

1st September 2021

Narrative report Jan – August 2021, L'Arche Mymensingh, Bangladesh



The COVID-19 pandemic was threatening for our community; however, it could not take away our joy. We lived each day as full joy as possible through caring and supporting each other. The days went by beautifully.

1 Transition process for the community leadership

The most important event was the first official visit of our new International Envoy, Elisabeth Di in March. It was postponed several times due to the pandemic but finally we welcomed her here in Mymensingh!

A new mandate (Aug. '21-Jul.'25) was developed with everyone's participation. It shows an important road map for the future, which gives us hope. Signing in the Memorandum of understanding between Mymensingh Catholic Dioceses Trust and L'Arche Mymensingh Trust for the case of dissolution was also remarkable event. It was fortunate that the LAI Envoy Elisabeth Di witnessed the signing.

New leaders of the community, Ratna and Goutom were chosen by the community members, and it was announced with joy. Ratna, an assistant for 12 years (House cum Assistant coordinator) will take the role as an acting community leader until arrival of a new community leader, and Goutom, an assistant for 14 years (Program coordinator) will support her.



The road map of the transition process was proposed to the responsible assistants and gained full support. Recruiting 2 male assistants was an urgent need to ensure enough assistants for both the community houses and the programs. Fortunately, the need was fulfilled by July and Ratna and Goutom could engage with the administrative work fully in July.

They have been working together with Naomi, the present community leader and taking over each task one by one. Meanwhile, they are fulfilling the required English and computer class.

Elisabeth Di, the International Envoy committed to have regular zoom meeting with them to assure their progresses and encourage them.

Sagar, the 1st year accountant cum office staff showed the good progress. Although it was difficult for him to manage with 'Tally', an accounting software at the beginning, he learned it and is now able to make financial reports with confidence. He was coached by the experienced accountant who worked for us as the voucher reviewer. Elisabeth Di also supports him through a monthly zoom meeting.



The Board (President, Secretary and Treasurer) appreciate the regular zoom meetings with the LAI Envoy. The meetings started in April and have been important to ensure a smooth transition process and secure a future for the community. The recruitment process for a new community leader was launched by the LAI and several applications were sent from both overseas and Bangladesh. We are hoping that an appropriate person will be selected by January 2022.

Meanwhile, the infection rate of the Delta variant skyrocketed in June and the nationwide lockdown began on July 1st. After evaluating the situation, the community went into quarantine. The infection rate jumped to 33% in early August with less than 3% of the population being fully vaccinated with the 2nd dose. The national daily deaths reached over 250 persons, and this was only the record at the Government hospitals at that time. Not one hospital bed was available, and a great number of people died without receiving oxygen or any other treatment.

The Board was deeply concerned with this situation and proposed to the LAI to extend Naomi's stay till December to secure the safety of the core members and it was the same for the community council as well. The matter was well understood by the LAI as well as the sending body of Naomi in Japan and the request was accepted. At the same time, the leadership team agreed that Naomi's extension would not make any delay to the transition process of the leadership.



2 Lives of the community members under the pandemic

2.1 Vaccination

Bangladesh depends on imported vaccines and oxygen from India. Therefore, it is understandable that there are not enough vaccines for COVID-19 in the country. It was only on July 18th that one of the assistants could get a first jab. Thus, to deal with the

situation the priority was to prevent infection in the community. Three L'Arche houses started quarantine in July. There have been a few common activities for the mental health of the members. Outside work is done by the day assistants with help from the electric car driver and the gate keeper.

When the Government organized a weeklong campaign to provide the vaccine, a few assistants were assigned to complete its registration as early as possible for those who were over 25 years old, not only for the assistants and employees but also for their family members. Seventeen assistants and employees (both full time & part time) amongst 35 were able to receive the 2nd jab in August. Afterwards, however vaccines have not been available in the country.



The registration for the core members to get vaccinated was rejected again. To receive the vaccine, one needs a national identification (NID). For the past several years all the core members have been applying for a NID but due to the fact that their parents' names are unknown their applications have continually been rejected. The Board decided to apply again with the name of the President as their legal guardian. New applications for all the residential core members were prepared to obtain new birth certificates. To ensure the success of the whole process, the Board helped us to connect to the CEO of the City Cooperation to bring the matter under his authority. The CEO promised to extend his hand for the core members once he has recovered from COVID-19.

We are aware that vaccine registration is important not only for our core members but also for a great number of people with intellectual disabilities who are denied the vaccine because they are unable to respond the complex government requirements due to their disabilities.



2.2 Residential core members and assistants

It was tough and challenging to deal with a series of core member hospitalizations this year.

Salma was hospitalized due to a chest infection. She was at the local government hospital for 3 weeks in April. In spite of the pandemic, a team of 4 assistants rotated staying with her at the hospital day and night. Although she was

discharged, she was admitted again a month later due to heart problems. Her condition was so fragile we thought we might be losing her.

Everyone in the community prayed for her and helped each other to support Salma's care as well as care for other 20 core members. A miracle had happened. Salma got well. She is still fragile but can eat and smile beautifully amidst her sisters in Pushpo Nir (the house for females).



Munna, a male core member in Asha Nir was also admitted to the hospital twice this year. The first time was for the cataract operation. He had the operation on the left eye last year and this February it was for the right eye. Munna bravely expressed his willingness to have an operation with his body language. It was the sign of his growth and trust in us since it took him a few years to accept the first eye operation. Considering the risks, the doctor conducted it again with a full anesthesia and the operation was done successfully. Munna now enjoys seeing the beautiful world.

However, a few months later, we noticed that Munna was fragile and looked pale. The assistants noticed that the color of his stool looked like chocolate. He was admitted to the hospital immediately for a blood transfusion, but it was hard to find donor as his blood type was B Negative which was very rare in Bangladesh. Assistants made a special appeal to find a blood donor using the mobile network and thanks to be God, we got 4 donors within a few days and the treatment went well.

Mazar-Ali in Asha Nir also had a difficult time in April. This innocent young man with autism somehow refused to eat and lost a lot of weight, he almost became a skeleton. Assistants did everything possible to provided him with good nutritious foods, no matter how expensive, but he did not want to eat. Dr. Probal Adikar Dotto, who we trust for the core member's treatment, worked hard to find out the best combinations of medicine for Mazar-Ali. Mazar-Ali's condition deteriorated to the extent that the doctor advised us to admit him in the hospital. Miraculously our Mazar-Ali gradually started to eat. He is no more in danger.

We believed that Allah/God responded to our cry to save his life and we are extremely grateful to the faithfulness and sincerity of Dr. P. A. Dotto. The doctor opened his ward in the Government hospital as the special outdoor clinic only for our core members in L'Arche. With this special treatment, we did not need to queue for a ticket and stand for





hours to see a doctor each time. We feel that he really loves our core members, and it gives us encouragement and joy.

There were a several remarkable developments in the core members. We were astonished the day that Priya, around 22 years old, the youngest core member in Pushpo Nir held a glass of water in her hand and drank it! It felt like we were dreaming. To add to that Priya willingly put on socks in the winter, when previously she would refuse. Another development is that all the ladies in Pushpo Nir learned to wear masks.

Rohim, the youngest in Asha Nir, who used scream day and night, now helps assistants bring plates for the meal and carries the soup pot.

Amazingly Pintu, in Shopno Nir, learned how to hook his mosquito net before lying on his bed!

Above all, what the most achievement for our core members was to learn washing their hands for 20 seconds! Many of them now refuse to eat without washing their hands which helps the assistants to remember to wash their hands!

Despite the pandemic, three residential house members celebrated together Easter in April and Eid on May. Celebrations always brings us the joy of togetherness and gives us courage to carry the life forwards. Assistants were also given the precious time to have a 4-day retreat at the Jesuit retreat center in March for Vipassana meditation and yoga. Breathing meditation is practiced daily at each house and among the assistants. It really helps their emotional controls and brings peace of mind.

In June we purchased the 2nd electric car (Auto). It took us for 4 years for it to happen because we had to patiently wait for an assistant to get an auto license. All were so happy and grateful to Rubel Kujul for taking on this role and getting the license. Improving the the accessibility of the community was an important agenda in the mandate of the community.

2.3 Nonresidential core members and their families

When the pandemic situation improved in February, the community started gradually to welcome a few external core members to join the Workshop and the Day-Care activities, however, soon after, it had to be reversed due to the pandemic situation grew worse.

Since then, the community keep continues to support the external core members and their families through providing food, medicines and family visits. Day-assistants have been busy for a few months to ensure all the external core members and their family members to get the COVID-19 vaccines.



Rajib and his father one of the families we cared for the most because of their fragile situation. The Day assistant noticed their ill living condition while visiting their house.

A sling fan was set up. Their neighbors kindly help with a part of the electric bill.

3 Financial hardships of the community

Our life has been blessed, but we notice the impact of the pandemic upon our financial situation. General foreign donations were less than we expected while we continue receiving local donations. We will be able to manage until the 1st week of December but will need approximately, another 5,000 euro to run the community till the end of December.

When the pandemic situation improves the responsible assistants will visit local shops to raise funds according to the monthly budget. Urgent appeals for help will be sent out to foreign friends soon. We will do our best to ensure the security of everyone in the community.



Thank you L'Arche International for your prayers, support, and guidance. We are going to celebrate our 19th foundation day in September. It would certainly not be possible to carry our lives together without your help. We convey to you our heartfelt gratitude!

Ratna Murum (House cum Assistant coordinator)

Acting community leader

L'Arche Mymensingh

