

PrimeTime Member Spotlight

February 2010

Each month *Connections* talks to a PrimeTime member to find out more about who they are, what they do, and their association with PrimeTime.



This month we spotlight

Friederike Loh
Social Entrepreneur:
Business Women Consortium,
Living Experience@Positive Inc

Interviewed by: Andrea Chalupova.

Personal talk ...

Connections: Where are you from originally, and how long have you been in Singapore?

Friederike: I'm born and bred in Singapore.

Connections: Have you lived in other foreign countries? If so where?

Friederike: I lived in Durham, UK, for three years as part of my undergraduate studies – and I think I would have been a very different person if I hadn't studied there. One of the most striking experiences I can recall were the number of single mothers I encountered. I was working as a part-time waitress and interacted with these women on a regular basis. They didn't regret having their children, in fact, their children kept them going and filled them with love. I truly respected and loved these women I worked alongside. They are some of the most generous souls I have encountered. One of their biggest regrets was not continuing their education and they encouraged me to do well in my studies. Their experiences and support further cemented my belief that education is one essential key to success.

Connections: What do you enjoy most about living here?

Friederike: I like the food, the efficiency and my loved ones.

Connections: What are your interests and hobbies?

Friederike: I enjoy running, yoga (although not as often as I should), volunteering, reading, travelling, dining and experiencing new cultures.

Connections: Have you had any particularly interesting experiences you would like to share with us?

Friederike: I would like to share a recent volunteering experience in Cambodia that involved a bunch of seven Singaporean youths aged 9–14 years. We were visiting the Killing Fields, where the Khmer Rouge regime killed and buried hundreds of Cambodians. The kids were asking me why innocent children were being tortured and killed. I could not answer their questions because I was unable to comprehend it myself. I told them that I didn't know - and probably the Pol Pot regime went through a period of temporary insanity. Throughout the volunteering trip, the kids continued to bombard me with questions that were seemingly simple and yet very difficult to answer. I learnt so much from these children, who approach life with such curiosity - something that us adults have forgotten and lost.

Connections: Which are your favourite restaurants/shops/places to go?

Friederike: I enjoy the food and margaritas at Café Iguana, located at Clarke Quay. Another aspect I like about the place is the decoration of Frieda Kahlo paintings that give Café Iguana a Mediterranean atmosphere. Another place that I like to eat is at Tiong Bahru Market, located at Tiong Bahru Road. The duck rice there is simply fabulous!

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Connections: What one thing would you like to accomplish in your lifetime?

Friederike: I've done quite a few things already. I've bungee-jumped and parachuted and I'm preparing to climb to Mount Everest Base Camp this September! But my dream in life is to establish a series of successful social enterprises in order to support the social causes that are close to my heart.

Professional talk ...

Connections: Please tell us about your business.

Friederike: My first business is the Business Women Consortium, which was conceived with one Filipino-Australian businesswomen and four other Singaporean businesswomen in September 2009. It is a social enterprise that assists women in Cambodia, Vietnam and Xinjiang (China) to sell their handmade products in Asia Pacific. Over and above the profit they earn from our purchasing, we invest one-third of the profits back into their community development. Instead of just giving the women the money, we decided to invest into their community because we've seen and heard of far too many women being abused or thieved by spouses who could not deal with their wives' new-found financial power. We view this concept of helping as sustainable because it creates overall community development for disadvantaged women and their children. We are expanding the business to assist more women in Asia Pacific.

The second business has just started and is termed Living Experience@Positive Inc. The main purpose is to alleviate depression in youths and working adults through alternative living experiences. I'm working with a team of passionate individuals who truly want to make a positive difference to lower depression and suicide rates, as we cannot even begin to fathom generations of depressed youths. This business started because my team encountered many people through our volunteer work who succumbed to suicide because of depression.

Connections: What did you do before you started your own business?

Friederike: I was working as a military combat officer and psychologist doing lots of stuff that women don't normally do, such as leading hundreds of soldiers in harsh environments, coaching military commanders and their command teams in psychological trauma management. I learnt a lot about leadership in the military and how essential it is for any organisation. I had very good experiences working with male bosses who mentored me and took me under their wings. One important lesson I learnt was to be authentic, especially in my leadership style. I have seen too many women trying to behave in a manly manner to fit into a male-dominated environment, whereas I think it's best to remain true to oneself.

Connections: How long have you had your own business?

Friederike: I have just started my businesses, so it has been only a few months. More challenges await!

Connections: How did you get started?

Friederike: I got started because of opportunities and reassurances from many female role models I met through PrimeTime and my involvement in other business associations. These women gave me the confidence that it is possible to juggle family and achieve one's dreams simultaneously!

Connections: What were the toughest challenges you've faced as an entrepreneur with your own business?

Friederike: So far I think the biggest challenges I have faced are the management of numerous high expectations of various partners and not getting the emotional support from some family members. Nevertheless, these challenges are not going to stop me!

Connections: What do you enjoy most about having your own business?

Friederike: I like the idea of creating something out of nothing and helping people as I grow my businesses.

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Connections: Have any of the PrimeTime programs helped you in starting or growing your business?

Friederike: Definitely! The networking events have given me confidence to know that women can be successful entrepreneurs and leaders. I have found the 2nd Thursday meetings and the Professional Development Series useful.

Connections: Any advice for those thinking of starting their own businesses in Singapore?

Friederike: First, pursue a business that you're passionate about. Don't start a business just because it makes money the fastest – unless, of course, making money is what you're passionate about. Second, find people who complement your strengths and weaknesses, as one individual is not able to do everything on their own. Third, don't be afraid to ask for help or advice, as there are plenty of successful entrepreneurs who are willing to share their business lessons with you. Fourth, watch your cash flow and avoid unnecessary spending on utilities or services that you don't need as a start up. Last, but certainly not least, read all the fine print – the devil's in the details!

PrimeTime talk ...

Connections: When did you join PrimeTime and how did you find out about it?

Friederike: I found out about Prime Time in 2007 through the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations.

Connections: Which PrimeTime subgroups do you belong to?

Friederike: I subscribe to The Small Business Group.

Connections: Do you volunteer at PrimeTime? If so, in what areas have you become involved?

Friederike: I've helped out sporadically with registrations and membership recruitment.

Connections: What do you personally feel are the benefits of being a PrimeTime member?

Friederike: The main benefits are access to exciting and intellectually stimulating activities which are really unique, plus the extensive network of international professional women. PrimeTime has also given me rich insight into how foreign women are coping in Singapore. It has been great to see that so many foreigners do thrive here and love our country.

Connections: Which was the most interesting or inspiring PrimeTime event you've attended?

Friederike: I loved the Buy1Give1 talk by Masami Sato. I was truly inspired and I actually got her to speak at another women's event to spread her word. I'm going to incorporate her concept into my own business.

Thank you Friederike!