

**FEATURE**

# Ensuring a **HEALTHY** virtual life

As children spend more time online parents need to become aware of their cyber wellness

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**A**ccessibility to information has become limitless through the power of the Internet. On the other hand it has also created a dire need to educate children on Cyber Wellness (CW). CW refers to the positive well-being of people using the Internet where it involves an understanding of online behaviour and awareness on how to protect oneself while in cyberspace.

Seeing the needs of CW, Yayasan Generasi Gemilang (GG) answered the call and became one of the pioneers to introduce CW in Malaysia. The aim of CW is to educate students to be positive and responsible digital users when navigating the cyberspace and to demonstrate respect for themselves and for others. At the same time, it wants to equip adults with the appropriate skills and knowledge to mentor children in the area of digital citizenship.

In an interview with *Top Class*, GG director of services Nick Foong, he talks about the CW programmes organised by the foundation, the challenges and the importance of parents playing a role in their children's wellbeing in cyberspace activities.

**Top Class: As GG sees the need and importance of CW, could you share what activities/activities/seminars the foundation has been conducting to educate students on cyber wellness?**

**Nick Foong:** We run a programme called CLUTCH (Changing Lives Using Truth, Character and Hope) where it mentors and encourages students to be positive online users and have a balanced lifestyle consisting of both online and offline activities.

The programme helps them understand how they can be shaped by developments in the cyber world and discuss topics including cyber bullying, social networking, gaming and pornography. It is designed in a way to encourage youth to be responsible users and challenge them to be a positive influence online and offline.

We strongly believe CW it is not just about internet security but to be able to live in a balanced reality. Hence, we go beyond safety and security; we address the values behind that and believe that family relationships are vital in dealing with cyber issues.

And because we believe relationships are important, we also run the MiGO2 (Mentoring the Internet Generation Online and Offline) programme that help parents and teachers to gain a better understanding of the next generation's motivation for internet activity, how to mentor more effectively and build better relationships.

Through the MiGO2 programme, awareness is built in both adults and children where the objective is to bridge the digital divide between them and to help them understand the fundamentals of the Internet today relating to social networking and gaming.

**How important is CW in today's digital age?**

It is imperative that both children and parents are made aware of the inherent risks involved in today's digital age and to know how to navigate the cyber world efficiently. As for children, the concern is about safety and security risks, as well as the consequences of their digital footprints on their future, imparting of values and character

According to MyCert Incident Statistics, Cyber-security Malaysia, cyber bullying cases are increasing and becoming a worrying trend. In 2015, MyCert recorded 442 cases, in 2016 it recorded 529 cases. The latest cases recorded until March 2017 is 150. However, incidences reported are for urban areas since children have greater access to the Internet as compared to rural areas.

**Could you share some cases of cyber bullying known to GG?**

As of 2017, we no longer handle CW counselling cases. However, when we discover cases during the running of our school programmes, we will recommend them to seek help from someone they trust (school counsellor, teacher or parent) while raising it to the counsellor or teacher in charge. At the same time, we would direct them to call Childline 15999, a confidential 24-hour helpline for children to seek the help that they need.

Could you share of the milestones achieved by GG through the CW programmes?

In 2016, we have worked with over 8,000 students and over 3,500 parents and adults in 23 schools (international/private/local) and seven organisations through the running of our CW programmes. We've also had the privilege to partner with key like-minded organisations to broaden our impact.

Back in 2011, we were invited by the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry to talk about CW at a child protection seminar which later led to us being part of their taskforce (with over 40 government ministries and key industry players) to discuss and develop child online protection policies in 2013. We also had the opportunity to work together with MDEC to reach 3000 students in schools in the Klang Valley to educate them on CW.

And just last year, our partner DiGi gave us the opportunity to leverage our expertise in cyber wellness to develop two key events to drive awareness and capacity building on the importance of digital safety and responsible digital citizenship. The DiGi Customer Open Day where we brought parents and children through an experiential learning process helping them understand the effects of cyber-bullying and how to address it. And at DiGi's first ever CyberSAFE Digital Citizen Camp we educated over 100 school children about current digital risks and their role in contributing towards a safe and positive digital lifestyle.

**What are some of the challenges that GG faced in terms of cyber wellness? How did GG overcome them?**

As a pioneer for CW, one of our biggest challenges initially was the readiness of schools to adopt such programmes into their curriculum. However, through the positive feedback from both students and school counsellors over the years, we have managed to establish a strong track record among schools across the Klang Valley.

In the area of counselling cases for families, one of the key challenges is the willingness of parents to invest the time to mentor their children. CW issues stem from problems within the family relationships, therefore if families are not willing to make certain changes it could affect their children's recovery from these issues.

**How supportive is the Ministry of Education in Generasi Gemilang's efforts to educate children on cyber wellness?**

We are currently a part of the same Child Online Protection taskforce at the Education Ministry where we share our on-ground experience and expertise whenever possible to add value to their policy-making.



Yayasan Generasi Gemilang director of services Nick Foong



PHOTOS BY JONATHAN LOI

to help govern these decisions. It includes being responsible, taking ownership and self-control, striking a balance online and offline and being a positive user by sharing good information

Meanwhile, for parents, it is about the importance of building a relationship with their children in order to mentor them in digital use, because very often relationship problems that are the cause of cyber-related issues we see. That being said, parents play a key role in mentoring children in making good decisions online and offline.

**So how should parents play a role in educating their children on cyber wellness?**

It is important to invest time in building relationships with their children as when they do they will also build trust with the children. With trust and openness, there's more room for dialogue to happen about challenges and issues that children may be facing.

The root of cyber issues usually stems from a relationship challenge that the child is facing. Building strong relationships also helps parents mentor their children to make better decisions online. We always say that rules without relationship lead to rebellion.

At the same time, it is important to be Internet savvy and understand the current trends. It is also important to build a strong family culture where children are moulded because it is where they learn values and principles, right from wrong.

**What is the situation of cyber bullying in the country?**