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NGO offers help to HIV patients

> Provides vocational training, counselling for them to integrate with society

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KUALA LUMPUR: People with HIV have been given another chance to reintegrate into mainstream society through the Women and Health Association of Kuala Lumpur (Wake).

Its patron, Datuk Dr Emmanuel Benson (*pix*), said Wake, a non-government organisation established in 2001, has been running programmes not just for those with HIV but also for transsexuals and children.

"We have 27 inmates in our three shelters. We accept women, children and transsexuals - these people are often displaced. At the shelters, we provide them a place to stay while they get treatment.

"They also receive some vocational training to allow them to join society again when they are well," he told *theSun* in a recent interview.

He added that right now, there are no babies at the shelter, the youngest child there being 12 years old.

Annually, it costs between RM300,000 and RM400,000 to run the shelters, and the residents try to raise the funds themselves.

"The patients are provided medication by the Malaysian Aids Council. We also provide them with counselling as it is a psychological battle because of the stigma attached to those with HIV.

"If the children have lost their parents to AIDS, most usually live with the stigma and discrimination attached to the disease. The counsellors have been working with us for 10 to 15 years," he said.



Wake's shelters use a holistic approach to the management of the children's health and for the other residents of the homes.

The staff from the shelters conduct regular visits to areas where women work as sex workers, and provide counselling in regard to their health, including issues on HIV/AIDS and to guide them towards rehabilitation.

"We want those people to be able to lead a normal life eventually. With the current medication available, this is possible. We guide the residents towards this goal," Benson said.

Currently, Wake is trying to find a building to accommodate its residents, and is seeking the government's help for a plot of land for the purpose.

"If we can no longer house these people, they have no where else to go but back to the streets."