

A place to play, a space to grow

A new toy library in Sentul is reclaiming play as a vital part of childhood, offering city kids space to grow, learn and connect, writes **Norma Umaira**

ALL work and no play makes Jack a dull boy — a phrase that's been around for generations, yet feels more urgent than ever. In today's world, where screen time often overshadows play time, the simple act of play is becoming an endangered part of childhood. And with it, children's wellbeing is at stake.

Later this year, a new community toy library is set to open at UTC Sentul in Kuala Lumpur, aiming to reverse that trend. It's more than a cheerful place to borrow toys; it's a purpose-built space where play is seen not as a luxury, but as a necessity.

The initiative is a collaboration between Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Sentul Raya Sdn Bhd, Toy Libraries Malaysia and YTL Foundation. Together, these partners aim to provide families — particularly in dense, urban neighbourhoods — with access to a safe, welcoming environment where children can learn, play and grow.

THE SCIENCE OF PLAY

Experts in child development have long stressed that play isn't just fun — it's foundational. It helps children build physical coordination, emotional resilience, creative thinking and social awareness. Unstructured, child-led

play has been linked to better mental health, cognitive development and even future academic performance.

"Play is a fundamental right of every child," says Datin Wong Poai Hong, president of Toy Libraries Malaysia, adding: "With this toy library, we're creating a safe and stimulating environment that nurtures curiosity, imagination and social interaction."

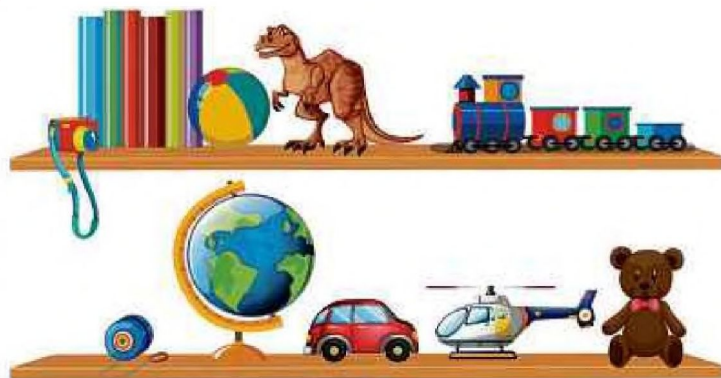
But in many urban environments, access to safe play spaces is limited. Homes are often small and crowded. Green areas are few and far between. And quality toys can be expensive, putting them out of reach for many families. That's why the Sentul Toy Library is more than just a room full of playthings — it's a holistic child development programme, wrapped in joy and laughter.

SAFE HAVEN FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Set to open in the coming months, the Sentul Toy Library will cater to children aged 0 to 12. It will offer a curated collection of toys, books, puzzles and educational tools — all designed to spark learning through play. But just as important are the people and programmes that will bring the space to life.

Storytelling sessions, parent-child workshops and community activities

will make the library an inclusive hub where learning and connection happen organically. The space will encourage not just child development, but also family bonding and neighbourly ties.



(From left) Toy Libraries Malaysia vice-president Dr Raihan Mohamed, Kuala Lumpur Mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif, YTL Foundation trustee Datuk Yeoh Soo Min and Sentul Raya Sdn Bhd executive director Datuk Hamidah Maktar at the signing ceremony for a Sentul community toy library, in Kuala Lumpur recently. PIC COURTESY OF YTL FOUNDATION

"Every child deserves the chance to grow, discover and imagine through play," says Kuala Lumpur Mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif at the project's signing ceremony recently.

"This partnership marks an important step towards nurturing a more caring and inclusive city for our young ones."

MORE THAN JUST TOYS

For many parents, especially those raising children in high-density housing, the toy library could be a lifeline. It provides access to developmental tools, but also to guidance, support and community.

The workshops and playgroups offer not just fun for kids, but shared knowledge and reassurance for parents — especially new ones. In a city where family support networks may be fragmented, the toy library fills an important gap.

YTL Foundation programme director Datuk Kathleen Chew says the power of play enriches children's lives and fosters stronger community ties.

"This collaboration reflects our commitment to ensuring every child, regardless of background, has access to joyful and meaningful learning experiences."

A MODEL FOR THE CITY

The Sentul Toy Library is intended not as a one-off, but as a model. Maimunah expresses hope that similar spaces would soon be developed in other parts of Kuala Lumpur.

In a city where children's lives are often hemmed in by traffic, electronic screens and academic pressure, these play-focused spaces offer young ones something simple but revolutionary: room to breathe, explore and be themselves.

And play, research shows, isn't just good for children. It's good for society. It fosters empathy, cooperation and emotional intelligence — qualities essential for any caring, resilient community.

With growing concerns around childhood anxiety, screen addiction and sedentary lifestyles, the Sentul Toy Library is arriving at a critical time. It reminds us that healthy cities don't just invest in highways and skyscrapers — they invest in children. They make space for joy.

As the library prepares to open its doors, its message is clear: childhood needs more than academics and discipline. It needs movement, creativity and connection. And above all, it needs room to play.