

Ministry ready for first community service sentence

The Star - 4/11/2007

KUALA LUMPUR: The Women, Family and Community Ministry is waiting for the first court sentence of community service for young offenders.

"We are all prepared, and are only waiting for the first case to come in," minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said.

"We foresee some teething problems in the first six months, but we should be able to overcome them," she told a press conference at her office here yesterday.

The ministry has set up a special unit under the Welfare Services

Department and identified 30 community service centres for the purpose, namely old folks homes, orphanages and homes for the disabled.

Among the community service that young offenders are required to do are housekeeping, minor repairs, landscaping, building rehabilitation and maintenance, care-giving and in-house management.

Community service was added in the amendments to the Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code as an alternative punishment for offend-

ers aged 18 to 21 who commit light offences.

The amendments also stipulate that community service should not exceed 240 hours in total.

The changes came into effect on Monday after Parliament approved them last July.

Previously, young offenders were sent to jail, fined or granted bail.

Shahrizat said her ministry had drawn up standard operating procedures, held discussions with related government agencies and sent its staff for training to handle the community service programme.

She said that once the programme runs smoothly it will be extended to other agencies and ministries, such as health and local authorities, schools, state government agencies and the public sector.

"We will prepare the module to suit a particular offender," she said.

"Community service will include counselling, guidance and religious classes for Muslims. We hope it will help them to repent.

"This is a healthy development because not all young offenders are criminals, and sending them to jail will not solve any problem."