The Circus wins big at Sustainathon

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The 2021 challenge to develop technology-based solutions to reimagine learning experiences, in line with Singapore's focus on building diversity in schools and lifelong learning with digitalisation as a main tool, was clinched by The Circus, an all-female student team from Singapore Management University and National Technological University.

The learning platform that Jennifer Poernomo, 19, Michelle Leong, 21, Ng Yan Qing, 20, and Jeannette Lee, 20 are developing to connect students to study groups and matches tutors to students received the most appreciation from a panel of four judges at the second annual Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) Sustainathon Singapore on Wednesday.

The platform focuses on reimagining learning experiences. It also has a question-and-answer forum and provides study materials to connect students virtually.

"It was very hard for us to make friends in school with online classes, where all we know of our classmates are their names on a screen. We hope that our platform can start a culture of peer-to-peer learning during the Covid-19 pandemic," said Michelle.

Since its inception last year, the Sustainathon, organised by leading global IT services, consulting and business solutions company TCS, has been attracting tertiary level students, from pre-university to university cohorts, in Singapore to participate in a case challenge.

They have to interact with like-minded partners across government, private, academic and non-profit entities to conceptualise innovative ideas and sustainability-focused solutions by leveraging digital technologies to address the challenge statements.

This year the competition, which accepted submissions from October to November last year, saw 67 teams put together 26 proposals for the challenge's partners – SG Enable, NTUC LearningHub and the National Institute of Education (NIE).

"Many societal groups in Singapore still face barriers to education," said Mr Ron Loh, director of Enablers Development, SG Enable.

"While a lot has been done to enhance lifelong learning opportunities for persons with disabilities

The Circus team members introducing their peer-learning platform Edugether to President Halimah Yacob. PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

through leveraging technology, collaboration among all stakeholders is needed to nurture a truly inclusive environment.

"This is where initiatives like TCS Sustainathon can support ecosystem partners and the young generation to be actively involved in creating more opportunities for persons with disabilities to further develop their skills and talents."

Mr Ameet Nivsarkar, vice-president and country head, TCS Singapore, pointed out that the Sustainathon is an excellent example of what is possible when the right ecosystem comes together to achieve a common goal.

"As a global hub for innovation, Singapore has a pivotal role to play in nurturing a culture that fosters innovative thinking and encouraging new discoveries," he said.

"We hope the Sustainathon will continue to create a meaningful space for the new generation to contribute ideas in tackling real-world sustainability issues."

President Halimah Yacob, who gave out the prizes to the top three teams at TCS' Changi Business Park offices, said that "the Sustainathon is a good example of how we can use a common platform to engage younger minds and involve them in solving the challenges and issues we face using technology and creativity".

She added: "We can overcome some of the challenges faced by our students and teachers by fully harnessing the power of technology, such as artificial intelligence. The TCS Sustainathon encourages participants to be drivers of change by leveraging technology to solve real-world issues such as supporting inclusive learning disabilities."

The top three winning teams received $5,000, $3,000 and $2,000 respectively. The first and second teams will represent Singapore at TCS Sustainathon Asean.

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