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Youths buck trend for mammoth gotong-royong

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KUALA LUMPUR — First-time volunteer Nadhirah Ramli, 30, drove three hours from Muar, Johor, to take part of the country's largest youth gotong-royong at Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman here yesterday.

The Universiti Tenaga Nasional (Uniten) graduate was among 7,000 youth volunteers who came together to pick up rubbish, remove illegal posters and

repaint buildings in the city under the Volunteer Malaysia (VM) programme launch led by non-profit organisation IM4U.

"I have always wanted to contribute my time and effort in a productive way for society but did not know where and how to start," she said.

"When a friend told me about the VM programme, I thought it was a great opportunity to sign up and finally become a volunteer."

Human resources executive Azme John, 29, from Ipoh, was another first-time volunteer who joined Nadhirah to paint a 1.5km stretch of the city's street kerbs.

"It feels inspiring to be part of a positive movement like this. I enjoyed my first experience as a volunteer and look forward to the next

one," she said.

Edwin Chandra 45, a visitor on holiday from Kuching, Sarawak, said he was pleased to see so many youths involved in the selfless clean-up.

The media consultant — who himself is a volunteer with the Special Olympics Sarawak, Kuching Chapter — knows too well how difficult it is to get youths interested in volunteering.

"It takes commitment and responsibility, and these youths have chosen to sacrifice their time, money and effort. It is a good start to promote volunteerism," he said.

IM4U chief operating officer Azlan Rudy Abdul Malik, who is also the drummer for local rap-rock band Pop Shuvit, said the aim was to promote a sense of social responsibility among Malaysian youths.

"We managed to mobilise over 20,000 youths from 220 universities and higher learning institutes nationwide to be part of VM," he said.

"All of them were simultaneously involved in the gotong-royong at 15 locations, including Perak, Kelantan, Terengganu, Penang, Kedah, Perlis and Sabah."

Rudy said the volunteers, between 18 and 40, had the option of joining activities of their choice, such as planting trees, painting murals with local artists or beach clean-ups.

Earlier, Federal Territories Deputy Minister Senator Datuk J. Loga Bala Mohan, who officiated the programme launch, said the effort was part of beautifying the city before it hosts the Asian Summit 2015.

"Jalan Raja Laut will also be spruced up. City Hall will continue refurbishments by improving street lighting and planting more trees along the road," he said.

The next VM programme is set to take place in June next year and will take place consecutively after every six months.



Youth volunteers paint a mural on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman during the gotong-royong.