



The KL-YES Program: *Opportunity for the global citizen*

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With the amount of intra and extra-curricular opportunities on offer, students are now nothing less than global citizens. One such opportunity that can, literally, be a life-changing experience for the better is the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program, for students between the ages of 15 and 17.

Initiated by the US Congress and sponsored by the Educational & Cultural Affairs Bureau of the US Department of State, the YES Program was named after US Senators Edward M Kennedy and Richard Lugar, and provides scholarships to high school students to spend up to one academic year in the United States. It was launched with the hope of forming a bridge between the USA and young people from Muslim countries. Since 2002, over 370 Bangladeshi students have taken part in the program.

The YES Program is administered in Bangladesh by International Education and Resource Network – Bangladesh (iEARN-BD) with support from the US Embassy, Dhaka. A young group including participants of previous years, the members of iEARN-BD work year round – pooling the applicants, taking interviews, and maintaining close contact with the current participants and their families.

“The primary goal of a participant is to represent their own country,” says Wasi Mahmud, Program Director at iEARN-BD. “For one whole year a young person learns to live in a different country, society and culture altogether, away from their family. It opens their eyes to the world outside and being young at age allows them to live the experience to its fullest.”

Clearly, it should come as no surprise that the YES

Program provides the chance for a teenager to become an ambassador of Bangladesh. Throughout the one year of residence and study, the participants get to impart knowledge about their own history, culture, cuisine, and lifestyle to the people in the new country.

Being a part of the program is not only an opportunity, but also an accomplishment in itself. Each partici-



part [travel, accommodation, and education at a high school] is fully-funded by the organisers; they also receive a monthly allowance of USD 125. Upon successful completion, they are US State Department Alumni members and become part of a worldwide network of active young people working to create a better world.

The YES Program is intensive in nature. Moreover, it would be uncommon for a Bangladeshi family to allow their child to travel to America for a year, sacrificing the first year of their higher secondary school (HSC or A Level). The people at iEARN-BD have, therefore, leave no stone unturned to address the queries that might arise in

parents and teachers' minds, with utmost sincerity and transparency. They have been using social media platforms to inform about the program and its benefits to schools and students.

Another important aspect of this exchange program is the “host family”. A host family is any typical family living in a city or a suburb; they are selected, much like the participants, after rigorous assessments by local placement organisations. Alumni members speak highly of their hosts, often referring to them as their “second family”. It is with this new set of parents, siblings and relatives that they spend an entire year with – from attending the local high school to taking part in daily chores and community-based activities – and form a lifelong bond.

Gulshan Jubaed Prince, currently working as a Program Assistant at iEARN-BD, is a US State Department Alumni. Right after completing his SSC from St. Joseph Higher Secondary School, he applied and was selected as a participant for the YES Program. He spent a year in a Mississippi suburb, and has amazing stories to tell.

“I was a bit homesick at first, but all that changed soon after. I had to introduce myself and my country at every step and that was a different kind of feeling,” recalls Prince. “The entire experience shaped me and taught me values; it made me independent.”

To be able to represent Bangladesh is something no young person should miss out on. Add to that the once in a lifetime opportunity to study and live for a year in United States – it's your one-way ticket to being a global citizen.

The deadline for KL-YES Program 2019-2020 application is November 24, 2018. To know more about the program and application process, visit www.iearnbd.org or www.facebook.com/iearnbd