

Journey to village a 'survival course'

NATION

Monday, 16 Mar 2020

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Safely delivered: (From right, back row) Wolf and Imm taking a group picture with the children and their new laptops in Kampung Giring in Ranau, Sabah.

KOTA KINABALU: Volunteers from a peninsula-based NGO not only had a first-hand look at how poor villagers in the interior of Sabah lived through their harsh realities, they also battled a "survival course".

A six-member team from Soroptimist International Ampang and Pertubuhan Komuniti Elite had several close shaves as they took boat rides in the dark and one boat overturned by the dangerously strong currents.

If that was not enough, they were also forced to move on foot over tough terrain to get across certain

Their noble mission? To donate laptops to children in remote Kampung Giring located in Ranau district.

Soroptimist immediate past president Sandra Mannas Wolf said the team, which included Alice Imm from Pertubuhan Komuniti Elite, friend Franky Low and Pastor Anthony Wong, started the initial part of their recent mission by road.

“We were told the roads there were challenging, so we got our gear and four-wheel-drive vehicles ready,” she said.

“What ensued was not just a rough ride, but life threatening situations.”

Halfway into their journey, Wolf said the team had to abandon their vehicles and continue in small wooden boats.

“It got so dark and all we had were tiny flashlights to see our way through. Luckily, the boatmen were skilful and knew what they were doing,” she said.

The scary part, she recalled, were the “crazy currents”.

“Our boats quickly filled with water, and we had to keep using buckets and whatever available to scoop the water out,” she said.

“As we were grappling with that, we were frightened by shouts from our boatmen instructing us to jump out immediately as the boat Alice was in had capsized.

“And ours was on the verge of overturning!”

Wolf said Imm fell headfirst into the river but was saved just in time by her boatman, who managed to move her to the riverbank.

“Low held my hand the whole way and I managed to survive the ordeal,” she said, adding that the boatmen took them in the other boats to safety.

Wolf said the team were worried about the laptops, which they had left on the boats.

But thanks again to the dependable boatmen, they got them back safely.

“They went back to where our bags, laptops and other items were floating and managed to retrieve them.

“They could have just said ‘no’ and left our belongings to sink but they went out of their way to help us.

“We got back almost everything,” she said.

Wolf said the rest of their journey into the village was wading in and out of the river and trekking on land.



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When they finally arrived at their destination, she said the villagers gave them the warmest of welcomes and helped dry the wet items.

“They gave also gave us dry clothes to wear,” she said.

The group spent the next two days at the village enjoying fun-filled activities with the children and villagers, including cooking and eating together, as well as swimming in the nearby river.

“Our journey was challenging but the grin on the children’s faces when they received their laptops as well as the time spent together was all worth the sacrifice we made,” Wolf added.

She said the team wanted their experience to be an eye-opener and to create more awareness about people who lived in remote parts of the country.

“We hope the authorities and society will be kind-hearted. Those who live in the interiors need our help and care,” she added.

Soroptimist International works together with other NGOs and various United Nations agencies to educate enable and empower women to promote human rights for all, equality, development and peace.

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