

Headline	Getting rid of the stigma on AIDS and HIV		
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Getting rid of the stigma on AIDS and HIV

Rini Zuhlifah Ismail

KOTA KINABALU: HIV-positive people here often become targets of AIDS discrimination and stigma, said Sabah Aids Support Services Association (Kasih) President, Joseph Benedict (pic).

On top of handling new health challenges, they also face rejections from family members and friends.

There are also cases where they lose their jobs, said Joseph at the World Aids Day at 1Borneo Hypermall's main entrance, here.

"Many factors can lead to AIDS discrimination and stigma. This is what we hope to reduce through public awareness and understanding on how they can and can't get AIDS/HIV."

The main objective of the programme was to spread the awareness and also to notify people of the NGO's existence in Sabah.

"We've been around since year 2003, but unfortunately, many people are still unaware of our existence here."

Furthermore, he shared that one cannot get AIDS or HIV by talking, hugging, shaking hands, sharing food or drinks or sitting next to a diagnosed person.

"You also will not be infected by being friends with HIV-positive people," he said.

Some people still believe that they can catch HIV through casual contact, such as sharing a drinking glass or touching a toilet seat. This greatly increases their fear about being near people who are infected.

He said there is no simple answer on how to deal with the stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS and the first step might be to seek support from people who under-

stand what one is going through.

"This is what Kasih provides. Apart from organising HIV awareness programmes and spreading information on HIV/AIDS, Kasih, formerly known as Kota Kinabalu AIDS Support and Information Hub, provides a temporary shelter home

at Taman Vista, Kepayan for single mothers and children infected and affected with HIV/AIDS.

Financial assistance and voluntary confidential tests are also available.

Among their objectives include complementing existing treatment services provided by the government by giving support services such as financial, material aid and referrals.

Also highlighted by Joseph was the HIV/AIDS information and related issues that they provide through counselling and help line.

"This benefits those who are infected and affected with HIV/AIDS."

Another objective is to promote public awareness through events, seminars, talks and public forums, he said.

"To prevent AIDS or HIV, be loyal to your partner, stay monogamous, use condoms and practise safe sex at all times and remembering not to share needles or syringes," he said.

Meanwhile, he also reminded HIV-positive people to continue with their treatments.

"What bothers me is the fact that there are those diagnosed with HIV who do not complete their medication or decide to take it one day and leave it the next.

"This will unfortunately make the virus stronger. If medication were taken properly, those diagnosed would be able to live better lives.

"Many people in villages do not know what is AIDS/HIV. They don't know how

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to prevent it and any other information associated with it, so this is where we come in.

“ We want to spread the word, so that more people will be aware.

“Although the statistics are low in Sabah, we do not want more people to be infected.”

Malaysians can also get free treatment

from government health clinics.

Kasih was established in 2003 after a group of volunteers and professionals noticed the general public’s lack of information on HIV/AIDS.

For further information, call: 088-712914 or Email: kasih@sabah@yahoo.com

