



TRANSCRIPT

ENTERPRISE + STEM

LINA QASEM

Founder, Robofun

I'm Lina. I grew up in Jordan. I'm a software engineer. I've moved to Australia four and a half years ago.

What is Robofun?

Robofun comes to my mind to doing workshops that attracting girls and all of kids actually. But, with focus on girls to inspire them and attract them to work in STEM.

**This Transcript is part of the
ENTERPRISE + STEM suite of resources,
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How did you make your idea a reality?

By chance, I've looked up at Darebin Council website, and I found this programme. They are running something called My Big Idea for Global Sisters. I thought 'why don't I join them' just to see, maybe they can help me in my idea'.

How did you test your idea in the marketplace?

I started doing free workshops every now and then to just figure out and test the market – see how it's going to be these sessions, using my family's laptops.

Did you write a business plan before starting a business?

At that time, I don't know what does 'business plan' means, because I don't have any idea about business, managing, and these kinds of things, because I'm software engineer, and I have passion about something. I think it's a good idea to have.

How did you get your first customer?

The first customer actually came from when I did a free workshop in Fitzroy Community School for two weeks. After that, one of the parents call me, "Hi, Lina. I just want you to come and give one-on-one session to my son." So I've been so happy at that time to get our first customer.

What research did you do?

From this research that I've read, actually, I've learned many things about the market and the needs of the parents. What do they need from the kids and even the schools, what do they need from the students? When I did some free workshops at that time, I figured out some needs from the parents, from the students themselves. And from that, I can figure out what the market needs.

Did you pitch your business idea?

I've pitched my business now three times. Yeah. The experience was, especially in the beginning, it was so nervous and because it's something new, but maybe the third one was much easier than the first one. The first one was with the Global Sisters, and it was in Sydney at that time. We've moved there to pitch our businesses for lots of investors, actually around 200 audience. It was big, and we've got a grant after that.

And the second one was with ygap First Gens Accelerator. It was for lots of audiences as well, to tell them about our stories and our ideas, and end up with a grant as well. The last one was with Darebin Council for something called 'Darebin Pitch It'. We're still waiting for the results.

How did you plan your projects?

I had to do some project plans, especially when I have this specific things to do, because I have lots of responsibilities, like family responsibilities and business responsibilities as well. So, I have to manage my time and write a plan to get the results.

How did you include creativity, innovation, and enterprise skills into your business?

I'm trying my best to include these skills like creativity, innovation, enterprise skills in my business and my work as well. For example, trying to be up-to-date in our workshops and to be creative in the way that we give our workshops as well, to let the kids engaged with materials and these kind of things.

For example, there's a new technology – it's called E-Sewing, which is to mix some sewing with the electrical and electronic things by using conductive string. This is a new technology and it's innovative.

We're trying to use it in our workshops now to attract more girls because they love fashion and design.

So, we're trying to attract girls by blending their interest in sewing and fashion design and mixing it with technology and science and these kinds of things.

My advice to other girls who want to start their business in STEM: you can do it, just go for it!

Do you ask for advice when running your business?

Everyone, I think has to ask advice if he's stuck somewhere and especially in the business, it's something very, very big. It's not easy to manage a business because it needs lots of skills. And if you're not ready for that, you need to ask some help and to ask some advice to make sure you are doing well and you are on the right path.

I've asked lots of experienced in the businesses about what I'm doing and if that's correct, and what should I do in this situation? For example, I have some business coaches from Global Sisters, from ygap, and I'm asking them about marketing stuff and about how to develop my, for example, website and these kinds of things, because they have more experience than me in these kind of fields. And, they are ready to help. 'Why not?' to just make sure you're doing well?

What skills do you need to develop to successfully run your business?

Many skills, but the most important one is the English language, maybe? Because I need

to communicate with lots of people, to tell them about my story, about my idea, to ask them about their needs as well. I had to upskill my English language. In another way, I needed help.

Actually, I don't have the marketing skills because I think it's something you need to learn. And some people they have it already, the market skills and sales, these kind of things. But in my situation, I needed to read lots of articles about marketing and how to reach customers. I've joined accelerating programmes to talk about these topics, and I've read many articles.

How do you develop your network?

From the accelerating programmes that I joined as well – we do in the pitching time. We do networking. I've met many people. They are interested in my idea, so they help me. We contacted after that. In the Meetups as well, I join Meetups every now and then in businesses and in my field, which is software engineering and in STEM fields as well. So from these Meetups, I connect with people there and find some areas that matching, and we stay in touch.

Have you received any awards?

My business Robofun had award last year with the AMP bank. They gave us Tomorrow Maker Fund. As well as because Robofun making our programmes



and competitive prices to make it accessible to all families in disadvantaged areas, so we got that award.

How does Robofun stand out from its competitors?

We have our own curriculum, as well as our teachers or instructors I qualified and they are all females. So, they are role models to other girls. So they can attract them, I mean, girls, to STEM by showing them their experience in that field. As well as, Robofun provides their programmes and competitive prices to make them accessible to all families in Melbourne's Northern suburbs, because we've been based in Reservoir.

We're offering our programmes, in the beginning at that time, for Northern suburbs. Most of families in Melbourne's Northern suburbs have kids who come from a refugee and asylum seeker background. That's what distinguish Robofun from other competitors.

What challenges do you face as a business owner?

One of the challenges that we faced in the beginning, it was the 'time' and 'time management', actually. Because I have lots of responsibilities, like family responsibilities and business responsibility as well. I had to manage my time between both of them. Finding the place is an issue because we don't have our own place. We need to hire our venues to do our workshops.

Has your education helped you as a business owner?

My qualification as a software engineer helped me a lot in my business because I have experience in robotics and coding at the same time as a software engineer, so help me to write the

curriculum for our programmes, helped me in figuring out the most important things in these fields, and how could I simplify to the kids actually. How could I... From my experience, as well as a participant in robotics and coding competitions, I found there's specific points we have to upskill the kids in it, like the problem solving skills, the logical thinking, and these kind of things. It's important to include it in your programmes.

What are your plans for the future?

My next step in Robofun is to expand our areas because now we're focusing on Northern suburbs and especially in Reservoir. I'm trying now to, because there's demand in other areas. They asking us to do our workshops closer to them. In this coming school holiday, we're going to, for the first time, doing our workshops in North Fitzroy as well. This is the first step to try: how could we manage the explanation that. Hopefully starting communicating and to partnership with the schools as well and councils, so that's the next step.

What advice do you have for someone wanting to start a business?

My advice to other girls who wants to start their businesses in STEM: you can do it, just go for it. Once you start and go through your business, it's going to run quickly, but you just need to start. This is the point. Don't just postpone the work and just postpone your idea till you find the opportunity to come to you. It's not going to come by itself. You have to go and follow your passion, follow the opportunity, actually. Don't let it come to you.

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