carmela once again drew the Committee's attention to the poor state of the latrines at the schools. The Committee grew even more concerned by Carmela's report and agreed to further investigate how the situation might be improved.

It became clear during the year that, astonishingly, it seems there is no one system, or organisation, and no civic or government agency which provides a clear and consistent approach to this problem.

An approach to the Nicaraguan Embassy in London for information about where responsibility for providing and maintaining school latrines failed to elicit any information about the problem.



The Dutch Group, teachers and pupils, at the completion of the new latrine at the El Recreo School

The matter gained added impetus through Carmela's report to the Committee in November when she reported on a visit by a small Dutch Group to the school at El Recreo, one of our scholarship schools, where the latrine was in such a poor condition that the group paid for a replacement (see photo) also see photo on the title page of this report of latrines at the Rosario Mayorga school. The group also commented on the threats to health and hygiene, as well as possible moral problems for the girl pupils, which the Link had previously brought to the attention of the local council. The Dutch group also stressed that there was a need for a minimum of two latrines at each school, one for boys and one for girls.

The situation appears to be that no-one at municipal, Regional, or indeed, Government, level seem to have any responsibility for providing or maintaining proper healthy and efficient latrines at schools.

This topic has continued to be considered by the Committee during 2016 when our concerns about the unsanitary conditions of school latrines were referred to the Alcaldia and information sought from other twin town groups but without securing any remedy or progress.

On this occasion the Committee decided that it was necessary to make a formal approach to the authorities in El Viejo and, also to the Nicaraguan Government about this unacceptable situation and as a start, and in order to get consistent information across our nine schools, the Committee designed a questionnaire seeking detailed information about the situation at each of our schools, to be

completed by the teachers, as a basis for an informed and researched approach to the authorities in Nicaragua about this important health and moral issue. The completed questionnaires are awaited and should be returned shortly following the start of the new school year.

#### **4. The Scholarship Project.**

The Scholarship Project, the Link's flagship project since its inception some eleven years ago, was the subject of much discussion during the year arising from rising costs and pressure on Link funds.

A special 'all member meeting' took place in September 2015 to discuss the future of the scholarship project and 2016 saw the cessation of the provision of school uniforms and changes in the contents of the schoolbags provided to each scholarship pupil. These changes were introduced following discussions with the Teachers Committee where agreement was reached for a total budget of US\$ 3000.00 for 200 schoolbags with three elements.

First, a standard set of basic contents for all 200 pupils. (Cost US\$ 1191.00)

Second, a sum of US\$ 2 00 per scholarship pupil for the schools to use at their discretion. (cost US\$ 400.00)

Third, the balance of the total amount of US\$ 3,000.00 – (US\$ 1409.00) but - to be available to the Teachers' Committee to purchase additional items for the schoolbags at their discretion but particularly for more specialised non consumable items needed for students in grades 4 to 6 .

This arrangement appears to have operated very successfully during 2016. It has benefits to the schools because it permits some necessary flexibility in the content of the schoolbags to reflect changing demands as pupils' progress through the grades. It also allows the Link to control its budget more effectively.

At the end of the School Year in December, the Link received details of the performance of all 200 scholarship pupils during 2016 from grades one to six across all subjects – mathematics, language and literature, knowledge of my world, natural sciences, social studies, coexistence and citizenship, cultural and artistic expression, technical and vocational orientation (Grade 6 only). The reports also included a score on students conduct, generally 'good' or 'very good'.

The Committee also decided to seek information from the schools about the future of the grade 6 students who had now completed their primary education. There is only one secondary school in El Viejo, the Instituto, in the city of El Viejo itself which is in the far south of the municipality. Daily access to this school would be very difficult for children from the rural settlements where six of the scholarship schools are located.

The Scholarship Project is administered by a committee of teachers comprised of two teachers from each of the schools, a representative of the local council, the local representative of the Ministry of Education and the Link Representative, Carmela Hernandez, who acts as Chair of the Committee. The Committee meets every two months and their meetings are reported as part of Carmela's reports to our committee.

The Committee agreed, as usual, to provide the members of the Teachers' Committee with a 'Canasta Basica', the national standard basic basket of foodstuffs and household goods, in recognition of their work on the Committee.

The Committee also agreed to provide framed copies of the graduation certificate to all the successful scholarship project graduates.

## **5. Guest Speaker – Jamie-Louise Morrison – 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2016.**

Ms Jamie Lee-Morrison from Ipswich attended the Link Executive meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2016 to speak to members about a project she had been involved in organised by a UK Charity called 'Progressio'. She was one of six UK volunteers involved in a small project in a small village called Parcilla, a small agricultural community in northern Nicaragua near the town of Esteli. The team was partnered by seven volunteers from the local community. The community was very isolated. There were no cars and agriculture was the main occupation. The village had a small primary school.

The main purpose of the project was to work with 17 families to build eco-stoves and provide information and education on climate change. A Nicaragua Charity provided the materials for constructing the eco-stoves – breeze blocks, red bricks, cement and iron plates. The stoves provided a safer and healthier way of cooking food. Instead of open fires within the homes the eco-stoves had a chimney to take smoke away from the houses. The stoves contained the heat and were also more fuel efficient and saved wood. Although they only provided a small number of the stoves, Jamie said that the locals could carry on with the project subject to getting the materials.

The team also introduced a system of water filters for 26 families because the ground water was contaminated with arsenic from gold mining in the area. The filters contained rusty nails which absorbed the arsenic. They also taught the villagers to deal with rubbish, which is a serious problem in rural Nicaragua, by using sacks and they managed to get a truck into the village from a nearby community to take the rubbish away. The group also gave talks on deforestation.

The team lived with families in the community. Jamie said that it was a simple life which she enjoyed but water supply was unreliable.

The project was organised by the UK Charity Progresio and Jamie had raised £800 to help with the costs of the visit. Unfortunately, the British Government doesn't want to continue to work in Central America and it was likely that Progresio would be closing down. She also said that young people in Nicaragua tended to leave the country and go to Costa Rica and the US.

## **6. Fund Raising Activities.**

### **(a) Virgin Lounge Event 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2016.**

This event was organised by Link Treasurer Sue Thomas with the Virgin Money Lounge in Davey Place. It was in the form of a musical evening organised by the Link Treasurer and Trustee Tony Bailey with the help of staff at the Lounge. The performers were ukulele duo 'Himasaz' consisting of Link member Tony Bailey and friend. They also provided ukulele lessons during the evening that attracted several participants from the audience.

Refreshments were provided, including a welcome drink on arrival. About 50 people attended the event which raised £231.14 for Link funds.

### **(b) Link Bike Ride**

The long standing Link Bike Ride organised by Link member Preston Thomas took place on 24<sup>th</sup> September starting from the Earlham Park Cafe. There were three routes – 1 to Intwood, Carleton Rode to the Bird in Hand Pub, Wreningham – 7.5 miles. 2, Back to Earlham Park, reverse of route 1 – 15 miles. 3. taking in Tharston, Wacton, and Hethel returning to Earlham Park via Cringleford -. 30 miles

The hardy cyclists consisted of Link Chair David Trevanion, Rhys and Sam Jenkins, Simon Nobbs, Preston Thomas and Cllr Richard Bearman. Between them they raised the magnificent sum of £1,568.03.

The opportunity was taken to join Virgin Money Giving which allowed widespread participation in sponsorship for the participants. The Virgin Lounge undertook a raffle for the Link which offset the cost of joining the electronic fund raising scheme.

(c) A quiz night, a school event and a generous donation from a performance by the Worstead Choir added to our funds thanks to Committee member Tony Bailey

## **7. Link Member Michael MacNeil**

Long Standing Link member Michael MacNeil joined the Link many years ago following a visit to Nicaragua following the Sandinista revolution. Although he now works and lives in London he is taking a 12 month sabbatical to take his family around the world. His first stop is in Leon in Nicaragua, about 25 miles from El Viejo and he has offered to meet up with our representative, Carmela Hernandez, who also lives in Leon, to arrange a visit to El Viejo on our behalf and report back with his impressions and possible suggestions.

We welcome Michael's volunteering to give his impressions of the scholarship project at work and look forward to his comments as well as what he has to say about his family's experience of life in Nicaragua.

## **8. Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign.**

The Link continues its affiliation to the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign which is the national voluntary organisation linked with Nicaragua. Other Town Twinnings and solidarity links with Nicaragua are; Bristol Link with Nicaragua (twinned with Puerto Morazan, the next door municipality to El Viejo), Islington Managua Friendship Association, Leicester - Masaya Link, Maria Zunilda Perez Brigade (Linked with Achuapa), Nicaragua Education, Culture and Arts Trust (Linked with Leon), Oxford Leon Association, Reading – San Francisco Libre Association, The Santa Rosa Fund (Twinned with the Santa Rosa School in Managua), Swindon Ocotil Link, Sheffield Esteli Society, There is also the Wales Nicaragua Solidarity Group.

NSC organises an annual meeting with all twinning and solidarity groups. This year the meeting took place in London on 11<sup>th</sup> February. Unfortunately, our Secretary was unable to attend due to the weekend rail travel problems between Norwich and London

Attached to this report is a message from HM Ambassador to Nicaragua to the NSC Twin Towns meeting setting out his views of the value and importance of the work of the British twin towns activity in Nicaragua.

The Campaign does publish a magazine four times a year about the political situation in Nicaragua and major development issues such as the proposed new shipping canal between the Atlantic and

Pacific oceans. The magazine also carries news about the town twinnings and other solidarity organisations.

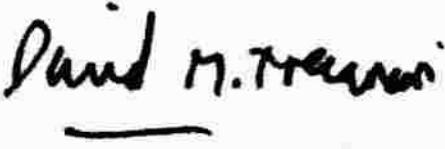
## **9. Acknowledgements.**

As always in a voluntary organisation such as the Link, many people are involved in all sorts of ways and it is right and proper that their contribution should be recognised and acknowledged. Most important is the continued support of our own small band of members. They are the lifeblood of the whole organisation. Without their support, we could achieve nothing. We are always ready and anxious to welcome new members to boost our activity.

We particularly thank the members of our Executive Committee for their time and enthusiasm for turning up and participating in dealing with the business of the Link.

Our thanks also go to the teachers at the Scholarship Schools in El Viejo, and the staff at the Alcaldia and everyone else who has any dealings with our project under the leadership of our representative Carmela Hernandez.

Finally, we thank the Norwich City Council for the facilities we enjoy for our meetings at City Hall and the printing services we receive. We couple that with our gratitude for the supper we receive from the Council's Twinning Officer Andy Emms, and we particularly give him our thanks and best wishes on his retirement in February. Our thanks also go to the Twinning Committee officer, Andy Futter.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David M. Treanor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Chairperson

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph Corke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Secretary.

**Message from His Excellency Ross Denny, Ambassador to Nicaragua  
to attendees at the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Twin Towns Meeting  
11 February 2017**

Good day everyone!

I am pleased to be able to address you today, albeit by proxy, at your annual UK-Nicaragua Twin Towns meeting.

I am struck by the fact that the town twinning movement has endured so many decades. What began as a powerful symbol of unity, promoting deeper understanding of the social, cultural and political values espoused by very dissimilar communities, has grown into a movement, managed largely by volunteers like you, that emphasises the development of links that address more pressing issues like sustainable development, local economic development and social inclusion.

The twinning movement has always been, at heart, about people meeting people where they are, both literally and figuratively, and cultivating meaningful international partnerships to the benefit everyone involved.

Although I have not been able to visit many of the towns that are the focus of your energies in Nicaragua, I have heard of and been impressed by the breadth and the impact of your work there, from community development projects and student exchanges to education support programmes.

Over the years, our Embassy in San Jose has been involved in numerous initiatives aimed at supporting economic growth in rural communities, reducing teenage pregnancy rates and preventing domestic and sexual violence, particularly in indigenous communities. We are always looking for ways to do more with less, as our budget for programmes like these is always quite limited, so for the 2017/2018 financial year, it is likely that our focus in Nicaragua will remain on supporting the rights of indigenous peoples.

In closing, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to each of you, for the tremendous work that you do in canvassing for donations, organising raffles and marathons, and hosting speaker tours and other sponsored events.

I am blown away by the generosity of spirit and commitment that is evident in the work that you carry out, and the tangible, positive impacts on the communities involved, both in Nicaragua and in the UK.

I wish you a successful meeting today and a productive year ahead.

Thank you.