



"A world that unlocks the infinite potential of every child."



Please respond to this letter by filling in both sides of the attached form.

The Joe Homan Charity

Peterley House

Peterley Road

Oxford

OX4 2TZ

Dear supporter,

We are writing to you concerning the child you sponsor through Boys Town Society (BTS), and changes to sponsorship. Please do take the time to read about what this means for you, and to respond using the form provided.

Your loyalty, generosity and commitment to supporting children in Tamil Nadu is so very appreciated. To those of you who have recruited others to the cause and shared the work that the Joe Homan Charity has done, we extend an extra thank you for that hard work.

Our founder, Joe Homan responded to what he saw around him, and was not afraid to confront difficult truths in order to make a difference in the world. The work he began and lived for improved thousands of lives, but Joe spoke about how he never wanted these projects to become institutions. He was innovative and creative and supported projects that gave the children more agency, more control and more space to be themselves. He was always willing to change and adapt and try new things when they were better for the children. Child sponsorship has played an important role in our past and provided shelter, basic needs support and educational opportunities to those who had very little available to them. However, an ever-increasing volume of studies and research have shown that it is not the best model of support for vulnerable children in the current global climate. Over time evidence has emerged that institutions may expose children to vulnerabilities and harm that none who care about child welfare would be happy to accept. When the world around is changing we need to adapt, just as Joe would have done.

As such, after long and careful consideration, we are ceasing to support the work of the Boys Town Society (BTS) in Tamil Nadu through sponsorship. This is a challenging journey for all at the Joe Homan Charity (JHC), but one that is undertaken with determination and unity, as we seek to do whatever is best for vulnerable children in Tamil Nadu in the long run, and to protect and invest in their futures. We hope that you will join us on this journey and take the time to consider the evidence for yourself to see why this is the right time for the Joe Homan Charity to evolve.



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Our Partnership with Boys Town Society

As many of you know, in November 2018 we conducted a child protection and safeguarding audit for all our partners. Safeguarding and child protection are the number one issue that the Charity Commission of England and Wales is having to address at present and it is both our moral and legal obligation to ensure that all our partners meet those standards. Tragically this became a very real issue that required urgent attention following the death of a young girl, Subiksha, whilst in the care of BTS. A few days after receiving the disturbing news of Subiksha's death the JHC board had their initial meeting with Jim Dyson, a safeguarding specialist, who had previously been contacted to consult and lead us through a safeguarding process. There are lessons that must be learned following the death of a child, and we cannot just accept the loss of a child as business as usual. The safeguarding audit found that BTS failed to meet the requirements of the Indian Juvenile Justice Act. In addition, previous unreported serious incidents and child deaths at BTS came to our attention, none of which were investigated at the time and from which no lessons were learnt. Despite these very concerning findings, there has been little to no commitment or desire for change demonstrated. Furthermore, the Charity Commission have advised us not to send funds overseas to any organisation which is not compliant with the local laws, such as BTS. It is also vitally important to note that as part of our ongoing partnership due diligence we asked all partners to take part in a financial audit (which is required by the Charity Commission) and BTS categorically refused.

Therefore, we have been obliged to suspend funding to BTS for almost two years (since February 2018), and escalated our concerns to the higher bodies dealing with child welfare in Tamil Nadu. BTS have had two years to work with us to address these issues. They were offered support from child rights and safeguarding experts. Sadly, this was not taken seriously with management failing to share recommendations and findings from the safeguarding audit with their governance and leadership teams.

Since then Boy's Town Society have elected to close five towns whilst not informing either JHC or the relevant authorities including the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and District Child Protection Unit (DCPU). Indeed, the Child Welfare Committee have recently informed us that BTS have failed to provide them with the appropriate discharge notices relating to children affected by these closures. Furthermore, Boy's Town Society have refused to provide us with any information about children currently in their care despite repeated requests for them to furnish us with this.

As communicated in a recent newsletter BTS is now under investigation by the Child Welfare Committee in India on a number of counts including: whether they are fit to provide residential care; whether necessary measures have been taken following the preventable death of a child in their care; and the whereabouts and welfare of children who have left their care following the closure of towns.

We are continuing to work with the authorities and have provided the CWC, DCPU and other relevant authorities with the most up to date sponsorship lists that we currently have, and have requested their assistance with helping us to identify the current status of these children on a case by case basis. This is an official investigation, and we must respect that whilst we can make requests the authorities are not obliged to furnish us with any details, particularly if they do not see disclosure as in the best interests of the children.

In summary, following an independent child safeguarding audit and the recommendations that came out of that audit, BTS failed to respond adequately to those recommendations and action points. The audit revealed that they were not compliant with the necessary legal requirements as per the Juvenile Justice



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Act of India. The Charity Commission stipulates that we cannot continue to fund any organization that does not comply with the local laws. Despite trying to work with BTS on a plan in response to the recommendations of the audit, drafts continued to fail to meet fundamental legal child protection requirements, including the need for adequate facilities and properly trained staff. We cannot overlook our responsibilities and are not prepared to continue business as usual following the death of a child, knowing that children remain at risk, without an investigation or lessons learned.

We continue to believe that it is profoundly important to support children from the most marginalized communities in Tamil Nadu and will continue to do so in new ways going forward.

Taking our values forward

Many of you became sponsors after hearing Joe's story. Joe's story and the stories he told inspired so many to act. These were stories of determination despite difficulties, and, as with many great stories, especially those that are true, Joe's own story was a tale of courage.

- It took courage for Joe to truly see those boys at the railway station that so many let remain in the corners of their eyes.
- It took courage for Joe to step out and begin that journey.
- It took courage for those first five boys to follow Joe to an acre of wasteland and commit to a vision that at that point existed only as an idea in Joe's head.

What remains before you is a courageous charity. One that will not turn a blind eye to injustice, hurt or a child suffering; one that is not afraid to stride forward and leave something behind to do what is right; and one that believes that investing in the ideas and visions of children in Tamil Nadu can lead to great transformation.

Joe Homan cared about doing things differently when circumstance demanded it. Some of our partners have lost sight of what matters the most – the children. We seek to strive forward inspired by the original vision of making a real difference in the lives of children. Our partnership with BTS is coming to an end. They have unfortunately moved away from Joe's original vision of the wonderful supportive place it could be, and we cannot prop up an institution that does not respond to concerns about unnecessary family-child separation. However, this is not the end of the journey, and we hope you will read some more about the fantastic community projects that are led by other longstanding partners of JHC, and the huge impact they can have in the lives of children.



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What happens now?

The generosity and kindness displayed through your regular donations to support a child in India demonstrates a commitment to making the world a better place for all children. All children, regardless of where they are born, deserve safe, nurturing environments in which they can learn, grow, play and gain the confidence and skills needed to succeed in today's world.

Understandably, you will be concerned about the cost to the children of withholding sponsorship money from BTS for so long. BTS is an independent organization with significant assets. We cannot confirm the exact figure, due to their refusal to submit to a financial audit. However, a conservative estimate based on figures we were provided as of March 2018 was that BTS had the equivalent of £368,000 in their reserves (considerably more than the Joe Homan Charity has) and land assets that run into millions of pounds. Our obligation to withhold funds need not have undermined their ability to provide for the children already in their care.

As you know sponsorship money has been withheld from BTS since February 2018, this money has been ring-fenced and held at JHC. Given that the partnership with Boys Town Society has now come to an end, we must ask you to take some time to consider what you would like to happen to that money.

What do I need to do?

We hope that you will continue to support the fantastic work of our partners through regular donations and are very happy to enclose information about three of our great partners and the impact they are making in the lives of young people. With your permission, we would like to release the funds that had been ring-fenced during this period of negotiation, to support other projects that are bringing joy and opportunities to children in marginalised communities.

Attached is a form to return to us, either via e-mail at JHC@joehoman.org.uk or the postal address given at the top. This asks you to indicate both what you would like us to do with the sponsorship money that has accumulated, and what you would like us to do with any future donations. Please do fill in both sides.

Where can I get more information?

We understand that this is a difficult message to hear and wish that we could write to you with more positive news concerning our partnership with Boys Town Society. We hope that the enclosed additional information will address any question you may have but know that there may be further concerns or queries you wish to raise with us. These are of course welcome, and we will do everything we can to answer fully and to respond with the time and diligence that you deserve. If you e-mail us at JHC@joehoman.org.uk, one of us will respond when possible. We are however a very small and busy team, so please do be patient and bear with us as this may take some time.

Your faithfully,

Deborah Wetherall (Trustee)
Arun Chinnaraj (Trustee)
Justin Segrave-Daly (Trustee)