

Putting a Roof Over the Heads of Orang Asli



STUDENTS of Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT) launched a heartwarming campaign for Orang Asli communities at the Tun Tan Siew Sin Building in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur. Eighty-four second-year Bachelor of Public Relations (Honours) students partnered with Epic Homes to raise awareness on the significance of safe housing for the Orang Asli. Their campaign titled “A.S.L.I (A Space Linking Identities) Campaign 2023 – Weaving Hopes for a Complete Home” aims to raise RM60,000 to build a home for a family of five. A home costs RM60,000 to construct.

“We were given a great opportunity to learn the wonderful Orang Asli culture as well as their lifestyle through a series of trips and activities in Kampung Orang Asli Gurney and Mah Meri Cultural Village,” said A.S.L.I Campaign 2023 organising chairperson Cheong Karr Mei. She said visits to the Orang Asli villages had been an eye-opening and humble experience for students, and they hoped to educate more people on the Orang Asli through their exhibitions and activities.

Epic chief operating officer and Epic Homes director Esther Chit said the non-profit organisation was dedicated to providing safe, comfortable and sustainable homes for marginalised communities across Malaysia. “The A.S.L.I Campaign 2023 aligns perfectly with our mission to inspire and empower individuals to create positive change,” she said. She added that the mission was not just about building homes but also to inspire, mobilise and empower people to create a positive impact around them.

The programmes in the campaign included educational exhibitions such as a Miniature 3D Map on Orang Asli Houses, Arts and Visual showcase on Orang Asli costumes and indigenous arts as a representation of East Malaysian indigenous artwork. Another educational exhibition that stimulated imaginative learning was the immersive multi-sensory exhibit named “Into The Forest Experience” which took visitors on a journey through music, presenting river and tree decorations, and sounds of birds chirping as well as flowing water.

“We hope our programmes enable us to receive greater assistance in amplifying the voices of Orang Asli communities to a wider audience and ensuring that they are heard,” said Cheong. Other activities organised by the students were henna application, bracelet weaving and photo booths for other students to join in and raise funds. Proceeds from programmes will be contributed to Epic Homes, as part of the students’ pledge to assist communities who urgently require aid, specifically in relation to Orang Asli housing projects. “Together we hope that this will make a positive impact on Orang Asli communities and eliminate the bridge between urban folk and the Orang Asli,” said Cheong.

TAR UMT president Prof Dr Lee Sze Wei also hoped for students to help preserve the Orang Asli’s culture and inheritance as well as help them overcome challenges of modern life. “Although, we have co-existed with the Orang Asli for many years, their community size is relatively small compared to other communities causing us to often ignore them,” he said. He added that the Orang Asli were a part of Malaysian society.

Kampung Batu 12 Gombak Orang Asli representative Sali Bah Nap said the Orang Asli were happy that their welfare was being looked into by other communities. “Without help from people, it may be difficult for us to stand equally with other communities in Malaysia. “May the nation continue to defend the fate of the 18 tribes that exist from Johor to Kedah,” he said.

The students are inviting the public to join them in creating a safe and comfortable home for the Orang Asli communities. Those interested to donate to the A.S.L.I. Campaign 2023 can visit www.simplygiving.com/tar-umt-a-s-l-i-campaign-2023 or their social media pages (Facebook: ASLI Campaign 2023, Instagram: @aslicampaign2023) for details.