

## A JOURNEY IN LITERACY

Literacy has the potential to empower, enrich and enlighten people who are powerless, and in doing so, it acknowledges and enhances the dignity of mankind,” says Jey Lingam, a bright young literacy specialist from Malaysia. She wants to see literacy gain a higher profile and recognition in development fields.

Ms. Lingam’s interest in literacy began when she taught English in Cambodia. For the first time she saw people who had never held a pencil, written a word or read a sentence. Thinking she could help more by teaching people to read and write in their own language rather than teaching them English, she began to look into literacy training options.

She attended the South Pacific SIL School in Australia in 2001 to study literacy essentials from analyzing a language’s sound system to teaching local people how to manage their own literacy programs. Ms. Lingam returned to Malaysia and instructed local trainers how to conduct writer’s workshops. She worked alongside SIL personnel as local partners in the Bidayuh Language Development Project.

Another aspect of her work has been to conduct a baseline study of the Bidayuh society in Malaysia. This is an ethnographic sketch of the Bidayuh people and will be published in the Sarawak Museum Journal. Ms. Lingam is currently in a study program for her Master’s Degree in applied linguistics at Northern Territory University in Australia.

Ms. Lingam has established a strong relationship with the Salako community in Sarawak, Malaysia. The Salako people are a sub-group of the Bidayuh society. She was adopted into a local family, given a local name and even given household chores to do. While living with them, she gathered literacy-related information. She will use this research to write a thesis about the traditional way skills are taught among adult Salako women. This will help future literacy practitioners teach literacy skills in a pattern that is familiar to the learners.



**“Literacy is a means to serve, help and empower people,” affirms Jey Lingam  
In Living Languages in Malaysia, p. 139.**