From the slums to Harvard

Sidrah Roghay
Karachi

Seven years ago, Anum Fatima became the first girl in her family to complete her matriculation. Today she is busy packing her bags for Harvard.

For the 23-year-old, admission to a school run by The Citizen Foundation changed her life. After completing her matriculation, she was encouraged to join the Institute of Business Management (IoBM) and later apply for a summer program to Harvard University.

She lives in Ismail Jhokio Goth, a slum near Steel Town. Her father is a driver at a private company. If the not-for-profit organization had not paid her university tuition fee, a degree at a private-sector institute would have been a distant dream.

So every morning when Fatima changed three buses to university and back, she thanked the Almighty for her blessings. “Yes my university mates had fancy cars and relatively easy lives, but if I was ungrateful, God would get angry,” she says.

She remembers how hard her initial days were. “All the lectures were in English, while I had always studied in the Urdu medium, but my teachers from TCF were very helpful”

Every day, after school, Fatima would go to the TCF head office. There, teachers helped her out with her English and translated lessons for her. “I was scared when I first went to university as the institute was known for its English-speaking crowd. I did not know what to expect.”

In the end, things turned out well for her; perhaps because she never tried to hide her origins. “I made my email account for the first time after I entered university. A friend helped create it in the university computer lab. To this day, we do not have an internet connection at home.”

Fatima has completed her BBA in Human Resource. Now she is enrolled in an MBA program.

When the student was accepted by Harvard, she was overjoyed and ran to her father to break the news. Her father was a simple man and did not know what Harvard was. “When he went to work that day, he asked his boss, who told him what a tremendous achievement it was,” she laughs.

Fatima is ambitious. She has a goal planned out for her life. “I want to be the CEO of a leading company, but before that I want to spend a few years at TCF to pay them back for all they have done for me.”