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AIDS orphans to get financial assistance

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Young children left orphaned after AIDS claimed the lives of one or both parents can now hope to get financial assistance.

The Women, Family and Community Development Ministry will work with the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) to channel funds to these children, regardless of their HIV status.

Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said the move would be a part of the Social Welfare Department's programme to give aid to the marginalised and needy.

"I will meet with the department's director-general (Datuk Shamsiah Abdul Rahman) on Monday to finalise the plans.

"The Ministry will help others living with HIV-AIDS or have been affected by the disease.

"The areas of concern are yet to be determined but we will give special focus to women and young girls," she said after opening the MAC's Seventh biennial general meeting today at Dynasty Hotel.

Earlier in her speech, Shahrizat said the Ministry was happy to work with the MAC as it had the proper expertise to identify and handle AIDS-related problems.

MAC president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said the council was giving aid to 300 orphans, but a survey by the United Nations AIDS programme, UNAIDS, in 2001 put the figure at an estimated 14,000.

"It's an invisible problem as we do not keep records of the number of children whose parents died of AIDS. Usually, we come to know of these kids through paediatricians who inform us of their plight."

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