

Dindigul Aids Control Society
DACS Anbagam Home
Annual Report 2017/18



Tucked away in the corner of a small residential street on the outskirts of Dindigul is DACS (Dindigul Aids Control Society) Anbagam Home for HIV. Anbagam originally started in 2003 when Thankachan and his wife gave shelter to 6 boys infected with AIDS. Anbagam means 'House of Love' in Tamil, one couldn't think of a more fitting name for this establishment. Anbagam is now in its 5th year at the current premises and currently houses 43 children and 6 foster mothers. Today's Anbagam is vastly different compared to the early days where the original 6 boys lived in a space smaller than its current kitchen. Back then, there was little knowledge and expertise on dealing with HIV, funds was limited and care was basic. Despite the conditions, Thankachan with the help of his wife transformed the lives of HIV patients. In fact, from that point onwards, death rates decreased dramatically and now children go on to live normal lives consisting of a nutritious diet, timely administration of medication, a daily routine and attendance at school or vocational training. In some cases children have returned to their original families, although for most, Anbagam remains the only place they call home.



Thankachan and his wife take on many roles to ensure the smooth running of the home, for example; Thankachan has a small mini bus which he uses for the daily school run. He transports 30 students to and from school every day. There is also an ambulance for emergencies in such case; Thankachan would be responsible for transporting the patient to the hospital.

Thankachan has a team of seven volunteers who help him run the home; they all receive an honorarium for their services. Here is a breakdown of the team by name and role. There are 2 newly appointed Nurses who are currently providing nursing care to Karthiga

who is an orphan aged only 8 months. All the members of the team live on site along with Thankachan and his wife who live next door to the main building.

Mr Thankachan – Superintendent. Mrs Vanaja (Thankachan Wife) – House Mother.

Alfred Thomas – Accountant and Administration. A Mahalakshmi – Warden / Attendant.

S Kavitha Head cook (Foster Mother). S Sundari – Helper.

K Kayalvizhi – Nurse. S Sivapriya – Nurse.

S Savadamuthu – House Father. He had been an HIV+ resident when DACS first opened (2003); he has no parents and unable to cope with life away from DACS is now an adult resident.

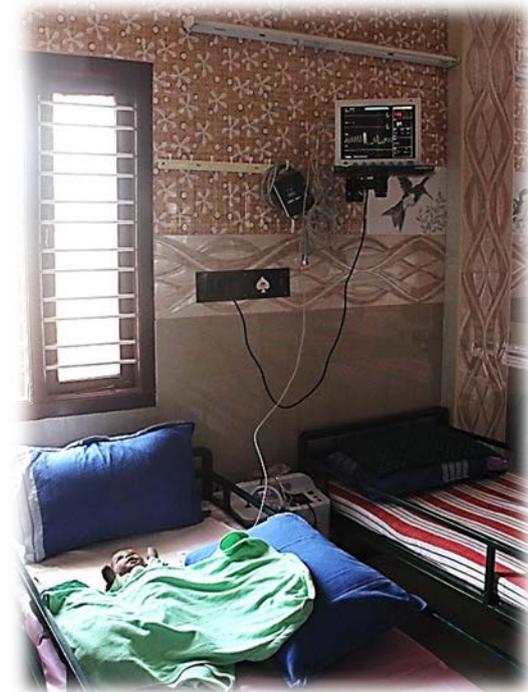
From the 43 children residing at Anbagam, 30 attend the local government or private Primary and Secondary Schools, across standard 1 to standard 12. 1 girl and 4 boys attend a local Industrial Training Institute (ITI). The other 8 residents not attending school include 5 babies, 1 adolescent who is 85% disabled and 2 mentally challenged children.

All the children attending school and ITI training take a packed lunch consisting of nutritious meals including protein rice and vegetables; this is to ensure all the children receive the adequate nutrition and vitamins. All meals are prepared in the home's clean and hygienic kitchen. All the foster mothers are trained to ensure food is prepared in accordance to the dietary requirements and follow a weekly diet plan.

There is a CCTV security camera in operation as well as a watchman, the premises also has secure gate. Upon entering the building, a small office is located to the left; this is where visitors are greeted by Thankachan and Thomas. The main hall easily accommodates all the 43 children; its main use are for dining, watching TV and playing games. The sparkly clean floors stand out and it generally looks spotless. The kitchen is spacious and well organized with a water purification system in place for washing and cleaning. Packaged water is brought for drinking purposes. A large gas cooker is used for all the home's cooking needs. Towards the back of the hall is a stairway leading to the girl's room which is directly above the main hall. All 23 girls sleep in the room and they all have their own cupboard containing their personal belongings and sleeping mat. On the side of the building is the boy's room. Although, the two rooms are besides each other both have separate entrances ensuring the girls and boys have complete privacy. Thankachan plans to build another floor which will accommodate teenagers aged 16 and above.



Thankachan also plans to build a Hospice for terminally ill patients next door to the main premises. At present, the nearest Hospice and the only one of its kind in Tamil Nadu is in Chennai.



Thankachan recently constructed a Palliative Unit, it has the capacity to accommodate 16 patients, at present there is one new patient, her name is Karthiga who is Anbagam's youngest member, she is only 8 months old. Karthiga was referred by the Police in December 2017. Karthiga was found abandoned in some bushes, having undergone treatment at Dindigul Government Hospital's Intensive Care Unit, Karthiga was brought to Anbagam. She is receiving treatment for TB and ART (Anti Retro Viral Therapy) to fight against HIV virus. The Nurse said her health has dramatically improved and they expect her to remain in the Palliative Care Unit for a further 3 months. When Karthiga was found she only weighed 2 kilos and now she weighs 4 kilos and is improving every day, her heart rate, BP and oxygen is constantly monitored.

Next door to the Palliative Unit is a large meeting room; it is here that Thankachan holds meetings with groups of MSc and BSc Nursing Students from Gandhi Gram Rural University and other training institutes from all over India. Thankachan and his home has gained a reputation for being a Centre of Excellence in the management of HIV, students come here to learn from Thankachan's experience of

managing the condition. A record of the meetings is kept in the office and upon inspection, it was noted that Thankachan hosts these meetings 2 or 3 times a month. Gandhi Gram Rural University has also given an honorary payment to Thankachan for his time; this money is then put back into the running costs of the home. Thankachan stated that over the last 6 years he has conducted 206 meetings of this kind; it shows from the notes that Thankachan has built a good relationship with the University.

The home holds 100 books in a small library for the children to use during the weekends. There is also a computer room containing 3 computers mainly used by 10 students who are studying standard 8 and above. Computer classes are conducted by Thomas; it would be very useful if DACS could find their own part time Computer Teacher, this is restricted by lack of funds. There are also 3 sewing machines, tailoring classes take place at the weekends for both boys and girls studying standard 8 and above.

The children of Anbagam hold Student's Parliament meetings every quarter to discuss and feedback any issues, concerns or suggestions to Thankachan. Following the last meeting, the children raised a suggestion to go on trip; the children explained that the last time they went to a trip away was 3 years ago when they went to Rameswaram. Thankachan explained that if there are any spare funds this year then he would consider it but he mentioned that the last trip cost the home 80 thousand rupees and it is unlikely that such funds will be available, he also stated that the Child Welfare Committee has a number of requirements which makes it difficult to arrange. Some of the requirements are that children should not go away during the rainy season due to the higher risk of infection during the season. JHC is now making additional funds available for a picnic trip during the better weather, thanks to another donor.

At the recent District level school competition, Selvavarshini did her home and school proud by winning a number of prizes, she is definitely Anbagam's star student, it was very impressive to see the many certificates and medals, this 7 year old girl achieved. This includes winning 1st prize in 100 metre race, 1st prize in the frog Race, 1st prize in Tamil Writing and 1st prize in Craft making. Well Done Selvavarshini!



Medical examinations are conducted at Dindigul Government Hospital; all the children have eye tests, liver test blood test, sugar level test, white blood cells tests, if there are any specific problems the child is referred to a specialist for further examination. Haemoglobin levels are examined every 6 months, from looking at the test results from August 2017; it was noted at 3 children fell below the normal HP levels. Thankachan explained that all 3 children are following an iron-rich diet consisting of an additional egg and peanut brittle every day. Later this month, the children will be re-examined to check their HP levels. In addition, to a well structured nutritious meal plan all the children receive vitamins and supplements. Foster mothers administer the ART medication; Thankachan collects the medicine for Dindigul Government Hospital every month.

Two boys fell off their bicycles on the way to school and suffered minor bruises and one boy fractured his leg and has recovered now. Some children suffer seasonal rashes and allergies although these are managed with medicines as and when the need arises. One foster mother was admitted to the Palliative Unit after suffering kidney stones; she was given Ayurvedic medicine and recovered well. Last year the Home had 3 leavers, 1 girl aged 14 and 1 boy aged 15 are siblings, they returned to their family after staying at the home only 2 months because they were feeling home sick. Another 11 year old boy left the home to live with his mother who is a widow and also a HIV patient.

District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) continues to stay in touch with Thankachan mainly to ensure the completion of government compliance processes. The most recent requirement stipulates that as the home accommodates over 40 residents it should also employ a minimum of 16 staff. Thankachan expressed that if the DCPU insist to see evidence of salaries then it would potentially act as a threat to the future of the home because he simply cannot afford to pay 16 people a salary.

Thankachan spoke of the need for an onsite Doctor to be employed on a part-time basis. This will mean 100 percent medical support and help will be there, at present having to find the expertise in case of emergency is difficult. Thankachan said the home also has a vacancy for a Superintendent and Social worker and an Administrator.

When asked how the children get on at school, Thankachan said it is a relief to know that the children get on well with their peers at school and there is no ill treatment amongst the students. Although, there were no recent reports of ill treatment, it was felt that the teachers do not treat all the children equally. Children do not receive any extra support with studies or preparation of exams, despite the fact that HIV patients are known to often lose their memory and can struggle to concentrate.

Full time education is very important to the children of DACS, as is the ongoing training for the older youngsters. 5 young adults currently attend ITI training at training institutes in the area. ITI is a government run programme aimed at youngsters wishing to get into Vocational Training.

I visited this school - Government High School in Chettinayakanpatti, Dindigul.



At present, 14 students attend the local school, located 4 kilometres away from DACS. It is a newly constructed school currently in its first academic year. The school is mixed with boys and girls studying 6th to 10th standard. It teaches a total of 200 students. The Headmistress said there are 12 teachers in full-time positions, 1 part time teacher who conducts tailoring classes and 1 specialist PE teacher. All the teachers were appointed by the government and hold various teaching qualifications all with a minimum of the teaching diploma.

The school runs both Tamil and English medium teaching methodology. Students studying standards 6 to 9 sit end of term tests and students studying 10th standard sit quarterly

exams, there is also extra tuition available for the students.

Among the spacious classrooms, there is 2.5 acres of surrounding land outside although no level ground for the playground as yet. Students are happy enough to make do as it is. The facilities at the school consists of government supplied electricity, free lunch for all the students although children from DACS take their own packed lunch to ensure they are all consuming food prepared in accordance with the home's hygiene standards and menu plan. There are 3 bore wells supplying water to the school. At present, there are no computers for the students; the teachers make do with 1 computer servicing their administration needs. There is a science laboratory and a school library currently holding 500 books, students get to use the library once every week. There is a need for a security gate for the school compound as there is also no CCTV or watchman.

Regular sports activities taking place at the school are Football, Cricket, Kho Kho, and Kabadi. The students take part in District and State level competitions, recent successes include 1st prize at state level for Swimming and Tamil Writing. The school runs after school clubs such as, Junior Red Cross, Scouts club and a National Green club. There are around 25 students taking part in the clubs and it is co-ordinated by the teachers.

From the 47 school students who wrote exams last year, all 3 students from DACS passed. This year there will be 39 students writing exams of which 2 students are from DACS. Thamarai Selvam is 85% handicapped yet he is completing 10th Standard, he contracted HIV from a blood transfusion given to him while he was at hospital recovering from an accident. Amongst the school's best performing students from DACS, Shobana and Soundharya study well at 8th Standard and Rajeswari is very good in sports.

One of the great advantages of this school is its prime location, its close proximity to Dindigul city means that the government will invest in the future development of the school. The Headmistress said she is confident that the government will provide funding to improve the existing facilities. Whilst it is obvious that the children from DACS will also benefit, its current location is quite some distance away from a Hospital. Thankachan stressed that in the event of an emergency this might cause the school some problems, but he is always on call to help.

Away from this School; Shalini is one completing an ITI course, as an Electrician, she is the only girl attending this course and she recently received an award from Dindigul's District Collector for scoring 456 marks out of 500 in her 10th standard.

We look forward to seeing the progress of DACS in the coming years; it is fair to say that Thankachan and his team run a smooth operation and the children continue to receive first class care and support.

JHC and the many charity supporters have done a wonderful job of assisting DACS move from a hovel to a place where children can be cared for and educated without worry. A job well done – thank you very much.

Tina Sahota 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.

A short video of DACS Anbagam Home is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lyhKOMns7s>

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

Child name / DACS

C/o Joe Homan Charity (India)

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