

My Volunteer Experience in Bangladesh with DCI

Nashrah Ahmed
DCI Youth Volunteer

The desperate situation of the poor in Bangladesh has never failed to shock and shake me out of my own comfortable world. It is sometimes so painful that it becomes easy to transform those street scenes into a particularly disturbing film that haunts you for a while and eventually you forget about. However, I told myself on the airplane when I was coming back to the States two years ago that I would not let myself forget. That even though I live in a place where most people are much better off, it doesn't give me the right to ignore the destitution of those who are not in sight. After all, we are all citizens of the same world, made of the same mold, and susceptible to the same misfortunes. Over the years, I've learned that it's not simply something righteous and good to help others, but it is a necessary act that makes us fully human. This is why I am drawn back to Bangladesh over and over again in hopes of doing something – anything – even the smallest thing to help the millions who have no homes, no security, no comfort, and no hope.

My goals in Dhaka for the summer of 2008 were centered on volunteering at a private English-medium school. Given the opportunity to interact with youth from Bangladesh's middle to upper economic classes, I wanted to expose my students to the idea of volunteerism and instill in them the belief that they too are capable of making a positive difference in society. However, it was very difficult to convince them of these ideas without concrete evidence and backup. This is where DCI came in the picture.

I wanted to get involved in an organization that was making genuine efforts to alleviate poverty and injustice, not only to gain knowledge and insight myself, but to pass it on to the youth in Bangladesh. I heard of DCI through a friend, and soon found that it is a very genuine and effective NGO because it not only has a set of permanent projects of its own, but it also works with and aids a variety of different individual and external development projects. For example, I visited an Urban Health Clinic in Mohammadpur that is funded by an individual living abroad and is administered by local professionals with the help of DCI. Although the clinic was not the most well-equipped or technologically advanced facility, it provided free basic health support and information to those who were living in slums and previously had no access to any type of healthcare. Thus it served a very important purpose and came as a blessing to those in need of the most basic medication and nutritional supplements.

DCI also gave me the opportunity to visit the slum from which many of the patients of the Urban Health Clinic came. It was perhaps one of the most difficult experiences of my life to see with my own eyes the inhuman conditions people were living in. However, I feel that visiting those in need is nothing less than a responsibility for me and for all those who are better off. It made me more acutely aware that one summer spent volunteering is not nearly enough in doing my part to make this world a better place. It made me aware that perhaps even an entire lifetime spent trying to help would still not be enough to alleviate poverty on a mass scale. However, I knew that the only way to live a meaningful life and be true to myself was to never forget what I saw at the slum, and I knew I had to use all the privileges and resources in my life to help those less fortunate than myself.

In addition to the Urban Health Clinic and the slum, DCI introduced me to another organization, Families For Children (FFC), a small orphanage. I was given the opportunity to visit, and was extremely impressed by the quality of care provided to the orphans. Both DCI and the staff at FFC were encouraging and open to any creative projects that I was willing to carry out. A fellow volunteer, Saika, and I came up with the idea of holding a short "seminar" with the teachers to get insight into the challenges of teaching orphans, and provide a forum for the teachers and ourselves to exchange ideas and share experiences about effective ways of teaching. Although it may not have solved all their problems, dialogues such as these always serve to renew commitment and push those involved to keep looking for better methods.

During my last week in Dhaka, I wanted to wrap things up by bringing all my experiences back to the students at Happy Times International School, where I had volunteered as a teacher. Ideally I wanted the students to form their own volunteer organization and do fundraisers at school so they could sponsor a child through DCI's

Sunchild Sponsorship Program. One thing I had become aware of while working with DCI is how little support NGO's like DCI get from the local community. Most of their funding comes from abroad. However, I did not have time to initiate a student-led organization, and instead I organized a presentation by DCI staff at the school. Ms. Mahfia and Mr. Romel were nice enough to visit the school and they gave a comprehensive presentation to the middle and high school students about DCI's various projects, and ways in which the students could get involved. At the end of it, at least three or four students signed up to become volunteers with DCI, and a couple signed up to become sponsors through the Sunchild Sponsorship program. I encouraged all the students to take the initiative to become active citizens and to participate in volunteer initiatives through organizations such as DCI. I am not sure to what extent they will follow through with my suggestions, but I am sure that with the help of DCI many, if not all, the students did begin to believe that they can make a difference.



I saw people are washing their dishes with dirty contaminated water.

Nashrah Ahmed
DCI Youth Volunteer,
College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA
Address: 6481 Rockshire Ct., Alexandria, VA 22315