



SPOTLIGHT

Volunteering: Beyond an extracurricular activity

Proper time management is a challenge for volunteers, especially students who need to juggle their academic life with other commitments. In order to support such students, most voluntary organisations conduct their meetings, events, and activities on weekends.

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Volunteering promotes skill building among the youth. While all kinds of extracurricular activities look great on resumes, what sets volunteering apart is that it provides a multitude of experiences.

"Volunteering is not something you have to do, but something you should do. It helps you define your interests extensively," shared Adnan Hossain, the founding chairman of It's Humanity Foundation. Taking up specific roles at voluntary organisations allows one to enhance their management and other professional skills needed for different careers.

Including volunteer work on a resume also demonstrates that the candidate is passionate, positive, and motivated by a cause that does not offer any monetary incentive.

"I think volunteering is important because it gives people a sense of responsibility towards their community. It teaches people empathy and compassion and helps them understand societal barriers," shared Tahiya Islam, the executive director of Volunteer Stories (VS), a platform that shares the experiences of young volunteers, inspiring others to join different causes.

Networking and making new friends is another advantage of volunteering. "When I started communicating with different



Volunteering teaches people empathy, compassion, and a sense of responsibility.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF IT'S HUMANITY FOUNDATION & AWARENESS 360

people and learning about their cultures and lives, I got over my shyness, and craved to learn more about different people," shared Rijve Arefin, the co-founder of Awareness 360, a global platform that empowers the youth to build community service projects in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Last year, they launched a youth development programme, which enrolled over 200 young people from 38 countries. During that, volunteers learned about different concepts and skills from professionals. They have also launched a children fellowship programme for

younger volunteers.

Many volunteering opportunities also provide training. For example, Footsteps has an extensive changemaker leadership programme that conducts workshops, putting individuals in real-life scenarios for six months. Another social organisation, Swayup, organises professional sessions to equip their members with important skills.

That being said, proper time management is a challenge for volunteers, especially students who need to juggle their academic life with other commitments. In order to support such students, most voluntary organisations conduct their meetings, events, and activities on weekends.

"As a student, it was very difficult for me to manage time for voluntary activities, but nowadays it is getting tougher as I have begun my professional life," shared Mahnaz Zabin, a dentist volunteering for Care for Paws.

While reaping the benefits of volunteering, people need to learn how to set boundaries and know where to stop. At the end of the day, the experiences are supposed to create a sense of fulfilment, not additional pressure.

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TALESPEOPLE SPIELS This is how we do it

SABRINA FATMA AHMAD

This year, most of the frequently asked questions pertain to the selection process behind the stories chosen for our Star Youth collaboration. I hope the following explainer answers most of them.

Who chooses?

The Talespeople team, plus a rotating panel of consultants. We usually ask editors, publishers and academics – in other words, industry experts – to weigh in on the stories to help inform our decision. For the sponsored posts (yes, there are a few more to come), we ask our sponsors to make the final selection.

What are you looking for?

Clear stories with a beginning, middle and an end. Original, and fresh ideas. Experimentations with form. Entries that relate to the prompt, and are within the word limit.

Why isn't my story getting selected?

First, we have a few veteran Talers, who have mastered the art of delivering perfectly polished pieces in the 250 words limit. If we were to only judge on the basis of literary prowess, we'd only be rotating the top tales between people like Sabiha Younus or Kazi Oishi, to name just a few. We make a conscious attempt to shine the spotlight on newer participants. For the same reason, engagement counts, but not that much.

We respect the community/publishing standards of our media partners. We understand that there are certain themes that don't meet the editorial standards of the Daily Star, and avoid those. On that note, given that we want to make this a wholesome community where people of any age can post, we're hoping our Talers can take a cue and refrain from leaning too hard on graphic violence or explicit content for the sake of sensationalism. We haven't been heavy censors in this regard yet, but it is something we're starting to take seriously now.

Whether or not your story made it to the Top 3 of the day, or won a prize, if you're able to participate, and your post has been published on the Talespeople forum, you're already a winner in our eyes.



ILLUSTRATION: RUBY RAHMAN

GUIDES

On borrowing books

USRAAT FAHMIDAH

Buying books can be expensive, especially if you are a student on budget. But you don't always have to buy books. If you are a student, availing a library membership card might be the best option for you. There are several perks to a library card, like accessing journals and digital newspapers which otherwise require a hefty amount of money to acquire.

Here is our guide to libraries and borrowing books.

Bookcentric

First on our list is Bookcentric, the first book rental service in Bangladesh.

Their collection boasts a huge number of books, including latest releases. From Olga Tokarczuk to Sarah J Maas, their library collection has everything you need, whether it is a hard to find book or a popular one. There are several monthly subscription packages that you can choose from, which range from BDT 300 to BDT 1,100. The most popular one is the "Bookster" plan where you can borrow two books monthly at BDT 300. Additionally, they offer special subscription plans for children and families.

British Council Bangladesh

British Council Bangladesh offers several membership categories for both their online and offline libraries. To become a member at the Dhaka Library located in Fuller Road, you need to submit a completed application form with proof of identification and one passport size photo. You can borrow books, DVDs, magazines and IELTS books with their membership plan.

The most useful subscription is their Digital Library plan, which offers more than 80,000 resources on the go. For an individual membership of one year for the Digital Library, you get access to all the digital journals, e-books, e-magazines, e-movies, e-newspapers, learning modules, digital graphic novels and more. From JSTOR to The Economist, you get access to all resources on an app for a yearly fee of

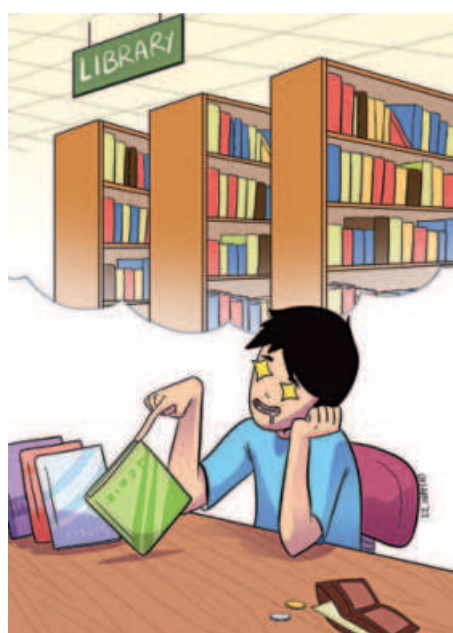


ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD

BDT 1,500.

Alliance Française de Dhaka

You can get a library membership at Alliance Française de Dhaka even if you aren't taking any language courses there. The annual fee for a membership card is BDT 2,500.

With a membership plan, you will have access to a wide range of books, magazines, journals, CDs, cassettes and DVDs. You must submit a completed form along with recent photographs (1 passport size and 1 stamp size) to become a member.

Goethe-Institut Bangladesh

Much like the other institutes, Goethe-Institut Bangladesh also offers library subscription plans to the general public.

To issue a card, you must book an appointment with the librarian.

The library membership was free for one year until April 28, 2022. The annual membership fee will be BDT 1,000, starting from May.

The author is a freelance journalist.

INTERVIEW

Furnishing your dreams

ZAREEN NAWAR

Savoir has been a soaring name in the furniture industry since 2020. The brand curates tasteful and minimalistic furniture for Bangladeshi consumers. In less than two years, it became one of the top 4 winners of the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC) Ventures: Cohort 4.

Following that, Savoir was selected for the Stanford Seed Spark incubation programme under the Spark South Asia March 2022 Cohort.

We caught up with Zahir Hasan, Co-founder and CEO, and Sadia Zaman, Co-founder and COO of Savoir to learn more about their ambitions.

How did you decide to start a furniture business?

Sadia: It was easy for me to join any venture with Zahir because he has considerable knowledge about different industries. After the surveys we took, it was also clear to me that the furniture industry could be on par with the RMG sector, but not many invest in it.

Zahir: I suppose it had to do with me being unsatisfied with the old-fashioned

furniture in the markets. I personally designed an item of furniture for a relative of mine because the options available felt exhausting and redundant. Our surveys also made me think that we could impact people's lives whilst changing the industry.

What sort of challenges did the industry present?

Sadia: The existing furniture brands often snuff out the credit of the designers. We focus heavily on recognising creativity and expression. We are hopeful about continuing to do things differently from the lot.

Zahir: Bangladesh may have a lot of



Savoir is known for tasteful and minimalist designs. PHOTOS: COURTESY

our ways and landed a spot among the top 4 ventures getting seed funding with the option of an additional amount as scale-up funding through funding round presentations, among other beneficial hands-on training methods.

How would the Stanford Seed Spark incubation programme be beneficial for Savoir?

Zahir: After our BYLC selection, we were getting acknowledged by different funders. The hedge fund, Bangladesh Angels, approached us and recommended we apply to Stanford Seed Spark. We are excited to learn much from the five-month online entrepreneurship programme led by Stanford Graduate School of Business faculty and seasoned entrepreneurs.

What can Bangladeshi consumers expect from Savoir in the coming years?

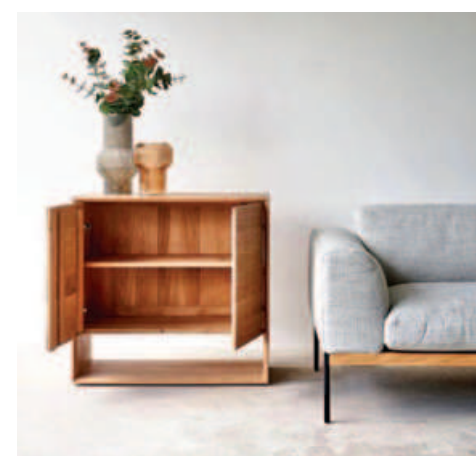
Sadia: Savoir has been built for people to choose their furniture from the comfort of their homes. We will continue to expand as a survey-oriented venture. We hope to increase Bangladesh's position in exporting furniture on the global market. We will also be launching an app soon.

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Zahir Hasan and Sadia Zaman.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



carpenters but not many with actual skills pertaining to the making of sleek and modern designs. We had to turn down clients during our initial months due to a lack of production capacity.

Talk about your journey of earning a spot in Cohort 4 of the BYLC Ventures.

Zahir: We took part in the Grameenphone Accelerator mentorship programme, where in spite of getting into the top 10, we failed to earn a spot among the top 3 innovative ventures actually getting help. We learned much from that application process and identified our shortcomings. We improved