

## Era Wijaya: Young Moms Embrace Tolerance through Culture

Era Wijaya is a young mother, illustrator, writer, and content creator from Solo, Central Java. She actively manages a community for families where families with young children can gather and learn through games and crafts. Her interest in providing cultural education for young mothers in Solo, Central Java, was what triggered her interest in Search for Common Ground's (Search) CREDIBLE program, as she was interested in enriching her knowledge of tolerance and Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) issues in Indonesia. *"The program seemed aligned with my concern on how families should be more tolerant of other families with different backgrounds. I saw a trend where families decided to live in a more homogenous neighborhood, become more religious, and sometimes have a stigma that several Indonesian cultures, more specifically Javanese cultures, as heretical cultures".*

Era was troubled by the perception of Javanese cultures as heretical in monotheistic Indonesian society, which inspired her to create counternarrative content that diminishes those perceptions. She discussed the problem with several cultural practitioners and experts and although she gained better cultural insights, it was still difficult to identify a clear strategy for addressing hardliner religious narratives through a cultural lens. During a discussion with an academic about a historical Mosque in Solo, she learned that its architectural design was heavily influenced by Hindu philosophical values due to the assimilation of Islam and early, Hindu-influenced Javanese culture. This unification of different influences reflects the interconnectedness of different religions in Indonesia and demonstrated the respect that the mosque's builders had for different cultures and religions. Inspired by this, Era then sought to produce online content that would shed light on Indonesian cultural products that can unify its diverse people.

After joining the "Creator Space" training in Solo, Era was selected as one of the 20 creators to join the Youth Fellowship Program, part of the USAID-funded CREDIBLE project implemented by Search in collaboration with local partners Campaign, Indika Foundation, SEJUK, and Solopos Institute. The project provided her with seed funding to initiate a social media campaign and organize a community event that would contribute to the promotion of religious freedom in Indonesia. Era used both her personal account, which focused on parenting, culture, and early childhood education, and her community account, to share stories of Indonesian cultural products that embodied the country's diverse religious and cultural heritage.

Working with experts, Era produced various stories on cultural highlights such as the Hindu-influenced [architectural Mosque](#) in Solo, diplomatic gifting of the mystical [keris](#) (Javanese asymmetrical dagger), and [wayang beber](#), a two-dimensional *wayang* puppet used to tell folk stories that is at risk of disappearing, which has been used to tell stories of interreligious conflict that ended in peace. The cultural product stories were produced as [an article](#), five short videos, and [a comic strip](#), and received positive feedback from her followers, highlighting the effectiveness of cultural identity in unifying people. Although Era still received a few insensitive comments that imposed their religious values on people of different religions, she was able to respond to them calmly and

messaged them to offer an invitation to join her in-person community event - an invitation which one commenter even accepted.



Figure SEQ Figure \\* ARABIC 1 *Guyub Kabudayan* participants collaborated to create batik despite diverse backgrounds. Photo by Era

The community event named [Guyub Kabudayan](#) (Cultural Bonding) was held with her community @playdatesoloraya. 35 young mothers from various backgrounds attended the event, including niqabis<sup>1</sup> and believers of local religions, who would otherwise rarely meet due to their vastly different social circles. The event started at *Pamedan Pura Mangkunegaran* to explore and learn from the architectural design of Solo's Masjid Al Wustho Mangkunegaran, which features a three-tiered roof reminiscent of Hindu temples, reflecting religious assimilation. Afterward, the event also included sightseeing in several places in Solo that have cultural/ religious assimilation designs, such as *Pura Mangkunegaran* (the palace), the press monument, and *Pasar Gede* (the traditional market). Then, the event carried on to the Brojobuwono Keris Museum, where participants looked at the *keris* production process and learned about *wayang beber*. The event ended with an art therapy session where participants collaboratively created an original *batik* design, which they named *Rukun Agawe Santosa* (collaboration in reaching peace). The event received many positive testimonials, particularly highlighting the art therapy of the *batik* creation process, which facilitated collaboration and conversations among participants from diverse backgrounds.

Era appreciated how the CREDIBLE project provided her with the opportunity to bring this initiative to fruition. However, she would need to find a way to make this process more sustainable, as it is quite time and resource-consuming. *“Without fund support, it seems impossible to do this. I still need to learn how to monetize this kind of content creation... I could keep FoRB content on my social media account by thoroughly checking the research stories that I might not have used yet.”* Despite this challenge, Era was able to find a new collaboration partner while attending CREDIBLE's activities. *“I met with local believers during one of the CREDIBLE activities. I approached them, and we talked about doing the art therapy that I usually conduct with my community. We planned to create a paper mask with Javanese motives. I also hope this collaboration expands to social media content and promotes tolerance among young moms”.*

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<sup>1</sup> Women who wear a niqab or ruband, a long garment worn by some Muslim women in order to cover their entire body and face, excluding their eyes.