



(From left) Sazia Afrin and Mehvish Raja

PHOTOS: MONON MUNTAKA

WIGGLES AND GIGGLES Where children can thrive

MADIHA ATHAR KHAN

When they began searching for an extra-curricular school for their children, Mehvish Raja and Sazia Afrin, two women who are sisters-in-law, were inspired to open one on their own.

Their school, Wiggles and Giggles, is for children who are interested in a variety of activities. With a focus on arts and crafts, the school also offers Zumba, Karate and Arabic courses.

Based on the children's needs, the activities at Wiggles and Giggles are carefully developed for each stage and age group that the team works with. The classes are separated according to age categories with one being for ages 3-5 and the other for ages 5-12. Ultimately, the founders hope to establish a fully operational pre-school.

Mehvish was a teacher at Hurdco International School and Sir John Wilson School. Sazia also has many years of experience in private tutoring. So, putting convenience and

interests together, they have joined hands to create something new for children, outside the traditional and rigid school curriculums.

Aside from the various activities, Wiggles and Giggles focuses on how to retain the interests of children so that they are always motivated to attend classes on their own. So far, they have had positive responses from the students and their parents. The place is brightly decorated, reflecting the spiritedness of childhood, with a reading corner designated for the children to spend time between classes or when they need a break.

Though the activities may include subjects taught at school, they are taught differently so that the children can hone their individual talents. "Younger children are first given play dough and then taught to hold pencils and crayons in the proper way, as a way of developing their motor skills," explains Mehvish. "Then, they slowly start drawing lines and simple shapes with colourful crayons.

Children are never rushed to complete their artworks and are often given the freedom to choose the topics."

On special events, the kids make themed artworks and collages. On Pohela Boishakh, they made traditional folk art inspired masks and a small gathering was also arranged for them and their parents. The programme featured dances, music and face-painting. Similar events were also held for Halloween and Christmas.

On a personal note, the women feel lucky to be able to work without leaving their children behind. Within a few months of its inception, the Wiggles and Giggles family already includes 50 students. Trained professionals are hired under the guidance of the two founders to conduct the activities. Admissions to any of the classes take place in the first week of a month. Mehvish and Sazia hope to start with meditation and English and Bangla creative writing classes soon.



Artworks by students of Wiggles and Giggles.

Living the dream at NASA

Mario Nirman Mondal and Eric Nixon Mondal have been working for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) since they completed their undergraduate education. Mario works as a Satellite Flight Engineer at NASA's Maryland center which specialises in Earth Observing Satellites (EOS). Following in his brother's footsteps, Eric has recently joined as a Configuration Manager for NASA's newest venture on laser technology.

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

The two brothers talked about their incredible journey so far. "I wanted to study Aeronautical Engineering since I was in school. I still remember how I used to read different journal articles on aerospace from a young age," said Mario. "When I got into BUET, I chose Mechanical Engineering as my major but eventually transferred to University of Maryland, USA. During my final year there, I was chosen to

work on a university project for NASA, and upon graduating, I applied to work there. I was quite lucky to be able to bag my dream job as a fresh graduate."

On the same note, Eric shared how his journey has been different from that of his brother's. "Unlike Mario, I wasn't a career-oriented person. I changed five jobs in the past three years," he said. "I completed my undergraduate degree in Microbiology but I wasn't sure if I was employable at NASA. When Mario informed me about this new

project, I applied and was called in. The rest is history."

Mario completed his master's degree while maintaining his job at NASA and Eric is currently pursuing his master's. Thanks to NASA's flexible working hours and accommodating workloads during their classes and exam seasons, pursuing further education has been possible for them.

As a message to the youth, Eric said, "If you are to aim, always aim at the sky. It

gives you the courage to spread your wings and fly." Supplementing his brother's thoughts, Mario added, "I believe today's youth needs to be more proactive than reactive. They will prosper if they learn to work hard."

Mario plans to keep working for NASA and pursue a PhD soon. Eric has signed an eight-year project with NASA, and plans to pursue a PhD soon after completing his master's.



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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

WTO Essay Award 2019 for Young Economists



The WTO has issued a call for young economists to submit papers for the 2019 WTO Essay Award. The award aims to promote high-quality research on trade policy and international trade co-operation and to reinforce the relationship between the WTO and the academic community.

DEADLINE: May 31, 2019 | Competition

Reimagine Education Conference and Awards 2019 in London

Reimagine Education is a global competition rewarding innovative approaches aimed at enhancing student learning outcomes and employability, offering \$50,000 in funding to the overall winner/s and 16 'Oscars' of Education.

DEADLINE: September 1, 2019 | Competition

GP Accelerator 2.0 (Pre-Accelerator program) – 2019

Grameenphone Accelerator is a cohort-based, mentor-led and curriculum-driven open innovation platform that helps early-stage entrepreneurs validate their idea. Successful graduates include Sheba, XYZ, CMED Health, Repto and Cramstack.

DEADLINE: Ongoing | Competition



(From left) Mario Nirman Mondal and Eric Nixon Mondal

PHOTOS: PIYAS BISWAS