

**TWINNING COMMITTEE – 8 October, 2009.**

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

**1. General.**

Little of note has occurred since the meeting of the Committee in July. There have been some developments concerning the school garden project where the school selected to carry out the pilot scheme have completed the preparation of the arrangements to create the garden and the Link has authorised the purchase of the tools and equipment that are necessary. The sowing season is now drawing to a close and it is the intention of the school to complete the sowing of crops to take advantage of the season.

The garden will be maintained by 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade pupils, including some of the pupils who have been granted scholarships under our scholarship project. The intention is that the crops will provide supplements to the meals provided at the school with any surplus being sold in the local market which will provide funds for the upkeep of the garden. The project will also be linked to local and global environmental issues and we are exploring the provision of appropriate education material with the Ministry of Education.

**2. Scholarship Project – Review**

The Link's Scholarship programme has now been running for seven years. In 2003, the first year of operation, 100 scholarships were awarded to children from poor families according to criteria that had been the subject of detailed discussion and consideration by the Link and the local Council in el Viejo. In 2004 and every year since the number of scholarships was increased to 200. Approximately 200 children have successfully completed their primary education. That is a record in which the Link can take pride.

At the outset it was agreed that the project would run for a complete primary school cycle of six years, later extended by a further year. It would then be reviewed in the light of its performance on the one hand, and developments in the education system which may have taken place in the meantime. That review is now underway.

Each of the eight schools in the project have been asked to complete a questionnaire seeking information about the impact of the project, its success, its value in community terms, the identification of any problems, and opinions about the mechanisms involved in its operation. Those questionnaires are now being analysed. Similar questionnaires have been sent to the Mayor and the local council and to the area delegate of the Ministry of Education.

There have been developments in the delivery of education. The Government has abolished parental fees and has attempted to improve the provision of education material though much remains to be done. There has been little real improvement in the economic situation of the people and real grinding poverty is still the daily reality for the majority of the population, particularly in the rural areas. Many children are expected to work in the informal economy to help to support their families and so do not attend school. There has been some desertion from the project, thankfully small, for this reason.

A report on the outcome of the review will be made to the committee in due course.

### 3. SilverJubilee of the Link.

The Link will celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2011. The Committee has begun to look at ways in which to celebrate the occasion. It is intended to attempt to organise two main events; one in Norwich if possible with a visit from someone from El Viejo, and in El Viejo, probably with the visit of a small delegation from Norwich. In addition to this exchange the Committee is also looking at the possibility of launching a public appeal for a project around the schools in El Viejo. What we have in mind is a school improvement programme. Because of a serious lack of resource most schools in Nicaragua, and El Viejo is no exception, are in a very poor state of maintenance and decoration which does not inspire or give any incentive to get involved in education.

We have already had an example of what can be achieved for relatively little outlay in a small school in the scholarship project. Two years ago the Link made a grant of \$200 for re-decoration which was carried out by parents. The school was transformed from a drab, dirty, and unattractive building into a bright inviting place for the children. Attendance and enthusiasm increased markedly and the building is now a gathering place for the small community. We would like to see if we can repeat that experience over a much wider area, and not just limited to the other seven scholarship schools.

### 4. Community Information

As the school year draws to a close in Nicaragua in December, our representative is preparing a comprehensive record of all 200 scholarship children and their families. This will enable the Link to build a picture of the communities served by the schools. The information will be concerned with family size and economic circumstances.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Raffaella', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Link Secretary.