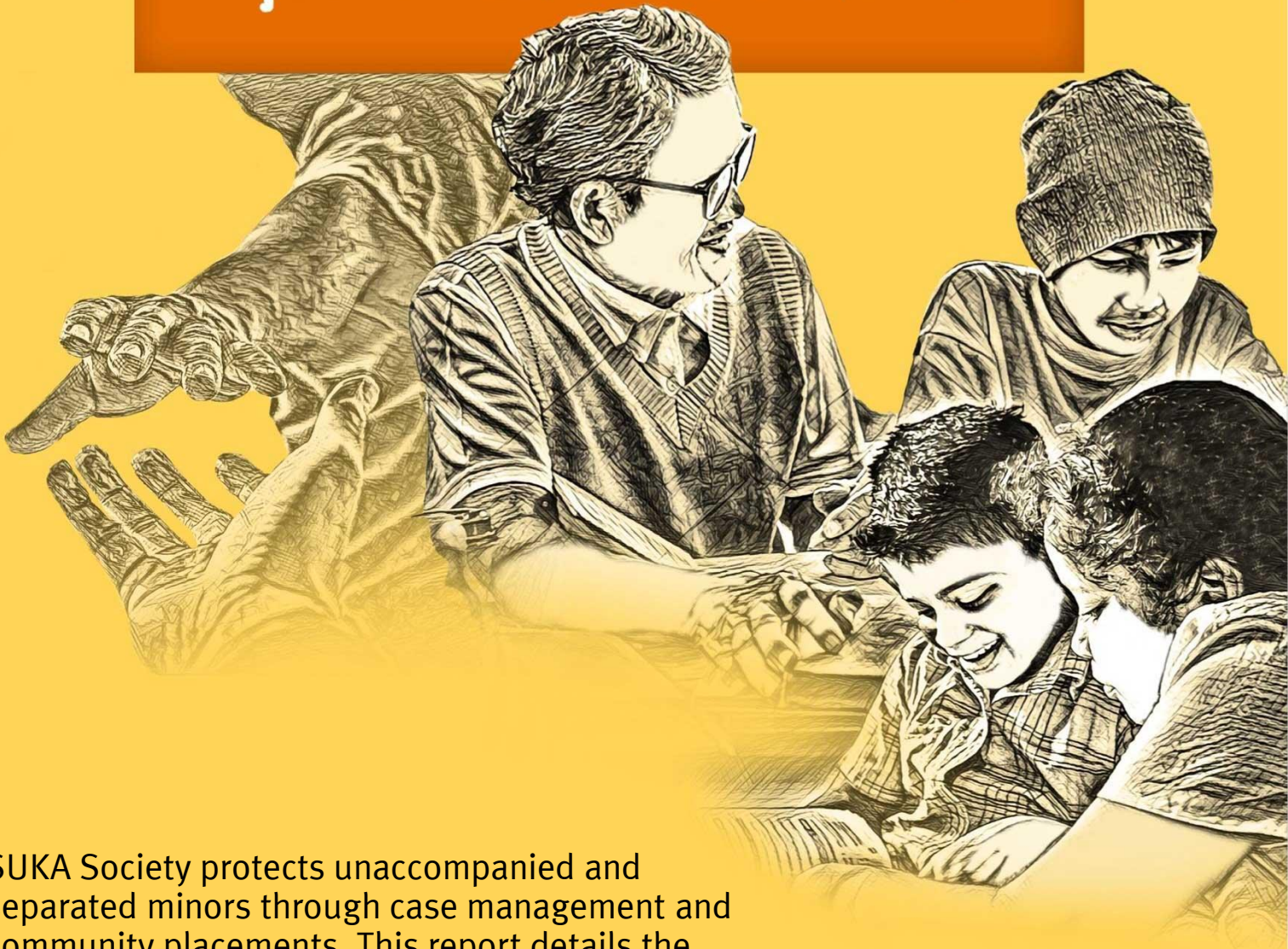


Providing Case Management for Children at Risk



SUKA Society protects unaccompanied and separated minors through case management and community placements. This report details the project's progress and impact from 2023.

2023 Report

PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

Programme Overview

The Community Placement and Case Management (CPCM) Programme is part of a concerted effort to end the immigration detention of children and adolescents in Malaysia. Malaysia is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and thus does not recognise the status of refugees in the country. Refugees and asylum seekers are treated the same as illegal immigrants, who are subjected to the threat of arrest and detention. Moreover, the Immigration Laws also do not discriminate between ages, which means that children of any age can be subjected to the same arrest and detention as adults. As there are no separate detention facilities to hold children, they are often placed together with adults with no consideration for their well-being and developmental needs. While in detention, children experience overcrowding, lack of adequate and suitable food and water, limited access to healthcare, and high risk of abuse. However, on humanitarian grounds, those who are registered with UNHCR and hold its card are usually not prosecuted.

Children who are unaccompanied or separated from their main caregivers are particularly vulnerable to the risk of exploitation, abuse, and trafficking due to their lack of protection and support. Children may be separated from their parents while fleeing from armed forces or being smuggled by human traffickers. Parents may also send their children alone to seek better economic opportunities or safety from war and conflicts.

Unaccompanied and separated children (UASCs) may have witnessed violence, lost loved ones, or endured perilous journeys prior to arriving in Malaysia. The separation from their families can cause significant emotional distress and psychological trauma. Without the safety and security provided by their own family, these children may struggle to adapt to new environments and build trust. On their own they face numerous challenges in accessing essential services in Malaysia. They will have difficulty obtaining shelter, food, education, and healthcare. Without proper documentation or legal representation, they are vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination.

The CPCM Programme provides a holistic case management system that specifically looks into the protection concerns of Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) at risk of arrest and detention and those directly affected by immigration detention in Malaysia. These children may be undocumented, stateless, refugees, asylum seekers, or children of migrant workers.

Community placement refers to the community-based accommodation that a refugee, asylum seeking, migrant or undocumented UASCs would be placed in. Community-based accommodation, such as placing children with foster families from their own community, is central in preventing immigration detention and ensuring UASC are in safe and stable housing until a durable solution or case resolution is achieved.

CPCM focuses our interventions and provides services to the minors based on these 4 goals: Safety, Stability, Permanency and Well-being. Each goal is vital in ensuring the minors' rights are safeguarded, and that the intervention provided ensures they can live independently after they exit the programme.

Programme Overview

Background

Refugee, asylum seeking and stateless children in Malaysia face a highly unpredictable life. This is because Malaysia is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. As our immigration laws make no distinction between refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons or undocumented migrant, anyone including children without the necessary legal documents are subjected to arrest and detention. The difficulties faced by a refugee, asylum seeking or stateless child are further compounded if the child is also unaccompanied or separated from his or her parents/primary caregiver. The lack of protection space in the country coupled with the absence of caregivers put unaccompanied and separated children (UASCs) at a significant risk of abuse, violence and trauma.



Children who are unaccompanied or separated from their main caregivers are particularly vulnerable to the risk of exploitation, abuse, and trafficking due to their lack of protection and support. Children may be separated from their parents while fleeing from armed forces or being smuggled by human traffickers. Parents may also send their children alone to seek better economic opportunities or safety from war and conflicts.

Unaccompanied and separated children (UASCs) may have witnessed violence, lost loved ones, or endured perilous journeys prior to arriving in Malaysia. The separation from their families can cause significant emotional distress and psychological trauma. Without the safety and security provided by their own family, these children may struggle to adapt to new environments and build trust. On their own they face numerous challenges in accessing essential services in Malaysia. They will have difficulty obtaining shelter, food, education, and healthcare. Without proper documentation or legal representation, they are vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination.



There are 49,065 refugee children below the age of 18 in Malaysia and they are vulnerable to abuse, neglect and exploitation.¹



Children without parental care face growth and development issues due to lack of care and support.



Unaccompanied and separated children often lack access to welfare, healthcare and education services.

KEY FACTS

¹ UNHCR (2023) [Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report](#)

The Case Management & Community Placement (CPCM) Programme

Since 2015, SUKA Society has implemented a holistic case management programme to address the protection needs of unaccompanied and separated children (UASCs) from refugee, asylum-seeking, and stateless communities. This programme advocates for alternatives to child immigration detention by offering a community-based model that protects UASCs and is promoted to the government as a viable solution.

All unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) under the case management programme will be protected through a structured case management process that involves the following steps –



Our case management programme covers three critical areas:

Safety

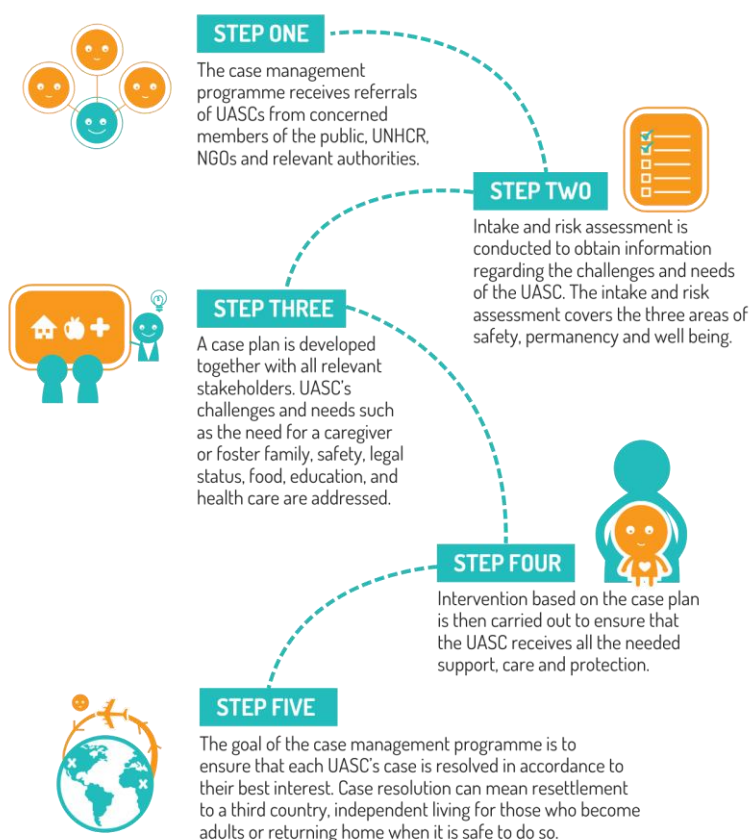
Ensuring that children under our case management programme are given protection from threat or actual harm.

Stability & Permanency

Creating a stable and permanent outcome for long term care and durable solution for children under our programme.

Well-being

Holistically providing adequate material well-being and affordable housing, improving access to healthcare and education, and developing positive relationships and a strong community support system for children under our programme.



IMPACT NUMBERS

Goals	Area of Need	Before Case Management	After Case Management
Safety/ Stability & Permanency	Legal Status	40 minors undocumented/ unclear legal status	40 documented minors/ legal status clarified
Safety/ Stability & Permanency	Safety/ Housing	32 minors in unsafe housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29 minors in safer housing in the community • 3 minors safe housing intervention ongoing
Wellbeing	Physical Health	31 minors requiring some medical intervention	31 minors assisted with health intervention
Wellbeing	Mental Health	17 minors requiring some mental health intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 minors receiving/ have received mental health support • 6 minors pending full intervention
Wellbeing	Welfare	50 minors requiring some welfare provision	50 minors received/are receiving some welfare support
Wellbeing	Education	49 minors were either illiterate, could not speak any English or had no access to school/education	49 minors assisted with schooling
Stability & Permanency	Durable Solution/ Case resolution	51 minors with unclear permanent case resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 minors reunited with their family • 7 minors resettled to US in 2023 • 7 minors on the pathway to resettlement in US in 2024 • 6 minors recognised as refugees and have been referred for resettlement • 28 minors are registered with the offices of UNHCR and are undergoing refugee status determination. • 1 minor unclear legal status

Safety

Refers to the protection from abuse, maltreatment, and neglect.

The immediate goal of the CPCM Programme is to ensure that the child is safe from any present or immediate danger, which may include real or potential risk of physical, sexual, verbal maltreatment, abuse or neglect. Each child in the programme will be assigned a case manager who will ensure that the child is placed in a safe environment, preferably within a foster family setting, and will conduct regular monitoring of the placement.

The case manager will visit the child and foster family at least once a month to assess if the child's needs are being met and that the foster family has adequate resources to meet the needs of the child. The case manager will create a care plan together with the child to assess safety risk and plan for contingencies. This may include safety planning with the caregiver and providing the child with knowledge and skills to protect themselves. For every new placement, the case manager will conduct a risk and safety assessment that takes into consideration potential dangers for the child from within the family and the surrounding environment.

If at any point the child is in danger, immediate action will be taken by the case manager which may include finding alternative places for the child to stay, seeking medical attention, or making reports to the relevant authorities.

In regard to the threat of arrest and detention due to being undocumented and lack of legal protection, the case manager may seek to obtain some form of documentation for the child, such as making referrals to UNHCR if the child has reasonable claims to seek asylum as a refugee.

Essentially, the case manager must consider what is needed for the child to continue to live in a safe environment.



Stability and Permanency

Stability refers to having a continuous and consistently safe and nurturing environment for children to grow and thrive. This may include having a sense of belonging within a family or community with whom they can form healthy, safe and positive relationships.

This can be achieved through family reunification or establishing family links, which include alternative care arrangements.

Family Reunification

The CPCM Programme adheres to the children's right to not be separated from their parents or family members. Following the principle of family unity, the primary responsibility of caring for a child lies first with the child's parents, second with the extended family, and lastly with the child's community often based on cultural commonalities linked to ethnicity or nationality. The case managers are expected to work towards preserving the integrity of the family unit as long as it is in the best interest of the child. Family reunification and establishing family links must be done in direct consultation with the child. Whenever possible, the case managers will try to establish contact with parents or other family members, through the family tracing efforts with the help of the members of the community or organisations with relevant expertise and mandate.

Alternative Care Placements

If family reunification is not possible, the case manager will consider alternative care placement for the child, which may take the following forms, in order of priority:

1. **Guardianship and kinship** care by relatives or close family members in the community. Monitoring of relationships is needed to ensure the placement is safe.
2. **Foster care arrangements** by other community members. Currently an informal process. Foster families are identified by the child, case workers, interpreters, community members.
3. **Independent living group homes** for older children. An assessment needs to be undertaken to determine which child should be placed in these peer-headed households. More support and supervision by the Case Managers will be required for this arrangement. House rules will also need to be developed and agreed upon by the children living in the household.
4. **Shelter or residential care placement** if safety is an issue or closer monitoring is needed. This placement option should be ideally temporary pending more permanent solutions on care arrangements being developed and used as a measure of last resort.

Stability and Permanency

Permanency refers to the long-term stability of the child. This would include providing legal protection in the country of transit while more durable solutions are being planned and pursued for the child.

Legal Protection

Interventions to address a child's lack of legal status. In the CPCM Programme, UASCs primarily go through a UNHCR process, if they meet the criteria for refugee status. The case manager will refer the UASCs through an initial registration process, which will require basic personal information including special vulnerabilities such as serious health issues, and sexual and gender-based violence. The case manager will then assist the child in following up with the case which may include going through a Refugee Status Determination (RSD) interview with UNHCR. If the child passes the RSD interview, they will be recognised as a refugee and be provided with a UNHCR card, which allows them some form of protection from arrest and detention, as well as limited access to health services, education and other essential support services from UNHCR, its partner organisations or other agencies.

Durable Solutions

Once the child is in the CPCM Programme, the case manager must already plan the exit strategy for the child, especially if the child will be aging out soon. Development of longer-term solutions must be done in consultation with the child. Long-term goals to ensure permanency and stability for the child once they leave the Programme may include:

- Resettlement for refugees, if a third country decides to accept them
- Repatriation following family reunification when it is safe for a return to the country of origin or if the child's family members arrive in Malaysia
- Preparation to live independently when a child turns 18 and ages out of the Programme

Well-Being

The case manager ensures that the child's basic needs are adequately attended to following community placement. These may include food, clothing, shoes, sanitary and hygiene items, or bedding. The provision may be one-off or on a regular or monthly basis.

The CPCM Programme assists the foster family to care for the child so that they would not need to bear the extra financial burden of providing for the material needs of the child. The case manager would assess the capacity of the foster family in providing for the child and fill in the gaps to ensure that they are able to meet the expected minimum standards of care.

Food and Other Material Needs

The child is provided with food vouchers and dry items from the food bank as required. The case manager determines what the child needs to survive and have an adequate standard of living. This is usually done at the point of admission into the CPCM Programme. For older children, part of their care plan may include learning how to budget and manage their monthly expenses. The case manager will guide them in planning and prioritising their purchases based on needs rather than wants. For younger children, their food expenses are managed by their respective foster parents. Food support covers the children sufficiently, but they may choose to share food with their foster families, who in turn will do the same with the children.

Towards the end of 2022 and at the beginning of 2023, a few of the children in the CPCM Programme reported running out of food by the third week of the month. According to the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER) in an article written on 9 January 2023 in The Edge, food items had gone up as much as 20% at that time. This significant increase in food prices made it challenging for them to purchase adequate amounts of food within the allocated budget. Therefore, a budget reassessment was conducted to account for the drastic rise in food prices. A case manager was assigned to do the calculations based on typical food items purchased from the supermarket where they usually do their shopping. As a result of the exercise, the monthly food vouchers were increased from RM200 to RM240 per month for each child.

Apart from food, the case managers will also look into their clothing, bedding, and toiletries needed for personal hygiene. Items may be sourced from donors or purchased, if necessary due to urgency.



A case manager and a volunteer packing food for the minors during the monthly food bank packing.



Staple food and dry items neatly packed for a minor.

Well-Being

Shelter

The child must have a safe and suitable place to stay. The case manager will conduct a risk and safety assessment of the current house and the surrounding environment where the child is currently or would be potentially placed. If necessary, the case manager will work with the current caregivers or potential foster parents to ensure that adequate housing and living conditions are met before placing the child. If the housing area is unsafe, the case manager may recommend the child be moved to a more suitable place.

If necessary, SUKA Society will cover the child's portion of the rent to ease the financial burden of the current caregivers or potential foster parents in caring for the child. Rent per room is usually between RM200 and RM300 depending on the type of house, location and facilities provided. A cap of RM350 is placed for rent. Should the cost of the room rental exceed the amount, the child will be moved to more affordable housing. This is to avoid an unreasonable amount of rent being demanded from the children who were placed in the CPCM programme.

The CPCM Programme requires that each child be provided with their own room or in cases where there is a lack of space, they must be placed with another child of the same gender and age group for privacy and protection. Essentially, the case manager must consider what is needed for the child to live in a safe and stable environment. Priority is for the child to be placed within their own community to preserve their culture and establish a support network.

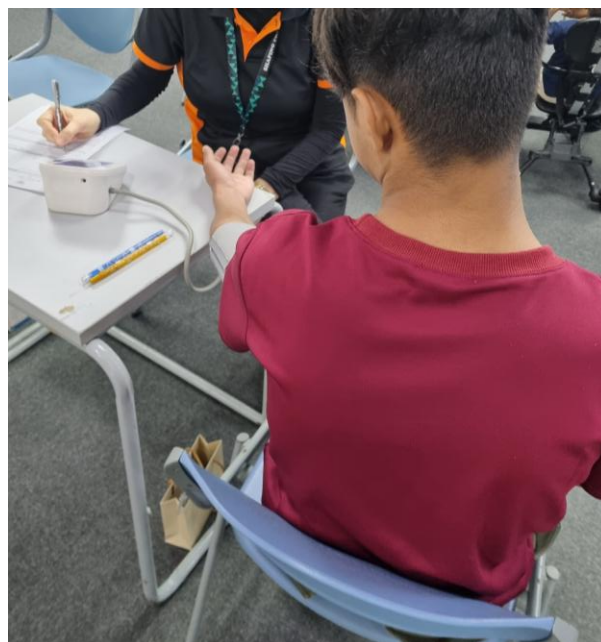
The case manager will monitor the placement by conducting consistent home visits. Children with more vulnerabilities and higher risks require frequent home visits and check-ins from the case manager. The case manager will typically conduct at least one home visit per month. If more regular monitoring is needed due to greater vulnerability, voice and video calls could also be made more frequently. The case managers will ensure that the older children have a working smart phone to allow them direct access to their respective case managers whenever they need assistance. Although the case managers are contactable anytime, the children are encouraged to approach their respective foster parents first to ask for help before going to the case managers. For younger children who may not yet be responsible enough to keep a smartphone on their own, the case managers are expected to conduct more frequent check-ins to ensure that the child has an avenue to express their needs and concerns without having to wait too long for the next check-in or home visit.

In 2023, there were two cases in which foster care arrangements were unsuccessful and the children had to be transferred to residential children's homes. Although SUKA Society's mandate is for children to be protected and cared for in a family environment, there are instances when there are shortages of suitable foster families, and the only viable option is for children to be placed in an institutionalised setting. In such cases, the case manager will try to ensure that the child remains institutionalised for the shortest period. Therefore, it is important that a more durable solution be found for the child, such as to advocate for resettlement or family reunification, if possible.

Well-Being

Physical Health

During the intake interview, the case manager will assess the health needs of the child. Once a child is accepted into the CPCM Programme, a comprehensive plan for intervention will be developed to address the health issues identified earlier. The health issues may have originated from the child's country of origin which requires follow-up treatment here. Whenever possible, the case manager will explain and obtain consent from the child before carrying out the treatment plan. Depending on the health issue, referrals are usually made to free NGO clinics, government hospitals and if necessary, to private clinics depending on the cost and whether or not the



child has proper documents. The case manager would need to decide what is needed for the child to be treated for the identified health condition, be free from illness, and maintain an acceptable health standard. SUKA Society would cover the child's medical expenses if necessary. In cases of serious illness which require expensive major surgery or medical procedures, there may be a need to raise funds to cover the medical expenses.

Mental Health

Based on mental health needs identified during intake, the case manager would make appropriate intervention plans to assist the child to achieve a stable mental and emotional condition. The case manager would explain what mental health services are available for the child to consent or assent to seeking treatment. Mental health issues may have originated from the country of origin and exacerbated once they arrive in the host country, especially when the children have experienced or witnessed sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) or have been a victim or witness of violence and torture. These traumatic experiences may trigger mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. Being away from home and separated from their family can further trigger feelings of loneliness, grief, loss, and helplessness. Children may report feeling stressed or angry at their situation. In some cases, it may lead to higher risks of self-harm and suicide.

The case manager needs to determine if the child requires further assessment or intervention to manage their mental health issues. Referrals can be made to mental health services offered by NGOs, government hospitals or private psychology or counselling centres. For children with serious mental health issues, such as those with self-harm and past suicide attempts, close monitoring must be made with greater involvement from the caregivers or foster parents.

Well-Being

Educational Needs

Education is a fundamental child's right which can have a profound impact on the lives of refugee children for their current well-being, ongoing development, and future prospects. Unfortunately, refugee children in Malaysia are not allowed to attend government schools. They are limited to informal education provided by community-based learning centres, often supported by UNHCR and NGOs.

Depending on the age and developmental level of the child, the case manager needs to ensure that they have adequate access to educational opportunities and other skills-based learning to prepare the child for independent living. The case manager must consider the school's accessibility based on location from the child's house and available transportation. This is an important factor when determining placement suitability, especially for children of school-going ages.

School attendance is a key requirement for children under the CPCM programme as this will increase knowledge and skill set, which in turn will open up more job opportunities for them in the future. Regardless of whether they will continue living in this country or have resettled to another country, having access to education will put them on a higher pedestal for education and work prospects. Schools can be safe havens for refugee children, shielding them from dangers like child labour and exploitation. Education provides a sense of normalcy for them to feel safe and secure by being connected to their peers and focusing on the here-and-now.

The case manager is to ensure that the child has all relevant school items including books and uniforms once they are enrolled in school. Where there are no educational opportunities readily available, the case manager may need to engage volunteers or set up an independent programme. One such effort undertaken by SUKA Society is to set up online classes focusing on English and Maths for those who are not able to attend school or as supplementary classes for those in school.



Well-Being

Social Needs

The child's care plan must also include the building of a strong support system and positive relationships especially within the child's own community. This is important because once the child leaves the CPCM Programme, it will be the community who continues to provide assistance and resources for the child to live independently. The foster parents would be the main source of support while housemates or other children in the programme can be additional support.

The case managers would try to organise various events and activities to encourage interaction and foster relationship building between children in the CPCM Programme. The more the child gains support from their own caregivers, foster family, and community, the less they are reliant on the case manager. This is an important aspect of empowering the child. Therefore, the case manager must constantly think about what is needed for the child to build a network of people as their source of support and how this can be achieved.

Leisure Needs

Finally, the case manager must also plan for the child's recreational needs. For unaccompanied and separated children, this need is often neglected as they do not have parents who will bring them out to parks or other fun activities. Spending time in nature can have a positive impact on children's mental and physical health. Access to parks, playgrounds, and green spaces can provide opportunities for exploration, relaxation, and connection with the environment.



Engaging in play and recreational activities can help children cope with stress, develop social skills, and build resilience. These activities can include sports, games, arts and crafts, and outdoor activities. Leisure activities can provide opportunities for social interaction and friendship building, helping them feel more connected to their peers and the community. This is especially important as being separated from their families often leads to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Background

- Female; 18 years old; from Kachin, Myanmar; Lisu ethnicity
- Fled to Malaysia alone in 2022 due to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) experience when she was doing a sewing course in a military school.
- Stayed in a female community member's house without documentation after she arrived in Malaysia.
- Was sexually assaulted by one of her male housemates a few months later when her female housemate went to work.

During SUKA intervention

- Referred Miriam's case to UNHCR and she managed to get her documentation.
- Worked together with Women Aid Organisation (WAO) on advising how minor wants to go about the SGBV experience. Minor eventually decided not to make a report to the police due to lack of evidence and she didn't want to revisit the incident again.
- Moved Miriam out from the community where the perpetrator was at large and placed her in another location with a caregiver who can take care of her needs.
- Provided Miriam with monthly food and rent support.
- Sent Miriam for counselling to process her trauma and support her emotionally.
- Supported Miriam in attending school for a few months and after that sent minor for a hair dressing course in her community (to build her skills for a future career).
- Expedited Miriam's resettlement process.

Before SUKA intervention

- Undocumented and worried about her safety in Malaysia.
- Couldn't work full time and was unable to provide for herself. Couldn't pay monthly rental fee and had no money to buy food.
- Couldn't lodge police report for the assault due to lack of documentation.
- Couldn't go to school and didn't have enough skills to work.
- Felt sad and anxious about her situation in Malaysia and did not have mental health support for the traumatic event she went through.

After SUKA intervention

- Miriam has mastered some skills in hair dressing and was able to look for a job.
- She is more emotionally stable and became more resilient despite her traumatic experience.
- She has learned basic language skills and is able to understand simple English and communicate with others.
- She was resettled to the USA in March 2024 and is residing with a Lisu family in the USA now.

*names have been changed for privacy

Background

- Female; 18 years old; from Myanmar; Rohingya ethnicity
- June was separated from her parents in Myanmar during a riot and was rescued by a Rohingya lady. She then came to Malaysia with this lady because the lady wanted to reunite with her brother in Malaysia.
- After June arrived in Malaysia in 2018, she stayed together with the family of the Rohingya lady's brother, whom she considered as her caregiver.

Before SUKA intervention

- June didn't understand or speak English. She also didn't know the importance and benefits of education.
- June was undocumented and at risk of arrest and detention.
- June's caregiver was struggling financially as the only breadwinner for his family and was unable to care for minor in the long term.
- June was at risk of child marriage, which she did not understand, due to the Rohingya culture and as her caregiver, whom she trusted and was dependent on, was struggling to support her financially.

During SUKA intervention

- June managed to obtain her UN card and was able to stay and travel safely in Malaysia after SUKA referred her case to UNHCR for registration.
- SUKA supported June to go to a community school to obtain a formal education. She started school at 13 years old from foundation class and quickly progressed to Grade 9 in just 4 years. At school, she worked hard to gain knowledge and acquired skills to improve herself. June also attended online classes provided by SUKA volunteers outside of her school time.
- June developed some crucial life skills through participating in SUKA's events such as the Aspiration Programme and Youth Advocacy Workshop.
- SUKA worked closely with June's caregiver to ensure he understands the importance of education and the risks of child marriage. Her caregiver cooperated and did his best to care for June and prioritise her safety. He became a model foster parent in the SUKA programme.

After SUKA intervention

- June continued her studies until Grade 9 in a community school and became the head prefect of the school. She can speak English fluently today and can communicate with others without an interpreter's help.
- June's caregiver was able to care more effectively for minor's needs with the rent and food support from SUKA as this helps lessen their financial burden.
- June's caregiver developed better parenting skills and provided proper care for June after attending SUKA's foster care training. He also shared his experience and encouraged other community members to foster unaccompanied children in Malaysia.
- June and the her caregiver's family successfully resettled to USA in 2024.

World Refugee Day and Aidiladha Celebration

Date: 1 July 2023

Time: 10 am - 3 pm

Venue: SUKA Society, Akar Umbi House

Theme: United We Play

It was a day of fun for the children in the CPCM programme to commemorate World Refugee Day and celebrate Aidiladha. Children from each ethnicity or nationality would introduce a traditional game from their country and play it with the other children. Lunch was also provided with food from various cultures. A total of 23 children participated in the event.



Minors from different nationalities participating in a traditional game from Myanmar.



A minor playing 'Guli' trying his best to hit one of the marbles out of the circle.



A minor made a Somali dessert called 'Halwa' to be shared with everyone.

IMU Health Screening

Date: 9 September 2023

Venue: International Medical University

IMU Cares hosted a health drive for our refugee minors in September. Our minors received basic health and dental screening from professional doctors and dentists, and participated in interactive booth activities run by IMU students to learn about oral hygiene and healthy food choices.



Volunteers from IMU Malaysia who helped with the basic health and dental screening for the refugee minors.



A refugee child receiving a health check up from a professional doctor.



Two IMU students helping refugee minors learn about healthy food choices.

Youth Advocacy Workshop

Workshop Dates and Venues:

The workshops were divided into two parts. The first part was a 2-days-1-night workshop held at Akar Umbi House, 8, Jalan 22/42, Seksyen 22, 46300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor from Saturday, 15 July to Sunday, 16 July 2023. The second part was a 3-days-2 nights workshop held in Tanah Suka, Lot 3358, Jalan Hulu Langat Batu 16, Dusun Tua, 43100 Hulu Langat, Selangor from Friday, 4 August to Sunday, 6 August 2023.

Aim and Focus:

While there are many agencies working to protect and advance the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia, it is useful for the refugee communities to learn how to advocate for their own rights and highlight their own struggles against discriminatory practices. This workshop aims to equip the participants with basic knowledge and skills to become an effective advocate for themselves and their own community.

It is important for these refugee youths to understand that they do not always need to wait on others to get the help and support to thrive in whatever situation that they find themselves in. The sessions are designed to help them feel empowered and build their confidence in making their own decisions. This way they can gain a better sense of control and agency over their lives. The key areas of focus include understanding their basic rights, developing effective communication, building relationships with key stakeholders, and building resilience in overcoming challenges.

Participants:

Except for one participant, the rest are unaccompanied and separated children in SUKA Society's Community Placement and Case Management (CPCM) Programme. As refugees in Malaysia, these children face difficulties in accessing essential services available to children of citizens and legal residents, such education, healthcare, and social assistance. The reason for this is that Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which are the key international legal frameworks for protecting refugees. The lack of legal recognition makes refugee children particularly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and detention, and even more so if they are here alone without their main caregivers. Therefore, all the participants have firsthand experience of the discrimination and challenges they face as refugees living without any legal protection in Malaysia.



Participants delving into the art of storytelling as they learn to share the stories of their lives.



Participants connecting with their rights as children through a hands-on learning experience.

Youth Advocacy Workshop

Workshop Activities

Part 1

Session 1: My Rights and Me

Participants were split into 3 teams with somewhat balanced demographic representation. Each team had to hunt for cards depicting the 54 articles of the UNCRC. Their aim was to collect as many of the same cards as possible. There are 4 cards with the same articles printed on them. Four cards with the same articles are worth 10 points, three cards 5 points, and a pair 1 point. At the start of the game, some groups were given more of the cards than others. The remaining cards were hidden in nooks and crannies, others had to be earned by winning at a game determined by the gamemaster at the game station, and some were given away freely by the facilitator to whomever they chose. The facilitator may choose to negotiate with the groups to barter for the cards they want. The facilitator also quietly stole some cards from some group to give them to other groups they favour.

The purpose of the activity was to simulate real-life situations of how different groups of people experience human rights. At the end of the activity, the facilitator led the participants to discuss various aspects of human right issues reflected in the game. For example, everyone is born with different rights given to them due to their gender, nationality, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc. Some rights had to be fought and earned. Some were given freely to those that happen to fit into a deserving criterion determined by the State. Rights can be lost if they are not guarded carefully.

Participants were able to relate to the many violations of human rights depicted in the simulation. One thing that they found fascinating was that as children, they have more rights than adults. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has only 30 articles as compared to the 54 articles of the UNCRC. The aim of this activity was for the participants to realise the different types of rights they are entitled to as children under the UNCRC.

Session 2: Rights & Reality Gap

In an ideal world, children should enjoy all the rights accorded to them by the UNCRC. In reality, various political, cultural, and economic factors may prevent them from enjoying these rights. In this session, the participants were asked to choose a few rights that they can enjoy in the current situation they are in and rights that they do not have due to their status in society. The aim of the session is to help them identify issues affecting them that they may want to advocate for.

Since most of the participants are aware of their lack of legal status as refugees in Malaysia, it was not a difficult task for them to identify the rights that they are deprived of. The most common includes Article 28 (rights to education) and Article 22 (refugee children). The rights that they identified as still having to a certain degree were such as Article 6 (life, survival, and development) and Article 24 (health and health services). There were also some articles that were only pertinent to some groups of participants such as Article 7 (birth registration, name, nationality, care) due to the statelessness of the Rohingya community.

The facilitator also pointed out the reason why they were placed in SUKA Society's community placement and case management programme is due to Article 20 (children unable to live with their family) and their case managers checking in on them regularly is due to Article 25 (review of treatment in care). And the reason for the session is to fulfil Article 42 (knowledge of rights).

Youth Advocacy Workshop

Session 3: Advocating for a Right (Group work) - Movie Screening

The participants were shown an advocacy film, *Saya Mau Skola*, which depicts the plight of stateless children in Sabah. Although these children should have been considered as Malaysians, their lack of legal documentation rendered them stateless and deprived of many basic rights crucial for their survival and development. Some participants were surprised to learn that there are Malaysian children going through the same struggles as them.

The aim of the session is to demonstrate how the use of media can be a power advocacy tool. During the group discussion, the facilitator explored how the participants were emotionally and mentally affected by the film. Most of them said that this is the first time they know of such a situation occurring in Malaysia. For some, it made them feel like they want to do something to help the children, if they can. There was a scene of children eagerly waiting for the garbage truck to arrive to scavenge for items they can sell for recycling.

The participants felt that although they were struggling as refugees in Malaysia, they never had to resort to collecting rubbish to survive and felt grateful for what they still have. They would avoid the smell of rubbish and avoid garbage trucks, not happily wait for them. During discussion, the participants also tried to identify how the film made an impact on them such as the use of imagery and the depiction of facial expressions that highlight the struggle of the children, their families, and even their teacher.

Sessions 4 & 5: Using Stories for Advocacy – Part 1 & 2

The participants were taught the art and principles of storytelling. Key principles of plot development were introduced to the participants from exposition, conflict, rising action, climax to falling action, resolution, and conclusion. Each section was discussed in detail with relevant examples taken from the participants' own life experience. Throughout the sessions, participants were asked to think and share how these principles of storytelling can be weaved into their advocacy stories. The participants were made to realise that their stories were significant because they represent not just themselves but their entire community and even humanity.

Therefore, it is not only their right that they are advocating for but the same principles of rights that should be awarded to every living person on earth. When they are sharing their stories, they are sharing what it means to be human, and this is something that everyone can relate to. The idea to find something in common with the audience that they also struggle with.

Session 6: Developing a Public Narrative (Group Work)

Although the initial plan was to make them work in groups, it became clear that each of the participants has unique issues that they would like to highlight based on their own personal experience. Therefore, they each came up with their own areas for advocacy. They were provided with worksheets to fill in based on the narrative structure covered in the previous sessions. The facilitators provided the participants with a lot of guidance on how to think of possible resolutions to their advocacy topics.

As part of advocacy, it is important not only to describe the problem, but also to demonstrate how the problem does not have to persist if action is taken. The end goal is to show how everyone, especially the audience, plays a part in perpetuating the problem through ignorance, lack of empathy, and inaction.

Youth Advocacy Workshop

Part 2

Session 1: Recap (Group work)

The participants played a game of Werewolf, which is a version of the social deduction game mafia. They were given a character of either werewolves (the powerful minority) or villagers (the helpless majority), with special characters with abilities to help the ordinary villagers identify the werewolves before they kill the entire village. From the interaction between the participants during the game, the facilitator helped them to reflect on what they remember about rights from the first part of the workshop. For example, everyone has the right to survival, including the werewolves. Additional points made were that when advocating for rights, it is important to understand from every point of view.

At the end of the day, it is about survival. Some people may deny the rights of others because they believe that it will threaten their own rights. Most of the fears are unfounded due to misinformation and limited experiences. Part of advocacy includes the attempt to provide accurate information by sharing actual personal experiences. The aim of the session is to consolidate the idea of rights and storytelling into a powerful advocacy tool. This sets the stage for following sessions in Part 2.

Session 2: Introduction to the Advocacy Tools

The remaining sessions were conducted by The Fourth Media, a group of experienced journalists and video creators who are dedicated to defending social justice through investigative journalism and impact media campaigns. In this session, they showed the participants the kind of work they do and how they bring about change in the society by creating content and using the appropriate platforms. Powerful examples include highlighting the impact of illegal logging on Orang Asli villages, UNHCR's move to cease the refugee status of Chin refugees, and the plight of stateless children in Malaysia.



Participants deciding on a cause to advocate for and exploring how to utilize social media to tell their stories with guidance from The Fourth Media.

Session 3: Choosing the Right Advocacy Tool (Group Work)

The session focuses on using social media such as TikTok as a platform for advocacy. This is a popular platform for the younger generation and has the potential to reach a wide range of audience. The participants were taught the technicalities of video creation, including how to develop content that can create a greater impact on the audience. It is important to know how to hook the audience to listen to their message amidst the plethora of videos on the platform. They explored the use of shooting angles, headspace, lighting, text overlays, and audio (including background music) to capture the attention and send the intended message to the viewers.

Youth Advocacy Workshop

Session 4: Developing your Advocacy Campaign (Group Work)

Participants were given step-by-step guidance on how to develop content for their videos. This was a hands-on session where they were to create an advocacy video on their topic of choice. They can choose to use the same topic that they worked on in Part 1 or an entirely new topic. Prior to attending the Part 2 workshop, the participants were already given the task of shooting short clips of their daily life that they may want to use in the video. The facilitators also explained that it is also possible to use free stock pictures, videos, and footages in their advocacy video. The participants' first assignment was to create a short video clip to introduce themselves.

After feedback was given, they proceeded to talk about their topic. They could choose to work as individuals, pairs, or groups. They then need to choose their own spot within the compound to shoot their videos. The facilitators went around providing immediate feedback and ideas on what they could include in the videos. Raw footage was taken, but there was not enough time for the participants to edit their videos during this session.

Session 5: Presentation

Various topics were presented such as the right to education, environmental concerns, discrimination of refugees, child marriage, and exploitation of working women. This session was spent on video editing instead of presentation. Participants worked throughout the night, fine-tuning their videos for the final presentation the next day. Considering that was the first time most of them were exposed to advocacy work through video production, it was a steep learning curve for them. Nevertheless, with proper guidance along the way, they were able to produce novice videos that accurately highlight their concerns. Although the content and video editing may not be the best, this is their first exposure to the idea of using social media not just for entertainment but as a platform to share their stories and voice their struggles as refugees living in this country.

Session 6: Assessing and Managing Risk in Advocacy

This session was used to present the final edits of the videos the participants have created. Feedback was given after each presentation. The main point was for them to develop confidence in making their thoughts and voices heard through the use of social media. The participants were not expected to post anything they are not comfortable with. Part 2 of the workshop was just an introduction to advocacy through social media. They would need more training and practice to be able to create something that meets the minimum standard for publication.

The intended focus of this session is to highlight potential dangers to themselves and their community that could be the outcome of their advocacy work. The facilitators talked about the risk of exposing yourself through social media. They shared examples of how some advocacy videos brought backlash that could make the situation worse instead of better. It is important that participants do not share personal information that could put themselves at risk of attacks and harassment. Participants were also warned of the potential effect of reading comments, especially the negative ones, on their mental well-being. Posting contents on social media invites trolls and haters, who will intentionally post rude and upsetting remarks to provoke a response. Knowing how to handle such remarks is important so as not to be overly affected by them. A simple way of avoiding this is to not read comments after they are posted.

Youth Advocacy Workshop

Overall, the workshops were a great learning experience for the participants as they explored the idea of advocating for themselves and their community. A few of these participants have a strong desire to improve their own lives and their community. During the workshops, some displayed leadership potential by volunteering to take charge of various responsibilities such as managing mealtimes and cleanliness of the workshop venues. They all came with a clear sense of purpose in their lives having direct experiences of violence, injustice, discrimination, fear, and various violations of their basic rights.

This advocacy workshop provided them with a sense of empowerment through having their voices heard and gave them a platform to share their stories and struggles with a larger audience. Some may listen, others may not. But it is important that they continue telling them, because all it takes is just one person to trigger change. This was one of key messages that was emphasised during the workshops.



Advocacy begins with knowing how to initiate a dialogue.



The facilitator laying the groundwork and tools for self-empowerment.



SUKA Online Classes

In 2023, we organised 113 online classes for minors in our programme, conducted by a dedicated group of volunteers. Subjects such as English, Mathematics, and Science are taught, with additional help being offered to the students. These classes are crucial, especially for minors who have never attended school, as they help bridge the educational gap and prepare them for formal schooling.



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“The English and Science classes are nice and easy to understand. The classes have helped me gain a better understanding of both subjects. I enjoy everything about the classes, and the teachers are good explainers, which make the online learning experience very effective.”

14-year-old Myanmar minor

“The math class is helping me to understand better. The teacher will teach me a new topic and when I learn it back in school, I feel refreshed, and can understand it better. I also passed my math exam, but I need to improve my marks more.”

15-year-old Myanmar minor

“The class was good! The student was very outspoken and shared areas of work that she struggles with in school so I can focus on those areas in the next lesson. She’s also very proactive and took lots of notes during the class and did a review at the end of the class!”

Volunteer Teacher for the English class

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Training Sessions for Stakeholders

Foster Care Training

This training is an engagement with the Rohingya community to identify and recruit potential foster families for SUKA Society's Community Placement and Case Management (CPCM) Programme. The goal of the training is to raise awareness about foster care arrangements for UASCs with the hope of identifying potential families who are willing and have the capacity to do so. This initial phase serves as a prerequisite before the implementation of a proper foster care programme among the Rohingya community in Malaysia. Potential foster families will be screened and identified for further training and assessment before they are engaged to foster the UASCs under SUKA Society's CPCM Programme.

From September to December 2023, 6 workshops were conducted with a total of 44 participants. All the participants were from the Rohingya community, except for two who were from other Myanmar ethnic groups. Of the 44, 6 were female, while the rest were male participants.

The training covered the following topics:

- Understanding the need for alternative care arrangements in the community in the form of foster care.
- Understanding the needs of UASCs, including vulnerabilities (abuse, exploitation, detention), safety issues, and the importance of child development (education, skills, cultural adaptation/integration).
- Understanding the roles that families can play in providing care for UASCs with proper support to build their capacity.

The training was based on 6 short videos depicting the life of a typical refugee family in Malaysia and their journey in providing foster care to an unaccompanied refugee minor. Each video highlights a specific process of fostering an unaccompanied child based on SUKA's Community Placement and Case Management Programme:

- Training Video 1 - Once Upon a Family: Hopes and Challenges
- Training Video 2 - Introduction to Foster Care: Roles and Responsibilities
- Training Video 3 - Welcome to the Family: Attachment and Assimilation
- Training Video 4 - Anticipating and Managing Changes: Disruption and Adaptation
- Training Video 5 - Working with the Case Manager: Support and Intervention
- Training Video 6 - Leaving Foster Care: Transition and Integration

Foster parents, who had previous experience or are currently providing foster care for UASCs, were invited to share their experience with the participants. At the end of the training, participants were expected to understand what motivates families to provide care for unaccompanied minors, the challenges they may face, and the role of the case manager in foster care. Even if they were not willing to be foster parents, at least they know what foster care is and may recommend other families who may be willing to do so.

Programme Expenses for 2023

Community Placement and Case Management Programme

No	Details	Total (MYR)
01.	Personnel Cost	342,363.00
02.	Rent, Medical and Education	147,104.00
03.	Food	123,953.00
04.	EPF	90,755.00
05.	School	32,159.00
06.	Interpreter	23,981.00
07.	Others	13,218.00
08.	RST	8,956.00
09.	Socso & EIS	5,825.00
10.	Travel	5,364.00
11.	Events	3,867.00
12.	Training	1,543.00
13.	Supplies	1,203.00
14.	Covid-19 Aid	245.00
Total Yearly Programme Cost		800,536.00

How Can You Help?

Our CPCM programme appreciates welfare support in both monetary form and goods such as food, clothing, bedding and school supplies. Looking out for those who are marginalised and taking steps to learn more about the refugee communities, either by volunteering for our CPCM events or simply having a conversation with them, also go a long way.

Acknowledgements

SUKA Society would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our esteemed sponsors, partners, and service providers for their unwavering support and invaluable contributions. Your dedication plays a crucial role in helping us to meet the needs of the minors, and we deeply appreciate your commitment to making a meaningful difference in their lives.

Contact Details

For more information regarding the CPCM programme, get in touch with us at enquiry@sukasociety.org.

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