

RED RIBBON @BRICKFIELDS CARNIVAL REACHES OUT TO INDIAN COMMUNITY WITH HIV EDUCATION

Kuala Lumpur, 20 May 2012 - The Kuala Lumpur AIDS Support Service Society (KLASS), a Partner Organisation of the Malaysian AIDS Council, organised its first ever Red Ribbon @Brickfields Carnival, a HIV/AIDS awareness-raising event aimed at the local Indian community today. The one-day carnival was a collaborative venture with Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC), Sungai Buloh Hospital and MAHSA College, held in conjunction with the International AIDS Memorial Day 2012 here at the Brickfields DBKL Car Park.

The Red Ribbon @Brickfields Carnival was launched by Dean of the Medical Faculty of MAHSA College, Prof Dato' Dr. Khairul Anuar Abdullah; Director of Sungai Buloh Hospital, Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim; and President of KLASS and Senior Consultant Physician (Infectious Diseases) of Sungai Buloh Hospital, Dr Christopher Lee. MAC Red Ribbon Celebrity Supporters, Utthaya and Anantha of THR Raaga radio witnessed the launch ceremony amidst the throngs of people who gathered to enjoy the day's festivities.

"While it is encouraging to note that new HIV infections have been on the declining trend for the past few years, there are in fact other worrying trends in the HIV epidemic in Malaysia that necessitate our immediate action. They are the increasing cases of sexually transmitted HIV as well as infection among women. These patterns may indicate that the epidemic is becoming more mainstream and is no longer confined to marginalised populations. As the epidemic evolves in the country, so must our interventions and strategies. This event in Brickfields is one of the means to spread and consolidate AIDS awareness among the general population," said Dr Christopher Lee.

The event organising committee was chaired by Dr Kumara Gurupparan Ganesan from The National Heart Institute, while Dr Christopher Lee and Dr Suresh Kumar from Sungai Buloh Hospital served as advisors. In addition, students of the MAHSA College Medical Faculty also lent their support to the event – they collectively regarded the event as a training ground for them to educate and interact with the public about HIV/AIDS prevention.

"It is not just about doing the right thing for people who are living with HIV and AIDS. Frankly, it is about doing the right thing for us – as members of the community. HIV and AIDS is an emerging problem and denial is not the solution. The community has the responsibility to understand the actual disease process and be equipped with the information and knowledge that can help reduce stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS. Further, engaging students in events like this, exposes them to the real situation of managing this disease, and make them responsible agents of change. With this,

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hopefully, the stigma and discrimination can be eliminated, and those living with HIV/AIDS will be able to lead a dignified life,” quipped Dr Kumara Guruparan.

National HIV/AIDS surveillance data revealed that a total of 94,841 cases of HIV/AIDS have been cumulatively reported since 1986. About 7.8 per cent or 7,437, and 14.6 per cent or 13,858 of them were reported in the Indian and Chinese communities respectively. Stigma remains the biggest single socio-cultural barrier for people living with HIV from any ethnic background in Malaysia to seek and appropriate HIV testing, treatment, care and support services.

Speaking against HIV stigma, Red Ribbon Celebrity Supporter, Uthaya said, “I hope more and more youths will be able to join us in spreading positive messages about HIV/AIDS to their family members and friends. This will help to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by those who are infected and affected by HIV in our society. People living with HIV need to be empowered and know that they don’t have to suffer and live in isolation.”

Aanantha, on the other hand, expressed how gratifying and fulfilling it was to be able to spend time and bond with the crowd, especially the youths.

In addition to the special appearance by the aforementioned Red Ribbon Celebrity Supporters, other highlights of the carnival included special appearance by Villianz Group, face painting, free legal consultation by the Legal Aid Council, wish tree messages, stage and street magic shows, and free medical screening by Medical Department of the Sg Buloh Hospital.

ABOUT KLASS

The Kuala Lumpur AIDS Support Society (KLASS) was established in 2001 at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and has since offered counseling, referrals, temporary shelter, and support group sessions for those affected by HIV/AIDS. In the past, the society had organized various campaigns to create awareness of HIV/AIDS issues amongst the Chinese and Tamil-speaking community. With the continuous support from the MAC, KLASS continues to provide support services to the public and its members in particular, and hopes to also serve as the voice of the community affected by HIV/AIDS. For more information, please visit www.klass.org.my

ABOUT MALAYSIAN AIDS COUNCIL

The Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) was established in 1992 to serve as an umbrella organisation to support and coordinate the efforts of organisations working on HIV/AIDS issues in Malaysia. MAC, in partnership with government agencies, private sector and international organisations, ensures a committed and effective response by NGOs working on HIV/AIDS issues in Malaysia. MAC, comprising the Secretariat and its Partner Organisations, work together as a team to provide nationwide coverage and serve as the common voice for the community. Besides coordinating and streamlining programmes with its Partner Organisations, the MAC Secretariat also provides these organisations with the necessary training, funds and other

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resources to implement effective HIV/AIDS programmes within various communities in Malaysia. For more information on MAF, kindly log on to its dedicated website, www.mac.org.my.

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