

'Tremendous scope for social entrepreneurs'

Mary Chin

PENAMPANG: There are growing opportunities for social entrepreneurship around the world.

Whitney Keyes, 42, an American Web TV show host, consultant, motivational speaker cum blogger, from Seattle, Washington, said Thursday, this is because governments alone are unable to provide for the people in their countries.

"In the United States, we have a budget cutdown and our Government worked very hard to provide social services but it cannot do it all or alone. So, we have a new business sector that is developing in our midst.

"And in the United States, its vision has been tremendous growth opportunity for social entrepreneurship. More and more businesses are calling themselves social entrepreneurs because people care about that and want to do business with the social entrepreneur.

"They (people) know that they (businesses) have got a 'heart'. They are not making money but helping the community," she said at the Workshop on *Empowering Women Through Entrepreneurship* held at the Penampang branch library here.

In her presentation, Keyes said social entrepreneurship has existed for a long time.

She defined social entrepreneurship as one that focuses on social issues like poverty, hunger, child abuse and violence against women, using business approaches.

"It's using a business model to address a social issue, that is, doing business and helping the community at the same time. While you have a business mind, you also care about social issues, leading to a solution.

"Hence, social entrepreneurs are people who are not just focused on making a profit. They are also focused on making a difference in their com-



Keyes

munity or the world," she explained.

Explaining how a social enterprise functions, Keyes said basically, it recognises a social problem and uses a blended approach to advance causes.

"In other words, social entrepreneurs treat social issues like a business with the characteristics of traditional non-profit and proven business principles.

"I think, so often a social group is trying to solve a problem but they are not using business methodology. And so they can be more efficient if they have a plan in this direction."

The one-day workshop for some 50 women entrepreneurs is part of the Programme for the US Embassy in Malaysia - *Promoting Human Rights, Democracy and Economic Opportunity: Empowering Women Through Leadership and Entrepreneurship Skills Development*.

It was jointly organised by the US Embassy, *New Straits Times*, Sabah State Library and Pacos Trust.

Also present were the US Embassy Senior Program Specialist Chew Wing Foong, State Library Director Wong Vui Yin and Pacos Trust Executive Director, Anne Lasimbang.

During the workshop, the women were given a written exercise on how they would play a role as a social entrepreneur.

Keyes is best known as the host, writer and producer of Whitney and Wyatt.com, a bi-monthly Internet television talk show for women. Currently, she does business as Director of Whitney Keyes Productions, based in Seattle.

Speaking to the *Daily Express* later, Keyes said social entrepreneurship has been happening for as long as business has been going.

"For example, if I own a bakery, maybe I will give poor people bread. If social entrepreneurs have no money to give away, they can offer other things like education.

"This concept has been going on...it just hasn't had a label. That's my opinion. I don't know if it's just in the United States but in the US, this concept is taking off. It's becoming more popular for a business to call itself a social entrepreneurship because the consumers won't buy from you unless you are being responsible. This occurs not just at the corporate level now but even in small business," she pointed out.

Social entrepreneurship is happening globally, according to Keyes.

"My point is that it's happening everywhere; it's not just a big corporation but also the restaurant and your community."

Asked why social entrepreneurship is important, she said it is the wave of the future. "The social entrepreneurship movement is growing. If you are going to be in business today, you cannot just make money and look after yourself. You are not going to succeed unless you take care of the community."

On social entrepreneurs in the United States, Keyes said American television host cum producer, Oprah Winfrey, and reportedly the most influential woman in the world, is a perfect example of the social entrepreneur.

"She makes good money but she also gives back to society. She has done amazing things for communities in Africa. She promotes authors. If she mentions one book, all the women in the United States will buy that book.

"So many businesswomen think she has good values and good leadership qualities. She is motivating a lot of women in the US."

According to Keyes, many businesswomen want to be like Oprah Winfrey.

"She is very inspirational because she is smart, worked very hard and struggled with issues of abuse and body image and lots of things like that."