

Headline **A place to call home**  
Date **20 Jul 2009**  
MediaTitle **Malay Mail**  
Section **News**  
Journalist **N/A**  
Frequency **Daily**  
ADValue **3,672**

Language **English**  
Page No **10**  
Article Size **442 cm<sup>2</sup>**  
Color **Full Color**  
PRValue **11,016**



# A place to call home

An after-care home for HIV patients run by a Catholic group in Batu Arang

## MASAMI MUSTAZA

RAZAK stands quietly by the window and looks out, his gaze searching a distant past that nobody else can see.

He thinks about a time when he had a family and people he could always return to.

But for a long time now, these things have been non-existent due to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Razak, 47, from Taiping, Perak, was diagnosed with in 1991.

He admitted to being a drug abuser in his younger days.

"I had a friend who was diagnosed with HIV but despite that, I still shared a needle with him. I know I was reckless but I was young then and didn't think much about the risks," he said.

A few months later, Razak was sent to Pudu jail for stealing from a supermarket. He discovered he had HIV after a health screening at the jail. In the following years, he was in and out of jail seven times, mostly for committing petty theft. The "death" sentence, however, failed to deter him from continuing to use drugs.

Meanwhile, he supplemented his drug habit with various jobs, waiting at hotels and even working as a security guard until he was fired when his employers found out about his illness.

By 1998, his health had worsened and he was constantly in and out of hospital. When not hospitalised, Razak spent his days seeking refuge under bridges in the city and going back to his drug habit to forget his sorrows.

"There were days when I felt that I really wanted to die. There were days when I desperately wanted to live. I was in a never ending battle against my cravings for drugs every

time I was out of hospital," said Razak.

Finally, deciding that he needed a long-term solution to be "clean" for good, he took up the hospital's recommendation to stay at the Welcome Community Home in Batu Arang, Selangor, where he is today.

The after-care home for those diagnosed with HIV is run by Catholic Welfare Services.

Its 37 inmates, aged between 20 and 60, have no place to return to and no one to care for them.

"I've not seen my family since finding out that I had HIV. My wife refuses to answer my phone calls. It's the same with my two grown sons. But why should I be surprised? I left them when they were very young. I did nothing for them. No wonder they have no love for me," said an inmate called Yahya.

"I also can't hope to ask much of them when I had caused them so much difficulty in the past."

It is the same with Razak, whose mother and younger sister live in Rawang.

"My mother has accepted my illness but not my sister. She will not speak to me or see me. Mother comes to see me twice a year but it's difficult for her. She's so old and she still needs to earn a living," said Razak.

Razak and Yahya are with 35 other inmates of various races at the welfare home.

Most got HIV through sharing needles and some through sexual intercourse. Many have criminal records.

However, at the home, the men are united and comforted by the only people in the world who can understand their pain and suffering.

And with the uncertainty of when

they will finally succumb to the illness, many turn to their faith to find peace within themselves.

While they are happy with the treatment and care given to them at the home, nevertheless a few of those of the Islamic faith have professed some discomfort in performing their religious duties as the home has pictures of Jesus and Mary and symbols of the Cross.

Muhamad Abdullah, or Ustaz Amin as he is usually known, discovered the Muslim inmates' predicament when he was called to give a talk at the home a month ago.

"The home's administrators have done a commendable job, providing for the religious needs of the Muslim inmates by providing a room converted into a surau and also driving them by van to the mosque for Friday prayers.

"However, some of the inmates have informed me of their concerns

pertaining to performing their religious duties and so, I had an idea to set up a home for HIV patients who are Muslim," said Ustaz Amin, who is also a trustee for the NGO Yayasan Al-Ijabah.

The foundation, originally set up for orphans, has recently acquired a rented house in Subang Jaya to accommodate six HIV positive persons. A few are from the Welcome Community Home.

The men, who are at the home called "Darul Uquwah", are in better health and can move about independently.

The operation of the centre is assisted by Haliza Abdul Halim, 48, who also runs a shelter home for women with social troubles in Subang Jaya. Part of the initiative to set up the home, said Ustaz Amin, was also because there is no other HIV patient home dedicated to Muslims.



DOING A COMMENDABLE JOB: The Welcome Community in Batu Arang