

400 join first autism fun run

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Julita (centre) presents the prize to one of the winners as Jais (left), Fairrul (right) and Natalie look on.

KOTA KINABALU: An Autism Fun Run 2026 held for the first time on Sunday at Universiti Malaysia Sabah Stadium drew more than 400 participants, reflecting strong public support for autism awareness.

The programme recorded participation from 83 persons with disabilities, 100 companions and 60 volunteers, including 37 walk-in registrations, highlighting active involvement from families, the community and support groups.

It was jointly organised by Sabah Social Welfare Department (JPKA), Sabah Autism Centre (Paus) and the Board of Visitors of Taman Didikan Kanak-Kanak Kurang Upaya (TDKKU) Sembulan, with cooperation from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences of Universiti Malaysia Sabah, in conjunction with World Autism Awareness Month in April.

Present were JPKA Sabah Director Jais Asri, Faculty Dean Associate Prof Dr Fairrul Masnah @ Kadir, TDKKU Sembulan Supervisor Mary Sipaji and Board Chairman Natalie Gaban.

State Women, Health and People's Wellbeing Minister Datuk Julita Majungki, who flagged off the run, said the programme also aimed to raise funds to equip a sensory room at Paus, expected to benefit about 65 children under its care.

She said such initiatives not only encourage meaningful community participation but also support fundraising efforts to provide facilities that enhance the development and wellbeing of children with autism.

The sensory room is designed as a therapeutic space to stimulate or calm senses such as sight, touch and hearing, helping children improve focus and regulate emotions.

Among equipment to be installed are bubble tubes, textured wall panels, fibre optic lighting systems and sensory integration tools such as swings and soft play equipment.

Besides the run, the programme featured health screenings, awareness talks and interactive sensory-based activities with participation from faculty representatives.

Julita said such programmes play an important role in improving public understanding of autism, especially among families with limited access to information and support services, particularly in rural areas.

Based on JPKA statistics, there are about 7,057 children with autism in Sabah, but only 18 special education centres and related facilities are currently available.

She said there is a need to expand autism centres and specialised facilities in the State to support children requiring early intervention and continuous care.

She emphasised that with the increasing number of identified cases, access to facilities and support services must be strengthened to ensure children receive the necessary care, education and developmental support.

Julita stressed that efforts to support children with autism must continue to be reinforced through close collaboration and community participation to ensure no child is left behind in accessing appropriate care and support.