

## Madurai Sevashram Girls Home Annual Report 2017/2018



Madurai Sevashram Girls Home (MSGH), it was founded originally over 50 years ago. A group of affluent local women saw a need and set out to help. These were predominantly young widows or women with children who had been abandoned with few skills or education to support themselves in life. So an education programme was started, a residence built to provide a safe haven and eventually it morphed into a home for disadvantaged girls where a solid education would provide them with the ability to raise themselves and their families out of the pernicious cycle of poverty.



The main building

Today the neat, tree shaded grounds house 91 school girls, whilst another 17 attend outside courses (Apprentices) with 80 of them supported by JHC. The buildings are in good repair; the main hall, auditorium and kitchen have been freshly painted. The recent years of poor rains still show in the rather sparse vegetation and fewer trees still standing but overall the grounds and buildings are clean and very well organized. The girls sleep in two large dormitories; one for 1st to 6th standard and the other for 7th to 12th standard. Each girl has a small truck filled with their personal things, stored on shelves along the wall. Four of the staff sleep in the dormitories with the girls.

The supervisor is a whip thin woman by the name of Seethalakshmi (Seetha), who has a close attachment to her charges after almost 25 years in the position and looks after them with great attention and love. She is joined by Mangalam who has been on staff for the past 2 ½ years as the office assistant and is in her third year studying for a Bachelor in Computer Applications. There is a house mother whose name is Jothi, several helpers, cooks and day/night watchmen.

The library of approximately 300 books is kept in the administrative office and is perfectly organized though it is easy to tell that the books are well used. The computer lab has 8 units and they all work; classes are held daily. There is another internet connected computer for staff and CCTV monitor in the office. The residence has cable TV but use is strictly monitored and usually only on holidays. Newspapers are delivered daily and the girls are encouraged to read them to keep up with the news. There is a music system and a radio which the girls can listen to during chores or their leisure times. Behind the buildings is a large and well used park area with climbing bars, slides and such which were donated by a JHC sponsor. The girls play Kabadi, Kho-kho, football, Tennikoit and badminton in the park. Indoor games include chess and carom; both the younger and older girls really seem to enjoy handicapping and rhythm games.



Library at MSGH



RO Plant for drinking water

The sanitary set-up is basic but clean - one toilet and bathing area (bucket baths, as is usual in this part of India) for every 10 girls. Laundry is done three times a week. Being in the city of Madurai has its advantages, the power grid is reliable and a consistent water supply is assured. A large RO system (reverse osmosis) donated jointly by two companies keeps all the water potable. The grey water is diverted to water the trees and flowering bushes. Unfortunately there is no place for any kind of vegetable garden. Unusually, the kitchen only has a wood fire cooking set-up but produces nutritious meal for the girls including lunches. Fresh supplies are delivered at least twice a week and dry goods such as rice and millet are purchased monthly and stored in secure, dry rooms.

Studies are taken seriously with a daily tuition teacher for the 10th to 12th standards and study hall every evening supervised by the warden and other staff for all students between 6 and 8 pm. The girls are divided into study groups with the older/better students helping out the younger/poorer ones. In addition a sewing or tailoring tutor comes in at weekends to provide some practical skills. Seetha reports that not surprisingly maths and English are the toughest subjects with physics being tough for the 11th and 12th standard girls. She does feel however that they are doing well with their computer skills having daily exposure.

The best students are as follows: in 4th standard - Pandimari & Vijayalakshmi, 5th - Gayathri & Abinaya, 6th - Madhumitha, 7th - Deepika, 8th - T Gopika, 9th M Anupriya, 10th - K Divya Bharathi, 11th - C Sumithra & P Devika and 12th M Jamuna. You may be interested to note that in the case where there is an initial in front of a girl's name it is because there is more than one girl in residence with the same name.

Pongal was celebrated recently with all the girls staying in residence, receiving new dresses and treats, setting off firecrackers which is extremely popular in Tamil Nadu and eating special meals.

Medical care is extremely proactive. Check-ups are done three times a year; multi-vitamins, calcium and iron tablets are given daily - as well as a diet supplemented by millet, 100 grams of soya and green peas three times a week, all donated by the TVS Krishna Hospital. Although none of the girls have had blood-work done to determine their haemoglobin levels, it is less of an issue given the care that is taken with their diet and supplements. The usual vermifuge tablets are issued twice a year. The local Child Welfare Committee (CWC) holds frequent workshops covering personal hygiene, AIDS awareness and sex education. There have been no serious illnesses or injuries this year; dental and eye care is done at the local hospital.

Another advantage of being in Madurai are the many opportunities to visit special places in the city - the Gandhi museum, Meenakshi Temple, as well as trips to places like Ooty or Coimbatore. Through the women who run the management committee the residence is very well connected and highly regarded in the community. Special meals are provided regularly each month and other donations such as clothing, furniture and sweets frequently come from local donors. When I asked Seetha if she had any wishes she replied simply "all is good!"

The girls go to two different schools; the local Government Girls School - Kakkai Padiniyar Girls Higher Secondary School, with over 1,000 students is divided into three groups - elementary, middle and higher secondary, currently 19 MSGH girls attend from 7th to 11th. The Head of the Secondary school is a dynamic woman who has been in the education system for 32 years - 25 years teaching 12th standard and the past 5 years as Head of school. She has 52 teachers for approximately 910 students; there are also three additional teachers for the vocational stream, a commerce teacher for the 11th and 12th standards and specialists for computers, drawing, architectural drafting/construction and PE.

As a great many of the children come from "disadvantaged" backgrounds the school follows an initiative sponsored by the government called Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) which attempts to "provide a quality basic education for 6 to 14 year olds to bridge social, regional and gender gaps". The teachers typically hold a minimum B Ed to teach from 6th to 10th standard and must have a master's degree to teach 11th and 12th. The methodology follows the government mandated syllabus and they have three separate streams - "A" being the English Medium from 6th to 10th at the moment, "B" being Tamil Medium from 6th to 12th and the third is a vocational stream. Interestingly the school does not offer any remedial assistance or tutoring.

The school has separate chemistry, physics, botany and zoology labs and while I visited they were setting up practice practical exams in each of them. The computer lab is in excellent shape but with only nine units rather small for the number of students. There are apparently over 6,000 books but they lack a room for the library at the moment. A smart room has been set up (perhaps the former library?) and while the Head thinks it may become very useful, she is facing resistance from the teachers who don't necessarily want to learn how to use it effectively - preferring to teach in the same old ways. I somehow doubt that the status quo will remain so given her determination!



Computer lab at Kakkai Padiniyar School

The on-site kitchen provides lunch for the students up to 10th standard. 11th and 12th are expected to bring their own. As a government school, uniforms, text books etc are provided up to various points, 11th students are to receive a bicycle and 12th a laptop upon graduation.

Last year 14 MSGH girls wrote the 10th standard exams with 12 passing - eight have continued into 11th standard, two are studying at a 2 year nursing programme and two are returned home, hopefully to continue their educations. Both Seetha and School Head report a good working relationship and they meet often to sort out any problems before they become major issues. A well run school with few concerns!



Balamandiram Higher Secondary School

The balance of the girls attend the Balamandiram school two doors down from the residence, which is a government aided private school also from 1st to 12th standard. This may change over the course of the next few years as further girls attend Kakkai Padiniyar School, as the logistic issue of transportation is fixed. I met initially with the principal and secretary; both seemed to go out of their way to ensure I understood how busy and important they were! Enrolment is down to 888 from last years 1,084 and severely down from previous years maximum. There are 19 full-time teachers and three specialists who teach, computers, PE and sewing.

The school has both English and Tamil Mediums follows the government mandated syllabus through 10th standard. The two higher standards are streamed into separate areas of study with a combination of: Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Commerce, Accountancy, Economics and Business Maths, History, Geography, Economics and Political Science. Wow!

The sports field is available for games such as kabbadi, kho-kho, and unusually stick fighting. In addition within the school there are chapters of boy scouts and girl guides as well as Junior Red Cross.

Special mention has to go to the girls (apprentices) who are equipping themselves for the challenges and opportunities of 21<sup>st</sup> century India by continuing into further education or training. They've flourished in their Girl's Home and are now taking that final step towards changing their lives. Courses ranging from Nursing (Diploma to BSc level), BA Economics, BSc Computer or Physics and one at Master Degree in Computer Application. They are the MSGH end product and prime encouragement as role models to their junior sisters. Not only have opportunities and provisions changed for girls in education and beyond, but equally important is the change in parental attitudes as they now see their girls as an asset and source of pride.

As you have seen, the girls can become software engineers or nurses or anything, because of your sponsorship and because of sponsors like you. They are delightful girls and they are trying hard, 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 support teams and of course the invaluable support of the sponsors, so 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](https://www.facebook.com/JoeHomanCharity) or [www.joehoman.org.uk](http://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 / MSGH

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