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## Serious fun in women's cause

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THE message of 3R Day (3R stands for Respect, Relax and Respond), held recently at KLCC Park in Kuala Lumpur, was clear: Violence against women has got to stop.

3R is a show for women aired over TV3 (also over Astro Ria) and its new season has just begun.

The events of 3R Day shared the same theme and was held in the fun-filled format of the TV show. That 3R Day succeeded in getting the message across was apparent by the people crowding the booths which were manned by volunteers and staff of various women's organisations and also staff from the Ministry of Women and Family Development.

The event was co-organised by Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) and All Women's Action Society (AWAM), with support from the Ministry.

Though the message aimed to put across was serious stuff, the organisers innovatively spread the word through fun, games and music.

One of the events was a treasure hunt (the proceeds of which will be donated to WAO and AWAM) which had Putra LRT's involvement. Another fun activity was a cheer-leading competition that scored high on the spectators' list because of the enthusiasm and energy of its participants.

The day culminated with an evening concert that featured some top-notch artistes, including Sheila Majid, Anwar Zain, Ning Baizura, Camelia and Too Phat.

The organisers wisely chose a programme which would appeal to the young; after all, the target audience is young women.

While the theme may have been subliminal at times, it was always there, and visitors to the park could not help but respond to its message.

"We chose to hold 3R Day for a number of reasons. Firstly, we were about to begin a new season of the show and there was also the fact that women worldwide were celebrating International Women's Day," said the programme's executive producer Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir at a recent interview with the New Straits Times.

"We thought that the events of the day would be the perfect vehicle to get this important message across. Violence against women is an issue that never dies and we felt that it was appropriate to highlight it at this time. We were also very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with WAO and AWAM in our efforts," Marina added.

She also said that the events of 3R Day were in keeping with the programme's usual delivery of issues in a fun manner.

"Our audience is one that is open to many influences, such as MTV, and we feel that the best way to reach them, as well as fulfil our social responsibility, is to do so in a manner in which they would be interested. We do not want to preach to them," she said.

AWAM vice president Manohary Subramaniam, who was on hand at AWAM's booth, was pleased by the response from the mostly young audience.

"We are here to create awareness on the issue of rape and most of the women that have stopped here have been keen to learn more about the statistics on rape and what the current definition of rape is," she said.

The women who stopped by at the AWAM booth were asked if they would sign a petition asking for further amendments to the rape law.

"We want the authorities to widen the definition of what a rape constitutes and the women here today seem to agree with us," Manohary said.

Visitors to the booth also stopped to put their handprints and messages against rape on a banner strung to one side of the booth.

"We are pleased that the people here were not only attracted by the 'fun' activities of the day. They seemed to be genuinely interested in learning about violence against women," she added.

WAO executive director Ivy Josiah was also pleased by the interest of the visitors regarding violence against women.

"This was basically an opportunity for WAO to work with 3R to reach a target audience that 3R already has. We want to catch them while they are still young and tell them that they have a right to speak out against the issue of violence against women," she said.

"The relationship that the women's organisations has developed with 3R is one that is synergistic. We are reaching out to younger women through a popular vehicle and this is certainly a dynamic and exciting partnership," she added.

"All the partners here today, from 3R to the different women's organisations to corporate sponsors, agree that one cannot stop saying enough that violence against women is wrong. We are fortunate that we have had the opportunity to say it on this occasion, which in essence, is celebratory," Ivy said.

Among the visitors to the booths set up by AWAM, WAO and the Ministry was student K. Shantina, 21.

"I heard about 3R Day on the radio and I thought that this would be a good opportunity for me to come out and show my support for the issue of violence against women," she said.

Shantina also said that she was interested in learning more about the issues of the different women's organisations and added that she would be interested in volunteering her time to help one of the group's in their outreach services.

"Women who have been raped or physically abused need not only our sympathy but also our help in resolving their problems. If possible, I would like to be involved in this area," she said as she signed a petition for stronger rape laws.

Among the corporate sponsors of the day's events was L'Oreal Malaysia. Its managing director Alvin Hew said the company hoped to give back to society what it had reaped.

"We are pleased to be involved with 3R Day because we believe that our goals coincide with 3R's, that of empowerment for women," he said.

Other sponsors of the event included Kotex (which sponsored the Cheerleading competition) and Putra LRT, which played host to hundreds of school children who used the mode of transportation in the treasure hunt.

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