

Headline	Giving back to society		
Media Title	The Star		
Date	16 Sep 2022	Color	Full Color
Section	StarSpecial	Circulation	175,986
Page No	14	Readership	527,958
Language	English	ArticleSize	1048 cm <sup>2</sup>
Journalist	SHATHANA KASINATHAN	AdValue	RM 52,742
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 158,226



A volunteer of Ananda Cares Charity handing out provisions to elderly women in front of Sai Ananda Centre in Kampung Laksamana, Batu Caves.



Seso Malaysia provides free meals to the homeless at Medan Tuanku in Kuala Lumpur.

# Giving back to society

A few individuals and groups find small acts of kindness can make a big difference, foster better understanding

By SHATHANA KASINATHAN  
metro@thestar.com.my

MALAYSIA Day, which marks when Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak became one country on Sept 16, is a reminder of how a new nation was formed to give better opportunities to all.

Although there are still pockets of society in great need, ordinary Malaysians have stepped up and come together to help all, regardless of colour and creed.

Often, new perspectives and ways of delivering aid are needed to ensure no one is left behind.

Here are some individuals and organisations who strive to lend a helping hand in various ways to those in need.



SJK (T) Taman Sentosa, Klang, pupils playing hockey as part of the Fun in Learning Programme.

## Comrades in charity

In April 2021, Hamidi Mookaiyah Abdullah, 63, wanted to help needy families affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"All I did was ask for RM20 from each of my friends and within 10 days, I managed to collect RM9,000.

"At that time, I knew only a few families who needed help but with the extra money, there was more that could be done so that's when I reached out to friends and families from other states," he said.

He spent the extra money on monthly food baskets for poor families.

Hamidi's Comrades in Charity (HCIC) has not stopped helping people since then.

Hamidi said that in the past 15 months, he and his team had helped more than 80 families with monthly food baskets.

The non-profit group struggled to get groceries and deliver them to families during the movement control order, so HCIC bought RM50 and RM100 supermarket cash vouchers for the families instead.

They also provided aid to those who needed medical supplies.

Hamidi, a part-time lecturer at Universiti Malaya, said he had always been transparent about the contributions he received.

"Every Tuesday, I post the collection amount on the HCIC group and on the last Tuesday of every month, I post the expenses and the balance brought forward to the next month," he said.

HCIC also embarked on a new initiative to help B40 students with school essentials such as uniforms and shoes.

The group distributed school uniforms and shoes to 70 primary and secondary school students.

Hamidi also brought together 16 retired teachers and started the "Foundation in Literacy Project".

As part of the project, the volunteers organised a Fun in Learning Programme at SJK (T) Simpang Lima and SJK (T) Taman Sentosa in Klang to improve pupils' conversational skills and motivate them to set long-term goals.

Under the pilot project, 40 underprivileged pupils were chosen to participate in the programme.

"We also provide a platform for these children to play sports such as hockey, where they get free breakfast and lunch too.

"We are planning to expand it to other schools in the future, provided we have enough resources," said Hamidi.

## Saving and serving food

Seso, an acronym for Save Environment, Save Ourselves, is a non-profit enterprise which was founded in 2017 to reduce food waste and poverty in the country.

The organisation "rescues" food that would have otherwise gone to waste, and turns them into a nutritious three-course meal.

Its volunteers collect food such as canned goods from supermarkets on an *ad hoc* basis.

Even before the pandemic, Tan Shi Wen, 35, who founded Seso Malaysia, and fellow volunteers would gather at a spot in Jalan Tun HS Lee, Kuala Lumpur near the Bangkok Bank area, and set up a booth to serve food to the homeless.

"We cook in the Seso kitchen and set the place up like a pop-up *mamak* stall.

"We bring tables and chairs and go to the street and eat with the homeless.

"Eating together is a great way to bond with others.

"Sometimes, all they need is someone to talk with," said Tan who is a lawyer.

However, during the pandemic, she had to change her approach to feeding the homeless and B40 group to comply with the standard operating procedure.

She had to collaborate with third-party transporters to send the food to those who needed it.

Seso Malaysia also gives out "Boxes of Kindness" comprising groceries that can last up to two weeks, depending on the size of the family, to those in the B40 group and refugees as part of its Covid-19 Recovery Programme.

Seso has helped more than 20 welfare homes, 5,000 Malaysian families and 250 refugee families over four years.

Tan said her desire to work with the homeless community sparked when she was studying law in the United Kingdom.

"Like most students, I remember throwing house parties and we would order a lot of pizza but there was always food that did not get eaten," she said.

One day, when she was throwing out leftovers from the night before, she saw a homeless man picking up discarded food from the rubbish bin.

"It was winter and he was not wearing a jacket but I noticed that his dog had one on, presumably his.

"To my surprise, when he found the leftover pizza, he fed his dog first.



Hamidi (right) giving aid to an elderly man under the charity's monthly donations to needy families.



Underprivileged children learning to play dhol (North Indian drum) from a volunteer at Ananda Cares Charity in Kampung Laksamana, Batu Caves.

"I thought when a person with so little could do so much for something he cared for, I could do the same to help society," she recounted.

The incident prompted Tan to volunteer at non-governmental organisations and dialysis centres, orphanages, old folks homes and a Down Syndrome school.

By the time she returned home in 2011, the seeds of volunteerism had already sprouted, eventually leading to Seso.

## Caring for the community

A non-profit voluntary-based welfare organisation, Ananda Cares Charity helps senior citizens, children and refugees.

Despite being a full-time research officer in Forest Research Institute Malaysia, Dr Vimala Subramaniam, 54, and her architect husband give most of their free time to the charity.

Ananda Cares was founded by Vimala's husband Ayavoo Arumugam, 60, in 1992.

"We began as a small human values class for underprivileged students, which was held weekly in a dilapidated temple in Kampung Laksamana, Batu Caves in Selangor.

"We wanted to serve the needy, especially the B40 group in that area.

"We never thought it would

grow into a full-fledged charity," said Vimala.

Today, Ananda Cares has a kitchen, bakery, food packaging operation, medical and dialysis centre as well as a children's education centre.

More than 100 children aged four to 12 go to the education centre, including refugee children.

"We have a lot of activities for them such as *dhol* (North Indian drum), *bharatanatyam* (Indian classical dance), computer and human values classes.

We also have kindergarten classes and tuition for primary school pupils," said Vimala.

"These classes are run by volunteers as well as full-time teachers. "Volunteers come in on Saturdays for the computer classes while the full-time teachers give tuition from Monday to Friday.

"We also provide breakfast, lunch and tea for all the students, teachers, volunteers and staff here."

She said meals were prepared by the underprivileged, including senior citizens and single mothers, at the Ananda Cares kitchen.

The charity also offers free dental care at its clinic as well as free check-ups and dialysis treatment at their haemodialysis centre for the B40 group and refugees.

Ananda Cares provides an allowance and monthly provisions to its part-time and full-time staff.