

Seeing his widowed mum struggle inspired him

Mr Alan Ho started an initiative at non-profit enterprise She Loves Data offering free online workshops for those looking to acquire or upgrade dashboard skills. ST PHOTO. LIM YAQHUI



Mr Alan Ho, 45, believes firmly in improving access to the male-dominated technology sector, where he has worked for 20 years.

His interest in levelling the playing field stems from watching his mother raise him and his older brother by herself, after his father died when he was a teenager.

"My mother worked as a Yakult promoter in a supermarket. I saw her working for more than 10 years there with no increment. Her career was stagnant," he says.

"It's about giving opportunities to anyone who is experiencing stagnation, anyone who is willing to work hard."

Since 2018, Mr Ho, a senior director of marketing at multinational corporation Tibco Software, has also been a volunteer with non-profit enterprise She Loves Data (shelovesdata.com), which supports women in pursuing careers in data and technology.

During the circuit breaker in April last year, when he witnessed thousands of jobs being lost, he

chipped in to help women affected by the pandemic transition to less impacted sectors.

"With the digital transformation driven by Covid-19, there were more opportunities to find work that is data-related," recalls the bachelor, who is also an adjunct lecturer at Singapore Management University (SMU).

He started an initiative at She Loves Data called Back On Your Feet - Dashboard Specialist Programme, which offers free online workshops for those looking to acquire or upgrade dashboard skills.

A dashboard, like the dashboard of a car, organises and displays information from multiple data sources in one place. It helps users to understand, visually, the complex links in data.

The online workshops, which debuted in November last year, have drawn hundreds of participants from industries such as technology, human resources, accounting, oil and gas, transport and the non-profit sector. About 80 per

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MR ALAN HO, a senior director of marketing at Tibco Software and adjunct lecturer at Singapore Management University

cent of them were women, from Singapore and countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Australia and the United States.

The programme, a collaboration with Tibco and SMU pulled together by Mr Ho, lets participants use software provided by Tibco free for a year, which usually charges an annual subscription rate of US\$1,250 (S\$1,670).

Mr Ho was surprised at the enthusiastic reception. Where previously only 50 participants may have joined, Back On Your Feet saw more than 1,100 sign-ups. The third round starts on March 27.

By encouraging more women to enter Stem (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) trades, Mr Ho hopes to debunk stereotypes of the data sector being the preserve of male computer science graduates.

"I hope to influence the confidence of women in the tech sector," he says.

Inspired to increase girls' access to technology in their formative

years, he has introduced a slew of educational software projects for schools in countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam.

There is good reason to do so. Ever the data scientist, he says diversity is important in making more accurate decisions.

"In any form of use of data, diversity is the only way to reduce bias. You want a diversified group of people to analyse the data you have," he adds.

While pushing for diversity in Stem involves equipping and encouraging more women to upgrade their data skills and find better jobs, Mr Ho does not identify as a male feminist.

"I don't believe in constantly saying that women are in a disadvantaged position. Why don't we focus on the outcome that we want?" he asks.

"Making an impact can take years. I hope to see more volunteers who are passionate about getting involved."

Venessa Lee