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IT all started when five 19-year-old students embarked on an initiative to help 100 first-year university students from Beaufort, Sabah, who were facing challenges with Open and Distance Learning (ODL).

Irdina Jailani together with her four friends, Intan Nur Atira, Azza Izatul, Nur Fatin Fariyah, and Azizah Abd Jais, started #BahBantuSiswa earlier this month to help fellow students who are having a hard time.

When the Ministry of Higher Education announced on Oct 2 that universities were recommended to postpone physical registrations, many students had to turn to ODL from home. But, many have problems affording or obtaining Internet access.

Realising these challenges faced by their fellow students, Irdina came up with the idea of providing ODL allowances in the form of reloads to first-year university students in her hometown Beaufort.

Their crowdfunding initiative, which was publicised via social media, achieved its initial target of RM3,000 in just one day for 99 Beaufort students.

The girls then decided to continue with the fundraising and help other first year students.

From Oct 8 - Oct 17, they raised RM12,447 from over 70 donors, as well as organisations such as Amanz Media and Gabungan Persatuan Belia Bahagian Pedalaman Bawah.

The beneficiaries comprised 390 first-year university students from 27 universities all over Malaysia and 26 districts all over Sabah.

Each student received an allowance in the form of RM30 reload

# Making e-learning possible

Five young women in Beaufort, Sabah, launch #BahBantuSiswa, an initiative to help university students facing connectivity issues with Open and Distance Learning.



(From left) Intan Nur Atira, Azza Izatul, Nur Fatin Fariyah, Davylandon Rubbin (Pertubuhan Kebajikan Impak Komuniti Sabah chairperson), Irdina Jailani, and Azizah Abd Jais during their previous Mask Kitani project. — BahBantuSiswa

credited to their phone number. "We purchase the reloads online and also at shops to support local businesses," Irdina says.

Irdina and her friends reveal that they were initially inspired by the many Malaysians who came out to help impacted university students when the ministry's announcement was first made earlier this month.

Following the announcement, most universities had cancelled physical registrations and students were even barred from entering the university. Many students were caught off-guard; they had already paid for bus and flight tickets had to pay rental for accommodation

even though they weren't staying there since they were barred from entering the university. They had nowhere to go as they didn't have relatives living nearby nor money to return home.

"On that day, we saw many Malaysians on social media platforms offering help to these students using the hashtags #RakyatJagaRakyat and #SiswajagaSiswa. Help came in the form of providing shelter, pocket money, free rides (transport), food and more," Irdina reveals.

Irdina and her friends did a survey (using Google forms), asking students about the challenges they face during the pandemic and they

received many responses.

"More than 180 of our peers from all over Sabah shared their experiences on how difficult e-learning during the pandemic has been for them," Irdina shares.

However, they found that not just university students in Sabah, but also the rest of Malaysia have been impacted.

Mazlan Aziz, 19, who studies at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris in Tanjung Malim, Perak, says: "I had issues with connectivity because my handphone only has a basic usage plan. It's been really hard for me since the first day I started online classes. Moreover, my house is rather far from town and I couldn't go out to purchase credit because of the movement restrictions," he says.

Mazlan applied for #BahBantuSiswa when he heard about it on social media and received RM30 credit to buy a data plan so that he could attend classes online.

"I'm really grateful to #BahBantuSiswa because they really made a difference for me," he says.

Syakirah Athirah Abdulla Hamid, 19, from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in Skudai, Johor, says that 'Internet connection was her biggest problem.

"There's no WiFi at my place so I need to buy my own Internet data to attend classes online. I spent quite a lot just to buy data reloads,"

she says.

Syakirah says that the RM30 reload provided by #BahBantuSiswa helped lessen her financial burden.

Mohammad Azri Mubin, 19, who studies at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, says that poor Internet connectivity caused him to miss online classes.

"I had trouble with the Internet connectivity which caused me to miss some of my online classes as my Internet quota isn't sufficient nor stable. It's also hard to ask questions during lectures," he says.

Mohammad Azri says that he is happy that he and other students can now afford an Internet plan for their ODL.

"This is an impressive initiative led by the teenagers themselves," he says proudly.

Irdina and friends had earlier embarked on another project called Mask Kitani, where they distributed around 1,800 reusable facemasks to groups in Beaufort, Tawau and Labuan.

"The response is great and it's wonderful that Malaysians are stepping up to help those in need," Irdina concludes.

Both Mask Kitani and #BahBantuSiswa are under a registered local NGO called Pertubuhan Kebajikan Impak Komuniti Sabah (PIKOS, Sabah Community Impact Welfare Organisation).