

# NORFOLK AND NORWICH - EL VIEJO FRIENDSHIP LINK

## The Link's Current Project

### A Scholarship Scheme to provide Primary Education for children from poor families



The current project, which is being carried out in close collaboration with the El Viejo Municipal Council, is about improving access to primary education for the children of poor families. It is planned to provide primary education for 200 children whose families cannot afford to send them to school. The failure to register for education, and the rate of drop out from school, was identified by the council as a major problem when a delegation from the Link visited El Viejo in 2001.

Although, by law, education in Nicaragua is free, the country is so poor that the Government can afford only to fund the basic maintenance of school buildings and pay teachers' salaries. Parents are required not only to buy school uniforms, but provide exercise books, pens and pencils, pay for school cleaning and security, pay fees for examination and grade certificates and make a contribution towards general education expenses. The country is so poor - according to the United Nations 82% of the population live on less than \$1 a day - that many families just cannot afford these costs. As a result, it is estimated that about 27% of children in El Viejo are either not registered for education, or drop out at an early stage.

Hunger is also a factor in non-attendance at school. The World Food Programme used to provide schools with ingredients for a daily basic meal and nourishing drink. Members of the Link witnessed the preparation of these meals during their visit in 2001. Unfortunately this food supply has now stopped. The Link is in correspondence with the World Food Programme office in Nicaragua to find out why and to make representations for its resumption. Many children still do not go to school because of hunger. This was confirmed on many occasions during a visit to El Viejo by the Link Secretary in April 2004.

The scholarship scheme aimed to provide 100 scholarships each year to children of poor families up to a maximum of 600 subject to obtaining a grant

from the National Lottery. Unfortunately our application for a grant has been rejected. As a result the number of awards has been limited to 200. Scholarships are worth about £60 each and provide each child with a package consisting of; a uniform (trousers/skirt, shirt/blouse, socks and shoes) a schoolbag, exercise books, pens and pencils. It also provides cash payments direct to the participating schools to cover family contributions for cleaning, security, fees for examinations and grade certificates and the parental contribution towards general education costs.



The first 100 scholarships, spread across four schools, were awarded in 2003 as a pilot scheme for the project, from funds raised locally. Despite the loss of the Lottery Grant, the Link has approved the grant of a further 100 scholarships in 2004, in four more schools, to be paid for from funds raised by the Link.

The project also involves the local people in running and controlling the project. There is a Municipal Commission responsible for overall control consisting of two councillors, teachers, the Link representative, and a representative of the Mayor together with the Council's financial officer. Each participating school has a committee of teachers and there are regular parents' meetings in each community.

The scheme is fully described in a document drawn up jointly between the Link and the Mayor of El Viejo. Copies are available on application to the Link Secretary.