

BROUGHT TO YOU
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GENEROUS AMBITIONS

Social enterprise has led Ong Kay Kay and her team to international success, writes
Aneeta Sundararaj

THE youngest sibling in any family may recognise the many emotions when receiving hand-me-downs. Be it a frayed much-loved teddy bear, worn out clothes or half-broken toys, it's as though the eldest, by accident of birth, is entitled to new stuff... and the youngest is expected to settle for less-than-perfect stuff.

This wasn't the case with Ong Kay Kay. The youngest of three children says: "When I got a hand-me-down, I felt it was something new. It's still useful and exciting. The item got my attention."

As her story unfolds, Kay Kay's positive persona has had such an impact on her life that it's no surprise that she is today part of a team that emerged as one of the six winning ones in a global programme known as the Young Social Enterprise (YSE) 2016 programme by Singapore International Foundation.

The team will receive seed funding of up to RM60,000 to help its cause. It was chosen based on the impact, scalability and sustainability of their social enterprise and took part in an eight-month, cross-cultural learning journey through mentorship, study visits and a Pitching For Change finale event.

VOLUNTARILY GENEROUS

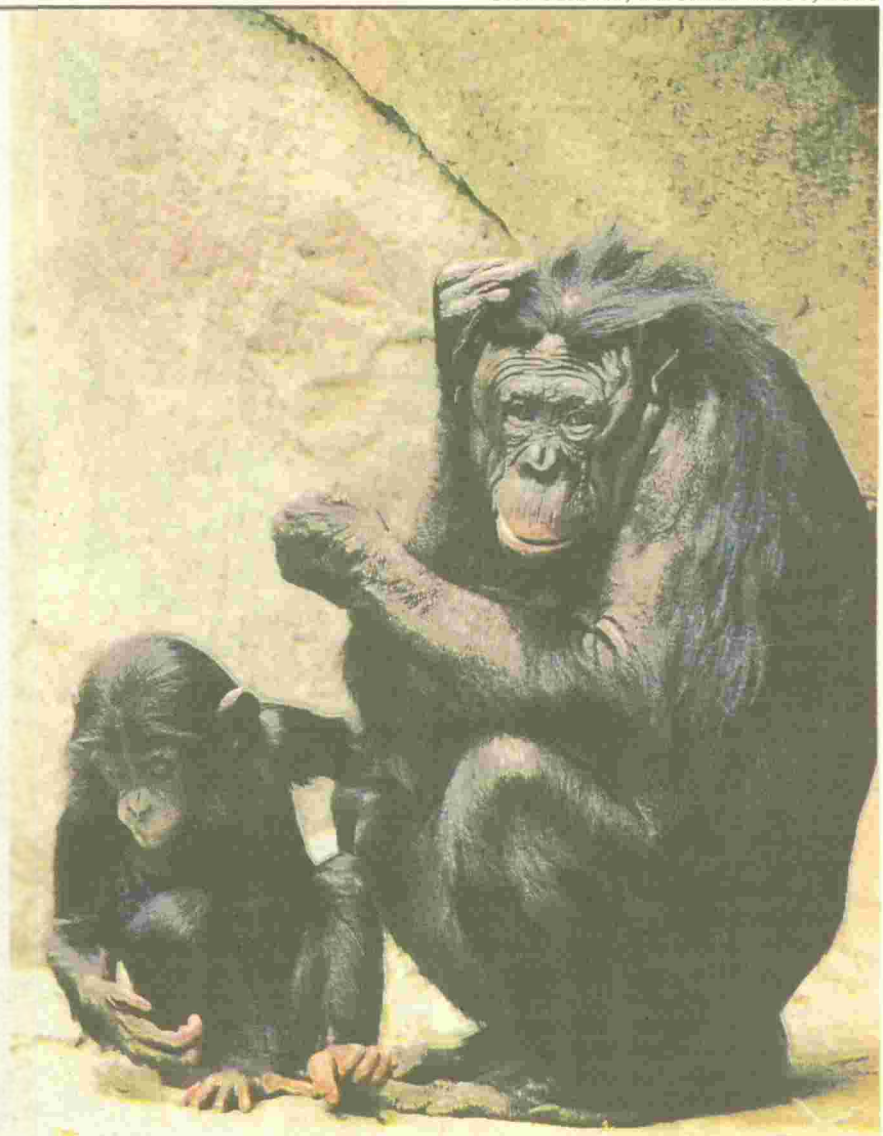
The social enterprise that Kay Kay is part of is called BeBonobo. Break the word into Be-Bonobo and you will understand that Kay Kay is inviting you to be like a bonobo, the great ape that's most closely related to the chimpanzee. The bonobo lives primarily in the rainforests of central Democratic Republic of Congo.

Whipping out her phone, she plays a video on YouTube. In it, when one bonobo is let into the enclosure with food placed on the ground, within seconds it unlocks the cage so that another bonobo can come and share its food. Pointing out the obvious, she explains that this voluntarily generosity is what sets the bonobo apart from all other animals. Also, humans are regarded as being 'in between' the chimpanzee and the bonobo — we have that competitive and fighting spirit of the chimpanzee, but the empathy of the bonobo.

It made sense that when the time came for Kay Kay and her team to choose a name for their social enterprise, the bonobo would feature in it. Founded with her partners, Jasur Hasanov and Madyan Aziz Hasan Malfi, BeBonobo focuses on building a free online network that connects individuals and businesses in the Klang Valley to list and search for items they may discard or need respectively. It seeks to contribute to a greener, more sustainable environment through responsible consumption while reducing wastage.

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

The key to understanding how all this works is in the words "responsible consumption". Take something as simple as a used book. If you send it for recycling, it's just paper and worth a few sen. But someone may want this book and you can give it to them. The philosophy of



The bonobo is known for its generosity.

YOUNG SOCIAL ENTERPRISE 2017

The Singapore International Foundation aims to build enduring relationships between Singaporeans and world communities, and harness these friendships to enrich lives and effect positive change. Malaysian youths can apply for the 2017 edition of YSE as applications are now open at www.sif.org.sg. Applicants should be aged 18-30 and have a viable business proposition to address a social issue. Submit your online application by Dec 18, 2016.

BeBonobo then, is to receive this book and pass it along to the person who wants it.

To demonstrate the inner workings of the website, Kay Kay uses an actual item posted on the site — a hair straightener. The user will post an image of this item and choose to give it for Free or a Tree. With Tree, the buyer pays RM12 and a portion of that money will go towards planting a tree. Once the Tree option has been picked 1,000 times, BeBonobo will engage with its partners in India, an NGO named Say Trees, to carry out a tree-planting exercise. The reason they chose Say Trees is because it is consistent and costs are fixed. These issues are crucial to a growing concern like BeBonobo.

PURSuing SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Well before her foray into social enterprise, the pretty 27-year-old completed a degree in the cultivation of aquatic organisms. Delving further into the business of aquatic nutrition, she

explains: "I learnt about our food's food. What food is our food eating?"

However, disillusionment set in when she understood that many researches are also manipulated by business and money. After she finished her MBA, she decided that it was time to pursue what she loves, social enterprise.

It began by helping a friend with his desire to provide a service called "suspended meal" (someone pays for a meal in advance for someone who may ask for it later).

The main lesson she learnt was that when something goes wrong, it's usually a management problem. "The person leading project needs to be there all the time rather than create an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) and expect everyone to follow."

Compiling all the lessons she's learnt thus far, Kay Kay feels confident enough to devote all her time to managing and growing BeBonobo. Although it's less than a year old, there are at least 300 items listed on the website.

During what she calls the "incubation period", and as one of many teams in the YSE 2016 programme, she's had access to key players in the social entrepreneurship scene such as Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC), Scope Group, Maybank, AirAsia Foundation and McKinsey & Company.

This allowed the BeBonobo team to tap into and network with a wide range of experts in various industries from legal and finance to investments and human resources.

In conclusion, Kay Kay's message is simple: "People are already aware (of all the issues concerning the environment). We're trying to elevate that awareness. When you want to throw something out, think of reusing it first before recycling or throwing it away where it ends up in a landfill," she says.