

## TECHNOLOGY HELPS DISADVANTAGED MALAYSIAN WOMEN TO FIGHT DISCRIMINATION AND WORK FROM HOME

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AdvocacyNet

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Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Washington, DC: Eight Malaysian women have used information and communications technology (ICT) to break through the barriers of gender discrimination and disability and find jobs that allow them to work from home.

The women will soon start work as customer service officers with Genting, a multinational resort company based in Kuala Lumpur. After on-the-job training, they will use the phone and Internet to field customer inquiries.

The eight are among 25 women who are currently receiving computer training from eHomemakers, a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP), on a grant from Microsoft. The program trains the women to use word-processing, the Internet, email, and popular software programs (Excel, Word and PowerPoint).

Some of the women have been severely affected by disabilities or chronic illnesses. Others are single mothers or have elderly or disabled family members to look after. For all of them, working at home is the only option.

Thirty-year-old Jayanthi Selvaraj, who suffers from renal failure, and 40-year-old Nesamary Roch, who has a spinal injury, said they initially felt intimidated during class because they had never used a keyboard before. But they soon overcame their fears. Another trainee, Molly Toh, a 51-year-old single mother, said she was “delighted” and “eager” to start training with Genting.

eHomemakers is now seeking funds to provide the trainees with interactive training skills that will help them deal with customers, manage a home office, and interview for a job. These skills will give the women self-confidence to seek work on their own.

eHomemakers seeks to help disadvantaged women who have been bypassed by Malaysia's economic miracle, and many of the group's 13,000 members have long been considered unemployable in the formal sector.

Securing jobs for eight members is seen as a major breakthrough, because Malaysian businesses have been reluctant to hire women at home, where they could not be supervised. Wong Peck Lin, who manages the project at eHomemakers, said that officials at Genting will be able to oversee the women by listening to their phone conversations. This marks a change in the “mindset” of corporations that have long insisted on overseeing employees in the office, said Chong Sheau Ching, the founder and director of eHomemakers.

The next group of women will begin their training in October, bringing the total of computer-

trained women to 70. They will then train more members of the network in ICT skills.

AP supports eHomemakers in the US by promoting eco-baskets that are made out of recycled paper by some of its most severely disabled members. This summer, AP intern Melissa Muscio helped this project (Salaam Wanita) to develop a business plan and also helped to launch eHomemakers' first e-newsletter.

- [eHomemakers' website.](#)
- [Salaam Wanita.](#)
- Read eHomemakers' [first e-newsletter](#).
- Read [Melissa's blogs](#).
- [Peck Lin's interview](#) with an applicant for the course.