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Fruitful partnership

By **SARAH CHEW**
educate@thestar.com.my

IT was an interesting exchange of sorts, research expertise for real life internship experience.

Ten students from Tulane University's (Tulane) School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, New Orleans in the United States (US), came to Malaysia for a month to help out in community projects, thanks to a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Universiti Malaya (UM) and Tulane to facilitate student exchange and internships.

The students, who completed the one-month Summer Service Learning Programme here, attended a one-day lecture and engaged in community service projects by partner organisations such as the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC), HIV and AIDS non-government organisations (NGO) Ikhlas and Pink Triangle, and refugee NGO Health Equity Initiative.

MAC president and UM Faculty of Medicine professor Prof Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman said the students have been conducting surveys, assisting in day-to-day activities and producing educational material such as leaflets on tuberculosis, dengue fever and AIDS.

"This programme focuses on infectious diseases and also deals with rights, stigma and gender inequalities," she said at the signing ceremony recently.

Students involved came back with reports

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on how it has widened their perspectives on social concerns and public health.

"It was interesting to see the diverse groups of people who came to Ikhlās, especially the drug-addicts and homeless," said Tulane student Michael Lamb, 20, (pic), who added it was an opportunity to "get my hands dirty" while he conducted surveys among them.

"I was also involved in an outreach programme and saw people living under bridges—it was an eye-opening experience."

Another student Azim Haqua, 21, said he found it exciting to experience the food and culture of Malaysia. He interned at Welcome Home, a home for AIDS patients abandoned

by their relatives.

Tulane associate dean for graduate admissions and undergraduate public health director Dr Jeffrey T. Johnson said the MoU signified continued friendship and scientific collaboration, with opportunities for research and exchanges.

He commented that the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine was established after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, United States, and left massive floods and destruction in its wake.

"After that incident, our students wanted to give something back to the community," he said.

"So, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching gave us a grant to start this Centre for Public Service, which offers our first international undergraduate public health programme."

Tulane students who came to UM were the inaugural class, joined by two students from Funan University, China.

"I feel that these students here will be tomorrow's public health leaders," Dr Johnson added.



From left: Prof Adeeba, UM Medical Centre director Prof Datuk Dr Ikram Shah Ismail, Dr Johnson and Tulane University Clinical Assoc Prof Latha Rajan after the ceremony.