



How safe are our children today?

In the last workshop organized by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM) to discuss on the National Child Protection Policy, those who attended were left wondering how much bite this policy would have when tackling complex issues of child abuse, human trafficking, juvenile detention and the state of undocumented children in the country.

Over the past few years, crime rates in the country have increased by 159 percent. Serious crimes have increased by 13 percent. Cases of child abuse have also increased by 60 percent. Statistics would show that 70 percent of abuse cases are still caused by immediate family members. Five in every 10 cases are caused by the child's parents themselves. Out of 1,999 reported cases of child abuse in 2006, mothers were responsible for 493 cases. Fathers came in a close second with 441 cases.

On a separate issue, last year, we had 1,649 missing children. Eighty percent of all missing children were girls. Names like Sharline, Asmawi, Preeshena and Nurin have unfortunately become household names for the wrong reasons.

It's not easy to accept that the above statistics are numbers reflecting the state of our society today. It makes it even more difficult especially when we know that our country is still a growing society.

We have approximately 4.1 million children below the age of six years old. Forty percent of the Malaysian population is still below the age of 18 years old. With such a young population, a strong emphasis on carrying out workable strategies by key stakeholders such as the ministry, NGOs, schools, parents and so on is crucial in safeguarding the interest of our children. A proper implementation of the above National Child Protection Policy must make a difference in the lives of every child on the street.

An initiative the ministry made last year was the introduction of Talian Nur (15999) - a telephone report service. We hear that the ministry has spent RM4 million to get Talian Nur up and running. Talian Nur provides the general public who may be facing social woes direct access to help from the correct people in the ministry. It's an intervention service that is much needed as

there are still many among those in difficult circumstances who do not know what services are available for them or how to attain them.

We at Shelter are constantly trying to improve our early intervention services by working out programmes that make a difference in the lives of children. We are trying to prevent the possibility of abuse in society by targeting our services to the populations within our society that are at risk. Through our community support programmes such as food and financial aid, documentation assistance, single mothers support and community centres; we are hoping that the assistance we provide would reduce the possibility of neglect, abuse and abandonment.

For example, every time we help a family who did not register birth certificates for their children, we are preventing future problems such as difficulties in school enrolment, obtaining identification cards and receiving government aid. Providing support and care for teens in the event of an out of wedlock pregnancy reduces the possibility of child abandonment upon delivery. In the same light, helping a family in financial difficulty reduces the possibility of child neglect or the possibility of the child becoming a school dropout.

Whatever services the relevant governmental agency or we at Shelter provide to those in need, a strong partnership with the community is very much needed. Not all people in need know what help is available and where to get them. Children in abusive or neglected situations for example need an observant and proactive member of the public to speak up and act on their behalf. They need concerned people who are willing to connect them to the relevant people. In these difficult times, all of us need to play our part. And the time to play our part is now!



Volunteers play an important role in our Homes!

From the time we have had residential Homes for the children; we have had volunteers working closely with us. Strong ties with volunteers are an integral part of any successful running Home. Homes cannot exist in isolation of the community that they are located in. The need for our Homes and our residents to interact with volunteers especially with those within the community is important for the social development of our children.

"I'd like to lighten the burden of the Home staff who are overloaded by helping to play with and teach the children." ~ Jayamani

In Shelter, we have seen volunteers with various giftings. At different times and occasions, we have had teachers coming to teach the children faithfully, handymen helping with repairs and maintenance, music teachers giving piano lessons or singing, students who spend their evenings playing games with the kids, groups who provide lunch and so on. Some volunteers help on an ad hoc basis, while some commit consistently and for an extended period of time.

We encourage all our volunteers who are serious in their commitment to the children in our Homes to take personal interest in the development of our children. A volunteer who helps a child in his or her reading is not only playing the role of a tutor, but more importantly contributing to the child's future development. By teaching a child how to read, the child stands a chance to gain proper integration and survival in today's society.

"I want to involve the children with the intricacies of art and craft as much as I am involved in them by interacting with them personally." ~ Mr. S.T. Khoo

This year itself, we are grateful to have had volunteers who faithfully helped in the setting up of our playroom and those who helped organize our inventory in Shelter 1. Over in Shelter 2, we have had a volunteer who organized a study tour to a newspaper printing plant and a pewter factory. We also had a volunteer who came regularly every evening at 4pm to teach the boys English in Shelter 3. These are things done for us which are both helpful and educational for the kids. And we are truly grateful to them.

If you would like to be a volunteer, please contact Angela at 03-7955 0663.





Shelter's Executive Director Mr. James Nayagam receiving the Certificate of Appreciation from the Home Minister Y B Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar

Certificate of Appreciation for Shelter by the Home Minister

Shelter was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation by the Home Minister Y B Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar in conjunction with their launching of the Integrity School for juveniles remanded in Kajang prison on 10 April 2008.

The award was given in recognition of Shelter's commitment as a forerunner in working with the prison authorities and

providing prison educational development services for juveniles in Kajang Prison.

The first batch of 35 inmates who completed their computer training also received certificates from the Minister. The computer training program was conducted by Shelter as part of the educational development activities for the inmates.

Monthly Community Activities



A staff member from Shelter distributing food and educational materials to the refugee community



Volunteer giving free haircuts

Shelter Community School (Refugee Work)



Medical assistance given to a baby as young as three years old

Since the beginning of 2008, Shelter has officially started its three community schools in the vicinity of Subang Jaya, Kepong and Puchong. Since it was started, the school has benefited approximately 150 children, mainly the refugee children from the Chin tribe, of Myanmar.

Besides providing educational opportunities to the marginalized group of children who have been deprived of education, Shelter has also reached out to these communities as a whole, by organizing monthly community activities, such as, providing free hair cuts, medical clinic as well as contributing to their daily essential needs.

Monthly Community Activities



English Class



Computer Class



First Mother Nature caught the children and the elderly.... Courtesy of the BBC

MYANMAR CYCLONE CHAOS



.... and then the lost children, cold and hungry... Associated Press

More than a week later, the rains are coming in again; this time it's just a little typhoon from the South China Sea. And about 4 inches of water, enough to keep your bed wet and cold. The mosquitoes are breeding ten times as fast because Cyclone Nargis created customized breeding pools in living, dining and rooms.

On 9 May 2008, the UN had an estimate figure of 216, 000 dead or missing people; on 10 May 2008, the official figure was 23,000; however one ratio tallied in both cases: the number of dead, dying or missing children. Today that figure is 250, 000

Two weeks after the cyclone, the people are still without food. And the vultures are closing in and preying on the young. Can we help? Another not-often-reported aspect of this crisis is the impact the cyclone will have on people's longer-term livelihood. This is the time of the year when people of the Irrawaddy Delta should be preparing the land for the monsoon paddy crop. For nearly two million people, this is now not possible. So, without a monsoon paddy crop, there won't be a harvest in October /November.

And this is in an area where at least a third of the children were chronically malnourished even before the cyclone. Yet another forecast that there is the promise of famine or a massive relief effort, which is going to last some time not only for Myanmar, but also for South East Asia.

Beginning of the aftermath....

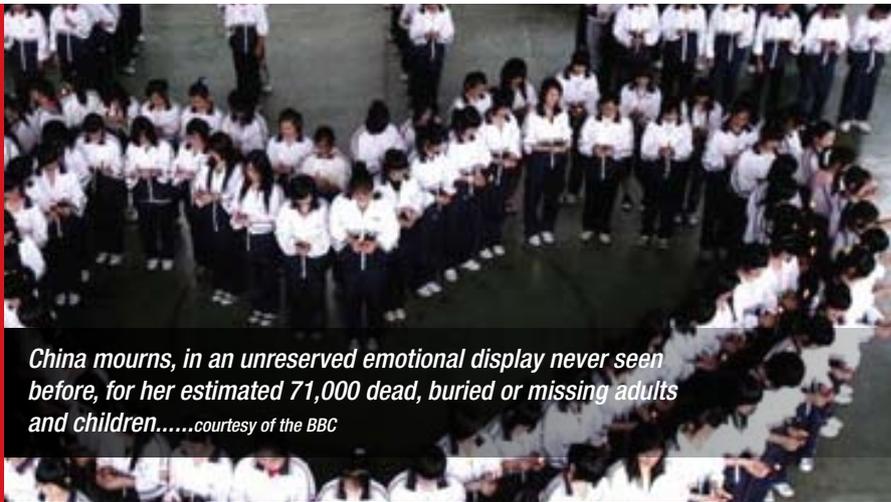


.... and then the lost children, cold and hungry... Associated Press

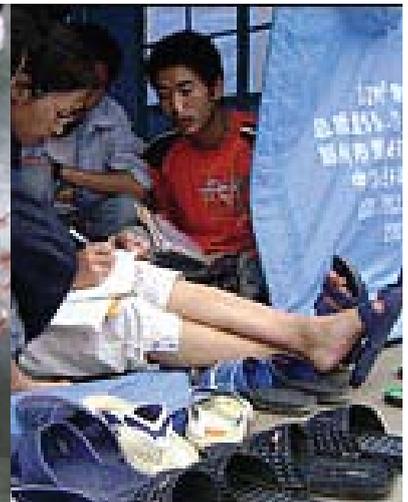
It's a curious reality: amongst the crying, starving, sick and lost children in the various campsites for the displaced, like out of a surreal painting, 'ghosts' are being enflashed. These are for real, though – the wolves in sheep's' clothing. Citing credible sources, Burma's National League for Democracy (NLD) said that gangs of human traffickers are moving into camps housing children to recruit 'child soldiers' or abduct young girls for sale.

With the death toll from Nargis at 100,000 and rising together with the 1,500,000 displaced and homeless people, the 'human vultures' have placed a premium on children and body organs, especially. How will parents teach their children to trust adults being in the adult mould themselves?

*Sources: BBC Headline feeders', 24 May, 2008;
Herald (International News Page 9, May 25, 2008)*



China mourns, in an unreserved emotional display never seen before, for her estimated 71,000 dead, buried or missing adults and children.....courtesy of the BBC



CHINA IN MOURNING ... UPDATES



These parents have just identified the body of their child at the ruins of a school in Dujiangyan....Getty Image Filepic

Complete devastation

The devastating 7.9 earthquake that hit China's Sichuan province flattened homes, schools and entire villages, cutting roads and leaving habitations isolated or destroyed to mark its aftermath, leaving 71,000 people dead, with an estimated five million people homeless. "I just don't know what's going to happen next," is a sentiment perhaps felt by many of the surviving.

A whole school and hosts of survivors are now sleeping in a tent city, as all dormitories were evacuated. There are no canteens and supermarkets so they must cook not only for themselves but also for their friends. Many are already orphaned though they don't know it yet. Some students help out at hospitals while others help clear away the rubble. Others help carry the injured to the hospital; they have to walk. Food and drinking water is very much a priority.



*.... as his mum looks at her son Zhang Jiachi who lost both arms when his school collapsed in Shifang the life ahead for both of them now looks very different...
Associated Press*

Basketball hoops in the playground of Juyuan School still stand a heart wrenching reminder of a world of laughter and chatter before the earthquake. But instead of children playing games, there are now rescue workers wearing face masks, police and soldiers, while distraught relatives, pack into the muddy playground.



This husband was digging for his wife's body; instead she turned up alive and well! Associated File Press

DONATION SLIP

Yes! I will help you help our children!

• Please fill in block letters

Full Name : Company / Organization / Dr / Mr / Mrs / Ms

Address :

Tel : (H) (O)

(h/p) Fax :

Nature of business (if applicable) :

Email:

Yes, please include me in the Shelter newsletter mailing list.

I would like to sponsor a child. Please contact me.

Please provide me with more information to serve on a voluntary basis.

I would like to pledge RM _____ per month for _____ months / year(s).

Enclosed is a crossed cheque / bank draft / money order no. _____

payable to **Shelter** for RM _____

Please charge my donation of RM _____ to:

VISA MasterCard American Express

Card Number :

Name on the card : _____

Expiry Date : _____

Signature : _____ Date : _____

Started in 1981, Shelter is a registered voluntary welfare organization for children and teenagers who have been abandoned, neglected, orphaned or abused. Shelter is supported by donations from the general public.
ALL DONATIONS TO SHELTER ARE TAX EXEMPT. (No.8954 / 90)



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On 24 April 2008 - Shelter was invited by the Association Against Parental Alienation (PEMALIK) to present a paper on trauma faced by children caught in custody battles. The following are some startling information that was highlighted and discussed during the seminar.

- 1) There is only One Family Court in the whole of Malaysia!
- 2) That it takes as long as 12 years before a divorce is final! With multi-affidavits for a divorce, custody proceedings, numerous postponements and even variations on a custody order, a child would sometimes be suffering the effects of the conflict throughout these many years.
- 3) That in all states (except KL), hearings for divorce cases are mixed together with other criminal cases. Can you imagine children in a public gallery being asked in a custody hearing which parent they prefer; especially in a situation where parental alienation has taken place and the children are already traumatized by the warring parents. Are we so blind that we can expect a presiding Judge, with a backlog of cases and probably just having taken over the case, to provide a wise decision whereby the future of the children are determined? With the increasing rate of divorce (total for past 12 years exceeding 200,000), can you imagine the quality of justice we are meting out?
- 4) We have yet to amend certain sections of the Law Reform (Marriage & Divorce) Act 1976 and Child Act 2001 to conform to changing needs. Section 95 pertaining to maintenance needs to be studied and the hue and cry of our women MPs on this issue to be addressed.
- 5) That our Marriage Tribunal is merely rubber-stamping licenses to divorce! We need to be aware that our laws are antiquated and Something needs to be Done to provide a solution is most encouraging; which is to set up a Panel of Experts comprising psychologists, psychiatrists, child counselors and social welfare workers to guide the divorcing couples on issues of custody, maintenance, education, upbringing and finance, and any other relevant legal issues and then the findings be forwarded to the Judge for decision-making. The key to all this is Joint Responsibility and not Joint Custody! (Nobody is fighting any battle! The only winning points are the saving of legal fees and the time of all affected.) We can even call this an "Early Intervention Project" as we can advise conflicting couples before it gets to the 'DIVORCE' stage.

The printing of this newsletter is sponsored by Thumbprints Uid Sdn Bhd

Sponsor A Shelter Child



If you have any questions regarding Shelter's Sponsor a Child Programme, or are interested to be a sponsor, please call Deborah at Shelter office or you could download the Sponsor Form from the website (www.shelterhome.org) and send it to our postal address. Sponsorship is for a minimum period of 12 months and most of our sponsors continue with this meaningful experience of helping change the world for at least one disadvantaged child after just trying it for one sponsorship term. So, do not delay and call us now at 03-7955 0663.

Volunteer



Interested in volunteering at Shelter? Do contact Angela for more details at 03-7955 0663 today!

We appreciate all that you do to make a difference! Child sponsors and volunteers are invaluable to us!

Dropzone



DropZone is a Shelter youth community centre project, which offers an alternative hang-out place for young people and runs activities which focus on the personal development of youth.

Contact Keat Lim at 03-7782 7448 if you would like to know more about DropZone's activities - happenin' Mondays to Fridays from 11.00am till 6.00pm.
DropZone is at: No.92-A, 1st Floor, Jalan Othman 1/14 (PJ Old Town), 46000 Petaling Jaya.