

Sheltering Hopes: Empowering Lives, Supporting the Homeless
(Melindungi Harapan: Memperkasakan Kehidupan, Menyokong Gelandangan)

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ABSTRACT

Empowering Lives, Supporting the Homeless is a comprehensive and compassionate volunteer programme designed to address the multiple challenges facing homeless individuals and communities under the motto "Homeless We Cares." This initiative aims not only to provide homeless people with necessities but also to empower them emotionally and spiritually to regain control of their lives and become self-sufficient. At the same time, the programme has taught students the importance of showing compassion and providing moral support from society to this group to make them more resilient and persistent. The programme is based on empathy and collaboration between non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local universities and government agencies, with a team of 35 volunteers working in various homeless communities around Kuala Lumpur. In addition, Sheltering Hopes plans to implement this initiative by engaging with homeless shelters, connecting with the local community, and raising awareness about the needs of this vulnerable group. Sheltering Hopes strives to break the cycle of homelessness and alleviate the social and economic burdens by providing hope to these communities so that they continue to look for a glimmer of light at the end of the dark tunnel. The immediate impact of this programme is to sensitise students to get involved in their communities and encourage them to develop into young people who serve society and contribute not only with academic qualifications but also to help promote a harmonious society.

Keywords: Volunteering, Homelessness, Community Support, Empathy, Empowerment, Social Impact

ABSTRAK

Memperkasakan Kehidupan, Menyokong Gelandangan ialah program sukarelawan yang komprehensif dan penuh belas kasihan yang direka untuk menangani pelbagai cabaran yang dihadapi oleh individu dan komuniti gelandangan di bawah moto "Gelang Kami Prihatin." Inisiatif ini bertujuan bukan sahaja untuk menyediakan golongan gelandangan dengan keperluan tetapi juga untuk memperkasakan mereka dari segi emosi dan rohani untuk mengawal semula kehidupan mereka dan menjadi berdikari. Pada masa yang sama, program ini telah mengajar pelajar tentang kepentingan menunjukkan sifat belas kasihan dan memberikan sokongan moral daripada masyarakat kepada golongan ini untuk menjadikan mereka lebih tabah dan gigih. Program itu berdasarkan empati dan kerjasama antara badan bukan kerajaan (NGO), universiti tempatan dan agensi kerajaan, dengan sepasukan 35 sukarelawan bekerja di pelbagai komuniti gelandangan di sekitar Kuala Lumpur. Di samping itu, Sheltering Hopes merancang untuk melaksanakan inisiatif ini dengan melibatkan diri dengan pusat perlindungan gelandangan, berhubung dengan masyarakat setempat, dan meningkatkan kesedaran tentang keperluan kumpulan yang terdedah ini. Sheltering Hopes berusaha untuk memutuskan kitaran gelandangan dan meringankan beban sosial dan ekonomi dengan memberikan harapan kepada komuniti ini agar mereka terus mencari cahaya di hujung terowong gelap. Impak segera program ini adalah untuk menyedarkan pelajar untuk melibatkan diri dalam komuniti mereka dan menggalakkan mereka untuk berkembang menjadi golongan muda yang berkhidmat kepada masyarakat dan menyumbang bukan sahaja dengan kelayakan akademik tetapi juga untuk membantu menggalakkan masyarakat yang harmoni.

Kata kunci: Sukarelawan, Gelandangan, Sokongan Komuniti, Empati, Pemerksaan, Kesan Sosial

BACKGROUND OF THE PROGRAM

Sheltering Hopes: Empowering Lives, Supporting the Homeless is a comprehensive and compassionate volunteer-based programme with the motto "Homeless, We Care." This programme emphasises the care of the homeless population residing in and around Kuala Lumpur, with the collection point facilitated by the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL). The Sheltering Hopes programme aims to contribute to this group with shower facilities, meals, and moral support. Furthermore, this program is conducted during the month of Ramadan, a time when this community is particularly affected from mental and emotional standpoints. Consequently, the Sheltering Hopes program has partnered with a non-governmental organisation (NGO) called the Institute Onn Ja'afar. This NGO has been entrusted and authorised to provide pre-dawn meals daily throughout Ramadan at three designated locations under the 'Jom Breakfast' Program. Sheltering Hopes has also received donations from an organisation within the University, the Islamic Centre, in the form of shower facilities managed by the programme committee. The programme committee has also extended a cooperative invitation to the Volunteer Club of the *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)* to participate and contribute to the programme's success. The programme runs from 9:00 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. with the participation of 35 volunteers.

MENTOR AND MENTEE

The Sheltering Hopes programme, aimed at Empowering Lives and Supporting the Homeless, was inspired by the President of the *Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM)* Student Facilitator Club (FaSaSi). The club believes students should take responsibility and foster positive relationships within the community and society. This perspective was also supported by the Club FaSaSi Advisor, Mrs Hadibah Binti Tahir, who shares the same views on this matter. To realise this aspiration, the club's committee members have taken a proactive initiative to turn this vision into reality.

Therefore, the club directed its External Relations Exco to conduct a brief study on volunteer activities, particularly those related to homelessness. A search related to the management of homelessness was carried out, leading the committee to collaborate with the Institute Onn Ja'afar, which is an active NGO dedicated to assisting the homeless and has received approval from Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL). Consequently, the committee reached out to gather important information from the NGO to reference the programme's framework.

Furthermore, the committee researched the official website of the Ministry of Women and Society Development and found that approximately 1,283 homeless individuals reside in homeless transit

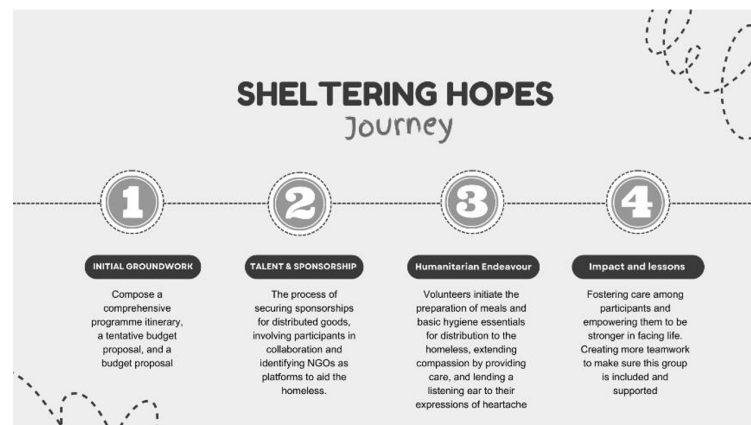


FIGURE 1. A visual timeline depicting the phases of programme implementation.

centres around Kuala Lumpur, marking the highest number in Malaysia. Targeting this data, the committee collaborated with the Institute Onn Ja'afar to carry out this mission.

Additionally, the program involved 35 volunteers who collaborated to ensure its success. In doing so, they indirectly fostered a sense of compassion,

mutual assistance, and respect among themselves. The programme specifically targeted the registered homeless population under DBKL in several homeless transit centres that have been provided. Therefore, volunteers offering support indirectly encouraged the homeless to continue facing life's challenges with determination.

Finally, the committee also researched how the

number of homeless individuals has been increasing yearly. Through this research, it was found that the registered homeless population under the Homeless Transit Centre in 2021 was largely due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly 50% of them lost their

jobs due to movement control orders enforced by the government. However, issues of poverty and insufficient income have also contributed to the emergence of desperate living conditions and consequently led to a surge in homelessness.

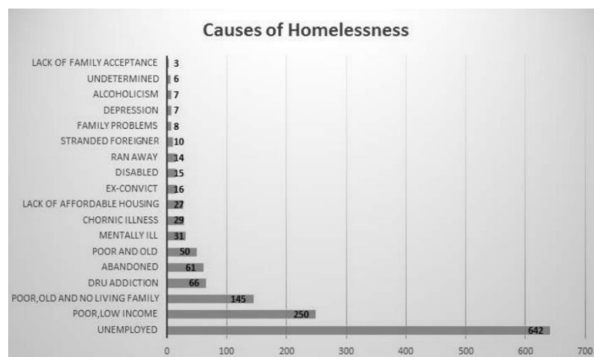


FIGURE 2. Wiki Impact.com conducted this study about the causes of homelessness

LOCATION SELECTION

Sheltering Hopes: Empowering Lives, Supporting the Homeless has secured information on the venues for this program with support from the Institute Onn Ja'afar, the organisation authorised by Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) to distribute food to the homeless. The Sheltering Hopes committee has identified three potential locations for this mission: the Homeless Transit Centre, Anjung Singgah, and Chow Kit Community Centre. DBKL has designated these sites as temporary accommodations for the homeless, aiding their transition to better living conditions. Depending on the space available, these locations can house between 80 and 250 individuals and are equipped with essential facilities.

MODULES

The implementation framework that guides the activities to be carried out can be translated into modules as follows. This framework is divided into three stages of implementation, beginning with programme planning and committee formation. In this stage, three processes are the main focus. The first is the Committee Formation Workshop, which trains the appointed committee members in planning the programme, roles and responsibilities, and effective teamwork. Next is the University Approval Process. In this stage, the committee is informed of the steps taken to obtain programme approval from the university management. Next is the exco training and role stage. Each formed exco is given an initial exposure to explain their roles and responsibilities, emphasising effective

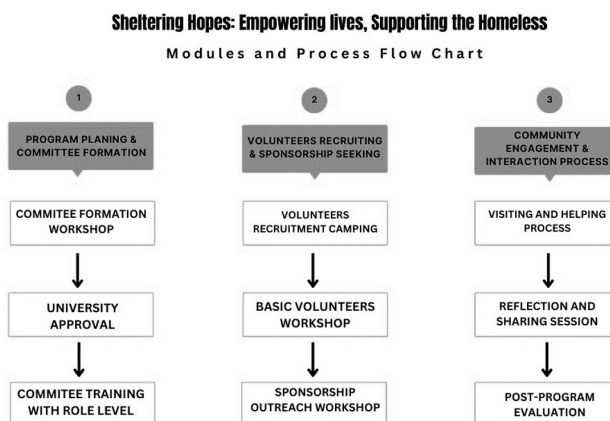


FIGURE 3. The flow chart for modules and processes throughout the implementation of the program

implementation.

The next stage involves recruiting volunteers and seeking sponsorships. These two essential processes must be completed to meet all program requirements. This process starts with an online volunteer recruitment campaign and basic volunteer workshops. Through this process, the newly formed committee will recruit volunteers interested in joining the programme, conduct interviews, and make selections. The committee also plays a role in organising basic workshops for all volunteers before engaging in the programme. The next process involves the sponsorship outreach workshop. Through this process, the newly formed exco will seek the best collaboration approaches to ensure the programme's smooth flow.

The final stage is the programme implementation and community engagement, involving the shelter visit and interaction process. In this phase, volunteers will manage to visit and help the underprivileged and practise good communication skills while listening to their heartfelt expressions. Next is the reflection and sharing session. In this phase, volunteers will reflect on their learning and share experiences for mutual benefit. Finally, the post-programme evaluation involves volunteers and the committee conducting a debriefing session to gather insights into the programme's impact, challenges, and future improvement areas.

ACTIVITIES

Sheltering Hopes: Empowering Lives, Supporting the Homeless has been divided into three phases of activities before executing this programme. In the first phase, a committee of 12 programme management members from the FaSaSi was formed. This committee made preparations related to the programme schedule, aid distribution, programme implementation plan, and various other aspects to ensure the smooth execution of the programme. Subsequently, the committee made further preparations to obtain approval from the university to proceed with the programme. Following that, the committee formed five executive committees (exco): sponsorship exco, registration and medical exco, printing and promotion exco, transportation exco, and technical and logistics exco to facilitate the programme's implementation.

In this programme, the sponsorship exco was entrusted with securing sponsorship for the shower facilities to be provided to homeless individuals. The registration and medical exco were tasked with recruiting volunteers from the university who were

interested in serving the community. The printing and promotion exco was responsible for designing posters to promote the programme among university students. The transportation exco was responsible for arranging the transportation to be used throughout the programme. Lastly, the technical and logistics executive ensured all equipment and supplies were sufficient and in good condition. Through the formation of this committee, students could learn and gain insight into managing a programme, enhancing their knowledge in academics and, leadership and management.

The second phase involves recruiting volunteers and sponsors for the Sheltering Hopes: Empowering Lives, Supporting the Homeless programme. The programme committee gathered information regarding the number of volunteers needed to execute this mission; a total of 30 volunteers were required from among the students, including the newly formed committee members. Consequently, the committee took the initiative to recruit volunteers using online platforms. Around 60 interested volunteers registered for the programme. Subsequently, the committee had to screen and select candidates to fill 18 vacancies and divide them into quotas. This was because the programme also involved six volunteers from the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) Volunteer Club. Following that, the search for sponsors who were willing to contribute to the community in the form of shower supplies commenced. The Islamic centre UTeM agreed to contribute 50 shower kits for distribution among the homeless.

The third phase involves activities carried out during the programme. In this phase, all the volunteers assisted the NGO, the Institute Onn Ja'afar, in packaging the food that would be distributed to all homeless individuals for their pre-dawn meal (sahur). After completing this, the NGO provided a brief explanation of the programme's flow and safety briefing to ensure the programme's smooth operation. Then, all 30 volunteers and five representatives from the Onn Ja'afar Institute formed three groups to visit three separate locations: the Homeless Transit Centre, Anjung Singgah, and Chow Kit Community Centre. Upon arrival at the designated locations, the volunteers greeted the homeless residents, provided them with meals, and listened to their stories and experiences during their stay at the shelters. After an hour of sharing their life stories, the volunteers returned to the gathering point at the Institute Onn Ja'afar for a gift presentation and closing programme before returning to their respective universities.



FIGURE 4. Sheltering Hope volunteers: Volunteers who have made the programme a success

PROGRAM IMPACT

The Sheltering Hopes: Empowering Lives, Supporting the Homeless programme has positively impacted both participants and the target group that received assistance. This is because, through this programme, the student committee members gained firsthand exposure to implementing effective communication and management skills, allowing discussions to reach precise goals and fostering a more positive social network between students and the community. Furthermore, the programme provided a new learning experience for all students who volunteered, fostering a sense of compassion and empathy towards the homeless population. Listening to their stories of struggle and hardship became a lesson for facing life's challenges in the future. Simultaneously, the programme opened minds and offered a fresh narrative to students and the local community about the lives of less fortunate individuals who seek refuge in homeless shelters. It emphasised the importance of not neglecting but providing moral support to these vulnerable groups. Lastly, the programme also exposed and educated student volunteers on collaborating with NGOs to extend aid and assistance through established channels.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Sheltering Hopes: Empowering Lives, Supporting the Homeless reflects students' transformation and dedicated initiative to contribute to marginalised communities. The three carefully planned

phases have demonstrated the approach taken by the *FaSaSi*. It all began with establishing the programme committee and seeking volunteers and sponsors to ensure its smooth execution. Subsequently, the program aimed to instil a sense of compassion and kindness towards the less fortunate. This initiative not only focused on providing aid to the homeless but also became a platform for students to actively engage in benefiting society. This can be seen through the students' perseverance in contributing various aspects to manage the programme effectively. Moreover, volunteers gained practical experience in leadership, teamwork, and project management. Additionally, the collaboration with the Institute Onn Ja'afar exposed the challenges often neglected communities face while fostering deeper empathy and understanding among participants. The impact of this programme is broad-reaching and symbolises the strength of grassroots efforts in creating positive change. The collaboration involving various stakeholders, including local universities, NGOs, and volunteers, has demonstrated the potential of collective action in addressing pressing social issues, such as the ever-increasing number of homeless people who need adequate attention and assistance. Sheltering Hopes serves as an inspirational beacon, showcasing how a determined group of students can channel their interests into meaningful actions and, in the process, strengthen the social network between students and the community. This young leadership will continue to contribute to society if given appropriate cooperation and recognition, and these young individuals can unleash their exceptional potential .

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