



# KIND TO YOUR MIND

INTERNATIONAL MENTAL  
HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
**PROJECT REPORT**  
SPRING 2020



# NAVIGATING THIS REPORT

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Welcome to the Kind to Your Mind (KYM) Project Report from Spring 2020!

We appreciate your interest in this project and invite you to peruse this report at your leisure, and welcome any follow-up questions at [team@imha.ngo](mailto:team@imha.ngo).

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# ABOUT IMHA

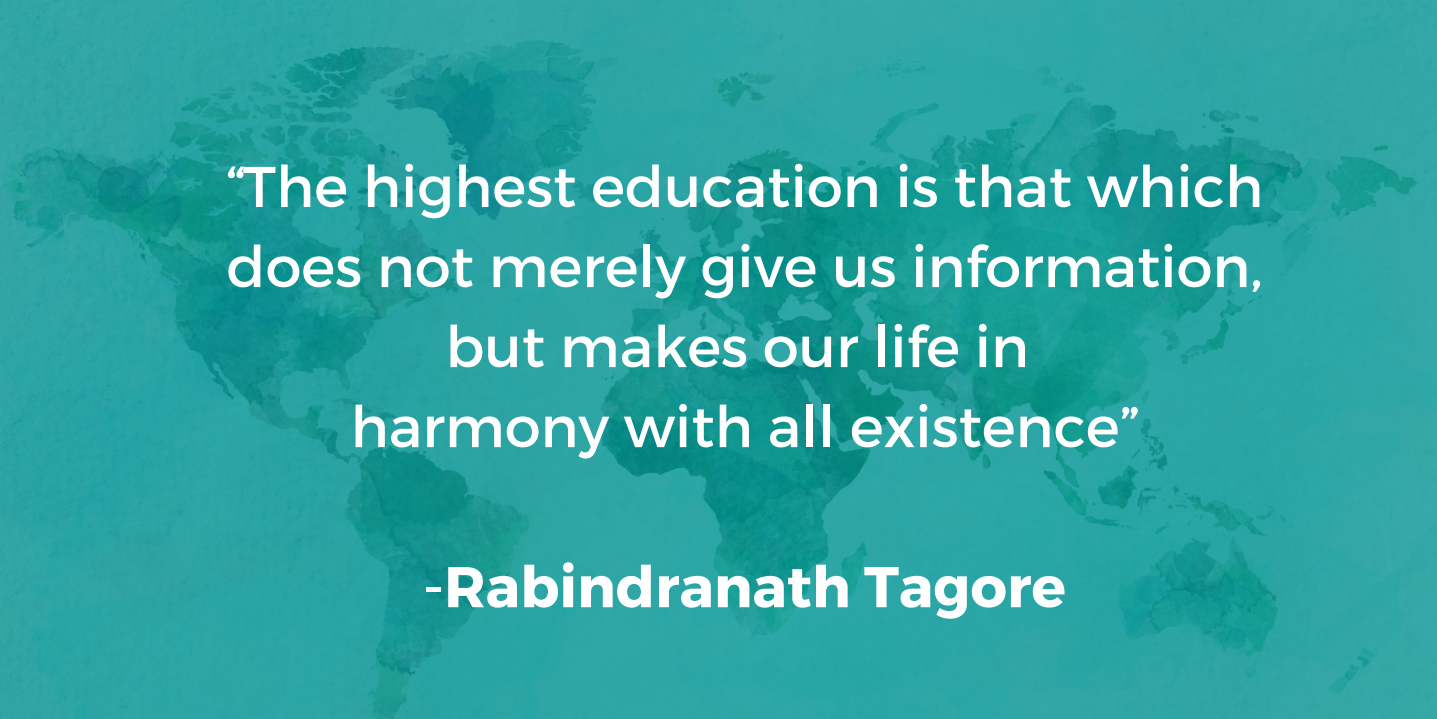
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**Mission:** Our mission is to build a healthier world through collaborative innovation.

**Background:** The International Mental Health Association (IMHA, *eem-ha*) is a 501c3 non-profit based in San Francisco, California. Since forming in 2020, IMHA has collaborated with partners in Bangladesh, Canada, Kenya, Uganda, the United States and Zimbabwe to develop global mental health capacity. Our team is comprised of mental health clinicians, educators, artists, entrepreneurs and students. We value creativity, humility, flexibility and strive to operate through culturally-grounded, trauma-informed lenses.

**Current Focus Areas:** As the time of writing, our geographic foci include Africa (East, West and Southern), North America and South Asia. Our population foci include serving the African diaspora, youth and young adults, students and survivors of coercive control environments. Our programatic themes include the intersections of mental health and; community development, literacy, STEM education, racial justice.



“The highest education is that which  
does not merely give us information,  
but makes our life in  
harmony with all existence”

**-Rabindranath Tagore**



# A MESSAGE FROM THE FELLOWS

*As soon as the pandemic hit in 2020, with the sudden lockdown and school closure during March, like everyone else our primary school students were in panic. While we were working with four different under-resourced community schools as a part of our Fellowship with Teach For Bangladesh we had some similar observations among them – panicking, oversleeping, lacking interest in most of their regular activities. All they asked “will the schools never open again?” “Will our lives never get back to normal again?”*

*We didn’t have answers to all, but we wanted to support. To tackle this we designed a 4 month long mental-well being project “Kind to Your Mind (KYM)” that supported our students from a distance*

*The whole support was dynamically designed with the help from experts at IMHA based on our students’ needs constantly changing along with this pandemic. The need drove us to be in constant communication and make the students feel that they can take charge of their own emotions. We assigned them various activities ranging from creative writing, cooking, painting, journaling, drawing, and crafting.*

*Through this project, our students started independently taking care of their mental well-being by generating activities and trying to adapt to the new normal. The project also helped us build a stronger relationship with our students, their parents, communities, and understand the mindset of how mental well-being is perceived in those areas. There is a lot of room for exploring more and working in this area of high need, especially during this pandemic.*

*We are grateful to the IMHA team, especially Sarah Fardin and Liz D’ Amelio for helping and supporting us throughout the project, the Teach For Bangladesh community, and our students.*

*Rechel Auditi Rema  
& Nadia Afrin Bintu*

# RELEVANT CONTEXT

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## **Country Profile - Bangladesh**

Population: 163 million – world's 8th most populous country

Project Focus Area: Dhaka

Prevalence of Depression among children: 13.4% – 22.9%

Less than 0.5% of government healthcare expenditure is spent on mental health services

0.073 psychiatrists per 100,000–population

## **Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities Relevant to Mental Health**

Strengths; New and upcoming mental health-focused grass-root organizations; interest from the younger generation to learn and address mental health issues.

Challenges; Lack of funding, high levels of stigma and discrimination, lack of mental health education resulting in lower mental health literacy

Opportunities; Political will for change as evidenced by the passing of a new Mental Health Act in 2018, this replaced the former "Lunacy Act" which had been in place since 1912

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

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The Kind to Your Mind Project ran from May–October, 2020 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Created in response to COVID-19, teaching fellows worked with IMHA to design and implement project focused on improving mental wellbeing for school-age children during lockdown.

Fellows began by assessing the mental health of their students through phone interviews, confirming the initial hypothesis that student mental health would suffer during lockdown. Next, fellows designed therapeutic activities involving art (pictured left), writing and play that students could engage with from their homes.

Week-by-week, students engaged with activities and fellows completed weekly check-in calls with students to monitor their process. As schools prepared to open again, the fellows wrapped up the project by completed a post-assessment with students and parents, measuring the impact of the interventions on student mental health.

# GET TO KNOW THE FELLOWS

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Nadia, Nashia, Prity and Rechel are all educators in Bangladesh with a passion for mental health. They met as Teaching Fellows through [Teach For Bangladesh](#) and after noticing their students wellbeing suffer during the first lockdown, decided they wanted to help. Working with IMHA, they designed and implemented the Kind to Your Mind Project over the course of 6 months in 2020.



Nadia Afrin (she/her)



Farzana Hoque Prity (she/hers)



Rechel Auditi Rema (she/hers)

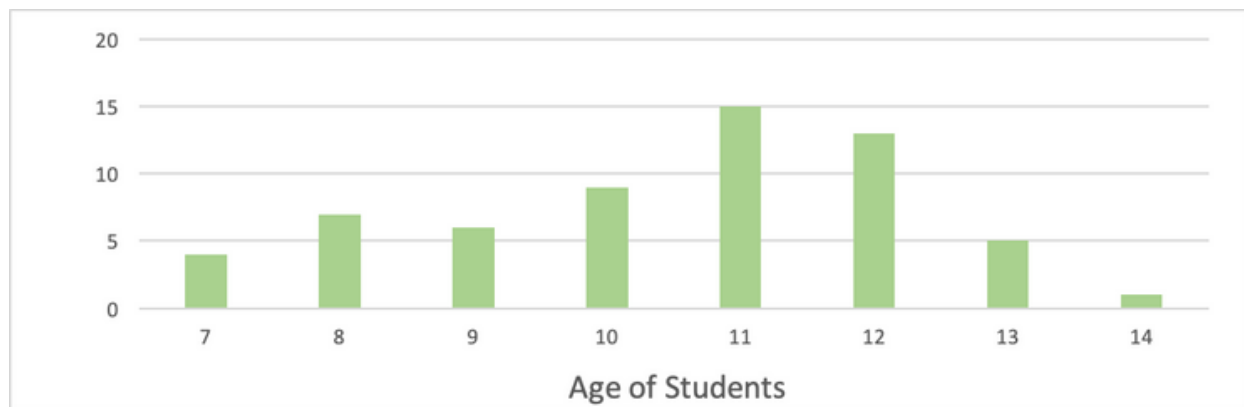


Nashia Tasnim (she/hers)

# PROJECT OUTCOMES

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The Kind to Your Mind Project conducted a post-workshop Student Impact Survey, which garnered 60 responses in total. Students who participated were spread out between Grades 2-5, with the majority (40%) in Grade 3. Only about 13% were in Grade 2, and Grades 4 and 5 made up about 22% and 25% of the participants, respectively. Age was much more varied, ranging from 7 to 14 years old (see graph below).



## Impact of the teachers calling students

Students were asked to rate on a scale of 1-5 how they felt when their teacher called them while their school was closed due to the pandemic, with a 1 indicating that they did “not feel good at all” and a 5 indicating that they “felt very good.” Most students (78%) gave a score of 5. No students marked either 1 or 2, and only one student gave a score of 3. When asked why the students gave their score, several mentioned that the phone call gave them a sense of “connection” during this difficult time when they couldn’t see their friends or play outside. Many were happy that their teacher was inquiring about their wellbeing. Several students also said the phone call made them feel that they were “loved.” One student wrote:

*“Because teacher showed care, [we] could share feelings. Also felt good because of the guidance offered by teacher regarding studies and emotions.”*

## **Routine Setting**

Almost three quarters of the students (73%) answered that they had made a routine during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Eight students said they did not, and another 8 students gave an answer of “maybe.” Those who did make a routine were asked if and how it helped them. While a handful of students said they were “not sure” if the routine helped, the majority listed a variety of ways in which making a routine helped them. Many of the students mentioned being able to finish tasks on time and even having extra time to do activities:

*“Managed time to play, eat sleep and study.  
Could sleep late in the morning and still managed time for all”*

*“She learned new tasks form her mom like making bread and cooking”*

*“Helped me organize my activities, gave me reminder to do things on allocated time.”*

Others noted that their lifestyle was easier when having a routine:

*“Routine makes my life easier and smooth”*

*“It helped me to organize my studies and helped me to arrange my time and activities.”*

## **Journaling/Drawing**

Over half of students had tried journaling, which was more prevalent among those in 4th and 5th Grade. Those in these top two grades were asked if journaling helped with self-reflection, indicated by a scale of 1-5 where 5 indicated journaling helped much with self-reflection and 1 indicating that journaling did not help at all with self-reflection. Around 66% of students gave a score of 5.

Even more students, about 77%, had tried drawing, which was more prevalent among those in 2nd and 3rd Grade. When asked how drawing made them feel, many indicated that drawing gave them positive feelings. In fact, drawing was one of the most common activities that students turned to when upset, with half the students saying that they drew or crafted when they felt upset.



## Mental Wellbeing

Over half of the students (58%) said they felt “very” confident about taking care of their own mental wellbeing. No students indicated that they did not feel confident at all. Almost 95% of parents who were surveyed said that activities other than studying were important for wellbeing. Many parents also noted a difference in their child from before to after the intervention, the majority of which were positive changes. Many parents noted that their children were more obedient, studied more, and became more engaged with activities. A few parents said that they did not observe much of a change in their child. However, of these parents, several indicated that although they did not observe much of a change, they have noticed small changes such as, “tries to sit for study a little bit more than before.” One parent said:

*“Has changed slightly.*

*Previously he used to be outside, and not listen to his mother.*

*These days he doesn't go outside. He is more obedient and gotten mature.*

*Takes shower in time. He didn't do all these this way previously.”*

When asked what more could be done to maintain students’ mental wellbeing, parents gave a variety of answers. However, some of the more common answers were to involve children in more religious activity, involve them in more play, provide healthy meals, have better communication, and read more.

*A piece done  
by one of the  
KYM students.*

*Dhaka, BD*

*Spring 2020*



# KEY LEARNINGS

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**Teachers are capable of providing mental wellbeing interventions via phone to school age children.** Despite having no prior training in mental health, Teaching Fellows were able to effectively deliver interventions and achieve positive outcomes.

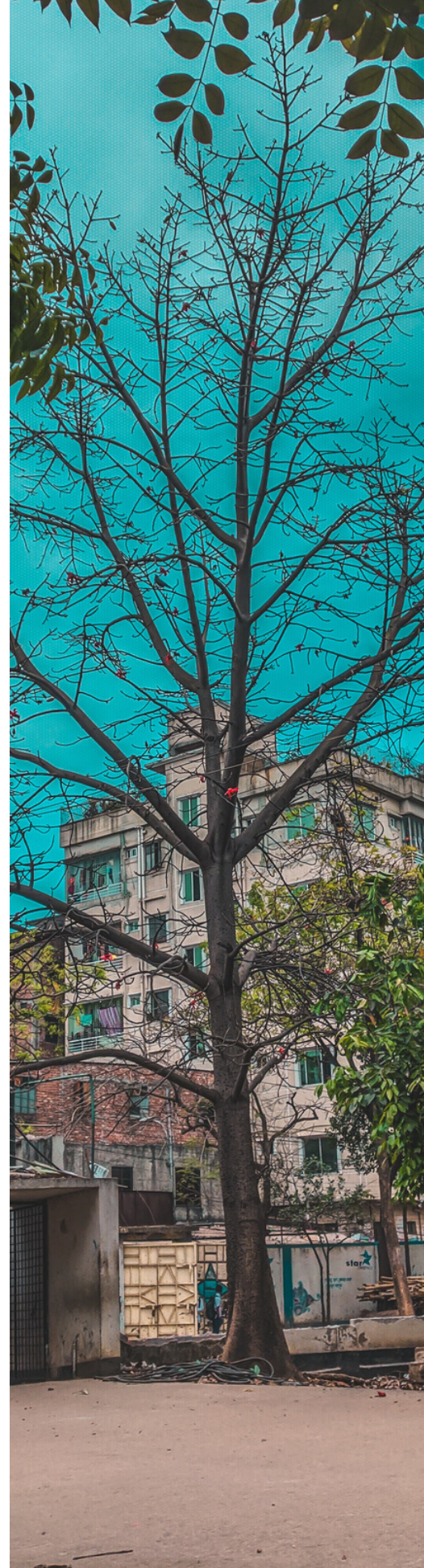
**Involving family members is key.** Throughout implementation, family members provided support to the students and invaluable insights to the Teaching Fellows. Engaging family members in home-based, remote interventions can have a positive impact on the entire household, not just the student.

**Flexibility is paramount.** Outcomes demonstrated that different interventions worked for different students – some connected with arts-based activities, others with writing and journaling. There were some students who found routine setting to be highly impactful, others who did not. There is no one-size-fits-all model to providing remote mental wellbeing interventions to students during a pandemic, flexibility and adaptability are critical.

## NEXT STEPS

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The KYM Project concluded in the Fall of 2020 with a virtual event sharing project process and outcomes with the global mental health and education communities. Due to the incredible work these for Teaching Fellows did and their advocacy efforts, Teach for Bangladesh intends to implement mental health training as part of their on-boarding process in future cohorts.



# TL;DR

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For accessibility purposes, our reports include a TL;DR "too long, didn't read" section that summarizes this report for readers who have visual, attention-related or other reading differences.

**About the Kind to Your Mind Project:** The Kind to Your Mind Project ran from May–October, 2020 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Created in response to COVID-19, teaching fellows worked with IMHA to design and implement project focused on improving mental wellbeing for school-age children during lockdown. Throughout the project, teachers called students for regular check-ins and students engaged in journaling, drawing and routine setting activities.

**Project Outcomes:** Students and their families reported positive behavior changes and an increase in positive feelings after completing activities such as drawing and journaling. Parents in particular reported observing an increase in student engagement in home activities.

**Key Learnings:** Teachers are capable of providing mental wellbeing interventions via phone to school age children. Despite having no prior training in mental health, Teaching Fellows were able to effectively deliver interventions and achieve positive outcomes.

Involving family members is key. Throughout implementation, family members provided support to the students and invaluable insights to the Teaching Fellows. Engaging family members in home-based, remote interventions can have a positive impact on the entire household, not just the student.

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**Next Steps:** Due to the incredible work these for Teaching Fellows did and their advocacy efforts, Teach for Bangladesh intends to implement mental health training as part of their on-boarding process in future cohorts.