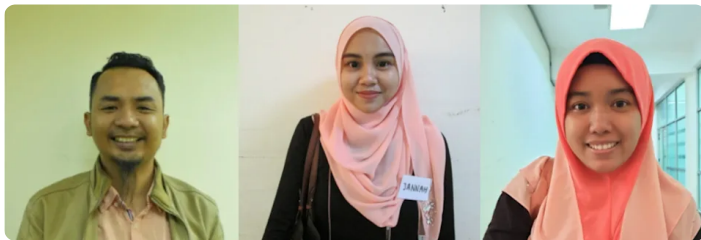


Malaysian social enterprise teaches the needy how to be entrepreneurs despite Covid-19 pandemic

Mark Ryan Raj

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Badzrol, Nurul and Sarifah are just a few of the many successful participants from People Systems Consultancy's programmes. — Pictures courtesy of People Systems Consultancy

PETALING JAYA, April 14 — Raising four kids is a challenging feat, to say the least.

But doing it on your own, while suffering from thyroid cancer, seems nearly impossible.

Yet from such a challenging experience, single mom Sarifah Idris chanced upon a special vegetable-based noodle recipe which would eventually become her prized business model — all thanks to her children's picky eating habits.

“My kids and I prefer eating noodles over rice. But I can't eat the noodles sold outside because it has boric acid in it and I can't eat that because of the cancer,” said Sarifah in an interview with *Malay Mail*.

“So, I made my own noodles. But the idea to add veggies was because none of my kids like eating vegetables, so I just blended some vegetable extract into the noodle batter.

“It was actually just a healthy veggie noodle for my kids and me. Then I decided to sell it to other cancer patients as well because it's a healthy alternative.”

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Sarifah said that she is currently pushing the hand sanitiser sales since the MCO has affected her noodle distribution. — Picture courtesy of People Systems Consultancy

Thanks to its nutritious base and niche clientele, Sarifah's "Q Noodles" or "Q Mee" have surpassed her other business, a nasi lemak stall, as her primary source of income.

Marketing her unique veggie-noodles with the skills she acquired from People Systems Consultancy's (PSC) entrepreneurship and financial literacy programmes enabled Sarifah to triple her monthly income.

PSC is a Malaysian social enterprise that aims to equalise financial capacity for marginalised communities, with the hopes of enabling them to have better livelihoods and teams up with welfare departments and NGOs to identify participants — which is how Sarifah and other participants get selected.

Thanks to the guidance and tutelage of the mentors at PSC, Sarifah added that even with the movement control order (MCO) in effect, she still manages to maintain her earnings despite the decline in noodle sales.

Sarifah now sells hand sanitisers to make up for her losses, with plans to open up her own frozen goods store in the future if noodle sales continue to do well.

Turning a side project into a business



Nurul said that the baby beds and shoes started out as just mini-projects to pass the time when she home from work. — Picture courtesy of People Systems Consultancy

Similar to Sarifah, mother-of-two Nurul Jannah also found her “speciality product” after she received rave reviews for her hand-made baby beds and shoes from her friends online.

“In 2014, I had dengue while I was pregnant, so my husband and I decided that I should stop working to stay home and rest,” said Nurul.

“Initially I just made some baby shoes for my two kids and a baby bed for my cousin. When I uploaded pictures of it onto social media and got great responses.

“People were even placing orders. So I thought since I’m at home and not doing anything, maybe this could be a source of income for my family.”

Nurul added that her previous educational background in business management, coupled with the tips and advice she picked up from her time at PSC’s programmes, allowed her to use and sharpen her skills to make a profitable business out of her cosy creations.



A look at some of Nurul's creations. — Pictures courtesy of People Systems Consultancy

And the baby beds really took off as well with orders rising from around five sets a month to a minimum of 45 sets a



to boost the baby bed sales,” said Nurul.



“Now it’s all about trying to improve production because I make all of the baby beds by myself.”



Nurul explained that she currently supplies her baby beds to three baby stores around Kuala Lumpur and sells them on [social media](#) as well, with hopes to supply to more shops in the future if demand continues to increase.

Baking their way to success

Another PSC success story, home baker Badzrol Affandi Jamaludin ditched his technical sales job to pursue a passion that is closer to home.



Badzrol and his family run the bakery from their home in Rawang. — Pictures courtesy of People Systems Consultancy

“My wife used to sell baking goods like regular pastries and biscuits,” said Badzrol.

“She got a lot of good response from people and the orders were piling in. I was helping her to make production time but I was still working at the time.

“So I decided to quit and put more focus on our pastry business and help take care of our five kids as well. It turned out to be a good bonding experience for us too because the kids always want to help out, even the little ones.”

Just as he took the plunge to push their homerun bakery, called “@Roticookie_kruncie” on social media based in Rawang, Badzrol and his family hit a stumbling block as sales gradually decreased.

“I have to say thank you to the people at PSC, they gave me a lot of tips and kept following up with me to see how our



and snacks including chicken floss buns, pizza buns, mini burgers and a selection of bread and pastries.



Badzrol also said that they have started to sell bread loaves to local stores and supermarkets near his home, helping to make up for the Gardenia bread shortage during the MCO and increasing their bakery's business opportunities in the process as well.



Why help?

Gabriel felt that there was something useful to come from his tough times in business. — Picture courtesy of People Systems Consultancy

Raymond Gabriel, the co-founder and executive director of PSC, said that the whole reason for establishing the social enterprise back in 2006 with partner Rohan Marshall was because of the hardships they faced when they were entering the business world.

"I started in business very young around 1997 during the recession period and when you're too nice sometimes you can get cheated or scammed by people. It was very tough for me," said Gabriel.

"When I went through those things, I was thinking about why it was all happening to me. What's the purpose?"

"Through that, I discovered that it was to help other people. To look at how I could work my way out of it and share that with others who are facing difficulties."

Gabriel started out by volunteering at local NGOs and organisations to share his experiences and tips with underprivileged communities, which later grew into a training programme.

He explained that when he and Rohan formed PSC, they did so with the hope of not only educating underprivileged communities such as the hardcore poor and refugees, but also help them grow and run their businesses.

"We saw a need to bring hope and a practical way of earning and growing income for these group of people," said Gabriel.

"Some of them come from family's which have been poor for generations and we felt like we could help them out of that



to generate their own income.”

Gabriel also mentioned that the financial training focuses on more practical teachings instead of theoretical ones. — Picture courtesy of People Systems Consultancy

He added that PSC partners with various local organisations and corporations to fund and look for participants to attend their training programmes.

PSC teams up with government agencies, NGOs and welfare departments to identify people that could benefit from their programmes and gets large corporations such as Maybank to fund said programmes for the participants as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

The programmes include courses and training based on Gabriel’s book in financial literacy in aspects such as “technopreneurship”, business development and sustainability and money intelligence and management — and it’s even available for children as well.

Gabriel added that PSC has currently helped over 20,000 people in the Asean region, with a remarkable 70 per cent

success rate, as successful participants have been able to

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increase their incomes by 100 to 400 per cent on average.

Its head office is located in Damansara, with other offices

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