

AKTIVITI ACS

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New Ministry, Fresh Hope

2004 is election year for many countries around the world. In some countries, this has led to unsettling turmoil and unrest.

We are thankful for Malaysia's recent general election that was peacefully held in April, which led to the formation of a new government under Prime Minister Dato Seri Abdullah Badawi.

The new re-structure saw the extinction of the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development. The welfare of people with disabilities that is under the purview of Department of Social Welfare has now been re-located under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.

People with Disabilities (PWD) is now grouped with 7 other target groups under this new ministry. However, the Minister in Charge, Dato Seri Shahrizat is a dynamic lady and so we are hopeful for a brighter future for people with disabilities in Malaysia.

For a start, we hope that the new Minister will look into the tabling of the proposed PWD Act 2002 at the next parliamentary session as was promised by the former minister.

It is ironic that Malaysia, being the second most developed country after Singapore in the ASEAN region is still without any specific legislation to protect the rights and the needs of its citizens with disabilities.

Visitors....

In the past 2 months, we were pleased to welcome 2 groups to Penang as part of their friendship trips.

One group from Malaysian CARE Kuala Lumpur comprised of 26 young adult members with learning difficulties supported by 9 volunteers and staff. Besides being tourists in Penang, they had a fun time of exchange with our adult members. They “worked alongside” in painting batik, weaving and in the kitchen. At the end of the day, they walked to the nearby Pulau Betong beach for games and ended up with a fun, dinner and dance at the Stepping Stone Centre in the evening.

A month later in early May, we hosted another group. This 10 member group from Friendship Club, Tokushima, Japan (Tomonokai) was more fascinating. 4 couples and 2 single men – all with some form of intellectual disabilities journeyed to Penang accompanied by 2 supporters.

They enjoyed their 2 night stay at a 5-star resort hotel, shopping and a BBQ evening with our members. It was such an eye opener for us to be in the presence of these guests and to learn so much about “independent” living and married life etc...

For Better or For Worse.....

To have a life-long partner who will support each other through good times and bad times ... doesn't that bring such fulfilment in life?

Somehow, the idea of people with intellectual disabilities having boyfriends and girlfriends is such a taboo thought in our society. Many of them do not have any friends of their own, and lead lonely lives. And loneliness can have many adverse undesirable effects.

And when you think about it – what then does “equal opportunities” mean for people with disabilities? Does it mean that once we have sorted out mainstream education, then only will we look into special education? Does it mean that we will consider employing people with disabilities only if there is a shortage of manpower? Does it mean that

people with intellectual disabilities cannot ever have friends of the other gender because they might all end up having sex? Or does it mean that marriage is out of the question because they cannot think for themselves enough to have a family life?

Mind you, we are not advocating for everybody with disabilities to get married. Since we can even predict failure in modern marriages nowadays, shouldn't we really be discouraging everybody from getting married? So what then is a perfect marriage anyway?

But from what we have seen through the lives of these 4 couples from Japan, they are as happy as happy can be. It was interesting for us to learn that one of the single males, who has some autistic characteristics, is a recent divorcee.

The question is, if they do meet someone who loves them and wants to spend their lives together, do we have a right to deny them this happiness? Or should we try and provide them with adequate support to make their marriages work?

We are just asking, on their behalf, for an equal opportunity to have a "normal life".



Friends from Tokushima, Japan

OPENING CEREMONY

Friday May 21st 2004 marked the official opening ceremony of the new building of ACS Stepping Stone Support Centre. It was certainly the highlight of our activities and probably the highlight for Pulau Betong community.

YB Dato Dr Ng Yen Yen, Deputy Minister of Finance was gracious enough to be our special guest of honour for that occasion. In her speech, Dato Dr Ng reiterated the Government's continuing effort in helping people with disabilities and encouraged the fostering of a closer working relationship with NGOs.

We had over 400 people in attendance, which included friends and supporters who came from KL, Ipoh, Alor Setar and some who flew in all the way from Japan. It was also with great pride for us to welcome Mr Y. Ishii from Nippon Foundation, our single biggest donor who has supported us right from the beginning of this building project 6 years ago.

The staff and members brightened the day with their colourful batik wear, which I may add, were hand painted by them. The members also showed off much of their abilities in hand weaving, candle / soap / paper making and baking cakes.

There were also hand building and wheel throwing pottery demonstrations, courtesy of Mr Guna and Mr Najib. We are hoping to introduce this new skill to the members in the near future.

We are thankful to many who were able to join us on that day. Grateful also to many who have contributed in one way or another in making this event a success. Thanks to Mr Khor, the local *ice-kacang* vendor who provided complimentary and refreshing *ice kacang* and to Mrs Ang & Mr Tan for their delicious durians.

For those who were not able to attend, I have enclosed some photos for you to share the day with us in pictorial form.

The event may be over but it is the beginning of this new project.

FIRST STEP CENTRE

School preparation programme began in April for our six-year olds. This is the time of the year where we “disallow” parents from participating in the sessions at the centre.

They can be quite a handful without their parents!! It was quite chaotic initially but we are glad that the 10 kids have settled down. Some have taken initiative to display their “*kay po chee*” leadership qualities at such a young age!!

As for the parents, I am sure they appreciate the 3½ hour respite break although they are busy planning for the graduation party at the end of the year. Let us know if you can assist with some sponsorships.

*Firdaus
evaluating
his own
performance at
the end of the
day.*



JOM! MOBILE TOY LIBRARY

In line with World Play Day on May 28th, KL YMCA held a series of workshops on Play. Being the only mobile toy library in the country, we were invited to share the work of JOM! in one of their workshop sessions in Kuala Lumpur.

We also had the privilege of presenting a paper on our work at the Asian Toy Libraries Conference in Seoul, Korea at the end of May.

STEP TRAINEES IN IL (INDEPENDENT LIVING) HOME

Ciao Shen and Kelvyn started the independent living training in Pulau Betong in April. They stay in the IL Home with minimal supervision on weekdays while on work placement at Stepping Stone Centre. This programme is with the understanding that they must return to their homes over the weekends.

As part of the training, they have to manage themselves in all areas of living skills. In the evening, they walk to the nearby coffee shop for their dinner.

After 4 months, the boys have indicated their readiness to “move out” into the community. This is a big step for all involved. In order to succeed, we need to ensure careful planning and hold lots of discussions.

Do remember us all in this “transition” period that we will “listen” to the boys and provide them with the necessary supports. This can be difficult to do as often we tend to put our fears before their desires.



A real-life fire drill was conducted by the Jabatan Bomba (Fire Brigade Department) at Stepping Stone in March.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dell Asia-Pacific gave us a couple of used computers. Despite being re-conditioned, those 2 computers are currently our most “advanced” systems in our IT collection!!

Donations and pledges received in conjunction with the opening ceremony amounted to RM 54,910.00. We would like to acknowledge grateful thanks to all individuals and companies with special mention to Penang Turf Club (RM 3,000); Rimbaco Sdn Bhd (RM 5,000); Leader Universal Holdings (RM 5,000); Eng Teknologi Holdings (RM 10,000) as well as Dato Dr Ng for her pledge of RM 10,000 from the Ministry of Finance.

TAX EXEMPTED

We are delighted to share with you that Asia Community Service’s application for tax-exemption for our donors has finally been approved by the Lembaga Hasil Dalam Negeri (LDHN) or the Inland Revenue Department of the Ministry of Finance.

We are very dependent on public donations therefore, we hope that the income tax relief will serve as a little incentive for our donors to continue their support towards our work for children and people with special needs.

With Grateful Thanks,
Khor Ai-Na, Director

The point of life is not to be married or single - it is to be.
We are human beings, or humans being. It does not matter
so much what lifestyle we choose - it's what we make of
the opportunities to grow, that counts.

- Alan Cohen, Rising in Love -

***A Non-Profit Organisation Providing Services To People With Special
Needs, In Particular Reference To Those With Disabilities.***

RESPONSE SLIP

- I would like more information / to be a regular volunteer in:
 - First Step Intervention Centre, Minden Heights
 - Step Training Centre, Relau
 - Stepping Stone Work Centre, Balik Pulau
 - "JOM!" Mobile Toy Library
 - Horse Riding
 - Administration / Fund Raising
- I would like to be put on your mailing list
- I would like to make a general donation of RM _____ .

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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Step Centre: 1-3-9 Kompleks Sri Relau, Pesiaran Bukit Jambul 1, 11900 Pg.

Phone / Fax: 04 – 6462804

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

Phone / Fax: 04 – 8665349

"Jom!" Mobile Toy Library: Mobile Phone 016-4487006



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