

**STAR**  
FOUNDATION  
"On Humanitarian Grounds"

# Powering change in vulnerable communities

Foundation and partners seeing tangible impact from four projects that serve to improve lives and environment

AS MALAYSIANS grapple with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, social change-makers have been working hard to mitigate challenges faced by vulnerable groups.

Last year, Star Foundation partnered with four change-makers under its inaugural Star Social Impact Grant (SSIG).

Each received a RM50,000 grant to carry out impact-driven projects to improve lives and the environment.

The recipients were Vision to Transform, Hopes Malaysia, Selangor and Federal Territory Association for The Mentally Handicapped (SAMH) and Pertubuhan Pembangunan Wanita Tamarai Pulau Pinang.

While the projects serve different communities, all of them share one thing in common: to empower beneficiaries with knowledge and opportunities to improve their livelihoods.

Star Foundation caught up with the four non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to learn more about their projects' progress so far.

## Entrepreneurship training

Vision To Transform (V2T) secretary Christine Chan said the SSIG played a major role in rolling out V2T's six-month economic recovery programme to help vulnerable communities.

Currently in the third month of the project, the 62 beneficiaries have undergone a series of online entrepreneurship courses and are receiving continuous support from the V2T team as they put their acquired knowledge into running micro businesses.

"Thanks to the grant from Star Foundation, beneficiaries have picked up digital and marketing skills to ride the digital economy. This will not only help them survive the current situation but also thrive in the long term," she said.

"Departing from the traditional business model, the empowered small-business owners are now more confident in expanding their business by tapping into digital services," Chan added.

The beneficiaries are also guided by mentors and will soon be introduced to a designated web app for continuous learning.

Noor Hidayalina Aliyas, 39, who owns a fermented fish products business and is one of the project beneficiaries, said the course was easy to understand and she was now able to be more systematic and was digitally informed in handling her business.

"Before this, I had no confidence in penetrating digital platforms, let alone do live sales on ecommerce platforms."

"Thanks to the programme, I am now able to spot loopholes in financial management and marketing strategies, and have also seen an increase in sales," she said.

Hidayalina hopes the programme will be continued to deliver greater impact.

## Food security

Promoting food access for better health and well-being, Hopes Malaysia is using the SSIG for its 12-month "Rural Crop Diversification via Vermiculture Project".

Hopes Malaysia co-founder June Wong said that since January, 33 households in Kota Belud, Sabah, have benefitted from the project.

"Without this grant, families would be struggling with food insecurity, having little to no knowledge nor tools needed for



Elinah explaining the preparation for worm breeding during a workshop in Kota Belud, Sabah. Photo courtesy of Hopes Malaysia



Ammar spraying wood vinegar fertiliser on brinjal plants in SAMH's farm. Photo courtesy of SAMH

sustainable livelihoods.

"Through this project, our farmhands can now work to better their families' future while conserving the environment," she added.

The beneficiaries learnt to use African Night Crawler worms to help improve soil aeration and fertility, leading to crop diversification. This process also turns food waste into quality organic compost or fertiliser.

According to Wong, over 100kg of better quality crops such as mustard, eggplants, luffa and long beans had been sold through Hopes' Gerai Tamu Kita platform, allowing the households to earn supplemental income to the regular physical sales.

At the same time, the rural farmers have generated some 10kg to 20kg of vermicompost fertiliser for their farm each month, which eliminates the role of synthetic fertiliser.

This helps to improve land soil quality and reduce waterway pollution.

Reaping the benefits from vermicomposting, farmer Elinah Pitah, 45, shared that she could now earn

additional income by selling her surplus harvest to neighbours.

"Through the project, not only are the crops harvested healthier and bigger in size, they also grow faster than usual."

"Today, I no longer worry about food sufficiency if a crisis strikes. The quantity and diversity of crops from the revitalised soil allow me to practise sustainable farming and enjoy a better life," she explained.

## Improved well-being

SAMH is another change-maker who shares Star Foundation's commitment to community development.

SAMH manager Krishnaveni Vellayatham said the grant helped 50 intellectually disabled youths at its centres in Klang, Brickfields and Jinjang through a farming project.

At the centres, students are taught how to sow, water, care for and harvest crops such as chillies, brinjal, mustard, oyster mushrooms, coriander and spinach.

"The harvested crops are used in

the students' lunch and the surplus is sold to the parents and community. This has indirectly introduced them to a healthy diet.

"Over the past three months, we have observed a better mood and improved concentration among the beneficiaries, which proves farming raises the well-being of the intellectually disabled," she said.

Trainees will also stand a brighter chance of securing jobs with stable incomes in the farming sector though their acquired skills.

Ammar Muzakkir, 23, who is a special-needs trainee at SAMH, expressed his joy at being able to grow crops.

"Since young, I have liked farming because I get to learn about different types of vegetables. I love harvesting them," he said while spraying wood vinegar fertiliser on the plants.

## Sewing for the future

Meanwhile, Pertubuhan Pembangunan Wanita Tamarai Pulau Pinang (Tamarai) uses the

## Star Social Impact Grant

Supports impact-driven projects that help to better the lives of local communities in Malaysia.

Selected NGOs and social enterprises will receive up to RM50,000 grant for their social project.

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Application closes on April 17, 2022

An initiative by: **STAR** FOUNDATION  
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grant to train women from B40 and marginalised communities in sewing and fashion, helping them to work towards self-sufficiency.

"Initially, the beneficiaries were taught sewing fundamentals covering usage and maintenance of sewing machines since their livelihoods as seamstresses would depend on it."

"In subsequent classes, they will be taught how to cut fabric, fit and prepare garments as well as coordinate accessories like bags and masks," said Tamarai chairperson K.S. Pakyalakshmi Subramanian.

Instead of using dressmaker's mannequins, trainees will make bespoke garments for their family members or neighbours.

"This allows them to experience real sewing challenges and see the direct impact," said Pakyalakshmi.

Tamarai trainee and single mother Catherine Arlandu Lawrence, 40, said "I thank the NGO for providing us with training, and Star Foundation for funding the programme. This will help us to work from home and earn a living as well as become financially independent."

"As the lessons have just started, we have a long way to go, but I am excited to learn more and craft a better life for my family."

"Based on Tamarai's track record of empowering marginalised communities for almost a decade, I am confident that I'll be successful like the previous trainees," she said.

## Looking ahead

After a successful inaugural grant cycle last year and perceiving the tangible impact from the four funded projects, Star Foundation is once again welcoming NGOs and social enterprises to apply for SSIG to carry out impact-driven and sustainable social projects.

Change-makers with project ideas that are aligned with the foundation's five focus areas are encouraged to submit their proposals and relevant supporting documents via [bit.ly/starsig](https://bit.ly/starsig).

Submissions close on April 17.

Established in 2004, Star Foundation is the charitable arm of Star Media Group, which aims to deliver meaningful initiatives with lasting outcomes to diverse groups of beneficiaries.

For more information on Star Foundation's work with the various communities, go to [starfoundation.com.my](https://starfoundation.com.my)