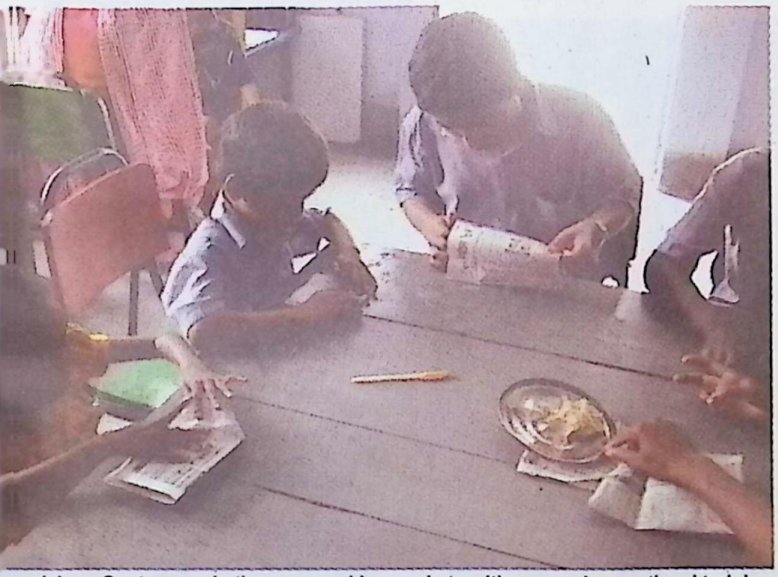
The stories are more or less same for Shawan, Trina and around 80 other enlisted students of Prayash; they all now dream of a better life thanks to Prayash.

Shahrier Tasneem Ishan at 14 is still learning his alphabets and taking vocational training at the class called Shapla at the FWCA's Prayash Multipurpose service centre. Making packets with old newspaper sheets and gum, he becomes enthusiastic enough to talk about his skills developed at the centre. "I can read, draw pictures, dance, play and even act in plays".

Shwan Sayem, 13, son of a night guard Abdul Malek is also happy as he can now read Bangla, English, and can do sums, as well as draw pictures and make packets. Santana is a little bit silent than others in the class. Her teacher say she is brilliant; she draws well and understands quickly. She is very diligent about any task she is given.



Ishan, Santana and others are making packets with papers in vocational training.

At other rooms, Ayesha, Proma, Nafiz are being given physiotherapy, Tinku is trying to walk in a frame while the children are playing with toys that help them learn things.

Later when the teachers announce that the hour for playing has come, the thrilled children rush out of rooms to join games. Those who cannot walk take frames for walking and playing.

Farhana Ahtar, the centre in-charge says that her family members often chide her saying she is a teacher of 'the mad'. "But I love to be with these children who were discarded even by their parents... in fact, without mental preparation, noone can work for disabled children as these children are not normal, and often behave abnormally", she says.

Behind the FWCA initiatives is a woman called Wahida Khanam who had to face the challenge of being ostracised by her husband for giving birth to two boys, both with disabilities. Her husband left her while they were in Dhaka so she returned to Rajshahi. Her friend Sadikur Rahman stood by her and her two sons. Daughter of a well-off family in the city, Wahida and Sadikur began an initiative together in late 2004 without realising that they had started something that would become so big.

They appointed three teachers for the two children with a target for spending Tk 6000 per month. They started their work from the garage of Wahida's parents' home at Helenabad which became their first office. Then they realised that the teachers needed proper training for looking after the disabled children. They had to spend Tk 5000 more for pretraining each of the teachers from Dhaka. As the expenses were increasing in this way, and still a friendly environment was lacking, they started adding more children to the programme along with their own sons Mahi and Rahi. Soon they found out that there were many children with disabilities in the city who badly needed an organisation that would help them to develop and learn the basic skills to survive in a hostile environment.

"The history behind our organisation lies in our frantic effort for accommodating Mahi and Rahi somewhere. There was no ideal place for them. We then started thinking of creating the accommodation by ourselves. And when we developed the environment for the two, we naturally felt about rights of numerous other disabled children of the city", said Sadikur Rahman, FWCA president and team leader.

Beginning with a sort of altruistic effort, FWCA is now established as a right based small development organisation. There are, of course many challenges. As an organisation , Rahman says, it is still trying to develop its organisational capacity maintaining its principles.

"We are gaining experience of working with disabilities, destitute, and voiceless women, and young adolescent girls living in risk-ridden situations at urban slums. We practice that every individual is able to contribute to bring about positive changes", he says.

"Our primary mandate is to work on woman and child rights and we are continuing with support of our members, well-wishers, contributors and few development partners in the country. We are facing financial constraints, and we are overcoming the problem through mental strength and our challenge to fight the social problems", says Wahida Khanam, executive director of FWCA.

Although lack of adequate funds has been the main limitation for the organisation there are also constrainsts regarding logistics, technical, and capacity building and lack of skilled staff, she says.

Meanwhile, observes Wahida, there is a growing trend of children's rights being violated which makes disabled children all the more vulnerable because of lack of awareness and education.

Limitations of resources and logistical support has made it necessary for the organisation to think about reducing the number of beneficiaries which means that FWCA cannot address all the representatives of the target group. For a society that constantly shuns disabled individuals, Prayash is a beacon of hope for these children who are often neglected and ostracised by even their own families. It is crucial that the efforts of this remarkable organisation are supported and encouraged. ■