

Rajapalayam Boys Town Annual Report 2017 – 2018



Rajapalayam is the furthest residence from the Boys Town Society's Office near Tirumangalam. An hour and a half ride south west puts you into close proximity with the Western Ghats and an entirely different environment. Rajapalayam town is famous for its cotton gin and spinning mills - situated there for the felicitous climate. Agriculture is varied with fields of corn, sugar cane, plantations of coconut and banana as well as small truck gardens producing all kinds of vegetables. In other words it is a relatively prosperous district and has had less impact from the poor monsoons of previous years which have so devastated other parts of Tamil Nadu.



RBT Entrance

The residence (RBT) has 23 acres, comprised of a mango orchard, a small teak planting, a good sized pond which has water year round and is used by local shepherds as well as the actual campus. Driving in through the gate you proceed up a long avenue with the boys dormitories on either side. There are many varieties of trees and plants all around the buildings and neat little irrigation channels to direct water to the plants, especially away from the buildings. It is apparent that the whole place has been maintained in this fashion for a long time. Despite the fact that this is likely the second oldest complex, built in 1967 it is in considerably better shape than almost every other residence. Certainly regular maintenance for such things as termite

control and normal wear and tear has been neglected these past few years but over all the buildings have stood up well. There are no capital or maintenance expenditures budgeted.

There are 30 boys living here; the same number as last year. All nine of the students who wrote their 10th standard exams last year passed and have gone onto apprenticeship training in various Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). 20 new boys were admitted to the residence; however over the course of the year 11 have left. Two boys were homesick and four were dismissed for ongoing disciplinary problems. Three boys returned to their families as their circumstances improved and two boys who were not academically inclined, finished 9th standard and despite extensive counselling by the BTS staff, dropped out and are now working.

The warden Muthumanickam is an "old boy" from the '70's and was educated to 12th standard before starting as an assistant warden at Tirumangalam Boys Town, then working as a warden at various residences from 1990 onwards. He has been at RBT since 2016 - an experienced and capable Warden. The assistant warden is Subburaj Pandi with a B.Ed and an M.Sc; he has been with RBT for two years now and also tutors the boys in maths and on the computer. Rounding out the group is the cook Sathya Vani who is a warm and lovely older lady originally from the Madurai area.

There are five building to house the boys but at the moment only three are being used. Each dormitory has a sleeping room with screens mostly covering the windows, fans and lights which almost all work; with a smaller room attached to store each boy's trunk. The residence has the usual wood and gas kitchens with vegetable

delivery twice a week and dry goods once a month being stored in a secure area. The library has approximately 360 well used books with about 270 being Tamil, 80 English and a smattering of others. They do have English language teaching CDs but as the boys attend a Tamil Medium school there hasn't been much emphasis placed on utilizing them to learn from.

There are no working units in the Computer room. The office has a computer with internet access which the senior boys may use for project research and another computer with a dedicated UPS has been repurposed as the sole unit to teach computer skills to the 30 boys. They do have all the usual AV equipment and a satellite TV so Sunday evenings from 5 to 8 pm are movie nights. Not surprisingly, Tamil movies are very popular and generally run three or more hours in length.

RBT is fortunate in having larger sports fields than most and they often host team competitions between the various other residences. Each year a small budget is allocated for new sports equipment and this year the boys parliament opted for new cricket balls and bats - as a result perhaps, they won 1st prize for cricket at the recent Pongal Celebrations. In addition they play volleyball, Kabadi, football and indoor games such as chess and carom. The RBT boys have a reputation as fine drummers, although whether you consider that as an indoor or outdoor cultural activity would depend on your tolerance for the rather noisy practice sessions!



Boys sleeping room



Shower unit

Water is amply supplied from the bore well and run through an RO unit (reverse osmosis) for potability. Another well provides irrigation water for the mango and teak trees as well as the plantings around the buildings. Electricity is quite reliable these days with a short daily shut-down to switch off the agricultural feed (farmers have free electricity daily until 11:30) and adjust to the commercial and domestic use. The residence does have a generator but it hasn't been used in quite some time. The boys have a toilet block for their own use and while it is scrupulously clean, they are now in need of maintenance. The showers are open air with a metal surround and do double duty as the laundry area. The staff have a separate shower/toilet facility.

Despite having good water this year, the kitchen garden only boasts a couple of rather tired looking pumpkin vines. The teak trees are about 15 years old and cannot be harvested until they are a minimum of 25 years old - obviously the older and larger the trees, the more valuable they are. There has been some attempt to plant new saplings but it is haphazard at best. In years past, RBT has had farm animals - cows and buffalo, goats and sheep, geese and rabbits; however the government forbade keeping animals as their care was considered "child labour" - one of the governmental more egregiously dumb decisions..

The 9th and 10th standard students have a math tuition teacher every evening from 6 to 8 p.m. Both the warden (all subjects) and assistant warden (maths and computers) assist the students as they can. The boy's parliament has instituted a programme whereby each of the better students take on the responsibility for helping two or three poorer students, as well as getting math tables and this has apparently worked out quite well. As usual the poorest subjects remain math and English. Several of the boys have done well in various competitions: Sivakumar won 1st prize in the regional Quiz competition, Muneeswaran, an honourable mention at the district drawing competition and Jeyamanikandan came 1st in essay writing at his school.

Medical care has been hit and miss. The RBT boys are only getting one check-up a year in August which covers a basic eye, ear, nose and teeth exam. This is entirely dependent on the availability of a volunteer doctor, all else must be referred to the local primary health centre (PHC). One of the younger boys had an allergic reaction to something from his visit home over Pongal and the warden took him off the PHC for successful treatment. Unfortunately while the boys are getting their vermifuge tablets twice a year, they are

only receiving a multi-vitamin once a week despite the standard being twice a week. A new protocol has now been instituted which requires all new children to have a blood-test prior to admittance which provides blood type and haemoglobin levels.

Five boys from RBT recently attended a workshop held by the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) at Tirumangalam Boys Town on personal hygiene, AIDS awareness and Adolescent Development. These boys then returned to RBT to teach the rest of the students. A local college sent a group of their students to RBT to talk about Dengue fever prevention and care.

The warden reports that they have a very good relationship with the local community; at least twice a month donors provide special meals; a group from Rajapalayam gave them 300 Palmyra seeds which have been planted around the pond (Palmyra being the state tree of Tamil Nadu and has distinctive palmate fronds with the tree soaring above the countryside on straight trunks).

Government bureaucracy is always one of the biggest challenges and obstacles to helping these needy children. Increasingly there is pressure to not allow children to be placed outside their home districts regardless of need or availability of support. Fortunately for RBT, the local DCPU has been willing to work with as opposed to against the needs of the residence.

All 30 of the boys at RBT go to the local school called Jothi Higher Secondary school. It is a bit of a hybrid as it is government aided to the end of 8th standard and they also cover the salaries of four teachers out of the 11 on staff. In addition the sister college across the street covers a large part of the school's costs out of the profits from their fees. There are three hostels which house students from remote areas and who are from what is called the "backward classes" and the Dalit (formerly the untouchables). These children are from 4th to 10th standard in the case of the Dalit and 4th to 12th standard for the others. All pay some small level of fees including BTS and their children's families.



Classroom at Jothi School

The campus is clean and neat, well organized and has well treed grounds. Entry is through a guarded gate in the compounds wall and while there is no CCTV system there is a night watchman. The head of school is a very talented woman by the name of Mrs Thamayanthi. She holds masters in Philosophy, History and Education, has been Head of School since 2000 and occasionally teaches classes. Apparently all her teachers hold their masters in their fields as well. There are no part-time teachers but they do offer tailoring/sewing classes for the 6th to 8th standards three times a week and comprehensive computer classes for the 11th and 12th standard student.

The school is Tamil Medium and follows the Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) methodology. To the end of 9th standard this means over the course of three semesters 60% of the marks come from theory, tests/exams and 40% from daily activities and practical work. While 10th and 12th standard have always faced the major and higher education determining exams, now the 11th students are being asked to write exams as well.

As many of the children from the backward classes and the Dalit come into the school with minimal literacy skills, the first three months of their year are spent in intensive remedial work up to the 6th standard. It is compulsory for the 10th to 12th standard students to attend additional tutoring for an hour each before and after regular school hours. Not surprisingly, all 54 students who wrote the 10th exams passed and only four of the 21 who wrote the 12th failed.

The school has an excellent and very well organized computer room; spotlessly clean with the unheard of 20 fully functional computers! The science labs are equally well organized with plenty of subject specific posters and appropriate equipment all neatly stored. The library which serves dual function for the teachers college across the road has a full-time librarian and well over 5,000 books, periodicals and journals; 3000 are also kept in the office for the younger students. The electrical grid is reliable as the school pays a special permission fee to have uninterrupted service. The borehole well supplies sufficient water for the school's needs and they use an RO (reverse osmosis) system to provide potable water. Sanitation facilities are in a

separate building which is very neat and clean. The kitchen provides a nutritious lunch for all the students which includes the ubiquitous egg.



Mrs Thamayanthi,
Head of Jothi School

The Head reports no problems with the RBT boys either academically or disciplinary and “they always do well in sports and chess. Some of the boys have done well in speech and essay writing but I don’t know which ones at the moment.” In any case both the warden and she communicate frequently to ward off any potential problems before they become larger issues. In past some of the RBT boys were consistently not doing their homework but once the warden was appraised of this, he instituted a checking programme to ensure no boy was allowed to get away with this again.

This is an extremely impressive school and Head - a fine example of what can be accomplished with the will and drive to make it so. It could be wished that all the other Heads of School were required to spend time here learning how a successful school is run.

The youngsters at RBT are delightful and they are trying hard, but would be no-where near where they are today without the Boys Town Society. They are from the poorest families and might be the first generation to be studying.

Thanks to your continued support, the vast majority of the youngsters here will go on to 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... the magnitude of this is almost too big to comprehend. 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!

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 / RBT
C/o Joe Homan Charity (India)
Post Box No 36
Dindigul – 624 001
Tamil Nadu
India