

# A MIGHTY ROAR FROM THE HILL

THEY used to be disinterested. Now they are champions. SK Bukit Lanjan, an Orang Asli school tucked away in a leafy enclave of urban Damansara Perdana just outside the national capital, is a winner in every way. The Lanjan Tigers hosted, won and created history at the nation's first national edition of the All Asli Under-12 Rugby Championship in September 2019. Nine schools from Selangor, Pahang, Perak and Kelantan took part in the competition held at the Desa Temuan Community field.

Sport is just one aspect of their success story. Once destined to drop out of school, the Bukit Lanjan children have made an amazing turnaround since the intervention by MyKasih's Love My School programme in 2014. The education bursary enabled the children to buy stationery, books, uniforms and food at the school bookshop and canteen using the MyKasih smartcard.

The impact was immediate. That same year, Year Six pupil Mohamad Luqman Nazri scored all As in the UPSR examination — the first for his community, and for his school since it was founded 60 years ago. Luqman went on to represent his district in shot putt and high jump, became head prefect and took on leadership roles in the school's English Club and his sports house.

By 2016, Bukit Lanjan teachers were reporting a dramatic increase in attendance and unprecedented interest in studies and sport. For the first time, all the children were adequately equipped for school and sport. The parents got excited too, and the teachers — already highly dedicated — were inspired. Soon the school's Parent Teacher Association became busy with events involving pupils and parents.

The Bukit Lanjan school is a classic example of how intervention can change destinies. When Dialog Group moved its headquarters to Mutiara Damansara in 2014, its executive chairman Tan Sri Dr Ngau Boon Keat and his wife Puan Sri Jean learnt of the Orang Asli community in their new neighbourhood. It soon became clear that academically, the children at the community school did poorly, if they attended school at all.

MyKasih began the Love My School bursary, then introduced a series of programmes to boost the children's academic, sports and co-curricular performance and it worked.

Over time, Jean observed that due to poverty and their remote locations, Orang Asli children across the country had a high dropout rate. Unattended, they would be left behind completely as the country moved forward. That inspired MyKasih Foundation's Orang Asli Children's Education Fund, which has already directed some RM2 million to programmes not supported by the student bursary. These include field trips and study camps.

In the last two years, this fund has supported eight Orang Asli Community Learning Centres, set up by the communities themselves in their villages. These are usually simple

wooden buildings with teachers from nearby schools. They address the children whose education is already disrupted. Aid includes books and stationery to help with literacy. In addition, they are taught basic cooking and to grow vegetables and are exposed to various farming techniques. The majority are primary schoolchildren but at some centres, there are teenagers who had dropped out of school for various reasons, among them, the long distance to school and a dislike of hostels. In most centres, adults are allowed to attend the reading and writing classes. Attendance is high as these are community-initiated centres. ■



Amirul Mukminin, a pupil of SK Siong, Baling, demonstrating the Lego Mind Storm Education EV3 robotics set at the launch of the Northern Corridor Implementation Authority's Human Capital Programme