



the ballad of **bravery**



preface

Every journey has a destination and an end. A journey without a destination can be lost in the unknown and uncertainty. Six years back in 2016, we sailed a boat name Uttoron – skills for better life. We started this journey with support from Chevron Bangladesh. We knew our goals and dreams and how we wanted to achieve them. We were committed to changing lives and light a flame of hope in young minds so they could find their way forward. Along this long journey, we stumbled, we fell, but we never gave up. We rose from the ashes like the phoenix. There is a famous saying, “*imagine with all your mind, believe with all your heart, and achieve with all your might.*” These are the stories of people who never gave up, believed in themselves, and rose up from the ashes, just like a Phoenix. This book is a tribute to all those trainees of Uttoron who became part of this long journey that is coming to an end. We salute their courage and dedication.

(Uttoron- skills for better life is a skills development project funded by Chevron Bangladesh and implemented by Swisscontact. The project has been working since 2016, and during the 2nd phase (2019-2022), it worked in Dhaka, Khulna and Sylhet divisions. It provided vocational training to more than 3500 youth, established a permanent training centre in cooperation with Sylhet City Corporation and established an advanced welding training lab at Khulna shipyard in collaboration with the government. For more information, please check

<https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/uttoron-skills-for-better-life>





“ I had to drop-out of school, I tried to learn everything with the highest level of integrity during training. ”

Raj Nayek is a 20-year-old spirited young man, everyone in his family calls him Raj. His home is in Dolaipara of Shahparan Union of Sylhet. In total there are seven members in his family including his mother, brothers, and sisters. He is second among the siblings. Raj has received training on Electrical Installation and Maintenance (EIM) from Uttoron project. Presently, working in the mechanical section of Khadim Ceramics for more than a year. With the monthly income including gross salary and overtime, Raj is doing well with his family.

Raj Nayek

a story of standing by Raj's family

Uttoron contacted Raj Nayek in advance to hear about the journey that he started since finishing the training. Despite doing the night shift on the previous work day, he was really punctual and reach UCEP training centre in Sylhet on the scheduled time. Sitting in an empty classroom at the UCEP Training Center, Raj said, *"I heard about Uttoron from a friend of mine. After that, I registered for this free training by searching the training centre location. To be honest, I would not have been able to afford this training if I had to pay for it. Since I do not belong to a solvent family, I didnot want to miss this opportunity. And my father taught me that learning any productive thing is never waste of time. Anyway, it will be useful in life."*

How was the training experience? When asked, Raj said, *"It was a completely different and new learning experience. I didnot realize how three months had passed. I could not study after eighth grade, so this training was like going back to school for me. Through three months of training, we learned house wiring, channel wiring etc. The one-day workshop after our training was a unique experience as well. Uttoron through this*

workshop taught us about workplace regulations, policies, dos and don'ts at job, and communication at workplace. All these helped me big time at my new job."

Tragedy struck immediately after Raj finished his training. His father died. To support and stand by the family, he joined Pran-RFL Industrial Park in Habiganj, away from home. But due to not having enough pocket money for the first month, he had to struggle a lot. At the same time, he felt very sad for not being with his family members. To be together with the whole family, on the advice of his elder brother, he returned to Sylhet, went to Khadim Ceramics, and submit his training certificate there. When Khadim told him to join to work, Raj joined there.

"I like to work. Since I had to drop-out of school, I tried to learn everything with the highest level of integrity during training. Now I can live with my family. This is a lot for me. In absence of our father, me and my elder brother run the household together. It feels fulfilling to be able to stand by the family," said Raj.

When asked about aspirations, Raj said, *"I have not planned much for the future. Since I have stood by the family, I have decided to do it with my heart. And want to learn computer work."*

Uttoron has changed the lives of many youths like Raj. Uttoron training has helped Raj Nayek to build a better today and in shaping a dignified position in society.

“Since I am supporting my family right now, I have decided to do it with my heart. And want to learn computer work.”



Roshna Begum

“I survived the societal pressures with the sole support of my mother. Today I am working independently by breaking all the barriers. I also had Uttoron beside me.”

Breaking the stereotypes in society is never an easy task but Roshna did it anyway. 26-year-old Roshna Begum, grew up in Mahaldwip village of Khadimnagar union of Sylhet Sadar. Hardship in her life started very early, after losing her father felt the burnt of poverty every step of their life. Her elder brother runs CNG autorickshaw while her younger brother has the opportunity of attending high-school education. Three sisters are married off. Roshna was married at an early age. But her new life added new dimensions of challenges. Her husband was a migrant worker. She was living with her in-laws. She became a victim of domestic violence. At one point when she could not take

Roshna with self-esteem and commitment

it, she decided to end the marriage and start over. But starting over is never easy. *“Mother has been struggling with us since childhood due to the inadequacy of required tangible assets.”*

Roshna’s voice gets heavy as she spoke about her days at her husband’s place. She knew that she must do something to fix things on her part. Despite trying desperately, Roshna could not manage a job. She realized, getting a chance to work is difficult without prior experience or certification. One day her elder brother gave her a leaflet, and that is how Roshna came to know about the free training of Uttoron.

UCEP Hafiz Majumdar Sylhet Technical School in Sylhet is located far from Roshna’s house. Still, she took the challenge of the long commute, which is not a normal thing in her surroundings. *“At first, I was a little worried about enrolling in training classes so far from home, but after going to the training centre to know the details, I came to know that there is a provision for travel allowance from Uttoron. That gave me hope and made me confident, so I registered and returned home.”*

Roshna started her training in the machinist trade of Uttoron project. When asked why she joined the machinist trade, Roshna said, *“A machinist’s job is a bit complicated, not many people do it, especially girls. I feel like if boys can do it, so can I. If I can learn this difficult task, then I can easily get into a job.”*

After completing her training, Roshna joined the RFL as an Assistant Operator in the fan section. Roshna provides substantial support to her family with her income. Regularly, she works beyond daily duties and does as much overtime as it is possible. She is also saving a little bit of her income through mobile banking services.

When asked what she wants to do in the future, Roshna replied, *“I want to take care of my family. I want to bring smile to my mother’s face. What I can do today is because of my mother. I survived the societal pressures with the sole support of my mother. Today I am working independently by breaking all the barriers. I also had Uttoron beside me.”*

Uttoron is proud to support confident and determined women like Roshna.

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“I had been waiting for this day for so long. The day I got the job felt like a dream to me, I waited for so long to see this in real. Now I do not need to be so restless thinking about how to pay for day-to-day expenses every month.”

“I quit my studies while I was in my second year of university education. My family could not afford the associated costs of education. Our family has fallen into a financial crisis as my father fell ill. To support the family in this situation worked hard as private tutor but that did not pay much. I was desperately looking for work but did not get anything that I wanted.” Fahima Akhter, age 20, said these in a breath. She is from Guzakhair village of Nabiganj sub-district of Habiganj district.

With parents, brothers, and sisters, in total there are 11 members in Fahima’s family. Her

Fahima Akhter

Fahima is already a few steps ahead in the race of life

four sisters were married off by selling the only land their family possessed. Her father used to work on other people's land. But after his heart attack, he could barely move let alone work in fields. Her elder brother got married and started his family separately, he could not bear family responsibilities.

Fahima's school and college were in Nabiganj. After a year of continuing tertiary education in Political Science, she had to leave her education to be the breadwinner of the family. In this situation, Fahima was trying to turn her life around. That's when one day she found out about the training of Uttoron from some of her friends. The next day she went to Uttron's Aushkandi Training Center for registration, after going through the selection process she admitted herself to Packaging and Finishing Operations Trade. Every day she had to travel quite a distance to attend classes. But Fahima continued training thinking that if she can finish the training properly, she will get a job.

After completing her training, Fahima joined the biscuit section of PRAN at PRAN-RFL Industrial Park of Habiganj as an assistant operator. When asked how it felt to join the work after so much hardship, Fahima said, "I had been waiting for

this day for so long. The day I got the job felt like a dream to me, I waited for so long to see this in real. Now I do not need to be so restless thinking about how to pay for day-to-day expenses every month. With my income, I can afford medicine for my father and can take care of my family's expenses. There had peace in knowing that I can manage the vested responsibility more conveniently."

Fahima lives in a hostel in Habiganj Industrial Park. Duty starts at eight in the morning and goes on till eight in the evening and does night shifts sometimes. Initially, she struggled to adapt to 12 hours shift. After nearly a month, she was able to understand the standard operating procedure (SOP) of the required machines. As she said, her supervisor is very happy with her work. Now, she can work on many machines in the biscuit section, leveraging the expertise she acquired from the training. Due to her tertiary-level educational background, her opinions are given a lot of importance. With a smile on her face, Fahima said, "One day my manager called me. He wanted to know how our work was going, and whether we can take the pressure of production. And what can be done to increase production? I answered everything. My manager later thanked me separately and mentioned that I speak constructively."

The smile on Fahima's face reflects the confidence she has now. For the time being, she wants to support her younger brother and sister to continue their studies. Being able to do something for parents is one of the most fulfilling things for her. Who we are is defined by what we do with the opportunities life throws at us and Fahima has definitely proved that she is worthy of the honor she earned.

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“ We have an assembly at the factory every day after work, and yesterday at the assembly, my supervisor was complimenting me and my work in front of everyone; he was sharing how happy he is with my work and it motivated me to do even better in future. ”

The story of Shah Kamil is very similar to many other Uttoron trainees. He studied up to high school and then dropped out because he lost interest in education. 19-year-old Shah Kamil is an energetic youth from Rustompur village in Nabiganj Upazila of Habiganj district. Kamil is the youngest among his four siblings. Two of his brothers work in hotels in Sylhet, and the only sister is now studying. After finishing his 12th grade, Kamil decided to discontinue his education. When Uttoron asked why he did so,

Shah Kamil

confidence to go forward

his answer was, *"it will take me years to finish my traditional education and get a degree that would help me get a job. "Besides, I was always more interested in acquiring technical and vocational skills and had a desire to do something in that line of work. So, it seemed that if I could take training from Uttoron and start working, that would be better for my future"*.

Kamil is working as an Assistant Operator in Pran/ RFL Group's Habiganj Industrial Park (HIP) at the biscuits section. He has been working there for three months. He received his training in Packaging and Finishing Operation (PFO) trade from Uttoron in Habiganj. . He has already become a favorite employee of the floor in-charge. Kamil was scintillating while sharing with Uttoron team a recent experience of his at work. *"We have an assembly at the factory every day after work, and yesterday at the assembly, my supervisor was complimenting me and my work in front of everyone; he was sharing how happy he is with my work and it motivated me to do even better in future"*.

Kamil learned about Uttoron training from a friend. He shared that the experience of training was good, *"Uttoron has prepared me*

with the basic skills that I needed to perform well in the industry; the rest depends on myself, how I excel in my career. But the confidence I have today is because of Uttoron". Kamil shared that he has learned a lot about the operation of different types of machinery in his training, which is helping him perform better at work. Since he already knows how some heavy-duty machines are operated, it is easier for him to learn to use new machines. Kamil earns between BDT 10 thousand and 11 thousand per month now. He sends a portion of his income to his family. When Uttoron asked him how he feels about his work and professional life, he happily answered, *"there is no pleasure like making an earning for your self. I am gathering experience and I can support my family too; that is simply gratifying"*.

"What is your future plan?" when Uttoron asked, he shared his aspirations: *"all the machinery I am operating now is imported from abroad, which means foreign countries also use the same type of machines in their factories. So, if I can gather more work experience here, I will be more skilled and will be able to get a higher paying job abroad as a skilled worker."*

Trainees like Kamil inspire the youth around him to become skilled workers and prosper in the future. Uttoron has given him the confidence to work, and hope that the skills he has acquired and the experiences he is gathering now will help him achieve much more in the days to come.

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Shahana Begum

“Being a local female worker with skills training I have the full potentials in reaching my career goal. It never occurred to me that I can’t do this, and I know I will achieve it and with mercy of Allah and prayers of my well-wishers I will get their one day.”

Scheduling an interview with Shahana Begum was a bit difficult. Lastly, she could give us time on a weekend. Shahana was excited, talking about her new life, *“since I am in the factory’s general services team, my daily routine is tightly scheduled. Sometimes I lose track of time calculating overtime of others,”* said Shahana with a laugh. Shahana wanted to be a college teacher and worked as a schoolteacher at Al-Gawsia KG and Junior High School in her village. Being a school teacher earned her respect in the community, but it did not pay enough to cover

Shahana's dream is to go far

her family expenses. She needed extra money to support her family. That is why she decided to join Uttoron training, hoping this will get her a respectful job with a higher income, and Uttoron did not dishearten her.

Shahana is from Goznaipur Union of Deopara village, Nabiganj upazilla, Habiganj. With her parents, five sisters, and one brother, she has nine members in her family. She came to know about Uttoron project from public announcements. She received three months of technical training from TMSS Technical Training Centre under the Uttoron project and completed six months of job successfully.

Shahana currently works at Habiganj Textile Mills (STL) in PRAN-RFL Industrial Park, Habiganj. She works under the direct supervision of the Compliance Coordinator. *"I took training on Electrical Installation and Maintenance (EIM) but observing my capabilities, my current supervisor picked me to work in her team."* She starts her day by punching 301 workers' cards around the factory. Managing the attendance registrar, calculating overtime of workers, preparing salary sheets, keeping records of workers on the job training or leave are some of the routine jobs of Shahana. She

also does some quality control work or other tasks assigned by her supervisor. *"How do you manage everything?". She answered sharply, "very simple! I make a task list at the beginning of the day and follow that. At the end of Uttoron training, I attended a pre-employment workshop. There was a session that taught us how to be a good worker- listing your tasks at the beginning of the day was one of the suggestions, and I follow that religiously."*

She is working full-time right now but did not give up on her hope to become a college teacher one day. She admitted herself into the National University. Her supervisor knows about her study and supports her. *"My supervisor assured me that I would be allowed to take a day off before and during exams,"* added Shahana while explaining the situation. Since National University classes are closed for the pandemic, she had no class in the last one and a half year, so it does not hamper her work. My college faculty members are also well-aware of my situation and support me to keep my spirit up.

Shahana has set an example in her union. Many girls from her community are interested in getting training like her. She has already set a goal for herself to become a floor in-charge

within one and half year. She is fully determined and putting her total effort into it. *"Being a local female worker with skills training I have the full potentials in reaching my career goal. It never occurred to me that I can't do this, and I know I will achieve it and with mercy of Allah and prayers of my well-wishers I will get their one day".*

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“When I go home my baby girl runs towards me and as soon as she calls me baba, I immediately forget all my struggles. I am trying my best so that she does not have to go through what I have gone through.”

Before joining the Uttoron training Sabed thought that housekeeping is about chef training, but after starting class he realized that it is completely different from what he anticipated. To his utter surprise, they were taught manners and how to attend to guests, how to make up a room, or handle service requests.

Sabed received housekeeping training under Uttoron project from the renowned Tony Khan Hotel Management Institute in Sylhet. Now he is working as a room attendant at Grand Palace Sylhet, one of the five-star hotel chains in the country. Sometimes he cannot believe that he is working in such a big hotel. Sabed is the eldest son among his five siblings. All three of his sisters are married. His parents, wife, two-year-old daughter, and younger brother are other members of his family. His father cannot

Sabed Ahmed

living among the stars

work due to old age, his mother and wife both are homemakers. Sabed is the sole breadwinner in the family. His family lives in their homestead close to Sylhet Osmani Airport.

After completing HSC from Shalutikar Bazar Degree College in 2011 with Science background, he started working in a local madrasah. Only working one job was not sufficient to support the family. So, he had to take up additional tuition. His regular day started at dawn, after Fajar prayer he would work on the small piece of land they have, and from there to the madrasah where the classes would go on till 2:30 PM, after that he would start the private tuition which would continue till 9-9:30 PM. But by the time he would get home, he used to be so exhausted that he could hardly spend any quality time with his two years old daughter.

In 2021 Uttoron undertook a special campaign in collaboration with Sylhet Deputy Commissioner (DC) Office. The campaign covered several institutions operated by Social Welfare Directorate for orphans and specially able youth. Sabed came to know about Uttoron training through this campaign around the Bagbari area, near his residence. After applying, he had to go through the initial screening process and upon qualifying,

he started training in the afternoon shift. According to the routine of the madrasah, the classes end at 2:30 PM in the afternoon. But the madrasah officials let him go early on special request, he managed to leave at 1:00 PM in the afternoon to join the training class.

Three months long housekeeping training opened a completely new window into his life. After completing training, he left the teaching job at madrasah. Explored jobs at several hotels. This is his fourth job in this profession, all these jobs were at Sylhet. At first, he started to work at Hotel Dallas, and worked there for 15 days, as did not like that and went to Panshi Inn leaving his first job in this industry. Worked a month at Panshi Inn, but lose the job during Covid-19 induced lockdowns affected layoffs. Then he joined Hotel Grand Zafran, and worked there for six months, after sincere efforts he landed the job at this five-star hotel. In reply to why he changed so many jobs in such short time, he said, *“Main reasons are salary and benefits. Here I get my monthly salary on the due date, on top of that get a good amount of tip, it also has residential facility and food support. To get into this job, I requested several times to the marketing manager of this hotel, and finally on a test basis got the opportunity, only after two weeks of work received the confirmation. Alhamdulillah, it's been six months now”*. Room

cleaning, bedding, amenities setup and guest receiving are parts of his daily job as a room attendant. He said, to work in this sector one needs to be well-spoken, properly dressed and behave appropriately. His family lives at home, and he lives in the staff housing facility of the Hotel Grand Palace, in a month cannot get more than two opportunities to visit home. *“When I go home my baby girl runs towards me and as soon as she calls me baba, I immediately forget all my struggles. I am trying my best so that she does not have to go through what I have gone through.”*

Uttoron is proud to be with many more young people like Sabed Ahmed.

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“ The training not only equipped me with technical knowledge but also helped me to acquire social skills to cope in a formal work environment, which I never did. ”

“Our life was going on fine. My father had a good job, and we were doing ok, until everything fell apart. My father was laid off from his company.”

As Fahim’s father was the only earning member of the family, they were in deep trouble. His father eventually got a new job, but as if misfortune was following them.

He had an accident and could not continue in his new job. As a result, Fahim’s family was in a hopeless situation with no solution in sight. Fahim Abrar was explaining how the bad time in his life started, how his ordinary life fell apart like a house of cards.

Fahim Abrar

Fahim's story of starting a new journey

22-year-old Fahim Abrar lives in Mirpur Pallabi area of Dhaka North City Corporation, but he is originally from Mithapukur, Rangpur district, one of the northern districts of Bangladesh. Uttoron team was sitting in the officeroom where Fahim works. As he was sharing his life story, he said that after his father's accident, there was no other option left for them. His father first decided to move to Dhaka in 2016. His father started to work as a care-taker in an apartment. Before coming to Dhaka, Fahim was studying in a Madrasa. His family struggled financially for a long time, but they never asked him to drop out of school. But as he was the only son among his five siblings, he knew it was his responsibility to support his family. So, he dropped out of Madrasa and moved to Dhaka in 2018. He was working here and there to make a living and support their family back in village; but things were really tough. Living in a dingy room in the garage of the apartment where his father worked was very difficult. He missed his family terribly.

He learned about Uttoron training from miking in the area where he lives. When he went to check about the training at Ahsania Mission (DAM), he was informed that there would be job placement opportunities after finishing

the training. Fahim after discussing with his father decided to enroll for the training. The selection process of Uttoron was also a unique experience for Fahim. *"I never participated in a workshop like that. It was lot of fun"* said Fahim.

Fahim completed the Mobile Service Operation training successfully at DAM. The training experience was exciting. Before attending the training, he had no expertise in mobile servicing work, but now he can fix all types of mobiles. After finishing the training, he was offered a job at a store named Linux Mobile.

But the location was very inconvenient for him as it required longer commuting time. But the training made him quite confident, and he found himself a job in the office working part-time as a computer operator at a construction firm name M.M Global Corporation. Gradually he got involved in administrative work of that office and now working as an operations manager. His day starts very early, and he works for a long time, but he likes the formal environment. *"The training not only equipped me with technical knowledge but also helped me to acquire social skills to cope in a formal work environment, which I never did."* He has been working in this position for the last six months.

The salary he is getting is helping his family in repaying some of the debts they had. His employer informed Uttoron that Fahim is doing pretty well in his job; he is well-mannered and knows etiquette. They are thinking about giving him a raise in the coming months.

He misses his family in Rangpur and hopes to bring them to Dhaka when he earns more. His dream is to set up a mobile business of his own. *"I will have a big shop one day, and there will be all sorts of mobile and equipment in that shop,"* said Fahim with a dreamy eye. Youth like Fahim needs a little push and a helping hand to pull them out of the dark ditches that life often pushes us into. Fahim had the confidence and the spirit all along. All Uttoron did was give him a push so he could follow his dream to become someone.

“I will have a big shop one day, and there will be all sorts of mobile and equipment in that shop.”



“ It is a great opportunity to get training in advanced welding at Khulna Shipyard. This training will help a lot to survive in the welding profession. ”

Uttoron team was talking to Akram at the Khulna Shipyard Technical Training Centre. He seemed spontaneous when he returned to this familiar place after a while. Akram Hossain is 22 years old and from Varaura village of Sreemangal, Moulavibazar. Their family consists of four members: mother, father, and younger brother. His mother is a homemaker, father is a migrant worker and works in a private company in Saudi Arabia, brother studies at the tertiary level. Akram is also an ongoing second-year Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) student at Shahjalal Government College.

Akram Hossain

skilled welder Akram

Akram came to know about Uttoron training after HSC exam. A poster of Uttoron for trainee enrollment caught his attention. The subjects of training were Electrical Installation and Maintenance (EIM) and Welding. Having little understanding and interest in electrical matters, he became more curious about welding. For admission to the training, he went through a long process of registration, a day-long workshop and an interview. Finally, he was informed by the Training Service Provider (TSP) that he has been selected for 3 months of welding training. *"I found welding a bit different from other works, which intrigued me to choose this career path",* said Akram.

The three months of basic training in welding opened a new world for him. It was not easy, and required a lot of hard work but he enjoyed it. He was planning to start a job after graduating from the training. While he was planning for his career, Uttoron project informed him about a new opportunity for advanced welding training. He was excited to know about it. Uttoron informed him that only 25 youths from the Sylhet division will be selected for this unique opportunity. He immediately decided that he will try his luck. The selection process

was quite robust. He had to appear in practical and written exams and finally Uttoron had a meeting with his family. How did you feel when you were informed that you have been selected."

In this regard, Akram said, *"I was excited. People of our region are usually reluctant to move out of Sylhet for work. I had a dream of working in mega projects. I thought of building ships or working in big industries, all of which are out of Sylhet. If I want to learn work, I had to go out of Sylhet."*

Akram underwent four months of residential training in advanced welding. Later, he successfully passed the 4G level in the test taken by the international certification organization Bureau Veritas. Akram said, *"It is a great opportunity to get training in advanced welding at Khulna Shipyard. This training will help a lot to survive in the welding profession."* Akram is working in MIG welding in Production Fabrication at Talukdar Group of Industries, he also had job offers from some other places too. When asked how he feels about working, Akram says, *"Not everyone is lucky enough to be trained at Khulna Shipyard. I am now applying*

what I learned from the advanced welding training at Uttoron. I can do a lot of work very conveniently."

In the future, Akram wishes to do something good in the welding sector of the country. As well as constructing a secured future for his family is another of his wishes.

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