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Cemetery clean-up for 'In Solidarity'

THEME TO REMEMBER: HIV survivors of all races and religions unite for a gotong-royong on International Aids Memorial Day

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IT'S a time to be 'In solidarity', the theme for this year International Aids Memorial Day (IAMD), where people of all races and religions unite to remember those who have died due to AIDS-related illness.

In conjunction with this annual event, the Malaysian Aids Council and their partner organisation, the PT Foundation, held a gotong-royong activity to clean up the Muslim cemetery at Taman Selasih, here.

IAMD is being celebrated this year on May 19.

The clean-up, organised in collaboration with City Hall, began from 9am and the entire morning was spent cleaning up the graveyard.

Approximately, 60 volunteers including HIV survivors from PT Foundation came with a smile but also with deep empathy for those

who did not survive the disease.

Senior programme manager Yusmar Yusof said they have been cleaning up this graveyard since 2007.

"We specifically chose this place because most of the deceased were buried here," she said.

"This memorial is not only to remember those who have died, but also to cherish and support those among us who are survivors."

The current patients are also forming a close relationship with the Federal Territory Islamic Religious Department from whom they are getting emotional and moral support.

Yusmar said those who are HIV positive are still being stigmatised by society.

"There are only three ways to get HIV infection. First, exchange of

body fluids; second, mother to fetal transmission; and lastly, sharing of needles by intravenous drug users. Society's fear of being around them has contributed to their difficulty of finding jobs," said Yusmar, adding that it was important to instil positive thinking in the patients.

The PT Foundation has helped 50 people find occupations since 2012.

While the overall number of people who are infected by HIV is dropping, the number of youths getting infected is rising.

"Teenagers and youths between 18 and 35 years are more likely to get the disease as they tend to have unprotected intercourse," said Yusmar.

The Malaysian Aids Council has also been visiting universities and colleges to educate students on this subject.



Volunteers from the PT Foundation cleaning up the Muslim cemetery at Taman Selasih to mark International Aids Memorial Day. Pic by Nurul Syazana Rose Razman