



Misión México NEWSLETTER

DEC
2015

Hola a todos!

I cannot tell you how fast life is passing by! It seems like only yesterday that Sammy and Ali were babies, and now, Sammy is 11 years old and in 6th grade and Ali is 12 years and in the 1st year of secondary! Where did those years go?

This last year has gone exceptionally fast and I do apologize for not getting more newsletters out to you. There just never seems to be enough hours in a day to get near a computer!

Even though life is so incredibly hectic, I did manage a visit to family in Australia.

Normally, I would not be away during the children's vacations, but in 2015 I had an exceptional reason to abandon ship. How blessed I was to be able to attend the births of our 14th and 15th grandchildren! Our daughter Brooke gave birth to little Tyler at the end of July, and our youngest daughter Hannah delivered Jonah two weeks later in August. What a privilege to be there for these monumental moments. Mothers and babies are all doing well, with Brooke arriving home in Mexico in October.

Life at the refuge has been anything but boring! Oh, my goodness, there is always so much going on, it is a constant roller-coaster ride. Though, regardless of the ups and downs of a refuge, the children are developing well, especially with their academic studies.



Education Update

We are delighted to announce that ALL our children and young adults are now enrolled in schools or universities. A great achievement for us and for the children. Our **Education Program** is funded by individual Education Sponsors, some of whom have been supporting us for a number of years. Nearly all our children now have an Education Sponsor which is fantastic. Knowing they have a sponsor who is supporting them is incredibly motivating for the children and a wonderful help. If you would like to sponsor one of our children through their educational journey please contact events@lovelifehope.com.

Six of our children were transferred from public schools into a new private school in August, with another transfer happening in December. The private schools in Tapachula provide smaller classes, more focused support and increased opportunities than the state schools are able to offer. We have been able to finance this thanks to the children's Education Sponsors and partial scholarships from the schools, to whom we are so very grateful.

Homework time was always a bit disorganized due to lack of tutors, computers, and continuous structure. Being a volunteering organization it is difficult to be consistent in areas such as these and the consequences are detrimental to their grades. For three months earlier in the year Renita joined us for three months from Melbourne as a volunteer teacher, organizing the homework sessions and revision. A number of students were struggling with subjects and organization skills, so it was great to have the structure and authority in place to attend to these issues. Renita is also a social worker and did a tremendous job with the children, we cannot thank her enough for all her hard work.

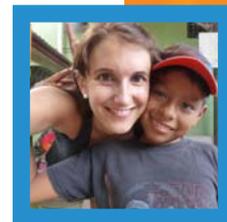
Renita worked with little Marli, Lupita, Hector and Maria to transition then back into mainstream school, the progress made was amazing. Marli was enrolled into a new Kinder school in August and has settled into her new routine. Our three young adults all enrolled into classes in September.

We are now looking for new volunteer teachers to assist with the homework time and tutoring for the 2015/16 academic year. We are also trying to find local tutors to help with this project. Please contact volunteer@lovelifehope.com if you are interested.

Our Homeschool Program continues to see wonderful results. A 14-year-old who had never been to school before, who could not recognize the letters of the alphabet or numbers above 10, can now read and do basic math problems. With two more years in our Homeschool Program she will be able to sit for an exam that will give her the papers she needs to move on to the next level of her education.

Our daughter Brooke, who launched the Homeschool Program in 2014, has since retired from active involvement due to the birth of Tyler. Kim, a dedicated teacher from Canada, who home-schooled her own children and is fluent in Spanish, has taken over the day-to-day running of the program.

"I started working with this group of kids in February as a part time volunteer and now I am in charge of their program. In this short time that I have working with them I have been pleasantly surprised on many an occasion. It is beautiful to see them grow and learn. They have good and bad days still but they are becoming accustomed to my style (of teaching), as I am, to their personalities. We have developed a good rapport and with that they seem to blossom more and more with each passing day. The road for many will not be easy yet I see great potential in each and every one, and I look forward to walking this path with them." Kim, Homeschool teacher.



Music, Ballet and Art

A number of children were involved in an orchestra and took part in numerous concerts throughout the year, which was a wonderful experience for them. The only problem was that they were expected to attend classes for 4 hours per day, 5 days per week which was interfering with their education. It was a difficult decision, but we have had to put the orchestra classes on hold. We are currently looking for a music tutor who can work with our children 1:1 or in small groups on the weekends.

We have also been granted two additional scholarships from the wonderful Ballet Classico de Tapachula, making a total of nine (six boys, three girls) who attend classes every week. They had their exams before the summer vacations, all receiving merits except for little José, who got a pass. Five of the children also performed in the **Ballet Classico Production** of Frozen, where they were applauded on stage separately for their grace, presentation and wonderful behavior in classes. So much talent.

Even though the children have full scholarships there are additional expenses related to this art. Thankfully we now have a wonderful sponsor for our ballet program, **Mexican Dance Group of Australia**, a Sydney based dance group established by Rebecca and Memo Gomez and now run by their beautiful daughter Emilia. Rebecca, Memo and family came to volunteer with us a few years back and taught our children some traditional dances. They have also been incredible supporters of our work for a number of years, and we are thrilled to have them on board with this dance program. Muchas gracias amigos!

If you are interested in volunteering as a music tutor or supporting our music or ballet program in any way please contact info@lovelifehope.com.

Art is a wonderful medium to express oneself, and our children are no exception. It is a form of therapy that is helping our children recover from the abuse they suffered in the past. We were blessed to have a number of artists join us over the school vacations to work with our children.

Choclo Project is an ethical clothing brand who travel to Latin America each year to host creative workshops with underprivileged children. The objective of these workshops is to nourish creativity, teach the children new artistic techniques and build their confidence. The art that the children create then becomes the inspiration for the graphics on their products, with a percentage of the money raised through the sales being reinvested to support the children's education. Our children and young adults loved the workshops and created some beautiful designs. Please follow Choclo Project's progress via their **Facebook page** or **website** and look out for our children's designs!

We also owe a big thank you to Dom, an artist who volunteered with us in 2014 and returned earlier this year to work on a short mosaic project with the children. "This **video** is a homage to the children at Misión Mexico. I went there with an art project and a bag full of paint and these children and their endless enthusiasm made for some absolutely incredible results. Their eagerness, creativity and open minded attitude to try something different was truly humbling to watch. After every class, the smiles they threw out to the world was a true testament to the organization and the love these children have and receive. Beautiful experience." Dom Attard, Artist.

Thank you Dom, it was wonderful to have you here with us – the children loved the project and we loved their enthusiasm and dedication with it. Dom's partner, Melody then joined us during the school vacations. Melody ran some wonderful art lessons with our children, with their work now taking pride of place on their bedroom walls. Melody and Dom are due to return in 2016 for six months to run a Creative Art Project for our children and some of the children in the beach community. Please visit their **fundraising page** to find out more.



Youth Transitional Program (YTP)

Our **Youth Transitional Program** expanded at the start of 2015 with three of our eldest males moving into a male transitional house and another of our young ladies moving into the female transitional house.

Our YTP participants are all advancing well in their studies. Isaac has changed his career choice and is now studying languages in University. He has a great talent for picking up languages and is receiving great grades. Carlos has enrolled in a computer system course at university, which he is studying part time whilst also working at our Misión Surf project.

Dulce has an average of 9.2 across her courses. She is very close to completing her Social Work degree and will be our first female to graduate university! Yuri is over halfway through her Biochemistry degree, also achieving a high grade-point average. Maria 1 and Maria 2 are both working hard to complete their college education.

Griselda completed her secondary education and spent the summer working at Misión México. In October she successfully transitioned to independent living and is now working full time in the tourist industry in Cancun!

Due to Delmar's legal status, he was previously unable to finish his secondary education in Mexico, which is a basic requirement for any decent work. We managed to get Delmar a humanitarian visa for Mexico, enabling him to successfully complete his secondary education and transition from our **Youth Transitional Program** to independent living. He has secured work in Puerto Escondido and is still surfing every day!

Our Saturday afternoon cooking program is proving to be extremely popular and beneficial. This program works with all of our children and young adults from 15 years+ and is designed to improve on valuable life skills such as planning and creating nutritional meals, budgeting and time management. This in turn prepares our young adults to live independently and transition to life outside of care. The program costs approximately AUD \$80 per month to run, and benefits 20 of our young people. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor for our cooking program please contact events@lovelifehope.com

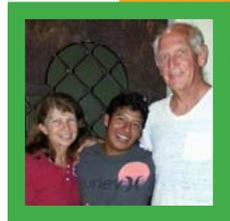
Misión Surf

For a number of years now our **Misión Surf Project** has been blessed with the support of Jacob and Rachel Shields' **Compound Cares**. Compound Cares' generous support has enabled us to build a manager's home for the family of five who are responsible for the development of the project, build a caretakers bungalow, finish tiling and painting the main building, build a generator & small storage shed plus much more. Without the support of our Florida friends we would not be where we are today with Misión Surf. Muchas Gracias Amigos.

We also owe a huge thank you to the **Australian Embassy in Mexico City** for providing Misión México with the grant that enabled us to furnish Misión Surf. Without this grant we would be well behind on our schedule to open our doors to the public. Your support has been amazing and we are so very grateful.

The Norm Innes Foundation have also continued to support the project with another donation earlier this year.

Stage 3 of the building project will continue for at least another year as we continue to source funding. This project began in February 2013 and has been providing work and work experience for a number of the older boys. We are currently looking for sponsors to fund the recreational and landscaping components of the **project**. If you can help please contact events@lovelifehope.com



Volunteers

We have had a number of returnee volunteers this year which is wonderful for the children to experience. It is great for them to understand that even though volunteers need to leave, they still very much care about them and keep them close to their hearts.

A big thank you to all the volunteers who so generously give their time to help these children on their journey through life. Every volunteer who passes through these doors has made an impact on each child at Misión México.

If you, or someone you know, would like to volunteer with us in Tapachula please contact volunteer@lovelifehope.com.

Health

Baby Josue arrived in July 2014 malnourished and lethargic, with a stomach full of parasites and laryngitis. Watching him grow into a healthy little boy over the 15 months that he was with us was so wonderful. Josue has since been taken to the capital of Chiapas by the DIF (welfare department) for adoption. This is usually the case for children under 5 years old and even though it was sad for us to say goodbye, we trust that he will find love and contentment with his new family.

Little Cesar has been assessed medically due to delayed development with his speech and toilet training. It has been discovered that Cesar has epilepsy and is now on medication. His comprehension of language is good and he is already starting to develop. We owe a huge thanks to his sponsors who are helping to cover all his medical costs.

Bupa Global have agreed to raise funds for our Health Program for the next 12 months, which couldn't have come at a better time. All our children have received dental checks and treatment and a number are due to be accessed for orthodontic work in the near future. Gracias Bupa!

Giving back!

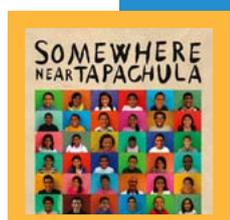
We endured some storms out at the beach during rainy season, which caused our Misión Surf front wall to fall down along with extensive flooding in the humble homes of the local community. A number of our boys worked hard to help move our neighbours' furniture to higher ground; we felt so very proud of their hard work and compassion. Directly after the evacuation, the boys treated us all by cooking a BBQ. Then, to our surprise, they washed dishes and cleaned up without being asked!! OMG'ness wonders never cease!!

They were all very excited to be sleeping the night in the Misión Surf building, only to have an intense rain storm hit, and then the power go off, which meant that with no fans they had to have the doors open because of the heat. Consequently, the poor kids were attacked by a million mosquitos! They had fun regardless, and it was a very rewarding experience for them.

In the media

We are excited to announce that our award winning documentary '**SomeWhere Near Tapachula**' is now available to watch **online**. Stefan has also produced a new short film, **I Lost My Dream** which follows the true and up lifting story of Mocar's life.

Please share this amongst your networks, host a film night or simply re-watch to support our family. Thanks again to Stefan Hunt and Jonno Durant for making both films for us; they are incredible pieces of work that been screened around Australia, the US and the UK – both winning numerous awards on their travels.



Fundraising

There have been so many individuals and groups that have been fundraising for us this year! To name a few: **Mexican Students Society at Sussex (MEXSAS)** whose members participated in a half marathon and sought sponsorship from their networks, **Hands of Latin America (HOLA)** whose students raised money for our YTP; our Glasgow fundraising volunteers who hosted a Family Fun Day to celebrate Children's Day which was attended by over 300 families, Maggie Daniels in VIC who hosted her second Mexican Fiesta in her back garden, the Nightrider UK participants who raised money for the YTP by completing 100km moonlit ride around London, and Macquarie Foundation who spent 2015 raising a huge amount of funding for our Education Program. God bless you all and thank you for your amazing love and wonderful support.

Sammy and I went to Florida for the **Compound Cares** annual fundraising event in April. At this amazing event with an incredible turnout, we shared Sammy's story. After an emotional re-visit into the life of this young man, we were all overwhelmed to hear, and see, the difference Misión México, and its sponsors have made in helping this young person to develop into the healthy lad that he is today. Sammy was blown away by the whole experience. His face said it all!

We can't thank you enough Jacob & Rachel Shields, Janet and Dan, all the volunteers, musicians Ray Barbee and the Mattson 2, and the Sarasota community for the incredible event.

Earlier this year Alan, Moacir and I attended an event in Sydney called 'The Pitch' to compete against a number of charities for funding. GyG secured our opportunity to be part of this funding bid, and to our astonishment, we won!

GyG also hosted the outstanding Misión Posible fundraiser for us on 22 October in Sydney, and were kind enough to fly me over so I could share some of our children's stories with all the attendees. I was blown away by the amount of hard work and organization that went into this event and cannot thank Steven, Naomi and the entire GyG team enough. The generosity of the GyG network will help enable a secure future for our kids, providing opportunities for education, therapy, afterschool activities and so much more. GYG have been supporting us for almost seven years and we wouldn't be where we are today without them.

Moacir and his girlfriend Skye, also hosted a fundraiser in Noosa raising over \$6,000 for the mission. The event was attended by over 130 people who enjoyed a great evening of music, delicious food from GyG and lots of awesome prizes including a custom made Tom Wegener Surf board which was auctioned off for \$1,000. Everyone who attended created such a beautiful atmosphere and the night was truly a success.

Melbourne **Mexfest** takes place every September in Federation Square, to celebrate Mexican Independence Day with the mission of bringing the best of Mexican culture, traditions, food and art to Melbourne. A big thank you to all our Melbourne volunteers who help us run a small stall at the event each year, and a huge thanks to MexFest for their continued support.

If you or your organization would like to **fundraise** for us please contact:

events@lovelifehope.com



Our Misión Mexico Team

A huge welcome and thank you to Paco and Brooke Skuse who have moved to Tapachula from Puerto Escondido to work with us. Paco has taken on the role of General Manager and has been such a help to Alan and I. The workload he has taken on includes liaising with the Welfare Department (DIF), lawyers, doctors, teachers, and of course the children. Brooke was instrumental in setting up our homeschool program and when she returns from maternity leave we will be looking to engage her in the administrative and educational side of things.

Tara Murphy designed and implemented the **Youth Transitional Program** (YTP) in 2014 and dedicated 12 months to working with our young adults to make the program the success that it is. We said a teary farewell to Tara in February 2015 and cannot thank her enough for all her hard work and the positive impact she had on a number of our children and young adults.

After Tara's departure Ben and Kristen Foley spent 6 months' with us as Caseworker and Youth Worker. As well as managing our YTP they organized three weekly youth groups with our teenagers and continued our Saturday afternoon cooking program. Monica Del Pino, a youth worker from the local church has now joined us to continue managing the YTP.

Melissa Biggerstaff has joined us to manage all our donor engagement, fundraising support and communications. Melissa first volunteered with us in 2014 and continued supporting us from London, working with the UK Board to coordinate fundraising events. Melissa has since been splitting her time between Tapachula and the UK. Great to have you back Melissa!

A warm welcome to our Homeschool Teacher Kim Dahl who is managing our homeschool program brilliantly. Her enthusiasm and dedication to the children are wonderful, and the children love her. The progress in the children's learning with her support is invaluable and we are thrilled to have her on the team.

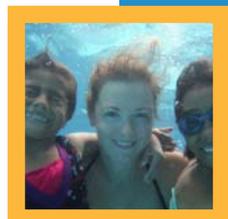
Ana Maria Jeatz has extended her commitment as the mission's chaplain. We are so happy that Ana Maria is continuing to help the children with their spiritual development. We have seen a huge positive change in the children since Ana Maria came on board, and not only have the children grown spiritually, they are also developing a sense of empathy and becoming more considerate.

Madeline Guerrini joined us in 2014 to do six months volunteer work but ended up staying for 12 months. As well as her general volunteering role, Maddy took on the mammoth task of managing all our finances, often doing double shifts. What a trouper! Over the years of dealing with traumatized children we have sourced the help of psychologists. Unfortunately, due to the nature of this organization, most of the help was voluntary and therefore there was no continuity. We have recently employed Marysol Perez, a fulltime local psychologist who is a much needed member of the team and a wonderful blessing to the children.

Farewell to Jackson Gillmore who was with us for two years in the position of Refuge & Volunteer Coordinator. Thank you Jackson for your dedication to the children of Misión México. You provided a vital service to the smooth running of the refuge during your stay for which we are very grateful. We wish you well in your future endeavors.

A warm welcome to Samuel Shalom Sprenger who has recently taken over the responsibility of Refuge Coordinator. Sam's involvement at the mission has already had a very positive impact on the routine of the house. Gracias Sam.

Emma Fleetwood returned to Tapachula in November to take on our Volunteer Coordinator role. This is Emma's third stay with us and we are delighted to have her back. Emma and her family have been a huge support to our Education Program, sponsoring five of our children between them.



New Niños at Misión México

Towards the end of 2014 we received three new girls; Perla 9, Kimberly 12, Wendy 13, and a brother and sister; Heidi 12, Jose Antonio 9. Wendy, Heidi and Jose Antonio were with us for six months.

Kimberly has received sponsorship from ex-volunteers to study at a private school. She is enjoying life at Misión México and shows a wonderful kindness to our other children and volunteers. Perla struggled with the routine of the house at first, but has now settled down and jumps at the chance to take part in bible studies and swimming lessons. She advanced particularly well in our home school program and has just been enrolled into private school thanks to her sponsor.

9 year old Israel joined us at the start of 2015. Since arriving at Misión Mexico he has fallen in love with skateboarding, soccer, basketball and swimming in the pool and at the beach on Sundays. He settled into the Mision Mexico family well and began his formal education at our home-school program having had no formal education before that. He is very eager and quick to learn and takes a lot of pride in his work. We also welcomed back Junior so he can continue his education. Junior does have a learning problem but is advancing well with the home school program. Junior's mother and brother visit every couple of weeks.

Final thoughts

During the trip to Florida I had to explain to Sammy that in the U.S. toilet paper should be put in the toilet, and he looked at me and asked; 'but why?'

There were many little things like that, such as, 'Sam, you know you can drink water from the tap.' Sam's reply, 'Really?' New cultures, new experiences!

One night we are watching the movie Gandhi and I was explaining to Sam about discrimination and how sad it was, and still is, just because of the colour of your skin or you religious beliefs. When Sam saw a scene where people were sitting on top of a train and asked 'Why are they on top of the train, is that because of discrimination?'

I was then able to explain to Sam about the many trains that passed through Tapachula not too long ago with all the people on top of them, and how circumstances had forced them to travel in such a way. How wonderful to see his mind ticking over and him asking questions. There's just so much to learn!

We hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and 2016 bring you much love, life, hope and happiness.

With love, Pam, Alan and
all the children of Misión México.

