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Transgender with a mission

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Transgender with a mission

33-year-old wants to help others like her cope

By **WONG PEK MEI**
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KUALA LUMPUR: Although it took her family more than a decade to accept her sexuality, Rina managed to overcome the challenges thrown at her at an early age – and is now helping others.

The 33-year-old transgender said her family kicked her out from their home in Kedah when she was 13 after discovering she liked to dress up as a girl.

"I was homeless and would wander around the streets," she said. "Nobody would give a job to a 13-year-old so to make ends meet, I became a sex worker," she said at the launch of PT Foundation's renovated HIV/AIDS centre here.

At 16, she discovered the foundation when other homeless people told her about it. It was at one of the

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foundation's clinics that Rina learnt she had HIV.

"However, with the help of the foundation, I continued my schooling until I obtained a diploma in architecture," she said.

Rina wanted to show her parents that she had made it good despite them rejecting her. However, her father died three days before her return.

"My mum told me that before he died, he told her to accept me if I ever came back," she said.

Despite the hardship, Rina forgave her parents and is now living with her mother.

When she was 26, Rina left her job to help others who have gone through the same experience as her.

"I realised it was my calling when a few of my close friends who were on the streets died of HIV but I was healthy and well. So I thought 'Why not give back to the community?'," said the manager for the foundation's Positive Living programme.

Meanwhile, PT Foundation chairman Hisham Hussein said HIV transmission through sex had overtaken transmission through sharing of contaminated needles as the main source of infection for the last two years.

Present at the launch were former Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir and Japanese ambassador to Malaysia Shigeru Nakamura.



New beginnings:
(From left) Marina, Hisham and Shigeru pasting small red ribbons on the big red ribbon to symbolise the launch of PT Foundation's newly renovated HIV/AIDS Centre in Kuala Lumpur.