

The Alumni Magazine

# Contact

**ISSUE 11**  
SEPT 2021



“

True heroism is not  
the urge to surpass all others at  
whatever cost, but the urge to serve  
others, at whatever cost.”

- Arthur Ashe

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# About Contact

**Contact** is the medium for OUM graduates to stay connected to their alma mater. Published as a quarterly e-magazine, **Contact** tells the inspiring stories of those who have realised their dreams at OUM.



# IN THIS ISSUE

Every day we get news and updates on Covid-19. Through them, we learn about the doctors and nurses, ambulance drivers and undertakers, healthcare workers and volunteers who continue to work tirelessly to combat the spread of this deadly pandemic. But did you know there are many other unsung heroes who are also playing important role in this global challenge?

The eleventh issue of **Contact** is dedicated to one of OUM's most accomplished alumni and a Covid-19 hero many may not know about. Accompanying this feature article are stories on one early childhood education expert and an author, both of whom proudly graduated last year. We also take a serious look at the problem of world hunger, and as a nod to these uncertain times, talk about embracing change.

Happy reading!

LOCAL HEROES:

# OUR OWN COVID-19 HERO

By Tengku Amina Munira (tg\_munira@oum.edu.my)

**F**or many of us, a big part of Covid-19 is about statistics. How many cases and new clusters are reported today? What are the latest infectivity, fatality and recovery rates? How many people have been vaccinated so far?

When the news comes on, these numbers are reported by ministers and health officials. Together with doctors, nurses, other frontliners and volunteers, these are the faces and voices that guide the Covid-19 narrative in Malaysia.

But have you ever wondered who else might be playing a huge but not often publicised role during this deadly pandemic?

Enter Dato' Dr Anas Alam Faizli, one of OUM's most accomplished alumni and a vital cog in the machinery against Covid-19.

Dato' Dr Anas is a two-time alumnus, having graduated from the Master of Project Management and Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programmes. In fact, he is the pioneering graduate for the DBA programme and was also the graduate representative at his convocation in 2015.

As Chief Executive Officer of ProtectHealth Corporation Sdn Bhd (ProtectHealth), this 41-year-old has been on his toes ever since the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (PICK) was introduced early this year.



“ProtectHealth is a not-for-profit company established under the Ministry of Health. In general, we coordinate, administer, and manage initiatives related to financing healthcare services,” Dato’ Dr Anas explains.

“During the pandemic, ProtectHealth has been coordinating the participation of private medical practitioners for the second and third phases of PICK, which started in May. So far, we’ve helped set up more than 2,000 vaccination centres and through ProtectHealth, PICK has dispensed more than 1.5 million doses of the vaccine across the country.



“We’ve also begun involving healthcare-related non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These NGOs have been performing house-to-house vaccinations for the sickly and bed-ridden, elderly, Orang Asli, those in remote areas, as well as the homeless and migrants. As a result, I’m confident that we can deliver the vaccination target for all adults in Malaysia before the end of October.”

This history buff has not always been an expert in healthcare services and management. Previously, he was in the oil and gas industry, asset facility management, and hospital support services. His current position allows him to assume a role that is quite unique in the corporate world.

“There aren’t many who can take on a corporate position but also contribute to the national agenda and give back to society at the same time,” he shares proudly.

Always passionate about socio-economic issues, Dato’ Dr Anas strongly believes that everyone deserves the best in education and healthcare. His only hope is for future generations to inherit a better Malaysia.

With Dato’ Dr Anas at the helm of ProtectHealth, Malaysia is certainly on track to realising crucial healthcare reforms in the country.

LIVE & LEARN:

# FROM DOING TO TEACHING: AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

By Izyan Diyana Merzuki (izyan\_diyana@oum.edu.my)



**D**r Ng Poh Yoke, 49, worked with young children in a kindergarten for 16 years. Last year, she made a big leap in her career by joining a private university.

"I am now a programme leader for the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education at a Kuala Lumpur-based institution. I teach early childhood courses at both diploma and degree levels," says this two-time graduate of Master and Doctor of Education.

Dr Ng says that she gained a lot of knowledge from both programmes because the lecturers were very well versed. "I also got to know a few course mates and we were able to exchange ideas. Most of them were not in the same field as I was. We had a good time."

She believes that in order to study and work at the same time, one needs to be consistent, persistent, and determined to work towards one's objectives.

Seven years of hard work paid off as she has now earned both her master's degree and doctorate from OUM.

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**I always like to encourage students who are reluctant to contribute during discussions to give their opinions. At the same time, I like to impart my personal knowledge and experiences in ECE.”**

“It was difficult. I had to be very disciplined and manage time very well. I had to follow a strict timetable every day to complete my work,” says Dr Ng.

Her interest has always been in early childhood education (ECE), thus both her master’s and doctoral theses focused on the topic. Her valuable experience and knowledge as an administrator and head of a kindergarten has helped her a lot as an ECE lecturer.

“I always like to encourage students who are reluctant to contribute during discussions to give their opinions. At the same time, I like to impart my personal knowledge and experiences in ECE.”

This ECE lecturer believes that if we are not good communicators, we need to practise communicating more often. If we are not good writers, then we need to practise writing more often.

When asked about her lecturing duties during the pandemic, she reveals, “Initially, having to carry out fully online teaching was very challenging. After some time, I found that I could have the same amount of interaction with students through forum discussions, just as much as I had through face-to-face teaching.”

Teaching young children and young adults are worlds apart in every way. Armed with a doctorate, Dr Ng took the plunge to achieve and experience more in her career and life.

She admits that she prefers to work with young children, though work in a kindergarten seemed never-ending. She comments, “I was more stressed because I had to manage everything and deal with teachers, children and their parents. Now I’m more independent and I have a lot of freedom. As long as I complete my work, everything is okay!”

WORLD VIEW:

# WASTING AWAY: THE STARK REALITY OF WORLD HUNGER

By Tengku Amina Munira (tg\_munira@oum.edu.my)

Imagine going to bed hungry every night, scavenging for food in someone else's trash, or surviving on a packet of instant noodles split between several meals.

Millions of people are starving, even more so now due to pandemic-related fallout. According to the World Health Organization, up to 811 million people were undernourished in 2020, almost 123 million more than in 2019.

The sombre statistics don't end there. Undernourishment is affecting one in every five Africans while globally, over 149 million children under the age of five are estimated to be stunted for their age, and another 45 million are too thin for their height.

According to Bachelor of Psychology programme director Dr Wong Huey Siew, going hungry is a serious deprivation of a physiological need, especially in children.



“Lack of food affects physical, cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor development. As a result, children cannot concentrate on learning, and suffer from behavioural problems, low energy and poor memory,” Dr Wong says.

Believe it or not, hunger isn't caused by a lack of food. Overall, the world produces enough food to feed everyone, but those who go hungry either do not have the land to grow food or the money to buy it. In short, the principal cause of hunger is poverty. Covid-19 is certain to aggravate matters, but let's not disregard climate change, which has already left an ugly mark on agriculture and crop production.

So what is the world to do?

During a crisis, governments provide aid through food basket programmes or stimulus packages, though Dr Wong says this is hardly comprehensive. As a result, there are people who fall through the cracks. It is in such a situation that regular people have gotten involved.

“In Malaysia, one example is the #WhiteFlag movement, a social initiative by civilians to mitigate the suffering of our friends and neighbours,” he explains. “It reflects

how this pandemic has aroused the spirit of a caring society. It also shows that social mobilisation and informal collective action are crucial to prompt immediate response.”

However heart-warming they are, grassroots-based initiatives cannot be a long-term solution.

Dr Wong agrees: “Aid programmes need to be better managed and deployed. Local authorities within districts or villages need to ensure aid packages reach the right beneficiaries. They could also look into setting up kitchens to provide cooked food for the poverty-stricken in each local community.

“One innovative idea is a food security protection policy, almost like an insurance policy for the B40 group and hardcore poor, similar to the current practice of making monthly SOCSO contributions to provide funds for the ones who are really in need.”

We must also all play our part individually. If we have food in our pantry, let's be grateful for our good fortune. If we have the chance to help someone in need, let's not hesitate. This is not the time for anyone to be selfish.

PERSONALITY:

# THE WRITING GURU

By Izyan Diyana Merzuki (izyan\_diyana@oum.edu.my)

**T**here's nothing easy about writing books but for Dr Umi Kalthum Ngah, writing has been a lifelong dream, respite, and distraction from stress. This author of 14 books and counting is certainly an inspiration through and through.

Graduating last year at the age of 61, this Bachelor of Psychology alumna already has two self-published picture books this year, nine upcoming titles and a few on-going manuscripts. One of them is a picture book entitled *Di Laman Herba*, which is based on her observation of the plants in her own little herbal patch in Ipoh, Perak.

"I've been polishing my colour pencil artwork skills, and the picture book is now in the printing phase. Each plant is self-illustrated based on my own interpretation and accompanied by a *pantun*. Did you know that UNESCO has recognised the *pantun* as one of the great world cultural heritages?" Dr Umi Kalthum elaborates.



Inspiration comes from many sources. For Dr Umi Kalthum, this included her lowest moment when she suffered multiple losses in her family. “*Seungu Lavender* was a book I wrote as therapy for my sadness after losing my father, followed by my youngest brother due to accident, then my mother a few years later. The book has inspired many young adults to excel in their studies and find purpose in their lives.”

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**I also participated in an online programme organised by Children’s Picture Book Association of Malaysia with other renowned storytellers. Almost 100 children joined in with their parents. I had a lot of fun!”**

Dr Umi Kalthum adds, “The other book which I derived great satisfaction from is *Keajaiban Haiwan Yang Mengubah Dunia*, which is a PhD thesis of one postgraduate student whom I co-supervised. It was intended to inspire more young people to love science and become future scientists.”

While busy with her own writing, Dr Umi Kalthum is also active in other projects and workshops. She often gives motivational talks, and conducts writing workshops organised by non-governmental organisations. In April this year, she presented a research paper at the *Persidangan Wanita Selangor* conference.

“I also participated in an online programme organised by Children’s Picture Book Association of Malaysia with other renowned storytellers. Almost 100 children joined in with their parents. I had a lot of fun!” she says.

During the pandemic, she has also taken part in a *Pertubuhan Penulis Isu-isu Wanita Nasional* initiative to publish an anthology of short stories by frontliners, their children, people involved in the food delivery business, and many more.

Always energetic and passionate, Dr Umi Kalthum hopes to continue inspiring people through her writing.

“Islam emphasises the importance of pursuing knowledge. What better way is there to convey knowledge than writing for others to read? As a Muslim, I’m trying to share whatever knowledge I have acquire. After all, asking people to do good and stay away from the bad is the duty of every Muslim. I try to do that in my writing.”

POINTERS:

# EMBRACING CHANGE

By Izyan Diyana Merzuki (izyan\_diyana@oum.edu.my)

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "Change is the only constant in life".

Everything around us is in a state of flux: feelings, people, weather, work, nature, places, and more. Whether you like it or not, change is inevitable. Many may find this petrifying because change is not in our control. Our fear of change is normal but rather than resisting or being upset about it, let's take a look at how we can embrace change instead.

## **Keep calm and go with the flow.**

It's all about acceptance. You can't control what happens but you can certainly control the way you respond. When change happens, don't overreact and try to remain calm. Take a deep breath and step away from the situation, go for a walk, indulge yourself with treats, watch a funny video, or take a nap. These things may seem trivial but they are a healthy way to comfort yourself, and in turn allow you to refocus, adjust to the situation positively, act accordingly, and figure out how to move forward.



### **Learn to live with uncertainty.**

“Uncertainty is the only certainty there is, and knowing how to live with insecurity is the only security,” said American mathematician John Allen Paulos. We will never know what the future brings, so we need to learn to live with ambiguity. You can introduce little elements of uncertainty into your life by changing your routine, or trying things, like books, meals or travel destinations, that are outside your comfort zone. The point here is to challenge yourself to do something out of the tried and tested so that you can better tolerate the unexpected twists in life.

### **Focus on the present.**

Worrying about the future will take you away from focusing on, and appreciating, the present. So, soak in as much of today as you possibly can: the sights, sounds, smells, emotions, triumphs, and sorrows. Celebrate every little success, practice gratitude and mindfulness every day so that your mind does not wander off. Don't forget to set goals for the future. Dream big but at the same time, work hard today to realise those dreams.

### **Closing thoughts.**

Adopting a positive approach to change will give you a chance to learn new things and discover new insights. You might also master new skills along the way, develop important qualities such as flexibility, optimism, persistence, and determination, and become a better version of yourself. Also, remember that the good things in your life now are the results of changes that happened in the past.

Perhaps the best thing about embracing change is learning to appreciate all our blessings, like our family, job, spouse, friends, and pets. Nothing remains the same forever, so let's make the most of every day and enjoy the life we have.



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Phone: 017-253 6386

E-mail: [zulhairi\\_zakariah@oum.edu.my](mailto:zulhairi_zakariah@oum.edu.my)

# CALLING ALL ALUMNI!!

Take the opportunity to be featured in this e-magazine and be an inspiration to others. Write to us at [alumnimag@oum.edu.my](mailto:alumnimag@oum.edu.my) if you're interested!

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Zulhairi Zakariah

Telephone: +03-7801 1994

E-mail: [zulhairi\\_zakariah@oum.edu.my](mailto:zulhairi_zakariah@oum.edu.my)