

**ALMOST READY:** Progress on Bambang's house was obvious at the end of the week.

**DOING THE WALL:** Jin Thai hammers a section of the wall into place.

# Students display spirit of altruism

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**WHEN** Bambang Sudarmono learned that Habitat for Humanity (HfH) was helping to build a house in his in-laws' village, he went over to have a look and make some inquiries. He even found time to pitch in and help.

The 31-year-old mental hospital nursing aide and father of three then submitted his own application for a house, went through the interview process and got the nod within a month. The building started on July 10. "It was on my birthday," Bambang beamed.

"I want to thank Habitat for Humanity for making my dream come true." He explained that after renting for nine years, he was more than ready to have a home of his own. HfH made this possible by way of some very reasonable conditions.

When the *thesundaypost* paid a visit, students from Swinburne University of Technology had teamed up with a couple of backpackers (who happened to be in Southeast Asia) to build Bambang's house. They

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— Wilson Liew, a mechanical engineering student

"There were no walls when we arrived," he said, pointing to the half-completed house. "I learned a lot of things about building a house this week."

Wilson Liew, 20, values the experience.

"We get to contribute to the community — besides, it's a productive way to spend time with friends instead of just hanging out at the mall," the mechanical engineering student said.

It was also the first time that Liew had tried his hands at building a house. While not as complicated as he feared, it did turn out to be quite tiring.

He confessed he and his university mates had been arriving for work later and later with each passing



**CAMARADERIE:** Jin Thai (left) and Liew agree this is a great way to spend the holidays and bond with friends.

missing out. Do something for the community."

Most Habitat for Humanity volunteers agree there is a certain satisfaction to seeing their hard work pay off before their eyes.

This was how Tessa Henderson, 22, ended up working with local university students on Bambang's house.

"My boyfriend and I are travelling through Asia and we want to do some voluntary work along the way. We found out about Habitat's work in Kuching through the website, got in touch and here we are."

It was their first trip to this part of the world, so working on a local voluntary project was a great way to take in the local colours and meet Malaysians.

"The experience has been fantastic. You can see results immediately," Henderson said.

"Building is the most productive way to help out. If you teach English for a week, you're not going to see results within that week. But you only need basic skills to help with Habitat and it's really rewarding," she added.

Habitat for Humanity is a Christian organisation but they make no distinction between race, religion and things people like to judge other people on.

Home partners are chosen on their level of need, and their willingness to be partners in the programme. They are also required to repay HfH an interest-free loan for the house but the

monthly installment will be within their means.

"When I filled in the application form, I had to put down how much I thought I could repay them every month," Bambang said.

"When my application was approved, two Habitat members came to interview me. They ended up lowering the amount I offered to repay."

A qualified home partner is also required to put in 400 hours of 'sweat equity' — meaning he must work with HfH's construction supervisor Eric Yap and a team of volunteers to put up his new house.

Bambang was so thrilled



**SHAPING UP:** The house frame taking shape. — Photos by Wilson Liew



**BREAK TIME:** The team members take a break under a shelter with refreshments provided by house partner Bambang.



**DOWN AND OUT:** Liew flat on his back after an exhausting day's work.

were the second group to work on a project at Kampung Sandong.

Jin Thai, 20, is a civil engineering student with an interest in humanitarian work. A week of house-building with HfH was right up his alley and a great way to spend part of his school holidays.

"It's related to my field," he said.

Jin signed up when HfH went to the university to give a talk. And for him, the experience of building a house proved meaningful.

week.

However, he won't mind signing up again if his personal schedules permitted.

"It's good exercise and the time you spend with friends is priceless." Liew said Bambang took pains to look after the volunteers ... by readying snacks and cold drinks at a nearby hut.

To people still looking for a good reason to get involved, this university student offers a simple advice: "You guys are

home together with his own hands.

Having helped in a previous HfH effort, Bambang said he would lend a hand to a future project when time permitted.

With his own house taking shape, he knows the value of Habitat volunteerism when helpful hands pick up a building tool ... experience optional.

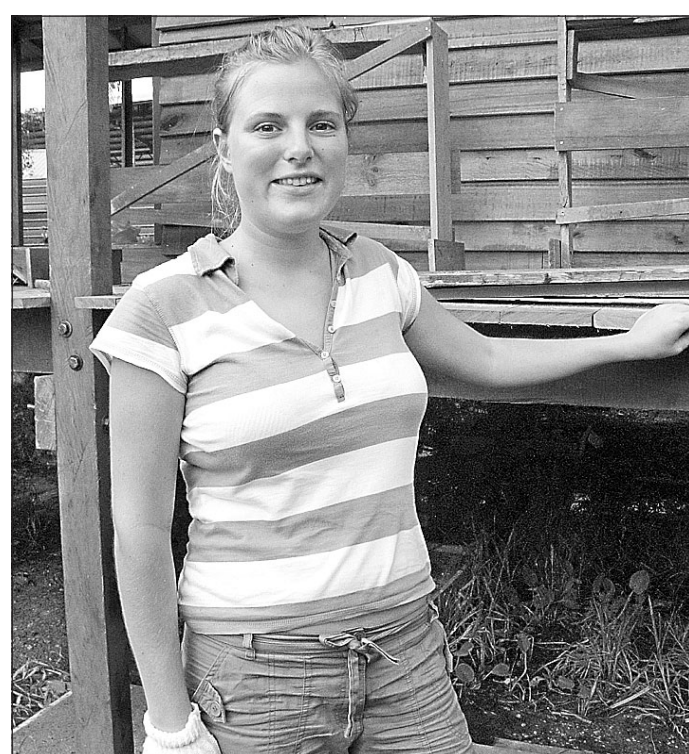
"You know you're doing

looking for a new way to bond.

Perhaps, you can only give a day or a weekend. Perhaps, you think your time won't be worth much because the hardest work your hands ever do is typing on a keyboard. But you should never underestimate how much this will mean to someone who needs a hand up in life.

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— Tessa Henderson



**LENDING A HAND:** Henderson wants to do something useful while visiting Kuching.

something valuable for someone," he noted.

Volunteers come from all walks of life — students on holidays, professionals on a team-building effort weekend, their colleagues, backpackers who want to do something more than visit a particular country, and an assorted group of friends

For more information on how you and your group of buddies can get involved with Habitat for Humanity, contact the Kuching affiliate (082-242700). You can also visit the HfH blog at <http://habitatkuching.wordpress.com> or the online community at <http://www.ammado.com/Nonprofit/HfH+Kuching>.