

## A\*Star welcomes its first 9-year-old scientist

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**Singapore:** The Institute of Bioengineering and Nanotechnology (IBN), A\*Star, Singapore, partnered with Make-A-Wish foundation, Singapore, (MAW) to make a young girl's dream come true. Ms Meenakshi Sundaram Losheni became the youngest-ever scientist at Biopolis, when she received the rare opportunity to don on a lab coat and work alongside scientists in a state-of-the-art research facility.

Ms Losheni has been suffering from chronic renal disease since she was young. However, the brave nine-year-old has a bubbly personality, endures her dialysis sessions and takes her medication without complaints. An avid reader, Ms Losheni has an inquisitive mind and is curious about how things work. Her favorite subject in school is science.

Ms Losheni, under the close supervision of Dr Andrew Wan, IBN team leader and principal research scientist, and Dr Meng Fatt Leong, IBN research scientist, studied the properties of liver, bone, kidney and stem cells that had been grown in IBN's fibrous scaffolds to determine their usefulness for tissue engineering applications. With help from the IBN researchers, she even presented her findings to Dr Wan's research team.

The wish-granting event was organized as part of IBN's Charity Month 2012. Other volunteer activities organized by IBN include visits to the pediatric ward at KK Women's and Children's Hospital in December 2012 and January 2013.

Professor Jackie Y Ying, IBN executive director, added that, "Our researchers are developing next-generation technologies for organ replacement and regenerative medicine, and volunteer opportunities such as this inspire them by putting a face to the biomedical problems that they are working on. We wish Ms Losheni and her family all the best for the future, and hope that she will continue to pursue her interest in science."

Ms Noreena AbuBakar, IBN director and chair of IBN's Youth Research Program, shared, "It was our pleasure to help grant Ms Losheni's wish today. IBN is strongly committed toward nurturing future scientific talents, and we hope that Ms Losheni's

story will inspire more young girls and boys to pursue their own scientific dreams."

Mr Paul Heng, one of the volunteer wish granters, and also board chair of MAW, said, "This is going to be one of my more memorable wish grantings ever. The magic of becoming a scientist for one day will truly be a memorable one for Losheni. More importantly, we believe that the experience will prepare her well, emotionally and psychologically, for her organ transplant operation set for December 26, 2012. It will also provide Losheni the hope, joy and strength to be even more prepared for the future."

IBN's Charity Month is an annual event, which started in 2010 as an institute-wide initiative to give back to society and help the less fortunate. Through this platform, IBN has organized activities such as fundraising, donation drives, visits and outings for the beneficiaries of various charities that include Child @ Street 11, Melrose Home, Beyond Social Services, The Tent, Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Food from the Heart, Lee Ah Mooi Old Age Home, Cat Welfare Society, and Pertapis Children's Home.

By fostering employee well-being and team spirit, IBN's Charity Month is one of the key components of the institute's platinum award-winning Workplace Health Promotion program.