



Published on: March 7, 2010

BYLC launches scholarship programme for underprivileged secondary school students

Amiya Atahar

BANGLADESH Youth Leadership Center (BYLC) officially launched BYLC Young Scholars Programme at the Korail slum, Dhaka, on February 21, 2010 as a tribute to those martyred 58 years ago. I experienced an inexplicable joy watching the underprivileged students, clad in new uniforms, settling down in the small BRAC schoolroom where the event was supposed to be held. They were as excited as any other child would be about a picnic, maybe even more so. Their mothers were present too; they welcomed us with great delight, as unlike many other similar families, their children would finally be able to pursue higher studies!

The first time I visited Korail, with it also being my first visit to a slum, was on December 16, 2009. I did not feel uncomfortable, or out of place even. Now that I think about that day, I realise that it was mostly because of the 25 local children I spent the day with all jolly, vibrant and talented 5th graders.

Since I had already become fond of them from our first meeting, the next two weeks of community service (a part of the BBLT programme) was a treat. Whenever we visited they would run towards us, grinning widely, and guide us around the complex arrangement of the slum. Even though our conversations were mostly about their school or light-hearted jokes, I knew many of them were worried about how to continue their education when they would reach the secondary level, as some of their parents could not afford it. Yet what struck the most was their incessant passion to study.

As we approached the end of the BBLT 3 programme, the fact that they needed help was undeniable. And we wanted to help, but did not know how. With this thought, we continued planning a fundraising campaign for our community service projects, which we would carry out over the next three months at Korail. The campaign was finally held on February 12 and 13 outside Agora, Pink City and Wonderland. A team of 18 BBLT 3 graduates and 3 volunteers sold masks, photo-frames, roses and cards made by some of the BBLT 3 graduates themselves. Within just 12 hours, we raised Tk.32, 180, which was more than enough to undertake successful projects in Korail. So, it was decided that any surplus would be given to the children for their education.

Salman Hossain, one of the facilitators of BBLT 3, then introduced the idea of the 'Young Scholars Programme.' BYLC Young Scholars would receive full financial support for pursuing their education from grade 6 to grade 12. The BBLT 3 graduates and facilitators were more than happy to be a part of it. We did not get involved only because we care about these children, but also because they are a group of bright young people willing to continue their education despite all the obstacles they face. They dream of

Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC)

11F Jahanara Apartments, 42-43 Siddeshwari Circular Road, Dhaka 1217, Bangladesh

Phone: +880-2-8333853, Fax: +880-2-8333854, www.bylc.org

helping the country and its people, and like any other children, making their parents proud. We had received month-long leadership training; it was time to catalyze the change by helping them broaden their views on life through further education.

When we asked the children what they wanted to be, we received a unique bunch of answers. Jahura's eyes lit up as she told me the first time we met, with a shy smile, that she wanted to be a doctor. Those very eyes were filled with tears when she faced the idea of not being able to go to school anymore. Hridoy, a small boy with an injured eye, also expressed his wish to become an eye doctor. "I don't want anyone to suffer from eye problems," he told us. Momen, like other boys, dreamt of joining the police force to help prevent terrorism in the country.

So, as the children came forward one by one to receive the first instalment of their scholarship, I could not help but smile. Some of the conditions of Young Scholars Programme are that they would receive the scholarship only if they want to continue their education and are dedicated enough, and that they take an active role in developing their community. After having spent so much time with them, I know for a fact that these children are not the ones to let us down.

(BYLC BBLT 3 graduate & A' level student, Sunbeams)

URL: <http://www.thedailystar.net/campus/2010/11/02/training.htm>