

NEWAGE Xtra

Published on: May 29 - June 4, 2009

Leadership and change

Sababa Islam

On August 16, 2008, a girl named Munni got up in front of a large audience and told a powerful story. In her speech, she spoke of how one day, while sitting in a bus, she noticed a blind man struggling to get on the bus next to hers. The passengers standing at the door of the bus would not let him in; no one was helping the man, or speaking up for him. When Munni realised this, she leaned from the bus window and shouted. She told the passengers to let the man in. After all, a blind man has as much right as anyone to ride the bus.



A small incident, but it shows how much difference one voice can make. If one voice can change people's attitudes on a bus, maybe it can influence a community. And if it can change a community, perhaps it can also change a city, and even the whole country. This is one of the ideas that Munni, who completed her HSC from Chittagong Government Women's College, absorbed while participating in BYLC's 'Building Bridges through Leadership Training' programme.

BYLC, or the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Program, is a registered non-profit organisation. Founded by Ejaj Ahmad, who holds a master in public policy from Harvard University and an MA (Hons) in Economics from University of St Andrews, it focuses on developing compassionate and competent leadership among Bangladesh's youth. Its concept and curriculum was developed at Harvard University's John F Kennedy School of Government in January 2008.

BYLC's first month-long leadership programme, Building Bridges through Leadership Training, won the 2008 Davis Peace Prize in the US, and was implemented in Chittagong. Munni was one of the participants in the Chittagong programme, and it was a great success.

Now the programme is being implemented in Dhaka. One of the main goals of the programme is to bring together youth from diverse educational backgrounds in Bangladesh. Students will be competitively selected to participate in the month-long intensive training programme. They won't just learn leadership techniques – they will learn how to interact with people from different backgrounds and how to think from

Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC)

4th Floor Treasure Island, 42-43 Siddeshwari Circular Road, Dhaka 1217, Bangladesh
Phone: +880-2-8333853, Fax: +880-2-8333854, E-mail: info@bylc.org

different perspectives.

The leadership sessions will be conducted by Ejaj, and he will be assisted by leadership facilitators from Dhaka University's IBA and department of economics. Two experienced trainers from BRAC University's Institute of Educational Development will also work as leadership facilitators for the programme.

Once the students finish learning the leadership concepts, they will be putting them into practice right away. In Chittagong the first batch of BBTL participants put in 670 hours of community service in Kusumbagh slums. They interacted with men, women and children of the slum and learned about their way of life. They then divided into groups, each identifying one problem in the slum area and coming up with a way to fix it. They set up garbage bins, planted trees, handed out medicine and even set up a school for the children, run by volunteers.

Students in Dhaka who are selected to participate in the programme will also get the opportunity to match the Chittagong batch's achievements. Students who have completed their A Levels, HSC and Alim are eligible to apply. The selected participants will attend the after school programme six days a week for the duration of the programme, which will take place at BIAM foundation.

The US embassy will be providing full scholarship for the thirty students who will be selected. The deadline for applications is June 4. One can also apply online at www.bylc.org.

At the end of the programme, the participants will take back with them a BYLC achievement certificate, an awareness about the lives of people from different parts of society, and an experience in leadership which will help them all in whatever careers they choose.

URL:

http://www.newagebd.com/2009/may/29/may29/xtra_also1.html