

## The Banyan Welcomes Supporters for Employment Launch

To launch two new employment initiatives for clients, The Banyan welcomed guests and dignitaries for a sparkling evening at the Chetpet office. Both initiatives provide opportunities for individuals that have recovered from mental illness to enter back into the mainstream by participating in gainful employment. The productive nature of this work elicits feelings of self-worth and self-respect within clients who have suffered much as a result of their illness, stigma and poverty; these benefits were evident in the smiles on the faces of all the clients involved in these projects that shone throughout the evening.

### Read on for more details

Guests were invited to experience both initiatives first hand. Those not resident at the snacks table (run by The Bread Winners) were inside browsing the busy, Banyan Line shop. Mr. Thangam Thennarasu (Minister for School Education) and Ms. Poongothai Balaji (Minister of Information Technology), Ms. C. Premakumar (Honorary Secretary of Lady Andal School) took their place on the intimate stage along with Mr. M. Mahadevan (Oriental Cuisines Ltd), Ms. Jaya Pradeep (of Jullaha) and Ms. Kamal Krishnaswamy (of Orange Harvest) to make the launch official. Madhu Sharan (Executive Director of BALM) introduced everyone and gave a beautiful summary of the two employment initiatives that was supplemented by the experiences of Mr. Mahadevan, Ms. Jaya and Ms. Kamal.



The Bread Winners Café launched on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July at Lady Andal School, Chennai and has gone down very well with the hungry stomachs of the school with its supply of pizza and savoury pastry. The initiative is supported by Mr. Mahadevan through the Give Life Café at Loyola College, part of his organization's work to engage those from low socio-economic backgrounds in employment to motivate and inspire them to connect further. The common interest between this and The Banyan's own desire to initiate employment opportunities for its clients matched perfectly and the Bread Winners Café was launched with the voluntary help of Vinay, the son of one of The Banyan's trustees.

The Banyan Line has been in the pipeline for some time as relations between The Banyan clients and the two Chennai boutiques have developed. Both designers now work closely with some clients having trained them in production to work alongside their regular staff and also used some of their designs for unique garments. Both designers reported the fresh insight and inspiration the clients brought with them to their units and reiterated their excitement about the projects and the quality of the work produced.





Vandana Gopikumar (founder of The Banyan) spoke at this point on the whole concept of rehabilitation for those with mental illness with emphasis on the part that employment plays in the journey. The Banyan reaches out to those that have faced hardships, stigma, abuse and privations that are unimaginable to most people and it is all that we can do to take steps to ensure their future with initiatives such as those launched at this event. Lives of productivity enhance feelings of self-worth within individuals, allowing them to enter into new and dignified lives as part of families and communities. As Kannan was quoted by The Hindu on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 'This is giving me a sense of self-worth, which I thought I would never get back'.

After endorsements by Mr. Thangam Thennarasu, Ms. Poongothai Balaji and Ms. C. Premakumar, the first salaries were presented to the Bread Winners bringing huge smiles and congratulations all round.