

Anthony Abs Childrens Village
Annual Report 2017-18



Upon entering Anthony Abs Children's Village (AACV), the expansive grounds give you a warm welcome as the large orange, pink and red Bougainvillea trees line the main entrance. The trees neatly decorate the entrance creating a colourful reception for any visitor. To the left is the children's playground fully equipped with a roundabout, climbing frame, seesaw, slides and swings. The playground is in use every day by the 56 children living here. Further down the garden, the Neem Trees dominate the communal grounds, Saraswathi is the warden here, she explains that when the need arises the leaves from the Neem trees are ground and mixed with turmeric to create a paste for the treatment of skin allergies, cuts or open wounds. At the centre of the grounds is a small temple dedicated to Lord Ganesh, the Hindu God of success and the remover of obstacles. The children residing here are a mixed group of boys and girls aged between 5 and 12 years.



AACV Foster mothers

Having served 6 years at Anthony Abs Children's village as Warden, Saraswathi does a fine job managing the project and a team of 4 Foster Mothers. In fact, Saraswathi is no stranger to the Boys Town Society; she initially joined the Boys Town Society (BTS) some 22 years ago and has continued her commitment leading this project with a thorough understanding of the needs of the children. Saraswathi spoke in detail about the current successes, developments and future opportunities at Anthony Abs.

With three acres of land, there is plenty of room for all the children to enjoy the ground and outdoor pursuits. A further 10 acres of land supplies some cultivated fruits and vegetables to supplement daily diets, with surpluses generating some income. Saraswathi has a good relationship with the local farmers who brought the fruit and vegetables, then sold at the local market. There is no independent system for irrigation due to the lack of rain water so the growth and cultivation of fruit and vegetables are totally dependent on the monsoon.

The used water from the communal boy's showers and kitchen area does aid the fruit and vegetables – nothing is wasted.

The Kitchen is organized between two medium sized rooms and a small store room, one room for preparing meals, the other for cooking using firewood collected from the farm land. Foster Mothers alternate kitchen duties, preparing meals for the children. All Foster Mothers complete daily duties which include helping the students get ready for school, cleaning, laundry, organizing activities after school and helping with homework.

AACV receives Special Meals for the children most months from local donors; during special festivals such as Pongal, the children will also receive new clothes from local donors.

A part-time computer teacher runs 2 hour classes on Saturday and Sundays, in a small computer room consisting of 3 computers, and Saraswathi spoke of the need for more facilities such as computers. Currently, the classes are held for 9 children at a time with 3 children to 1 computer, not all children get equal access to the facilities due to the lack of resources. The small library holds 360 books of which 200 are Tamil Books and 160 in English. The children get a chance on Sundays to use the books from the library. A Physical Education teacher runs a class at the weekend once or twice a month. Ideally there would be an extra tuition teacher to help the children with English and Math's.

Currently, there are 13 Bungalows of which 9 accommodate 56 children, 32 girls and 24 boys, 4 bungalows remain dormant. The Bungalows are spacious, set up with 2 rooms, 1 room for storage and 1 for sleeping. All are kept tidy and there is plenty of natural light with windows in each room. Each bungalow has a rain water collection system, which further supplements the toilets and washrooms. A Foster Mother sleeps in a separate room in each Bungalow, ensuring all the children are supervised throughout the night.

The Bungalows were last painted two years ago, this being restricted by funding. When the need arises for maintenance or repair works, Saraswathi would normally use local expertise. The bungalows and communal rooms are generally in good condition. Solar panelled lights are used in the Auditorium; Saraswathi hopes to install government subsidised solar panels in communal rooms.



Box room



Saraswathi, AACV warden

Seeing the display of various certificates, awards and prizes awarded to individual students and the children's village, it is evident that AACV has gained an excellent track record of winning competitions in Sports, Culture, Arts and Academics both at District and local level. At BTS Pongal function, AACV children competed in sport and cultural activities, coming first or second in many events, including the coveted Pongal Dance exhibition. More proudly Saraswathi took the 'Best Warden' award and AACV won, the 'Best Unit' Award.

When Saraswathi was asked what she thought was the key to their success, she replied that the students are talented and they just needed someone to coach them. The poorest performing subject is spoken English, the only in-house resource is listening to or watching English cartoon and learning DVDs. Finding suitable English tutors remains difficult.

All the children begin their day at 6.00 am with a Prayer followed by cleaning duties, breakfast and then down to some study before they all walk to school. Upon return the children receive a snack and then they have some time to enjoy the grounds followed by homework and dinner. The children have plenty of time in the evening to use the playground and its equipment and they enjoy playground games such as cricket, football, Kho Kho, Kabadi, Skipping.

There are also organized clubs such as bird watching, Nursery club which is mainly for children who like to take part in gardening and caring for the plants, trees and vegetable and fruit farm. There are a number of indoor activities on offer; these include coin and stamp collecting club, science club, chess, carom, and arts and crafts

clubs. The children are encouraged to take part and do well in sports, sciences and crafts and arts. It is fair to say that the children are encouraged and motivated by Saraswathi and their school teachers.

All the children undergo compulsory medical examinations organized by the local Primary Health Care unit twice a year, one at the school and the second at the Children's village. Recent medical reports indicate that the children were in good health. Saraswathi maintains a good relationship with the local hospital located 4 kms away. There were no major illnesses reported in the last year. All children also complete a test to check Haemoglobin levels, and are given Multi-vitamins regularly.

The children are taken on regular picnics (trips away from AACV), this year this has included: Dindigul Rock Fort and park and Anaipatti Anjaneyar Temple, travelling by minibus with Foster Mothers in attendance. Saraswathi made all the arrangements such as hire of the mini bus, the four foster mothers and Saraswathi. These breaks away from AACV and school are so much enjoyed by the children, again a restricted by funding.

The restrictions being put upon AACV by government regulation is increasing, with frequent call for compliance forms and audits. The two main government agencies, the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) have the right to visit the project and interview the children at any given time. Every 3 months members from each government monitoring agency, a student representative, a teacher from the school attend the Home Management Committee meet to discuss the progress of the Children's Village.

There is an urgent need for more computers, currently the 3 computers are used by only 9 students at a time and mainly for the older students. There is also a need for more library books, particularly in the subject of Spoken English. The children need extra tuition and support in Math's and English, therefore there is a current vacant position for a Tuition Teacher for Math's and English. The children's village receives 3 special meals for the children every month from local donors; this is usually arranged and managed by Saraswathi. During special festivals such as Pongal, the children will also receive new clothes from local donors

All the children attend the local government school, Pudukottai Panchayat Union School. The 148 student school is located one kilometre away from the children's village, the children walk to school through the surrounding village every morning. At lunch time, students receive a free lunch and an egg. A foster mother escorts the children to and from school every day. Run by the Panchayat (village council), the school first opened in 1928; in 2004 it was upgraded to a middle school for children to 8th standard. The Headmistress Manimekalai has been in post for 6 years, assisted by 9 full-time teachers.



Students at classroom

Teaching Pedagogy Methodology, a form of Active Learning based teaching, encourages students to create Mind Maps and aids learning through creative thinking. Students are tested at the end of each term and 'slip tests', informal testing of knowledge retention of the students on various subjects, take place once a month.

The Right to Education Act stipulates a 'no fail' process to testing; in effect, this is done to ensure the child remains in school thus preventing them from falling into child labour. The teachers have a challenging job to keep students in school, one teacher described a case where she had to physically go to a village students' house and take them to school to prevent the student from going to work.

The school continues to win awards at local and District level, clearly aided by youngsters from AACV. With prizes for subjects ranging from Dengue Awareness to Young Scientist.

There are 5 classrooms in the school for 8 different standards and no computer room (or computers) or library! Classes being taught back to back or outside when the weather allows. Construction of 2 new classrooms is

currently underway following receipt of government funding. The Headmistress explained there is need for 2 new rooms, one an office, library and safe keep for the computers, and an office for herself and the teachers.

The Headmistress added she would try to upgrade the school to a secondary school. Currently, the school needs a Physical Education coach, Computer teachers and more learning resources in Spoken English, Science and Math's. Whilst the students and teachers have a keen interest in science, there is no government funding for science laboratory or science equipment. The school receives free electricity supply by the government. The school learning resources include a DVD in Spoken English, a projector, English, Math's and Science books.

When asked what she considered to be the reason why the students consistently perform well at local and district level competition, the Headmistress said the students are keen to learn which makes the teachers job to motivate them rewarding. She further explained that she encourages the teachers get the best from the students and the students also want to do well so the results come through in the competitions.

Saraswathi visits the school twice a month; the meetings are to discuss general issues such as student's performance, homework and general health and wellbeing. Saraswathi would normally work with the teachers when there is a requirement for any rehearsals for school cultural activities. It is clear from spending time with both Teachers at the school and Saraswathi that they have a common goal which is to help the children succeed in school and in their personal lives.

The children enjoy one the best sites for facilities in the BTS portfolio and attend a school where the Headmistress is ambitious for the school and the teachers are motivated. Relations with the local community are healthy and AACV inspires a lot of generosity. These are delightful children and they are trying hard, but would be no-where near where they are today without the Boys Town Society.

Thanks to your continued support, the vast majority of the children here will go on to higher education at other BTS projects and then gain a trade, or even a degree, which will guarantee them job opportunities for the rest of their lives. The next generation of their families will be raised above the poverty line. None of this would be possible without the care and dedication of the BTS and JHC teams and of course the invaluable support of the sponsors, so THANK YOU!

Interviewed and Written by Tina Sahota, JHC Volunteer February 2018.

All Project Reports are checked and when necessary amended by JHC Manager.

Many youngsters supported by JHC are seeking sponsorship; you may have a relative or friend who might help these youngsters?

We need volunteers who might help these children and others in projects JHC supports with their education and spoken English, do you know anyone who might be interested?

Want to read news from JHC and India? Then why not follow us at www.facebook.com/JoeHomanCharity or www.joehoman.org.uk. We need friends to spread the news of our work with needy children.

Video of BTS Pongal celebration is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2x4hICMuZ0>

To write to your sponsored child, please use email via the charity website, or the following postal address.

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