



PHOTO: COURTESY

TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF CHILDREN

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Proportion is an organisation that provides free education and healthcare services to underprivileged children. Sabbir Khan Saym, the founder of Proportion, is from the Forestry and Environmental Science department of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet. He started the organisation around three years ago, with an incentive to improve the lives of children who have little means to rely upon. Sabbir started off

with saving his lunch money to leave an impact on the lives of these children.

Today, Proportion has two schools in Rangpur, one of which is in Rolakatar Char, Kurigram. The children in Rolakatar Char did not have access to any other school before Proportion came to their aid. The organisation recently inaugurated their third campus in Mirpur. Currently, their schools have 150 students.

The children also take part in many workshops held by Proportion. The organisation

also distributed more than a 1000 pieces of clothing during Eid all across the nation in the last few years.

Sabbir explained that he works for education because he values it as the greatest weapon in the world. He saw his younger brother drop out of school due to lack of money. "Despite being the top student, my brother's education was halted just because our father could not afford to pay the fees," says Sabbir. Today, his brother is a Botany student at the University of Dhaka. Sabbir's

selfless devotion to Proportion reflects his dreams of creating a Bangladesh where no child is deprived of knowledge, even the ones who live in poor conditions.

Proportion has also saved the lives of over 50 child patients, by funding their entire medical treatment. "Even if the child is not from our schools, we try our best to do all that we can to help," explains Sabbir. Proportion is largely financed by many non-resident Bangladeshis as well.

Furthermore, Sabbir takes online classes

on a wide range of topics and organises workshops on career counselling and social issues. He has also initiated a campaign called *Purano Boi, Nottun Shopno* (Old Books, New Dreams) for people to donate their books to those in need. He received hugely positive responses for the campaign.

Sabbir has high expectations from himself and the nation when it comes to improving healthcare services and education. He hopes to recruit more promising volunteers for Proportion in the near future.

An unconditional love for animals



PHOTO: MONON MUNTAKA

SHARMIN JOYA

Md Salim Hossain Sourav sold a five-storied building, his only property, to run the animal welfare organisation, Care for Paws, along with a few of his friends. The initiative started its journey in 2014, and three years later, it was registered by the government and enlisted as a non-profit organisation. An avid animal lover since childhood, Sourav got his first pets, Nadu the cat and Caesar the dog, in 2011.

They still live with him.

"At many points in my life, people criticised me for my commitment to animal welfare and no one really came forward to help," said Sourav. "Despite challenges, we are committed to investing in the protection of the lives of innocent animals." Sourav, along with his friends Zahid Hossain, Kamal Choudhury, Mahinur Akter, Kohinur Akter and Nabila Basher, set out to become the voice of the voiceless.

"One of my two dogs passed away due to the lack of proper treatment," Sourav adds. "I did not have enough money. No veterinarians agreed to treat my dog without money. Since

then, I wanted to work for animals." The Care for Paws shelter, first located in Mohammadpur, shifted to Keraniganj in 2018. In the shelter, there are 62 stray dogs and 42 stray cats, most of whom are injured.

"In most cases, the animals are injured by people, which breaks our hearts. We found two dogs from Mirpur who were burned alive. We were able to save only one of them," says Sourav. "We often rescue tortured street cats. One time, we found a dog whose stomach was fully cut and whose intestine was out." There are four permanent staff members in the shelter and three veterinarians who visit the animals weekly. These veterinarians are also available at the Care for Paws clinic in Zibatola, which is open for all. Sourav further adds that most doctors in the veterinary hospitals run by the government, are trained in how to treat cows and goats, but are not well-equipped when it comes to treating cats and dogs.

"I took the tough decision of selling my five-storied building so that we could carry on the activities of Care for Paws. But once I made the choice, I did not think twice," explains Sourav. The shelter receives donations from pet lovers

around the country who are connected to their Facebook page. But before having the shelter, Sourav kept the strayed animals in his own building for a long time. He held a full-time job as a banker but gave that up to start his own business so that he could give more time to the animals. Over the years, Sourav and his team have saved the lives of more than a thousand stray animals. "Cats and dogs are our priority. They are most commonly seen in the streets across Bangladesh and they depend on us," explains Sourav. "We aim to prevent dog culling in many places. At the same time, we want to create awareness about vaccinations and sterilisations for animals."

In Bangladesh, Care for Paws also became the first to introduce cancer treatment for dogs. Previously, euthanasia was the only solution to cancer. As of now, the organisation has 10 paid volunteers and 40 unpaid volunteers around the country. "Our future plan is to establish an around-the-clock healthcare service where anyone can avail treatment, based on emergencies," asserts Sourav. "Besides that, we want to build our shelter homes and healthcare services in all the divisions and districts of Bangladesh."

Maya begins a new journey today

MINAM HAQ

We live in a time where we are often judged for the things that we say or do. How great would it be, if we could just speak without having to worry about other's opinions? Thanks to Ivy Huq Russell, the founder and CEO of Maya, (formerly known as Maya Apa), who actually made it possible.

Ivy's brainchild, named after her mother who is a cancer survivor, was conceived during her first pregnancy. It began as a blog for mothers in Bangladesh, who faced challenges when trying to access accurate information and advice. She aimed to provide one-on-one reliable and relevant information to those who needed it, especially women, while keeping their identity secure. One of the prime reasons behind its popularity is the fact that questions can be asked anonymously with the help of end-to-end encryption.

Driven by its mission to assist users, Maya has come a long way, upgrading itself at pace with technology. Around 25 percent of the consultations are conducted by artificial intelligence (AI). Last year, it was recognised by Google Launchpad Accelerator, which further helped to enhance their AI capabilities.

With financial support and advice from BRAC, Maya started a digital healthcare delivery app in 2015, which connects anyone looking for help to experts from relevant fields. Apart from Bangladesh, Maya also operates in Sri Lanka and plans to venture into India and the Middle East soon. As it aims to be a self-sustainable business, the Maya service (app, web, and messenger) has garnered half a million users presently. On average, they respond to 2000 - 3000 queries per day, and completed one million consultations successfully.

Maya recently partnered up with Advanced Chemical Industries (ACI), which owns Shwapno, a leading supermarket chain with an immense customer base across numerous locations. From today, Maya will be implementing its subscription service. It has teamed up with Shwapno, to provide a joint membership card, which will provide access to facilities of both Maya packages and Shwapno, all with the same card. There are various packages available to suit the different requirements of the users like Maya Easy - 30 day messaging and consultations, Maya Therapy - 20 minutes of therapy and so on, all with various subscription fees.

