Volunteering Solutions Bank #011

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society – Bogra Branch

PROJECT HAPPINESS: Engaging Youth during Eid and Beyond

LOCATION: Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) was established in 1971. Bogra Branch is located in North Bengal about 205 Kilometers from the capital Dhaka. It has a population of 34,00,874. Bogra Red Crescent Branch has 4 paid staffs, 10 Branch Executive Committee Members, 1292 Life Members, 15 Red Crescent Youth (RCY) Executive Committee members and more than 1500 RCY volunteers from different educational institutions.

THE ISSUE
Children born in poor families are often unable to enjoy the basic rights they are supposed to enjoy. Many of these children are forced to work as child laborers due to lack of food, shelter, clothing etc. As a result, most of them cannot continue their study or do not study at all. Thus, these children face the harsh reality at a very tender age, lose the joy of life and start to think themselves as outcasts of society.

Red Crescent Youth volunteers of Bogra Branch wanted to bring some positive changes in the life of those children. So “Project Happiness” started its journey to make the children believe that they too belong in this society!

BACKGROUND
The concept of “Project Happiness” was first introduced in 2007 before Eid festival by the RCY volunteers of Bogra Branch. However, nothing significant could be done at that time due to inadequate resources. This inability rather made the determination stronger and later, the concept started materializing in 2010.

The project has two objectives:
(i) Engage with the children, educate them on healthcare and develop their moral and humanitarian values;
(ii) Provide new clothes and dry food during Eid, the biggest public festival in Bangladesh.

Among these two objectives, clothes and dry food distribution has grown bigger since 2014, and in 2016, it has drawn biggest support from all sectors of the community.

ORGANIZING THE PROJECT
Red Cross Youth (RCY) Executive Committee of Bogra Branch calls in highly motivated RCY Volunteers from different educational institutions for this project and engages them in various activities during the organization phase.

(i) Community Engagement and Healthcare Education: To motivate children and increase their moral and humanitarian values, RCY volunteers conduct games, fun street show,
cultural events, dinner, iftari etc. throughout the year on different occasions at various locations of Bogra city including slums, orphanages etc. They also provide simple training on healthcare and sanitation. They conduct awareness programs for preventing child labor and encouraging parents to send their children to schools. People from the community also participate in these activities.

(ii) Distributing New Clothes and Dry Food before Eid Festival: During the holy month of Ramadan and on the eve of EID, RCY volunteers raise fund for this event from the local community. Branch Executive Committee members, life members and branch staff donate. Senior RCY members of Bogra branch, who are established professionally, contribute as well. School and college RCY volunteers also donate a very small amount of money ranging from BDT 1 to BDT 10 saved from their tiffin cost. During fund raising, print, electronic and social media play an important role for this project. Over the years, the cash raised were: BDT40,000 (2014); BDT47,000 (2015); BDT60,000 (2016)

Volunteers also conduct a survey to select the beneficiaries. Then they buy new clothing, dry food, prepare venue, publish materials (e.g., leaflets, banners, festoons, posters etc.) and invite the guests. Government high officials, community representative, local and national personalities attend the event as guests.

OUTCOME

Project Happiness contributes to strengthening resilience and facilitates social inclusion of under-privileged children. In 2014, new clothing and dry food were provided for 150 under-privileged children and their family. This increased to 300 children in 2015. In 2016, new clothing were distributed to 250 children and dry foods were provided to 150 families.

Volunteers’ skill development is also an important aspect. Two hundred (120M:80F) RCY volunteers get a unique chance to improve their skills and values through being involved in this project. There are a number of youth led organizations and groups in Bogra, which are inspired by this project and have started working with children in streets, slums and orphanages.

LESSON LEARNED

Wide participation, coupled with determination, could make a small initiative impact positively on the lives of the vulnerable and less privileged in our society. The resource generation and fundraising during Ramadan and Eid were in good timing as our people had more tendency to be generous during this period compared to other times of the year.