

Experts: Tackling homelessness takes more than providing jobs

KUALA LUMPUR: It takes more than just generating and securing jobs to tackle the issue of homelessness in the capital.

Malaysian Counseling Association (Perkama) vice-president Dr Mansor Abu Talib said providing security in employment for the homeless would only work if they also had access to other basic needs, such as food, shelter and emotional support.

The Universiti Putra Malaysia professor, an expert in human development, commended the initiative by the government to provide jobs to the homeless in Kuala Lumpur as timely in the wake of the pandemic and the economic challenges it brought.

He said placement officers must be trained to match the homeless with jobs suitable for them based on their knowledge, skills and attitude.

"These can be done through psycho-educational activities such as training," he told the *New Straits Times*.

He said the authorities must address human and social capital development aspects for the homeless as they were used to living day to day without salaried work and had little need to take into consideration their living spaces.

"The urban poor need to have second or complementary income or develop skills to manage their limited resources.

"Government agencies, universities and industries could collaborate in developing a structured program by using specific social interventions."

Kechara Soup Kitchen operations director Justin Cheah, while welcoming the move, hoped it would not become another half-baked plan in the long run.

"There must be a comprehensive plan to get them back on their feet.

"We have to look into factors that led them to live on the streets and provide the social support system by empowering them and safeguarding their wellbeing.

"All these go beyond just getting jobs for them."



Workers packing boxes at Kuala Lumpur City Hall's transit centre for the homeless yesterday. PIC BY ASWADI ALIAS



(From left) Dr Mansor Abu Talib, Justin Cheah and Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye

"Some of them are homeless because they cannot rent near their place of work or get transport to travel between work and home."

He said there was an increase in homeless people this year due to the pandemic, with the Movement Control Order resulting in

loss of jobs.

"Any effort to tackle this issue has to be comprehensive.

"It should involve participation and feedback from all NGOs who have been dealing with the urban poor and homelessness in KL," said Cheah, adding that the organisation was not consulted in any of the discussion leading to the initiative by the Federal Territories Ministry.

Alliance for Safe Community (Ikatan) chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye commended the government's effort and wanted to see how the job placement process would be implemented.

"I have to emphasise that besides their suitability or aptitude

to the jobs, their safety is another area that needs to be considered.

"Issues such as potential occupational safety risks and hazards must be mitigated before they are given employment."

He agreed that the homeless required adequate job training and supervision to ensure they were competent for the job and could perform tasks efficiently.

He said the government should work out a social safety net or living assistance scheme to allow the 30 per cent of the homeless people who City Hall took in and were found not mentally or physically fit to work "to live with dignity".