



ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD



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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

Knight-Hennessy Scholars Program 2021 at Stanford University (100 Fully Funded Scholarships)

Applications are now open for Knight-Hennessy Scholars Program Autumn 2021 session at Stanford University! Knight-Hennessy Scholars develops a community of future global leaders to address complex challenges through collaboration and innovation. Every year, up to 100 high-achieving students from around the world will receive full funding to pursue any graduate degree at Stanford.

DEADLINE: Oct 14, 2020 | Scholarships



National Geographic Call for Proposals for Big Cats Conservation (Prize Money \$100,000)

The National Geographic Big Cats Initiative (BCI) seeks to advance conservation efforts benefiting big cat populations, protecting and restoring them, and their habitats via field-based, action-oriented, direct, and quantifiable strategic programs. The goal of this fund is to identify projects that will help reduce the decline of African big cats in the wild.

DEADLINE: Oct 21, 2020 | Grants

2020 Money Trail Grants for African, Asian and European Journalists

In Money Trail, Journalismfund.eu offers working grants for mixed teams of African, Asian and European journalists to investigate cross-border illicit financial flows, tax abuse and corruption in Africa, Asia and Europe.

DEADLINE: September 14, 2020 | Grants

Transitioning from campus to corporate life

The Daily Star, in association with SBK Tech Ventures, Shah Cement and Mountain Dew, recently hosted the Youth Skills Summit 2020 on World Youth Skills Day, with Star Youth, 10 Minute School, Preneur Lab and Youth Opportunities as the youth engagement partners. During the daylong discussion series, over 60 speakers from different walks of life presented their views on the existing challenges and requirements faced by the youth in the corporate, academic and social sectors.

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHISAMADDAR

The session, *Transitioning from Academics to Corporate: The Post-COVID-19 Scenario*, moderated by Galib Bin Mohammad, Head of Marketing, Arla Foods Ltd, discussed how the pandemic has affected students and graduates.

Educationalists Mohammad Baktiar Rana, Associate Professor, Institute of Business Administration, Jahangirnagar University, Md Saimum Hossain, Assistant Professor, Department of Finance, University of Dhaka and Mahboob Rahman, Vice President, Administration, BRAC University were present in the panel discussion, which revealed that there is a mismatched demand and supply demography, in terms of the number of graduates available in the job market, and an absence of skills demanded by employers. In order to bridge this gap, affiliations and collaborations between educationalists and employers are important. Md Saimum Hossain said that critical thinking, communication skills and team-building capacity are three essential skills for any professional employee.

Mohammad Baktiar Rana mentioned

that there is a gap between the knowledge offered by job seekers and the soft skills required and expected by employers, in order to balance out their needs without wasting resources like time and energy. While people question the competency of educational institutions in this regard, there are two sides of this coin. "We tend to blame universities for being incompetent in producing creative and skilled professionals. However, we often forget about the bureaucratic system each university must deal with to update their curriculums," shares Rashed Mujib Noman, Country Director of Augmedix (Bangladesh).

Acquiring soft skills is also tough. "Theoretic framework is already facilitated by our educational institutions, but students need to analyse the market needs, especially the latest technologies and applicationw associated with the area of specialisation. This can be done by simply utilising resources that are available online, even for free sometimes," adds Rashed Mujib Noman. "In the fast-changing 21st century, the role of institutes is to educate students on how to learn from available resources. Graduates need to identify their strengths and self-train themselves."

Mahboob Rahman emphasised on the importance of technical skills, especially during the pandemic, as both students and professionals are studying and working from home, respectively. Other such soft skills are also important for recent graduates in order to pursue good jobs or run successful entrepreneurial ventures. "When I was a student, I felt that our curriculum did not put enough focus on technical skills such as the proper use of software like STATA, SPSS, and Excel," mentions Farhana Shahnaz, an Economics graduate from North South University who currently works as a Communications Officer at UNDP. "While my one-dimensional curriculum focused a lot on theoretical knowledge, it failed to address the necessity of practical proficiencies. I adapted to the changes, and I was also keen on upgrading my practical knowledge. As a result, I was able to cope up with the job market. However, many of my peers who didn't, are still struggling to find jobs."

Making the transition from the campus to the corporate life might be challenging initially, but if students focus on delving into the real world approaches, they can easily adjust to the new circumstances.



Redefining perceptions about less fortunate communities

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA

Perception Foundation started out in 2014, when some school students identified various societal problems and the differences between communities with regards to access to basic necessities. Since then, they have been working to improve the lives of the underprivileged populace in Bangladesh.

"We observed the gap between people from different socioeconomic classes residing in the same area and the struggles that the underserved communities have to go through," shares Sajid Mahmud, one of the founding members and an advisor to the organisation. "We wanted to address this gap between people, with reliable approaches."

The organisation runs Project Pot Belly during Ramadan, Sweater Weather in winter and 'HaatheHena' during Eid, among other programmes.

For Project Pot Belly, their volunteers are divided into different teams, who are



Perception Foundation's members and volunteers with the school kids from Project Dream.



A volunteer from Perception Foundation hands out food packets to day labourers during Project Pot Belly. PHOTOS: COURTESY

responsible for bringing, sorting out and handing out food packets to underprivileged groups, including day labourers in their localities, for iftar. Around 300 people benefitted from this project in Uttara, this year. During winter, their volunteers collect donations and winter clothes from people in the city. They use the monetary donations to buy winter clothes for those in need. Last

year, the clothes were distributed to 400 people in Rangpur. At their annual charity programme, 'HaatheHenna', volunteers supply henna on people's hands for a certain amount, during multiple live performances. A percentage of the earnings from the event is utilised in other initiatives of the organisation.

Perception Foundation teamed up with Footsteps Bangladesh for Project WeCan, where waste collected from different schools was recycled with the help of GarbageMan, another organisation working to protect the environment. The profits were used to develop school resources and provide access to safe drinking water and sanitation systems. Perception Foundation was the pilot funding partner in the project.

Change the Lives School is an organisation that strives to provide a better future through education for the disadvantaged children residing in slums. For their initiative, Project Dream, Perception Foundation's volunteers spent a week with these children by interacting with them through sports, art competitions and many other activities.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the foundation has been working in different areas to help struggling communities. Their COVID-19 response began with the collection of donations and the distribution of care packages in eleven areas across the country, including Khulna.

Their volunteers maintain proper social distancing protocols while working, and raise awareness about proper hygiene and cleanliness practices. As the number of COVID-19 cases are on the rise, Perception Foundation plans to continue their initiatives to help people in need.

"We aim to step up for those in need, while involving the youth. We want to empower young people and teach them how they can use their privilege to make the lives of the less fortunate a little easier," says Nazeef Khan, CEO of Perception Foundation and a recent graduate from International School Dhaka.

Determined to bridge the economic gap in our society, members of Perception Foundation are working tirelessly to change the views we have about the underserved communities.