

THE NORFOLK AND NORWICH – EL VIEJO FRIENDSHIP LINK

ANNUAL REPORT 2010

SUBMITTED TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

16TH FEBRUARY, 2011

David Trevanion
Chairperson

Ralph Gayton
Secretary

Sue Thomas
Treasurer

THE NORFOLK AND NORWICH – EL VIEJO FRIENDSHIP LINK

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1. MEETINGS AND MEMBERSHIP

Eight meetings of the Committee, and a Special General Meeting, were held during the year. The Committee did not meet during February, due to the AGM, and August. The October meeting was cancelled due to lack of business.

Attendances were as follows;

Tony Bailey	-	7
Ralph Gayton	-	8
Rhys Jenkins	-	6
Simon Nobbs	-	8
Jonathan Sheales	-	7
Sue Thomas	-	7
Vaughan Thomas	-	4
Vivienne Thomas	-	6
David Trevanion	-	7

The Special General Meeting on 22nd September was convened to approve changes to the constitution of the Link in order to comply with the requirements of the Charity Commission in the preparation of an application for Charitable Status.

Membership of the Link at the end of 2010 was 38 an increase of 4 over 2009. There were also a number of lapsed members. We still have eight affiliated organisations.

2. FINANCE

We opened the year with a total of £51,957.97. Expenditure amounted to £13,465.12 in transfers to Nicaragua and £159.31 on other payments as recorded in the accounts. The total expenditure figure includes a transfer of US\$5,000 in December 2010 which had the effect of inflating the total.

Income included £1600 from membership fees and donations and £1093 from the sponsored bike ride. The full figures are shown in the accounts attached to the AGM agenda

Interest rates continued to be minimal and the 12 month fixed rate account at the Cooperative bank realized only £182.60 on £29,215. A further temporary six month holding account of £25,000 and a current account for £4,398.11 have been opened at the Cooperative Bank. The Treasurer continues to seek out the best deal for our cash reserves.

The General account continues to be held at the Halifax for ease of transfer of funds to Nicaragua.

3. LINK REPRESENTATIVE.

The Link continues to employ Carmela Hernandez as our representative in Nicaragua.

Carmela continues to make regular visits to El Viejo to manage the Link's activities. She organises the regular bi-monthly meetings of the School teachers' committee and makes regular visits to the seven schools in the scholarship project. The Link receives monthly narrative reports about her activities and quarterly financial reports setting out the accounts of expenditure of the funds transferred to our bank in Nicaragua. The Committee also receives monthly reports of all correspondence with Carmela.

A major task undertaken by Carmela concerns the organisation and manufacture of the school uniforms for our 240 scholarship pupils. This operation involved measuring each child and then organising the making up of the uniforms using local resources. Carmela also organises the purchase of a schoolbag, carrying the Link logo, for each child containing pens, pencils, exercise books a ruler, and eraser.

During the year Carmela also organised the purchase of tools and seeds for the new School Garden Project

Carmela is also our link with the Mayor and local council in el Viejo. She carries out her work for us with care and enthusiasm and we are grateful to her for her dedication.

4. THE SCHOLARSHIP PROJECT

During 2009 the Link carried out a comprehensive review of the scholarship project based on detailed questionnaires completed by the schools, the teachers committee, the local council and the local representative of the Ministry of Education. The questionnaires included sections for parents. The exercise revealed that the degree of poverty in the area is still high and that the project is held in high regard by all those involved. The Link Executive Committee agreed that the project should be continued and increased the number of scholarships to 240.

The allocation of scholarships to each of the eight schools in the project is decided by the teachers' committee in accordance with criteria laid down in the project document and in 2010 was as follows;

School	2009	2010
Norwich	23	33
Hermana Maritza	26	30
Perpetuo	15	27
Evemilda Somarriba	17	28
Amigos de Holanda	29	32
Hermana Rosario	42	42
Francisco Morazan	40	40
El Recreo	8	8
Total	200	240

The small school at El Recreo was forced to close early in the year due to lack of pupils and the eight scholarship pupils were transferred to the schools nearest to their homes.

Two of the schools, Amigos de Holanda and Hermana Rosario are located in the town of El Viejo. The other five schools are situated out in the countryside, including the school at the Norwich settlement. Two of them, Hermana Maritza and Francisco Morazan serve families in two quite remote settlements.

The teachers' committee plays an important part in the operation of the project and is the vehicle through which the schools contribute to the development and management of the project. The Committee applies the criteria for the award of scholarships each year to

replace vacancies caused by the graduation of pupils from grade 6 and also the, thankfully few, cases of children leaving the project through moving away from El Viejo or failing to meet the requirements of the project, for instance due to poor attendance or performance.

The number of successful graduations of scholarship pupils from Grade six in each school in 2010 was as follows

School	No of Graduates	Girls	Boys
Norwich	7	4	3
Hermana Maritza	7	2	5
Perpetuo	2	1	1
Evemilda Somarriba	7	7	-
Amigas de Holanda	5	2	3
Hermana Rosario	4	-	4
Francisco Morazan	10	5	5
Total	42	21	21

All the schools, and the successful pupils, are to be congratulated on these results. It should also be borne in mind that the children concerned came from some of the poorest families in their communities and, in all probability would not have been able to attend school at all were it not for the scholarship project.

In December each graduate was presented with a framed diploma at a meeting of the teachers committee on behalf of the Link.

One of the initiatives by our representative has been the establishment in each school of a 'Link Corner'. This consists of a table containing a number of items relating to the Link, who we are, some basic information about Norwich, and some reference items such as dictionaries for use by pupils. The Link Committee has agreed to try to provide additional material for these 'corners' such as posters and material about Norwich.

As indicated in Section 3 above, a central part of the project is the provision of education materials (schoolbag, exercise books, pens, pencils etc) and a school uniform for each scholarship pupil. The uniform consists of a shirt or blouse, trousers or skirt, socks and shoes. Carmela arranges to obtain these items from local sources where possible. Local organisations and cooperatives are used to make most of the items but the shoes are more specialised and come from outside the area. A sum of US\$10 per scholarship pupil is also given to the schools which they can spend as they wish on education material or other items directly concerned with the interests of the pupils education.

The schoolbags are distributed to the pupils at events organised by each school or group of schools and are an important event in the school calendar and usually accompanied by performances by the children. The distribution of the uniforms is a major event usually carried out in a single operation involving all the schools and parents and takes place centrally in the city itself. It is attended by the Mayor and other local dignitaries and starts with the singing of the national anthem. The individual parcels containing the uniforms are handed to each child in turn. Recitations and local dances take place in a very festive atmosphere.

5. COMPUTERS FOR SCHOOLS

The 2009 Annual Report set out the Committee's intention to provide a PC for each school to enable the teachers to become familiar with the educational potential of information technology and take advantage of computers as an aid to education. The agreement to provide computers was made subject to a training programme for the teachers. The

Mayor of El Viejo undertook to provide the training and details of a six month course were provide to the Committee. The course called for two teachers from each school to spend four hours each Friday afternoon learning many aspects of computerisation. The course was well planned and approved by the Committee.

Carmela has been asked to obtain costs of purchasing the computers and we await receipt of the prices.

6. SCHOOL GARDENS

Considerable progress has been made with establishing gardens at each school as reported at the 2010 AGM. The purchase of tools and seeds was authorised early in the year and a lot of work has been done to establish gardens at all of the schools. There have been some setbacks caused by the weather with exceptionally heavy rains during the year and in a couple of cases damage has been caused by animals.

Produce from the gardens has been used to supplement basic food supplies from the Government to provide a varied and nutritionally valuable diet in the meals provided for the children. Most of the preparation and cooking is carried out by parents. The pupils also benefit by learning about growing crops and their nutritional value.

7. 25TH ANNIVERSARY

The Committee has given lengthy consideration to the celebration of the Link's 25th anniversary during 2011 both here in Norwich and in El Viejo.

The Mayor of El Viejo has supported the organisation of events in each of the schools and there will be a major performance by the schools in the centre of El Viejo during March. The Committee has also invited the Mayor and local council to identify a small anniversary project in El Viejo which will be co-funded by the local council and the Link Committee. The committee has agreed to make up to \$2,500 available as our share of the funding.

Plans have been made for an audio-visual event at the Fusion facility in the Forum during August. The event will be on for a week and will consist of a combination of video and still photographs displaying our work in El Viejo over the years and, in particular, our project with the schools. The occasion will also be used to provide publicity material and promote membership of the Link.

Other activities being investigated include a public performance of the Ken Loach film 'Carla's Song' at Cinema City, a Civic Reception by the Lord Mayor of Norwich and a charity dinner with an invited eminent speaker. It is also hoped to invite Norwich schools to become involved. More details of all the events will be publicised as the plans develop.

As part of the anniversary year activities, the Committee decided that a small delegation should visit El Viejo to renew the relationship with the people and the local council. Accordingly, the Chairperson, David Trevanion, the secretary, Ralph Gayton, and committee member Simon Nobbs will visit El Viejo for about ten days towards the end of March. They will visit the Scholarship Schools and meet the teachers committee. Discussions about possible future activities will take place with the Mayor and local council and the delegation will attend local activities to celebrate 25 years of contact and work in the municipality. El Viejo is the largest municipality outside the capital and extends to over 1,000 sq km. With a population of just over 100,000 The delegation will visit some of the more remote parts of the area to observe living and working conditions.

8. CHARITABLE STATUS.

Investigations into obtaining charitable status for the Link have been under investigation during the year and we are grateful for the advice and assistance given by Chris King, a local solicitor with experience in this field. The Special General Meeting in September 2010 took the first steps in agreeing modifications to our constitution and work is proceeding with the preparation of an application to the Charity Commission.

Registration as a charity will give increased legitimacy to the Link in appeals for funds and will also enable us to benefit from the 'Gift Aid' system. There is a problem with the requirements for registration in that to qualify organisations are required to have an annual income of not less than £5,000. The Link, at present, is unable to satisfy that requirement which is one reason, among others, for making every attempt to increase our membership.

9. ACTIVITIES

The hardy annual sponsored Summer Bike Ride was organised once again on 18th July to coincide with the anniversary of the Nicaragua revolution in 1979. The ride followed a route devised by Committee member Simon Nobbs. The route took those involved along the Marriot's Way cycle route along the old M&GN railway from Barn Road to Reepham, on to Aylsham and then followed the Bure Valley Railway route to Wroxham and back to Norwich, a route of over 30 miles.

Although only four members took part, the ride was very successful in raising funds for the scholarship fund raising almost £1,100 from sponsorship. Thanks to Simon and those who took part.

Simon also took on the task of reviving the Pub Quiz to take place in January 2011. This event was a 'Quiz and Chips' event which included a fish and chip supper as well as the traditional general knowledge quiz.

10. INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERS.

The Committee has agreed in principle to a suggestion from Norfolk International Projects to investigate the possibility of sending two local young volunteers to work in El Viejo for a period of 12 months on behalf of the Link. Funding for the venture would be provided by the European Union

The Link, in consultation with our contacts in Nicaragua, will have to identify a project or a programme of work for the volunteer(s). Application would be made to the British Council which is the agent for applying for funding from the European Youth scheme.

If successful the volunteer(s) would be funded 100% for the twelve month period including all travel, accommodation and food, plus a small personal allowance.

The Committee considers that this is an important initiative with major possibilities for the development of the civic twinning and we will seek the active support of the City Council for the funding application. The topic will be a central issue in the discussions with the Mayor of El Viejo by the delegation in March 2011.

11. DfID GLOBAL LINKS PROGRAMME

During 2009 DfID (the Department for International Development) announced a new initiative called the Global Links Programme and sought information from organisations working with partners overseas. The Secretary registered the Link with DfID as the programme appeared to offer financial support for organisations such as ours. Other twinning links with Nicaragua did likewise. It now appears that Nicaragua, along with other Central/Southern America countries has been dropped from the programme.

Following representations from several of the British twinning links with Nicaragua, DfID issued the following response;

'The information you provided has been collated and the Executive Summary is available at [Global Community Links Baseline Survey Report](#). Read the report to see some very interesting results from the 400 responses, representing more than 340 links.

When compiling the survey we were keen to get as full a picture of community linking in the UK as possible. We sought responses from as many different types of Link as possible, and for community groups linked with a broad range of developing and middle income countries.

Global Community Links will continue to support Links between the UK and the world's poorest countries, but it is not able to support all the Links that completed the survey.

Unfortunately, as the country you are linked with is not classified as "least developed", "other low income", or one of the countries that DFID is committed to working with through its Public Service Agreement (PSA 29) your Link **will not** be eligible to apply for support from the programme.'

The only Caribbean/Latin American country included in the scheme is Haiti. Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the whole of the western hemisphere after Haiti but has been excluded. Other poor countries include El. Salvador and Guatemala. The Link Committee was very disappointed with the DfID decision and found it difficult to understand and reconcile with the reality of the poverty of the country.

12. NORWICH CITY COUNCIL TWINNING COMMITTEE.

The Link is represented on the Norwich City Council Twinning Committee along with the other three twinning organisations; the Norwich – Novi Sad Friendship Association, the Norfolk and Norwich – Rouen Friendship Association, and the Norfolk and Norwich – Koblenz Friendship Association.

The Committee meets three times during the year and receives reports from the member organizations. The Committee has a small budget and makes grants to the associations to assist their activities. Small grants are also made to other organisations who undertake activities in the twin cities. The Link receives support in kind via the Committee for postage and printing costs.

13. NICARAGUA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

The Link has continued its affiliation to the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign which is an umbrella organisation for the various British links with Nicaragua. There are some 16 UK towns and cities with links to towns and localities in Nicaragua. We receive regular reports on human rights issues and developments in Central America as well as weekly news bulletins about the political and economic situation in Nicaragua.

14. 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 members. Without their support nothing would be achieved. We are always ready, and anxious, to welcome new members to help with that we do.

The ability to communicate effectively with our friends in Nicaragua means that translation plays a very important part in Link activity. We have been fortunate in always having people we can call on to translate English to Spanish and vice-versa. We are most grateful to Niki Taigel, Katherine Osborne and James O'Brien for their help during the year.

We are also grateful to Gill Holmes who lives in Managua. Her knowledge and experience of the country and its people are most valuable. Gill also sends us useful information on economic and political issues from time to time.

We particularly thank the members of the Executive Committee for their time and enthusiasm in turning up each month for our meetings.

Finally, we thank the City Council for the facilities they provide for our meetings at City Hall and for the printing services that we receive. We couple with that our gratitude for the support we receive from the Council's Twinning Officer, Andy Emms and the Twinning Committee Officer, Valerie Hay who retires in February, 2011.

David Trevanion

Chairperson

Ralph Gayton

Secretary

February, 2011.