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PANTHERS OF ISKL #14 - Asha O.

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PANTHERS OF ISKL #14 - ASHA O. - THE PASSIONATE PHILANTHROPIST & ENVIRONMENTALIST

Today we catch up with Asha O., who even at the young age of 17 years old has embarked on many projects at ISKL and beyond, caring for the environment, helping the less fortunate and mentoring and inspiring [Middle School](#) female students to ace in Maths and Science! Hailing from Canada and Australia, the Grade 11 student has lived her whole life in Malaysia and attended ISKL since she was four years old. Asha has been incredibly busy during the Movement Control Order, organizing a food drive campaign for the Chin refugees. Here is her story.

“It's crazy, but I have lived my whole life in Malaysia! I was born here, but my family is Canadian and Australian. I have been at ISKL for 13 years, beginning in prep junior when I was four years old.”

"I feel fortunate to have had the chance to live in Malaysia my whole life - it is a beautiful country with a fantastic mix of cultures and people. Living here has taught me so much about how to be open-minded, accepting, and embracing everything that comes my way. I am also very grateful to be a lifer at ISKL. Not only are there incredible opportunities like GAP and Malaysia Week, but the teachers here really care about you, and I have had the chance to discover many of my passions at ISKL. That being said, going to an international school means that most people leave every three to four years, and so saying goodbye to people every single year-- whether it's just a familiar face or your best friend - it can get difficult.

'I would consider myself a Third Culture Kid as I have grown up in a culture very different from my "home" culture, but I don't have the defining feature of having had to move around. I've found that it can be challenging to know what your identity is, especially when even though I've lived in Malaysia my whole life, I'm still considered a foreigner.

'Even when I go back to Canada or Australia, I have also felt like a foreigner - having grown up outside of these two cultures; I had so many parts of me where being a "Malaysian baby" showed through. (My comfort food is roti canai!). It felt like I didn't fit in anywhere, and that I didn't have an identity. Fortunately, over the last couple of years, I've realized that my identity isn't about where I'm from, but about all the different cultures and countries that have shaped me to be who I am.

'I have never organized anything like a food drive before - although I've been a part of other projects! This is the first time where I have done a project where I could visibly see the difference it makes.

'It is quite empowering to know that even when we are all locked up inside when we come together as a community, we can make a difference in the lives of others.

'My family has always tried to support each other. My Dad has helped me set up my first eco market, and we all came together to support the Faisal Cup. The virtual food drive is the first time we have worked so closely on a project - we haven't killed each other, yet so I would say it's going well!

'My piece of advice for anyone who would like to start a similar campaign would be that it should be about something you care about - that has to be your motivation. Doing service projects takes a lot of time and effort, but as long as it is a cause you are passionate about, the time and effort it takes will feel like nothing.

'I would also say that you need to be thoughtful in the way you go about it, but also don't overthink it. We found out about the need for the food on April 11, and within 24 hours, I had created the campaign and launched it.

'Not all projects need to come about that quickly; in this case, the cause made it urgent, and we were able to pull it together in such a short amount of time. I put a lot of thought into what is most important, which was how to encourage people to donate while making the experience easy, yet meaningful. At the same time, I didn't obsess over the small details like what color the poster should be!

'As the President of Earth Club and a member of the HS service council, I have been part of different projects, including organizing the annual eco market event, as well as the HS shark tank assembly.

'Two of my biggest passions are service and the environment, so a lot of my free time is spent being part of clubs at school (Earth Club, the Service Council, and Peer Helpers). I also love science and want to encourage more girls to feel confident in pursuing it. My



friend Ann G. (from Grade 11) and I run a club with MS Teacher Ms. Anya Keithley called 'Girls Excelling in Maths and Sciences' (GEMs), which is an afterschool activity for Middle School girls. Here we teach them scientific concepts, do fun experiments, problem-solving, and also teach them about different women in science.

What's in store for Asha's Future?

'After graduating next year, I hope to attend university in Canada to study biological sciences, as I have realized that science is the field I would like to go into. My family always travels to the Canadian west coast for summers - and it is an area of the world that draws me in.

'My hopes and dreams for the future are surviving the IB, which is high on my list! Jokes aside, I think my biggest wish for the future is to be doing something that combines my love for science while also helping others (and being happy would be great)!

'That dream would be to have a career that combined both helping people and science, through medicine or public health. That being said - I am keeping myself open to new possibilities, and I am just excited to see where life takes me!

'If I were in a position of wealth or power in the future, what would I do to help society? How much money are we talking about?! I have contemplated this question for quite a bit, and honestly, I still don't know the answer. The environmentalist side of me would say that the money be used to help with innovation and research to find ethical and effective ways to repurpose all the waste that humans are creating - both with carbon emissions and plastics.

'On the other hand, I would also probably use that wealth and power to ensure that everyone has equal access to quality education and health - including water/food security and access to medical support. To me, if everyone had the opportunity for learning and health - there doesn't have to be a barrier. This, in turn, gives more people the chance to pursue what they wish and not only what they must as a means of survival.



'There are so many people and areas of my life that have been such a positive influence on me. First of all, Master Tan, who has been my taekwondo master since I was a prep senior. He has taught me not only how to push myself, but to also have confidence and embrace the challenges that we face in life.

The second is a team of doctors from BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver. They supported me when I had complex pain in Grade 4 and 5 and helped me through everything to make a full recovery. The doctors were just amazing, compassionate humans that cared so much about all their patients. We stayed in touch, and in Grade 8 we collaborated on a series of videos for kids who were also going through complex pain. We presented those videos at the International Symposium for Pediatric Pain, here in Malaysia that year. The experience opened my eyes to the world of medicine, and the many differences that doctors make in people's lives.

'Then there is being part of the ISKL community - this school has been my home for a long time. I can still remember very distinctly being in Ms. Monica Tindall's 1MT elementary class and learning about the environment and the concept of farm to table. Learning about the impact we have on the environment has stuck with me throughout all these years. Just the ethos that has surrounded me throughout my time at ISKL has shaped me. Funnily enough, the Melawati way that we learned in Elementary School has become the core of who I want to be!

'Finally, there is also my family. My mom has always been there to support me in whatever crazy endeavor I participate in, and she has never failed to show me that grit is the key to success. As for my Dad, he works incredibly hard, all the while giving his time to help different social enterprises. Both of my parents are amazing people that have shaped me to be the person I am today.'

What does "Be All You Are" mean to you?

"To me, "Be All You Are," means that you embrace all of your passions and even the smallest quirks that make you "you." It can be so easy these days to try to change ourselves to fit the idea of who we think we should be, but in the end, it is just about embracing yourself for who you are."

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