

# Ashia Foundation reaches out to people in need



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MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Ashia Foundation was established by Talha Sayed, a student from Independent University, Bangladesh, in June 2014. With an aim to help underprivileged communities, the organisation conducted a number of campaigns in the last few years.

Talha conceived the idea for the foundation after he came across some underprivileged kids playing with kittens on the streets. "At first, I thought they were trying to harm the kittens, but later, I realised that they were giving the kittens milk to drink," he said. After a short conversation with the kids, he realised that they did not have a proper meal for breakfast and they did not know whether they would have any meals for the rest of the day. "Their gesture of feeding the kittens even when they had no food of their own, inspired me," Talha added.

At Ashia Foundation's first event, 'Smile', volunteers distributed food packets to over 25 individuals. Their regular projects include a Ramadan



Team members and volunteers of Ashia Foundation at their Winter Warmth Campaign in 2019.



PHOTOS: COURTESY

A volunteer of Ashia Foundation helps a rickshaw puller to wear a mask.

distribution drive and a winter clothing drive. They also help flood victims in different ways.

Furthermore, the organisation looks after the medical expenses of those in need, from time to time. They also conducted an awareness campaign, where they distributed water bottles to people in the summer months. During their initial days, they arranged a charity bake sale to raise funds. They also sent out food to the Rohingya refugees.

Talha added that time management is a major challenge for the team. Most of Ashia Foundation's members are university students, who need to juggle their studies and part-time jobs with

volunteering.

Their recent endeavours are focused on the COVID-19 pandemic. They distributed around 300 masks and liquid hand-washes to raise awareness about the spread of the coronavirus disease. In these troubling times, underprivileged groups, especially day labourers, have little to depend upon, as they are faced with unemployment and food shortages. Bearing that in mind, Ashia Foundation volunteers distributed grocery packages with rice, lentils, oil and other essentials to over 7,200 people in Dhaka and other parts of the country. They reached out to families in Uttara, Shyamoli, Mirpur, Old Dhaka, Sylhet, Khulna, Comilla, Pabna,

Gopalganj, Faridpur and Gaibandha.

"Our latest campaign emphasised on buying necessary equipment for the health industry. We want to ensure that hospitals can treat more patients in the long run," Talha shared. The foundation also provided food to around 200 frontline healthcare workers and supported nearly 100 COVID-19 patients by providing them with the required medicines during their treatment.

They plan to establish an educational institution in the future. "The school will have a children centre, where kids of all ages can come and stay. We also intend to provide them with necessary facilities," concluded Talha.

## YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

### Global Youth Academy Membership Call 2021

The GYA is a global organization that places a high value on its diversity. They encourage applications from all qualified candidates. All applicants receive consideration and will not be discriminated against with regard to race, color, ethnicity, religion, creed, sex, marital status, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, physical or mental disabilities, or other factors. Global Youth Academy especially encourages women and applicants from different minority groups, and from diverse disciplines including the natural, physical and social sciences as well as the arts and humanities and people working in government, industry, and non-governmental sectors to apply.

DEADLINE: September 15, 2020 | Miscellaneous

### ISWA YPG Blog Writing Competition 2020 – "Impacts and opportunities from COVID-19"

The International Solid Waste Association (ISWA) Young Professionals Group (YPG) calls on young professionals and students from around the world to create a blog post exploring how COVID-19 exposed fragilities and strengths of waste management worldwide. Take part to win the publication at Waste Management World Magazine and win a yearly ISWA membership. Apply for the ISWA YPG Blog Writing Competition 2020.

DEADLINE: October 2, 2020 | Competitions

### The Commonwealth Foundation's COVID-19 Special Grants Call (Up to £30,000)

The Commonwealth Foundation's grants Programme supports innovative project ideas and approaches that seek to strengthen the ability of civic voices to engage with governments to improve governance and development outcomes through their active participation. In lieu of their annual grants call, they are launching a special grants call in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



DEADLINE: September 18, 2020 | Grants



## Raising awareness about health and social issues through earnest efforts

When Syed Tanzil Ahmed, Sheikh Zahrat Maanha, Syeda Nabreesha Ahmed and Sahar Matin lost their baby cousin Zayan Chowdhury last year, they wanted to honour his memory by helping the people around them. When the pandemic hit this year, they felt that it was the right time to start working towards that goal. Bearing that in mind, they started Joyodhoni Foundation in April.

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA

"My sisters are only teenagers, and because of their involvement with the foundation, they are gaining new perspectives about life and the people around us," says Syed Tanzil Ahmed, one of the Co-founders and a student of International Studies at Simon Fraser University.

In just a few months, the foundation launched several initiatives across Dhaka. During Ramadan, they started their first project, in collaboration with the Banani Police Station, by providing 300 families in the Banani slum with groceries for the whole month. As a part of their COVID-19 relief initiative, Joyodhoni Foundation volunteers collected the contact information of the slum dwellers. Through a token system, they successfully provided the families with bags of groceries.

They also distributed 500 packets of iftar in Dhanmondi. To avoid the risk of community transmission, social distancing methods were maintained during the distribution drives. They also gifted clothes and balloons to several children on Eid.

The four Co-founders and their network of volunteers initiated a drive for menstrual hygiene, called 'Talking Taboo', where they provided necessary sanitary products to underprivileged women and girls, and raised awareness about menstruation.

Before the pandemic, Faiza Tasnim Zaman, a well-wisher of the foundation, along with her friends at NSU, conducted a social experiment to raise awareness about menstrual hygiene, where random Dhaka dwellers were asked about it. Their lack of knowledge about menstrual hygiene proved our ignorance towards the matter.

"Most people are simply not aware of certain issues and menstrual hygiene is not among their concerns," shares Syeda Nabreesha Ahmed, one of the co-founders and an AS student at DPS STS School. "Most



Team members and volunteers of Joyodhoni Foundation distribute Eid gifts among underprivileged kids.

PHOTO: COURTESY

women in underprivileged communities don't have access to sanitary products during this time, resulting in various infections and other health issues."

"With this drive, we not only plan to distribute sanitary napkins, but also educate women about maintaining proper hygiene," adds Sheikh Zahrat Maanha, one of the Co-founders and a 9th grader at Sunbeams School. "We want to take this initiative across the country to establish the fact that menstruation should not be a taboo matter."

In collaboration with Staysafe, their first event under this drive was a session, where female volunteers discussed the importance of menstrual hygiene and how to use and neatly discard sanitary napkins. 565 families were provided with food, and 565 women took part in the discussion.

They further plan to distribute sanitary

napkins to orphanages and schools and conduct short classes on menstruation to educate children and normalise discussions about the matter. The organisation also plans to launch a webpage, where people can share their stories, related to menstruation.

Their project, 'Bonnar Khaddo', will support 5,000 flood-affected families in the Derai upazila of Sunamganj during this month. With the assistance of local village authorities, they plan to distribute packages containing rice, sugar, lentils, potatoes, oil, salt, water purifying tablets, medicines, sanitary napkins, blankets and mosquito nets, among other necessities.

"As an organisation, our goal in the next couple of years is to gain an NGO status, partner with major corporations and collaborate with embassies," concludes Tanzil.