

SMU students take overseas community service projects online

JOLENEANG

Global travel restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic last year derailed plans for several overseas community service projects by students from Singapore Management University (SMU).

One such project by a group of 15 aimed to educate people in the Iloilo province in the Philippines on health risks posed by sweetened drinks, as well as help them improve their waste management system.

Second-year information systems student Frances Severino, 22, one of the leaders of Project Kapawa II, said they decided to tweak the project to fit the context of the pandemic.

The students opted to look at online learning in the Philippines.

"While they were in lockdown, they had no structured education programme... unlike home-based learning in Singapore. Teachers there were struggling to get something going and were relying on physical materials," said Ms Severino.

The group decided to teach educators to utilise online resources such as Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint and Word, as well as navigate open-source websites and find catchy videos on YouTube.

This was done via videoconferencing platform Zoom, with five high schools and three elementary schools. Some 280 teachers from the Philippines participated.

Ms Severino said: "Initially, there was disappointment (that we could not go to the Philippines). But even though we had



A screenshot of a Zoom lesson by Project Vikasa, run by a group of SMU students. They taught children from India English and maths virtually. PHOTO: PROJECT VIKASA

to do a new project from scratch, it was a rewarding experience."

A second group of SMU students planned to travel to Jaipur, India, to teach street children and destitute women conversational English, mathematics and financial literacy.

But when Covid-19 struck, Project Vikasa had to move to a virtual medium too.

The 30-strong group decided to focus on children despite the challenges.

Mr Li Zeyu, 22, a second-year business student and one of the group leaders, said conducting the project on Zoom meant it was more difficult to retain the children's attention.

Some children responded better to pictures and videos, so the group switched to virtual drawing boards and YouTube videos. They also spoke with the children to build connections with them.

jolenezl@sph.com.sg