

OrphanUpSkill and how it started

By Muddassir Masihuddin (Project Head and Founder)

In 2011, a group of international students decided to come together and spend Eid doing something significant for orphans in Kuala Lumpur. Since then, our team has always been very active in taking care of orphans from feeding them to taking care of their shelter and distributing gift baskets every Eid. We've been growing as a team and doing pretty well. This year however, we decided to stop and reflect on ourselves about how far we have come and where to from here. We realized that we were no different to the many Islamic Organizations that pretty much do the same work.

We asked ourselves, how significant is what we do? How much of a long-term difference does it make to orphans? Did we want to just recycle what was already out there or do something different? We realized that orphans need more than food, shelter and clothing and being dependent on others. They need to be introduced to a world we are connected to and that is, the world of computers. The most orphans can currently expect in employability here is jobs such as restaurant waiters, taxi drivers, cleaners and so on and often never get access to learn what we learn on computers due to lack of resources and their underprivileged status.

In today's world, having basic computer knowledge is almost as equivalent as being educated. With this in mind, OrphanUpSkill was founded to raise a new generation of orphans where they not only learn about computers but also how to program, web design, graphic design, create apps and much more. Taking care of orphans simply means, empowering them to be responsible and to be independent citizens of the world. It is about teaching them what we know. It is about demonstrating what computers have the potential to do. It is about introducing them to an ocean of knowledge that computers and internet unlocks.

Tech jobs are among the fastest growing in the world and yet orphans are left behind. The biggest drop off happens between the ages of 13-17. This age is the golden age in picking up technical skills that can transform lives by making them independent and job market ready. By 2020, there will be 1.4 million jobs available in computing related fields. How are orphans supposed to compete for such jobs when they lack in special set of skills and technical knowledge?

OrphanUpSkill was formed to address this significant current gap. OrphanUpSkill is designed to teach orphans for 9-weeks about Graphic Design, Web Development and Programming. After 9-weeks, they get to choose their area of interest and are then provided online resources to further develop their skills and expand their learning, and skills on how they can generate an income with these newly-learned skills. This will make the orphans independent and give them hope of a better and brighter future. They can then be easily hired in SME companies related to their skills and expertise. They can also take on freelance projects that will leverage their skills with successful outcomes. Graduates from the program will always be given orphanUpSkill alumni access where they can seek more help if and when needed.

We anticipate that in one-year's time, we will be able to have tangible results that are measurable and nurture orphans that are more confident about their future prospects. The success of this project will ensure its continuity and we are confident that it is achievable.

You can join this great initiative, that is the first of its kind in the Muslim world, by helping us raise the funds we need to buy computers, teach orphans and connect them to launch their careers in the fastest growing IT industry. You can help us by supporting and donating to the cause and ride along with our journey.