

Dear Supporter,

As Chairman of the Joe Homan Charity I recently returned from attending two memorable events in the life of Boys Town Society (BTS).

They were memorable for different reasons: the first was the annual Pongal harvest festival celebration. This was as good and as inspiring as in previous years and Joe would have been well pleased to see the continuing enthusiasm and enjoyment shared by children and visitors alike – despite his absence. From the raising of the flags in the early morning until the speeches and cultural show in the evening it showed BTS at its best.



The evening was also enlivened by the sudden arrival in a large convoy of police and acolytes of the Revenue Minister in the Tamil Nadu Government. They descended out of the darkness, placed the Minister and press photographers on the stage and the Minister proceeded to give a supportive speech about Boys Town Society. He had originally been a student of Dr Raja (General Secretary of BTS) and clearly had a great regard for him and BTS.



The performances were well up to standard and represented all the residential units and the growing numbers of children in the new English medium school and young people from the Education for Life projects being run in the villages by BTS.

The next day was Inauguration day for the new school building which has been renamed The Francois Meyer Matriculation School – and the whole campus is now the Joe Homan Campus of BTS.



Events started at 4.00 am, which was the most propitious hour, with a Puja conducted by 4 priests in the entrance hall and which was over before the sun rose. After the naming ceremonies for the building and its 14 classrooms were over – all rooms were named after donors and given the name of a flower – the speeches followed in the existing school premises of the FTC. This is a very impressive school building and it will be a beacon for the next 50 years in the same way that Joe's homes have been in the last 50. Dr Raja is currently seeking permission to expand the school into a Higher Secondary School and in the years to come the building will have an extra storey to cope with this.



The financing of the project has been a struggle but nearly 80% has been raised and there are credible plans for the last 20%. The encouraging fact is that while 40% of the total has come from generous donors in the UK and Belgium the rest has been financed locally from reserves and donations from people and organisations in India.

In the years to come as the school expands BTS should be able to finance it from the sale of surplus land and buildings as the residential units close down. Dr Raja and BTS now have the enormous challenge, in his words, of 'strengthening the school with quality education, responsible teachers, responsive systems and enthusiastic students. I will achieve it in within another 2 or 3 years. Kindly pray for the progress of the school'.

At the moment, as the school is establishing, the children come from the 'quite poor' socio - economic groups and pay fees of about £60 per year. About 20% of the current intake cannot afford this. As we have previously reported we are working on a bursary scheme to help that group. JHC would also like to see a greater intake from the next group down, although realistically the very poorest rural children would probably not be able to benefit from an English medium school.

One of the visitors who spoke in a very moving way at the inauguration praised BTS for making such a splendid opportunity for poor children and their families. He was the vice Principal of a large 2000 strong Matriculation school in Chennai and he had to charge students fees of nearly £600 per annum. So in a way that puts into perspective what BTS are doing in Tirumangalam!

We have again this Spring been fortunate to have some first class volunteers working both in Tamil Nadu and Thailand. You will soon read some of the many many reports they will have produced. We are very grateful for their time, expense and dedication to JHC.



So thank you once again for all the support and money you so generously give and I am pleased to report that we are in good shape and facing up to the uncertainties of funding and organisation which the next few years will bring.

With all good wishes,

Peter Church