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Four-day motivational camp for transgenders

BY ROSLINA MOHAMAD
roslina@thestar.com.my

KUANTAN: The Malaysian Department of Islamic Development (Jakim) and Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) have joined forces in taking steps to deal with issues involving HIV/AIDS by organising a four-day motivational camp for transgenders at an agro-tourism resort recently.

Twenty eight participants aged between 19 and 49 took part in a series of activities carried out at the Agro Resort Semuji, about 50km from here.

Jakim monitoring and enforcement assistant director and programme coordinator Sharulnizam Abu Bakar said the setting and approach was more relaxed and casual.

"They are free to be themselves and there are no restrictions or conditions imposed on them while undergoing the programme.

"All they need to do is to take part in the activities and attend motivational and health talks organised in a very relaxed manner," he said after an ice-breaker session held for the participants.

He added that the participants hailed not only from Pahang but also Kelantan, Terengganu, Johor and Sabah.

Sharulnizam said the programme provided them with religious knowledge, skills training and business opportunities.

"As part of the efforts to help improve their lifestyle and livelihood, Jakim and MAC are working together with government agency, MARA, and Dagang Halal, a food

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products and services company.

"By opening the ways to them, economically and spiritually, we hope they can lead a better life," he added.

There were also talks on how to handle stress, HIV/AIDS prevention and social stigma and discrimination often associated with transgenders, he said.

To a question, Shahrulnizam said it took a while to convince them about the programme when they learned that the religious body was involved.

However, his efforts paid off after a few meetings with 10 of them, said to be the 'chieftains' here, he added.

He also said the programme was first held in Jelebu, Negri Sembilan a few months ago which attracted 17 participants.

"Initially, 30 people has agreed to attend but there were attempts by certain people who told them that they would have their long hair cut if they took part.

"However, it did not hamper our morale and the programme proved to be a success as 13 of them have shown progress and improvement," Shahrulnizam said, adding, two of them became fascilitators for the Kuantan session.

At the end of the programme, the state religious department would carry out follow-up activities as the programme is not a one-off thing.

Motivational speaker Mohammed Hanafi Abdul Malik of Sahabat Insan Dan Iman Malaysia (SIDIM) who conducted the entertaining ice-breaker segment said the approach to the whole idea was to develop more connections and less

corrections.

"Eventually, they will affect the desired changes," he added.

One of the participants, Mohd Bakri Abu Bakar or also known as Kak June, 48, said he helped to gather the group as many harboured the hopes of improving their lifestyle and livelihoods.

He added that the programme is something different. It is an opportunity not to be missed.

"At first, we were afraid and not interested as JAIP (Pahang Religious Affairs Department) was involved but after the briefings and getting a clear picture, we decided to give a chance," said the Kuantan resident.

He added that he planned to share the knowledge gained with the others so they too could reap in the good benefits.