

HEAVY rain ushered in the morning of Aug 25, 2012 but it failed to dampen the enthusiasm of the young participants of SABM's Rural-Urban Exchange Programme. They came early to the

Rumah for the day trip to the Orang Asli settlement at Sungei Bil, Slim River in Perak, their first RUEP 2012 venture into a rural area.

Our hope was that the excursion would help awaken our urban children, even the few from disadvantaged homes, to the fact that glaring disparities exist in the standard of living of Anak-anak Bangsa Malaysia in current times. And perhaps they would come away from that experience recognising how much they themselves had and what those in unfortunate circumstances lacked.

Weeks earlier, four RUEP facilitators had visited the settlement to meet Cikgu Nora, an amazing lady with immense capabilities and a strong conviction that education was the key to freeing her people from the cycle of poverty.

Nora adeptly finalized a program for our RUEP children. She also drew up a budget that covered resources required for children’s activities, meals and refreshments, and also the handicrafts her team of helpers would make for our impending visit. Nora was assured that RUEP would bear all expenses incurred, including the rental of canopies needed as shield against rain.

In the days leading up to the trip, parents of RUEP participants, well-wishers, RUEP facilitators and volunteers bought, as well as sourced from contacts they had, foodstuff and other items that had been identified as necessities at the settlement.

That August morning, willing hands loaded onto the bus the many donations that had come in various forms: bottles of oil and fruit cordial; bags of rice; packets of sugar, milk and meehoon; tins of sardine, biscuits, condensed milk, cocoa and Milo; cartons of Vitamin C and Ribena; boxes and bags of clothes and books; toothpaste, toothbrushes, pencils, ball pens, stationery sets and toys.

When the bus finally began the journey with 32 enthusiastic passengers on board and ahead of three cars carrying two sponsors and two families, the rain had yet to let up. A wet and dreary Kuala Lumpur and its opulent offerings were soon left behind and hours later, rural scenes began to dominate the landscape.

Sungei Bil’s Orang Asli settlement beckoned … a world, we were to discover, that had a richness that was rare. It was the spirit of excellence that Nora and her people demonstrated, giving so generously of themselves, their talents, their time and their friendship.

Our RUEP children had arrived at Sungei Bil's doorstep bearing material gifts for a community in need. Little did they know that those waiting to greet them had already mastered the art of giving freely. What Nora and her community offered that day to their visitors was much more, so much more.



Unloading goods at the bottom of the road to the settlement.



A village elder and her young girls waiting to ‘crown’ their RUEP guests.



(Left) Olga Nocanday sharing the bowl at the target area.

(Right) Olga Nocanday sharing the bowl at the target area.



A typical home of the very poor in the settlement.



Tradition has it that a child born into the Ga Adangbe family is the reincarnation of a departed relative, and the child is addressed by the name of that relative.



RUEP children competing in a game of balance.



Perhaps the most hidden gem in the settlement : the toy library cum learning centre for the very young, the brainchild of Cikgu Nora.



RUEP's turn to give back – our boys helping Orang Asli kids to complete their origami craft.



Girl talk amidst new friendships formed.

