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They now have somewhere to go

A CATHOLIC Welfare Services project, the Welcome Community Home in Batu Arang, is an after-care home for HIV patients who have nowhere else to go.

The home has operated since 1995 and moved to its current location in April last year from another location nearby.

Its administrator, Anthony Gomez, said the home has a maximum occupancy of 43 persons and currently houses 37 men of various races and religions who were referred to the home from Sungai Buloh Hospital or the local prisons.

The home is run by two administrators, including Gomez, and 17 employees, including six assistant caregivers. It currently employs a

full-time nurse and will have two more soon.

The inmates are treated well and without prejudice.

Inmates are free to practise their own religion and on days when they are required to attend to prayers at their respective places of worship, they are chauffeured to those places. Food is also well taken care of. A Muslim assistant caregiver is tasked with the grocery shopping and to cater for the Muslims and the Buddhists. No beef or pork is served at mealtimes.

The running cost of the centre is RM438,000 annually out of which, a funding of RM226,000 comes from the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry via the Malaysian AIDS Council.

Gomez described the inmates as being "close-knit" and having "the best peer support".

"Despite the differences in their background, they have each other to rely on and that helps them to overcome their hurdles in battling HIV. We have three inmates who, when they came here for the first time, were wheelchair-bound but with the care that they received and the support of their peers, are able to walk again," said Gomez.

There are depressing days for the inmates as well, especially when a fellow inmate passes away.

"Last year we lost seven inmates who were already in the terminal stage of the disease. Everyone was very down for many days."



SUPPORT: The Muslim HIV patients at Welcome Community Home in Batu Arang