

Universal Children's Day- Making a difference

Introduced in 1954, Universal Children's Day is a day dedicated to promoting welfare and equality among children in every part of the world. The International observance is reserved for November 20 and UNICEF sets aside a different agenda each year to make the world a little better for children.

With this year's theme being, 'Child protection and SDGs- Issues and opportunities,' protecting tomorrow's doctors, lawyers and presidents, providing equal opportunities of dialogue and freedom in a sheltered world are at the heart of UCD, 2017.

Ending violence and discrimination against children seem like mighty tasks to undertake. But a small stone can instigate ripples of change. And it can all start with you.

Start off by extending kindness and forgiveness to the less fortunate and contemplate by putting yourself in their tiny shoes. The idea here is to end violence and encourage a friendly community. So, instead of callously warding off eager kids on the lanes of Dhaka city, try buying that balloon or the stem of rose. Solve a dire need.

You can also opt to do more. Extend your generosity. Feed a hungry mouth, clothe a freezing child in the cold or simply, give away an old book for papers or knowledge. The possibilities exploring all hands on deck are endless. Bring about a change and be a part of a safer community for underprivileged children. It only takes one.

But what happens if we adjust our scales a little bit to include not just one but many?

Educational institutions and learning communities such as schools certainly benefit from greater numbers and a good reach. While learning is at the front and centre at these places, can these unions do more?

Universal Children's Day is about kids of all ages, races and creeds and schools can celebrate the day under the umbrella of 2017's agenda.

Children at schools can be taught to protect themselves against abuse with the introduction of karate or self-defence lessons as an extracurricular activity. Cultural programmes can commemorate the day and literary plays and dramas can shine light on the cruelties faced by children all over the world. Social issues can be discussed in engaging debate competitions on children's rights on occasion of Universal Children's Day, challenging students to be opinionated and encouraging free speech.

Moreover, animated movies can intrigue students of all grades, followed by a spirited discussion of the actions and choices made by the heroes and villains in the films. Children can be taught the difference between right and wrong and the importance of having their views heard can be highlighted.

Clubs or different departments of schools can even organise fairs and carnivals like winter fetes to raise money for underprivileged children. The idea of setting up drop-boxes can also be adopted to prompt teachers, parents and students to

make contributions. From warm clothes and books to plastic bottles and utensils; a group of volunteers can even distribute accumulations to children in need.

But are schools on the highest tier on the scale of magnitude? Resoundingly, no. Schools are not the only communities benefitting from mass numbers.

This is where non-governmental organisations come in.

Charitable organisations are leaps and bounds ahead when it comes to higher numbers and a greater reach.

Surpassing schools in size, charitable organisations already have a head start when it comes to spreading awareness about children's rights and equality on Universal Children's Day and beyond.

JAAGO is the pioneering non-profit organisation holding regular events to pave the way for a better and safer community.

Durnibar Foundation is another such union dedicated to gender equality and abolishing poverty. However, it was JAAGO who first instigated a move in the spirit of Universal Children's Day in 2009 with the introduction of its annual UCD event.

"Raising awareness about Universal Children's Day is what JAAGO plans to do every year. UCD is a social event where volunteers deemed 'yellow armies' take



over the streets on this day, trading places with hawkers and underprivileged kids," shared Syed Muhammad Mujtaba, volunteer co-ordinator for Volunteer for Bangladesh, one of two branches of JAAGO. "The purpose of organising an event on this day is for volunteers to step into the shoes of underprivileged children, giving them the day off."

To break it down, the idea of JAAGO's social event is to lift the veil of oblivion about the abuse and discrimination faced by kids. And with that agenda, over ten thousand volunteers all over the country approach pedestrians with a rose and a brochure, stating statistics of world illiteracy and children inequality. And thus, people are requested to make a contribution towards the education and welfare of children.

And these contributions certainly make an impact. JAAGO's UCD events manage to raise sums of Tk 5-10 lakh every year. The funds are then invested in schools opened to provide free education and lessen illiteracy rates among children in poverty. Thirteen schools have been established in 4 districts so far. A true milestone was crossed when the importance of Universal Children's Day and JAAGO's social message in spirit of UCD, 2015, 'Quality education for all' was recognised and addressed by the government of the country.

Whether you're on your own or amid the support of a community comprising thousands, the most ordinary of actions inevitably bring about an extraordinary change. Allow the importance of Universal Children's Day to sink in and channel it to do something special on this 20th of November.

By Ramisa Haque
Photo: Collected

Creative Enlightened Society

It's definitely fate's approval -- a blessing. The Creative Enlightened Society is a remarkable health and advancement club in the peripheries of Bangladesh dedicated to adolescent girls.

Once you step into Barail village in Brahmanbaria, you will surely be enchanted by the beauty of the rural community. Whilst the green takes off stress, the advancement of the locality amazes guests. What's more interesting is that the occupants of the tiny village have done wonders for the community. One such name is Lutfe Tahera, initiator of the remarkable social welfare project.

Tahera has been involved with public assistance and NGO programmes for more than two decades, collecting accolades for her involvement with vital national issues such as rehabilitation of street children, health and welfare concerns, population control, etc. Her latest venture marks the visionary's sole concern for enhancing and improving the lives of the citizens of her beloved country.

February 2013 marks the initiation of the noteworthy institution, Creative Enlightened Society, deliberately striving to change the destiny of young girls in the vicinity of Barail Village. "This is just the beginning denotes Tahera. With proper planning and support, we hope to open such associations in all the villages under the given union."

The hospitable initiative has ingrained a set of steadfast beliefs amongst its members. And that is -- only education can progress life and craftwork can translate into financial freedom.

The young members of the association, belonging to the age-group of 12-18 years, are knowledgeable in significant subject matters, including child rights, puberty related health issues, dangers of early pregnancy, etc.

Long term attachment with the initiative has helped these girls in several ways. Around 30 of them received certificates for a one-year intensive sewing course and 24 even earned free sewing machines to start

off their careers at once. On an average, these girls are able to earn Tk 500 to Tk 700 a month, but on special times of the year like Eid, Puja and the Wedding season, their monthly earning sometimes surges to Tk 1500- Tk 2000 a month.

October 27, 2017 was an extremely special day for the girls at 'Creative Enlightened Society' as they were able to celebrate all of their birthdays together. Ecstatic, all the girls shared a feeling of warmth and enjoyment. Mariam, a young member of the esteemed association, even revealed her happiness by saying, "This is the first time ever that I celebrated my birthday. The feeling is surreal; it's as if I was reborn today." Another important occurrence on the same day was the advent of a 5-member volunteer group named 'Neel Kontho' that hopes to combat early childhood marriage in the society.

Conversing with other members of the association, we came across Eity Akhter, a charming young girl who has been associated with the foundation since the begin-

ning. "I got married after enrolling as a member and receiving one year of intense training on sewing at the institution. My in-laws and husband are extremely happy with my efforts, appreciating my involvement with the foundation," she informed.

Hoping for an outcome where hundreds of girls like Eity and Mariam have their destinies change by becoming financially independent and content, Lutfe Tahera strives relentlessly towards strategising a bigger plan to incorporate more members and a brighter future for all.

By LS Desk
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