



Disabled Malaysian entrepreneur learns how to expand homemade biscuit and mobile spa businesses online through RISE programme

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Hazellina is able to earn more after learning the ropes of social media and promoting her business online. — Picture courtesy of RISE

PETALING JAYA, May 21 — A partially deaf Malaysian entrepreneur Hazellina Ismail struggled to keep her businesses afloat during the first movement control order.

And while many took to social media to promote their business amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Hazellina was not equipped with business and sales knowledge, and could not promote her homemade biscuit business online.

This led her to only earn an average of RM100 a month for the past year and she struggled to pay for expenses such as her phone bills and rental.

Having had the experience of baking and learning through YouTube videos, Hazellina, 53, makes a variety of cookies such as florentine cookies, jam tarts, almond cookies and even burnt cheesecake.

She has also found it difficult to talk to her customers as her hearing became worse three years ago resulting in her having to ask customers to repeat their orders.

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However, she is unable to earn an income from this now because of ongoing travel restrictions.



“Luckily, I have four children - all who are working and would sometimes cash in money to me whenever I was in need.



“I also had some savings so that helped whenever I was low in cash, but how long was I going to depend on my savings?” she told *Malay Mail*.

Expanding her business through RISE programme

After joining the Reach Independence and Sustainable Entrepreneurship (RISE) programme, Hazellina now earns an average of RM2,000 a month — 10 times more than what she used to earn before joining the programme.

RISE is a six-month mentoring programme, a partnership between Maybank Group’s corporate responsibility arm Maybank Foundation and social enterprise People Systems Consultancy (PSC) designed to support disadvantaged communities.

The programme was established in 2014 and has its centres across Asean countries such as Indonesia and Philippines.

Participants are mostly People With Disabilities (PWDs) in three categories: motor impairment (wheelchair users), hearing or visual disability while the rest consist of disadvantaged communities such as single mothers.

Participants of the programme must qualify for the requirements such as passing an interview round, be aged 18 and above, physically disabled with a sound mind, belong to the B40 group, have an interest to start a business and intend to change their life for the better.

Hazellina was able to learn new skills such as opening up social media accounts to promote her online biscuits business after being in her third month of the RISE programme.

“I’ve not only learned skills such as content writing on social media to promote products but I’ve also learned to face rejection from customers and learn to stand strong and find other ways to promote my biscuit and massage business online.



sell my cakes and cookies, and aiming to sell face serum in the future.”

She also aims to promote her biscuit business via e-commerce platform Shopee and plans to open a confinement centre for mothers who need postpartum care.

Maybank Foundation chief executive officer Shahril Azuar Jimin said that many of the RISE participants like Hazellina initially lacked effective economic empowerment programmes for them to improve their financial literacy skills.

The programme, in return, equips participants with entrepreneurial skills to kickstart or improve their business skills.

“The marginalised communities, especially the PWDs, are left behind as they either do not have their own personal savings because of their low income or have low employment participation.

“With the current travel restrictions, they also face challenges such as operating their businesses on a face-to-face basis.

“Hence, many became depressed because their incomes were badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.”

Some of the modules taught to them were business management skills such as setting financial goals and accounting, and technical skills such as digital marketing and communication.

Initially, many of the participants were unfamiliar with using applications such as Zoom, and so participants were mentored to utilise social media and e-commerce platforms to promote their products.

PSC executive director Raymond Gabriel added that one of the modules performed in RISE was reengineering participants' mindset and injecting positive opportunities.

“Many of the participants come from difficult backgrounds, and this module Flip Technology helps participants shift their mindset from negative to positive.

“Other skills that the trainers need to be equipped with when teaching PWDs are strong communication skills, and a good



business and current news to come up with practical solutions and relevant business advice for participants,” he said.



Raymond added that it was important for the public to support businesses of PWDs by recommending to friends and family and even buying their products.



The RISE programme has trained a total of 11,615 participants, with 9,325 of them coming from the PWD community.

To date, one of the biggest successes of the programme was recording an average income increase of 384.75 per cent among its top 40 per cent of participants, while the average income increase of all participants was 149.66 per cent.

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