

JULY-AUGUST 2008  
MISIÓN MEXICO NEWS.  
[www.lovelifehope.com](http://www.lovelifehope.com)

## **Hola a todos, saludos de Mexico,**

This email is long overdue, apologies once again. I suggest you print this and read it at your leisure. These emails give you an insight into the life of Mision Mexico, all the 'ups and downs' and brings you along on the journey of the lives of these special children. Thanks for taking the time to be a part of it.

### **Blessing of the new Refuge**

Finally, the new refuge has been opened and blessed! What a beautiful weekend it was. People came from near and far. It was an ecumenical event with Bishop Benito Juarez from the Iglesia Anglicana in Veracruz, Mexico; Father Mark Hanns from the Catholic Church in ACT, Australia; Pastor Carol Menkus from the Quaker Church in Portland, Oregon in the U.S.; Pastora Maria Castillo del Pino from the Iglesia Cristiana, Tapachula, Mexico and Decons Steven Paterson and John Mather from the Episcopal Church, Arizona, U.S. partaking in the proceedings. How beautiful to see different faiths come together for a common cause, namely, to help and support those less fortunate than ourselves. Our supporters from the Jewish faith were there in spirit as were many others.

Thank you to all who sent good wishes and prayed for the big day. Everything went smoothly with just a few slightly stressful moments, what could one expect with so many children involved! The children were just adorable as they performed dances from around the world, sang songs and read 'thank you' notes in English and Spanish. The weather was perfect and the house and gardens looked amazing.

A big '**THANK YOU**' to all the volunteers and supporters who helped prepare for this moment, that is, with donations, fundraising, grant applications, working on the construction, caring and help for the children and also, the preparations for the actual weekend. It has been a huge team effort and without your help the day would not have happened. We can't thank you enough for being there for these kids; you have made a huge difference in their lives.

For over twelve months, Alan and I have been trying to do all that was needed to build the new refuge. Alan had been working at the site on a daily basis, coming home exhausted each evening to face 40 children!

We start the day at 6am and we are usually not in bed before 11pm.

I have been running in all directions buying materials, paying bills, attending meetings and looking for grants among other things. Because of this, I haven't been able to spend as much time with the children as I would like, but thankfully, we have had some wonderful volunteers who have selflessly given up their time to spend time with the children. It hasn't been easy for any of us, as I have said before, these children come with a lot of emotional baggage and at times they are very difficult. It is a slow process to undo the wrongs of the past but most of our volunteers have found patience beyond the norm and have done an amazing job.

An example of team effort; a family of two adults and four children came from Australia and helped the children with their educational studies and as well, they taught three groups of children, traditional Mexican dances. Unfortunately the family were not able to be here for the opening and blessing but what they started was carried on by other volunteers and after many practice sessions and many stressful moments, the children danced each dance beautifully at the opening event, so-much-so, that they were asked to do two of the dances at the 'end of school year' celebrations a few days later, at the local state primary school where most of our children attend.

One dance was called 'El Toro' (the bull dance) where some beautiful señoritas (five of our girls aged from 8yrs to 11yrs) came into the market place with a bull in tow (Luis). The bull broke away from the señoritas grasp and started charging those around. Some 'vaqueros' (cowboys) (4 boys, 9yrs down to Sammy 4yrs) came to the rescue chasing the bull until they lassoed the bull and dragged him away with the young señoritas dancing, praising the young men for their brave act.

Another was 'The Machete' dance. This dance is the story of some young 'campesinos' working in the field cutting grass with 'machetes' and managing to show off with tricks as they worked. The audience gasped as each young 'campesino' threw his machete up into the air for the other to catch and, not dropping a single blade!

For those of you who might be a little worried about the fact that we let the children play with 'machetes', we would like you to know that instead of using the metal ones that are normally used for this dance we had some wooden ones made and painted to look like the real thing, thanks to some Aussie volunteers, Bern and Ted Murphy.

Rebecca and Memo Gomez of the Mexican Dance School in Sydney, 'you would have been proud, the kids were great'!

We also had an amazing lot of help from John Mather and his team from Arizona who arrived a week before the event and got straight into making furniture, painting and general cleaning up. By Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> June we had an altar, numerous benches and other items for the chapel. The chapel of 'Saint Michael and All Angels' was dedicated on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> June in Loving Memory of Sean Michael Mather and in Honour of the Children of Mision Mexico.

### **Background**

It has been over four years since the conception of the idea to build, or should I say 'renovate' the old carpenter's workshop, on the large block of land bought by John Flanagan (previous owner of Harmon Hall English School in Tapachula). It has been four, long years of raising money to commence building.

We have only recently moved in. Can you imagine what it is like to move house for forty children as well as look after them?

There are still a number of jobs to complete. A few doors need to be made and we need to put locks on almost everything!! A number of pieces of furniture still need to be made, such as shelves, lounges etc. and also, we need to buy new mattresses for the kids.

At some stage in the near future we will need to replace the roof which has a few serious leaks. Even though the building looks absolutely amazing it still has a tin roof without any lining, that is, no ceiling! And, the climate in Tapachula is extremely hot, all year round.

We also have a private contract with John Flanagan for payment of the land. John has been very patient waiting for his money but hopefully we will be able to raise the money needed in the 'not too distant future' to pay him out.

(The deeds for the new refuge are in the name of 'Mision Mexico').

### **Support**

I am just filling you in on a few details as I want you to understand that we still need your ongoing support. People might get the misconception that because we have the new refuge we don't need the support that we have been receiving.

Nothing could be further from the truth. It is now, more than ever that we need your support. At the moment we have 41 children that we are caring for and educating; 41 children who are going to school, who need uniforms, shoes, bags and books. We have about three quarters of them involved in sport; surfing, swimming and soccer.

We have many girls in dance classes, three girls in ballet, two kids in French classes and 15 children in English classes. All additional classes are provided free but we still need to buy books, gear etc.

We go through almost a tube of toothpaste each day. Soap, shampoo and conditioner just disappear and of course, we go through mountains of toilet paper!

We always seem to be dealing with a headlice problem and with 14 teenage girls you can imagine the products needed.

Fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and milk are everyday needs and definitely add up. Soap powder for the mountains of laundry each day, dishwashing detergent and the list goes on, too much to write here. All these items have to be bought and also, there are electricity, telephone and car registration bills to pay. There always seems to be some sort of legal fee to pay as well. So as you can see, we need your help, we can't do this without you. You are a huge part of this organization and for that we are extremely grateful. The new refuge has drained us in more ways than one, physically and financially so we ask you to please continue to support us and, if you can tell our story to someone else who might be interested in becoming an ongoing supporter, then please do. Our 'needs' continue to grow with so many children and, so many whom seem to be turning into teenagers virtually overnight!

If you would like to help, there are lots of ways to send donations:

If you live in **Australia**:

1. Cheques or cash can be sent directly to:

*Fr Mark Hanns  
Mission Mexico (Australia) Inc.  
PO Box 4717  
HIGGINS  
ACT 2615*

Please include your name and contact details with your donation unless you wish to remain anonymous.

2. You can make a direct deposit or electronic transfer at:

*Commonwealth Trading Bank, Camberwell Branch  
**Account name:** Mission Mexico Australia Incorporated  
**BSB** 06 3113  
**Account** 10410249*

Please don't forget to include your name and any special purpose for which the donation is made in the relevant remarks section of the deposit form.

**International** tax deductible donations:

You can donate through **Global Development Group** (GDG), an AUSAID-approved not-for-profit organisation with which Mission Mexico is linked. Donations of more than \$2.00 made through GDG are tax deductible. Further information about GDG can be obtained from its website, [www.globaldevelopment.org.au](http://www.globaldevelopment.org.au)

There are various ways to donate through GDG:

- Secure on-line donations at <https://www.aus-e.net/globaldevelopment/donations.php>

**IMPORTANT:** In the box labeled 'My donation to go to' please enter '**Project 231 Mission Mexico**'

- You can donate over the phone by calling GDG on +61 7 3841 4509
- You can also send your donations to GDG (please remember to quote Project 231: Mission Mexico): 56 Goorari Street, Eight Mile Plains

*Please note that GDG take 5% of each donation for administration purposes.*

If you live in **America:**

Donations in the United States can be sent to:

The Peace and Justice Center  
PO Box 16252  
Phoenix, AZ 85011-6252

The Peace and Justice Center is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Contributions are tax deductible ([www.peacejusticecenter.org](http://www.peacejusticecenter.org))

If you are not already an ongoing supporter and would like to help on a regular basis, or are interested in volunteering at the refuge please write to [info@lovelifehope.com](mailto:info@lovelifehope.com)

Also, feel free to visit our website for more info and recent photos [www.lovelifehope.com](http://www.lovelifehope.com)  
Thank you for caring, thank you so much for your support.

### **Education**

Recently we had the end of school year celebrations with 6 children graduating from different levels of school.

Merril graduated from secondary school and will now be going into 'prepa' (senior). Bruno, Maria, Margarita and Carlitos graduated from primary school with Maria, Margarita and Carlitos going on to the secondary school and Bruno possibly learning some craft or trade.

Alex graduated from the third level of Kinder and is looking forward to grade one. For these kids it is a great achievement to graduate. For many, grade six, is to finish formal schooling, which is the possibility with Bruno. Bruno has suffered so much and received numerous beatings to the head which has caused problems with learning. He didn't start school until he was nine so was well behind to begin with. Bruno is 17 years old. Recently he started a course with a neighbour learning how to make piñatas which he is enjoying.

Maria was another one who was not put into school and was made to work at the age of seven or eight. Maria was also beaten but not to the extent of Bruno. She had mental blocks to learning and could not solve simple problems but after a lot of work she has overcome them.

Alejandro (Alex) would not join in his class dance for his graduation from Kinder, he sat alone. Alex doesn't like to be in the limelight because of his scarred face. He doesn't like to draw attention to himself except of course, if you are family or a volunteer, then he doesn't care and can be quite the clown. For the opening/blessing, he was a cowboy in the 'El Toro' dance but had a scarf across his face which gave him confidence in front of everyone.

Jose started school late after a very difficult beginning. He suffered greatly when he was young and still has a lot of issues he is dealing with.

Jose has been studying in an open learning school for the last couple of years to get to the correct level faster though now, he wants to commence the first level of senior at a regular school with students his own age. This is not easy as he missed the entrance exam and even

though he is a top student and received a 9.5 for his secondary studies and, has almost completed the first level of senior, getting admitted to the 'Escuela Preparatoria' will be difficult. We have had meetings with different people regarding his situation and we are hopeful that doors will be opened for him to be accepted, never-the-less, the opportunity to be in a 'normal' school is not automatic.

Education here is complex. There is a lot of red tape to get through. For example, if you don't have a report for each year you cannot go to the next level.

When you finish grade 6, you do not automatically go into secondary school.

Even if you have done well and passed your exams, you have to sit for an admission exam and, if you don't pass that, it's more than likely you won't go to secondary school or, if you only just pass you will have to find an afternoon school where all the under-achievers go.

This year we had three children fail in primary school, grade 2 & 3, all for the sake of a few decimals, not a full point, in either Spanish or Maths. They passed all other areas. These three kids are average students but now face another year in the same level.

With the help of a friend, we have had meetings regarding these cases, stating that these children have already suffered enough and need all the encouragement that they can get, not another slap in the face, that is, another whole year in the same grade for want of a few decimals. We now have vacation tutoring and possibly, within a month after they return to school they will sit for another exam and if they pass they will be put up the grade.

For this reason, it is imperative that we are settled in the new house as soon as possible. These children need a good routine and order in their lives. The old house did not provide that, everybody was on top of everybody. There were no quiet places to study in peace. The new place will provide them with good study areas and a small library. We have some second hand computers that we hope will be suitable learning tools.

Hopefully, we can give these children every opportunity to achieve, to break the cycle of poverty due to lack of education.

### **Sporting Update**

Before I close, I want to let you know that the older kids have started a Boardriders Club. They voted to call it 'Mision Mexico Boardriders Club' (they are proud of who they are). The idea of the club is to bring them together to help and encourage each other in their sport. They will be able to talk about problems with learning and how to overcome them. They will be able to teach one another how to repair boards and each take responsibility of looking after their 'surf shack' (the place where they store and repair boards).

They have been very enthusiastic and are trying to do more surf training. Most of the older girls and a number of younger boys are now learning and are very keen.

Not too long ago, Jose rescued a man who was being swept out in a rip and couldn't swim. Using his surfboard and his surf life saving skills, he brought the large man safely to shore to a very thankful family who had been watching helplessly. Well done Jose! (Surfboards donated last Christmas from Global Surf Industries in Sydney).

Our congratulations go to Merrill, 16 years, who recently represented the state of Chiapas at the National Cup Swimming Competition in Acapulco, Guerrero for his preferred stroke, 'breast stroke'. Merrill came 12<sup>th</sup> in 50m and 200m breast stroke and 11<sup>th</sup> in 100m breast stroke. Merrill has only been swimming seriously for about twelve months and before he came to live with us he could not swim at all!

### **Child Profile**

Our latest member of the family is Cristian, a sixteen year old from Honduras. Cristian grew up in a dysfunctional family and ended up on the streets. He is a victim of poverty and fled from his country to find a new life in the U.S.

Along his journey through Mexico he was kidnapped, robbed and physically abused by 'Marasalvatruches'.

Cristian reported the attack to the police and the attackers were caught and imprisoned.

Because of this Cristian cannot return to Honduras as gangs, 'Maras' now want to kill him.

Cristian only has a grade 4 level of education but wants to finish school and better his life.

If you are able to help Cristian or other children at the refuge with their education please write to Deborah at [info@lovelifehope.com](mailto:info@lovelifehope.com)

### **Well, time to close!**

Once again, a big 'Thank You' to you all for your most valued support.

Thank you for all the donations that we have received, every little bit helps. Thank you also for all the donations of clothing, toiletries, books etc. Thanks for the mountain of gear that Rebecca and Memo brought over with them when they came to volunteer and thanks to all who helped to fill those huge boxes. The children are all using their new pillow cases!

Thanks to Kieran Gailer, our nephew, for spending 8 months volunteering here at the refuge.

Working with the children is not an easy job and to dedicate that much time is just awesome!

Thanks to our sponsors, locally, and to those in Australia; Ere Perez, Santos Wish and MAWAI – your continued support is very much appreciated.

All the help, in whatever form, does make a difference, Gracias!!!

May God bless you all in abundance and keep you all safe.

With love from us all at 'Mision Mexico'

*Pam & Alan Skuse*