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## We Are Not disabled, We Are Differently Able

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BEING students of second semester at BRAC University, this spring we are spending a semester at the Training and Resource Centre of BRAC at Savar, popularly known as TARC Savar. It's a semester aimed at developing leadership and social skills among the students in addition to providing an out-of-the-ordinary education. As a part of this endeavor, the students of BRAC University recently went to CRP, the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed.



The one-hundred and fifty students from various departments who are now attending the semester in TARC were divided into eight groups for the visit to CRP. The first four groups went to CRP on the 1st of March and the others went there on the 8th of March. This visit was arranged by BRAC University in collaboration with CRP. The students were accompanied by their Pro-Vice Chancellor, Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed, the Chairperson of the Economics and Social Sciences department Dr. Anwarul Haque, as well as other members of the faculty. The visit was arranged with the aim of informing the university students about the plight of the paralyzed citizens of our country, and to raise awareness about them in general. It was also intended to remove the common misconceptions about the physically challenged, and any stigma that we previously associated with being physically disabled.

CRP is a humanitarian organization run by Ms. Valerie Taylor. A physiotherapist by training, Ms. Taylor left her home-country England to come down to Bangladesh and dedicate her life to helping people who are less privileged. Initially she came to Bangladesh as a member of the Voluntary Service Organization. Upon arrival, she noticed the neglect and humiliation the physically impaired people face from the society here. She decided to do something for them, and dedicated her life to the alleviation of their suffering. Today, she has been serving the disabled of our country for more than three decades. Under her guidance and with her motivation, a highly dedicated team is working in CRP.

While entering the narrow alley that led us to this philanthropically active place, we had no idea about the emotional journey that we were about to embark on. Upon entering through the gates of CRP, we were amazed by the number of physically-challenged people that were waiting to

receive help. There were mentally-handicapped kids as young as two years old, who choke on their food because they do not even know how to swallow. We saw women who were buried under the earth as a result of a landslide during the flood season. Many of them had developed bedsores as a result of lying on one side for too long.

Many of the patients have been rendered paralyzed due to accidents, such as falling off a tree, road accidents, strokes etc. One common accident is slipping to fall while carrying heavy weights on one's head, something that is very common among the working class in our country. Some of them are born with a disease known as cerebral palsy, which results in a baby being born disabled. There is a lack of awareness about this disease, even though a substantial number of people are afflicted by it. It was saddening to see children barely three months old carrying around this disease in their tiny bodies.

CRP has taken many initiatives in an attempt to make life better for these people. They provide practical help such as occupational therapy, which teaches the patients how to cope once they go home. They are given physiotherapy to facilitate movement. Skills such as sewing are taught to the girls and many of the males with amputated arms were drawing better than most people with paintbrush or pencils held in their mouth.

In the halfway hostel, they perform activities that allow the patients to adapt themselves to their new lives. In addition to treating the patients, their family members are also taught how to provide better care.

What struck us the most was the fact that these people were happy. They were not bitter about their lives. We met a lady who has been in a wheelchair for more than ten years, yet she has a family, and feels she has a better life now than she ever had before. Incidents like these opened our eyes to all the things in our lives we are gifted with and take for granted.

As our bus rolled back on the road, all of us were thinking along the same lines. How can we, as members of society, do our part for our fellow human beings? The answer came in consensus: we can lend them our support. The physically disabled are not looking for our sympathy. They do not want our insensitive probing or unnecessary show of concern. All they want is to be treated equally, and with respect. Because after all, they are not disabled, rather, they are just differently able.

**For inset box:**

If you want to extend a helping hand, then you can become a member of CRP for Tk. 2000 per year. This money will be used to provide better healthcare and support for the CRP patients. For more information how you can do your part, visit: [www.crp-bangladesh.org](http://www.crp-bangladesh.org)

**For inset box:**

**The story of Mr. Babul:** Twenty-two years back, Mr. Babul was young, energetic, and full of dreams. Being an engineer and the only son in his family, he was the sole breadwinner. But an accident paralyzed his life for good. One day, he fell off a tree, landing with a thump on the reality of an immobile life. From that day on, he has been confined to his wheelchair.

However, the word “confined” doesn't quite suit him. He is just as active as any of us. In fact, he plays basketball, does his grocery shopping, and has a family. However, things were not always this good. At first, he had to face the disappointment of his family members, and the brunt of the society. He lost all hope of leading a productive life. At one point, he was contemplating giving up for good, but CRP intervened. They gave him hope and faith to lead his life with courage and confidence. Today, he owns a small, successful business, and leads a full and happy life. He still faces hardship; he still hears insensitive comments from tactless individuals, but he brushes them off, knowing that he is leading a fuller life than before.

#### Student Responses:

Rubina Rashid Bhuiyan (English Department)- The visit to CRP was like awareness taking shape. I felt grateful for what I have, and I feel thankful to God for what could've happened but didn't. I feel more empathy towards those who are less fortunate than me. So people, volunteer for CRP!

Ashiqur Rahman (ECE)- whenever I saw a physically impaired person, I would look at them in a different way. But after the visit to CRP, I see them in a totally new light. I appreciate the courage with which they live their difficult lives and face society. I hope everyone reading this would do something practical for these wonderful people and help them reach their full potential.

Koushik Dhar (ECE)- I tried to put myself in the shoes of a CRP patient, and realized how much I have been blessed with. I can't imagine the thought of being confined to a bed or wheelchair. Just like me, maybe some of them loved football, but today, they are paralyzed from waist below. CRP has opened my eyes in a new way.

Mahfuza Ferdousy Sarwar (BBS)- When I saw the differently able people, my sorrows or difficulties seemed nothing in comparison to what they face everyday. It ripped my heart when I saw kids being supported by others to stand or to talk. Their future would have been a dark one in a country like Bangladesh, but CRP is trying their best to shed a ray of hope in their sadness. Thus I pay my respect to Miss Valerie Taylor for her philanthropy, and hope we can all appreciate her hard work to improve life for those who had no other hope.

Zawad Hossain (BBS) - I felt like doing something for them. I even tried to volunteer whatever services I could provide. When I looked at them, I felt like being a part of them, because their intelligence far surpasses ours. I hope that society would be more receptive towards this neglected part of itself.