

Help for hungry undergrads

Students rally together to feed growing number of needy varsity mates

PETALING JAYA: Seeing students struggling in universities due to lack of money, even to eat, is not new but with the rising cost of living, it is a serious problem now.

It has reached the point where more and more student bodies are having to help them get regular meals. And the number of such needy students is growing.

Many student bodies report cases where students can only afford RM1.50 a day for food.

In some instances, there are students fainting from skipping meals.

A recent survey by the Muslim Volunteer Malaysia Association of some 26,000 students in six public

universities also revealed shocking facts.

More than half of the respondents said they could set aside only RM5 a day for meals while many were living on instant noodles or ate only plain rice with one fried egg and soy sauce.

Some student bodies have devised creative programmes to help feed students who struggle to pay for three square meals a day.

Most of the programmes revolve around the "suspended meal" concept, where financially able students pay in advance for extra food, to be given to students in need.

One example is the "Project

Suspended Meals 2.0" programme, managed by the student council of the International Islamic University Malaysia, which began last Dec 21.

Under the programme, a customer buys a coupon worth RM2 or RM4, and then pastes it on the board for students to claim later.

Meal coupons were also recently introduced for students of Universiti Malaya in a collaborative effort between the Muslim Undergraduates Association and the Darul Hijrah Foundation.

"Coupon for the Needs" began on Jan 7, and five zones will be open for students to get the coupons.

"A student has to call the pro-

gramme representative based on the zone they are in, collect the coupons at the cafe counters, and enjoy their meals," said the foundation's Facebook page.

"Each coupon is worth RM4 and the menu has been fixed through an understanding with the cafe operators."

Over at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), the Srikandi Putra group of female students ran the "April Food" programme.

A free food giveaway concept inspired by Dapur Jalanan – which feeds the homeless in Kuala Lumpur – April Food fed 150 students when it was first carried out in April last year.

UPM students also run the #FreeshopUPM programme, where they offer free food to needy students on selected days, and also call on fellow students to donate to the cause.

Meanwhile, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia launched a food and welfare aid programme last September. Through it, 220 of its needy students were given aid throughout their course duration.

"Financial aid of RM300 to RM400 a month will be given to eligible students for each year of the course, while the food aid will be continued from time to time, depending on the funds generated," said its website.