

## NORFOLK AND NORWICH – EL VIEJO FRIENDSHIP LINK

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

7<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2018

### ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2017

#### 1. Meetings and Membership

Your Committee met on eight occasions during the year since the 2017 AGM

Attendances at the meetings were;

Anthony Bailey	7
Brenda Gayton	8
Ralph Gayton	8
Dr. Rhys Jenkins	8
Chris King	4
Cllr David Raby	4
Susan Thomas	4
Cllr Vaughan Thomas	3
Cllr Vivien Thomas	3
David Trevanion	8

We thank all members of our committee who, despite many pressures on their time, continue to attend our meetings and contribute to our activities whenever time permits.

Membership amounted to 28 individual members (a decrease of 8 since the last report) and four organisations.

The Committee thanks those individual members who remain in membership, and the four organisations, but regrets the loss of individual members. However, the Link has managed to maintain its support of 200 children from the poorest families in El Viejo by providing for their access to primary education.

The need to increase membership of the Link becomes ever more crucial if we are to continue to give support to the children and families of our twin city. Do you know anyone, friend or family, who would like to join us?

#### 2. Carmela Hernandez

Despite a couple of periods of ill-health during the year, Carmela has continued her role as the Link representative with the eight schools in our scholarship scheme and the local Council during the year. Carmela also acts as Secretary to a committee of two teachers from each of our scholarship schools which meets every two months. A great deal of correspondence passes between our Secretary and Carmela during the year.

Carmela also sends us a report of her activities each month and she sends a quarterly record of her expenditure.

### **3. Translation**

It is appropriate, at this point to say something about translation. In order to avoid errors and misunderstandings which can be costly and embarrassing when dealing with issues and personalities in another country where English not the common language, it is crucially important to be able to rely on ready access to accurate translation. In the past we have used a previous NSC worker from Nicaragua on occasions where an accurate translation was particularly important. However, we now have one of our committee members, Cllr David Raby who, with his wife, provides us with rapid and accurate translations. We are most grateful for the help they provide in this important area.

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

One of the main events of the year is the distribution of schoolbags to the 200 scholarship children. Each child in the eight schools in the project receives a school bag bearing the Link badge containing school materials; various exercise books, pens, pencils, ruler, and other items for use in class. The older children in grades 4,5, and 6 also get a geometry set, pencil sharpener, and more specialised exercise books. The schools are given US\$2 for each scholarship child in their school to buy cleaning materials or other items at the discretion of the teachers. We have received information from Carmela about how this money has been spent.

The distribution of the schoolbags and their contents usually takes place at special events at two or three of the schools, attended by the children, parents and the Mayor. they are important social occasions.

The end of the school year in December 2017 saw 50 grade six scholarship pupils graduate from the eight schools in the scheme;

Norwich school	9	Evemilda Somarriba	8
Rosario Martinez	8	Rosario Mayorga	1
Maritza Martinez	9	Amigas de Hollanda	3
El Perpetuo	5	Morazan	7

### **5. School Improvements**

An important recent development which appears to have taken place seems to be a programme of school improvement. We have not yet had any information about this from official sources but in a recent report Carmela has mentioned that in 2018 the Francisco Morazan school will be 'improved' and that improvement had already been carried out at Rosario Martinez in 2015, and Friends of Holland in 2017. This is important news but we have not heard anything about these improvements up to now and we are asking Carmela to find out more and keep us informed about this important development.

The Committee decided to take no further action on seeking improvements to school latrines until such time as we receive information about this apparent programme of school improvement.

## **6. Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign.**

We remain affiliated to the NSC who provide access to relevant information about events in Nicaragua, and Central America in general. The campaign keeps a watchful eye on developments, issues and problems and also provides general assistance and advice to its many affiliates.

An issue which NSC brought to our attention in November concerned political action by the US Government against Nicaragua which would have a disastrous effect on many aspects of life. Known as the US Nicaraguan Investment Conditionality Act, the US Government is attempting to block all loans to Nicaragua from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank currently running at US\$250 million annually. These loans are used by the Nicaraguan Government to invest in education, social programmes, electrification, roads and other infrastructure initiatives.

Your committee has agreed to highlight this action by the US Government against the second poorest country in Central America. Your Committee will attempt to organise a public meeting with appropriate local groups to consider taking action on this important issue. We will also work with NSC to assist the Government of Nicaragua overcome this nasty action by the US. *A note prepared by NSC on the US action is attached as an appendix to this report.*

## **7. Office Supplies from closing of Banana Company**

In March, Carmela and one of the teachers made application to a Banana Company in Chinandega which was closing down, to be considered for donation of redundant office equipment and furniture, including computers. They succeeded in their request and received a variety of desks, tables, chairs, filing cabinets and sundry other office supplies, including a number of computers, monitors and printers. These supplies were distributed round the scholarship schools and Carmela provided a list of all the items delivered to the schools. Some items of furniture were also given to the local representative of the Ministry of Education.

## **8. Tropical Storm Nate.**

In early October Tropical Storm Nate travelled up the Caribbean Coasts of Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras. The effects of the storm were felt across Nicaragua and in El Viejo very heavy rains caused schools to be closed and widespread damage was caused to roads. Some schools were also damaged. Fortunately, there were no casualties in El Viejo.

## **9. Fundraising events**

On 8<sup>th</sup> April a music gig was organised with the 'Ougadougos' group at Norwich Arts Centre. Other groups also performed in the bar area during the evening, including our own Tony Bailey. This was an important fundraising event for the Link and raised a total of £725.00. We hope to be able to repeat this event in 2018.

Other fund raisers during the year included a Quiz Night at Micawbers Pub, organised by Tony Bailey, brought in £86.00, A Falcon Junior school event, again organised by Tony Bailey, brought in £94.00 and the Virgin Lounge Ukelele Frolic raised £231.14, again thanks to Tony Bailey and his friend and their skill on the ukulele. *(Note: a further event at the Virgin Lounge has been arranged to take place on 28<sup>th</sup> March this year – don't miss it!)*

## **10. New Data Protection Regulations**

New legislation on data protection will come into force in May 2018 replacing the Data Protection Act 1998. It will introduce more strict controls and larger fines.

It will be necessary to thoroughly review our procedures to make sure that the Link observes the new, and much stricter, legislation. The officers are looking into the new procedures to make sure we can comply and a report will be made to the Executive Committee in due course.

## **11. City Council Twinning Committee.**

The Link is represented on the Norwich City Council 'Twinning Committee along with the Norfolk and Norwich – Koblenz Friendship Association, the Norfolk and Norwich – Rouen Friendship Association and the Norfolk and Norwich – Novi Sad Friendship Association. The Committee meets three times a year and receives reports from each of the associations. The City Council allocates a small budget to the Committee which is used to support the various activities undertaken by the groups. We do not take a share of this budget instead we take support in kind through free use of accommodation in City Hall for our meetings and use of the Council's printing facilities. This latter point is due for review as we now make much greater use of e-mail to maintain contact with our members.

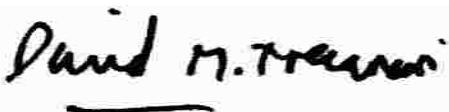
## **11. Acknowledgements.**

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. Thanks are also due to Gill Homes who lived in Managua for many years and gave us great support during visits to El Viejo. She has also helped us with translation from time to time.

Finally, we thank the Norwich City Council for the facilities we enjoy for our meetings at City Hall and the printing services we receive.



David Trevanion (Chairperson)



Ralph Gayton (Secretary)