

Please help Jonah get an education

By **Letter to the Editor** - December 30, 2020 7:16 AM



I would like to share a short story about six-year-old **Jonah Michio Tan**, who is fighting for the right to an education.

Although I am twice his age, I feel something has to be done to help him obtain a good education.

Born with a rare form of skeletal dysplasia, Jonah of Damansara Perdana is always full of life! He is always smiling, happy, thoughtful and well-mannered, besides being a great brother to 4-year-old Jamian.

Nevertheless, Jonah's life journey is not as smooth-sailing as one would like to think. It is full of challenges. His physical condition, however, does not stop him from pursuing his two passions in life: baking and dancing!

He has been taught by his mother that cooking and baking can help to develop a sense of responsibility and help release stress. His ability to move to the beat of music is simply admirable.

Unfortunately, Jonah is lagging behind in his studies. As he turns seven next year, his parents are still unable to find him a suitable school that provides intensive care for Jonah.

According to his mother, they have been in touch with a government school which offers the Integrated Special Education Programme (PPKI) classes tailored to children who are differently-abled.

However, she has come to the conclusion that Jonah isn't fit to join their classes as they do not differentiate between physical and mental disabilities.

The children in the classes are hyperactive and some have autism; they may not know how to interact with Jonah. A simple fall may cause his bones to get fractured easily.

Jonah's mother has gone to the State Education Department to seek help, but it has been a disappointment.

While she can understand that caretakers of the school are not allowed to step out of the class, this would also mean that Jonah will not be able to get any assistance during toilet breaks.

After learning about his dilemma, I feel I have to do something to make a difference in Jonah's life. Yes, I may be only 13 years old, but I think my opinion as a young person matters.

I am sure that all Malaysians will feel that it is unfair for Jonah to be deprived of a good education just because of his physical condition.

We must put our efforts together to produce another Nick Vujicic. Nick was born with physical disabilities, but he is able to do so many things in life.

I believe we should all work together to bring about positive changes to Jonah's life as well as the other children who suffer from the same condition as Jonah.

Finally, I appeal to the Ministry of Education to give some attention to Jonah's case.

Anyone who would like to offer help or suggestions can contact Jonah's mother at miyumi.yanagi@gmail.com.

Jocelyn Yong is an FMT reader.

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