



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Social Enterprise, Gobbler5, Partners South West CDC to Launch “TOWKAY @ South West” Pilot Programme for the Needy**

**15 September 2016** – Mr Zaini Bin Hamid never dreamt that he would one day be his own *towkay*<sup>1</sup>.

Well, that is now becoming a reality – thanks to the “TOWKAY @ South West” pilot programme – a collaboration between Gobbler5 and the South West Community Development Council (CDC). Gobbler5 is a social enterprise under Gobbler Pte Ltd, which is part of the ComfortDelGro Group. It aims to improve the quality of living through low-cost provisions, education and partnerships.

Mr Zaini, 36, who was born with cerebral palsy and depends on a motorised wheelchair to move around, is one of three participants to have signed up for the programme. When he was seven, he attended the Spastic Children’s Association of Singapore (now known as Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore) where he underwent physical rehabilitation until he turned 18. After graduation, he tried unsuccessfully to apply for a deskbound job.

Two years ago, he got a job selling pens but it lasted only six months. During that time, he took home a monthly salary of just \$120. His wife, a preschool teacher, drew a monthly salary of \$1,800. The salary was barely enough for the couple and they found it challenging to make ends meet. Zaini was thus recommended for the “TOWKAY @ South West” programme.

This is how the six-month programme works: Participants such as Zaini are first identified and then provided with training in financial management and customer service. They have to pass a written assessment and practical exercise before they are given their start-up inventory of 1,200 packets of tissue paper to sell – at no cost. Everything they earn, they get to keep. After all the packets of pocket tissue paper are sold, they may purchase additional tissue packets at cost from Gobbler5. After the pilot phase is completed in February 2017, they may purchase other inventory items such as snacks or candies for resale.

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<sup>1</sup> *Towkay* means “business owner” or “boss” in dialect.

Besides Zaini, married couple Mr Jamaludin Bin Awang, 57, and Mdm Mastura Bte Hj Abdullah, 56, have also joined the programme. Jamaludin worked previously as a dish washer, while Mastura was a stall helper. They live with their eldest son, 26, who is unemployed and their two daughters, aged 18 and 20, who are still in school.

Both are excited about starting work and hope to be able to sell as many packets of tissue paper as possible.

Speaking at the launch of the programme today, Ms Low Yen Ling, Mayor of South West District, said: “The South West CDC is happy to partner Gobbler5 to launch and pilot ‘TOWKAY @ South West’. The programme will help our residents build up their capabilities through training and reskilling, thereby enhancing their employability. Through ‘TOWKAY @ South West’, jobs are brought nearer to the heartlands, making it more convenient for participants to travel to and from work. We are thankful for the support of organisations like Gobbler5 in reaching out to the South West community and we look forward to having more like-minded partners join us in our effort to build a more inclusive South West District.”

As part of the programme, all three “towkays” have been given uniforms and permits to sell packets of tissue paper at SBS Transit bus interchanges located in the west. Zaini will be located at the Joo Koon bus interchange, while Jamaludin and Mastura will be located at the Boon Lay bus interchange. They will each be given an ez-link card with a stored value of \$88 for their travelling expenses.

Mr Janan Kwek, founder of Gobbler, said: “We hope to see these ‘towkays’ achieve some form of financial independence through the programme and ultimately, an overall improvement in the quality of life. The success of the pilot phase will allow Gobbler5 to expand the range of products that are sold as well as the programme to other parts of Singapore in the future.”

Zaini likes the flexibility that the “TOWKAY @ South West” programme brings and cannot wait to embark on it. He said: “I like that I get to plan the hours I work and that the interchange is near to where I stay. I look forward to being able to help my wife contribute to our monthly expenses.”

## **Gobbler5**

Gobbler5 is a social enterprise that aims to improve the quality of living of the marginalised communities and 'sandwiched population' through low-cost provisions, education and partnerships. Part of the ComfortDelGro Group, Gobbler5 is a business unit of GobblerCO, a collective of social enterprises that aims to meet the needs of the local communities by addressing pressing social issues. Each social enterprise reaches out to a different segment of individuals who are having a difficult time, hoping to lend them a helping hand and empower them to lead a better life. For more information on what Gobbler 5 does, please go to <http://www.gobbler5.com>.