



(L) Although Hate Khori Foundation's Friday School is closed due to the pandemic, they are making necessary arrangements for their students to continue their studies at home. (R) Members and volunteers of the foundation distributing face masks among children.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF HATE KHORI FOUNDATION

Write to Fight Post COVID-19 Era: The youth's perspective on tackling the crisis

YOUTH DESK

Youth Opportunities and IPDC Finance Limited recently arranged an essay competition titled, 'Write to Fight Post COVID-19 Era', a national writing competition for Bangladesh's Recovery Idea and Plan: Youth Perspective. The competition aimed to give the youth a platform to raise their voices and present their ideas and recommendations to the policymakers.

"The youth share many of their brilliant and impactful ideas and recommendations on social media. Unfortunately, those never reach the policymakers," shares Osama Bin Noor, Co-founder and Chief Operating Officer, Youth Opportunities. "We aimed to provide a platform where their voices can be heard by the policymakers, so that they can include the recommendations in their action plans."

The competition focused on ten thematic areas, including protecting migrant workers and flow of remittance, ensuring agricultural sustainability, promoting young employment and job creation, strengthening the healthcare system, reviving exports and safeguarding women employment and



PHOTO: COURTESY OF YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

empowerment among others.

The submitted essays suggested ways to tackle the current hurdles and considered both short-term and long-term implications of different policies and regulations. The Youth Opportunities team plans to send the recommendations to respective organisations to incorporate them into the action plans.

The judging panel included Sonia Bashir Kabir, Founder, SBK Tech Ventures and SBK Foundation, Shariful Hasan, Head of Migration Programme, BRAC, Arpeeta Shams Mizan, Assistant Professor, University of Dhaka, Tina Jabeen, CEO & Managing Director, Startup Bangladesh Limited ICT Division and Dr Abdun Noor Tushar, physician and media personality, among others.

A total of 1,217 submissions with more than 6000 recommendations from over 227 institutions across the country were received for the competition.

The competition started back in May and ended in July. On September 5, a virtual prize-giving ceremony was arranged to award the winners.

Champions of each group received a research grant of BDT 10,000 from IPDC Finance Limited and internship opportunities at the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources.

EMPOWERING CHILDREN OF FISHERMEN

With an aim to eliminate inequality and ensure access to basic rights for children who belong to fishermen families, Hate Khori Foundation was founded by Suman Chandra Mistri Sajib. The organisation is a recipient of the Joy Bangla Youth Award 2020. They work closely with families in Mathbaria, a town in Pirojpur District, Barishal.

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Children residing in Pirojpur District have very limited access to education and have little or no knowledge about the usage of the internet and technology. The transport and communication system of the region has not developed over the years. As a result, the students have to walk at least two to three kilometres every day to go to school. Unfortunately, due to the distance, many girls often drop out of school and are married off very early.

Besides education and technological advancement, the organisation is also working to ward off social problems such as child marriage and stalking, alongside raising awareness on the importance of blood donation.

"I often visit the Baleshor River with my friends, as it is very close to my house. One day, we came across a young boy selling food from a box that was strung to his neck. We came to know that his father is a fisherman and cannot afford his school fees," shares Sajib, the President of Hate Khori Foundation. "Moved by his story, I, along with my friends Shourov,

Shanto, Ujjal, Joya and Ovi, started different projects to help such kids."

The organisation has been actively working for around three years. "We decided to start working towards reaching our goal. Subsequently, on the birthday of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, we launched Hate Khori Foundation In 2018," shares Rubel Miah Nahid, the Adviser of the organisation.

Hate Khori Foundation arranges different quiz contests and workshops under 'Project Alo'. Alongside different academic activities, the children are also encouraged to pursue co-curricular activities such as sports, art and other cultural events through this project. Their initiative 'Digital Project' is designed to equip these children with IT knowledge and skills. Alongside using computers, the children also learn internet browsing and gaming, among other things.

During monsoon, most of these children have to stop going to school for at least 2 months, as they cannot afford umbrellas. With their initiative 'Project Shopnopur', Hate Khori Foundation has donated over 250 umbrellas to the school-going kids till

date. With 'Project Hashi', they have successfully distributed school supplies to over a hundred students and hope to increase the number with every passing day.

While some of the children are sent to school, a significant portion of the population is still kept away from education as their parents prefer to send them to work. As a result, rather than being students, most of the children are hawkers or daily labourers. The foundation's 'Project Sikkhabarta' aims to raise awareness among the parents in this regard.

They also arrange a regular weekend session, titled 'Hate Khori Friday School' where 100 registered volunteering tertiary-level students conduct free regular classes for the kids on Fridays, as most of them cannot afford additional coaching classes to improve their school grades. Although our Friday School is closed at the moment due to the pandemic, we are making necessary arrangements for our students to continue their studies at home," says Sajib. They also distribute gifts to these children on different religious festivals and

occasions.

"We only want a better life for these children, however, it becomes very difficult to sometimes convince their parents as most of them are yet to comprehend the necessity of education," asserts Sajib, when asked about the challenges they have faced so far. "Social welfare also requires a lot of funding and the current economic crisis is only adding to our struggles."

More recently, members of the foundation distributed free masks, and encouraged people in remote areas to follow safety and hygiene guidelines, through awareness campaigns.

Hate Khori Foundation wants to eliminate all social inequalities that the children of Pirojpur District fall prey to—be it based on gender, social status or race. They also hope to bridge the gap between mainstream school children and the kids residing in this rural region, so that they can explore their options and work towards improving their lives.

The author is trainee reporter, Arts & Entertainment, The Daily Star. Write to her at shoptorshisamaddar@gmail.com.

An earnest effort to serve New York's families in need

LABIBA KABIR

Long Island (LI) Helpers is a youth-led, collaborative grassroots effort that grew out of a necessity to ensure that residents in Long Island and beyond were able to feed their families at the height of the devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic in New York. Fawzia Syed and Misha Khan, young Bangladeshis based in New York, started the voluntary organisation as Co-founders.

"I think that this organisation, along with the strong work ethic and human display of selflessness, generosity, and humility by my parents have made me the person that I am," says Fawzia. "I strongly believe that my purpose is to serve others in whatever way I can. The name of the organisation comes from



Since March 20, 2020, they have served over 2,500 families.

a quote by American icon Mr Fred Rogers of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood": "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping. I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realising that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world.'"

Food is a critical part of most, if not all, immigrant communities. For many, traditional diets are tied to religious practices. LI Helpers provides culturally specific food for people in New York. They have served Muslim, Hindu, and Jewish families— all of whom specifically ask for food items respecting their religious traditions. LI Helpers makes sure to provide



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF LI HELPERS

Members and volunteers of LI Helpers.

meals that are *halal* to Muslim families, vegetarian or vegan friendly to Hindu families, and kosher to Jewish families.

In these cases, food is a means of preserving the dignity and strong sense of identity that families and communities hold in a diverse, multicultural community such as New York — and at large, the USA.

LI Helpers intends to prioritise grocery deliveries to the populations most prone to fall through the cracks: domestic abuse survivors, disabled individuals, single mothers in New York City shelters, Covid-positive patients, elderly people and undocumented individuals. They began with the modest goal of providing groceries for 12 domestic abuse survivors and their children in Long Island. But with requests and donations pouring in every day, their small effort organically grew to include like-minded groups, businesses and individuals, with the same passion and commitment.

Since March 20, 2020, they have served over 2,500 families. The effort started off with the support of different communities in New York. Leaders in the city uplifted their work through their networks. Many have collected donations for grocery deliveries and long-term projects with families. Manpower for purchasing, organising, and delivering groceries are a critical part of LI Helpers' success and growth.

Most of the volunteers are young people who have dedicated their time to this effort. Many older supporters with families have also supported them financially with regular donations.

Local groups such as Muslims of Long Island, Ummah Giving Circle, and BAPA

Bangladeshi American Pharmacists Association as well as businesses, such as Bangladeshi restaurants BBQ Nite and Ali Baba, have helped them with large donations. Food assistance groups such as Bronx Mutual Aid, Queens Mutual Aid, and ICNA Relief NY and many more individuals and families also assisted them.

LI Helpers plans to prepare for the second wave of Covid-19 hitting New York. They are preparing their volunteers to attend to the high number of requests they anticipate getting. They are pushing fundraising efforts and working on organising their inventory of items in their storage space, which is the garage in Fawzia's home.

For the past few months, they received less requests, in comparison to the months of March to July. They are focusing on completing the deliveries and also on their long-term goals.

LI Helpers intends to be an official nonprofit and continue helping certain families they have built relationships with. They hope to connect these families to people who can help them acquire jobs, housing, and other important things for their survival in New York. As loss of jobs and livelihoods, sudden expenses due to illnesses, high costs of medical care, unbearable rent costs, lack of affordable housing and many other issues have indefinitely upended the lives of millions of working-class New Yorkers, the founders of LI Helpers are committed to continue their work by feeding and serving as many of their neighbours as they can.

The author is a freelancer. Write to her at labibakabir99@gmail.com.

