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24 **PEOPLE**

Eco warrior princess

Helping children, households and companies find easy ways to act now against climate change makes Firdaus Nisha's day

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FOR many urbanites, nature and the ecological system is something to get into on the National Geographic Channel.

Not so for eco warrior princess Firdaus Nisha Muhammad. She has made a commitment to herself to create awareness about sustainable living and educate people about the environment. "Changing perceptions and behaviour can be difficult within our community. However, behaviour change isn't impossible and is certainly necessary when trying to improve the going green concept," says the 33-year-old when met at her house in Taman Tun Dr Ismail.

"I started my love for nature during my camping days when I was younger," says the Kuala Lumpur native. "My dad is an absolute camper. We used to

stay in Petaling Jaya, Section 5 and the whole area used to be forested. I used to walk through Pantar Dalam, where there was an orang asli community, a dam and lots of wildlife. I grew up with that

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FIRDAUS NISHA MUHAMMAD

as my norm. But as I grew up, I realised that more and more parts of the city are being developed," explains Nisha.

Nisha spent a lot of time in Perlis with her grandparents. It's her kampung, she says.

"There was a big contrast between the city and my kampung where people grew padi. But during my teenage years, I questioned why people were selling their land and building houses on the padi fields. My grandfather told me we have enough rice, and it's coming from Thailand. I never understood it as food security.

"That's the journey that led to me my commitment today. The fact that Bukit Nanas has shrunk overnight, and the only place we Klites can bring our friends to see nature is in Gombak

because there are still rivers there with green places to hang out. Of course there is always Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, that



COMMUNITY EFFORT FOR A SUSTAINABLE GARDEN: (from left) Nisha, Loo, with Zuraida holding Myra. With them are (from right) Chris, Ana, Miriam and Eunice (behind Miriam). The young eco warriors in front are Omar and Akirah.

artificial rainforest. However, it is a beautiful auditorium to bring people to as we can talk about the rainforest without actually going to an actual one," explains Nisha who studied aeronautical engineering but left the corporate world as a trainer for her ecological adventure.

Nisha, and her partner Loo Ly Mun, are the brainchild behind Ecocentric Transitions. They focus at mainstreaming sustainable liv-

ing through various workshops and community engagements.

Both members of Raleigh International, the duo believe in experiential learning, hands-on construction, and have conducted various workshops in four areas — environmental empathy, sustainable living, waste and resource redistribution, and food security and edible gardens.

Nisha walks the talk. "We took a look at the amount of waste we were producing and the plastics we were using in our house. When we bought our 3-in-1 coffee, it was a packet in a package in a plastic bag. We realised this had to change and this was how we got into the whole idea of sustainable living," says Nisha.

"I enjoy sharing and assisting people in developing a lifestyle which is environmentally friendly. For instance, we conducted a clay playshop programme to engage and expose children to the various recycled items while apply-

ing crafting skills.

"I got the clay idea from my mother as she likes experimenting with it."

"We wanted to build a connection with the everyday throwaway items and create value both for the newly created item as well as the skills applied.

"My next project is The Pinhole Camera Project 2014, a collaboration with Obscura Festival and the Georgetown Festival scheduled for August. This is an opportunity for students to learn upcycling, apply scientific theory and create a street exhibition where they interact with the visitors.

"We can make pinhole cameras from a lot of things. We have made them out of cardboard boxes, potato chips tubes, and drinking water bottles. I got the up-cycling bottles idea when I was

in Kuala Terengganu. A lot of issues on the coast lines is that there are many resorts, generating a lot of plastic throwaway waste.

"Then we thought to ourselves: if we can teach the kids to make things they could sell to the tourists, it would be like tourist waste turns into tourist products. That is how we engage kids with hand skills as this is lacking."

"We started researching online, talked to people and we basically spent our time with a lot of bottles. It is a good chance for them to explore various photography exhibitions.

"I feel everything that I have experienced in my life has brought me to where I am now. Every person that I've met has enabled us to do what we do."

"Many people look at us and question how we manage all these workshops without selling anything. Most of our work that we get is through word of mouth, as

it's really because of the absolutely beautiful people that we have met.

"Be more conscious about your input to the planet," adds Nisha.

She knows this is an oft-repeated statement, so she adds: "There are simple ways to be sustainable, like the homemade fertiliser that you can put in your pots. You can also grow stuff."

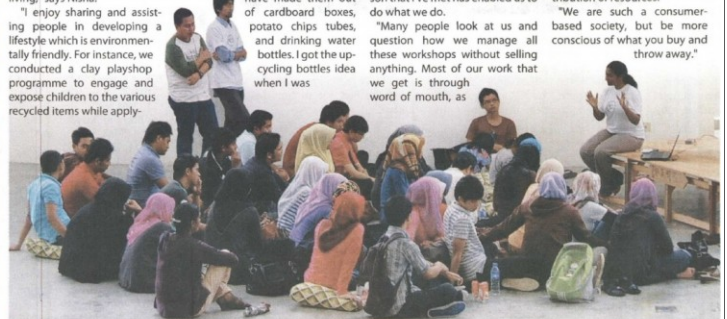
"Look at where your waste goes, and try to divert it from the land as much as you can."

"Give things away. Social media is such a unique space so interact and share things with one another. It's all about redistribution of resources."

"We are such a consumer-based society, but be more conscious of what you buy and throw away."



WORKING IT TOGETHER: Nisha and team at the Kids Upcycle workshop



THE WORLD: Nisha (right, seated on table) tutors the youth on the importance of the environment