

Nusrat Ahmed
Sewing Center Project
1995 Summer Service Fund

Dear Class of 1995,

Over the summer I worked with the JAAGO foundation in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is home. I have a lot of affection for my country. The tea gardens carpeting earth, children walking water barefoot, fins in place of heels. It is here I learned of the power of service and my responsibility to the world. With JAAGO we were able to renovate their sewing center with funding from the Princeton Class of 1995. JAAGO foundation was founded in 2007 as a Bangladesh based non-profit organization catering to the educational needs of children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The Sewing Center is JAAGO's first women empowerment project. It opened in collaboration with Bacchara, a high end-fashion label with the ultimate objective to provide the women with the opportunity to be self-employed as personal tailors.

The sewing center had been broken down for the past few years because of lack of funding and poor infrastructure. So we worked on creating a new sewing center from the roots up using a much stronger foundation. It was incredible watching a sewing center constructed out of raw materials from the start to finish. It really exposed to me how much work is needed to develop any service project dedicated to self-sufficiency.

The women workers were extremely happy to know that the sewing center was being re-built near their homes. I had the opportunity to speak to Asma, one of the first women workers of the sewing center. She has one son and one daughter who both study at the JAAGO School while she sews. But because the sewing center had been broken down, she was transferred to a new location. She told me that it was really inconvenient to have to take public transportation to work because that meant she would have to leave early and return home late, barely seeing her children throughout the whole day. But with the sewing center now constructed near her home, she will be able to spend time with her children and come home at a reasonable time. Asma is very grateful for JAAGO for helping her learn how to sew. In her words, giving someone money is not helpful; teaching them a skill is. Asma loves to sew and sews her own clothes. It's beautiful to see her love the work she creates.

Because this entire project was in and of itself, a creative pursuit, I wanted to get the children involved. I worked with the students of grade two to create art projects, which would then be used to decorate the walls with. The children drew tremendously! I was blown away by their artistic ability. A lot of them actually drew

mangos, which made perfect sense to me because it is an incredible delicacy in Bangladesh. A girl named Samira drew the Shahid Minar, a national monument in Bangladesh symbolizing the struggle to get Bangla as our national language. After the art project, I took each of their pictures and had them tell me story. They ranged from war to what they wanted to be when they grew up. We took a large sheet of paper and used paint to imprint our handprint on it. It was very fun to see the children get so excited about colors and paints.

The sewing center has officially been constructed and soon the women will start work there. It was been an extremely fulfilling experience. I absolutely love service work that creates a lasting change and I am sure that this sewing center will help countless women. Nothing is more powerful than to see women who are self-sufficient and empowered to do what they love. Thank you the class of 1995 for funding such an impactful cause. I sincerely hope the women and children benefit from the sewing center and would like to thank you again for all of your help and support!



Before construction!





He drew the city of Dhaka!





The children put their handprints on this sheet which will be put on the entrance of the sewing center.



The sewing center is almost completed!