



An inspirational young alumnus's efforts to make the world a better place have not gone unnoticed.

Towards a better world

GROWING up in a Malaysian village corrupted by gangsters, gamblers, drug traffickers and prostitutes, Soon Kam Lim admits it's easy for youngsters to fall prey to a life of crime and deceit.

The QUT alumnus, who was recently presented with a 2006 Outstanding Young Malaysian Award by Junior Chambers International Malaysia, has watched his friends die from choosing the wrong path.

"A few of my childhood friends were killed in gang fights," he said.

"Some indulged themselves in drugs. Many were school drop-outs who, in their pursuit of wealth and status, resorted to selling drugs and ecstasy pills, smuggling and gambling.

"Pre-marital sex was common practice in the village and girls were being forced into marriages due to teen pregnancies."

Hoping to address these social problems and empower children and teens to be good community citizens, Soon Kam drew on his Bahá'í Faith and started child and youth programs.

After completing his masters degree at QUT's Faculty of Built Environment and Engineering in 2004, he returned to his home village of Jenjarom in Malaysia where he founded the Jenjarom Bahá'í-inspired Community Centre.

Today the centre works with about 200 local children, showing them they don't have to follow in the footsteps of corrupt family and friends.

"The things that we teach are all based on virtues and service to the community," he said.

"The concept of our education is that every child has gems in their heart and the role of the educators, the teachers, is to polish those gems and let them shine."

Soon Kam said empowering children to develop a sense of purpose produced positive outcomes.

"I have many stories of how these young people have transformed," he said.

"For example, before Lim Jia Chin became a vegetable seller he was a local gangster. He was quite notorious. He was involved in cheating and fighting.

"But Jia Chin decided to give up on his life of crime after participating in a moral education program sponsored by our centre."

Soon Kam said many children were benefiting from the positive influences that the community centre was able to offer.

Today Soon Kam has returned to QUT and is currently studying a PhD in sustainable construction, under the CRC for Construction Innovation PhD Scholarship Award.

Although he no longer works directly with the centre, Soon Kam remains closely involved with the members and the work they are doing in Malaysia.

"We keep in contact. Almost every day I will call them, they will write to me, or they will call me," he said.

"It is my conviction that everyone can play a part in building a peaceful and prosperous global society, no matter how meagre their means or limited their capacities.

"The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and good deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct."

