



Misión México NEWSLETTER

JULY
2016

Greetings from Mexico!

It is now half way through the year; a time to reflect on the previous months, and take a look at the growth that has happened around us.

There are many 'ups' and 'downs' of one's emotions when working at Misión México. One day could be a complete disaster, and the next, absolutely fantastic! Throughout the years, nearly 16 to be exact, I have had many, incredible 'highs' and disastrous 'lows'. Each time after a 'low', has been a time to pick myself up, dust myself off, and then face a new day. How could I do any different? Each new day is a new beginning for the children, who very rarely know that they have 'knocked the stuffing out of you' the day before.

Misión México's children have been traumatized, and every now and then the consequences of the trauma, flares its ugly head. Some will heal over time, and others will take years upon years to heal, if they ever do. Some of the children, through no fault of their own, will suffer the effects for the rest of their lives. They will not fully understand why they behave in a particular manner because they were too young to remember clearly what actually happened to them, but what did happen to them was real, and will remain with them forever.

We have a number of children who show signs of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD); a condition which is the result of the mother drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Now, each little success is a milestone in their young lives; a triumph to be celebrated even if they are well behind other children of the same age.

This type of trauma hinders growth physically, mentally and emotionally. Some will have obvious signs of the disability, and others will have an invisible disability.

Some will have uncontrollable 'meltdowns', and others will have learning disabilities that will frustrate them and cause depression. Many of the children are behind academically, but most are notably behind in their maturity. When their bodies are developing, their maturity is usually at least couple of years behind. All this needs to be taken into consideration when there are behavioral problems; I am not trying to excuse the children's behavior, but understanding their disability and learning to have more patience and tolerance is imperative.

It is a slow process but there is growth, and the growth is what we celebrate, be it, a little, or a lot.



www.lovelifehope.com

One 15 year old is now reading! She still has many hurdles to jump, but one hurdle at a time. An FASD child is also reading, slowly, but reading! A couple of kids are Dyslexic and having difficulty at reading, but they are doing incredibly well in Math. Another FASD child is doing really well in school and having less 'meltdowns' at home. Another, who had delayed speech is now talking and loving life. A disconnected child is being connected through his music. An uncoordinated child is now more coordinated because of ballet. Another child is finding peace in his heart due to being able to express himself through dance.

All the children are developing in one-way or another, and life at Misión México is so exciting because of it.

Renovation works

Misión México experienced a few changes during the first half of the year. Bathrooms were renovated; creating two separate bathrooms for the older boys and younger boys. A very small bathroom was installed also in the 'chiquitos' room by taking some space from our medical room. And after 16 years, 8 years in this place, Alan and I finally have a kitchen complete with sink and stove! This was all thanks to the generosity of Adam & Kylie Ford, who offered to fund the renovations after visiting us in October 2015 from the USA and spending a few day's getting to know our family. How fantastic!

Education and Graduations

Recently Alan and I, and our sponsors and staff, had reason to celebrate in a huge way! Dulce, one of our older girls graduated from University as a Social Worker. It is an incredible triumph for Dulce, but also for us, and all who have supported Misión México in any way.

Dulce came to live with us at the tender age of 12, after her mother died from a dreaded disease and whom did relatives then exploit. Her grandmother would send her to beg on the streets, telling her that girls did not need an education, and as women, her job was to find a husband.

Dulce is the first person in her entire family history to complete a formal education and become a professional. She is also the first Misión México female to gain a university degree!

At the beginning of July, Dulce started her first full time job at a university, and is in the process of transitioning from our Youth Transition Program (YTP) and moving on to independent living. Congratulations Dulce! We are so proud of you and who you have become. You have overcome all odds and shown the world around you that you are a strong, courageous woman.

July also brought on more graduations, Marli, from kinder to grade 1; Samuel and Cristian, and Kimberly, from primary to secondary; and Meche, Angélica, Victor and Yoni from secondary to senior prepa. We are all so proud of these kids and their accomplishments.

Our homeschool group graduated from one grade level to the next, which is an amazing achievement, so we had a lovely, memorable celebration for this. We said a sad farewell to our homeschool teacher, Kim, who will be spending some time back in Canada over the next academic year. A new local homeschool teacher will be joining us whilst Kim is away.



Ballet

This year we have nine children in ballet; six boys and three girls. Ballet Clásico de Tapachula has given us scholarships for all these children! We are so thankful for this opportunity for the kids and also thankful for our sponsors who support the ballet clothing and presentations. Ballet is certainly working as a form of therapy. It is teaching discipline, confidence, coordination, social awareness and so much more. Recently the children have had two major events that they participated in, allowing them the opportunity to spend three days visiting and exploring a different part of Chiapas and performing on stage to a huge audience. We couldn't be more proud of them.



Art Program

The school year has come to an end once again, so now we need to think about what we are going to do with 30+ kids each day. Fortunately, Dom Attard and Melody James have returned for five months to run The Chido Project, a wonderful art project which uses Street Art as a tool for empowerment and expression for disadvantaged children. As well as involving our children, we have opened up the project to children from the local community at Pt. Madero (near Misión Surf), many of whom have had limited access to education and next to no exposure to art. It is beautiful to see all the children expressing themselves through art and creativity. Exciting times!



Youth Transition Program (YTP)

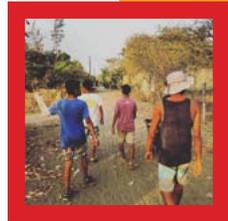
When we piloted our YTP there was a strong focus on our female participants and many successes were achieved. This year we welcomed Luke Owen to the YTP team as our new male YTP Coordinator, who is focusing on expanding the program to our young males. Luke is responsible for mentoring all our male YTP participants, running boys group, managing the male transition house and co-managing the YTP cooking program alongside our female YTP Coordinator. Luke is also acting as photographer/videographer for the Misión and teaching our young adults how to edit their own videos.



“My work with the boys here is challenging but extremely rewarding. All of the older boys in the house meet with me on a Friday evening where we recap the week, talk about the successes they have had and any challenges they have faced. We then work through a personal development curriculum I have created.



A recent highlight for me has been our Boy's Group camping trip out near the beach. The outing acted as both a reward for working through the life skills curriculum and as a forum for using some of the skills they are learning, but also just as a way of them to experience new things. They learnt to make a fire, roast marshmallows and go fishing. The boys were responsible for planning budgets and food menus for the entire trip, which allowed them to use some of the skills they have been learning from the cooking program.” Luke



As an experienced teacher and boarding house master, Luke has begun working with our Education Coordinator to produce individual study plans for all of our boys to help them improve their grades in subjects they are struggling with. Over the next six months Luke will be working closely with our five older boys to enable them to set goals, explore career paths and research higher education options. Welcome Luke! It is wonderful to have you with us.



We have also been blessed to have Tara Murphy, our original YTP Coordinator and program designer, return for four months this year to provide additional support and training to our YTP Coordinators. Tara has played a crucial role in transitioning one of our 18 year old females out of the refuge and into our female YTP transition house. Gracias Tara, it has been great having you back!

Misión Surf

The teams focus has been on finishing off the finer details in the building and weather proofing our buildings with additional roofing and awnings, and also the construction of a reinforced wall to protect the land from the heavy seas that we have experienced in previous years. We have also begun the landscape gardening and football pitch. It's all coming together, and things are looking good.

We will be hosting a team from California in August this year who will be working in the local community at Pt. Madero to construct a community football field. A tractor has already leveled an area ready for the work to be done. If you would like to help sponsor our community work, please contact events@lovelifehope.com

April, a month of heartache.

April was a fairly heavy-going month here at Misión México. Starting with Maria hurting her neck while surfing and ending up at hospital, and having to wear a neck brace for ten days. Next we had an emergency appendix operation for Alex. It was very serious but he is now well again, praise God. Directly after Alex's operation, Maria was distraught after her boyfriend's cousin was killed in a motorbike accident. He was only 19 years.

Someone then stole our daughter Brooke's dog from out at Misión Surf, and now has advertised it for sale. The grandchildren are greatly saddened by this heartless act! Then we find out that the brother of an ex-Misión México young adult was killed in an attack with a machete. He had gone off the rails and had a lot of enemies. Poor Cristian, one of our ex-Misión México young adults who now helps at Misión Surf, witnessed his body and is obviously traumatized by what he saw. The month ended with a devastating newspaper article informing us that a friend living in Pt. Madero drowned at the beach while swimming in the ocean alone. It has all been far too much to take in.

But as always we have found that during difficult times we are blessed with the support and love of people from all around the world. We owe a huge thank you to all our supporters who came together to provide the funds for Alex's medical costs within seven hours of us putting out a fundraising appeal. We have received countless blessings, prayers, condolences and beautiful messages of support during these past months, all of which play a large part in helping us to find strength and continue.

Misión México Reunions

How wonderful it was to have Delmar, Moacir and his fiancé, Skye visit for approx. five weeks; reconnecting with the kids, helping out, and giving some good advice to the next generation. It was also great to watch as Mo and Skye moved forward with their new business, **Cielo Collective**.

I was fortunate to be able to visit with Moacir and Skye while they were in San Cristobal, Chiapas, Mexico, and also Lake Atitlan, Guatemala for a magical couple of days in both places. What an experience that was! We visited markets and cooperatives to look at textiles, arts and crafts, enjoying the rich culture and vibrant colours of these amazing lands. We were also invited to lunch with indigenous families in both places and experienced the wonderful hospitality of those people.



Fundraising

We have been overwhelmed by the lengths people have gone to this year to raise funds for our children. A **16 year old girl** is attempting to swim across the English Channel as a solo, from Dover to France, taking approx. 13 hours! A couple rode 3,500km across India in a **Rickshaw** to fund our YTP. Another brave man took part in the **Marathon des Sables**, running 256km across the Sahara Desert carrying all his own equipment! A recent volunteer cycled all the way from Texas to Mexico. People have run marathons across Europe, hosted film screenings, held coffee mornings and family fun days, taken part in pop up event and festivals, and our own children successfully ran in the first ever Tapachula 5k Colour Run to raise money for Alex's medical costs. All this and we are only part way through the year!

I was fortunate to attend the fund raising events in Florida again this year, organized by the amazing Rachel and Jacob Shields of Compound Board Shop. I was hosted in the home of Janet and Dan Holcomb, Rachel's parents, and was totally spoilt during my stay. The first event was a casual dinner where we were able to share the journey of one of our young boys. The life he came from and where he is now and the dreams he has for his future. We were also able to say 'Thank You' to all the people for their wonderful support over the years.

Reorganization of our Misión México Team

Alan and I were not getting any younger, and the demands on us were becoming greater. After years of 'going it alone', a restructure of Misión México was needed to relieve us of some of the demands and pressures, and also preserve and safeguard the refuge's vision and mission. In doing this, 2015 was a period of trial and error, with certain things working and others not. It was certainly not without a lot of pain and heartache, but we have finally managed to get things in place, and now, half way through 2016, life is good, and we feel truly blessed to have such dedicated staff from around the globe, and an organization that is functioning well. A huge 'thank you' to all our staff for their hard work, dedication, patience and commitment to help Misión México and its children work toward Excellency.

Our Misión México UK Board has also undergone some changes. As we welcome Susie and Vicky as our newest Trustees, we said farewell to two of our long standing Trustees, Katie and Maurizio who have shown huge dedication in driving forward our UK fundraising and building new networks and partnerships for us. We wish Katie and Maurizio the best of luck in their next ventures.

Volunteers

Of course our volunteers deserve a huge 'pat-on-the-back' also for their selfless sacrifice to help the refuge run smoothly and aid the children in all areas of need. Being a volunteer in a place like Tapachula where temperatures and humidity are extremely high all year round, is a huge challenge in itself, let alone dealing with children who have come from traumatic pasts. We owe a special thanks to Whitney-Lea Simpson who 'stepped up' to cover the role of Volunteer Coordinator for us for three months. Whitney did a fantastic job managing our volunteers and supporting our children in their daily routines. We are in need of volunteers for September through to December this year, particularly those who have experience in teaching art, dance, sports, music or academic subjects. Please contact volunteer@lovelifehope.com to apply.



Many thanks to all our supporters for 'being there' for Misión México, your support is making a difference.

God bless you all.
Pam, Alan and
all the family at Misión México.

