SAVIOUR OF ANIMALS:Public relations students of HELP raise awareness of the importance of treating animals with care and compassion

A BLACK cat with scald scars and patches of bald skin snarled at anyone coming close to it. It looked angry and miserable. And, with good reason, too.

The poor creature which was scavenging for food near hawker stalls in Jalan Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, was splashed with boiling water by an cruel hawker.

Hitam, as Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) caregivers now call him, was rescued when an elderly lady tipped off the organisation.

"The lady who wishes to remain anonymous feeds stray cats regularly. She was appalled to see Hitam being abused by the hawker and helped to rescue him," said Pyo Ng, media and humane education officer of SPCA Selangor.

Hitam was one of the two cats brought by SPCA Selangor to the recent AniHELP event held at HELP University College in Damansara.

"AniHELP is the initiative of the public relations students of HELP Matriculation Centre and is organised with the cooperation of Pet Positive and SPCA Selangor. It is an anti-cruelty animal awareness campaign that is aimed at creating an appreciation of animals among HELP students, staff and the general public," said Dhanesh Balakrishnan, HELP University College's dean of the Faculty of University Foundation Studies.

"Our objective is basically to make people realise the importance of treating animals with care and compassion.

"Many people take home cute cats or dogs that they take a liking for. But, after taking them home, many seem to forget their responsibilities towards their pets.

"Remember, always treat animals with respect and compassion in the same manner in which you would want to be treated," he said.

Apart from educating the public on the importance of taking care of animals and about what could be done when they found animals being abused, AniHELP organisers hoped to encourage the adoption of homeless pets at SPCA.

"We get tip-offs and comments on our Facebook page about animal abuse. Many do not give the correct address or information and this hampers our efforts in helping animals in distress," Ng pointed out.

"Complainants can call up our shelter and if the abuse seems severe, we will go and check the case. It will be helpful if there are photos, videos or any recording to show us the severity of the abuse," she explained.

SPCA and the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) would take a look at the case before making a police report. The complainants who are the witnesses should make a police report if necessary, together with SPCA and DVS, she said.

"DVS and the police have the authority to go into someone's home to investigate the case. SPCA has no power to prosecute or barge into someone's home," she said.

Ng said only two cats were brought to the HELP event because the organisation was short of manpower that day.

"We have about 400 to 500 dogs and cats waiting to be adopted.

"These animals were abandoned or surrendered to us as their owners didn't want them or couldn't afford to look after them anymore. Puppies and kittens are often left on our doorstep.

"The population of stray animals out there is too huge and we hope the owners will be responsible and get their pets spayed and neutered," she added.

Adoption fees include charges for spaying, neutering and vaccination. A cat costs between RM50 and RM100 or a little more for pure breeds like a Persian cat while dogs can cost between RM100-RM200 or about RM500 for good breeds like golden retrievers, dalmations, German shepherds and others.

Christine Ng, a first-year psychology student was spotted cuddling a beautiful grey and white cat which she adopted from SPCA.

"I decided that since I was going to get a cat, there was no point buying one from a pet shop when there are so many cats at SPCA which are cute, adorable and longing for a good home.

"Since more kittens get adopted, I chose an older cat. This tabby cat is six months old. I don't know how this cute cat with silky fur got abandoned.

"If you cannot commit long term to having a pet, you shouldn't get one. They have feelings too. They multiply and remain on the streets. It's very cruel.

"I feel very happy that there is one less homeless cat living miserably on the streets. I plan to get her toys and good food," she said.

HELP students were also spotted playing and making friends with dogs for adoption at the event, which were brought by Malaysia Independent Animal Rescue (MIAR).

Some even brought their own dogs to mingle with and play with the other pets.

Pusparani Thanabalasingam, founder of MIAR, said she and her team usually went to the municipal council's dog pounds in various places in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur each week to rescue animals before they are put to sleep.

She said while MIAR rented homes and set up shelters to house the dogs until they were adopted by good Samaritans, the cats rescued from being euthanised were handed over to 'Kaki Motong' another organisation which rescues cats and tries to find decent homes for them.

Also present to launch the event and give talks regarding animal rights issues was Anthony Thanasayan, president of Petpositive.

Those who wish to lend a hand to these organisations can check out both websites on Facebook to learn more about what you can do to help them out.

In case you are wondering, AniHELP stands for Animals and HELP University College.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.