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A Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
B was established in 1983, and we are the largest service provider in Malaysia that provides free crisis support services (hotline, shelter, counseling, social work and empowerment programmes) to women and children who suffer domestic violence.

To promote and create the respect, protection and fulfilment of equal rights for women and to work towards the elimination of discrimination against women.

To create a society that upholds the principles of substantive equality where all women enjoy their human rights in every sphere.

"As we mark the 40th anniversary of WAO's relentless commitment to advancing women's rights and eliminating violence, we find ourselves in a moment of reflection and resolve. We stand on the precipice of the past, present, and future, strengthened by our victories, enlightened by our setbacks, and inspired by the prospect of a future free from violence.

WAO's mission when we started was rooted in the belief that all women, regardless of where they come from or who they are, deserve a life free from violence and inequality. Today, this principle continues to steer our path.

However, we understand that the road to equality is paved with hardships and struggles. It's a road that requires steadfastness, tenacity, and an unwavering commitment to justice.

Our learnings from these four decades are these - Vision,
Persistence, and Unity.

Vision - To create a world free from violence, we must first believe in its possibility. We must envision a world where every woman is respected, every voice is heard, and every right is protected. This vision is not just a hope or an aspiration, but a guiding principle that shapes our actions and fuels our efforts.

Persistence - The struggle for women's rights and the eradication of violence is not a battle easily won. It requires unwavering persistence and relentless determination. Often, change is slow and progress can be dishearteningly incremental. However, each step forward, no matter how small, brings us closer to our vision.

Unity - We are not alone in this fight. We stand shoulder to shoulder with the courageous survivors, dedicated volunteers, and countless allies. It's our unity that gives us strength. It's our collective voice that amplifies our call for justice. In the face of adversity, we must remember that our unity is our greatest asset.

Our vision, persistence and unity for a future free from violence is not merely a dream; it is a goal towards which we continually strive. Today, as we mark this milestone, we reaffirm our commitment to work towards that future and a better Malaysia for women. In this spirit, we call on everyone to join us in this movement towards equality.

Change begins with us. It begins in our homes, our communities, and our societies. Every action, every word, and every attitude can challenge the norms that perpetuate violence and inequality.

We acknowledge that our work is far from over. There are still battles to be fought, rights to be won, and justice to be upheld. But with your continued support and the strength of the women we serve, we believe we can shape a world where gender equality is not a distant dream, but a tangible reality.

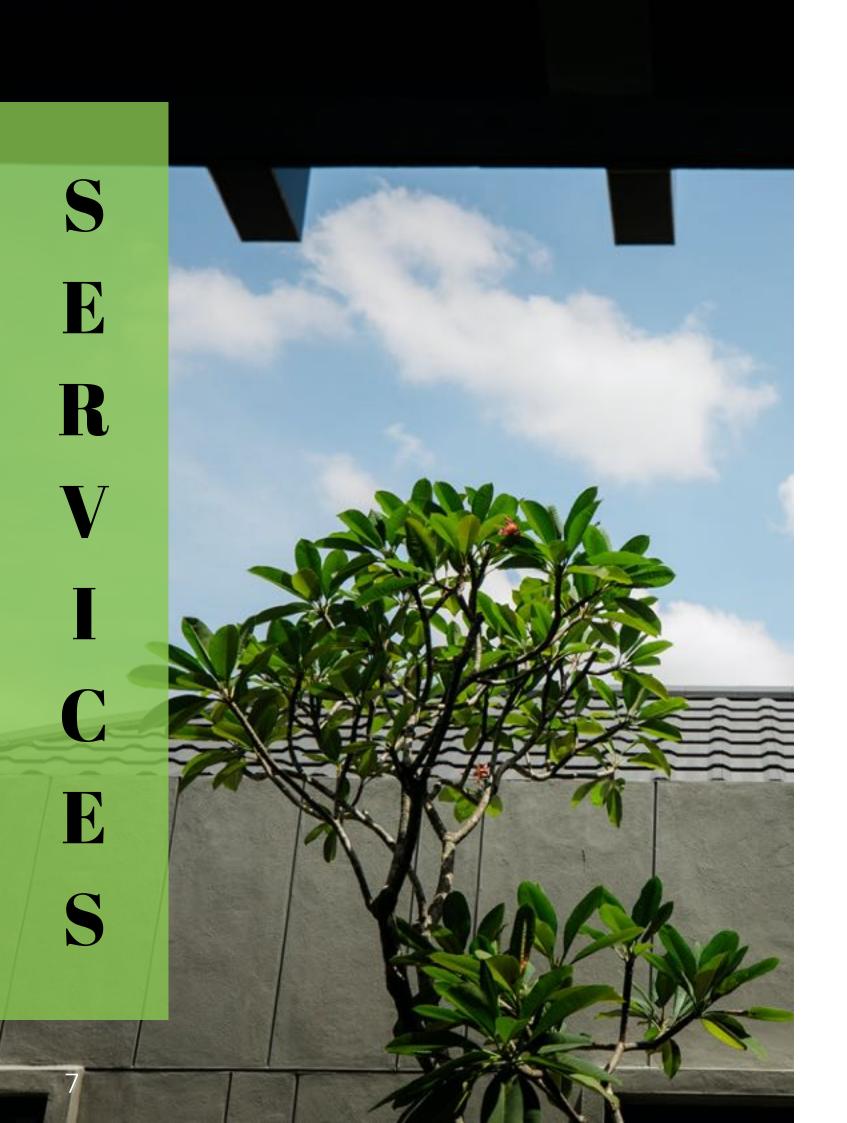
The journey ahead may be challenging, but the destination is worth every effort. So, as we look ahead, let us envision a Malaysia where every woman lives in safety, equality, and dignity. Let us continue to fight for justice and advocate for change. Let us keep educating, collaborating, and persevering until our vision becomes a reality.

Here's to a future free from violence, to a better Malaysia for women, and to the next 40 years of our shared journey. Thank you for standing with us, for believing in our cause, and for making a difference in countless lives. Here's to a future of peace, respect, and dignity for all".



Our People and Culture team is dedicated to fostering a dynamic and supportive environment for all. WAO committed to not just recruiting but also retaining and inspiring exceptional talent.

In 2023, while facing the inevitable changes that come with growth, we took proactive steps to ensure our team remained strong and resilient. We welcomed a fresh wave of passionate individuals to our ranks. These new additions not only filled the gaps left by resignations but also bolstered our workforce for ongoing projects and reinforced our People and Culture team.



# **Shelter and Child Care Centre (CCC)**

The WAO Refuge serves as a safe space for women and children of gender-based violence. When women and children are faced with a crisis, WAO refuge provides survivor with the means to escape abusive and domestic situations. Beyond ensuring the safety of survivors, the WAO Refuge functions as a multifaceted environment where comprehensive case management, psychosocial support, empowerment initiatives, and various activities are conducted, all of which contribute significantly to the overall well-being of survivors.

In 2023, amidst the storms of adversity, 45 women and 52 children found their way to our doors, seeking safety and support. Malaysians and non-Malaysians alike, from the bustling streets of Selangor to the vibrant heart of Kuala Lumpur, found refuge under our roof. Each story is a testament to resilience, each stay is tailored to their unique needs, guided by compassion and crisis management expertise.

Our newly minted Child Care Center is not just bricks and mortar, it is a haven of healing for little hearts scarred by trauma. Here, every corner is infused with love and understanding, designed to nurture the physical, emotional, and social well-being of our youngest residents.

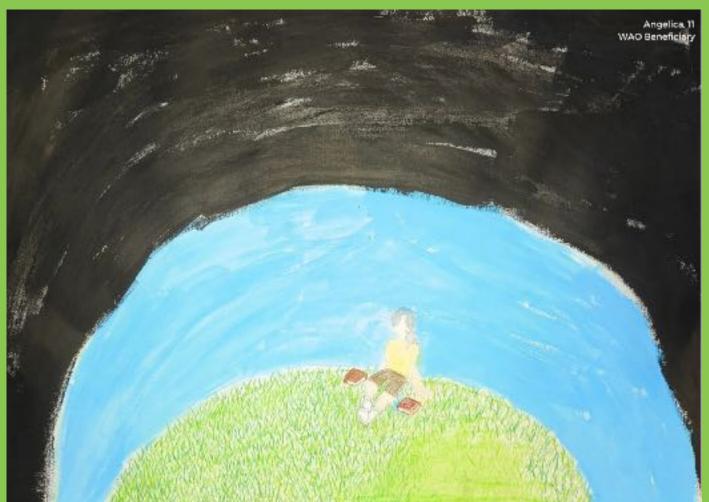
But our mission does not end there. For single mothers, the healing journey often intertwines with the need to secure livelihood. Yet, the obstacle of safe childcare looms large whereby our Child Care Center steps in, offering a lifeline to these courageous mothers, providing not just safety for their children but also support and understanding. Total of 63 children received daycare services at CCC and were given support through academics, arts and crafts, and living skills activities.

In December, we found the shelter had major structural damage which required shelter residents to evacuated and moved into the CCC. Since then, for safety and health reasons, the CCC has been converted into the WAO Refuge. WAO Refuge and CCC continued providing services as usual despite the changes.

At WAO Refuge, every challenge is met with resilience, and every setback is a testament to our unwavering commitment to those we serve.







# WAO BENEFICIARY ARTWORK

Left top: Mathanraj, 11 year old Right top: Logeswary, 18 years old Left down: Angelica, 11 years old

# **Shelter Success Stories**

## Story 1: Nila's Unwavering Determination

Nila is a survivor whose journey from darkness to light is nothing short of remarkable. Her journey began in 2022 when she sought refuge at the Women's Aid Organisation's (WAO) Shelter, escaping the suffocating grip of domestic violence. Despite initial setbacks, Nila's determination never wavered. In June 2023, with her two children by her side, she returned to us, ready to rewrite her life's narrative.

Embracing the shelter's activities, from therapeutic sessions to empowerment programmes, Nila immersed herself wholeheartedly. Her compassionate nature made her a pillar of support, extending kindness to fellow residents and creating a sense of unity and strength among survivors.

For Nila, her children were her driving force. Committed to a better future for them, she ensured their access to education through our Child Care Centre. With newfound skills and support, Nila secured employment and a safe home for her family, marking a significant step towards independence.

Yet, challenges persisted. When faced with renewed violence from her husband, Nila's strength shone through. Armed with knowledge and support, she took decisive action, seeking assistance from the One Stop Crisis Centre and reporting the incident to the police, refusing to be a victim any longer.

Nila's story is a testament to the resilience of survivors everywhere. Her journey inspires us all to break free from the chains of domestic violence and embrace a future filled with hope and possibility.



### **Story 2: Journey Home**

In 2022, Rosy arrived at the shelter, seeking refuge with her autistic son, David. The intricate nature of her case demanded meticulous planning and a steadfast commitment to her well-being. A foreign national married to a Malaysian, she was rescued by her embassy after experiencing an incident of physical abuse. Her spousal visa had expired and her passport was damaged.

The embassy issued a travel document for Rosy's return to her home country, but a significant hurdle arose, her autistic son, David, did not have a passport. As Rosy was the primary caregiver, leaving him behind was not an option for her. The embassy, with welfare assistance, attempted mediation with Rosy's husband, but progress proved elusive.

WAO stepped in, obtaining a protection order for Rosy and securing Rosy's essential documents. Despite receiving a new passport for Rosy, the immigration struggle for David's passport application persisted. Various immigration offices insisted on the father's physical presence or a custody order in favour of Rosy for passport issuance, a process notorious for its prolonged duration.

Undeterred, WAO collaborated with the embassy's lawyer to engage the father in discussions. A meeting, facilitated by a determined investigating officer in charge of Rosy's criminal case against her husband, hinged on leveraging Rosy's husband's cooperation for the passport application against withdrawal of the criminal case. Success seemed imminent as he agreed, but his unreliability surfaced again on the crucial day.

Foreseeing this, WAO took an independent approach, seeking a special pass for Rosy to remain legally in Malaysia while pursuing David's custody. Complications arose with the overstaying penalty, but through persuasive negotiations, the immigration officer waived the RM 3000 compound, recognizing the unique circumstances.

Finally, the case submitted to the special case division paved the way for a passport for David. To ensure compliance, the immigration officer agreed to issue the passport if Rosy left the country promptly after receiving a special pass. The journey was arduous, particularly at the shelter where accommodating a special needs child presented challenges. Yet, adaptability prevailed, focusing on David's needs and safety.

The success of this case underscores the multifaceted role of social workers – as advocates, negotiators, and coordinators of multiple stakeholders. It serves as a testament to the power of collective agency cooperation in aiding survivors of domestic violence. In the end, Rosy departed the country with David, unburdened by a compound or protracted custody battles.

# **Case Management**

Social workers play a vital role in empowering survivors to reclaim their lives from the grip of violence. These unsung heroes are not just there for immediate help, they are educators, guiding survivors through their rights and available services.

From crisis intervention to legal navigation, they are a lifeline, helping survivors secure protection orders, offering emotional support, and ensuring their voices are heard.

But their work not stop there. Social workers build bridges between agencies, creating a strong support network for survivors. They provide tailored referrals, ensuring every need is met. And they are not just one-time support, they are companions on the journey to healing and independence, ensuring survivors can live without fear.

In 2023, social workers returned to in-office setting, bringing back face-to-face interventions for a more personal touch. Despite challenges, they remained dedicated, handling 1990 hotline calls and 3514 messages, offering advice and support tailored to each caller's needs.

Their efforts translate into real change,197 face-to-face interventions, supporting 242 women and 52 children. Among them, 162 women found solace in their experience of domestic violence, with 71 assisting in police reports and 9 obtaining protection orders. 84 women and children received counselling services.

Behind these numbers lie countless hours of dedication. Six social workers conducted a staggering 5485 interventions, proving that their commitment to survivors knows no bounds.

These numbers aren't just statistics, they represent lives transformed and futures reclaimed. And it is all thanks to the tireless efforts of social workers, the unsung heroes of empowerment and hope.

# Case Management Success Story

## Thila Breaks the Cycle of Violence

lives forever.

Thila is trapped in a cycle of domestic violence, but her bravery shines through as she seeks help for herself and her children.

Her story unfolds with chilling incidents of abuse, with recorded dates marking the scars of her suffering. Seeking medical aid for her son, Amir, whose medical condition adds to their vulnerability, Thila bravely shares her truth with a medical officer, sparking a chain of events that will change their

Recognising the urgency of the situation, the medical team reaches out to WAO, igniting a partnership that will provide a lifeline for Thila and her children. With swift action, WAO embraces their case, offering support and sanctuary at a community centre, where they find refuge from the shadows of violence.

While shelter was not an option due to Amir's medical needs, WAO did not falter. Instead, they rallied around Thila, securing an interim protection order and coordinating medical care for Amir. Their support extended beyond the physical, offering emotional solace and practical assistance with legal matters and UNHCR-related issues.

Thila's journey is a testament to resilience and the power of community support. With WAO by her side, she is no longer alone in her fight for safety and freedom. Together, they navigate the challenges, one step at a time, towards a future filled with hope and possibility.



# Power Up Initiatives

In 2023, the Power-Up initiative changed the lives of 172 at-risk women, including single mothers, in the B40 community. We provided a safe space for them to learn new skills, find support, and embrace digital literacy. Through 219 offline and online activities, Power Up built a community of 350 empowered women focused on improving their lives and making a positive impact on families, neighbourhoods, and workplaces. Our Stitching Forward programme taught sewing, embroidery, and crocheting, creating a vibrant community that not only mastered new skills but also generated RM14,763 in income in 2023.

The Grub Hub, Power Up, empowers women to start food businesses from home. With catering courses and home-based food business opportunities, participants not only gained skills but also formed a supportive community. The Grub Hub's impact was evident in the impressive sales of RM10,198.50, showcasing the tangible outcomes of the participants' entrepreneurial journeys.

# **Volunteering for Survivor Support**

Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) celebrated the graduation of 26 Crisis Support Officers (CSOs) in 2023. These officers underwent a six-month extensive training, showcasing WAO's commitment to a survivor centred approach while combating gender-based violence and discrimination. The graduation marked a substantial stride in community efforts and bystander intervention to advocate against GBVD and support survivors. The dedication of these CSOs serves as a testament to the organisation's impact on making a difference.

Together, these initiatives reflect a commitment to empowerment, support, and positive change, creating a ripple effect that extends from individual lives to entire communities.

# A Journey of Resilience and Empowerment

# Living Her Dreams

Nora, a brave single mother at 31, broke free from an abusive relationship after six tumultuous years. With unwavering support from her mother and assistance from WAO, Nora found a path to a violence-free life.

In November 2022, Nora joined Power Up, starting with an entrepreneur class and diving into sewing courses. She turned her dream into reality, opening a thrift store and offering alteration services. Despite initial challenges, Nora's determination prevailed, leading to financial and emotional recovery.

Through Power Up, Nora initiated a sewing project, receiving orders for batik products. While a job offer came her way, Nora's geographical constraints and childcare expenses led her to decline, viewing it as a confidence boost for future opportunities.

For Nora, Power Up is not just a programme; it has been transformative, providing empowerment and a supportive community. Her advice to women in abusive relationships is powerful: take the daunting step of walking away, as everything falls into place after that. Nora stands as an inspiration, showcasing resilience and pursuing a brighter future for herself and her children.



# Mel's Train to Empowerment

Mel is a 31-year-old mother of two, who is facing challenges as a migrant family in Malaysia. Despite the hardships, Mel found hope through WAO's Power Up programmes in November 2021. Mel, who used to crochet as a hobby, joined WAO's turtle project and earned over RM500 by crocheting over 30 pieces. Through Power Up's upskilling programmes in entrepreneurship, English, sewing, and embroidery, Mel took her talents to the next level. Proudly earning over RM2000 through various projects, she is no longer solely dependent on her husband's income.

But it's not just about the money for Mel, her mental state improved tremendously. Her joy positively affected her children, and she became a group leader and teacher, roles she never thought possible before joining Power Up.

Now, Mel dreams of giving back to her community by training other women. She encourages all mothers to make time for personal growth and fight for their rights. Mel sees WAO as a place where dreams come true, but she is the true superwoman for turning her life around and wants to empower other women to do the same.

Power Up is proud to engage with Mel, helping her become a community leader and a crochet trainer. We hope her newfound sewing skills will lead her to become a sewing trainer, inspiring even more women on their empowering journeys.

# **Embrace the Challenge**

Fiona is a resilient mom of three who turned life's challenges into opportunities. Formerly an admin staff member at CIMB Bank, Fiona faced health issues in 2019, leading her to resign due to stage four lupus nephritis.

Undeterred, Fiona embraced entrepreneurship, diving into a small business selling delicious cakes and biscuits. In 2020, she joined WAO's Power Up programme, attending classes in cooking, sewing, and packaging. Fiona skillfully applied her newfound knowledge, expanding her product range to include brownies, vanilla cake, banana cake, and even frozen curry puffs.

Empowered by entrepreneurship classes, Fiona enhanced her products' presentation, improved cost calculations, and successfully marketed them online. In 2022, she scored a significant order for 150 bottles of pineapple tarts from a corporate client, delivering them promptly despite health challenges.

Facing rising costs in 2023, Fiona adapted by diversifying. Learning crochet and sewing through Power Up, she discovered a passion that helped her weather financial challenges. Despite her declining health, Fiona temporarily paused her food business, focusing on creating and selling crochet tote bags. The Power Up Economic Programme became her lifeline, earning RM990 from her first big sale.

Fiona's achievements didn't stop there. With newfound sewing skills, she ventured into making children's baju kurung, achieving success without any prior knowledge. The Power Up programme not only equipped Fiona with skills but also boosted her self-confidence and expanded her social network.

Despite her journey's twists and turns, Fiona's advice to women is clear: embrace challenges, seize opportunities, and be open to learning. She emphasises the importance of financial freedom for all, especially women, encouraging independence rather than complete reliance on others.

Fiona is more than an entrepreneur; she's an inspiration—an iron lady who perseveres and never gives up, proving that with determination, new skills, and a positive mindset, one can overcome any obstacle.



Iln 2023, our capacity-building team spearheaded 6,158 engagements. These efforts were driven by a shared vision, to empower our community with a profound understanding of the grave consequences of domestic violence. We aim to pave the way towards a safer Malaysia, where women and children can thrive without fear.

One of our most celebrated success story of 2023 was when a participant in our GBV training bravely shared her harassment experience, sparking positive change. Our training empowered her to speak out, leading to upper management taking action against the perpetrator. This success story highlights the transformative power of our programmes, fostering environments where survivors' voices drive meaningful change.

From our corporate training, we realised the importance of intertwining gender equality and human rights with business practices. To address this, we crafted new modules aimed at equipping companies with tools to navigate these complex intersections.

Our work with government priorities highlighted the challenge of changing mindsets, especially regarding training. To tackle this, we're targeting frontline government workers, aiming to reshape their approach to communication and services, particularly for GBV survivors.

During our GERAK Suara Kami 2023 project in Kelantan, girls embraced discussions on taboo topics like consent. By blending in with local norms, we created a space where they felt comfortable sharing their truths and experiences.

Piloting our gender equality training module with Monash engineering students proved highly successful, with students expressing genuine interest and finding the module educational.

Our Shelter Standard Workshop brought together shelter providers, inspiring them with survivor-centric approaches. Despite challenges like limited resources, their dedication underscores the importance of supporting grassroots movements. Through collaboration and networking, we aim to empower these providers to make a lasting impact in their communities.

These stories showcase the diverse ways our initiatives are making a difference, from empowering survivors to reshaping societal norms and fostering genuine interest in gender equality.













### **TOP LEARNING**

Grassroots training has taught us some valuable lessons, especially about the challenges they face. The biggest hurdle will be the limited funds and resources. While we step in to boost their capabilities, it's essential to acknowledge these obstacles. By recognising and addressing these challenges head-on, we can raise awareness about the need for financial support and resources to empower grassroots movements effectively.

That's why we start by conducting a priority needs assessment and engaging in dialogue with community representatives. This helps us understand their specific needs and tailor our support accordingly. But it doesn't stop there. We also connect them with other stakeholders in the community, creating a network of support that ensures their work is sustainable in the long run. Our goal is simple, to empower grassroots providers to make a lasting impact in their communities.









# **Gender Responsive Budgeting**

Since 2021, WAO and Engender have embarked on a partnership alongside our partners Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Yayasan Sime Darby to make the national budget gender responsive. A gender responsive budget looks at the budget's impact on girls, boys, men and women. Gender budgeting notes the differences in situations, roles, contributions, and needs of different communities and strata of society. It 'responds' accordingly by allocating specific budgets for both women and men beneficiaries in projects and programmes.

The past two years, we have run advocacy initiatives around this including a training programme for ministries called the Gender Responsive Budgeting in Practice (GRBiP) Programme, coordinating annual submission of recommendations, publishing a budget memorandum and running the Gender Lens on Budget scrutiny. However, due to the change in government in November 2022, this year marked a departure from the annual national budget schedule. In February 2023, the state prepared for a mini budget announcement in February 2023. WAO was invited to represent the Gender Budget Group (set up in 2021) to present our recommendations to the government and the national consultation on the budget. This we believe is a direct recognition of the work that WAO and ENGENDER does on making the national budget gender responsive.

Following a successful Gender Responsive Budgeting in Practice (GRBiP) Programme in 2022, WAO and our partners, ENGENDER and in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, embarked on running induction courses with three other ministries to ensure a gender responsive budget process. These ministries include the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Communications and Digital, and the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Living Cost. The goal of these two day workshop programmes is to build a solid understanding of gender, gender equality and the impact of sensitied allocations on the whole of Malaysian society.

In September, we once again attended the national budget consultation for Budget 2024 and successfully hosted the Gender Lens on Budget 2023/4 roundtable at the Asia School of Business bringing together various stakeholders including academics, CSOs, and government agencies. When the budget was announced in October 2023, we held our annual Budget Watch Party with the Gender Budget Group and shared on the ground analysis in numerous media interviews.

In addition to this, WAO was also involved in the budget scrutiny sharing sessions with Members of Parliaments and the Parliamentary Special Select Committee.

# **Stalking Criminalised**

After over a decade of advocacy efforts, stalking finally became a crime in Malaysia when the amendments to the Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code were passed on 29 March 2023. It was operationalised and went into effect on 31 May 2023. Following this WAO was part of a technical committee set up by the Ministry of Law under the Prime Minister's office (BHEUU) in order to create guidelines for the police force as well as draft the protection orders for survivors. WAO and other stakeholders championed successfully to ensure that the protection order remained accessible in the police station as well as online via the courts website.

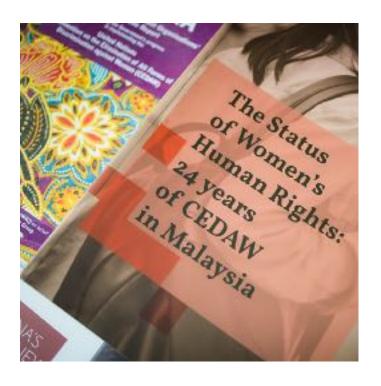
In the meantime, there were several highly publicised cases of stalking including that prompted questions on the implementation and guidelines in managing stalking cases. This was an important avenue for us to ensure that survivors knew they were able to access support and advice from our hotline. In 2023, we received 32 hotline calls involving stalking survivors and provided support to numerous survivors who shared their stories online and on social media. Besides that, technology facilitated stalking remains an issue that has not drawn as much attention in regards to policy, highlighting a gap in the current system.

There needs to be an emphasis on prosecuting these cases as well as strengthening the regulations that are meant to protect individuals online. The Advocacy team continues to monitor public cases to track enforcement of the stalking laws.

# **CEDAW Coalition**

In preparation for the Malaysian government's reporting cycle with the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), WAO coordinated the women's groups response in submitting a critical List of Issues to the committee. The LoI provides the committee with an on the ground realities of women in Malaysia.

The advocacy team also coordinated several meetings and orientation sessions to prepare various women's groups for the submission of information in the NGO report due in April 2024.





# Jawatan Kuasa Keganasan Rumah Tangga

WAO sits on the various subcommittees of the JKRT focused on Protection, Data, and Advocacy and Capacity Building. Through these engagements, we have provided feedback and input on the direction of the committees. For example, we have highlighted the barriers and obstacles faced by WAO's clients and social workers in case management such as access to OSCC service and access to education for children of domestic abuse survivors. We also raised the issue of the low number of Emergency Protection Order (EPO) issued and recommended for the efficiency of the application process. The JKRT has met twice throughout the year and there have also been six subcommittee meetings.







# **RE:CARE Project**

The Endemicity, Care, and Gender: Towards Developing Resilience in Malaysia's Essential Care Workforce and Infrastructure project, also known as RE:CARE had a successful 2023 by securing ethics clearance and beginning our data collection. RE:CARE aims to understand the experiences of women essential care workers during the pandemic undertaking their care work, both at work and at home, to recommend policies to support the resilience of Malaysia's care economy, for future crisis preparedness. The research takes a participatory approach in order to centre perspectives of essential care workers and their solutions. WAO has partnered with academics from the University of Alberta and Universiti Malaya in these efforts, alongside government stakeholders from TalentCorp and Ministry of Health.

### Successes:

Across 2023, we managed to build connections with care worker communities across Malaysia, from government to grassroots. This culminated in the completion of 25 focus group discussions (FGDs) across Malaysia, including in East Malaysia, where the RE:CARE Team engaged with over 30 care workers who undertook the role of Research Associates in a co-learning process to conduct the FGDs and highlight their experiences.

Additionally, the RE:CARE Team built strong partnerships with government counterparts, as well as the broader care economy ecosystem in Malaysia, through attending conferences and roundtables to better understand challenges from policymakers' perspectives. This includes Women Deliver 2023, the biggest conference centred on issues of women's rights, in Kigali, Rwanda, where the team participated as a panellist in one of the events.

### Main Learnings:

Throughout 2023, it became abundantly clear that Malaysia has reached a point where care work can no longer be ignored. One of the biggest learnings for the RE:CARE Team is the importance in building bridges across the multitude of sectors within the care economy, as well as the various and diverse care workers in Malaysia, from doctors to hospital cleaners to care providers for those with disabilities to migrant domestic workers.

Crucially, the voices and experiences of care workers must be centred if we are to create solutions for the challenges they face. RE:CARE, in 2024, hopes to bring forward these solutions, crafted from insights with the care workers who have worked alongside us in this project.

# Gender Progressive Journalism: Saksi Malaysia

Saksi is a WAO initiative on gender progressive journalism that was launched in 2021. Unfortunately due to the lingering effects of the pandemic, it faced substantial challenges in its first year but was revived with additional funding and support from the US Embassy in 2022. This funding enabled the development of a website as well as other projects under the initiative. Three main events were held this year; a citizen journalism workshop, a networking event and an art exhibition.

# Gender Progressive Journalism Workshop

The first workshop was held in March of 2023 with 18 participants. The participants all expressed a keen interest in journalism and activism and were interested in learning more about how to get started in the field. They were given a runthrough of what gender progressive journalism entails and how to report on sensitive topics such as gender based violence in an ethical way.



# Saksi.com Launch & Industry Expert Networking Event

In order to relaunch the upgraded Saksi website, we planned and coordinated a networking event in June 2023. Besides launching Saksi.com to a wider audience, the event was also leveraged to connect women experts in male dominated fields such as economics and media with each other and to build a database of industry professionals for Saksi to use for future content. The main panel session featured three accomplished women in media (Melisa Idris, Nadira Ilana and Vaneesha Krishnasamy) who share their experiences and the challenges they faced throughout their careers. The event was attended by 31 guests, many of whom stayed back to network. Guests were encouraged to sign up as industry experts to be added to Saksi's database and by the end of the event 22 people had signed up, with expertise in a diverse range of industries.

# Strokes of Resilience

In conjunction with International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (IDEVAW) and the following 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence campaign, Saksi and WAO held an art exhibition/fundraiser titled Strokes of Resilience: Empowerment Through Art. A call for submissions was sent out via social media for artists to submit their works for the exhibition. A total of 18 pieces were selected along with an additional collaboration with local fashion brand House of Antara, who showcased a textile based piece that would be put up for auction during the event. The one day exhibition was a free event that was open to the general public but WAO's partners were given personalized invitations. The showcased artworks, spanning traditional and digital mediums, provided attendees with the chance to view and purchase unique pieces. Fifty percent of the proceeds from the sales went to WAO's Services team, while the remainder went to the artists.

# Website and social media

The most popular articles on the website this year were both related to stalking and how survivors felt about the need for the Anti Stalking Law. The first was an inquiry into the atmosphere of stalking and harassment faced by cosplayers within the Malaysian ACG (anime comics games) industry and the second was an overview of the journey behind the Anti Stalking Law, detailing its development and how it finally came to pass. Both pieces included interviews with survivors in order to include their lived experiences.

Saksi also began receiving articles written by community members in 2023. These ranged from topics such as the underrepresentation of women in our parliament to the case for menstrual leave in Malaysia. Besides this, Saksi also received articles and press releases from other advocacy groups such as RRAAM as well as organisations like UNFPA. Both of these are in line with our aim to exist as both a platform for burgeoning journalists to spread their wings and as an independent, nonprofit newsroom. Saksi also managed to grow on social media with a total of 81 posts made over the year on Instagram.



# **International Representation**

### Women Deliver 2023

Women Deliver is the largest conference centred on women's issues. In 2023, it was held in Kigali, Rwanda. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC), who convened the Women RISE Initiative grant which funds the RE:CARE Project, invited Anis Farid, as Principal Investigator of the project to Rwanda to be part of a panel for the conference. In July of 2023, Anis and Shazana Agha, Head of Research, went to Kigali for Women Deliver.

The panel, entitled, "Balancing access to care and care responsibilities among women healthcare workers: Breaking down international evidence and solutions for communities, families and women", focused on how managing care work impacts the ability of care workers to provide care. Alongside Anis, the panel featured other experts from around the world, including Dr. Lisa Avery, an academic physician from Canada, who leads another Women RISE Initiative project based in Kenya, Dr. Melania Chiponda, an African ecofeminist with The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), and Dr. Muriel Ametoglo, a regional feminist economist with UN Women in West and Central Africa. Particularly, Anis highlighted the challenges faced by nurses and hospital cleaners in Malaysia, but also the importance of working in a cross-sectoral manner, noting how RE:CARE has managed to build relationships across a variety of stakeholders as a central strategy to empowering care workers.

Additionally, the RE:CARE Team attended a variety of sessions, including one organised in conjunction with the US Department of State and Asia Foundation on strengthening care policies and intersectional movements for care justice. Other sessions on gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) were also attended.

Main learnings: The panel highlighted the importance of recognising the relationship and intersections between paid and unpaid care work, especially in a post-COVID-19 world. The panel acknowledged how unpaid care work remains difficult to address because of how inextricably linked it is with gender and cultural norms. But the vibrant fabric of women's movements around the world brought to light key initiatives and ideas for the research team to bring back, including the importance of sensitising donors and funders, involving male allies, and the importance of addressing violence against women and SRHR to drive gender equality.

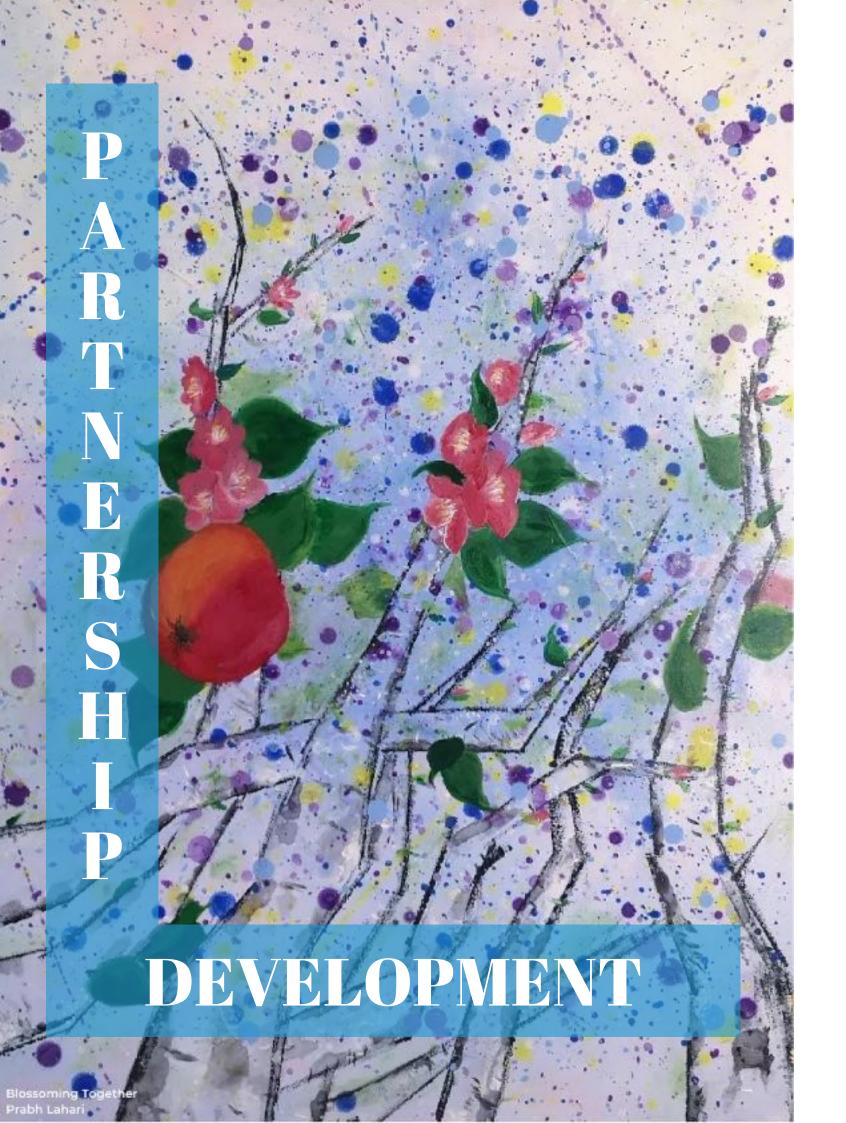
### **Gender Equality Learning Exchange**

Through our funders – Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) – WAO had the opportunity to learn and share more about gender equality and advocacy efforts in Malaysia in an international capacity. In June 2023, we were invited for a learning trip alongside nine other participants including MPs, media and government officials to Berlin and Brussels to share our experiences with the German government and European Union officials. WAO was represented by Abinaya Mohan, Advocacy Director who successfully shared and moderated discussions with the Berlin State government on gender responsive budgeting as well as on gender equality in political participation with the European Commission. We also engaged with CSOs such as Women Political Leaders, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, and the National Council of German Women's Organisation.

### Feminist Legal Exchange Convening

WAO's Senior Advocacy Officer, Zati Hanani attended the Feminist Legal Exchange Convening in Chiang Mai organised by Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) from 18th November 2023 until 20th November where we discussed strategies and challenges in feminist advocacy through legal perspective. WAO was part of a panel session sharing WAO's journey advocating for Anti-stalking Law.





Behind every successful mission of the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), there is a cast of unsung heroes, our donors. Just like the wind beneath our wings, they propel us forward, ensuring our initiatives to support and advocate for women and children in need take flight.

In a world where support can sometimes feel scarce, we count ourselves lucky to have our donors, partners and stakeholders who stand by us, firm in their belief in our cause. Their generosity is not just about money, it is a lifeline that keeps our mission alive and thriving.

In 2023, WAO launched an exciting lineup of initiatives designed to ensure a seamless continuation of efforts to aid survivors of gender based violence.

The "Love Bombing" campaign, held in collaboration with IPG Media Brand, stands as the largest initiative aimed at educating the public about Love bombing, a manipulation tactic where perpetrators shower victims with excessive affection, praise, and gifts to exert control. This creates a false sense of security for the survivor. After the abuse, gifts are given, and the trauma is either forgotten or forgiven, only for the perpetrator to repeat the cycle.

But that's not all, WAO has also partnered with the Practical Classic Drivers (PCD) team to launch an initiative promoting male allyship in support of WAO. In anticipation of Violence Against Women and Girls Month in November. This philanthropic initiative not only raised awareness and funds for the WAO but also emphasised the crucial role of male allies in addressing gender-based violence, 30 classic cars embarked on an inspiring journey across the Malaysian peninsula for "Rentas Peninsular 2.0: We for She."

Furthermore, the initiatives known as Dine4Her, Shop4Her, and Drive4Change were included in the fundraising calendar for 2023. These campaigns serve the purpose of raising awareness within society regarding the crucial need to invest in initiatives that empower women and children who are subjected to domestic violence. By partnering and organising dining experiences, shopping promotions, and other fundraising activities, these campaigns aim to highlight the significance of supporting and uplifting women and children affected by domestic abuse, thereby fostering a more supportive and equitable community environment.

At WAO, we are about weaving a narrative that blends environmental consciousness, social impact, and governance principles into the fabric of change, grounded in the principles of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG). In 2023, our partnership team successfully executed the WePledge program in collaboration with six entities, Sri KDU International School, Bos Wealth Management Berhad, Berjaya Sompo Insurance Berhad, OCBC Bank Malaysia, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and AVEVA reaching out to over 500 participants to raise awareness and share information about Gender-based Violence (GBV).





WAO also placed a strong emphasis on forging collaborations with other strategic partners such as Air Asia, Sodexo, OCBC Bank Malaysia, Baldwyn Lowick Lodge, and the Rotary Club of Kuala Lumpur City Centre through CSR programs and fundraising efforts.

As we arrived at our 40th anniversary, WAO achieved a significant milestone by garnering support from prominent organisations such as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality, Chong Chook Yew Sdn Bhd, Women's Fund Asia, Yayasan Sime Darby, IDRC-Total International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and UNHCR. This support was dedicated to impactful projects aimed at challenging societal perceptions and fostering a deeper understanding of gender-based violence among the public.

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Artwork by: Prabh Lahari



An unwavering commitment and collective efforts from every staff member, WAO maintained the trust of the community as the primary platform and channel for aiding women and children affected by domestic violence. This is evident when WAO received RM246,095.97 through generous contributions from individuals of diverse backgrounds, all of whom generously donated to support WAO's initiatives in making Malaysia a safer country for these individuals. WAO's partnership team extends heartfelt gratitude to the media partners who have provided extensive coverage of our programmes, fundraising campaigns, and research endeavours. Without the support of the media, our efforts to reach the broader community would not have been realised.

We extend our gratitude to the volunteers who serve as the driving force of WAO. In 2023, we conducted four induction sessions for community members who registered as volunteers. A thorough screening process was carried out for nearly 70 community members at these inductions before being officially certified as WAO volunteers. Our efforts to raise awareness through public engagement initiatives would not be successful without the assistance of our trained volunteers.



# **2023 FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS**

# WePledge



WePledge: A corporate initiative undertaken to raise unrestricted funds by pledging with WAO. In correspondence to the corporate pledge of donations, a one-hour brown bag talk was conducted and CSR programs were coordinated. The talks focused on prevention and response to gender-based violence to establish a safe community in the workplace. WAO was supported for one year with funds to finance 24-hour crisis support services and temporary shelter that addressed all forms of gender-based violence

# iPledge 365



The "I-Pledge to Rebuild Her Life" campaign was a call-to-action for individuals from the online community to pledge their support, creating a virtual community dedicated to awareness and empowerment.





# Dine4Her



Officially launched in November 2023, This campaign brought in partnerships with food and beverage (F&B) establishments. The campaign was aimed at raising crucial funds for WAO Safe Spaces to ensure it remain accessible to women and children survivors of violence. When patrons dine-in at partner F&B establishments, a percentage of their bill is donated to Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) to support women rebuilding their lives after gender-based violence. This campaign demonstrated the concept of dining with purpose

# Journey4Her



Journey4Her was aimed at engaging ride and drive clubs nationwide to fundraise for Women's Aid Organisation (WAO). Beyond the thrill of the road, participants drive impact by supporting women affected by gender-based violence.

# Shop4Her



This campaign aimed at transforming everyday shopping into a charitable act. Shop4Her is an initiative aimed at creating a virtuous cycle of empowerment between retailers, consumers, and WAO. Through limited edition collections, collaboratively designed items and existing products, a percentage from the sale is contributed to empowering women through WAO's vital programs.



# **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

In 2023, Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) did not just make connections, we ignited sparks of empowerment and education that reverberated across communities. As the year unfolded, WAO forged impactful connections with 13,166 individuals, each interaction a thread weaving a stronger fabric of support and understanding.

But these weren't typical run of the mill connections, WAO went above and beyond, orchestrating nearly 90 electrifying public engagements that transcended the mundane. From captivating webinars to university talks, from dynamic forums to soul-stirring interviews, WAO orchestrated a symphony of empowerment that echoed far and wide. And let's not forget about the vibrant mobile booths and colourful beacons of hope amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Each booth was a microcosm of empowerment, a sanctuary where individuals found solace, guidance, and community.

In 2023, 23 mobile booths were strategically activated to showcase the WAO brand. These weren't just displays, they were vibrant hubs of awareness, making WAO's presence felt and recognised in the community. But that's not all, in a move that resonates with empowerment, WAO brought back the Ambassador Programme for 2023. Out of 13 incredible participants, seven were chosen as official WAO Ambassadors for the year. This not only showcases the enthusiasm of the participants but also extends the reach of WAO's advocacy through these dynamic ambassadors.

Now, there are 13 passionate advocates proudly representing WAO in various capacities. Adding a personal touch, WAO opened its doors wide, conducting three virtual and one in-person volunteer induction sessions. A warm welcome to 67 new volunteers, ready to contribute their time and skills towards WAO's noble cause.

2023 was not just a year for WAO, it was a year of dynamic connections, passionate advocates, and expanding influence. Each number tells a story of empowerment, education, and community engagement, making WAO's impact truly remarkable.

# RM100,000 and above

United Nations Entity for 115,476.13 Gender Equality

Chong Chook Yew Sdn Bhd 200,000.00

Women's Fund Asia 342,921.38

Yayasan Sime Darby 555,400.94

IDRC- Total International
Development Research Centre 721,243.25
(IDRC)

UNHCR 827,982.00

United Nations Entity for 115,476.13 Gender Equality



RM20,000 - RM 99,999	:0,000 – RM 99,999		
Harlow's and MGI Sdn. Bhd	20,000.00		
J/K Projek Khas PPN	20,000.00		
Kuok Foundation Berhad	30,000.00		
Dpl International Sd	37,342.76		
Beauty In Motion Sdn Bhd	46,625.00		
RCE Marketing Sdn Bhd	54,000.00		
Wanita Berdaya Selangor	71,150.00		

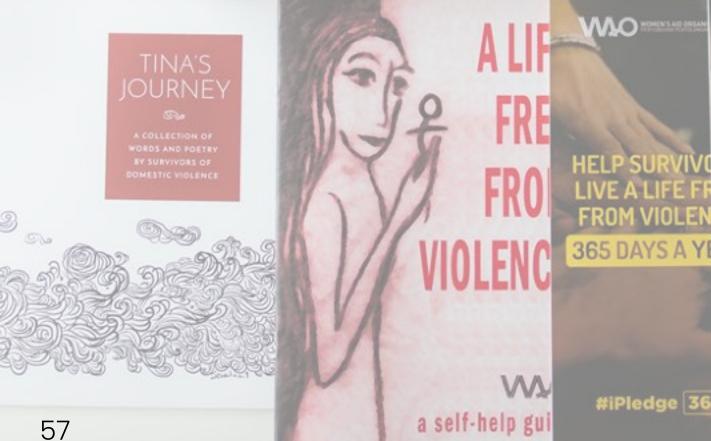
RM5,000 - RM19,999	
Z Zurich Foundation	10,000.00
Rotary Club Of Kuala Lumpur City Centre	10,250.00
UK Online Giving Foundation	11,869.04
Zurich Insurance PLC	12,006.43
Can-Care Health Systems (M) Sdn. Bhd	12,379.75
B Adore (M) Sdn Bhd	13,056.00
Connie Tong May Kwei	15,000.00
TOBIAS BINNA	15,000.00
KOSÉ (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd	16,800.00
Baldwyn Lowick Lodge	17,500.00
Usdo Officer Symbol	18,862.76
St. Jude BEC (Sec.12 PJ)	19,510.00
Connie Tong May Kwei	15,000.00
Tobias Binna	15,000.00
KOSÉ (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd	16,800.00



### RM5,000 - RM19,999

Anantha Lakshmi Ananthashankar	5,000.00
Astro Productions Sd	5,000.00
Chai Woon Huai	5,000.00
Chang Choon Ming	5,000.00
Christopher Tan Chor Sen	5,000.00
Mr. Lim Ghee Keong	5,000.00
Soh Weng Thiam	5,000.00
Puveshini Rao A/P Su	5,011.01
National Institute O	6,000.00
Eaternity Empire	6,200.00
Unknown Cheque	6,500.00
Unknown	7,475.00
Iskander bin Ismail Mohamed Ali	8,000.00
Aveva Asia Pacific S	8,500.00
Dagang Nexchange Ber	9,933.00
Alantic Sports Sdn Bhd	10,000.00
Canada Embassy	10,000.00
Imu Education Sdn Bhd	10,000.00
Pusat Khidmat Rakyat	10,000.00
Techarta Sdn. Bhd.	10,000.00





### **WAO PARTNERS**

### AirAsia X

"We extend our gratitude to WAO for this remarkable opportunity and eagerly anticipate future collaborations, continuing our journey of making a positive impact on the world. This experience reaffirms our commitment to actively engage in endeavours that genuinely make a difference in the lives of others, aligning with the core values of AirAsia, where gender equality is upheld, ensuring equal opportunities for all. We gained insights into the specialised training required to protect women from violence, whether through contributing professional knowledge or offering support via hotlines. Understanding the challenges faced by survivors emphasised the organisation's pivotal role in empowering women. Our 'Dare to Dream' slogan inspires us to step out of our comfort zones, challenge ourselves, and speak up".

### Coco Pod Cafe (Partner for DineforHer)

"Our joint efforts aimed at raising funds for the meaningful work WAO does in supporting domestic abuse survivors have been both impactful and fulfilling. The commitment and passion displayed by the WAO team were truly inspiring, making our collaboration seamless and purpose-driven. What further warmed our hearts was WAO's willingness to extend its support to our Christmas party initiative hosted by Coco Pod Cafe for two orphanages. Their genuine commitment to making a positive difference in the community goes beyond their primary mission, and we are genuinely grateful for their collaboration. In essence, our experience with WAO has been marked by professionalism, genuine care, and a shared dedication to creating positive change. We look forward to more collaborations that make a lasting impact on the lives of those in need".

# IPG MEDIA BRAND (Partner for Hush Hush Gifts Campaign)

"Mediabrands Content Studio collaborated with WAO on a compelling campaign called The Hush Hush Gifts, shedding light on manipulative tactics disguised as affection in society. The synergy of WAO's vision and our creative efforts resulted in a seamless and gratifying partnership. Contributing to their success was truly fulfilling, and we eagerly anticipate future collaborations with WAO".

# **WAO CRISIS SUPPORT OFFICERS**

### Cheryl

"The training is well organised and helpful in preparing volunteers for duty. Appreciate the effort and confidence boost for those who are anxious for duty."

### Najmin

"While I have always been aware of the Women's Aid Organisation, I did not truly understand the impact of the work they are doing until the Movement Control Order (MCO), when an increasing number of women and children experienced abuse when isolated and stuck at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. I knew then that I wanted to play a bigger role in assisting the survivors. When the call for CSOs was announced over social media, I jumped at the chance to join the WAO. The training was thorough, covered many critical areas, and prepared me for the calls that were coming in through the hotline. While the calls could be difficult, the support I have received from the CSO team has been invaluable. It has been an honour and privilege to be able to play a part in assisting vulnerable families."

### Aishah Hamdan

"I volunteered to be a Crisis Support Officer (CSO) to manage the WAO hotline in 2023. Before I could join the WAO fleet of CSOs, I had to go through training via online lectures as well as an actual face-to-face practicum. The training provided was relevant, on point, and current, and it has given me more confidence and security to call the hotline. I understand that, as a CSO, I am here to support the Social Workers (SW) by triaging calls, as not all calls need SW intervention. This, however, requires me to know when I need to escalate to the SW and when it is not necessary. I would also need to know what information needs to be provided if the problems can be solved without SW intervention".



# **WAO VOLUNTEERS**

# **WAO AMBASSADORS**

### Yasmin

"It has been a great and joyful experience volunteering for WAO. Am proud to be part of the collective conscience that strive to provide a better future for women and children. And to be surrounded by positive and like - minded people in WAO family. Volunteering makes you a better person, insyaAllah. I heart WAO."

# Jing Hwei (MCKL College Student)

"I'm glad that I got the oppurtunity to volunteer for WAO even though it was only for 2 events, because it really opened my eyes to see how real domestic violence against women is, and it touched me to see how much WAO does to raise funds to help these women in need. I also got a chance to hear about the inspiring and empowering experiences of several women in the "Women's Safety in Transit and Transport Industry" forum."

### Shiva Prakash

"As a privileged man I have never done anything for the best part of my life to understand the plight of women issues in our country. I found WAO essential in opening my eyes to such issues and now I can never ever close my eyes to the same. As such, volunteering with WAO has helped me and will continue to help me make better decision for myself and my community."

### **Angeline Tan**

"Being an Ambassador for WAO has been an extremely meaningful journey in fighting for equality and promoting a better society for all. There is no better way to represent a cause that I care about and foster friendships with likeminded intellects from all walks of life."

### Ashileen Arriveena

"As a WAO ambassador, I've witnessed the profound impact of advocacy and support on survivors' lives. Through education, outreach, and legislative efforts, we strive to break the cycle of abuse and empower individuals to seek help and find safety. It's crucial to amplify survivors' voices, challenge societal norms, and foster a culture of respect and empathy. Together, we can create a world where everyone feels safe and valued."

# Nor Hidayah (Volunteer & Ambassador)

"My role as volunteer and ambassador for WAO has been one of the most fulfilling things I've done! Alongside helping to advance an important cause, it has given me an opportunity to be around such inspiring women and taught me that every person's potential has no bounds. I'm also continuously learning new things about pertinent social issues and lived realities of survivors of gender based violence in Malaysia."

### **WAO BENEFICIARIES**

**Grace**: "WAO programmes have given me more opportunities to be financially independent. The emotional support from the WAO staff and the other ladies helps build my self-esteem to be more active, regardless of my age."

**Nadia**: "All programmes encourage me to do something great. All the programmes give me the courage and motivation to do something on my own. Above all, my husband has stopped mentally torturing me because I joined WOW. And here, he is also afraid of the police."

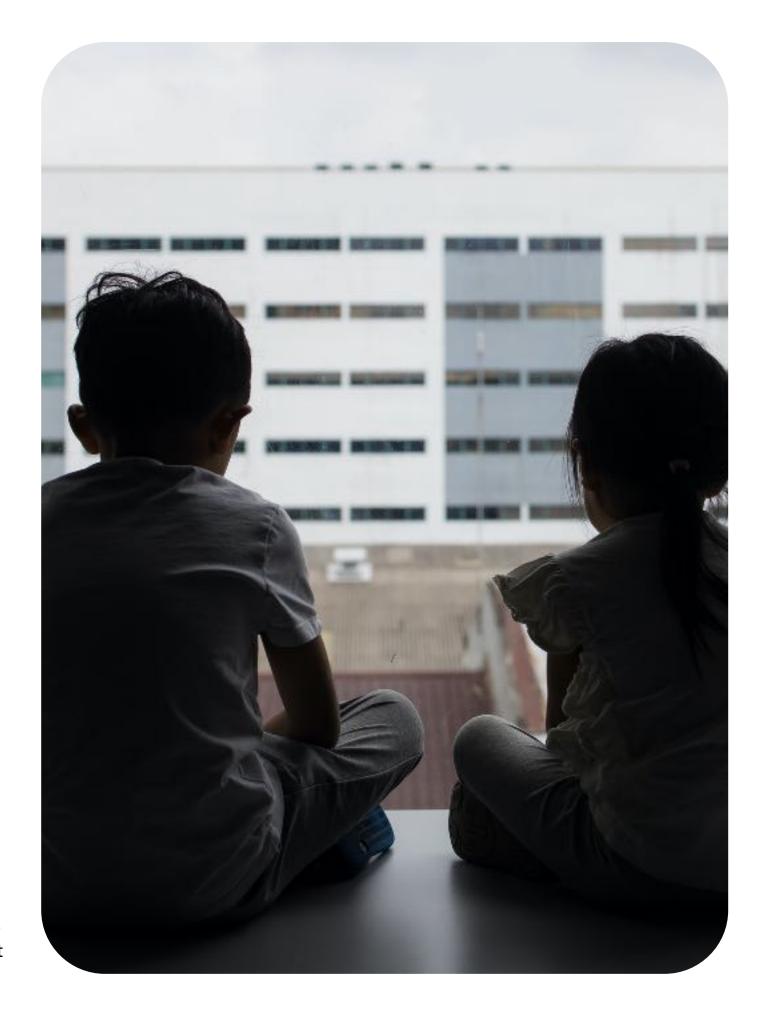
**Asriyah**: "The programmes and opportunities given by WAO helped me a lot to grow and manage my small business".

**Rose**: "The programmes make me feel that I am strong enough to survive, as I am being cared for under different programmes".

**Mercy**: "I learned cool new skills from my crochet class! Now I can make neat tote bags and feel proud of my work. It was fun learning with others, even though it meant leaving my kids at home. Sharing what I've learned has been rewarding—I even earned some money from it. Now I want to teach others and empower women through crochet. Leading the DECORTE project boosted my confidence and made me feel important."

**Rajes**: "In my Digital Marketing course, I learned all about different strategies like social media marketing, SEO, email marketing, and content marketing. I also mastered tools like Google Analytics for analysing data and creating targeted campaigns. Now I feel confident and empowered. While I haven't started my own business yet, I've been helping friends and colleagues with their small businesses, and improving their online presence. In the future, I aim to use these skills to grow my family business and make it more visible online."

**Ruth**: "In my beginner sewing class, I learned to use a sewing machine and make various items like tote bags, coin pouches, and clothes. It was my first time sewing, and I'm proud I can now do simple sewing tasks at home like fixing pillowcases and hemming pants. We had a great time learning together and helping each other like sisters. The teachers were patient and kind. Setting up the machine and making patterns were challenging, but I feel accomplished and more confident now. I've only done basic sewing for home use, but I want to learn more about business. My dream is to achieve financial freedom to support myself and my children."



# THANK YOU AMBASSADORS

**Angeline Tan** 

**Ashileen Arriveena** 

Isma Hanum

Joyce Lai

Kaberi

Li Ann Kon

**Loh Jiayi** 

Natasha Franco

Nor Hidayah

Shih En

Syahirah Ruslan

Syara Rossham

**Yasmin Harizal** 

# THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS

**Adelina Zulkifli** 

Adinda

Alicia Nam

**Amanda Gan** 

**Amani** 

**Amiera Norazizan** 

**Angeline** 

**Angeline Tan** 

**Arthur Chong** 

**Ashileen Arriveena** 

**Athira Kahar** 

**Bee Yin** 

**Bee Yin** 

Dina

Edana (MCKL

Student)

Effa

**Esther Ng** 

**Farah Afiqah** 

**Farah Teng** 

Faustine (MCKL

Student)

Fong Sam Pei

Habiba

Hanim

Harshinii

Hashwini

Hidayah

Isma Hanum

Jing Hwei (MCKL

Student)

Joanne

Joyce Lai

Kaberi

Khushboo

Li Ann Kon

Loh Jiayi

Maryam

Mei Yee

**Michelle Simons** 

**Mun Yee** 

**Nadia** 

Natasha Franco

Nemisha (MCKL

Student)

Nirmaljit

**Nisheeta** 

Nor Hidayah

**Nur Jihan** 

Oz

Pooja

Priyadharshni Eswaran

Ranessa Theyakaraja

Regine

Rohini

Seroja

**Shansa Camilla** 

Shih En

**Shine Leung** 

**Shiva Prakash** 

Siew Kaii Xuan (MCKL

Student)

Siew Yin Yee (Catherine)

Su Min

Suriakala Apparao

Syahirah

Syahirah Ruslan

Syara Rossham

Tan Jing

Teo Ai Lan (Lisa)

Valen (MCKL Student)

**Victoria Tay** 

Yasmin

Yasmin Harizal

Yasmin Zolkifly

Zaiti Zubir

# Gallery















