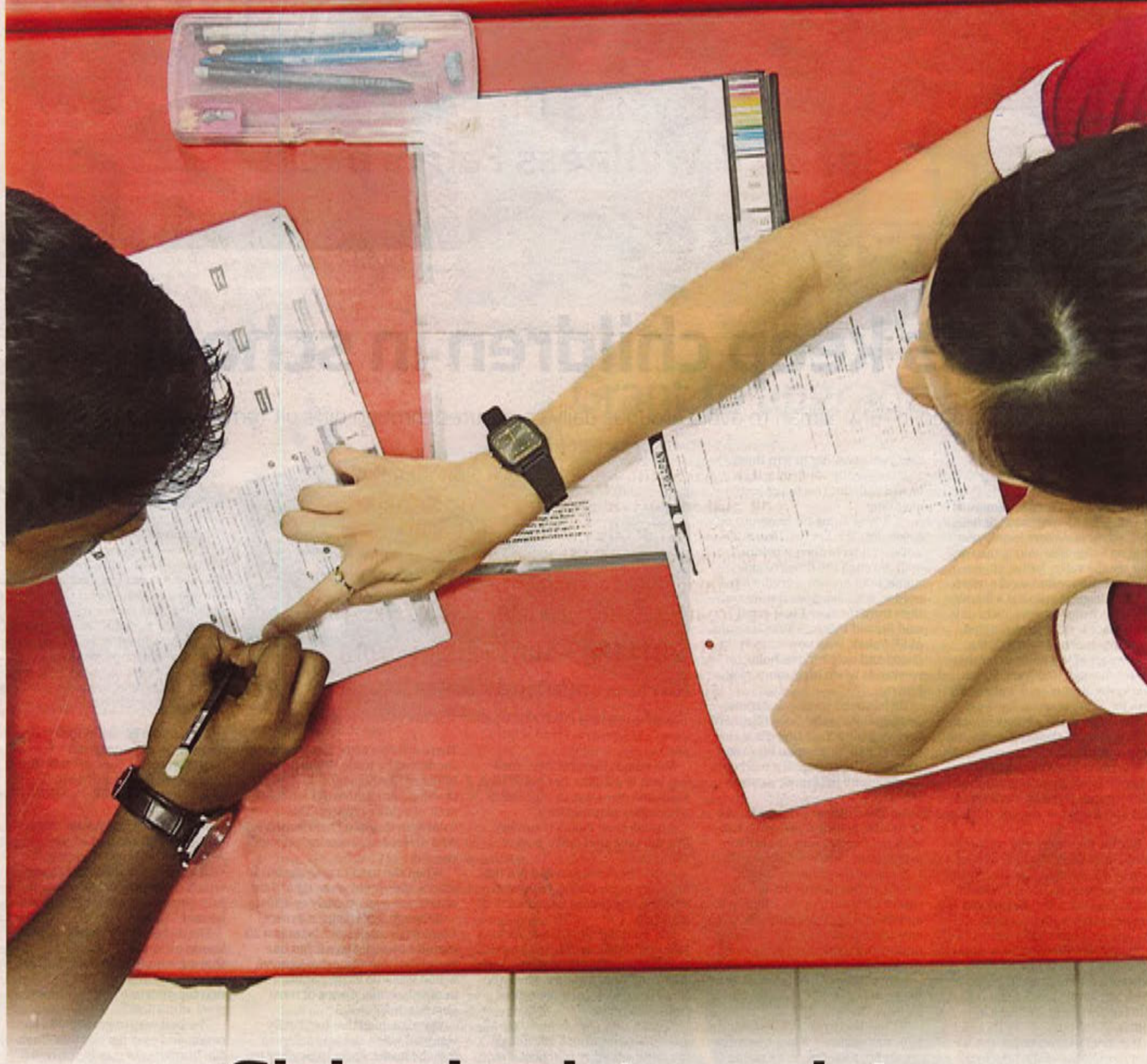


# Star educate



## Giving back to society

A foundation aids children in underprivileged communities and carries out education programmes designed to break the cycle of poverty. > 8 & 9

## Cover story

By OOI MAY SIM  
educate@thetsar.com.my

Xi used to be an angry child. He would come to class grumpy and could not tolerate criticism. At one time, when another student laughed at his work, he became aggressive, shouted at the boy and wanted to punch him.

That was five years ago. Today, the 18-year-old is a calm and polite lad. All he needed, it seemed, was support and guidance. And he got that through Yayasan Generasi Gemilang (GG).

GG is a foundation that aids children and families in underprivileged communities. Formed in 2010, it carries out a host of education programmes designed to break the cycle of poverty.

"We started with a six-month education programme because we found that the dropout rate was very high in schools," said GG head of education Simpson Khoo, who added that the children were mostly from the urban poor community.

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 states that one out of five Malaysian children do not complete their secondary school education. Another study by the ministry and Unesco in 2004 found that about 85% of school dropouts come from poor families.

"Those who drop out (from school) end up joining the workforce as low-skilled, low-income earners," said Khoo.

To address this, GG holds classes under the Pusat Bimbingan Pelajar (PBP or student guidance centre) banner each week for primary and secondary students at various locations across the country. There, mentors guide them in English and Mathematics.

### A session commences

Selayang is the location for one of these classes. The sessions are held on the ground floor of a block of low-cost flats. The compound of the flats is dark and gloomy, and the walls are filled with graffiti. But step into the "classrooms" and it's a different story.

The teaching team has done up the open space, making it bright, clean and conducive for learning. They have put up dividers to carve out sections for the different age groups, which makes lessons more intimate, and lined the walls with sponge to reduce echo.

Throughout the years, GG has endured vandalism and theft, but things are much better now, assured Khoo.

Each session sees about 50 children in attendance, and there is one mentor for every three students. The same mentor usually teaches the same child so she can keep track of his progress. This system also forms trust, the basis for the other thing the team teaches, such as values.

"Mentors don't just teach school subjects; they share their background and their journey with the students. It's a conducive environment to learn and model good behaviour and values," said Khoo.

The centre doesn't just focus on academic growth but also the children's personal development.

"We want them to gain confidence and purpose. So we talk to them about why they want to attend classes, their ambitions and their dreams," said Khoo.

He shared the case of Xi, who

# Changing mindsets through education

Centre equips students with skills and values that go beyond books.



The same mentor usually teaches the same child, so she can keep track of his progress.



Khoo says the centre focuses on the children's academic growth and personal development.

used to be hot-tempered, aggressive, and had low self-esteem.

"We would ask Xi to stay back after class to talk to him. And after a while, he changed," said Khoo with a smile.

Xi, who completed his Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) last year, is now studying automotive technology, aided by GG's education fund.

"Although Xi doesn't come for PBP classes anymore, he will stand outside the classroom when we have night lessons, then walk the mentors to their cars," shared Khoo.

However, change does not come easy for the students. "It is easy to change on the outside - you just buy new clothes and have a different hairstyle. But it takes years to change what's inside," he said.

And the challenge is not just about changing the mindset of their students. Their parents too have to change their perception of education.

"Many parents today send their children for tuition during the school holidays. But the students here have to work to help with their household income. That is also the main reason students drop out of school," Khoo said.

So the team visited families to speak to parents and their children about the importance of education. They also provided support workers to counsel families on their problems.

In the past four years, not one of PBP's students have dropped out of school, Khoo announced proudly.

When asked about who attends PBP, Khoo said the students who join the programme are academically weak.

For example, Amir dreams of becoming an engineer as he likes to construct buildings. For that, he would need to be good in English and Maths. So he started attending PBP when he was in Year Four.

"My English and Maths were pretty bad," said Amir, who is in Form Four now. "I used to fail but began passing these subjects when I was in Year Six".

Ashraf attends the classes twice a week and says that he now understands maths formulas.

"In school, the teachers teach very quickly, and it is hard for me to keep up. Here, the speed is alright so I can understand," he said.

Amy, 14, has been coming to the classes for five years to learn English because "I think it is important to speak English (to get) a job".

She said that since joining PBP, her results have improved and she has picked up a lot of new words, and will then try to make sentences with these.

"Here, the teachers translate the words for me so I know what they mean. In school, they just use the words, so I don't know what they are saying," she said.

Another student, Sasha, 15, also believes knowing English and Maths is important for her future because she wants to be a neurologist.

"My brother has a nerve problem, so I want to be a neurologist. For that job, English and Maths are very important," she said.



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The clean, brightly lit classrooms are a contrast to the surrounding area.

She has been attending classes for the past six years, and over the years, her results have improved: from getting D in Maths, she now gets a B. And she scores A for English.

"My spoken English has improved as well," Sasha said confidently.

### Giving back to society

Vigneswaran Krishna Murthy Thevar and Karthik Kumar, both 18, were PBP students who have returned to mentor other children.

Vigneswaran or Vig, as he is affectionately called, shared that this is his opportunity to help others.

"I have been coming here for five years. Before I joined, I couldn't speak English and my parents couldn't afford to send me for tuition," he said.

Vig added that the classes are very helpful as they followed the syllabus taught in school, so it "reinforces what the students have been taught".

A scorer of nine As in the SPM last year, he came up with the suggestion that the children go for vision screening, after learning that many of them could not see what the teachers were writing on the board.

"Vision problems are among the reasons that hold them back from excelling in their studies," he said.

Now, GG holds annual vision screening and provides spectacles to students who need it.

Karthik, who scored two As in last year's SPM for Maths and English, said: "Before coming here, I was shy and couldn't speak English. Now I do."

His hope is that his students would score and do well in their examinations.

There are other volunteers who dedicate time and energy to the programme. One of them, who

wants to be known as Ng, has been volunteering at the centre for the past four years.

"I used to help my children in their studies, but now that they are in university, I come here to teach every Saturday," he said.

Ng mentors four children and said that there would be improvement as long as the students are willing to come.

He also believes that mentoring goes beyond teaching students school work.

"It is about imparting knowledge and values in them, and teaching them to love learning, if not, they won't think beyond this compound."

Ng added that these children need individual attention.

"If you don't do anything, they will just drop out of society."

At the end of each session, volunteers do a debrief to talk about lessons, their student's progress and to share their thoughts and feelings.

As Khoo puts it: "Volunteers can sometimes feel emotional or start questioning their teaching methods if their students don't improve. They need support too."

And while the organisation welcomes people to volunteer as mentors, they have a stringent screening process to ensure the safety of the children. GG has also installed CCTVs at its premises as a precautionary measure.

"We don't allow mentors to hug, kiss, and carry students and put them on their laps. The most important thing is that our children are safe."

Names of students have been changed

Watch the video  
[thestartv.com](http://thestartv.com)



fast to its surroundings.

## Cover story

### Covering all aspects of wellbeing

TEACHING children English and Maths at Pusat Bimbingan Pelajar (student guidance centre) is but one of Yayasan Generasi Gemilang (GG)'s education programmes.

The organisation also holds talks and camps on cyber wellness, financial education, and leadership and character building.

There is also a computer literacy programmes in partnership with Microsoft and a community reading programme that promotes reading and English literacy among primary school children through one-to-one mentoring.

And while education is the key to change, this alone is not enough. So, various community development programmes such as PRUKasih, conducted in partnership with Prudential Assurance Malaysia Berhad were set up.

The free financial protection plan safeguards families from financial risks resulting from death, injury or any unfortunate circumstances that prevents the breadwinner from providing for the family.

These families will get temporary financial assistance, giving them time to recover and get back on their feet.

In GG's website, the three teenage children of a single mother who passed away, and a new widow, were some of the people who received this assistance.

As of last year, over 20,632 households from 12 communities in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Johor benefited from this.

The organisation also provides school uniforms and breakfast to school-going children.

For more information, visit [www.gengemilang.org](http://www.gengemilang.org).

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CHILD'S MYKD / PASSPORT NO.\*: \_\_\_\_\_

#### PARENT/GUARDIAN'S CONTACT DETAILS

NAME (AS PER I.C.)\*: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS\*: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS\*: \_\_\_\_\_

POSTCODE\*: \_\_\_\_\_

TOWN/CITY\*: \_\_\_\_\_

STATE\*: \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT NUMBER\*: \_\_\_\_\_

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