



Schools under the Sky

Whilst primary education in Bangladesh is free and compulsory there is a test that children have to pass in order to get into local schools. Many of the children attending the SUS come from the poorest families and would not be able to pass these tests. Consequently KYAG runs 14 Schools under the Sky supporting over 1,100 children.

The age range of the children is 3-6/7 years after which they go to Primary school. Classes run from 10.00 a.m. -12.00 p.m. during the cold season and 9.00 – 11.00 a.m. when it is warmer. The schools range in size from 50-130 children. All the Teachers use a blackboard and resources, including posters and flash cards. On Thursdays they hold an exercise session and at other times children chant, sing and clap. Trustees and senior staff at KYAG encourage the Teachers to engage the children as much as possible to keep them focussed and interested. Children have books and slates provided by KYAG. Each group has two Teachers, 2 blackboards, two easels and two sets of resources. Children are generally divided into two groups. In some of the Schools children are divided into a more advanced group that is focussed on activities to prepare them for the primary school entrance exam. The second group consist of younger or new children who are doing more basic topics, learning the alphabet etc.

The Teaching Supervisor visits the schools regularly reporting on the quality of teaching as well offering support and advice. The Teaching Supervisor reports to the Project Co-ordinator.

New curriculum

The KYAG project Co-ordinator and the Teaching Supervisor have worked together to include a new curriculum. Trustees during their February 2015 visits were able to support its developing giving input and advice. The curriculum includes a month by month list of topics. It supplements the general knowledge resource that all teachers have and includes basic maths, the Bengali and English alphabet, initial letters and words, rhymes, fruit, animals, colours, rivers, parts of the body etc. In addition they learn about topics such as the National day, the Geography of Bangladesh and the history of Schools under the sky.

The Schools under the Sky Teachers have been trained in the new curriculum during regular teacher briefing meetings.

Trustees often meet former pupils many of whom move on to attend Sylhet High School the BRAC, or UNICEF schools as well as progressing to College. (BRAC is a development organisation dedicated to alleviating poverty by empowering the poor)

KYAG teachers have recently formed closer relationships with Khasdobir Primary School where teachers have visited the Schools under the Sky to talk to the children about primary school and admission routines.

Students:

Mohammed Jaheed:

Mohammed is 11 years old. He attended Badambagicha 3 School under the Sky and then went to Khasdobir Primary School where he studied up to Class 5 and was taught by one of the teachers supported by KYAG. He is now in Class 6 at an Aided School. He regularly attended Badambagicha SUS and enjoyed learning there. He has two sisters, one was studying in school and his younger sister attends Badambagicha SUS. His mother is a housewife and works in the family home. His father is a plasterer. The family of 5 live in one room close to the Badambagicha SUS. When he grows up he wants to be in the RAB (armed police).

Sumaya:

Sumaya is 8 years old and attends Badambagicha 1 School under the Sky. She has just started to attend SUS. She likes learning her ABC. Her father has died. Her big brother is a labourer and he does not know words. One brother works in a shop and one is very small. One of her sisters is married and one is very small.

Annual costs of SUS:

One Schools under the sky teacher - £280 a year



Coaching Class

It is an accepted part of high school education in Bangladesh that families pay for extra tuition at home. This is not possible for many of the poor families that KYAG supports. KYAG runs 8 early morning coaching classes. Attendance is very good and students are committed to attending classes. Over 200 students are supported by the coaching classes. In addition, a Friday spoken English group running after the coaching class has started. Classes include Accountancy, English, Maths and Science. Most students attend 4/5 days a week and study a different subject each day. Because the classes cover different school years attendance is staggered during the week to give appropriate an teacher for each year group.

The age range of students is approximately 11-19 years. That is 1st year high school (Class 6) up to college (Class 12). A small number of BA/BSc students (8) also attend the English coaching class to continue to improve their standard of spoken and written English.

Many of the students want to be teachers. The high standard of teaching offered in the coaching classes is reflected in the remarkably good results students attain. Many students achieve A+ or A in SSE exams (equivalent to O level, HSC and A levels).

KYAG also pays school fees and exam fees for over 180 students to enable them to sit exams and go to high school. School fees are also paid to those children already in high school with proof that they are working hard and attending regularly. Most of the coaching class students have previously attended Schools under the Sky. Their commitment to education for themselves and their community is exemplary.

We have examples of ex-students becoming teachers or supporting the coaching class, for example we had one student, Pavel, who was studying for a physics degree at College and was volunteering in one of the coaching classes. Students often continue to attend when they leave school, whilst they wait for a place at university or during their time at university.

The coaching year ends with an Award Ceremony; the last ceremony was attended by the Deputy High Commissioner for Sylhet and local councillors. The President of KYAG, Kabir Ahmed gave a presentation about the work and success of students in KYAG.



Examples from the Coaching Class:

Student:

Binu is 19 and is in her first year studying English at the Womens` Government College in Sylhet. She attended the coaching class for 7 years and attended Ambakhana Girls School. There are 9 children in the family and both her parents are dead. Two of her brothers are working as car mechanics. She wants to find a job in banking or teaching.

Teacher:

Lipi Begun 21, living on the Malnicharra tea estate is studying BA hons in Islamic History and teaches English to junior school students. She has been involved with KYAG for 4 years, ever since she was a student in the coaching class herself. She found out about the coaching class from Moni, the Coaching Class Maths teacher. She is the eldest of 5 children. Her mother works as a day labourer on the tea estate, earning 50 taka (42p) a day. Lipi is interested in Non Government Organisations and hopes to get a job with an NGO when she has finished studying.

Annual costs (as at 2015)

1 Coaching class teacher £350

1 Coaching class student £36

Widows

There are no state benefits of any kind in Bangladesh. Our founders Peter East and Harun Ahmed were particularly concerned about the plight of elderly widows with no means of earning an income and no family to support them.

From the start KYAG has given very small amounts to widows. Currently there are 70 elderly frail widows who receive very small amounts of money each month which literally make the difference between life and death.

Widows needing help come to the KYAG office to request support. Initially their needs are checked and then re-checked each year. They are paid at a specified time at the beginning of the month when they come to the KYAG office.

Most widows live in appalling conditions. During a recent Trustee visit one of the Committee members and a Trustee met with a group of widows who talked freely about their living conditions.

Many of them live in one roomed tin shed houses. Some have no electricity, water or sanitation, whilst others have electricity and access to a tube well.

They pay rent of between 500 – 1000 taka a month (approximately £4.20 - £8.40) and many of them have to supplement their meagre income from KYAG (700 taka a month – approximately £5.90)) by begging. Apart from the rent they also need money for food and medicine.

(Note: At August 2015 the National Minimum monthly wage is 1,500.00 taka – equivalent to £12.60)

Widows` stories:

Layla is 60 years old living in one room tin shed house. She has two daughters, one is married; the other is autistic and lives at home. As well as receiving the widows allowance Layla receives help with medicine.

Jorina is a widow aged just 55. She lives in a broken down house with no electricity, no tube well and no clean water or sanitation. She has one daughter who is married. Living in conditions that no one in Britain would tolerate Jorina says that KYAG helps her a lot.

Annual costs for widows:

One widow £72 a year (as at 2015)