

Fluency in English in reach for 13-year-old girl

SABAH, 22 February 2011: Felicity Stefanus, a bubbly and energetic 13-year-old, has a clear goal in her mind. She wants to be able to one day communicate fluently in English. While most Malaysians think this is easy enough to achieve given the availability of educational opportunities and resource materials in the country, this is not the case for Felicity.

Growing up on a humble plantation estate in Tomanggong, deep in the heartland of Kinabatangan, Sabah, Felicity does not have access to a great number of textbooks or English story books in the way that other children may have. "In addition to Bahasa Malaysia, English is very important. I would like to be able to communicate better in English," said the determined Felicity.

Today, Felicity is well on track to achieving her goal. This is thanks to a unique initiative by GAB Foundation and the Borneo Child Aid Society, a non-government organisation, who recently came together to introduce *Reading Corners* in remote locations throughout Sabah. The *Reading Corners* provide English reading materials that range from textbooks, encyclopaedias and general knowledge books to dictionaries and storybooks to facilitate sharing of knowledge among disadvantaged children.

The *Reading Corner* sponsorship programme throughout East Malaysia is an initiative by GAB Foundation. In 2010, GAB Foundation set up six *Reading Corners* in Sarawak and later added another 12 *Reading Corners* in three locations in Sabah, namely Lahad Datu, Kinabatangan and Tawau. In Sabah, the *Reading Corners* are all located within the Learning Centres run by Borneo Child Aid Society.

Serving as a complement to the basic education that children receive at school, these *Reading Corners* enable children to reap the benefits of nurturing good reading habits in order to increase their proficiency in English while gaining extra knowledge. The GAB Foundation believes that the key to providing the younger generation with a better future lies in laying a good foundation for them in their early education.

In addition to reading materials, each *Reading Corner* features custom-built furniture including colourful bookshelves with decorated motifs of people, animal and places. There are also multicoloured tables and chairs for the children. All in all, each *Reading Corner* is created to be an appealing and wholesome environment to allow the children to thoroughly immerse themselves in the world of books.

"I visit our *Reading Corner* every day during recess. I am currently studying the Standard Six English textbook which will help me in my ambition to speak better English," explained Felicity, a pupil of Humana House Learning Center 53, an education facility run by the Borneo Child Aid Society. "I am very happy and grateful to have these books. We will take care of them and also help the younger children learn how to use them!" she exclaimed.

For younger schoolmate, Nurhijrah Hj. Nanrang, 10, it is not just about being able to speak

English better. She wants to improve her mathematics. "I am slow in learning maths so I spend a lot of time at the *Reading Corner*. I usually use it in the morning, during recess as well as during my free time. The books help me a lot and make the classroom beautiful" "Most of the time, I am learning from the Mathematics textbooks. My teacher said I am making progress. My classmates and I will take care of the *Reading Corner* in our school and make it our treasure," she added.

According to the girls' teacher, Yvette Francisco, her students have already benefited significantly from their *Reading Corner*. "We use the *Reading Corner* in our English learning programme to encourage our students to pick up an English story book every week. We will then read the book in class. If any of our pupils are unsure of a particular word, we will all refer to the dictionary together. After a week, we translate the story into Bahasa Malaysia. This is to ensure that the story is understood properly by all our students while enabling them to absorb what they have learnt better," she said.

"Young children are a curious lot. The *Reading Corner* provides different books, many of them with pictures and this helps to pique our pupils' interest and curiosity about the world. We encourage them to ask questions and everybody learns along the way. This is indeed a valuable resource that allows us to provide a more complete education for our students," Yvette added.

Renuka Indrarajah, Corporate Relations & Legal Director, GAB Foundation, said, "There are children in Malaysia who face difficulties in accessing all the tools necessary to learn and develop academically. This is often due to factors such as distance and poverty that may curb their development. GAB Foundation's *Reading Corner* project was established to make a difference in these children's lives. By instilling in them the love for reading and improving their command of the English language, we believe that they will then have the necessary skills to better define their future.

GAB Foundation to-date has invested approximately RM400,000 in setting up these *Reading Corners* in Malaysia, and will continue to explore opportunities to widen the reach. GAB Foundation is also looking forward to investing a further RM150,000 for sponsorship of more Reading Corners this year.

"Books can be such a joy and the doorway to a brighter future. Seeing the positive response from the teachers and students who are benefiting directly from our *Reading Corners*, this will drive GAB Foundation to continue to support the needs of the indigenous communities in Malaysia," she concluded.

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About GAB Foundation:

GAB Foundation was established in 2007 to carry out Guinness Anchor Berhad's (GAB) corporate social responsibility initiatives in three core areas – environmental conservation, education and community. Within these three key areas, the Foundation strives to identify causes that not only contribute significantly to empowering and enriching the lives of deserving Malaysian individuals and communities, but also resonate with GAB's corporate values of striving for excellence, acting with integrity and having a genuine respect for people, society and its diversity.

The management and administration of the Foundation is governed by a board of trustees made up of senior members of GAB's management team and independent nominees.

For more information on the GAB Foundation please visit www.gabfoundation.org .