

# Nurturing young superheroes

An innovative programme aims to teach young children to recognise the signs of a stroke and to act quickly so they can, potentially, save the lives of their grandparents.

SCHOOLS all over the world are working together to build a community of children who can save their grandparents.

The Fast Heroes campaign aims to turn children into “superheroes” who can help someone, most likely their grandparents, who may be suffering from a stroke.

The campaign was first developed by the Department of Education and Social Policy at the University of Macedonia in Greece, and is supported by the Angels Initiative, a healthcare intervention dedicated to improving stroke patients’ chances of survival and a disability-free life.

As many children spend a lot of time with their grandparents while their parents are working, it made sense to teach children to recognise the signs of stroke as they may be the ones present during an emergency involving their grandparents.

The acronym F.A.S.T stands for Facial droop, Arm weakness, Speech difficulty and Time to call an ambulance when stroke strikes.

The programme started in Germany when a six-year-old child, Amy, reacted perfectly when her grandfather suffered a stroke and collapsed on a playground.

She called for help immediately, which helped to save her beloved grandpa Klaus’ life. This real-life story proved that children can play an important role in times of emergency.

In 2022, the Malaysia Stroke Council brought the programme to Malaysia and so far, 830 students from participating schools and kindergartens have been involved in the Fast Heroes campaign.

The participating institutions include SJKC Sin Hwa, Parit Buntar, Tadika Sin Hwa, Parit Buntar, Asmet Academy Taman Midah, Cheras in Kuala Lumpur



Fast heroes participants from Tadika Sin Hwa, Parit Buntar. – Photos: Fast Heroes Campaign



Teoh Shiao Han, a Fast Heroes participant with her grandfather.

and Tadika Kuputra, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor.

The main aim of the Fast Heroes campaign is to educate children about the signs of a stroke and the importance of acting quickly. Children are taught to recognise the three primary stroke symptoms and dial 999 in case of an emergency.

For now, the campaign in Malaysia is focusing on children aged between four and six.

It’s a heavy subject to teach children and so the programme uses animated superhero characters to drive the message across.

“I want to be a big hero that can help others. If grandpa, grandma or any old people get a stroke, I want to quickly dial 999 to call for an ambulance,” said Fast hero participant from Tadika Sin Hwa, Janice Lee.

Ros, a mother of another Fast hero participant named Raeesa from Tadika Sin Hwa Parit Buntar, said that the lessons are not only informative but encourages children to bond more with their grandparents and elderly relatives.

“It’s a good exposure for children to learn about strokes. By doing the activities in the workbook, children can become aware about stroke symptoms that may strike their loved ones.

“At the same time, this programme helps them bond with their grandparents and parents as they do their workbook activities together,” said Ros.

In Malaysia, stroke is one of the top three causes of death and has become a significant public health issue. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2011 conducted by the

Health Ministry, the prevalence rate of stroke is at 0.7%. Additionally, it has also manifested among the youth, with 40% of those affected being under 60.

“People who suffer a stroke require access to high quality acute care as quickly as possible, so that they can survive with their lives intact.

“Through Fast Heroes, children can help to spread stroke knowledge among their wider family. Together, we can save the world – one grandparent at a time,” said head of medicine of Boehringer Ingelheim (pharmaceutical company) Dr Azhar Ahmad.

Although children aged four to six years old might not be able to grasp what a stroke is, it is important for them to know what to do when in an emergency as strokes can happen to anyone.

Principal of Tadika Sin Hwa Parit Buntar, Ng Sai Gin praised this initiative which leverages on schools to create awareness of stroke among children.

Fast Heroes project leaders for Malaysia and consultant neurologist from Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz UKM, Dr Wan Asyraf Wan Zaidi and clinical neurologist HPUPM Dr Anna Misya’il Abdul Rashid said believe that as children are the “pillars of the future”, the programmes is innovative and will, hopefully, have a “snowball effect” for a better stroke awareness within the community.

By the end of 2022, the Fast Heroes programme aims to enrol at least 1,500 students in Malaysia.

More information about this program can be found at [www.fastheroes.com](http://www.fastheroes.com).