

1987-1988

DON BOSCO ANBU ILLAM - S A L E M.

This short paper attempts to clarify and share our eleven months of experience at Don-Bosco Anbu Illam at Salem. We, the three, salesians working at Anbu Illam, feel, we, have grown a long way in the light of experiences we could count upon. Here at Anbu Illam we care for street Children rag-pickers and vagrant boys.

HISTORY:-

At the outset, may I narrate to you in brief the history of our Anbu Illam. As it is said 'Rome was not built on a day' - it is so much true with regard to Anbu Illam at Salem. Salem a big town in Tamilnadu with one and a half million inhabitants bubbles with life like any big town. Since Salem is surrounded by numerous Villages where famine and unemployment are always on the increasing line, myriad of people especially young people migrate to the town. Since no jobs await them open-handed they land up on the pavements either stealing or rag-picking.

There are hundreds of boys roaming about the length and breadth of the town, often are harassed by the police and by the 'Dadas' of each area who easily identify and manipulate such vulnerable boys.

From the year 1980 onwards, salesian clerics from the studentale of Philosophy, Yercaud, have been contacting some of these boys, especially near bus stand and railway stations, on Sundays.

As the years passed by, the need to start a home for these street children became evident. By middle of 1987, two salesians were set apart by the provincial to have more frequent contacts with these boys and to the study, the feasibility of building a home for these boys, later. The two salesians stayed at the Retreat Yercaud and were coming down to meet the boys, everyday.

As the two salesians felt the urgency of starting a home for these boys in Salem itself, a suitable place

was needed. With the help of Divine Providence, a suitable site was available in the heart of the town itself. Though the land and the existing shed cost heavy, through the help of some dedicated well wishers, the deal was fixed.

On 14th of December, 1988, the two salesians moved into the newly bought house which consisted of a shed, one room house, with a little land left for the boys to have recreation..

On the 16th of February, we had a formal inauguration of Anbu Illam, when we invited the District Collector, the Superintendent of Police and created public awareness of them, to certain extent of the need for working for such boys.

OUR PATTERN OF WORKING:-

Anbu Illam today has 40 regular inmates and a group of 100 floating boys. We have begun to take individual care for each of the boys. We have. For each boy, we have a Bio-data form with his photo attached and a file which is intended to act as a 'follow up' and any incidental events in his life are noted.

Whenever a new boy is coming to our home, one of us, talk to him at length, to find about his past life, his antecedents, and initial care is shown. The boy is welcomed to stay here everyday. A short case history is prepared to find out if the boy is a 'run away' from home, or taking shelter here after a theft or any other crime.

Identity cards are issued to boys who frequent our home regularly for about six months. This helps them from police harassment. Such boy is also given a safety locker, where he preserves his belongings. One key of the lock is kept with us.

The boys have decided that they all would leave 'Anbu Illam' by six in the morning and would return only after they have earned enough for day. We also go around to the usual work sites of boys, to see, if they are actually working.

When the boys return home in the evening, facilities for bath are made available. An atmosphere of freedom

and spontaneity are consciously created and great efforts are taken to make the boys feel that they are treated respectfully and with dignity.

Family gatherings and group games are conducted after to instil family spirit in them and to remove the spirit of vengeance and hatred which is so strong in them.

We also have prepared a set of rules and have explained them to the boys. We have seen that these boys can be trained to lead a disciplined life.

Our creativity the organising programmes takes into consideration, the spontaneous suggestion of the boys and this has resulted in participation of the boys in programme planning and their implementation.

Our Response to the Boys' need

* One of the most urgent needs of our grown up boys was employment. We had spent many day motivating them, that rag-picking is not to be their life-profession. It was not only to prevent them from rag-picking, but also to prevent them from relative evils such as stealing, being idle and wasting money in instant pleasures.

* Hence this problem posed us with a challenge of offering alternatives to these boys. As a result we had bought a cycle-cart, by which one boy earns his livelihood and pays also a certain amount every-day of the house.

* We had helped a boy to get a driving licence for light vehicles and are trying to get him a loan to own a vehicle.

* About twenty boys have been placed in different work situations ranging from factories to institutions to private homes.

* Two boys have been sent to school to continue with their studies. More boys will be sent in the coming year.

* Boys have been encouraged to begin small savings with the bank and are offered incentives for showing interest in saving.

About 10 boys are regular in saving money. We are motivating the boys to get loan and make best use of it.

* Regular night classes have been conducted for the boys. Among the twenty-five boys who attend the class, fifteen boys are regular. A lay teacher has been appointed to take classes for the boys. Boys are awarded for their regularity and interest.

RECREATION

* As the rag-pickers look for entertainment, Anbu Illam tries to fulfil their needs by providing them with decent pastimes. Indoor games such as carroms, Chinese checkers, draughts are offered. Foot ball is also taught to them. For boys who are interested in physical exercises, weight-lifting equipments, bars have been provided.

Regular party-games, competitions are organised to keep the boys busy, happy and to provide them with healthy recreation.

The house is also fortunate to have audio and video equipments which includes a colour television and ~~xx~~ video cassette Recorder and rather a good collection of video cassettes. Weekly films are organised for the boys.

Besides occasional excursions, regular outings are organised for the boys. Many Religious Institutions have invited our boys to their Institutes.

'Bosco Boys' as we lovingly call them, are taken out for motivation camp' and also a day is organised, at the retreat, Yercaud in their honour.

WEEKLY MEETINGS

These have been regularly conducted so as to come closer to the boys and they to one another. Here during these meetings, they are often encouraged to make more progress and are praised for their improvement in behaviour and for initiatives they have taken. The boys

the hall, filling the water pot and clearing the toilets and bath rooms.

The boys are also told about a few rules and announcements are made. Besides these, the weekly meeting becomes a forum for voicing their opinions and raising their complaints against one another. Doubts are clarified and suggestions for improvement are made. The meeting are always animated by all the salesians of Anbu Illam.

It must also be noted that many of our boys have stopped smoking, game up drinks and drugs and go about more clean and well-behaving.

A STREET CHILDREN SURVEY

Don Bosco Anbu Illam, Salem, in an earnest effort to make the work among street children more methodic and effective, had commissioned 'Bosco Institute of social work' to conduct a street children survey at Salem. The questionnaire was prepared by them with our help and on 8th, 9th and 10th of September, they conducted a survey among 500 street children. It was a random sampling using the tool of interview guide. The results of this survey are to be submitted by the 24th of January to us which will be released at a public function to be held to commemorate Don Bosco and the first anniversary of the inception of Don Bosco Anbu Illam.

Together with the research material the Department of social work will also give us guidelines to make our work more effective. The social work department also sends us one of their students to study and analyse our work. The student also conducts casework and groupwork for the needy boys and assists at in the activities of the house.

This guidance has been helpful in better organisation of our work. The student has also planned to a short research paper in fulfilment of his masters degree, on some aspects of problems of rag-pickers.

In this connection Anbu Illam has been building up rapports with local rich, resource persons, past pupils of our institutes and with people who are interested in our work.

Meeting also have been held with these people to make them aware of the situations of our boys and to help them contribute their share for the welfare of these boys. Resource persons have also been invited to give talks to our boys and to conduct programmes and to sponsor programmes. Thus we are trying our best to mobilise resources especially the young people.

MOBILISING THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Don Bosco Anbu Illa, has also 'reach-out' programmes, we have been animating the youth of one of the main parishes in Salem. Invitations from other parishes have also been extended to us and we are trying to reach out to the catholic youth of Salem, in order to make them aware of this deprived section of the society and to mobilise their energy for the welfare of our boys. We also go often to different schools and Institutions to give talks about our boys. To enhance any substantial help from any young people, we believe, making them aware of the problem of these boys is an ineluctable necessity. To bring about a climate of 'Youth for youth' is our humble aim and we are confident of achieving this end in a few years.

Conscientization of Salem youth is done by giving talks, taking our boys to their schools and inviting them to our home.

WE BUILT OUR HOUSE

At the inception our Anbu Illam had provided only a roof over the boys. The salesiam had just one room without a bath room. As the Salesiam had built a small house for themselves, bathing rooms and toilet facilities were built for boys. A water tank was built to store water. Three face electricity was got for the house, after much difficulty. The house has drinking water supply, a telephone, safety lockers for boys. A shed for the jeep has been completed. The house has enough facilities to

PROBLEMS WE FACE:

One of the constant workies is to make our work with the boys more effective and methodic. To motivate the boys to lead a better way of life by getting employed else where and to forego oldbad habits has been one of the major problems we face.

Another problem is that some boys use the name of our Anbu Illam for their vested interest. Boys especially after the theft or a gang fight use the infrence of Anbu Illam for their protection. Some of these boys have come just once or twice to our home.

Many of our boys need to be rehabilitated. They have to be told convincingly and taken home if. Many of them do not like to go back home due to fear what we need to do is 'home visits' and do collateral contacts.

It also happens that some of our boys do not clingon to the opportunity. Work at a good place but give up such good work in order to be with their peer group.

Some of our boys, expecially the young ones, still continue to eat the left overs of the hotel food in the dust bin. These boys have been told again and again. Alternative method has to be offered to them. We are studying pros and cons of allowing them to cook in our premises or to find some cheap food that can be sold to them.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE:

* We have a lot of plans for the welfare of our boys. We have already seen miracles happening. Even the hard-core bad boys have undergone themendous change within. We see the same growling hottempered mis fit going about so gentlemanly, respecting and helping.