

pulse **people**

Satin dreams

A young woman sets out to share her skills and resources with orphans and changes their lives, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

THE dinner party is in full swing at the luxurious banquet hall in a swanky hotel in the city. There is much merriment and gaiety.

Then, the doors open and three young women walk in. Dressed in identical baggy baju kurung, they keep their heads bowed and make their way to the stage to perform a song and dance. Seeing them, someone in the audience says softly: "Ah! Here come those girls from the rumah anak yatim (orphanage). Poor things."

This remark irks Nur Farella Nazlin Najib. Identifying where someone comes from based on their attire alone and feeling sorry for them.

"Clothes," explains the young entrepreneur, "tell so much about you."

The 21-year-old then decided to embark on a project to empower these young women. The Satirical Satin Project, it is a social initiative by youth for youth which focuses on developing talents to specifically produce confident and empowered young individuals.

PONDERING CLOTHES

The idea began to take root by chance, says the bubbly young woman. She was having a conversation with her uncle about the plight of many young people today. Sharing her thoughts, she says: "I couldn't relate to others. I wanted to know why the world seems to not move for certain people. They

could do so much more with their lives. Why don't they?"

By the time she had pondered over this, Farella had already learnt something about herself — and the power that comes with dressing in a proper manner. A second-year law student at a local university, she used to dress in stark shades like black and white.

"I was against convention and I hated following the crowd," she explains. Then, one day last year, she decided to add colour to her wardrobe and something happened. With a broad smile, she says: "I realised I could blend in more. People became friendlier."

As she runs her fingers through her long hair, Farella adds: "Jumping onto the bandwagon isn't always bad. You can develop yourself better and get the kind of influence you need. People (including your peers) will support you in your projects."

After attending events at KL Fashion Week and a conversation with her mother, the concept for Satirical Satin began to take shape.

"My mum collects shopping coupons," Farella explains. "She told me to share them with my friends. I don't want to simply give them to people. Today, many kids are just given things. They have to stop somewhere. So I decided to start a project and help these kids."

TOTALLY UNPREPARED

The children she refers to are the ones she met while doing volunteer work at orphanages. "At the homes," says Farella, "the children are made to wear specific stuff. At 18, they leave the home totally unprepared. They don't know how to appear professional and lack the skills on how to behave. All they know is how to cook or to serve a customer in a restaurant."

When she tried to engage with these girls, she came across another stumbling block — many of the girls assumed that the clothes Farella wore cost a lot of money and they wouldn't be able to match her financially. Aghast, she looks down at what she's wearing at that moment — black blouse, coral-coloured jeans and a jacket and confides: "These were all from Bundle (thrift store)." Pursing her lips, she adds: "The saddest part is that they feel they don't deserve it. They'll say things like *Tak layak pakaimacam kakak* (I don't deserve to look like you)"

Even though Farella decided that she would teach these girls to mix and match their clothes, she was aware that this skill alone wouldn't take them very far. To improve their long-term prospects, they would need to develop more skills.

THE FASHION WORLD

As such, three 17-year-old girls from Rumah Kasih Harmoni Paya Jaras — Nurul Haizatul Ardiella Abdullah (Diella), Siti Nursyaswani RamLee and Intan Ruzana Abdul Rahman (Zana) — were chosen to take part in the Satirical Satin Project that commenced on Nov 21 last year.

For one month, they were exposed to five aspects of the fashion world: Sewing, design, communication, internship and motivational talks. The aim of this project was threefold: To promote youth social and



The project is focused on empowering youth and developing artistic skills.

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Farella

economic empowerment, civic engagement through volunteerism and sustainable environment through sustainable fashion.

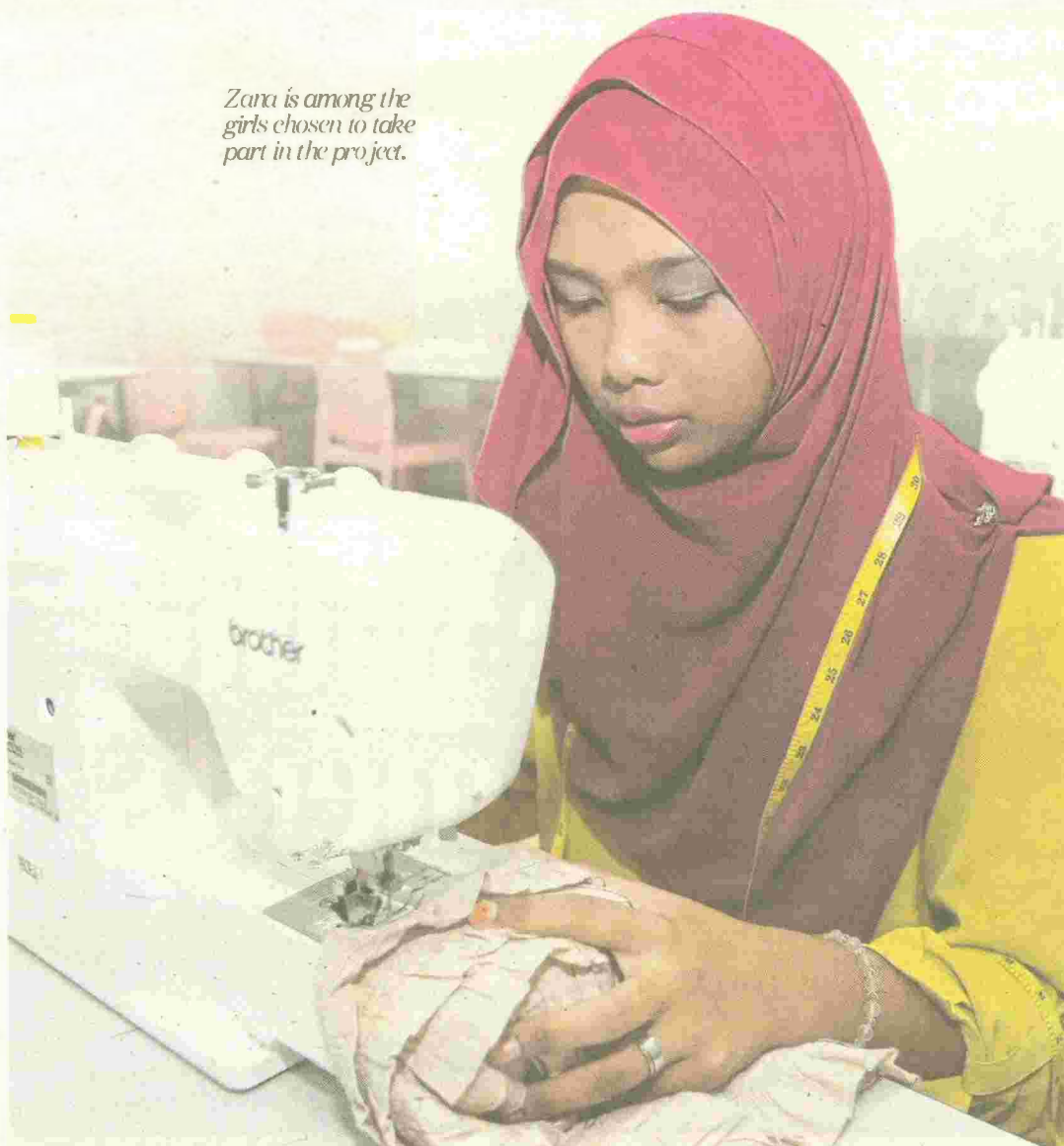
Even before she began, Farella faced many obstacles. For one, there was no funding. One organisation told her not to waste her time and money helping these girls. Meanwhile, another told her to return in a year when the project was up and running. Many were more interested in giving money to causes that were already established such as those that fed the homeless.

She asks, with despair in her voice: "What's the point of cooking for the homeless when the homeless can't cook for themselves tomorrow?" Throwing her hands up in the air, she retorts: "How was I supposed to start when I didn't have the funding?"

Still, the young woman persevered and found a few business partners to work with. The Satirical Satin Project is affiliated with the Selangor Council for Rehabilitation and Superheroes Movement.

iM4U, a Government platform, has provided the space where Farella can

Zana is among the girls chosen to take part in the project.



people pulse

her, she is able say: "Jangan dengar cerita orang. Bukan yang dia orang nak tolong. Mengutuk kita saja (There's no need to listen to other people's stories. It's not as though they're going to help. They're only going to criticise us.)"

Hearing such confidence in the three girls, Farella is comforted. As they prepare for the final phase of the Satirical Satin Project, a fashion show to showcase the outfits the girls have transformed or created, she feels confident about continuing with this project. For this year, she'd like to bring forward this project and start it in August so that the clothes can be made in time for KL Fashion Week.

All of this, however, doesn't compare with her knowing that she's helped brighten the future of these girls by sharing her skills and resources with them.

(From left) Nurul Haizatul Ardiella (Diella), Intan Ruzana (Zana), Nur Farella and Siti Nursyaswani.

conduct her sewing classes. Three sewing machines are on loan from Brothers International. The fabric and clothes are sourced from discarded materials and thrift shops while well-known designers and stylists have come forward to share their knowledge and skills with the girls.

Other than transforming dowdy outfits into edgier ones, what has perhaps been more valuable for the girls are the personal lessons they've learnt. With new grooming techniques and the opportunity to garner internships in fashion houses, their confidence has risen manifold.

Shyly, Zana shares: "Orang tak ejek saya (People don't tease me.)" The ambitious one among them, Diella, has the confidence to state that she yearns to succeed in both the fashion and music industry. Grateful for the motivation that Farella has given

