

RENGASAMY CHILDREN'S VILLAGE Annual Report 2017/2018



Rengasamy Children's Village (RCV) is very much in a state of flux this year. The Supervisor Ayyammal has been transferred to the Inner Wheel Girls Town (IWGT) after the abrupt departures of both the Warden and Assistant Warden there. While this maybe a temporary move on her part, it does leave RCV with only the 5 foster mothers (FM) to manage the complex. BTS are managing this situation and are active in recruiting new qualified staff.



Foster mothers at RCV

Divya has been here for six months, is well educated and has computer experience; she has one five year old son who is in upper kindergarten. Vanajothi who has also been on site for six months has her 10th standard, some computer knowledge, can sew and worked previously in a hospital so she has good practical experience; she has one eight year old daughter who is in 3rd standard. Vidya has been with RCV for 8 months, has her 10th standard and can sew; she does not have any children. Vennila has been with RCV for eight months, has not had any schooling so is functionally illiterate, she has three children - a seven year old son in 2nd standard, another son of five years and a four year old daughter who are both in lower kindergarten. Muthumari is the newest FM at three months; she is also basically illiterate, can sew and has a nine year old daughter in 4th standard and a six year old son in 1st standard. Both Vennila and Muthumari share cooking duties.

In addition another young woman called Indra is staying at RCV, with her five year old son who is in lower kindergarten. She is now the Accounting Assistant for BTS. Fortuitously, she originally applied to be a Foster Mother but with her skills was tapped to fill a much needed position within BTS' administration. She will also be starting to do evening math tuition at the residence.

Ayyammal is still handling all the government regulatory paperwork with the assistance of one of the office staff as she has the entire IWGT paperwork to manage as well. Both Divya and Vanajothi are starting to be given additional training to become assistant supervisors. Vanajothi manages the stores and children's activities. Divya handles the financial banking and basic administrative duties.

This year there are 49 children in residence; 16 girls and 33 boys. Of the 53 children from last year, 37 remain, 11 transferred up to IWGT or TBT upon reaching the age of 11 and entering 6th standard. 19 new children were admitted but seven left throughout the year for a variety of reasons. Of the total, 31 children go to the English Medium Francois Meyer Matriculation School (FMMS) and 18 go to the local government school called Panchayat Union Middle School (PUMS) which teaches in Tamil Medium. Which of these two schools a child goes to is largely determined by their previous educational experience. This means that the youngest who are just starting school will go to FMMS to be taught in English Medium.

The campus on first glance looks lovely with big shade trees and an immaculately neat and tidy appearance. However closer inspection shows the age of the entire complex. Maintenance and repair has been minimal for

several years with minimum funds available and only done in emergency situations. The original structures were built of mud bricks which are very durable but only as long as the protective plaster coating is maintained.

The site (or Tindlepatti Children's Village) is now being reviewed for a full maintenance programme. This will bring all buildings and facilities back up to a good and safe situation.

Where in years past, when monsoon rain was abundant, there would have been a small garden in the centre with a little children's play area and flowers is now just a hard beaten patch of ground. The larger playground has also suffered and is not often used, the swings, slides, merry-go-round sit in isolation, leaving a large field of dusty weeds. The children still have outdoor sports, playing age related games such as Caram, Kho-Kho, Kabadi, cricket, ball games and skipping. A P/E teacher comes to the residence twice a month on Sunday afternoons for four or five hours to guide the children in the more structured sports. New equipment is typically provided at the beginning of each year as needed.

The library is rather disorganized at the moment, as about 200 books were removed to the library at FMMS leaving approximately 500 including 50 new ones. The computer room has two working computers one of which does double duty for the CCTV system, a UPS which is not connected at the moment; Divya has taken charge of tutoring the students on weekends from 4 to 5 pm.

The electrical grid has steadily improved over the past few years and is much more reliable - shutdowns occur once a month only for maintenance. There is a new bore well which supplies sufficient water for the compound's needs and potable water is delivered once a week or as necessary. Security is provided via the CCTV system, with a three month new night watchman called Narayanasamy and a rather dilapidated wire fence which surrounds the entire complex.

BTS owns another children's village which was mothballed three years ago and consideration is being given to closing Rengasamy at the end of this school year and moving all the children there for the new year. Tindlepatti will need new electrical systems, new bore holes drilled, termite spraying and general building repair but it is in much better shape overall. In addition there are almost three acres of more fertile land so there is the potential for kitchen gardens and other plantings.

Despite all these challenges the children appear to be thriving; they have their parliament and take it quite seriously. They are preparing for Pongal and I'm told this year's dance will be an interpretation of the conflict between traditional and modern habits - I look forward to watching that with great anticipation. The children collect various items such as stamps and coins to learn about and display. Two of the children attending FMMS have won prizes - Sivapriya in 4th standard won 1st place with a speech on flowers and Rajapandi who is also in 4th standard won a 1st for a speech on Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the Indian independence movement. Saravanan who attends Panjayat Union in 5th standard won for a speech about Abdul Kalam, the 11th president of India.



RCV Children

Medical check-ups follow the same protocols as all the other residences - twice a year in July and February which include vermifuge tablets. This year all the BTS children will have their haemoglobin levels tested in February to check for anaemia. It has been recommended that in future this blood-work is done at the beginning of the year in July along with the first regular check-up. Any problems requiring action can be dealt with then and appropriate monitoring scheduled going forward. There have been no serious injuries or illnesses this year other than the normal scrapes and bumps.

The children's meals are typically cooked on outdoor fires although the residence has both gas and wood fire units. Greens are delivered twice a week and dry goods monthly. I can attest that the food is very tasty and proper attention is paid to preparing nutritious food with what is available. The children receive vitamin tablets twice a week and a wheat porridge tiffin after school. Local donors supply four or five special meals a month, typically buying chickens or bringing huge pots of homemade food such as biryani. Last Republic Day another donor donated an A/V system and a group from Tirupur has gifted new Diwali outfits two years in a row.

The Panchayat Union Middle School in Katrampatti where 19 of the RCV children attend school, is less than 2 km away in the middle of the village. The Panchayat campus is small but quite lovely and far better than a great many I've seen. Like most schools, everything does look rather worn and tired but there is no slovenliness. There are animated paintings on the walls of the buildings, everything is clean and tidy; the temple is next door and the children are allowed to use the large open field there as a playground. Each classroom has a small library, fans and good ventilation. The three kitchen staff provide a full lunch meal for all the children.

The schooling system is in a state of transition; previously all state schools taught solely in Tamil, now the government is mandating a switch to what is called English medium. Panchayat now teaches English medium for standard (or grade) one through three and as the children advance to the higher standards they will gradually be converted.



Panchayat Union Middle School

The school is uniquely fortunate in its Head Master, Mr Shajahan who speaks excellent English and has a legitimate passion for education. He has been a post-graduate teacher since 1986 and Head for the past eight years. His seven teachers appear to be equally qualified with as much as 16 years experience and keen to utilize the ongoing educational opportunities provided by the government, comprised of one to three day courses. There are no on-site specialists but the government sends a special needs tutor once a month to help both the nine students and their teachers. The teachers themselves help with remedial tutoring during lunch hours and after school as needed.

The school conducts weekly tests and adheres to the mandated exam schedule. Each student has a very thorough docket to track their progress and help identify any potential issues. Academic standing is based on 60% scholastic and 40% activities/projects. They have three desktops and three laptop computers and while there isn't a class dedicated to them, all the teachers and students have scheduled time and access. They also have A/V equipment and a projector for videos etc.

Mr Shajahan indicated that the 19 BTS students fit in well with the other students and their parents, and while they sometimes need a little extra time to adjust when they first arrive, they settle in and are as good learners as the others. Indeed Mr Shajahan seems to take great pride that he gets the "problem" students as he feels his school is uniquely able to help them. Previously Ayyammal worked closely with the Head, now the two main foster mother do so and they meet several times a week to work on any issues which may arise.

When I asked if there were any issues or problems he wanted to address, the Head's only concern was that now the Francois Meyer Matriculation School has opened, his schools' enrolment would be declining and he would lose the opportunity to help these and other BTS children.

This new building housing the Francois Meyer Matriculation School (FMMS), had its first school year start in June and is situated in front of the old primary school on the same large plot of land containing the BTS administrative offices, the Guest House and the sports fields. It is surrounded by a high concrete wall painted white and topped by orange - the same colours as the building itself. For the moment there is simply an opening where the gates will be and the site still has that rather unfinished construction site look but with trees being planted and some plants flourishing if the rains hold up it will become quite handsome.



Francois Meyer Matriculation School

The interior is airy and light with plenty of breezes to keep everyone cool. The classrooms surround a central gravel playground/assembly area with a stage directly across from the entrance.

The Head of School Mrs Umarani is an accomplished woman with Masters in Science, Arts and Education and is also a Librarian. She is one of two teachers who have moved over from the old school when this one was commissioned. There are 15 full-time teachers with five having master's degrees in their fields; three administrative staff, three drivers for the dedicated school buses and three bus helpers. The assistant warden from TBT, Pandiarajan is also on site most of the time to assist as needed. There is currently one part-time position, that of an arts/craft/drawing teacher. Three of the teachers are specialists for English, Hindi and Computers.

The school is an English Medium School, following the government mandated syllabus with additional subjects taught in Hindi and computers. There are 295 students from junior kindergarten to 6th standard of which 42 are actually from BTS. Subject testing is done every three months within the appropriate standards.

Tutoring by the appropriate teacher is theoretically available for students in the morning between 8 and 9 and again in the afternoon between 3:30 and 4:45. However this is entirely dependent on the bus schedule and all the children are bussed in. There are three buses to pick up children from as far away as 25 km. Some children do arrive at 8, but if they are on a later or longer pick-up and need remedial work they have little or no recourse. The same applies of course for the return home when additional tutoring is also offered.



Library at FMM School

Because it is a very new school it would be unfair to take them to task too severely - there is always shake-down and adjustment period. There are however a number of areas which the Head has indicated still need to be developed. The overseeing government officials say the science lab and equipment are insufficient. The library is small - 435 new books with only one or two books in Hindi which will make teaching the language difficult. The computer lab (*at the time of this report being written*) hasn't yet been set up. They also need a UPS system for the computers even though the electricity is more reliable with only one monthly shut down for maintenance. A photocopier is fervently wished for as well!

They may be victims of their own success as the school already needs an additional three class rooms. The stated intent is to bring an additional standard on board each year i.e. next year add 7th standard and so forth. However without constructing a second story there simply isn't room. Additionally, approval from various government regulatory bodies has to be given before a school can transition from a primary (kindergarten to 5th standard) to a full matriculation institution. One of the major challenges they will face is keeping qualified teachers given the huge disparity between what the school is paying and what other or government schools pay.

The sanitary facilities are well thought out, spacious and meticulously clean. The security CCTV has not yet been set up but the school shares the night watchman with the guest house and admin offices. No indication has been made as to when the gates will be installed and how they will be configured. The bore well provides water for sanitation and filtered drinking water is delivered as needed, typically every three days. There is no kitchen so all the children must bring tiffin from home or from the residences. Private schools typically don't supply the "freebies" the government schools do, which can be tough but they are now mandated to ensure their students have the following; children from kindergarten to 2nd standard must receive a Vitamin A injection every year, they must receive the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine and in order to combat Dengue fever, each child must be given a Neem/Herbal soup for a minimum of three days in a row once a year every year. This soup has been shown to strengthen the immune system (something to import to Canada in flu season perhaps?)

Although the school doesn't yet have a P/E teacher, the children can still use the old playground with its slides, merry-go-round and play games like burst the balloon and such like. The sports field is directly behind the school and can be accessed through another opening in the compounds wall.

Once again my heart is moved by the efforts of so many to improve the lives of these children. Almost all of them have sponsors but the majority never hear from them. They long to have a photo and to know something about the sponsor and their families. Education will change their lives for the better but in particular for those

with only one parent or even none, the contact with another special adult is very important. If you have not written yet, please do. Five short simple sentences and a photo would bring great joy.

Joe Homan's wish was to give every child a chance and it really does feel like we are giving them the very best chance in life, here. Boys Town Society and its residential projects, isn't just about providing these children with a roof over their head, food on the table and a good school (although isn't that an incredible feat?!). It's about providing a supportive and nurturing environment which will help the children to develop into well-rounded young persons. Extracurricular activities allow them to develop other skills and interests and give back to the community. As these children get older having structure in their lives will make them more disciplined; having a hand in the running of the project will help them to become responsible and mature and take pride in the things they have.

Thanks to your continued support, the vast majority of the children here will move into higher education and go on to gain a trade, or even a degree, which will guarantee them well-paid job opportunities for the rest of their lives. You can imagine how life-changing this is to a child born into poverty. A far cry from the prospects their, mostly illiterate parents would have faced in their youth. Thank you for your support.

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.

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