

Letters To The Editor must
carry your name,
address and contact number.
A pseudonym may be included

'Ernest' plea to realise a child's dream

THE recent 5th National Early Childhood Intervention Conference (NECIC) was a success not just because of the 1,000 children, parents, professionals, NGOs, etc who took part but because of the wonderful children who spoke or performed.

Three children stand out:

- Natalie Dong, 10, was the MC for the VIP first plenary at which the Unicef director of Malaysia spoke. Natalie is profoundly deaf but, with the hard work of her family and a cochlear implant, she has great speech and attends a normal class.

- Ng Jun Yin, 11, was the second VIP speaker at the first plenary. He has autism but spoke flawlessly, without any text in front of him. He shared about his need to be seen as a child first, rather than as a disability. His parents' commitment has seen him do well academically in a normal class.

- Ernest Teoh, 14, gave a number of stellar violin performances. Ernest is blind but, due to the persistence of his family, is doing well academically in a normal class. He also passed his Violin Grade 8 at 11 years of age.

These delightful children impressed all of us with their capability and abilities.

During the open dialogue with managers from the Health, Education and Welfare ministries, Ernest made an impassioned plea. He is keen to become a scientist but Education Ministry policy is that visually impaired children cannot do science as they cannot participate in science experiments.

Ernest argued that some of the best scientists in the world are disabled e.g. Stephen Hawking. The representative from the ministry said his request would be considered.

The NECIC made a promise to Ernest that our collation of over 25 NGOs would strive to make his dream a reality, even if



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we have to present a memorandum to the ministry.

This is an open letter to the prime minister and the ministry, a plea for Ernest. Do not let the dreams of any single child fail because we did not offer the chance to see them become a reality. Ernest has already overcome insurmountable odds to be included in a normal class. It is only a small

leap further to allow him to do science and modify the environment to support him.

We trust that our leaders and the ministry will implement the Incheon Strategy (with the objective of improving the lives of persons with disability): "Make the Right Real". And do this by making real the policy of inclusive education on the ground, starting with Ernest.

Who knows, Ernest may be our first winner of a Nobel Prize in Science.

We await your positive response for Ernest, his family, the families of all children with disability and the Malaysian people to hear.

DATUK DR AMAR-SINGH HSS
PRESIDENT, NECIC