



Masidi speaking at the launching of the convention.

UMS students trained to help their peers

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KOTA KINABALU: Students who have taken part in the national "Pembimbing Rakan Siswa (PRS)" convention are the bridge between their peers and professional counselors at schools.

This is because students with problems are more comfortable opening up to their peers instead of teachers and other professionals, University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Deputy Vice Chancellor Student Affairs and Alumni Datuk Dr Kasim Md Mansur said.

"We have 17,000 students in UMS and there are 1,001 different types of problems affecting these students from having no money to being homesick, heartbroken, depressed and failing the mid-term examination.

"These are the pressures they face and some are too embarrassed to talk to the counselors about their problems," he told reporters after the launching of the PRS convention by State Education Exco Datuk Masidi Majun who was representing Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman.

Dr Kasim disclosed that those who were too ashamed to speak to their lecturers or counselors tended to open up to their peers and this was where those who had undergone the convention would be able to assist.

The convention provided opportunity for undergraduates who wanted to assist their peers to overcome their problems, he said, adding that currently there were about 100 students in UMS who had taken on the full-time PRS role.

"Sometimes students who have participated in PRS will report some of the cases they have come across to the four professional

UMS counselors who in turn will call the students with problems to talk to them," he said.

On the convention itself, Dr Kasim disclosed that more than 1,000 students from public and private higher learning institutes all over the country as well as secondary school students from the state's west coast are taking part in the event.

Meanwhile, Masidi who was also present at the press conference stressed the importance of the convention as it could guide the younger generation towards the best way to overcome their problems.

According to the Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister, sometimes, modern technology could turn an individual into an introvert because they relied too much on the Internet for information.

"To me this is not good because when they do not interact with other people, the possibility of them having a one track mind is higher. The individual does not have the opportunity to hear the opinions and ideas of their peers.

"You see when we evaluate an individual who will have an important role in the country, we want that person to be open, always ready to learn from others as well as ready to accept differences of opinion and respect another person's opinion.

"The worse thing that could happen is when you have a leader that thinks he or she decides everything without consulting other people. That can only happen if he or she is a loner so we want to avoid this," he stressed.

Masidi also said that having more matured peers to dole out advice could also overcome social

ills, including abortion and baby dumping.

He was of the opinion that the problems of abortion and baby dumping arose because these people did not have the support and guidance of a more matured peer.

"They keep their problems to themselves, so our hope is that this convention can let them know that you always have a friend to listen to you.

"This convention also aims to educate and teach students about leadership. The end result is that small problems can be resolved," he said.

On the issue of baby dumping, Dr Kasim said there were no such cases involving UMS students as those who were expecting would be given counseling and advice.

He also stressed that no UMS students were involved in prostitution as claimed by irresponsible quarters sometime back.

"We have conducted out investigation with the police and found that the allegation is baseless as well as untrue," he said.