

Programme to help the young

'On the Pitch, Off the Streets' to keep them away from crime

By **ROBERT KENNARD**
metro@thestar.com.my

CHILDREN and youth most in danger of failing at school or getting into crime have a new lease on life through a programme that integrates education with sport.

The Educational, Welfare and Research Foundation (EWRF) has launched a new campaign "On the Pitch, off the Streets" in an attempt to prevent young students across Malaysia from getting involved in street crime and juvenile delinquency.

The campaign will actively seek out students who are struggling academically or involved in crime, to participate in a mentoring and educational programme that revolves around a team sport.

EWRF has an aggressive social justice campaign, with strategies already implemented to reduce underachieving students to 30% by 2015 and to promote alternative education by

50% for school drop-outs. Beginning with football, the campaign teaches students through outdoor activities and character building.

EWRF has 20 branches across Malaysia communicating with local schools, parents and councillors regarding problematic students.

EWRF president Datuk A. Yogesvaran described the campaign as a "multi-channelled" approach to education, using football as the first sport to engage youths from low socio-economic backgrounds.

"The viral effect of crime unfortunately hits children from poor communities much harder," Yogesvaran said.

"From our learning experiences, we realise the great potential that sports can play in keeping children away from crime."

"On The Pitch, Off The Streets" is part of the Civil Service Intervention (CSI) initiative of EWRF and was established in 2006.

Through sustained teaching of



Team on a mission:
(From left)
Rajasegaram Raj,
Krishnan, M.S.
Subramaniam,
Yogesvaran, S.K. Samy,
Nadarajah and Joshua
Edgar at the press
conference.

English and Bahasa Malaysia, the initiative has taught 15,000 children literacy and goal-setting every year, offering life-long virtues usually ignored by the poorest students.

Many of the students who have been taught and mentored by CSI come from backgrounds rife with serious crime and poverty, EWRF general secretary K. Nadarajah said.

"Some of the boys in the programme could steal a motorbike for you in 10 minutes for RM100 but could not read at all.

"Some of the girls were also res-

cued from prostitution at the age of 14 or 15."

Nadarajah said no student would come to the education and mentoring classes if it were not for the football "prize".

"If they learn with us, they have the incentive of getting the jersey, the boots and socks."

Football has been used internationally as a team-building and educational sport, breaking down social, cultural and political barriers in the name of sportsmanship.

Last Saturday, CSI held its first

football tournament, aimed at celebrating the achievement of these students and build self-confidence.

Although only 4% of Malaysians live in poverty, EWRF believes this income group is most susceptible to juvenile crime and illiteracy.

By tackling the problem through football, each youth that is prevented from engaging in street crime saves RM1.7mil to RM2mil through incurred prison, judicial and rehabilitation costs.

To contact EWRF, visit ewrf.org.my or call 1-800-883-973.