



Not too young to Make a difference

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While the age for driving licenses and national IDs are signified boldly in society, the correct age for social accountability remains a confusion amidst ignorance and excuses. We are part of a society that is no stranger to poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, rights violation, pollution and myriad other concerns drowning our social media and everyday lives. It's impossible to disregard such burning issues when 'global warming' is the first headline on your newsfeed or you see children your age begging for money while you're on your way to school. It's almost inhumane to be aware of such issues and yet say "But I'm just 16, what can I do?"

ARE WE TOO YOUNG?

Youth may be a period when it's difficult to make time for social work after juggling education, extracurricular activities and what not. However, while the age factor restricts some, others see it as an opportunity. Shayan Husain, an 18 years old active member of Perception Foundation, says, "While studies come first, social responsibilities are something we're born with. As long as we have people around us who could use a bit of kindness, it's not something we can ignore in the name of age and responsibilities." He ensures that though he started at Perception during his O Levels, his grades turned out as he expected. It really depends on how you organise things.

"It is actually hard to juggle so many things at once," says Sajid Mahmud, one of the co-founders of Perception who started social work at around age 16. "I usually prioritise my work," he says, "I believe, if you really want to do something, you can always find time for it."

WILL PEOPLE TAKE US SERIOUSLY?

When tackling such serious concerns at a young age, a rational fear many teenagers have is not being taken seriously. From his own experience, Shayan Husain advises to confront this issue by handling things the way people would expect from a professional. He shares that he usually has slideshows and documents prepared, speaks eloquently and with substance about the things he works for. "The age factor makes people believe young initiators aren't credible because we're just trying to 'show off', or aren't mature enough to know our way around socioeconomic problems," he says. "So I'd suggest making up for it by simply knowing about your topic and showing that you do." On the contrary, Sajid Mahmud admitted to never really facing such problems. "People were always ready to listen to us and have helped us in every way they can," he says.

YOUTH INITIATIVES IN ACTION

Regardless of all odds and excuses, many socially responsible youths of the country are taking initiatives. Youth organisations are battling



social issues with whatever involvement they have to offer. They not only reach out to people they are equipped to assist but also promote awareness among their peers by encouraging them to volunteer in their projects. Two of many such initiatives are mentioned below.

Perception

Perception is a youth-based, non-profit foundation established by a group of teenagers upon the principle of tackling socioeconomic issues through citizen engagement so they can change peoples 'perception' and continue that ripple effect. Perception started off as a team that took part in a competition in 2014, called the Summer Challenge hosted by the Physically-challenged Development Foundation. This team decided to stick together and

carry on their work after the project ended. While they have the support of patrons, Sajid Mahmud, one of their co-founders informs that their biggest support come from their tight-knit group of contributing friends and an overwhelming volunteer response. Annually, Perception initiates several ventures such as Sweater Weather (collection and distribution of winter clothes for the unprivileged) and Potbelly (providing food to the less fortunate during Ramadan), and encourages interested volunteers to engage in these projects by advertising their activities on social media.

Link: fb.com/TeamPerceptionBD
Khatakolom

Khatakolom is a joint initiative by two youth-based organisations – Perception and DAWN – which aims to spread the idea of individual-focused creative education throughout Bangladesh. It's operated by students volunteering to teach at a site built with the help of friendly companies.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

"You don't have to jump right in and start a new organisation; we already do have quite a few. But teaching less fortunate children could go a long way," adds Shayan Husain.

Not everybody may have access to the resources required to start something big. However, already established foundations such as Perception and Khatakolom actively encourage volunteers to take part in their projects. For those who truly can't manage time, these one day projects every few months, collecting winter clothes or distributing food among the unprivileged, can make a big impact.

"Usually when picking volunteers I don't discriminate between who does it for the certificate, and who does it for the nobility of the work," says Shayan Husain, "You'll find yourself joining as a certificate-seeker, and leaving with a serious sense of satisfaction and empathy." Sajid Mahmud adds, "We hope to encourage volunteers by doing projects which are more invested in them taking part actively and gaining experience firsthand so they know why we do what we do."

Shayan Husain's final advice is, "Learn whatever you can. Whether it's practical knowledge, like how to scream at a bunch of volunteers to get them to line up, or emotional knowledge, like how to appreciate the change you're making. Starting young, and being enthusiastic in the service will really make you fall in love with it."

Youth is not only a time to be socially aware, but also a time to recognise an issue and have the passion to confront it. Consciousness only holds so much purpose if not coupled with responsible actions. Age may be a factor that limits certain actions, but doesn't completely tie

our hands. And when age does not excuse the harm done upon victims of socioeconomic problems, why must it excuse people of their social responsibilities?

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Samin Sabah Islam believes there are very few problems in life, if any, that a good nap can't fix. If she isn't asleep, your queries may be answered at sabahsamin11@gmail.com

