

SPOTLIGHT

**BYLC** Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center

# FIND THE LEADER IN YOU

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PHOTO COURTESY: BYLC

“If we want to be a leader, we should have patience, eagerness, teamwork, good communication skills that are worthy of attention, and the power to convince the people of the work we do”, believes 20 years old Mohammad Farid Ahmed, a participant of the after-school programme, Building Bridges through Leadership Training (BBLT), offered by Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC).

Farid is a 4th semester student at the Department of Social Welfare, University of Dhaka. Inspired by his friends, and social media, he joined the BBLT 14 programme. According to him, the BBLT programme has led him to believe that once you get out of your comfort zone; anybody can be a leader with the proper skills, mobilisation power and teamwork.

Last week, BYLC had successfully completed its 14th BBLT programme, where 45 participants, representing the three educational mediums of the country – English, Bangla and Madrassa – underwent comprehensive leadership training.

“Even if the idea sounds simple, it’s exceptional in the context of Bangladesh, as students studying in these mediums don’t have the opportunity to socialise, thus creating stereotypes and common assumptions about their abilities and skills”, says Shaveena Anam, Deputy Manager, Communication at BYLC. “Changing perceptions is one of BYLC’s main aims so that young people become more tolerant and inclusive of different ideas and perspectives”, she adds.

The 10-week long BBLT programme is designed for students between 17-21, who are studying Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC)/Alim /A Levels and in first and second year of university. The participants have to pass a very competitive selection process in three different steps. The programme is partitioned into two major phases – 6 weeks in-class training, followed by a 4-week community service phase. The curriculum is designed with an experimental learning model that compels the students to critically think about leadership.

“Once the training in the classroom is over, they design community service projects to implement what they have understood from the classroom sessions and apply their learning in the real world”, says Adnin Mourin, one of the facilitators of BBLT 14 and a BBLT 5 graduate.

In the classroom sessions, participants take part in lectures, large class discussions, small group peer consultations, structured reflections, team building activities, public speaking workshops, and more.

“We pick cases from our personal experiences and present them to the group. We discuss within ourselves and try to figure out the root causes and solutions”, says 21-year-old Nayeem Ahsan Ayan, a student of BBLT 14. Ayan is presently studying Mechanical Engineering at Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology.

The instructor delivers lessons and the



The participants worked on basic problems like first aid, health and hygiene in disadvantaged communities.



A participant is showing the proper way of washing hands to the children of a slum in the capital.



participants discuss their insights with each other in small groups of 7-8 members.

“Delivering content is not our job; we try to create an environment so that participants can reflect on lessons through group activities while respecting other’s values and opinions”, says Jahedul Islam, BYLC Project Executive and Instructor of the BBLT Junior program, and a BBLT 2 graduate.

The BBLT programme also offers extensive sessions on public speaking. As we know, if we want to mobilise people towards a cause, or lead them, we need to have dynamic public speaking skills in order to communicate with the mass. BBLT provides a platform for participants to exercise public speaking in front of others. They receive instructions on how to prepare a draft, how to begin a speech, what to write in it and also how to deliver the speech with a call to action. Even though in the beginning, some of them were nervous, over time, they have discovered their potential as public speakers.

In the last week of the classroom session, the participants work in the ‘Leadership in Action (LIA)’ phase. “We brainstorm on how to create a system, how to prepare a framework, how to plan a budget and raise funds, we discuss what can we do in the community and how to apply our leadership skills”, says Junayeth Shahriar Provat (19), a participant of BBLT 14.

This time, six groups have worked in

their own health and hygiene issues. But the communication skills that they have acquired from the first phase helped them convince the locals and manage situations tactfully.

“At the end of each week, we had meetings in class and would discuss about our activities, challenges, and how we have overcome them”, says Provat. “In this way, at the end of the class, we were able to gather more experiences from the other teams.”

Each group had a facilitator who observed their activities and progress. When new issues and challenges arose, the team members brainstormed to find solutions to navigate them.

The BBLT programme doesn’t teach participants about what leadership is; rather it tries to establish necessary skills so that they can exercise ethical leadership in whatever role they take on in society. Recently, around 600 participants took part in an online survey which demonstrated that 91 percent of BYLC participants believe that BYLC has brought about a significant change in their lives.

Apart from the BBLT programme, BYLC has four other programmes— BBLT Junior (for children aged 12-16), Art and Practise of Leadership (APL for third and fourth year university students), Youth Leadership Boot camp (YLB for all university students) and Youth Leadership Summit (YLS for university students and young professionals).

BYLC is in the process of introducing ‘The Office of Professional Development’



six different areas of the capital, where they focused on basic problems like education, first aid, health and hygiene in disadvantaged communities.

“We, the female members are working on issues around menstruation, while the male members are working on family planning. Apart from these, we have also given them practical knowledge about the basics of first aid and personal hygiene, for example- the proper technique of washing hands”, says Eshaya Binte Hassan, a BBLT 14 participant and a member of team *Moshal*. Each of the 6 teams had a unique team name and the rest five are- *Jagoron*, *Swapno Sanko*, *Panjeree*, *Swapner Panjeree* and *Dhankurakur*.

Working within the communities was quite a challenge for the participants, as most of the inhabitants are not aware of

for BYLC graduates, where they will learn practical skills required in the work place, such as writing a good resume, interview preparation, elevator pitches, etc.

Generally, students belonging to our education system have a tendency to memorise. In fact they rarely get any opportunity to practise critical thinking, analytical and leadership skills. BBLT, the after-school programme offers the student the chance to develop and exercise these skills. This programme is driven to establish a firm belief among the students that leadership is all about action, not position. Whatever background we might come from, whatever our position may be, or wherever we might work in, we can exercise leadership by attaining and applying a necessary set of skills — and that very attempt by BYLC is nothing short of commendable. ■