



180 students attend the Alokito Hridoy School in Tangail.

SUMAIYA KABIR

Alokito Hridoy Foundation (AHF), has been working towards making Bangladesh's current education system more holistic, through a model where children learn by playing, problem solving and inquiring. As of today, when the world is faced with a pandemic, their research and efforts over the years prove timely and highly relevant.

Following the inception of Alokito Hridoy School in Tangail in 2016, 180 children from pre-primary to the sixth grade are receiving the kind of education that helps them grow more social, moral, emotional and cognitive skills, and makes them adaptive and innovative problem solvers. It not only carries a supportive learning environment but also a design-thinking approach to understand the real impact of education. AHF's aim is to extend this model from their own school and government primary schools to eventually all other mediums, and fuel change at a systemic level.

In attempting to reinvent the education system of Bangladesh, AHF recognises that it is crucial for educators to be empowered as well. "Every teacher has some unique techniques they apply in their classroom. I feel that the magic they work there is not highlighted enough," says Founder and Chairperson Azwa Nayeem. "Our aim is to develop the teachers as catalysts of change, and teaching to be the most sought after and respected profession."

In line with that thought, AHF recently launched the 'Alokito Teachers' web platform, where these teachers from different parts of Bangladesh can stay connected to



Founder and Chairperson Azwa Nayeem (5-L) with the teachers of the Alokito Hridoy School

each other through learning and sharing resources online, from home. Soon, it will also include the option to explore job and other growth opportunities.

The foundation recently announced an idea challenge, sponsored by Daraz, to inspire teachers to think creatively and contribute towards minimising the challenges arising from the education disruption we are currently facing. It is a great opportunity for the teachers to assume the role of leadership in these unprecedented times. Any teacher may apply, and will be judged on how much their idea ensures equity, and whether it is applicable in all schools and inclusive of all types of students or not. The winner will be awarded with a gift voucher worth

BDT 20,000

AHF has also been closely working with the ICT Ministry and their Access to Information division team to create a digital education platform that redirects to the foundation's website as well as that of 35 other esteemed organisations. Subsequently, it acts as a repository for all academic resources. It hosts quizzes and lessons through video content and e-workbooks. This way, everyone involved can have an inclusive learning and self-assessment experience. The core philosophy behind many of their projects is that the quality education they are trying to provide should include an active partnership with the children's parents as well. "We want to ensure that both

the parents and their kids know about the impacts of this virus right now so that they can be aware, but do not have to panic," says Azwa.

Since March 28, 2020, teachers and parents of the Alokito Hridoy School have been connecting over live sessions online, addressing issues that are emerging in the current crisis, such as kids being difficult to discipline during the lengthy period of self-isolation, and their lack of focus during online classes. The discussions that have taken place so far include parenting during the pandemic, interactive online classes, social-emotional learning, and anxiety and stress management for students, teachers and parents alike.

Majority of the students of the institution come from families of factory workers, who either are suffering from health risks or damaged livelihoods due to the coronavirus outbreak. AHF has stood beside these families not only academically, but also emotionally and financially. The foundation initiated a virtual discussion series as well, on reimagining education with COVID-19 and beyond. In the series, policymakers and education experts come together online to explore what challenges the aftermath of the pandemic will bring, and their innovative solutions.

"We want to stir up the right conversations about all the issues that need to be addressed, starting from the bottom to the top of the system, as everyone is in a very receptive mood right now. Everyone wants to do something, and there is no better time than now to redefine our education system," concludes Azwa.



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SPREADING JOY AMONGST STREET CHILDREN

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Jhilimili is a social welfare organisation, formed by some students from Institute of Business Administration (IBA), University of Dhaka (DU), that aims to support street children in different ways. Founded in 2015, the organisation initially intended to help two children, who dropped out of school and roamed around DU. The founders, who were final-year students from IBA at the time, soon realised that many other children who roamed around the campus had no access to formal education. Subsequently, they started conducting classes for these children regularly.

Over the years, the legacy of the original founders was continued by other students from IBA. However, since the children all had different levels of knowledge and schedules, it soon became challenging for the team to conduct the classes in a structured way. Subsequently, they changed their mission to spreading joy amongst the children. "Through Jhilimili, we hope to ease the daily struggles of these kids and make their childhoods a little happier. We bake cakes for them, apply henna on their hands and give them Eid gifts every year," said Shabnam Sharmin Swarnali, the president of the organisation.

The organisation also works to highlight the life stories of these children through their activism. In 2018, the team arranged an art exhibition at EMK Centre, where drawings by the children were sold to raise funds. The drawings showcased the children's dreams, as portrayed by them. The money collected from the exhibition was provided to the families of the children, with a request to spend it behind their education. Last year, the organisation hosted the programme, 'Jhilimili Eid Happiness' to provide new clothes, food and stationeries to over hundred children.

Most children that Jhilimili is connected with have faced abuse. Bearing that in mind, the team intends to conduct partnered sessions to teach the kids about various forms of abuse and violence. They also plan to publish a magazine, featuring rhymes, artworks and stories written by these children and the team members. "If the magazine manages to generate positive



PHOTO: COURTESY

Jhilimili volunteers at their International Mother Language Day celebrations with the kids.

feedback, good publicity and greater funds, we will make it an annual publication," said Asif Mahmud, Publication Secretary, Jhilimili.

"We always try to communicate with the kids. We often play badminton with them, tell them short stories and draw pictures with them," explained Shejuti Sharmin, Treasurer, Jhilimili. Families of these kids reach out to the team whenever they need any sort of help. "Once, we came across two sisters who were searching for extra sources of income, as their educational fees had increased substantially. We provided them with a sewing machine," added Shejuti. The organisation also tries to help the children's families with medical support, when necessary.

This year, they invited the children to accompany them to the Central Shaheed Minar on International Mother Language Day. This was done to instill a sense of patriotism amongst the children, while educating them about the struggles that led to Bangladesh's independence. The team arranged an art competition to celebrate the day and had lunch with the kids.

Currently, Jhilimili is conducting a campaign to help marginalised communities that have been harshly affected by the coronavirus

pandemic. Through 'Ashun, Ebar Ghure Darai Ekshathe: Make the Comeback Easier', they are collecting funds to provide groceries to families in need and help them bear school expenses, once things around us get better. Their distribution project focuses on Kamrangir Char, as a large part of the destitute children around DU live in that region. They aim to collect BDT 60,000 for 40 families by this month.

For the campaign, the organisation asked people to make short videos, answering the question, 'What influenced you the most as a child?' and post it on social media, following their guidelines. Individuals from different backgrounds are participating in the campaign, by discussing recent events, and how the pandemic is affecting the education sector. The participants recited poems, sang songs, painted pictures and shared their childhood stories and work experiences in the videos. Jhilimili has also started an auction, featuring paintings by the kids.

With the aim of helping children with disadvantaged backgrounds prosper, the organisation marches on with their selfless members and volunteers.