

Considering these various concerns, Parveen wanted to see if there was anyone who would start on their own, who would help those who truly needed it. "Ultimately, I felt the responsibility is mine. The Beauty Industry is where I work in, I introduce myself as a beauty artist, an entrepreneur and I run my own business. I felt it was my obligation to the people, the women who could do something so much better if I can help them."

Parveen mentions her work with the government SME-s in the last five years. As she worked in the district level, she felt the lack of follow up-s were definite shortcomings, but she also identified potential sections that needed improvement. These helped her in establishing the ground work for Ujjwala.

Of course, this was not done just within mere months. It took two years of constant work, including surveying over 100 parlours and analysing their demands. The factor that kept coming back was Women Empowerment, which would trigger phenomenal growth.

Parveen talks about the creative, outgoing and knowledgeable women who can do the necessary work in a parlour, but just aren't able to do so. These women, she mentions, didn't know who to go to, or how to deal with the eventual happening. Some even went up to opening a parlour with very little thought.

"I have so, so many stories," she said as she started talking about the girls and women they are working with. "I have known a girl who was married off right before her SSC, and was deserted by her



husband after having a child she was left by the husband. Her struggles are countless as she is pursuing higher studies now. She is currently with her father. Even medical expenses are a burden for her. For an individual who is stuck in a situation like this, she needs a comfort zone where she can work with safety and security. Ujjwala is that place for her."

As for progress, she mentions that Ujjwala in the last seven months has reached over 850 girls. Ujjwala not only provides training and secure dormitories,

but mental support as well. What sets them apart even further is their approach in understanding the individual. Every person that comes to them has a specific need. Some need the training, some need advice, and others just need the right guidance to work better. Ujjwala welcomes all and works for all. The training sessions as well as other workshops are most often conducted by industry and business heads and CEO-s as well as university professors— to deliver good quality content to the attendees.

Parveen added that Ujjwala has great strengths that can only be fully visualised with empowering women. She expects that more highly educated women will enter the Beauty Industry to move it further. Just as every other industry and business segment receives the spotlight, the service-based Beauty Industry too will share the same platform.

As for future plans, Ujjwala is looking to spearhead the progress and growth of the Beauty Industry in Bangladesh. Their district level mobile training centres would become permanent and be run by the representatives or Ujjwala Sarothis. Ujjwala also plans to market local, superior quality salon products to be used by all. Just as Bangladesh now looks to the outside world and depends on imported beauty products, Afroza Parveen is a believer that the scenario will be reversed very soon.

With high optimism and a single-minded focus of growing with all who are involved, Ujjwala is out to make that much needed difference in helping women grow on their own terms.

By Iris Farina

Photo courtesy: Ujjwala

For more on Ujjwala's vision and plans, visit <http://www.ujjwala.co>

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