

AKTIVITI ACS

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July 2008

A Rude Awakening

So much transformation has taken place over the past six months globally as well as nationwide. Look at the Delta River's typhoon in Myanmar and the Great Earthquake in Sichuan. Lives will not be the same for many people.

In the Malaysian March polls, the political scene took a drastic change with the Barisan Nasional coalition party being denied the 2/3rd majority and Opposition parties taking over 5 states in the country. The voters have clearly spoken. It is true but hard to believe the power of one's casting vote!

The federal government was forced to wake up and is doing serious soul-searching. It is difficult to predict the daily scenario as reformation of sorts takes place in the country.

More recently, the Cabinet's announcement of a 41% hike in fuel prices shocked the nation. The *rakyat* is forced to wake up and has to start bracing for this ripple effect. Our lifestyles will have to change.

The government, the politicians and the *rakyat* were once too complacent and had to be given a rude shake-up. Let us not have to go through another shock treatment to be reminded of how short human life on earth is. We need to be more conscious of the roles and responsibilities that have been entrusted to us – towards both humanity and the environment.

We are, after all mere pilgrims passing through this temporary world.

DEVELOPMENT IN DISABILITY

At the end of last year, a major leap in the disability scene was the historical appointment of the first disabled person Prof Dato Dr Ismail Salleh who is blind, as a **Senator to represent the disabled community in parliament.**

The Parliament also passed the long awaited People with Disabilities Bill (**PWD Bill 2007**) in December. While we are glad that there is now a piece of legislation, we regret that it is non-punitive in nature. This means that there is no penalty or punishment for those who breach the rights of the PWD. In other words, it is like speeding on the highway without the fear of being caught, because there are no fines.

Following the general elections, some new state governments have appointed or proposed the inclusion of representatives from the civil society and **people with disabilities on their local councils.** In the past, members were restricted to those from political parties only. So, this is really a positive way forward.



*Meeting with the new
Chief Minister of Penang*

Internationally, **Malaysia signed the UN Convention** on the Rights of People with Disabilities on 8th April 2008. By signing the Convention, we are now obligated to refrain from acts that would defeat the purpose of the treaty. We hope that Malaysia will ratify this important document soon so that concrete measures can be taken to ensure that PWD enjoy human rights on an equal basis with others and have access to education, training, employment and public amenities

PWDs in Malaysia have been relying on the goodwill of others far too long. This has to change! I believe we can cater for the needs of PWDs

if there is a serious political will. It is definitely not a money issue for after all, our country can afford to spend RM 100 million to taxi one man to outer space.

The rights of the minority should not be overlooked or taken lightly. It can be detrimental to the nation at large in its pursuit to become a developed and civilised country by 2020.

PLAYGROUP ACTIVITIES

Prompted by the long waiting list of children at the First Step Intervention Centre, we decided to start playgroup sessions at the beginning of this year.

We were conscious to keep a clear difference between an intervention programme which is more structured, and the playgroup. While parental participation is a criterion in both the programmes, we realise that most times we fail to spend enough time discussing with parents as our intervention session is usually packed with activities. In the playgroup, we hope to remedy that and have dedicated time to explain some of the rationale behind the activities, listening to parents and getting them involved.

The other feature of the playgroup is the involvement of siblings in the fun and play based session.



We really want to put into practice the family-centred approach.

WORLD PLAY DAY

We held the ACS Family Day in conjunction with the celebration of World Play Day on May 17th. Two hundred children, family members and volunteers participated in fun activities held at the Penang Youth Park with manpower assistance from Intel and HSBC.



Monkeys watched while we played. And the afternoon ended with ice cream and some who went dipping into the nearby children's pool.

VOLUNTEERS

We had our share of international volunteers over the past few months. Wendy Verlinde and Karen Cosemans came as students from Belgium and stayed for 4 months. We also had Martin Baumgartner from Switzerland, Nahum Evans from the UK and Fumi Toyama from Japan. It is refreshing to host these youths who energised our work! Bee Lim, a speech therapy student from UKM was also on placement with us for 4 weeks in May.

In conjunction with Intel's 40th anniversary, ACS has been identified as a partner in the Volunteer Matching Grant Programme whereby Intel workers are encouraged to serve in non-profit organisations. The organisation in turn will not just benefit from the work performed but also get a matching grant for the volunteer hours.

I think this is a great corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative and hope that others will be able to emulate this effort.

WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL DAY

In line with World Environmental Day, ACS Stepping Stone Centre hosted an Open House event for the local community of Balik Pulau on June 14th. The City Council put up a display on recycling; Don & Mylene (Green Crusaders) gave a practical talk on managing zero wastage and T.H. Lui (Comfort Organic) promoted organic vegetation.

Our members at the ACS Centre also show-cased their eco-initiatives in their recycling activities namely making soap from used oil; weaving using cloth remnants and recycled yarn; traditional hand made paper using the mould and deckle method and making of paper-bags.



Our Guest of Honour, the Member of Parliament for Balik Pulau, YB Yusmadi Yusoff arriving on the bicycle proudly accompanied by some of ACS members on theirs as well!

Community in attendance was encouraged to make a individual pledges on what they will do to reduce the carbon dioxide and how to conserve water and energy and go green.

YB Yusmadi, Dato Gillian Teh and Tuan Haji Hassim tying their promises onto the Pledge Tree.



MUTIARA VOICE (SELF-ADVOCACY) CLUB

Three MVC members were invited to fly to Kelantan to give a talk on “What is Independent Living” and share about the MVC activities to a group of social welfare officers in April.

Shahell, Sariha and Diana had never imagined this opportunity. And they were greatly encouraged by the audience’s response. Supporting friend Syarifah who accompanied them came back beaming with great pride.

Another MVC member, Jian Wen also had the opportunity to share about MVC’s activities to a group of medical practitioners in an evening dinner meeting at a Penang Hotel in April. He impressed everybody present with a poem he wrote in accompaniment to his slide presentation.

This actually shows how capable people whom we label as intellectually challenged can be, given the support and opportunities. Even those of us who work alongside them never fail to be amazed.

In March, we hosted six young adults and staff members from Seri Mengasih Sabah for several days. Likewise in May, another six young adults and supporting friends from United Voice Kuala Lumpur stayed with us for a couple of nights.

Working together with friends



Over the past few months our visitors included groups of university students from Kanagawa and Fukui and a busload of teachers from the Perak State. We also had individual visitors from China, Philippines and Australia. I always believe that these visits will bring forth positive outcomes such as fostering a closer tie between nations and individuals.

AN APPEAL

Like everyone else, we are concerned with the increasing cost of basic commodities as a result of the oil hike. We have to be more conscious of water and electricity usages at the centres and we have not had the luxury to replace our spoilt ovens. We may have to cut back on our Mobile Toy Library services to the rural communities.

The saddest concern is that we have a team of dedicated workers but it has become increasingly difficult to keep them on our meagre salary. One staff member has to work in the night market and gives tuition over the weekend to supplement her income because she still loves being with children with special needs. But lately her physical health is taking a toll on her.

Yes, an easy solution is to raise the salary as like any corporate company would. But unfortunately we are a non-profit welfare based organisation and have to raise RM 28,000 per month to cover salaries of 35 people (9 full-time & 3 part-time staff and 23 members with disabilities), rental of premises and other running expenses.

We were deeply encouraged by Kuok Foundation who increased their financial support to our work early this year. We are of course grateful to many groups and individuals who have contributed to help us reach out to the marginalised community.

If you have not, would you consider pledging on a regular basis to keep our work going?

Thank you for your consideration,
Khor Ai-Na
Director

I expect to pass through this world but once. If therefore, there be any kindness I can do to any fellow being, let me do it now, let me not defer nor neglect it, for I will not pass this way again."

- Stephen Grellet -

RESPONSE SLIP

- I would like more information about ACS and its' activities.
- I would like to be a volunteer.
- I would like to be put on your mailing list.
- I would like to contribute towards the ACS First Step Centre's building fund.
- I would like to pledge _____ on a regular basis.
- I would like to make a general donation of RM _____ towards the activities and running expenses of ACS.

Postal Order/Cheque No: _____ Date: _____
(Please make all cheques payable to Asia Community Service. All cash donations are tax-exempted).

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel No: _____ (H) _____ (O)

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Stepping Stone: 53 Jalan Baru, Pulau Betong, Balik Pulau, 11000 Penang.

Phone / Fax: 04 – 8665349

“Jom!” Mobile Toy Library: Mobile Phone 016 – 4487006



A Non-Profit Organisation Providing Services to People with Special Needs, in particular reference to those with Disabilities

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