

# A film about **Hope**

**Child abuse is a growing concern in the country, but one area that is often neglected is the impact on the children as they grow up. NATALIE HENG attended a video workshop for abused children that offers them a platform to exercise their creative abilities and showcase their talents.**

---

**T**HE statistics are grim. In 2008, 863 children were physically abused, according to the Social Welfare Department. And 733 suffered at the hands of a sexual abuser, often someone known and trusted. A further 952 children were victims of neglect.

What's even more worrying is that these figures are merely the tip of the iceberg – the actual number could be far higher, experts say.

Child abuse happens, we know this from the headlines. But how often do we look past the headlines and question what the future holds for these children?

The trauma of neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse often leave scars that run deep. These children grow up lacking confidence, self-esteem and a belief in their abilities.

For thousands of marginalised and victimised children in Malaysia, the opportunities to build up these broken traits are far and few between.

But recently, 17 teenagers were given a chance to discover the potential they have within themselves through the medium of film via a United Nations Children Fund (Unicef) video workshop on 'Hope'.

It was a platform to exercise their creative abilities and showcase their talents, and hopefully, begin that long and difficult process of healing.

Children's welfare NGO Suara Kanak Kanak (Suka) helped introduce the teens, all of whom came from either backgrounds of

extreme poverty, or were victims of abuse, including physical and sexual abuse, to the workshop.

"Having a workshop like this triggers a lot of things for them, it's a reminder that they are valued and that people want to hear what they have to say," said Suka executive director Anderson Salvasegaram.

The media hotel was a hive of activity during the five-day course earlier this month.

"We have 17 producers, 17 directors, 17 scriptwriters and 17 cameramen here today," said 24 year-old Aiman Roslan, one of the programme facilitators. Aiman is an associate producer for the local campus station at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) where he also teaches radio production and broadcasting.

Alongside local filmmakers Imri Nasution and Dian Fitri Tan, Aiman made up a three man team of video professionals roped in by Red communications to conduct the course on basic video making, production and editing skills.

3R programme and radio host Kartini Kamarul Ariffin added some local celebrity spice to the event as the official Unicef spokesman and coordinator.

Armed with professional cameras, courtesy of Panasonic, and a basic editing suite on sponsored Dell laptops, the team went to work teaching basic film making, production and editing skills to the teens.

The participants worked in groups to write, produce, direct and edit a series of comedy shorts, and then as individuals to

complete their own projects about 'hope'.

The result was a series of short films showcased during a special screening for their friends, families, carers and Unicef helpers.

Eighteen-year-old Jo spoke with pride and energy about her experiences at the workshop, saying that it helped her realise what she needed to do to make her hopes for the future become reality.

“Whilst I was doing this video I was studying my heart and like, talking to myself. I have not yet achieved what I want, and I myself am not yet stable so how can I do it?

---

“And then I realised, that no matter what it is, there is a way. Whether you can or cannot do it now, there is a way to do it, and it depends on yourself.”

The task of visualizing how to make these things happen and acting it out through the medium of film was an empowering experience.

Jessica's video was impressive. For a 16-year-old, her video demonstrated a rare foresight and rationality with regards to how to approach the future.

Her video starts off with her slogging away at algebra, but progresses to reveal that unlike normal teenagers, she also holds down two jobs to help support her large family.

In her video, she accents this as a necessary path to a future that is bright, a future which sees her standing triumphantly in front of the tree-lined

entrance to KBU college.



**“It is really important that kids express themselves.”**

- Hans Olsen, Unicef representative to Malaysia

The last scene is especially telling: a camera slowly zooms in on a large five-storey building, eventually focusing on its pink signage. Read out loud it said: ‘Jessica Holdings’.

“It is really important that kids express themselves,” said Unicef representative to Malaysia, Hans Olsen.

“This is perhaps the first time these kids have had this kind of audience listening to what they are saying.”

The workshop may have only lasted five days. However, one thing is for sure, the bonds these teenagers built during that week are set to last a lifetime.

In times of self-doubt, a hard copy CD with each of their own personal productions burned onto it will serve as proof of

precisely just what they are capable of if they put their minds to it.



Aiman showing participants how to use a professional video camera.