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Seek new ways to reform addicts, AIDS patients

Tina Melan

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - A new approach should be adopted to help rehabilitate drug addicts, and those with HIV and AIDS, said AIDS Foundation chairman Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir.

She said this approach should also involve the participation of parents and families of those affected as the family was an effective support group in the rehabilitation process.

She was launching the Rumah Pengasih's Family Support Group at Rumah Pengasih in Jalan Syers.

Marina said existing programmes on rehabilitation focused on individuals only.

"However, it is important that families also come forward and be a part of the rehabilitation programme since they are closest to these people."

She later opened Balai Epyen, a hut built by residents of Rumah Pengasih in remembrance of Epyen, a former staff who was a role model at the centre.

Epyen, as the centre wishes to identify him, returned to society and became a bank officer after being addicted for a several years. He died after suffering from head injuries while diving at a waterfall in January.

The group was formed last year to bring families of drug addicts, ex-drug addicts and people living with HIV and AIDS together to share experiences, offer support and find solutions to their problems.

Pengasih Association of Malaysia president Mohd Yunus Fathi Mohamad said the function of the group was to raise awareness among the family members on HIV and AIDS-related matters and provide moral support to them.

Also present was singer and actor Ahmad Azhar, better known as Awie. Mohd Yunus said Awie was invited to speak on behalf on Rumah Pengasih as Awie had many young fans.

Awie surprised the guests when he confessed his drug abuse experience during his younger days and advised youngsters to stay away from dadah.

Rumah Pengasih, a rehabilitation centre formed by a group of volunteers, houses 75 reformed addicts and those with HIV and AIDS.

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