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BBLT 4: Training of a lifetime

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Location: Regional Public Administration and Training Center, Chittagong

Time: 3 pm to 6 pm

Purpose: To be a part of BYLC's leadership training



Although these were the four commonplace notions on all 38 of the young minds present, little did these individuals know that this day would mark the beginning of a new era for them. Being a part of Building Bridges through Leadership Training (BBLT 4) of Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC) has helped us realise how much we lack and how much can be attained. The exceptional lectures that we attended not only unbolted the gates to leadership, but also did what others deemed unattainable- uniting Bengali, Madrassa and English medium students.

After an intensive month of leadership training, all of us came out with a fresh perspective on life. Empowered with the training to lead social change, we decided to translate the classroom teachings to a real world setting in order to bring change to the lives of the underprivileged. We chose six community projects and selected a local slum in Motirjarna, Chittagong to implement our newly found skills.

Every project team had a motto. The team 'Aamra Pari' chose women's skill development. They worked with 85 families and facilitated skill development training to 10 women. Their training included teaching women how to make different items from bamboo. Their motto was quite simple- "The only way women

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would be interested in day to day aspects like health and hygiene is if they are given the opportunity to earn for themselves first". They wanted to uplift these women in such a way so that they learned something that would stay with them long after the training was over. They were very successful in doing so too. Although the formal project is over, the team has promised to stay in touch and work together in future as well. Team 'Aunirbaan' worked on water refinement and disinfection in the area. They had come to this decision when they discovered that in the past month, three children had died from waterborne diseases. They had worked with approximately 60 families and distributed water filters to four families who needed it the most. Their interventions turned out to be a success; they had effectively managed to teach the importance of water purification to the people in their area.

Team 'Durnibaar' worked on health. There was a crying need for solutions to a myriad of health related problems. More importantly, out of 300 families they worked with, barely 10 were aware of the existence of anti-worm medicines or oral saline. Some of them even claimed to have visited a doctor, paying a hefty fee, who prescribed medicines that did not work. Hence, the necessity of a medical intervention was palpable. They had organised health camps for approximately 300 families and awareness camps for the same. Their project turned out to be a success - people actually came up to them and appreciated for what they did. Not only that, they believed that to improve their lives for real, they would have to bring about changes in themselves - something they were taught during their awareness classes. Hence the solutions were not only technical, but also, and more importantly adaptive in nature.



Team 'Kandaari' worked on cleanliness and hygiene. Kandaari observed that one of the chief problems in the slum area was the lack of appropriate garbage disposal. These problems not only caused a constant odour in the surroundings, but also led to mosquito infestation in the area, leading to many deadly diseases such as Dengue fever and Malaria. After meticulous survey, they realised that such improper garbage disposal is also the reason behind severe flooding in such areas. The team organised a myriad of awareness campaigns teaching people the magnitude of proper hygiene. Their efforts did not end there. They also built a full size brick dustbin outside their area for people to dispose their garbage, receiving much praise from the locals.

Team 'Obhijaatri' decided to work in the field of sanitation after observing that there was only one toilet for over 25 people. Additionally, the sanitary condition of the existing toilets was tremendously poor. For their pilot project, they raised awareness on sanitary issues such as using soap and keeping hands clean. Ranging from fund raising to soliciting authoritative permission, Obhijaatri worked extremely hard to make homes healthier and cleaner. During the three-month long project, they decided on building latrines for their area.

Obinoshshor felt the value of adult education during their survey when they realised how adult illiteracy is the nucleus of many social issues. They chose to work on adult literacy and moral education. Awareness classes were at the core of their project, and they organised numerous ones. The group has successfully received community support and together they have made significant progress during the past three months.

With quivering steps we had started, having no inkling as to what impediments we might have to encounter. Now as we look back to the three months, we begin to realise that we have changed the lives of hundreds. While at the training, we were taught how it takes only one to lead social change. We believe in that even strongly now. The training helped us know that there is a part in all of us willing to do good for the people, and community service brings out that side in us. When people came up to us and said "You have done more for us than anyone else ever did", we knew that it was gratitude towards BYLC. It was a moment of pure success.

(The writer is a BBLT 4 participant)

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