

**If you think that the work of St Joseph's Hospice Association is local to the Liverpool area, read on.....**

I had never heard of Jospice until I arrived in Guatemala at the beginning of 1999 to join Lloyds TSB bank there. In Guatemala, I was overwhelmed by the number of needy causes right on our doorstep.

I was soon made aware of the Hospicio San José, some 20 miles from Guatemala City and of the support provided by Jospice in Liverpool which used our bank to make its monetary transfers from the UK.

Then I was asked to join the local Board of the Hospicio which was established 17 years ago to help those suffering from AIDS and those identified as HIV positive. The very modest premises currently cater for some 38 live-in patients, mainly children who have been orphaned because of AIDS or abandoned by their parents who are suffering from the disease, but there are also some adult patients. In addition, the hardworking staff provide community support for more than 200 families who are affected by the illness. This was clearly a cause worthy of support.

Patient turnover was distressingly high because the Hospicio could not afford the latest drugs, so it was providing a place for its patients to die with dignity. I was greatly impressed by the efforts of Elena Clavijo, the Colombian administrator.

Then the British Embassy became involved and H.M. Ambassador Andrew Caie was elected President of the Hospicio's Board. For the first time, financial assistance from the State was secured which helped to lift the Hospice out of its precarious financial position.

Following the departure of the Ambassador in 2001, I was asked to take his place as President of the Hospicio Board and we concentrated on raising morale by recognising the importance of the people who were actually making the Hospicio work.

In March 2003 I was posted to Honduras and became aware that Jospice had another home for the terminally ill (in this case not limited to AIDS patients) situated in San Pedro Sula some 150 miles from the capital. There I had the pleasure of meeting Cath O'Leary who does a magnificent multi-tasking job. We were able to assist with the employment of an administrative assistant to allow Cath more time to concentrate on her patients.

I retired in October 2004, and my wife and I returned to Guatemala in January 2006. We found Elena in excellent spirits after a visit to Jospice in Liverpool with her administration assistant Paty Santis. Local fundraising, Government support and ongoing assistance from Liverpool have enabled the Hospicio to build new premises. New drugs are prolonging the lives of children and adults with the disease, often by preventing those who are HIV positive from developing AIDS itself. This means that fewer people are dying so demand for space at the Hospicio has increased.

Thanks to the new premises, Elena and her team will be able to help more people, so the need remains as great as ever.

Having witnessed the good work supported by Jospice in Guatemala and Honduras, my purpose in writing is to say what a privilege it has been to have been personally involved with Jospice and to have seen the work it does. Ongoing financial support is vital to these homes around the world and all support is, therefore, greatly appreciated.

Christopher Legg

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