

Inba Seva Sangam Girls Hostel Annual Reports 2017/2018



Inba Seva Sangam (ISS) was founded by a single NGO; a Belgian Christian charity which runs all the activities on site as well as a great many other community related projects in this isolated valley. The girls residence, co-educational school and boys residence are part of a 10 acre plot within the greater area, which includes the administrative buildings and a five acre orchard/agricultural project. Mountains surround on all sides, this means that there is little outside connectivity, affecting internet and cellular coverage. Most telephone contact with the outside world is by land line, which feels very archaic in this day and age.

Driving up into the valley I see evidence everywhere of a decent monsoon - there are bright fields of red and orange marigolds interspersed with acres of racks of hanging gourds and runner beans. But I can also see the ravages of many years of failed rains - dozens if not hundreds of dead coconut and palmyra palms; their bare trunks looking absurdly spindly without foliage or lying in the groves where they have been cut down.



Girls room

The girls residence was originally built as a Siddha Hospital (a type of traditional medicine originally founded in south India) and is well able to withstand the vicissitudes of hundreds of girls every year. It is very solid with many small rooms and corridors off the central courtyard which is planted with both herbal and ornamental bushes and a wide variety of herbal plants. Surrounding the building providing shade and various other medicinal benefits are trees such as Neem, Silk Cotton, Gooseberry, and Dungaai. The girls use these herbals on a regular basis for ailments, such as earaches, minor eye infections and skin irritations not to mention their sought after beauty applications.

The one acre organic garden is overseen by a university trained agriculturalist, with the girls' assistance on weekends and is planted with gourds, aubergine, lady's finger, tomatoes, radishes, greens such as spinach, cluster beans, lemon and banana trees. A further four acres is an orchard planted with mango, coconut, banana, lemon and sappota trees. The produce from these two areas is mainly for the residents (girls and boys) consumption but also brings a variable annual income. Three cows bought last year replace the need to purchase milk from outside sources. The cows are kept in the village, which gets around the government's inexplicable ban on the children being involved in animal husbandry.

There are 136 girls living in the residence this year up from 128 last year. All the girls are accommodated in 16 rooms with 8 to 10 girls per room separated by years. Private rooms for the warden Bhuvaneshwari and the assistant warden are near the entrance. Last years' leaky concrete water tank has been repaired which solved the out of control mould problem in warden's room. Two large combination toilet and bath rooms anchor the corners. Upstairs are the dining hall, which doubles as the TV room for Sunday afternoon movies and an open air assembly area, both of which are also used for studying. Outside the front entrance are

another toilet block and the laundry area. Each girl is responsible for their own washing and typically they do laundry daily.

Security is provided by a fence which surrounds the residences, school and agricultural area with two watchmen on a 12 hour day/night schedule and living at the front gate. CCTV was installed this year as is mandated by the government.

There are several women teachers who live in close proximity and who are tasked with before and after school tutoring for the girls. Rounding out the group are four cooks who prepare breakfast and dinner for the girls, and lunches for all the students at the project's school (230+, includes boys from their hostel). There are the usual two kitchens; one with gas and the other an outside wood one for preparing large quantities of rice and lentils. Food storage is divided into separate rooms for dry goods, condiments, greens and vegetables. The girls return the short distance to their residence for lunch but the boys eat at school as their residence is considerably further away. Sweepers and cleaners come in daily from the nearby village of Kadavur.

The electrical power grid has been getting steadily better, with only one scheduled maintenance shut down for a full day once a month. The generator comes on automatically for the residence but hasn't been used recently. Water is drawn from two boreholes which supply the entire campus and potable water is supplied by a RO system (reverse osmosis). Hot water for some of the showers comes from a solar power array on the roof. Plans have been the works for some time to expand on this system but so far no funds have become available. Wastewater is handled by a fairly new septic system and there are no problems with it at this time. During the course of the past year some maintenance work has been done such as painting, door and screen repairs and electrical wiring updates.

Like other residential projects, ISS has a Parliamentary system run by the girls, they meet quarterly and are mostly concerned with sports, food quality and helping to organize the annual school trip. Over this past year there have been a number of Belgian and Swedish volunteers who have visited for a least a week. They helped the girls with various projects and demonstrated their own traditional cultures.

Medical checks are handled monthly by a volunteer doctor and an annual more thorough check-up was completed in December. Hygiene, adolescent development, sex education and AIDS/STD awareness is handled by the DCPU (District Child Protection Unit). Vitamin distribution (once a week) and vermifuge (twice a year) is handled by the school. If dental work is required the girls will be taken to Dindigul and if glasses are needed they are provided as well.

Annai Lea Higher Secondary School is unique in that it exists solely for the benefit of the ISS girls and boys residences. As a result there is considerable cross-over between the school versus the residences responsibilities. The Head Master Kumaresan is new to the position this year but has been teaching 6 to 10 standard at the school for the past 10 years.

The school campus is bright and clean with wide shaded verandas where you are likely to see senior girls and boys taking advantage of the quiet to study. There are thirteen classrooms; the computer room now has eight working machines; there is a biology lab and another which covers physics and chemistry. The library is quite extensive with approximately 5,000 books in both Tamil and English covering a wide variety of subjects. Students are allowed to borrow books for up to a week at a time.

There are 13 full-time teaching staff as well as a number of part-time positions. An herbalist comes once a week in keeping with the NGO's approach to encouraging the use of herbal medicines, and teaches both paper making and an 11th and 12th standard course. There is a tailor to teach the girls sewing, and another individual to work on spoken English. The full time agricultural specialist works with all the students as a supplement to the regular mandated syllabus.



Students at classroom

The Head Master reports the local primary schools are getting better but incoming 6th standard students typically still need at least three months of intensive remedial work to bring them up to par. Last year of the 20 girls who wrote the 10th standard exams, 17 passed. Nine of them have gone into 11th standard, five have entered various apprentice ITI programmes, two have returned to their homes for hopefully further education and one girl is apprenticing as a tailor.



New basketball court

The school has a large sports field with the addition of a new basketball court. The students also play football, khokho, kabbadi, badminton and have a thriving track and field programme. Rukkumani who is in 7th standard and a JHC girl won 1st prizes for a speech competition and in athletics. Ramya in 11th standard and also a JHC girl has done extremely well in the inter-school athletics competitions. The indoor sports include carom and chess as well as various clubs such as bird watching and collecting stamps, coins etc.

Standard 6 to 9 do not receive marks, only an alphabetical grade following the "all pass, no fail" education system in place and have 5 subjects per semester on the Tamil Medium system.

Standard 10 drops the "no fail" and how the youngsters do on their final exams will in large part determine what sort of other education they receive, and quite likely how they do for the rest of their lives. The 10's are exposed to weekly tests, quarterly and bi-annual exams which will make up 60% of their final mark with 40% determined from assignments and projects throughout the year. Not surprisingly there is a tremendous focus on helping the 10's do well on their exams - they have additional tutoring before school and there are special classes on the weekends for the 10 to 12th standards. All students have regular after school studies from 4:30 to 5:15 with the younger students divided into three groups based on their abilities and extra sessions on Saturday and Sunday for specific problems.

Parent/teacher interviews are held twice a year to ensure that all parties are aware of the capabilities and ambitions of the students and for the 10th to 12th standards vocational guidance and counselling takes place 4 times a year. They celebrate the national holidays with cultural events like dances and music/drumming as well as the "Mother's" birthday - commemorating Lea Provo who founded ISS in 1968. Finally there is a summer camp for all students in April after final exams. The residents partake in a wide variety of activities - folk dancing, trekking in the hills, street theatre, swimming (when sufficient water is available in the 'tanks', drought currently makes this impossible), stick fighting, cycling, spoken English seminars and working on "eco" projects.

The 11th and 12th standard students are split into one of four streams:
 Biology/Maths/Chemistry/ Physics;
 Computer Science/
 Maths/Chemistry/Physics; Computer
 Science/Economics/
 Commerce/Accounting and Agricultural
 Theory/Agricultural Practical Parts One
 and Two/Biology - they all take Tamil and
 English.

It is a complicated system with some serious flaws but overall an effective programme for producing reasonably well educated, useful people ready to take their places in the world.



Girls at study

JHC staff meet regularly with the Head Master and the girl's Warden to resolve any problems - everyone agrees the system works well.

ISS has opened doors for many in the past, and each the future looks even more exciting. Whereas in the past the trauma of parental death, disablement or abandonment jeopardised a girl's education, the Girls

Hostel is a safety net and prevents girls from having to resort to the type of work that their families may have been involved with for generations; these intelligent, confident and well motivated girls have a plethora of options accessible to them now. As more girls pass through the hostel as well rounded, enthusiastic and motivated young women sought after by industries and employers and making full use of their new opportunities, they will each pull their families with them, saying goodbye to the poverty they were born into and being welcomed by an entirely new environment. There's no way that could have been the case if it wasn't for the continued support of dedicated sponsors and coming straight from the girls themselves - 'Nandri' Thank you!

Kimberly Smith, Volunteer 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.

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

Child name / ISS

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