

Fund for HIV families

IMAGINE this: Self-administering an HIV test could be as convenient and accessible as a pregnancy test.

Dr Balaji Sadasivan, the Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and Information, Communications and the Arts, has hopes now that an oral self-test kit able to give results in 20 minutes is available.

"Today, you can buy pregnancy test kits at 7-Eleven. I hope the Ministry of Health will study this HIV testing and make it available more readily for the public," he said at the launch of the first fund that helps needy families affected by the human immunodeficiency virus.

The Care for the Families Fund – initiated by Rockeby

biomed, the distributor of OraQuick Oral HIV test kits and run by Action for Aids Singapore – was launched in conjunction with World Aids Day on Saturday. Rockeby contributed \$5,000 and has pledged 50 cents from the sale of every kit over the next three years.

Dr Balaji stressed the value of testing: "We have to find a way to save lives by having people diagnosed early (so) they can go on medication to prevent complications."

As of end-June, there were 3,224 HIV patients here, and most women are infected by their husbands. Affected families spend more than half of their income on HIV treatment for husband and wife. — CHANNEL NEWSASIA



CLOSE BRUSH WITH HEALTH: Ms Eunice Olsen and Mr Balaji (second from right) showing support for the fund by using an oral HIV self-test kit.

The third in a seven-part series on Pro-Family Businesses

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Where families get close to nature



WHEN the Jurong BirdPark was conceived in 1968, then-Minister of Finance Dr Goh Keng Swee envisioned it to be a place where families could relax together and get close to nature.

Today, the park attracts close to 900,000 visitors a year; and families make up an approximate 70 per cent of its annual visitorship.

"We aim to make our premises pro-family in all ways possible, right from the moment visitors enter our grounds to the time they leave," said its sales and corporate affairs manager, Nicholas Cordeiro.

The BirdPark has a highly-popular Feather Friends Membership programme for families, which receives more than 100 new sign-ups each month. Members enjoy unlimited entry into the park, as well as discounts at participating food and retail outlets.

For once-off visitors, both children and senior citizens enjoy concessions for admission. For instance, seniors enjoy a 50 per cent discount off the usual \$18 entrance fee and children below three years old enter the park for free.

To ensure safety, much thought has also gone into the design of the park, such as wide and level walkways, and non-slip finishings.

For easy access around the park, air-conditioned panorail trains circle the park's four free flight aviaries so that visitors, especially the elderly and parents with young children, can get around effortlessly.

The panorails are also designed to ensure that cabin doors are wide enough to accommodate prams while the last cabin is wide enough to fit an open wheelchair. All

panorail stations are also equipped with lifts.

Mr Cordeiro added: "We provide rental of baby strollers and pull wagons for parents. Wheelchairs are also provided free-of-charge and staff are reminded to offer visitors these amenities once they see the need to, rather than wait for visitors to make enquiries."

Mrs Vanbanna Agrawal, 36, a tourist from India who was at the park with her 10-year-old son and one-year-old daughter, was glad for these little conveniences.

She said: "Everything is so accessible. Being able to rent a stroller for my baby makes it easier, since it's no easy task touring the park with two kids in tow."

Mrs Agrawal, who caught a show at the amphitheatre, added: "This whole place is very entertaining. My children and I are having a good time."

Despite having four free-flight aviaries, three themed exhibits and daily shows, Mr Cordeiro acknowledged that "it takes more to keep restless young children amused".

Hence, the Splash N Slide Station – a wet and dry playground – was developed. "When the idea of a playground came up, some staff suggested adding the water element to make it more fun. That led us to think about the need for changing rooms nearby as well."

The station is strategically located next to the park's picnic area, a popular venue for family events organised by corporate organisations and statutory boards.

"Over the next five years, our development plans include a rainforest-themed Junior Jungle for kids, as well as paddle-boat rides for the family. We're always thinking of new ways to attract families to keep coming," said Mr Cordeiro.

– Cathleen Tung

The Pro-Family Business (PFB) Mark, supported by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, signifies businesses' commitment to welcome families as customers.

It underscores the potential business value that can be derived from targeting families as customers.

For more information on the PFB Mark, contact the PFB Secretariat at 6375 0933 or log on to www.mbp.org.sg.

Kleptomaniac escapes jail term

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RECOGNISING the need for the courts to adopt a "broadly consistent" approach to offenders afflicted with kleptomania, appeal judge V K Rajah yesterday laid down sentencing guidelines for similar cases in the future.

A probation sentence is appropriate under two conditions: The offender has been "rigorously diagnosed" by independent psychiatrists to suffer from a compulsive urge to steal; and he shows "a firm commitment" to his treatment programme.

In this instance, rehabilitation, not deterrence, should be the thrust of sentencing, said the judge as he ordered 18 months' probation for a 26-year-old kleptomaniac.

Justice Rajah ruled that Goh Lee Yin met both conditions.

In the appeal heard yesterday, the prosecution had sought to increase the one-day jail sentence Goh had earlier received under Community Court judge Bala Reddy. Goh had stolen two handbags – a Coach and a Louis Vuitton – worth a total of about

\$2,300 last November. She was also fined \$8,000.

On the earlier sentencing, the computer-engineering graduate – who had been shoplifting since she was nine – was midway through a 24-month probation for previous theft offences.

Explaining his judgment, Justice Rajah said Goh's repeat offence "can probably be attributed to an unfortunate relapse" as she was facing work problems at the time.

He said he saw no evidence suggesting she "has been remiss in adhering to her various treatment regimes". Psychiatrists had reported "significant progress and improvement".

The judge also acknowledged her psychiatrist's concerns that Goh's detailed treatment plan could be "irreversibly derailed" should she be put behind bars.

Her employers had also written to the judge commending her "performance" and "attitude".

Goh, subdued in the courtroom, showed her relief after she exited. She broke into a smile, hugged her boyfriend, and thanked the 10 family members and friends with her.



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PRO-FAMILY INITIATIVES AT JURONG BIRDPARK

- Discounted admission fees for children and senior citizens. Children aged three and below enjoy free admission.
- Air-conditioned panorail, with doors wide enough to fit wheelchairs and prams, for greater convenience.
- Prams and pull wagons are available for rent, while wheelchairs are available for free.
- A wet-and-dry playground was developed to keep children entertained.