**Title: Rising Above and Beyond, A Multi-systemic Approach in Addressing Social ills among Girls from the bottom 40 Community**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The paper aims to show a Multi-Systemic intervention initiated for Girls through the Maharani Learning Lab (MLL) which is the flagship program of the RYTHM Foundation, Qi Groups Social Impact Initiative, for the marginalized Bottom 40 community by adopting the UN sustainable Development Goals. In our course of interaction with the beneficiaries, we found that 20% of school-going children drop out before reaching higher secondary. Main factors behind students dropping out of school and they are disinterest, poverty, parents who were neglectful, illness, disability, social problems, learning difficulties and underage marriage. An impact assessment was carried out to provide substantial input for the programme using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The methodology applied are focus group discussion, one to one interview with selected groups namely parents/teachers/stakeholders/service providers). The outcome illustrated that our intervention strategy through MLL programs plays an undeniable vital part in the lives of young girls. Maharani (Princess) Learning Lab created a safe space for students to attend various self-development programs consistently organized by Maharani Learning Lab and participating in Maharani Camps (Module Tailored made according to SDG 4 & 5: Phase 1, 2 &3). The camps played a pivotal role in increasing self –confidence, academic grades improved, decrease in school dropout, good communication skills and instill hope in achieving their dreams. The girls who once felt hopeless and marginalized are lifted up and empowered to stand up for their rights to live a dignified live and ensure they are not left behind.

**INTRODUCTION**

Girls are born strong and should stay strong, that is the tag line for the Maharani Prorgam. In any communities and in every parts of the world, women are usually marganalised and left behind from decision making, voicing their opinions, right to education, right to decent pay and employment. There is always a constant and systemic approach to down play women as they are always regarded as weak and powerless. This ambiguity has been challanged and the trend is changing ; women are rising high above and beyond.

They are equally in par with men and in certain circumstances are doing far greater than men in the area of Social development, business and politics. Women are becoming key decision makers in enacting and amending policies that are favorable to women to gain equal opportunities regardless of race, creed, religion and social status. In this era of 21st century and where artificial intelingence and technology plays a vital role in our lives, women have not been left out.

In this modernise era, women and particurlary women form rural areas are being exposed to the use of internet and smart phones. This has enable women to venture into online business to showcase their products to imporove thier family economic conditions. In many situation, they have become the sole bread winner eventhough their spouses are alive but are not able to supplement the income due to various social ills such as substance abuse, in prison and in some instances just lazy to work.

Nevertheles, not many women and girls have the opportunity to rise above and there is still a vacum and this has to be adressed by creating a platfom for these girs and women from marganalised communities to tapped their rich talents and resources. At Maharani Learning Lab this is our credo. We look for young girls who are underachievers, timid, and particularly from dysfunctional families and shape them to become respected, responsible and reliable individuals. Through our various Maharani programs, we mould these girls to be a game changer and turn into a new leaf and find their true identity – Each of them Born Strong, Stay Strong

The approach is a holistic Multi-Systemic Approach in Addressing Social ills among Girls from the bottom 40 Community. The approach encompasses a holistic view in developing the girls’ emotional being, the social being, physical being and the spiritual being. The multiple approach has able to plug out their hidden talents and that all begins when they discover who they are and what they are capable to achieve and that is when they realize that they are a powerful and successful being.

The girls that attends the MLL have shown enthusiasm in creative arts such as drama, Indian classical dance, drawing and handicrafts. They are able to express their feeling and thoughts through these avenues. There is a gap in their academic performance but the girls have expressed their intelligence via alternative education pathway.

There is a loophole in our education system that is not addressing the issues faced by these girls. The schools only focus on academic achievement and gives the limelight to high achievers. Many of the girls that patronized MLL are underachievers and with low self-esteem and lack confidence. Students of such are usually left behind and labelled as D and E students and in some instance as ‘Trouble Makers’. At MLL, we welcome the underachievers and turn them around to become high achievers both in academic, unleash their talents and become productive individuals.

We therefore, echo and champion the UN SDG 4 which is providing Quality Education for all children irrespective whether they are high academic achievers or underachievers. Schools should not only become a place churning merely ‘A’ students but also develop students who may not have academic interest and intelligence but most definitely have other intelligence such as Musical, Naturalist, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Intra and Interpersonal, graphic and artistic. Schools should do this more and moving education one step higher which is quality, creative, fun and holistic

Many Indian girls from the B40 drop out of schools due to not being able to cope with their academic requirements and coupled with poor family coping mechanism. Realizing this phenomena, MLL was design to address these issues and we have many success stories that are amazing and such lesson has to be shared at this conference and we wish to bring this program to all schools to support girls from the marganalised communities and give a supporting hand to the schools that together we can nurture these girls to the help them realize their dreams and become productive individuals to their family, community and country

**THE MAHARANI PROGRAMME**

The Maharani Programme was initiated by the Foundation in 2010. Consisting of a three-phased camp and a Learning Lab (MLL), the programme aims to inspire and empower poor marginalized and socially excluded girls and young women through the provision of skills and knowledge to:

• Enable them to identify and work towards their full potential

• Become responsible agents of change in their community

In 2015, the Maharani Learning Lab (MLL) was established in Sungai Siput, Perak as an expansion of the Maharani Program to cater to girls from the poor communities. Since its inception, the Maharani programme has reached out to 5,000 underprivileged girls, aged between 11 to 16 years old.

**Vision**

Envisions a world where every young woman achieves her full potential

**Objectives**

* To nurture the girls to develop their full potential
* To equip girls and young women with living and social skills
* To improve academic performance
* To develop creative skills and entrepreneurship
* To encourage active participation and contribution towards community well being

**Methodology**

The Maharani programme comprises two main components;

**Maharani Camps**

The Maharani camps has been conducted in 12 locations throughout Malaysia in which an estimated 6,416 girls from underprivileged families between the ages of 13-16 took part. The camps are divided into the three phases as below; -

This phase encourages participants to explore their individual identity and build their confidence and self-esteem

This phase enables participants to be exposed to the outdoor environment, overcome physical challenges and learn survival skills to adapt to the environment.

Participants will learn to recognize their own leadership potential and use effective communication skills to create change in order to serve their community.

**Maharani Learning Labs**

The Maharani Learning Labs (MLLs) are aimed at providing a physical facility as a safe space for participants and non-participants of the Maharani Camps. This facility is intended to facilitate the participation of young women and girls in activities and expose them to experiences that will help them acquire skills and knowledge that are essential to making good and right choices in life. The MLLs are intended to complement the Maharani Camps as an ongoing support mechanism to ensure that the positive results achieved during the camp period is sustained. The MLL is aimed at providing direct community support through a variety of skills training, teaching and coaching to the participating young women and girls.

In collaboration with third-party service providers, the following services are currently offered at the learning lab:

1. **Academic teaching & coaching**
2. **Skills training**
3. Domestic skills – cooking, sewing, baking, DIY skills
4. Soft skills – communications, grooming, speech and drama
5. Creative skills – Performing and visual arts
6. **Entrepreneurship training**

**Maharani Trainer Kit (MTK)**

The MTK is a module for trainers who have experience working with teenage girls to use as a point of reference to run the three-phased camp and the MLL programme on their own. The MTK is written into modules and sessions that can be utilized at the camps and/or at the learning lab. Each module is independent of the other but can also complement each other.

There are three main objectives of the MTK:

1. To ensure standardization of content;
2. To ensure sustainability of the Maharani Training Program; and
3. To enable the instruction manuals for the MTK modules to be used individually as stand-alone training modules, or cumulatively as a complete training program.

The training methodology enables the participants to actively engage and learn from the experiential sessions.

Each session in the module has clear objectives, set of instructions, expected key learnings & outcomes, as well as ways for participants to apply the topics at home. Facilitators’ notes which contains comprehensive information of the topics described in the respective sessions are also included.

The presentation and facilitation of MTK takes into consideration the principles of Child Rights, Gender and Non-Discrimination, as well as the cultural diversity of Malaysian society.

**PROGRAM IMPACT STUDY**

**By PINTAR Foundation: SCHOOL’S SATISFACTION SURVEY 2018**

**Background**

Pintar Foundation has conducted our manual stakeholder satisfactory survey amongst its members since 2011 and with schools since 2014 as part of our Monitoring & Evaluation. In 2018, this manual survey was conducted from July – October 2018 as part of PINTAR Foundation Monitoring & Evaluation exercise.

**The survey focused on:**

1. SJK Mahatma Gandhi Kalasalai Sg Siput Perak
2. SJK(T) Ladang Dovenby Sg Siput Perak
3. SMK Datuk Haji Abdul Wahab Sg Siput Perak

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| **MAHARANI PROGRAMME** | **SATISFIED** | **NEED IMPROVEMENT** |
| Level of satisfaction towards Maharani Programme | 99 % | 1% |
| The effectiveness of Maharani Programme | 97 % | 3% |
| Maharani involvement with schools | 96% | 4 % |
| Average Satisfaction on Maharani Programme under school adoption programme | 97% | 3 % |

**Assessment Period:**

Survey Period: 10th Jul – 5th October 2018

Instruments: Survey Forms, One -to One interview and online survey

Total Respondents: & respondents (Principal, Headmaster/Counselor and Teacher in charge)

Number of schools: 3 schools

**The Findings:**

In general, the schools were satisfied with the programmes and financial support from VF.**98%** of their respondents were satisfied with the effectiveness of programme implemented by RYTHM which were useful and beneficial:

•**100%** of the respondents were satisfied with the implementation of the programme, which helps to boost them motivation of participants involved.

•**100%** of their respondents were satisfied with the implementation of the programme as it has increased the overall schools' passing rate in the National Examination.

•**100%** of their respondents were satisfied with the implementation of the programme as it has increased the students' academic performance.

•**100%** of the respondents were satisfied with the programme by members which has helped to enhance the teachers' teaching skills.

**The Effectiveness of Maharani programme**

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| --- | --- |
| Meningkatkan motivasi peserta yang terlibat (***Increased Participants Motivation)*** | 100% |
| Meningkatkat pencapaian Sekolah dalam peperiksaan (***Increased achievemnent in school examinations)*** | 100% |
| Meningkatkan prestasi akademik pelajar ( **Increased in academic performance)** | 100% |
| Meningkatkan kemahiran guru dalam aspek pengajaran (**Increased in Teaching Skills of the teachers)** | 100% |
| Memupuk potensi diri peserta yang terlibat (**Support in identifying Self potential)** | 100% |
| Menggalakkan penglibatan ibu bapa dalam program yang Menerapkan nilai-nilai murni dalam diri peserta yang terlibat (**Parents Involvement in engaging students to learn value based programs**) | 86% |
| Meningkatkan tahap kesedaran terhadap isu social semasa ( **Increase in awareness on current social issues)** | 100% |

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Maharani Trainer Kit designed by RYTHM Foundation addressing key issues faced by girls in their teenage years, within the current social environment and to explore new emerging issues based on their lived realities.

Through camps, school outreach programmes and Learning Lab programme assists students in self-development, education, understanding gender equality, health, building healthy family relationship, economic empowerment through skills and through private partnership in radiating poverty

Maharani Programme have been approved by Ministry of Education since 2010, The National Population and Family Development Board’s Malaysia (LPPKN) active partners at the Maharani Camps as they present topics on Reproductive Health and I am in control modules. Yearly twice stakeholder meeting jointly organized by Pintar Foundation we are able to present to corporate companies to initiate the Maharani Programme in National Schools.

To ensure sustainable pedagogy, educators are to effectively prepare learners with the knowledge, skills, and values they will need for creating more sustainable places and communities, a transition must be made from transmissive teaching models to transformative learning processes. But how can courses be designed or redesigned so that they create opportunities for transformational sustainability learning. Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**.**

Education Ministry should implement Interdisciplinary teaching for sustainability programmes in National schools as part of the extra co-curriculum an approach to curriculum integration that generates an understanding of themes and ideas that cut across disciplines and of the connections between different disciplines and their relationship to the real world.

**CONCLUSION**

RYTHM Foundation, the QI Social Impact Initiative along with our strategic partners aim to re build the lives of the marganalised girls and their families through its 3 Strategic priority areas namely providing and promoting equitable education for all, championing gender equality and rebuilding the broken community by initiating sustainable community development. RYTHM support the commitment signed and agreed by the global community to implement the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2015.

The founding chairperson, Datin Sri Umayal Eswaran strongly advocates that every girl is a Maharani has the inner power that has to shine and rise above all odds in lives. ‘We at Maharani helps the girls not to compete with boys but to realize their capabilities that they too can become high achievers because all girls are born strong and should stay strong’ said Datin Sri Umayal.

The chairperson has a dream to introduce this program to all school and help all girls irrespective of race and religion because all are equal before the eyes of the creator and we believe this will take place at this platform.

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**About The Author**

Ms. Barathy Devi Murugaya is the Assistant Manager of RYTHM Foundation. She is the prime mover of the Maharani Program in Sungai Siput. She has great passion for the marganalised girls and she has good years of experience in community development initiatives in Ipoh and Sungai Siput. The Paper was reviewed by Mr James Ryan Raj (RYTHM Foundation Program Manager) and Ms. Jayamalar Samuel (RYTHM Foundation Head of Department)