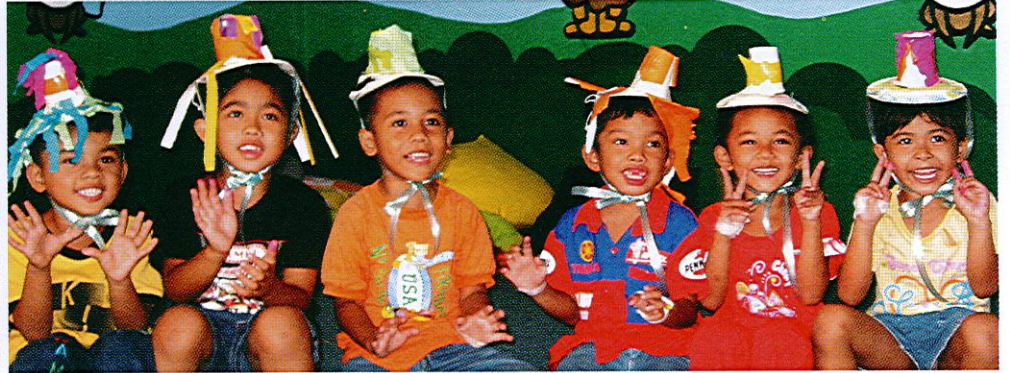


The Art of Health



A positive mind frame does wonders for health. Recognising this, Mulpha International Bhd uses the arts to enhance the physical and mental well-being of patients in six Malaysian hospitals under its banner.

The CSR initiative, aptly called *Arts for Health*, began towards end 2006 involving children diagnosed with cancer at the Selayang Hospital. The idea was to provide a creative and engaging outlet to children who are terminally ill, so as to get their minds off their pain and perhaps also to release some positive energy. Overriding this was also the objective of forming a closer relationship with the children and their families and to be able to offer them emotional support without being intrusive.

The concept had been successfully carried out in the UK, where there is a strong belief that patients gain healing benefits from self-expression via drawing, writing, dancing and other forms of creativity.

A children's playroom at Selayang Hospital was converted into a space that was suitable for the arts activities planned. The programme soon proved so popular with not just the children but also their families and hospital staff, that Mulpha decided to extend it to all children at the hospital – both outpatients as well those who were admitted but were not terminally ill.

Within two years, the programme had spread to Kajang Hospital, Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (HUKM) and University Malaysia Medical Centre (UMMC); and in 2009 it was further extended to Hospital Kuala Lumpur (HKL) and Hospital Sungai Buloh. In all, more than 400 hospitalised children have benefitted from 10 programmes run a year under Mulpha's *Arts for Health*. Activities range from drawing to colouring, craft-making to story-telling, reading to singing, play-acting to board games, depending on the age of the children and their mobility.

Although the programme is open to all children aged four and above, most of the participants are in the four-12 age bracket. Those who are bed-ridden are catered to specially by 'Mulpha Angels', who conduct the sessions in the children's wards, by their beds, so they do not have to miss out on the opportunity to find solace and joy through the arts.

Mulpha Angels are employees of Mulpha who volunteer to help the artists carry out their activities. This group of caring volunteers is made up of staff from all departments of Mulpha, from property, human resources and administration to the director's office and corporate communications. They are guided by Shairin Jaslin Mohd Sharif, who is studying for a Master's in Counselling from HELP University College while also pursuing an International Montessori Teaching Diploma.

Through this programme, Mulpha is also forming a better rapport between its management and medical staff, which will ultimately benefit both the patients and the hospital in general.

What began as a humble effort to contribute to children with terminal diseases has become a programme that the Mulpha management and hospital staff are truly proud of. Recovered patients urge the hospitals to continue with the programme, saying how wonderful it was and how much it had helped them personally.

Every year, Mulpha sets goals and objectives for the *Arts for Health* programme. At year's end, the management reviews the programme to ascertain its feasibility. So far, all goals set have been met. Mulpha is currently in contact with the UK founder of *Arts for Health*, Manchester Metropolitan University, negotiating the possibility of becoming its Malaysian affiliate. This would help the group expand the heart-warming programme more extensively throughout the nation. ■

