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Give responsibly, ad hoc donors urged

Overlapping distribution of food and groceries to homeless can be prevented with proper coordination, say NGOs

BUSINESS owners in Chow Kit, Jalan Petaling and Medan Tuanku in Kuala Lumpur — the focal points for charitable activities — say that Good Samaritans are doing more harm than good when feeding the city's homeless.

They claim that food packets are being thrown on five-foot ways, resulting in flies and rat infestation.

"Every morning when I open my shop for business, I have to clean up the mess left behind by the homeless," said a cafe owner in Jalan Petaling who wanted to remain anonymous.

"The food attracts rats and flies. There are also packets of unopened food and *kuih* left in front of shops," she added.

Nyonya *kuih* seller, known only as Tiong, said she was appalled by the amount of food wasted every day and that the food could benefit orphanages and the genuinely poor.

"When the supposed poor and homeless can actually pick and choose what they want to take home or eat, you know that something is wrong," she said.

A manager of a hotel in Jalan Petaling said he even saw volunteers forcing people to take packed food.

"A girl was celebrating her birthday and wanted to commemorate the day with a good deed.

"I saw the girl and her friends forcing pre-packed food on the homeless, even though they just had their meals handed out an hour before from a soup kitchen.

"The next day, dozens of food packets were left in front of my hotel.

"It is such a waste," the manager added.

A shopkeeper in Chow Kit said that while he sympathised with the homeless, he felt some were merely taking advantage of the situation.

"Some of them are drug addicts, some too lazy to work and some are retirees who just sit and sleep along the corridors waiting for handouts.

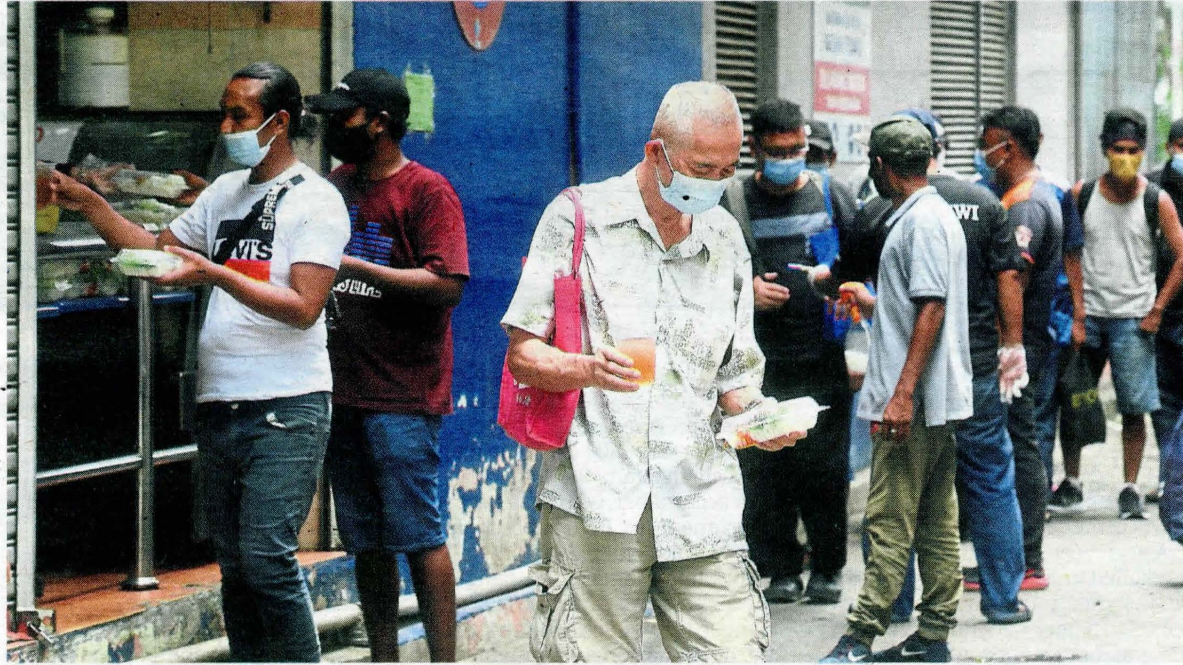
"I even know of some who take a bus here every day, sit for hours, collect the grocery baskets and head back home," said the shopkeeper.

A spokesperson from waste contractor Alam Flora admitted that its contractors were noticing more organic wastes in Jalan Petaling and Chow Kit.

"Every day, we see a lot of unopened food packets left everywhere," he said.

Kuala Lumpur and Petty Traders Association chairman Datuk Ang Say Tee said hawkers and petty traders in Petaling Street were being blamed for the mess left behind by the homeless.

"Jalan Petaling is getting dirtier



The homeless waiting to collect food distributed by a soup kitchen in Chow Kit, Kuala Lumpur. — Photos: AZHAR MAHFOF, AZMAN GHANI and SHAARI CHEMAT

by the day and we are aware of the homeless situation too," he added.

Finding a solution

Pertiwi Soup Kitchen founder Datuk Munirah Abdul Hamid said the problem resulted from ad-hoc volunteers and Good Samaritans.

She said that after her establishment provided food, another group gave food to the same people who did not want it.

"The homeless prefer freshly cooked food and if pre-cooked ones are shoved into their hands, they discard it," she said, adding that even groceries were oversupplied to the homeless and B40 group.

"More people are distributing groceries and the same people are taking home bags and bags of rice," Munirah noted.

She said that she knew of people who had taken home 40 toothbrushes and shampoos besides dozens of rice bags.

"They (ad hoc groups) do not know that the same people are getting the goodie bags and return the next day for more.

"That is why the number of people who come to take the donations is increasing," she said, adding that it created a colony of hoarders.

Munirah called on those wanting to help to liaise with the soup kitchens for a system to be worked out and to ensure zero wastage.

Focus Point Caring Hearts Charity Foundation chairman Datin Nancy Sim said the growing number of homeless people crowding the streets for handouts were putting themselves and others at risk of contracting Covid-19 and creating a new cluster.

The pandemic, she said, aggravated the situation as more were seeking help, making it tough for coordination.

"My take on this is we must give responsibly and we should vet who we are donating to.

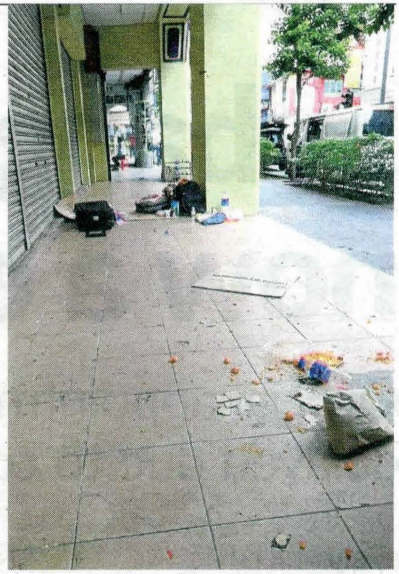
"While the vetting takes up time, a bit of legwork is also sometimes needed," said Sim.

She said there were still pockets of society that were underserved and suggested that donors do more homework to identify who they were.

"Only then can the distribution process become more sustainable.

"Fundraising is becoming challenging and the underserved are most impacted.

"With the advent of social media, vetting is made easier and flow of information is faster," she added.



Unfinished food and drink packets left behind by the homeless attract rats and flies.



Food parcels and cups collected by Alam Flora workers the morning after feeding sessions.



Alam Flora workers cleaning up the mess left behind by the homeless.



Many seniors converge in Chow Kit to get food and handouts.



Ang says hawkers and petty traders in Petaling Street are being blamed for the mess left behind by the homeless.



Munirah says ad hoc groups do not know that the same people are getting the goodie bags and return the next day for more.