

Mentoring partnership stories

Dr Narisa Chauvidul-Aw is the Founder and CEO of fintech start-up, KogoPAY – a mobile payment solution which is now rolling out instant mobile payments

Her mentor **Hollie Whittles** is the Director of Purple Frog Systems, a global IT consultancy



From Narisa:

Our mentoring relationship started just as COVID-19 and lockdown was looming, and the impact has been felt by everyone. I was meant to launch the Bangkok office of KoyoPAY in April but haven't yet been able to. Without the tie of global meetings and international travel, and working from home like everyone else, I have instead been able to use technology to connect to people I wouldn't usually have done.

However, I found that trying to raise my second-round of funding during the pandemic was more challenging than when I initially sought seed funding. I didn't know where to get advice from, or who to approach for support. The Santander Breakthrough Women Business Leaders' Mentoring Programme has connected me with such a fantastic mentor, Hollie. Having her support and experience in AI has been invaluable; from suggesting other opportunities to try, to encouraging me to accelerate the launch of online banking with my app.

Because of this confidence and because of travel restrictions, I've also met amazing people from across the world, and this has helped me to grow the presence

of KogoPAY. From Silicon Valley to San Francisco, I've been invited to talk at large events and join three-day seminars, all via Zoom.

“Our mentoring relationship is validating”

Having a business in Fintech isn't easy, but it's in my character to not give up. You've always got to keep yourself motivated and having courage is the most important part. I recently approached two fantastically successful entrepreneurs during a seminar in Silicon Valley, and they agreed to become my mentors as well. It took courage to approach someone I admire, but it's because of this courage they're now supporting me as well.

It's been a privilege and an honour to be around so many women who support each other. Hollie has been instrumental to this as well; her advice and expertise have been invaluable.

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From Hollie:

The highlight so far has definitely been hearing about Narisa's successes. She's very knowledgeable in her own right and has achieved so much for her business. From surrounding herself with amazing people to securing an amazing investor to support the growth of the business. Our mentoring relationship is focused on validating what she's already doing really well.

I've been a mentor for young business start-ups in the past, and also volunteered in schools giving talks as an Enterprise Advisor. I've also done adhoc mentoring for businesses to help them grow but being matched with Narisa, who has such experience in business and in our mutual field, has meant our relationship has really flourished.

Whilst of course it would have been lovely to meet face-to-face, we haven't found meeting online to be a challenge at all. I've also found that outside of our mentoring relationship, it's been really useful to attend the webinars as part of the mentoring programme. It's given me that opportunity to cultivate connections, especially at the 'meet the mentor' event. It's been interesting to hear about how other people have approached mentoring and their business models, but also to hear about the challenges they're facing.



Embracing the challenges of COVID-19 and listening to these other stories has meant I've pivoted my business model as well. Bouncing off the enthusiasm of Narisa and others in the programme has made me think about what I can change up and make work better for me. I've now built a bespoke consultancy offer for schools, colleges and universities who would like someone to help them embed careers into their curriculum and achieve GATSBY benchmarks.

The programme has been so interesting. When I started, I wasn't quite sure what to expect or what level Narisa was going to be at with her business. But it was refreshing to speak to someone who has such a diverse background in technology and whose business isn't just starting out but is on the cusp of global success. This has been one of the most valuable parts of the mentoring programme for me – I really look forward to meeting with Narisa for our calls, but also to joining the other events and webinars as part of the programme. The start of the year has been challenging for us all, so having something to sink my teeth into and enjoy has been really beneficial, both personally and professionally.

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