

Specially trained dogs for the disabled

STAR 12 AUG 2001

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KUALA LUMPUR: The disabled now have the opportunity to become more independent with the launch of a service to provide specially trained dogs to assist them.

Themed *Bivai Special Dogs*, the project was founded by *The Star* columnist Anthony Thanasayan and launched by Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir yesterday.

The name Bivai comes from

the combination of his two pets — *Biman*, an Alsatian, and *Vai*, a Kottweiler

Thanasayan realised the importance of having a dog as a companion after observing a scene in San Francisco, United States, in 1991.

"I first saw a service dog in action — assisting a tetraplegic client retrieve an object from the floor. It impressed me so much that I resolved to meet the challenge of personally training service dogs for the disabled in Malaysia,"

Thanasayan said.

Marina congratulated Thanasayan on his efforts to break down the barriers between the world of the disabled and able-bodied.

"People shouldn't be excluded from contributing to society because of their disabilities. It is important to know the dog is not only a pet but a companion for life," she said.

"Hence, a service like Bivai Special Dogs will allow more disabled Malaysians to participate fully in other activities."