



MINISTER of Welfare, Family, and Community Wellbeing Datuk Fatimah Abdullah and Assistant Minister for Early Childhood Education and Family Development Hajah Sharifah Hasidah Syeed Aman Ghazali together with the 'Toybox Malaysia Project' principal investigators and research team. Photo: Doreen Ling

Lundu, Bau kindergartens to partake in 'Toybox Malaysia Project' study

BY DOREEN LING

KUCHING: KEMAS kindergartens in Lundu and Bau will be taking part in a study under the 'Toybox Malaysia Project' as part of an initiative to prevent obesity in early childhood.

Originally introduced in Europe, it will be a collaborative effort by the University of Roehampton, Durham University, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas), and National University of Malaysia (UKM) and will be targeting teachers, children, and parents with a research grant provided by the Newton-Ungku Omar Fund and funded by the Medical Research Council and Akademi Sains Malaysia.

The project also aims to alter the target behaviours in drinking, snacking, physical activities, and sedentary behaviour by encouraging children to practise a healthier lifestyle with the help of their parents and teachers.

This was revealed when the project's principal investigators and research team paid a courtesy call

to Minister of Welfare, Family, and Community Wellbeing Datuk Fatimah Abdullah to brief her on the subject matter.

"We in the state government welcome this study and whatever steps that are effective and help decrease the obesity rate.

"Starting with a feasibility study in Lundu and Bau, if it is effective then we can extend it to other kindergartens in the state and not just those under KEMAS.

"The conceptual framework is simple as it's about food and activities as well as the engagement of children, teachers, parents, and the community in general.

"If we want to do change, it is best to do so when the children are still young," said Fatimah during a press conference at her office at Baitulmakmur here yesterday.

According to the project's Malaysian Project Leader, Dr Poh Bee Koon who is a Professor of Nutrition from UKM, it has already started in the beginning of the year through planning and assessment of needs first.

"This is so that we can know the requirements of each kindergarten and the community around them, which can enable us to make the necessary translations and adaptations of the project materials to fit them.

"This is because the study was originally done in Europe and presented in English as the main language," said Poh.

Poh added that after the pre-intervention assessment, she hoped that by mid-year they will be able to go to these kindergartens to do on-the-ground evaluation and see the situation of the children there along with their health.

"The implementation process will be done in six months and once the period is over, we will evaluate again to see if it is effective or not.

"We just hope that these children will carry these habits into adulthood," said Poh.

Also present during the press conference was Assistant Minister for Early Childhood Education and Family Development Puan Hajah Sharifah Hasidah Syeed Aman Ghazali.