



Amader Pothochala

Stories of hope by garment workers and their children



Major achievements



Nursery care, pre-school education and birth certificates for **2,500** vulnerable children (age 2-5 years) of garment workers.

Non-formal catch-up education, life-skills and livelihoods skills training for **3,500** dropout working children (age 6 -17 years).



Enrolled **1,500** out-of-school children of garment workers to the mainstream local schools.



Awareness building on garment workers' rights and child **safeguarding for more than 12,000** community members in the slum areas of Mirpur and Adabor in Dhaka.



Supporting children of garment workers

A VIDEO CASE STUDY



The power of education

A VIDEO CASE STUDY



Birth certificate

A VIDEO CASE STUDY

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Project Introduction

Improving access to education and protection services for children of women garment workers

The garment industry in Bangladesh has provided opportunities for women to earn a living; it has also had a seriously negative impact on their children. Most textile workers are single mothers, who have very low education levels and are unskilled. Working long hours for extremely low pay and without access to childcare facilities in their place of work, single working mothers are unable to adequately care for their children. Mothers are forced to leave their young children (2-5 years) alone or in the care of older siblings, exposing them to accidents, human trafficking, and sexual abuse. Poverty forces older children (6-16 years) to supplement their mothers' meagre income by entering illegal activities (notably

drug trafficking) or informal sector jobs, depriving them of education and exposing them to extremely hazardous working conditions, irregular pay and violence. This project, implemented by Nagorik Uddyog in collaboration with ChildHope UK and TRAIID, aims to protect and improve the lives of extremely vulnerable children aged 2-16 years through day care and drop-in educational centres in Dhaka. It raises awareness amongst textile factory employers, community leaders and government policy makers of the need to better respect the rights and improve the working conditions of garment workers and increase access to education and skills training opportunities for their children.



Glossary of terms

ChildHope UK – A registered UK charity supporting children and young people who face the worst form of injustice, violence, abuse in Africa and Asia.

Day care centres – The project has two day-care centres in Dhaka where children of garment factory mothers, aged 2-5 years access quality early childhood education, nursery care and are prepared for entry into primary school.

Drop-in centres – The project has two drop-in centres in Dhaka where working children aged 6-16 years access quality non-formal catch-up education (basic literacy and numeracy), as well as life-skills and livelihoods development training.

Nagorik Uddyog (NU) – A Dhaka based registered non-government organisation, working to strengthen local government in Bangladesh via the dual imperatives of raising community awareness of people's basic human rights, and building people's capacity to pursue and realise these rights. Part of their work includes running day-care and drop-in centres for the vulnerable children of garment workers in Dhaka.

TRAID – Textile Reuse and International Development (TRAID) is a UK-based environmental and poverty relief focused charity. TRAIID reduces landfill through the provision of textile recycling facilities, its charity shops and upcycled clothing. Funds raised go to environmental and textile related international development projects globally.

Acknowledgements



Since 2013, TRAIID has funded ChildHope UK and Nagorik Uddyog to establish four bright spacious centres providing high quality care, food and education to the children of garment workers; children

whose mothers are often single parents. The centres address the problem of young children having to fend for themselves while their mothers work long hours to feed their families. Most powerfully, this project works to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty – one of the most insidious hall marks of garment work – and has supported many hundreds of children to get the schooling and long-term education that will make for a better future.

Maria Chenoweth, Chief Executive Officer, TRAIID

Although the garment factories in Dhaka are obliged to provide a safe space for the children of workers, such spaces, when they exist, are quite grim. Without appropriate childcare where children are safe, mothers are either unable to work at all or have to send their children back to their villages to live with their extended families. This severely affects the bond between mother and child. Through our four daycare and drop-in centres, we have not only cared for younger children, but also those who have dropped out of school have been given another chance at basic education and skills training. Thanks to TRAIID and ChildHope UK, over the last eight years we have reached out to more than 6,000 vulnerable children of garment workers in Dhaka.

Zakir Hossain, Executive Director, Nagorik Uddyog



ChildHope feels privileged to be working with Nagorik Uddyog and TRAIID, supporting the children of garment workers in Dhaka. With so little quality childcare provision available, Nagorik Uddyog identified the tough choices mothers have to make, between the safety of their children and the need to earn money to survive. We've worked together to address this, giving children a safe space to play, learn and grow, while engaging parents, community and employers to play a greater role. We can see the difference it makes to each child

and their family, and want to share that through this impact story booklet. Special thanks to everyone in the project team, especially, Joyeeta Hossain and Amit Arulanantham for planning, designing, and documenting this book. Thank you Joyonta Kumar for capturing important moments on camera. We hope it inspires others to work towards the rights of all children to be protected, thrive, and reach their full potential.

Jill Healey, Executive Director, ChildHope UK



Struggle for survival



Due to extreme poverty at home, Suma had to start working at a very young age. When her father passed away, she was only five years old. Her mother's lack of interest and the conditions at home, kept Suma away from education.

Due to the lack of livelihood options in the village, her mother moved with children to Dhaka. Here she rented a room in the slums of Adabor and started working as a labourer. Suma and her brothers also engaged in rag-picking, collecting recyclable wastes like plastic bottles and tin cans to sell. At the age

of 7, Suma started working as a domestic help and joined a paint factory at the age of 12.

Just 3 years later, she was married off to a rickshaw puller. Her husband went to jail a few times during her stay with him. He was also abusive and violent





towards Suma and would throw her out of the house, often along with her two children. She started working at a garment factory and later divorced this man. Her children stayed with their father. Suma was soon promoted at work from the position of helper to that of operator.

She shares, *"I married again in 2013 and gave birth to our daughter Fiza (name changed) in 2018. I had to leave my job for her birth but soon felt that my husband's earnings were not enough to sustain us. However, Fiza had to be taken care of at home and hence I couldn't go back to work."* When Fiza turned 2 and a half, Suma decided to go back to work. The conditions at home had also worsened in the light of the global pandemic. A neighbour told Suma about Nagorik Uddyog's day care centre. Suma visited the centre in December 2020 and got Fiza enrolled there. Soon after, Suma started working in a garment factory as a senior operator, earning 9,500 Bangladeshi taka (£90) a month.

Suma is now able to contribute to the household finances and feels proud to be able to do this. Fiza has also made friends at the centre and actively participates in all activities. In Suma's words, *"I have been able to take charge of my life because of the surety I get from the day care. I feel equal in the house as I help my husband. We have started saving as well, which I will use for the education of our daughter."*



Making ends meet



Shahida, raised in a small village, was one of seven siblings. Her father worked as a farmer in the village before he migrated to Dhaka with the family.

They rented a house in the slums of Mohammadpur. Shahida's father started working as a guard in a garment factory, and her mother as a house help. Her elder sisters also worked in the garment factory. Shahida had studied to class 3 in her village and was enrolled in an NGO-funded school in Dhaka. However, she dropped out after a few months. Meanwhile, her parents got divorced and Shahida stayed with her mother.

At age 11, Shahida started working in a garment factory as a helper. In 2001, after working for three years and at only 14 years old, she was married to a carpenter. She faced immense abuse from him for eight years, as she couldn't bear a child. In 2009, she had her first child, a girl. She left her job in order to take care of her daughter. However, six months after the child's birth, her husband went missing. She later learnt that he had gone to India and married another woman there. Shahida therefore returned to her mother and joined the garment factory again.

Her husband returned in 2015 and claimed that he was imprisoned under false allegations. She says, *"I trusted him and took him back. In 2016, we had our son, Rizi (name changed). My*

happiness however was short lived. In 2018, he left me to live with his Indian wife." Shahida continued working at the garment factory while her mother took care of her children.

After some time, Shahida's elderly mother fell ill and could not take care of the children. Rizi, now 3 and a half years' old, also had a speech disorder. Shahida, being the sole bread earner in the family, had to find a way to continue working. She enrolled her daughter in a local school. Then she learnt about Nagorik Uddyg's day care centre, from a co-worker. Rizi has been attending there since January 2020. Shahida says, *"I drop him at the centre in the morning around 7am and take him back in the evening after my shift. He is getting nutritious*





food and medical care along with education in the safe environment of the day care centre."

Rizi's speech has also improved and he recites poems and talks to everyone. Shahida hopes to give her children a good life and ensure they are good human beings.



Rise and shine

Sheuli is a young mother of a little girl. She was born in a small village, the third child among four siblings. Sheuli's father worked as a farmer and mother took care of the household.

Finding it difficult to sustain the family of six, her father decided the family should relocate to Dhaka in search of work. In 2004, they came to Adabor in Dhaka. Sheuli, 12 years old then, started working in a garment factory as a helper. After six months, her salary increased from 900 to 1,300 Bangladeshi taka (£8-12).

In 2009, at the age of 17 years, Sheuli was married to Ataur Rahman whose proposal came through one of their neighbours. Ataur worked in an insurance company as a field worker. After five years, Sheuli gave birth to Aayat (name changed), their daughter. Sheuli had left her job sometime before Aayat's birth. However,

with a child added to the family, she realised that her husband's income alone wasn't sufficient. When Aayat turned 3 years, Sheuli decided to return to work.

She shares, *"It was around this time that we discovered that Aayat had a speech disorder. We started communicating with her through gestures and came up with sign language for her. Before I could join work to help sustain the household, I had to make arrangements for Aayat's safe stay."*

A neighbour shared with Sheuli about Nagorik Uddyog's day care centre for the children of working mothers in garment factories. Upon visiting the centre, Sheuli found it to be the perfect for her daughter's needs. In April 2018, she enrolled Aayat in the centre where she would stay from morning till evening, playing and learning. Soon after, Sheuli found work in a garment factory as an operator for a salary of 9,500 taka (£90) a month.

She expresses, *"With the special needs of my daughter, there was no place better than the day care centre. She was safe there, given nutritious food and primary education. Being with other children, her speech has also improved a lot. The teachers encouraged her to open up and speak freely."* Aayat is now enrolled in Nurani Najera





Hifz Kitab Group O Fokrania madrasa school in class 3. Sheuli expresses, "If I hadn't found day care, I would not have been able to work again. The day-care took away all my worries about my child's well-being and I was therefore able to focus on earning the money we needed to survive."



Inclusion



Shahida was married off to her maternal cousin at the young age of 14 and forced to move from Dhaka to her husband's village. She led a peaceful life there until the birth of her daughter, Tasmia (name changed).

Then her husband stopped going to work regularly. He abused Shahida for no apparent reason and often hit her. She tolerated it for a long time, but it only kept increasing. When Tasmia was two years old, Shahida couldn't take it anymore. She left her husband and came to Dhaka to her parents.

She joined a garment factory to help sustain herself, her daughter and support her parents. But her sick mother wasn't able to take care of Tasmia for such long hours. During this time, her husband also came back to her. He started working as a driver and Shahida worked in the garment factory as a helper. However, the question of Tasmia's wellbeing, while her parents were at work, remained.

Shahida shares, *"When i heard about Nagorik Uddyog's (NU) day care and drop-in centres for children of garment factory workers, I was curious. I was reassured when I personally visited the centre. Along with a safe space, the centre offered nutrition and healthcare for all children. The teachers were also warm and kind."* Shahida was able to focus on her work while Tasmia was at day care. However, soon her husband returned to his abusive ways. One day he left home after indulging in a bout of domestic violence. Shahida later found out that he had married another woman back in his village. Meanwhile, Tasmia developed an enlarged kidney and was quite ill. Her health was taken care of by the day care centre.

Shahida and her husband eventually got divorced. However, he forcibly took Tasmia away and she





was taken care of by her grandmother. In 2019, when the grandmother died, Tasmia's stepmother became quite abusive towards her. Shahida's parents then forced her ex-husband to send Tasmia back to her mother. Once she returned, Tasmia was enrolled in NU's drop-in centre and started to receive an education as well as healthcare. Shahida shares, *"No school here was ready to enrol her as she had lagged behind. At the drop-in centre, she was able to catch up with her studies and make friends too. She takes part in sports and other extra-curricular activities along with her education."* Shahida is thankful to NU for the opportunity it is providing her daughter and other children in similar situations.

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Stitching dreams

Rooni (name changed), age 14 years and born in Dhaka, is the eldest among three siblings. Her father owns a small cart and works as a vegetable seller. Earlier, her mother worked in a garment factory. Despite their financial struggles, Rooni's father wanted her to get an education, and she was able to study up to Class 6.



Amidst extreme poverty, Rooni's mother fell ill and had to quit her job at the garment factory. Rooni's father had to take huge loans for her medical treatment. Due to her mother being bed-ridden, the condition at home worsened and Rooni had to drop-out of school and start working at a printing factory instead. She worked as a helper and earned 5,000 Bangladeshi taka (£47) a month.

She shares, "I was very upset that I could not go to school anymore. But I had to earn to help my father." At the printing factory, she made a friend of her age, Halima. Halima told Rooni about Nagorik Uddyog's drop-in centre where children engaged in learning. Rooni went there with Halima for a few days and observed many girls her age studying, playing and engaging in other fun activities. Rooni also saw that children of her age were learning sewing in the centre. After a week of exploring, Rooni went to the in-charge and requested her own enrolment. However, for the training, Rooni would have to be at the centre a few days per week at a certain time. This would have been difficult with her work commitment at the printing factory. Seeing Rooni's interest, the teacher at the centre convinced Rooni's father and she was able to leave her job and attend the centre.



Rooni shares, "I was regular at the centre and would receive training in tailoring. My teacher was very happy with my performance and efforts in education. My mother even promised to buy me a sewing machine." However, soon her mother fell ill again. Rooni went back to work and also managed the household chores. She shares, "I was sad to leave the centre, my friends and the routine there. But my family needed my support. Because of the training that I received at the centre, I was promoted at work and my salary increased from 5,000 taka to 6,500

taka (from £47 to £61)." Rooni still visits the centre on Thursdays, which is her day off and meets her friends. She is determined to help her siblings complete their education.



Change for good

Born in a remote village in Madaripur district, Reshma spent her childhood in extreme poverty. Reshma, sixth child among seven siblings, saw her father who was a rickshaw puller, struggle to make ends meet.

In 2006, he moved to Dhaka with the family in search of better livelihood opportunities. He started working as a rickshaw puller in the capital and Reshma's five elder siblings started working in a print factory. Once her older siblings got married, she and her parents were again faced with financial insecurities. To help out, Reshma started working in a garments factory in 2010 and after six months was promoted to be an operator.

Reshma got married to a colleague in 2011 and gave birth to her first daughter by the end of the year. Later she gave birth to two more daughters and could never get back to work. With five mouths to feed at home, her husband became increasingly frustrated, and the couple would often fight. She was physically abused. She remembers, *"I decided that I had to work to change the situation. I sent my two daughters to my in-laws back in the village. But my youngest one, Samira (name changed) was only 3 years old and could not live without me. I had to find a safe space for her in order to go to work."* Her previous workplace didn't have a crèche and hence she was in a fix.

In January 2020, she got to know about Nagorik Uddyog's day care centre, for children of garment factory workers. She visited the centre and instantly liked it due to the cleanliness, good facilities and friendly behaviour of the staff. She shares, *"I couldn't believe that such a place existed for my child, that too free of cost. This was all I needed to turn my life around. I enrolled Samira there and found a job within a week at a garment factory."* She started earning as much as her husband and the situation, financially as well as personally between her and husband, started improving. Samira also loves the centre. Reshma shares, *"She starts crying if she has to stay at home any day instead of going to the centre to her friends."*





My daughter is growing up in a way I never imagined. She is learning at pre-school level and that makes me so happy.” Reshma is determined to ensure Samira’s education, so she can be self-dependent when she grows up.



Self-reliance

Married at the young age of 12 years, to Shofik Mia, in 2001, Bilkis moved to Dhaka to live with her husband and his family. Hailing from a remote village where her father worked as a farmer and brother as a fisherman, Bilkis's childhood was spent in poverty.





Shofik worked in a brick field and Bilkis gave birth to their first son after a year of marriage. Around this time, Shofik got into the habit of gambling and lost a lot of money. They had to take huge loans to sustain themselves. When their son was only 3 months old, Bilkis had to start working at a garment factory due to the financial crisis. Luckily, her in-laws could take care of the child while she worked.

She shares, “I joined the factory as a helper for 6,000 Bangladeshi takas (£57) per month. I had to leave the job after three years when I got pregnant again. By the time my second son was born, Shofik’s gambling habit had worsened. After going to work one day, he would skip it for a week and gamble instead. More loans that he took, further pushed us into poverty.” Bilkis involved her brother to counsel Shofik, and Shofik agreed to move back to the village and work as a fisherman.

Bilkis stayed back in Dhaka with her in-laws. She continued working at the garment factory and was soon able to pay back all the debt taken by her husband. By the time of the birth of her third child, Pari (name changed), she was again struggling financially. It forced her to go back work when her daughter was only 17-days old. However, this time Bilkis needed more help than her in-laws could offer. Pari was a very delicate child and struggled with many illnesses. Bilkis had to leave her job when Pari was severely ill at the age of 19-months, and she could only resume work after a few months. A friend informed her of Nagorik Uddyg’s day care centre for children. Bilkis found it fascinating and safe, upon visiting. She expresses, “Pari was safe along with other children of her age. They took care of her health and nutrition as well. I had nothing to worry about. Meanwhile I was promoted and became senior operator with a salary

of 9,500 takas (£90). The day care helped me become financially stable and independent.” Pari is now enrolled in Nurani Najera madrasa school.

“My life has improved so much and I am committed to ensuring that my daughter is able to continue her education,” explains Bilkis.



Brighter Future



Nine-year old Noori (name changed) lives in Dhaka with her parents. Her father works as a driver and mother works with Nagorik Uddyog (NU).

Married in 2007, Noori's parents earlier worked as a salesman and a garment factory worker. Later, Noori's mother got the opportunity to work with NU and was able to avoid the long working hours

at the garment factory. She also arranged for her husband to learn how to drive, as he could earn more driving than as a salesman.

When Noori was born, her mother would leave her with aunts and other relatives while she went out to work. At times, when there was nowhere to leave Noori, her mother would take her to the NU office with her. This was a great support for Noori as well as her parents.

In 2014, NU started its day care centre, for children of women working long-hours in garment factories. As a staff member, Noori was also able to access this facility. Her parents moved to Adabor, where the day-care was located. Noori was dropped off there every day by her mother and picked up in the evening. She attended the centre till the age of 4, and Noori has fond memories of her time there.

She shares, "I used to play and draw pictures there. I had friends who played with me. We also got good food every day. I learnt a lot, even before going to school, and my teachers praised me for that."

Noori's mother explained that she would not have been able to continue her work if her daughter didn't have a safe space. She would have had to considered moving back to her native village. During the critical initial years of Noori's life she was able to avail quality healthcare, nutrition and care at the day-care centre. Her mother, being a NU employee as well as a beneficiary of its services, realises how critical such a facility is for





working mothers, especially working long hours (up to 12 hours, six days a week) in garment factories. NU's day care centre supports the early childhood development needs of these children, in a safe environment. Noori is testimony to how investment in the early years can transform a child's overall development. She says, *"I love reading science books and watching similar videos on YouTube. I want to become a scientist when I grow up!"*



A mother's endurance



Hosna lives in Dhaka and works at a garment factory. Her daughter, the youngest among three siblings, attends Nagorik Uddyog's (NU) day care centre, while she goes for work.

Hosna's childhood was spent in a remote village, where she studied and was a good student. However, after class 5, she had to drop out due to a financial crisis in her family. At the age of 17 years, she was married to a rickshaw puller named Khokon.

Within a few years of her marriage, she had two sons. After some time, her husband left for work abroad. However, he neither contacted Hosna nor sent any money to support the family. Hosna and her sons lived in poverty, with a little help from her in-laws.



Khokon returned home after some years, financially bankrupt. Despite the bad memories of surviving alone, Hosna accepted him back into her life. Soon, Hosna was pregnant with her third child, a daughter. After some time, Khokon left again for work and cut off all contact with Hosna.

She shares, *"He got married to another woman while I was giving birth to our daughter. This time, I had to leave my in-laws' house. I didn't want to go back to my parents' house and be a burden. So I decided to come to the capital (Dhaka) with my children."*

She had a sister here who agreed to keep Hosna's two sons with her who were grown up enough to take care of themselves by now. Hosna rented a room with her toddler and was able to get a job at a garment factory, as a helper. However, the question of her daughter's well-being while she was at work stood before her. A neighbour shared with Hosna about NU's day care centre. Her visit to the day-care convinced her that it was the perfect place to ensure her daughter's safety and wellbeing.

She expresses, *"I was able to concentrate on work without worrying about my little daughter and received a promotion after a year. This was made possible because the day care took care of all of my daughter's needs and her safety. In a few months of her time at the day-care, she learnt rhymes and knows*

both the English and Bangla alphabets. This makes me so happy!"

Hosna feels that more mothers should receive such help so that they can work to make their children's future better. As a single mother, she is determined to continue raising her children in the best possible way with support from her job.



Commitment for a happy life

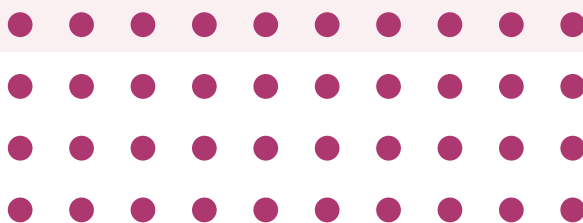
Nasima was born in Talbaria village in the south-west of Bangladesh. Her mother passed away when she was only five years old, so she could only study in a local school up to class 5.



When she was 17, she was married to a man who was already married. She suffered abuse and torture throughout her marriage. She eventually divorced him and returned home. However, Nasima wasn't welcomed there and so started working as a janitor in a hospital in Jessore and later as a domestic worker in Dhaka to make ends meet.

She shares, "In 2004, I married again. This time I knew of the man's first wife and children. When I had four consecutive miscarriages, this man left me and I was alone again." To survive alone, she joined a garment factory as a helper in Dhaka. Within six months, she was promoted at work. Her husband returned in 2016 and Nasima had her first son, Nazrul (name changed), a year later. She left her job to take care of him. However, when her son was only 18 months old, Nasima's husband left her again to live with his other wife. Nasima sent her son back to her village to live with a neighbour and started working as a house help. She hardly earned 5,000 Bangladeshi taka (£47) a month, which was not sufficient to survive on. She shares, "I had to bring Nazrul back to Dhaka due to his illness. For the first few days, I kept him at home and went to work. Later, I kept him at a neighbour's who charged 1,000 taka (£9) per month to take care of him. However, it was a very unhygienic environment and he would not even eat well."

Nasima got to know from a co-worker about Nagorik Uddyog's day care centre, for the children of garment factory workers. She enrolled Nazrul there in March 2020 and was able to find a job at a garment factory soon afterwards. With





Nazrul at the day-care, she is able to work and earn up to 13,000 taka (£123) a month. She says, "Nazrul's safety, primary healthcare and education is all taken care of. My husband doesn't pay a dime for us and hence it is very important for me to be able to work. Nazrul is more respectful now and has also learnt poems." She adds, "I dream that one day Nazrul will become a maulana (religious priest) and that I will be able to build a house for ourselves in our native village."



Ayesha's hope



Ayesha (name changed) was adopted by Razia Khatun and her husband Akhtar Hossain in 2010, when she was only three months old. Having two sons, the couple wanted a daughter and adopted Ayesha from her biological mother.

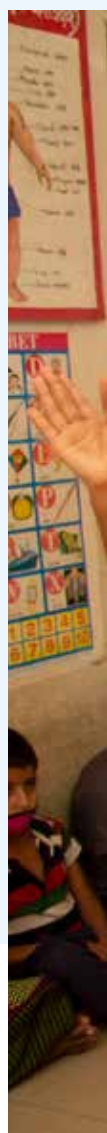
While Akhtar worked as a rickshaw puller, Razia left her job at a garment factory to take care of Ayesha. However, owing to financial difficulties, Razia re-joined the garment factory when Ayesha was three and a half years old. She got to know about Nagorik Uddyog's (NU) day care centre from an acquaintance, as she worried for Ayesha's safety while she was at work.

When Razia visited the day care she liked the atmosphere and appreciated that it looked after

the children for long hours, enabling mothers to work. Ayesha was enrolled at the centre in 2014 and continued for two years. Ayesha had a problem with her left-eye. Sponsored by the project coordinator at NU, she received eye treatment at Al-Noor eye hospital for nine months and her vision was restored.

Later, NU supported her to be accepted into a mainstream school, in Class 1. However, her parents couldn't afford the school fees, so she was enrolled in NU's drop-in centre. In 2017, she dropped out of the centre as her family moved away.

When the family returned to the area, Ayesha was enrolled in Ananda School. When she was in class 5, she had to drop out as her mother got involved in a family feud and went to jail. Her father fell sick afterwards. Ayesha's elder brother came with his wife and two-year-old daughter to live with them and take care of their ailing father. His wife however didn't like Ayesha. Ayesha shares, "She would neglect me while giving food. I had nowhere to go and I missed studying. So, I contacted the drop-in centre and told them everything. They encouraged me to return."





Ayesha joined the centre again in 2020. In her words, *"I am a peer member and have improved a lot in my studies. I also regularly participate in events and awareness programmes. I came first in the Kodom (moderate learner) section and feel more confident now."*

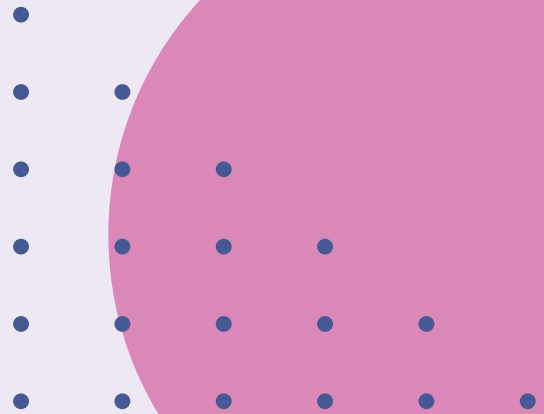
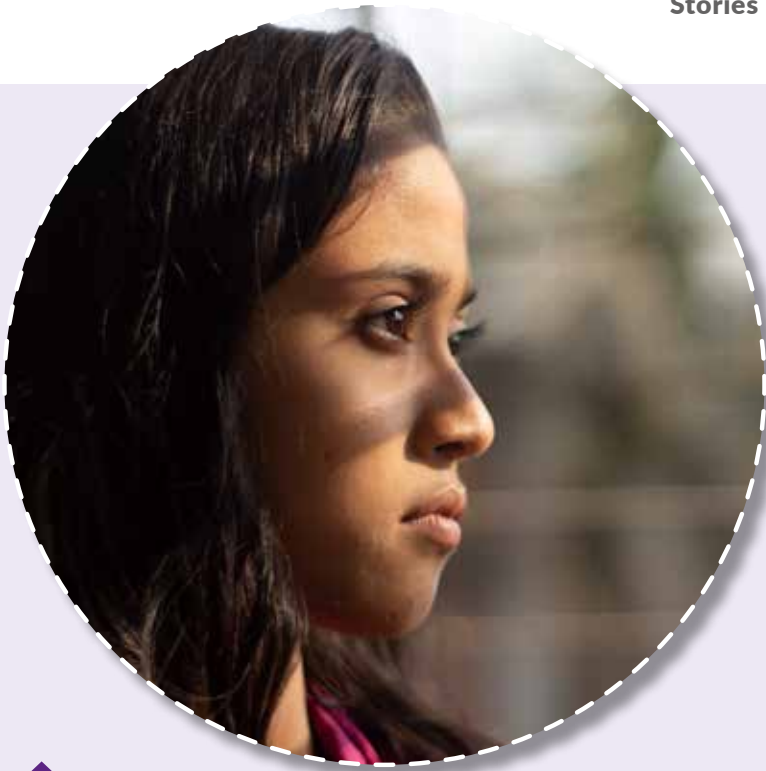
Ayesha shows constant improvement and has great interest in her education, as well as extra-curricular activities. She dreams of a better life in the future and wants to become a Police Officer when she grows up.



Courageous Akhtari

Akhtari (name changed) is 13 years old and lives with her parents and elder sisters in Dhaka. A year after her birth, her father started working at a dairy farm and mother joined a garment factory.





Akhtari would stay at home taken care of by her elder sisters until the age of 3 years. Then she was enrolled in a pre-school. However, the family's financial problems lead to Akhtari dropping out of school after two years as they could not afford the fees. Her sisters had to take up work in an embroidery factory to help their parents run the household. Since Akhtari needed to be taken care of at home, her mother left her job at the garment factory to care for her. Her father also left the dairy and started working as a security guard.

One day, Akhtari's elder sister got to know about Nagorik Uddyog's (NU) drop-in centre, from a staff at the centre. Upon learning about the facilities at the centre, she decided to enrol Akhtari there. Her parents couldn't afford to enrol her in a school and hence the drop-in centre was a promising option, since it was free of cost. In 2015, at the age of 7, Akhtari started studying in the centre. She was attentive and was soon promoted to the second grade.

After two years at the centre, Akhtari's family's improved financial condition allowed them to enrol her into primary school. In 2017, she was provided with a transfer certificate by the centre and enrolled in a formal school.

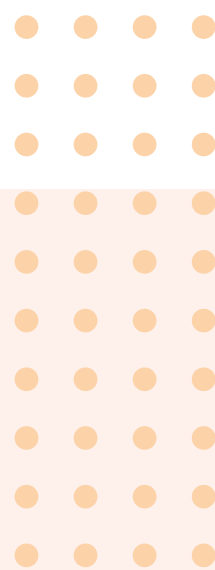
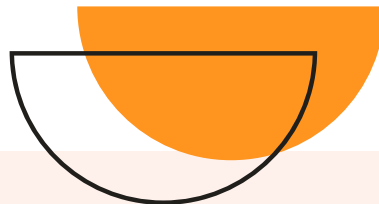
In 2020, Akhtari learnt that the drop-in centre was providing a basic tailoring course to interested adolescents. She expressed her interest to the teacher at the centre and was enrolled in the



training programme. On the four-months long training course, she learnt how to design dresses. She shares, "I have learnt good basic skills in tailoring. I am confident that I will be able to contribute to my family's financial stability by working in a tailoring shop."

At the same time, Akhtari is determined to continue her education. She shares, "My mother couldn't study but has high hopes with me. The support from the drop-in centre has given me a lot of confidence and built my awareness. I want to become a banker when I grow up." She appreciates the support from her teachers at the centre as well as at school and dreams of helping other children, in similar situations, when she grows up.





Skilful Rukhsar

Rukhsar (name changed) is 15 years old. She used to live in her native village with her elder sister and parents. When her elder sister was to get married, her father sold the small piece of land he owned to his brothers to provide the dowry.



However, the price the brothers offered was unfair and it turned into an ugly family dispute. Rukhsar's uncles became so violent that they wanted to kill her father. The family had to flee to Dhaka, where her parents started working as labourers.

Living in a single room in a slum in Dhaka, Rukhsar's parents carried sand, earning 300-400 Bangladeshi taka (£2.80- £3.80) a day. Rukhsar's elder sister started working at a garment factory and lived with Rukhsar's parents, along with her husband.

Rukhsar shares, *"Due to poverty, I couldn't attend school. However, many of my friends here attended the drop-in centre, free of cost. I saw them visiting the centre regularly, playing and learning. I also joined the centre in March 2016."* Rukhsar was enrolled in Nagorik Uddyog's drop-in centre and was put in the beginners' section. Soon she was moved to the fast learners' group. Seeing her progress, she was enrolled in a mainstream primary school in Class 4 under the supervision of a teacher from the centre. However, due to the responsibility of household chores and taking care of a younger sibling, Rukhsar dropped-out. She however continued coming to the drop-in centre and was made a peer member.

In March 2019, owing to her good performance, she was enrolled again in school in Class 5. Rukhsar shares, *"Learning at the centre has transformed my life. I am more conscientious now and participate in all workshops and activities. I attended a workshop*



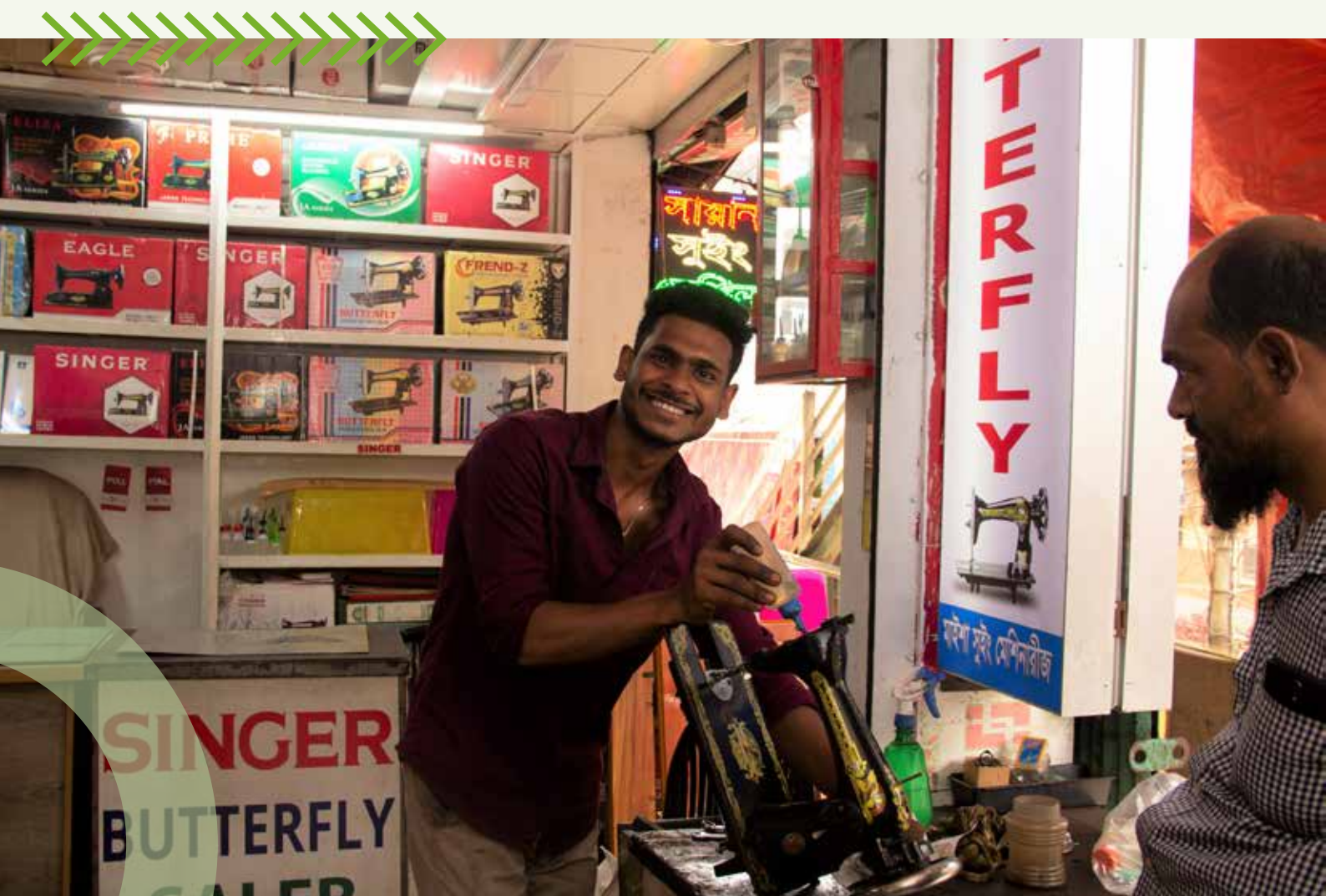
on animation organised by TRAIID and Rainbow Collective. I also got training on cooking and sewing at the drop-in centre."

Since Rukhsar's school has closed for almost a year, due to the global pandemic, she has been working at an embroidery factory to support her family. Basic training in tailoring, that Rukhsar received at the drop-in centre, helped her in securing this job which gives her around 11,000 taka (£104) a month. She says, *"I am pleased to be able to support my family, as well as continue learning at the drop-in centre."*



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Faith of Jamal



Jamal (name changed), aged 19, is the eldest among his siblings. His father wanted him to pursue his studies and got him enrolled in a local madrasa school.



However, Jamal, being rather naughty, would flee from the madrasa at any chance he got. Eventually he started roaming around with local goons and regularly skipped school. It was then that his father decided he needed to work.

In 2014, his father moved to Dubai in search of better earning opportunities. He started sending money back home after six months, which was all spent on repaying the loans he had taken. Jamal worked in fields as a labourer to help sustain the family. In 2017, Jamal moved to Dhaka, staying with Swapan, a neighbour from back home. Swapan's mother found him a job at a tailoring shop in Mirpur at a salary of 3,000 Bangladeshi taka per month (£28). However, being uneducated, Jamal could neither name the machine parts properly nor do the basic accounting work.

Jamal heard of Nagorik Uddyog's drop-in centre and was keen to learn. He believed that if he learnt the basics, it would help him manage his job better. He started visiting the centre whenever he got any free time. He shares, *"Initially I used to feel embarrassed, but gradually I learnt how to read, write and do small calculations. I also learnt computers in the centre as I realised that it would help me maintain accounts in big shops."*

Now, Jamal manages the entire shop and has also gotten an increment and earns up to 10,000 taka (£95) per month. He feels that he is able to supervise the shop much better now but continues to visit the drop-in centre to learn more. He expresses, *"I am an active peer member at the centre and have friends with whom I learn about child rights, harmful effects of substance abuse, etc. I eagerly wait for my day-off when I can come here. I can now write*

in both Bangla and English on the computer. I am able to send more money to my mother." He feels that his life has changed for better, due to learning at the centre, and wants to have his own servicing shop one day.



Team sharing



Masuma (Carer, Nagorik Uddyog)

Masuma works at Nagorik Uddyog's day care centre for children. With two school-going and one married daughter, Masuma is the sole earner in her family.

Few years ago, when her husband passed away due to a stroke, she was devastated. She remembers, "After a few months, the relatives also stopped helping. I didn't know how to sustain my family after my husband died. There was also a loan to repay, which we had taken for my elder daughter's marriage." Because she had no work experience, Masuma was not able to find a job.

When she came across the opportunity to work as a chef at NU, she wasted no time and applied. She was promoted to become a carer for the children after a year. She shares, "My work with children makes me happy. I have learnt a lot from my colleagues. Today I am an independent single mother with a job which I look forward to everyday!"



Taslima (Carer, Nagorik Uddyog)

It has been seven years since I started working at the day care centre. Prior to this, I never met so many people and children from such a diverse background. I am also grateful to have received trainings on safeguarding and garment worker's rights. Working here has brought me respect in my neighborhood, now people listen to what I have to say. People in my community come to me for advice and value my words. The experience that I am gathering here is priceless for a woman from a disadvantaged community.





Joyeeta Hossain (Project Manager, Nagorik Uddyog)

I am extremely grateful to have been part of this project since its inception. As a Project Manager at the age of 24, with very little experience in the field of service-based work, it was initially a challenge for me. I have worked day and night to find the right location, select appropriate staff, purchase materials, communicate with mothers and inform the community about the project.

Now, when I look back, I feel it would be impossible for me to do this job if there was not unconditional support from ChildHope, TR Aid and NU. I am proud that for eight years I have been able to provide services to so many garment workers through this programme and this is still continuing. *"When I see our children from 2013, grown up so gracefully, it melts my heart. It is not solely a job for me anymore; the children, their parents and my colleagues have become a significant part of my life."*



Nurjahan (Carer, Nagorik Uddyog)

Nurjahan has been working at Nagorik Uddyog's day care centre in Mirpur for seven years now. A mother of three children, Nurjahan was married at the young age of 14 years. When she had children, she realised that her husband's income alone was insufficient to meet their needs. She worked as a domestic worker in private houses for five years before joining NU.

She remembers the day of her interview at NU fondly, for the kindness displayed by the staff. She joined the day care centre as a cleaner. Later, she was promoted to be a cook for a year, and then a carer.

She shares, *"As a domestic worker, I got no holiday ever. Now, I get day-offs and have a designation at work. People take me seriously and my opinions are taken into consideration in office meetings. I meet diverse people and learn so much."* She feels that the trainings at work enable her to look at the world with a different and new perspective.





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“Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add color to my sunset sky.”

Rabindranath Tagore

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Contact us for your support:

Nagorik Uddyog, Dhaka, Bangladesh <https://nuhr.org/>

ChildHope UK, London, United Kingdom <https://www.childhope.org.uk/>