

Do more for special children



ORGANISERS of this year's Borneo International Marathon (BIM), which was held last Sunday in Kota Kinabalu (*pic*), partnered with Unicef Malaysia to raise both awareness of disability and acceptance for people with disabilities.

The theme for this year's marathon, #thisability, urged the public to see beyond a child's disability and to accept and respect their differences as part of our society.

Besides highlighting messages of disability throughout the event, the organisers, together with Unicef Malaysia, also put in much effort to enable individuals with disabilities to participate in the marathon, such as waiving the participation fee and preparing a 3km running track for them.

Throughout the event, Unicef Malaysia featured messages of hope and achievement by children with disabilities under the slogan “All Different, All Able, All In”, bringing the focus of diversity and inclusion into the spotlight while creating awareness, understanding and acceptance of people with disabilities in an inclusive society.

Children with disabilities need opportunities to participate in our society in all aspects, and we applaud Borneo International Marathon and Unicef Malaysia for enabling their participation in the marathon.

We need more event organisers to consider the needs of people with disabilities and make adjustments to break down barriers to access and participation.

Sport is just one of the various aspects that children with disabilities face barriers to full engagement in our society.

In Malaysia, many children with disabilities and their families still encounter obstacles in obtaining quality care, education and services that are critical for them to gain knowledge and skills to overcome everyday challenges brought on by their disability.

Although Malaysia has seen substantial growth in awareness and services for children with disabilities, more efforts must be taken to support their needs.

Due to rising costs, many children with disabilities and their families still do not have access to necessary intervention services such as early intervention programmes, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, counselling, physiotherapy and psychological intervention/consultation.

It is time that concrete steps are taken to make these services affordable and accessible to children with disabilities and their families. Particularly, these intervention and support services need to be regulated to keep professionals and programmes accountable so that these children and their families can be assured that they are receiving effective and evidence-based services.

Early detection and intervention is crucial to ensure that children with disabilities and their families acquire the necessary services and support for their various needs and improve their quality of life.

If you notice or suspect that a child you know has not kept up with his/her development, seek help immediately from paediatricians.

When should parents be concerned about their child’s development?

These are a few key indicators that a child may have a developmental problem or disability:

1. Lack of response to name, lack of appropriate eye contact, or lack of gestures (pointing, reaching, waving) by 12 months;
2. Not able to speak six clear words with meaning at 18 months;
3. Not able to walk independently at 18 months; and
4. Not able to read and write after one to two years in kindergarten. (Adapted from Filipek *et al.*, *Neurology*, 2000, and Datuk Dr Amar-Singh HSS, 2017)

Dr Amar-Singh, a senior consultant paediatrician, further emphasised the key message to all parents that would enable them to pick up 90% of children with, among others, autism and speech delay: “If your child has any of the above indicators, see a good paediatrician as soon as possible; do not delay. If the doctor reassures you or tells you to wait, go find another doctor who will listen to you.”

Healthcare professionals should never dismiss or take lightly any parental concerns.

Early intervention is crucial to support children with developmental problem or disability.

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Read more at <http://www.thestar.com.my/opinion/letters/2017/05/11/do-more-for-special-children/>