

Using art and creative enterprise to upend assumptions on disability

by David Harrold

[The Ketemu Project](#) is a Bali-based creative social enterprise, working to allow disabled members of the community to express themselves through art. But for many of their artists, simply having a place to come together and share their experiences is a novel opportunity in a society in which they are often isolated and marginalised, both socially and economically.

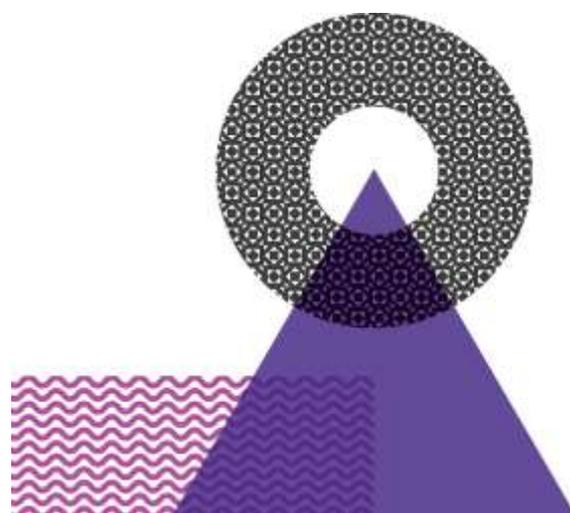
Mayun Dewi, Social Enterprise Manager at Ketemu, explains 'because disability is not widely understood, people with disabilities are still very much stigmatised [...] They tend to be kept in their houses by their families'. Across Indonesia, this lack of understanding affects all corners of life for disabled persons, who face discrimination in access to education, employment and healthcare services. 'We have a long way to go', Dewi acknowledges. But Ketemu hope that the power of art can help take them the distance.

When the Ketemu team learned of the Collaboration Grants offered through the DICE programme, they set out to find a UK-based social enterprise which shared this vision. They found their collaborator in the [Arts Development Company](#), a creative social enterprise and consultancy based in Dorset.

Their collaboration link became Gerakan Kreabilitas, or the Create-ability Movement. Gerakan Kreabilitas sets out to change perceptions and increase public awareness around disability issues by supporting disabled artists and inclusive and creative enterprises with both artistic and business development. This change of perception is intended to function on two levels. First and foremost, in the artwork itself, the artists are encouraged to reflect their experiences of physical and mental disability and, in so doing, increase public awareness. Second, in working to develop financially sustainable business models, the project aims to refute misconceptions about disability by demonstrating that disabled persons can be valued economic participants. In the commercialised culture of Indonesia, economic productivity can be a powerful statement against social and economic exclusion.

With Ketemu's track record empowering disabled artists, and the Arts Development Company's expertise in furnishing social and creative enterprises with hard business skills, Gerakan Kreabilitas draws on the strengths of both organisations. It was clear from the outset of their partnership that the enterprises' knowledge and experience would supplement each other well. Jane Showell, Culture and Programme Manager at the Arts Development Company recalls 'we felt like they had the same outlook to us... but also, I'm Indonesian! It was a complete coincidence to be honest.' While Jane's knowledge of the culture and language eased communication, the project operated throughout the diverse island nation of Indonesia, where over 500 languages are spoken. One shared language did not provide the quick fix it might seem! 'I didn't realise there are even different sign languages used in different areas as well – it was eye opening' says Jane.

In spite of these challenges with communication, in June 2019 Gerakan Kreabilitas began with an event which brought together 30 participants from all corners of Indonesia. The *Ayo Ketemu* event was a residential programme for entrepreneurial creatives with physical and mental disabilities, described at the time as a 'landmark' event by the *Jakarta Post*. The four-day programme consisted of panel discussions, hands on workshops and presentations, discussing the core skills of social entrepreneurship,



challenging the stigma around disability and using art as a vessel of change. On the final day, the participants delivered pitches to an expert panel of judges in a bid to win a year of funding, training and mentorship from the Ketemu Project and the Arts Development Company. The five most inclusive, creative social enterprises selected by the judges went onto become the core focus of the Gerakan Kreabilitas project.



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The artists developed over the course of the programme conveyed their experiences through a range of mediums, spanning contemporary as well as traditional Indonesian art forms: from comic book strips to traditional Batik textiles. 'I'm always surprised by the ideas and the different ways to think about things [the artists] have,' Jane notes. Much of the art relates to the artists' experiences of physical and mental disability, 'it's not just any product, it links back to the conversation: you can see their emotions, their stories- it is life in action'.

Developing the participants artistically was key, and expert product designers were brought in from the UK to work with each group: 'it's about raising the standard and quality of the products. We want to drop the perception of people with disabilities as a charity case, and turn that around to say, "this is good, well-made visual art and design"'. From there, the participants were equipped with the skills and support to launch a 'huge digital marketing campaign' bringing these products to market, and to reinvest their sales profits to build sound, sustainable business structures which can support more disabled persons and help build their confidence.

Both Dewi and Jane speak highly of the project's successes but note that it was not without its share of logistical difficulties. On top of the flexibility and sensitivity required when working with disabled people, each of the different groups spoke different languages, had different ranges of ability and access requirements, and were based in different



areas of Indonesia. These logistical issues unfortunately led to one of the five groups dropping out of the programme.

Further, in tackling an issue as vast as disability in Indonesia, both organisations acknowledge that they are starting small, but their focus is on leading by example, making a statement rather than effecting systemic change. 'It's basically advocacy', says Jane, 'saying we *can* work with people with disabilities'.

Nonetheless, Dewi and Jane seem ambitious and confident that progress will continue beyond the DICE project, and not only through the four creative enterprises they have fostered. Throughout the year, they have been drawing upon their learnings to create 'toolkits' to be made available to arts organisations looking to work with disability across South East Asia: 'it's about telling more stories, raising more awareness and changing more perceptions'.

