

LETTER

Hope for an inclusive Malaysia

[National Early Childhood Intervention Council](#)

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LETTER | Against all odds, Malaysia has experienced a peaceful transition of power in line with the will of the people. This is a moment that all Malaysians are proud of.

The National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC) – a coalition of parents, practitioners and professionals from NGOs and governmental agencies involved in advocacy for early childhood intervention – would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our new prime minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

As we wait for the new cabinet lineup, NECIC would like to urge the new government to consider new directions on current practices and services for children and community with disabilities.

Children with disabilities cut across gender, ethnicity, culture, and countries. Data suggest there are 15 percent of them, and this figure is equal to about 1.2 million children less under the age of 14 in our country. All of them can be helped with quality education in an inclusive setting.

The spirit of Inclusion, in both educational and social sense, provides fertile ground for fostering greater acceptance of diversity and creating a harmonious society.

Inclusion is not solely reserved for the people with disabilities. Inclusion is universal. It is about bringing together people from all backgrounds – regardless of gender, ethnicity, faith, sociocultural background, geographical, and disability – to learn to live and learn together.

We would like to make a few recommendations to the government, on matters regarding children with disabilities:

Make education real for all

It is vital that majority of children with disabilities should be in an inclusive education setting. For this to happen, we urge the pre-schools and kindergartens to be more open to accepting children with disabilities. Early Intervention workers can provide support and partner with these kindergartens to support such inclusion.

NECIC has a [memorandum](#) on inclusive education which has many suggestions on how this can be implemented and the transitional steps that are available. In addition, an inclusive education module has been developed by NECIC with localised teaching strategies which are available for teachers to use.

The current National Achievement KPI for schools is largely segregational and does not support our children with disabilities who can blossom in the mainstream. This needs to be changed to an Inclusion KPI where “Leave no child behind” must be our motto.

Training of professionals

A study of knowledge, attitudes, and practices conducted by UNICEF Malaysia in 2016 showed that there are gaps in the understanding of disability in our country. This is due to limited knowledge.

Currently, there is almost no teaching in undergraduate courses for health and educational professionals in an area which affects up to 15 percent of our children. We would like to advocate for disability awareness training (Social Model) for all who come in contact with the care of children.

Empowering families

One of the focuses of NECIC is to empower families and recognise that parents can play a leadership role. Knowing what their children need, parents can often design services that better meet the needs of their children. The parents’ voices should be heard and their ideas are taken into consideration to develop more cost-effective services.

Fee schedule for rehabilitation services

Rehabilitation services for children with disabilities are getting more expensive in the private sector. Although these services are available in the public sector, the waiting list is long; most children cannot afford to wait.

Turning to the private sector has become an enormous financial burden for these families. We urge the government to regulate these services and set up a fee schedule capping the maximum charges for these services such as speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, clinical psychology services and early intervention.

Inclusion in the community

We urge the leaders of our country and fellow Malaysians to actively engage people and children with disabilities and their families, in the development of our country. Not just in the areas of education, healthcare, social welfare and employment, but also in making public infrastructures, buildings and community spaces, social events, etc. more disability-inclusive.

We also require greater disability representation and inclusion in the media. We would like to see the enactment of social policies and planning to intentionally include the meaningful participation of people and children with disabilities.

We sincerely hope that the ruling government will enable all Malaysians to embrace the spirit of Inclusion. It is important that we learn to listen to, understand and respond with respect and kindness to children with disabilities and their families. We need to uphold their rights as citizens and “Leave no child behind”.

The wealth of a nation is not defined in monetary terms alone. How we care for children with disabilities and their families will define us as a nation.

Signed by:

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