

Headline	The unsung heroes		
MediaTitle	New Sunday Times		
Date	23 Sep 2012	Color	Full Color
Section	Life & Times	Circulation	156,910
Page No	4	Readership	295,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	260 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 8,482
Frequency	Weekly	PR Value	RM 25,446



The unsung heroes

CORPORATIONS hosting Hari Raya open houses to foster goodwill and thanksgiving with the less fortunate are the norm these days. The latter are treated to lunches and dinners throughout the month of Syawal. Many receive duit Raya and other gifts.

This year, one open house that stood head and shoulders above the rest was a corporation that hosted a half-day "session" to show its appreciation to the caregivers of these organisations. The event also included a lavish buffet spread for those in their care.

It wasn't just about getting a bunch of "less fortunate" people together, feeding them, giving them angpaw, shaking their hands and saying "good-bye, see you next year".

In an elaborate programme that lasted from breakfast to lunch, Maxis Berhad invited two representative caregivers from 23 organisations in the Klang Valley to a "surprise seminar". That seminar turned out to be a session where caregivers were given recognition and acknowledgement for their work and contributions.

That morning, I met caregivers of all races and backgrounds — those who work with the deaf, or with babies born with HIV, physically and mentally disabled children and adults suffering from various syndromes and illnesses, and the elderly. From the sharing session, we were given a glimpse into their lives and routines. These were the unsung heroes that Maxis wanted to reward.

From the response of the caregivers at the end of the session, this was something extraordinary.

As "Makcik" Sarah from a community-based rehabilitation centre for the physically and mentally disabled said, "This is something I will never forget for the rest of my life."

Sarah has worked as a caregiver at the centre for more than 20 years, and is now its administrator. She didn't do this because she had a disabled family member. She did it because disabled children pulled at her heart-strings.

"It is not an easy job. It's hands-on, it's physically challenging, and the children are not always predictable. If there are not enough staff or volunteers, you just have to pick up the mop and clean up the mess — vomit, pee or poop. If you want a glamorous job, this is certainly not it," she said, adding that the reward is when you see them getting better and going on to the next phase — being independent, integrated into society or getting jobs. This was a sentiment shared by all caregivers there.

One woman who calls herself Kak Long works for a Down's Syndrome centre because her child was one. After being there and seeing that many others were in the same situation, she said her family just grew from that day on. All the children at that centre were like her children too. And because of that, they will receive her best.

One young man said, "As caregivers, people forget that you too may have feelings and problems. So they scold you when you come home from work late or if you cannot meet their demands. They don't think or care about how your day has been. Even your child can scold you if you cannot fulfil his request for the day. Today,

however, we hear a lot of 'thank you's'. I am moved and don't know what else to say."

Another woman who works with the deaf had tears streaming down her face when she was thanked. She felt so humbled that people were thanking her for doing a job she loved.

Purnima Das, wife of Maxis chief executive officer Sandip Das, said at the end of the session: "Every year, I attend

these functions and we hand out gifts of money to people from homes. We never really got to know them. We just know of them. Today, we get to meet the people

who are the driving force behind the organisations.

"These people are so used to giving and not receiving. These are people who are seldom thanked or appreciated for what they do, their services that they willingly give to the best of their ability. Today, we salute them."

The Maxis team of volunteers had organised themselves into groups who took care of the caregivers as well as the busloads of residents from the various homes. No one was left unattended that day at the Mandarin Oriental hotel. The caregivers were placed at VIP tables, each of which was hosted by a senior ranking officer of the company. Food was served to them from the buffet. They were cared for.

Each representative caregiver was given a handphone complete with starter pack and top ups. Five selected homes received RM10,000. Maxis also adopted two homes for which they will be giving cash contributions and holding activities over the next 12 months. Residents received duit Raya of RM50 each.

Well done, Maxis! You touched our lives and gave us an unforgettable experience and memories. Thank you.



Putri Juneita Johari
volunteers at
the Special
Children Society
of Ampang. You
can reach her at
juneitajohari@
yahoo.com.