

From Peer Trainer to Social Worker: *Biswapriya* is working to make his dreams come true

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File photo of Biswapriya

Biswapriya Patra is a Class 8 student of Vivekananda Shikshya Kendra school based in Dum Duma slum, Bhubhaneshwar, Odisha. He has been associated with Pro Sport Development (PSD) for two years, since he was in Class 6. In these two years, Biswapriya has grown immensely, proving the impact that sport can have on the holistic development of a child, and the values that can be learnt through sport.

Biswapriya has been part of two of PSD's projects – the Community Sports Program, which aims to develop children's soft skills and imbibe values, and the Kadam Badhate Chalo (KBC) program, a partnership between PSD and Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF), which seeks to empower youth to take on leadership in their communities to challenge issues of violence against women and girls.

Through his participation in both these programs, Biswapriya has developed his confidence, communication skills and leadership, and has become a champion for gender equality in his community. Indeed, even as one of the youngest participants in both the programs, he has excelled and flourished so much that his trainers were confident that he would be suited to becoming a peer trainer for the KBC program.

Yashvi Sharma, a KBC trainer associated with MFF, said that Biswapriya was a rare participant who justified the values instilled through the KBC program. Not only had he internalized these values, but he was also a good speaker, and was able to parse out and articulate his ideas and thoughts. Wanting to further support such a valuable and strong participant, they invited him to be part of Antargoonj, the annual National Youth Workshop held for select KBC participants, even though he was younger than most other participants.

Antargoonj was supposed to take place in April 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented a face-to-face workshop from taking place. Hence, the KBC program started an online fellowship, with a few select participants from each program location joining in. Around 5 individuals were selected from the Bhubhaneshwar location of KBC to join in the online fellowship, and Biswapriya was one of them.

The KBC trainers found that his answers and reflections were always thought out, and his articulation of his thoughts were commendable. Not only did he write out his thoughts well, but he was always able to convey his ideas through different mediums, such as art. This led to the KBC trainers identifying him as a peer trainer, to help other KBC participants through the program.

The KBC trainers gave him some basic training in leading and conducting workshop sessions, and they began to include him in the online trainings of other KBC participants. He led sessions on gender, violence and stereotyping for other youth leaders in his age group. They found him to be an excellent trainer, who was able to give real life examples from his perspective, which the other youth from his age group were able to relate to.

Talking about being a peer trainer, Biswapriya said: "I have learned that whatever work needs to be done cannot and should not be done under pressure. I led 3 sessions online and 4 sessions offline, and trained many of my peers. I am good at explaining the concepts to other children. I also tried to motivate them to move forward, telling them that we can proceed only by crossing the hurdles that come in our lives. I have also learned a lot from other students."



Biswapriya enjoying his team's success at a tournament (bottom row, right-most)

Part of why Biswapriya has been successful in being a strong leader who understands social issues is that his family supports him in his ventures. They understand that the holistic development of children includes not only focusing on academics and studies, but also on engaging in extracurricular activities, including sport and play, and engaging with social issues. Indeed, his father understands the importance of social work, and has done a lot of work himself on issues of anti-casteism in the community. This support from his family has been invaluable for him to build his sense of social responsibility and appreciation for extracurricular activities.

Biswapriya continues to be an important youth leader – PSD has recognized him as an important youth representation at forums that they are invited to take part in. Recently, Biswapriya was a youth representative at a Literacy Day event, where he spoke of the importance of functional literacy.

As a part of the youth of this country, Biswapriya is playing his role as a change-maker, by being a strong voice for change on a variety of social issues. Looking towards his future, he said, “I want to become a social worker and therefore, I have to work on my leadership and communication skills to keep my view across people and help them understand the issues faced by women in society.” This is not just something he says – he has been approaching PSD and KBC trainers to understand the academic path he should take in order to make his dreams come true, and has enquired about the courses he could enrol in in the future. And he is just 14!

His association with PSD is a step towards achieving his dream of becoming a social worker – his participation in the various programs has given him a platform to show his leadership skills and express his views on social issues.

