

# Campus fun for special kids

AN EVENT held specifically for children with Down syndrome at Bukit Ekspo, an agricultural centre and recreational space within Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in Serdang, Selangor, proved to be a fun-filled day.

Organised by UPM Student Representative Council (MPP) with help from 50 volunteer students from other universities, it welcomed 80 children with Down syndrome aged between one and 12.

Accompanied by their parents and caregivers, the children took part in a 3km brisk walk.

Along this path were four activity checkpoints where they could arrange puzzles, draw patterns on traditional water jars and transplant salad bunches from their hydroponic containers to portable pots which the children could take home.

Event director UPM MPP secretary-general Muhammad Syafiq Mohd Salleh, 22, said the activities were designed by participating volunteers who had taken into consideration the limited motor skills of children born with Down syndrome.

Muhammad Syafiq said his inspiration to organise the event

## UPM student body organises activities for 80 with Down syndrome



UPM student volunteers helping children with Down syndrome transplant bunches of salad from hydroponic containers to small pots for the children to take home.

was from his late cousin who was born with Down syndrome.

In addition to physical activities, the children's parents were also given time to share their experiences.

"Among the topics raised were how parents should not be overly protective by doing everything

for children with Down syndrome," said Muhammad Syafiq.

"Instead, they should allow them to discover their own strengths and capabilities.

"For a start, they should be given responsibilities to do household chores, for example," he elaborated.



Parents and their children going for a 3km walk on campus grounds.

He said the programme's objective was to give UPM students the opportunity to understand the reality of life in special communities and cultivate the spirit of inclusivity.

He said the direct involvement of students in such programmes could serve to help them delve deeper into challenges as well as explore capabilities of the Down syndrome community.

UPM Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences lecturer Dr Nor Azyati Yusoff said such programmes had a positive impact on the development of special children.

"Planned social activities like this can stimulate their motor,

social and emotional skills.

"In fact, it also gives parents the opportunity to see their children's true potential in a supportive and open environment," he said.

The programme is supported by the UPM student affairs division, Farm Fresh, RHB Islamic Bank, Jiwa Malaysia, Pertubuhan Ihsan Masyarakat Malaysia, Satria Malaysia, Volunteer Trip Malaysia, UPM chancellor college volunteering and internationalisation secretariat, as well as the Down syndrome parent-community from Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Putrajaya. — **By GRACE CHEN**