



REVIEW

## Utsho Bangladesh

Dating as far back as 25 years, a vision to create a safe shelter with quality education to underprivileged children took form. At the heart of an attempt to make the lives of children from impoverished families a little better, stood a visionary --Mahbooba Mahmood Leena, Executive Director of Utsho Bangladesh.

"Underprivileged children from broken homes and unfortunate backgrounds often find themselves without the necessary support of a house or education. To solve this problem, I, along with a few others rented a small room in 1993. We took in three children and also decided to open a school for them," explains Mahbooba, and from this initiative, Utsho Bangladesh was born.

A low-key, community-based organisation, Utsho Bangladesh works relentlessly to promote access to basic human rights for neglected children and women alike. With central offices located at Niketon, Gulshan, what started out as a humble venture with three children in a small room has now branched out to 382 hopeful children living and studying in three schools (one residential and two non-residential) named 'Utsho Bidyaniketan.'

With the one residential school located at Sreepur, Gazipur, Utsho Bidyaniketan does not just focus on academics. It also helps develop basic IT skills by training children on how to use computers. Children also learn photography from esteemed photographers, as part of a project, Postcards from the Future. Here, the children are inspired to get in touch with their inner creativity. An art exhibition showcasing some of the best works by enthusiastic children was organised at Drik Gallery in 2014.

"Only providing education will not do. Children have to be taught how to dream," states Srabanti Datta, a dedicated member, working away as part of the Utsho crew. "Here at Utsho, children are taught karate, singing, dancing and even painting. The whole idea is for the kids to realise their true potential, let it be academic or creative."

"I want to be a pilot when I grow up. I don't want to fly a black or blue airplane. I will only fly a white one because white is my favourite colour," shares an enthusiastic 6-year-old Zeyad, one of the many kids studying at Utsho.

Apart from inspiring tomorrow's leaders, Utsho also manages two daycare centres under the name 'Aastha Daycare Centre' and is dedicated to providing employment opportunities to women and children who have been victims of violence or unfair treatment.

But how is an organisation like Utsho even run?

Utsho successfully operates mainly via local/personal resources and child sponsorship programs where people and families are encouraged to chip in a portion of the expenses of a child taken in by the organisation. "No contribution is cashed in profits. Everything goes towards the kids," ensures Srabanti Datta.

However, to take care of the hefty task of administration costs, biannual fund-raising events and small businesses that offer catering and tailoring services have been set up. A fund-raising event in the name of 'Utsho Shondha 2017' was also organised in December of last year by the very-capable catering team, serving scrumptious Bengali dinner in the midst of classical songs and performances.

One has the option of availing the catering services for themselves; even groceries are supplied and garage sales are arranged, all in the hope of accumulating funds.

And if you want to lend a hand, Utsho welcomes volunteers with open arms and appreciates anyone who wants to make a difference.

Despite facing several challenges in the forms of unusable donations and difficulty in earning due credibility, it's safe to say

the non-profit has impacted the lives of many children. Some have prospered to earn educational degrees in SSC and HSC examinations; others found themselves on an even playing field in the local job market. And some more children grew up to be hired as employees at newspaper agencies and even schools.

"As long as the kids don't go astray and take to derailed paths, whatever they do and wherever they end up is a success story in our eyes," shares Srabanti Datta. "Our greatest victory is when a child of Utsho realises their potential and progresses in life, regardless of family history, race or creed," she further adds.

"We have created something that will inspire others and prompt them to give back to society, however they can, with Utsho. We want to set an example for others and prompt them to follow," says Mahbooba Mahmood Leena.

And with such goals to strive for and such achievements in its bag, stands proud a humble non-profit organisation, in all its glory, by the name of Utsho Bangladesh.

**By Ramisa Haque**

For more information on the activities of Utsho Bangladesh, log into: [www.utshobangladesh.org](http://www.utshobangladesh.org), or send an email to: [utshobd@gmail.com](mailto:utshobd@gmail.com)

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