

## Tirumangalam Boys Town

Annual Report 2017 – 2018



The Monsoon this season was “pretty good”. This means that some of the reservoirs are half full at the moment and the ground water has replenished to some degree. It will take several years of good rains for the land to really recover however. Walking through the fields over to Tirumangalam Boys Town (TBT) everything is greener than last year and there are some signs of hope. A field planted with aubergine and ladyfingers; flowering bushes attracting clouds of butterflies and even the dusty acacias don't look quite as droopy. However, the fruiting trees are all stunted and shrivelled so there won't be much of a harvest again this year.

The Residence is still an oasis of towering trees and carefully tended bushes but the buildings are showing their age and in need of repairs and restoration. The government has mandated that the Residence must have a secure, solid wall around the entire compound as part of the security upgrade requirements (currently 4 CCTV and a night watchman) but all is on hold until a decision is made on widening the road and by how much. Indeed the road work may necessitate demolishing and rebuilding one or more of the dormitories so holding off on some of the much needed repairs makes some sense. On the plus side, the government has installed solar lighting in the auditorium and covered approximately half the cost. While not as bright as the old fluorescents it will provide a nice cost savings over time and may be rolled out to the other Residences over the coming months.



Pot painting

The boys are joyously welcoming and keen for photographs of themselves and their friends. Last year I brought a small photo printer and there appears to be great anticipation of getting pictures to share with family and friends again! On weekends the flat roofs of the dormitories are festooned with drying laundry which the boys are personally responsible for. The showers have been recently enclosed with a tin fence and all the grey water from both the showers and the laundry is used for the gardens. The boys have a club to maintain the rather bedraggled and dry kitchen garden, work together keep the grounds neat and tidy and look after their few animals - one speedy hen with an indeterminate number of chicks, three guinea pigs and one rather indolent spotted black dog.

The boy's parliament manages the day-to-day non-academic and leisure activities of the Residence which gives the boys practical exposure in leadership, managing resources and the start of financial acumen. Positions are rotated on a schedule to give all the boys an opportunity with the exception being the Head Boy who is elected for the entire year.

This year there were 52 boys in residence down from 57 last year. No apprentices are currently living on site. Three boys left; one was homesick, one left to look after an ill mother and continue school in his home village and one boy left after running away several times and being generally “mischievous”. Scholastically, all 12 of last years 10th standard boys passed their final exams; seven have gone to Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) in a variety of fields - A/C mechanics, electrical, electronics, fitters, motor mechanics, tool and die, instrument & control engineering (ICE) and computers.

One boy has advanced to +1 (11th Standard) and is in residence at Athoor Boys Town and four have returned to their families. This year there will be four boys writing the 10th standard exams and the warden has high hopes that one of the boys will achieve over 80% and also go onto 11th standard. Both of the boys who graduated from 12th standard last year are currently enrolled at university, one studying for an engineering degree (B.E.) and the other in Costume Design (B.Sc.)

Tutoring is handled by a part-time tutor who comes daily from 18:30 to 20:00 and covers all subjects although his qualification is in the sciences. In addition the warden works with the students enrolled in the English Medium programme at school, from 18:30 to 20:00 and 20:30 to 21:30 if necessary. There are three new students who arrived functionally illiterate and who are working on a modified curriculum to focus on the most important subjects - reading, writing etc. An intense schedule but all these children understand the difference a good education will make in their lives and the lives of their families so you seldom hear complaints!



Thulasiraman, Warden, TBT

Thulasiraman is a well seasoned warden with many years at TBT and other residences; Pandiyarajan who is the nominal Assistant Warden spends a great deal of his time working at the Francois Meyer School. He been here for 3 ½ years and was previously at Athoor Boys Town as well as being an “old boy” from Nilakottai. The cook Petchi has been on staff about a year and a half and keeps two immaculately clean kitchens; one the traditional wood fire and then other with a more modern gas unit. An RO system (reverse osmosis) unit produces the water used for cooking. Fresh vegetables are delivered once or twice a week and the dry goods delivered monthly are kept in bins in locked storage. Surprisingly two of the shallow bore holes are producing good water while the deepest one at 300 feet is completely dry. There is also a 1000 gallon purified water tank which is refilled at need by a local NGO.

The other facilities include a library with about 260 Tamil books and approximately 60 English ones and the boys have mandatory

“reading” for an hour each on Saturday and Sunday. The computer room has three computers which all work and another in the office which is connected to the internet. The boys are allowed to use that computer for project research under the supervision of the warden. Power is becoming ever more reliable with one shut down per month for maintenance so while they do have a diesel generator it is never used but the computers do have a dedicated UPS.

They have a music system - very important for their dances (six of the boys came in 2nd for cultural dance at the regional competitions), and a TV and DVD for movies, documentaries and educational CDs. In addition to dance, they have reintroduced some traditional games such as “Goli” which is played with marbles, “Pambaram” which uses spinning tops and “Gilli” which is likely a precursor to cricket and played with long and short sticks (I don’t pretend to understand Cricket so Gilli is way beyond me!). The TBT boys have done so well this year in sports, indoor games and cultural activities that Thulasiraman has hopes of winning the BTS Championship for the first time in several years - a highly coveted honour!



TBT Boys playing volleyball

The boys have a medical exam twice a year, in August shortly after the start of the school year and again in February before exams start in March. The check-ups include all the basics as well as dental; eye examinations and vermifuge tablets are done through the government schools only. Personal Hygiene is covered in a presentation held once a year by a professor from the university in Dindigul. Incoming students will now be required to have baseline blood work done to check for anaemia amongst other things and plans maybe underway to establish a regular monitoring schedule.

The TBT boys and the girls of IWGT organized a Dengue Fever awareness rally at the local village recently. In conjunction with the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), they also created a dance drama to educate

about appropriate and inappropriate touching and general sex education which was also held in the village on Joe Homan's Birthday.

One of the biggest challenges facing TBT is the deteriorating infrastructure. It has been so long since any capital expenditures or even basic repairs have been done that there are serious deficiencies in every building. This is now a high priority for the BTS Management, having reviewed the situation it is hoped that donated funds will be used over the summer break to make good areas needing maintenance and repair. Waiting for the road work decision makes sense for certain items but there is a great deal which could be done now and for relatively little cost.

Most of the boys attend Achampatti Higher Secondary School. The campus new construction remains ongoing. BTS have recognised that the site is not perfect for the youngsters whilst work is ongoing and is in constant communication with the School to improve this.



Students at Achampatti School

The Head Master Ramasubramanian has been in the position since August 2016 and has post graduate degrees in Science and Teaching. He has a full-time staff of 22 teachers and three clerical and three part-time specialist teachers - computer science, PE and drawing. Standards 6 through 10 are split into Tamil (291 students with 18 from BTS) and English Medium (70 students of which 10 are from BTS) streams, though again the warden reports that the English teachers' grasp of the language is very poor with most subjects actually being taught in Tamil. Next year 11th Standard is scheduled to be included into the English Medium. In the normal course of events, inclusion is determined solely by the parents and students level of interest in studying English.

The school is still offering 11th and 12th standard classes but only two of the four different streams are taught. As long as the students study (1) Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Math or (2) Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Computer Science they can stay in Achampatti. Otherwise they must go to another school for the other two streams.

Standards 6 to 8 utilize the Advanced Learning Methodology (ALM), 9 & 10 Std follow the Continuous Comprehension Evaluation (CCE) model and 11 & 12 Std use Active Learning Methodology. In practice, the government mandates an "all pass, no fails" programme until students enter 10th standard. This may mean in practice, that by the end of 9th you have an older student but not necessarily an educated one. In 10th standard they are required to write a final exam worth 60% of their final mark. Their results will determine if they go onto a higher education through standards 11 & 12 and beyond, or be directed into vocational, Industrial Training Institute (ITI) or Poly Technical studies.

Achampatti Higher Secondary has the potential to be a great school, they have a large campus, new facilities which should all be operational by the start of the new school year and a number of government sponsored initiatives such as smart class rooms upcoming.

Eight of the younger boys attend the new Francois Meyer Matriculation School at Boys Town in 6th Standard English Medium.

It is easy to forget, when watching the excitement of Pongal or even of their own evening game of football, the diligence of their cleaning activities or the way they attend their morning yoga class with one boy leading the others, that the boys are at a Boys' Town because they would not otherwise be able to have these opportunities – to feel organized, to study and to play and develop within a range of subjects and activities and eventually to earn in a viable manner – because their circumstances, some of the most disadvantaged even by Indian



Students at FMM School

standards, would preclude them. It is not always easy for them to be here – they often miss their families (if they have any family) - but they are trying hard and they support each other, just as the first five boys town boys did nearly 50 years ago.

When I asked one teacher at the Alampatti School, which were the outstanding Boys' Town boys, she said: "All of them. They are from poor parents. They are likely the first generation to be studying." They are all pioneers.

They are delightful boys and they are trying hard, but would be no-where near where they are today without the Boys Town Society. Thanks to your continued support, the vast majority of the boys 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. 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?

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