

Morgan Parker's Wheel2Wheel gives aid to WAO

PETALING JAYA: The Women's Aid Organisation received RM29,608 for its legal aid fund recently.

The amount was raised by Wheel2Wheel, a non-profit organisation established by former investment banker Morgan Parker who rode his motorcycle across 10 countries to raise funds for 10 charitable causes.

WAO executive director Ivy Josiah said the fund was mainly intended to help women who could not afford to pay the administration fees in divorce and custody proceedings.

"Lawyers who take up cases referred by WAO often do it free of charge. We wanted to raise funds to pay for the administration fees involved in the filing of such cases in court," she said, adding that she was grateful to Wheel2Wheel for its support.

Ivy said the fund would also help women who were dismissed from work or denied employment because of their gender or because they were pregnant, and women whose children had been converted against their will and those who had been accused of battering their husbands.

"Abusive husbands tend to use children as leverage and to blackmail their spouses who are seeking divorce. They even go to the point of abduction to keep the children away from their mothers."

"In some cases, we have seen abusive men go to court to seek divorce and accelerate custody hearings.

"They then declare the mother unfit

to deny her access to the children," said Josiah.

She said there had been many cases where women with children were so traumatised when facing their husbands during the custody or divorce negotiations that they dropped the pursuit of divorce altogether. Sometimes, she added, they even returned to their abusive husbands.

Parker, who was in Kuala Lumpur earlier this year, said: "I had to be away from my eight-year-old daughter Aria. But I have gained tremendous insights with this expedition. It hasn't been a joyride," he said, reflecting on his 25,000km journey through Hong Kong, China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Malaysia.

At the time, Parker still had to ride through Indonesia and Timor-Leste to get back to his hometown of Brisbane in Australia.

"Realising that a ride of thousands of kilometres can lead to a school being built for underprivileged children and helping abused women has made me strong enough to carry on even though I have fallen off my bike many times," he said, adding that WAO was picked because a Wheel2Wheel member had lost a relative because of domestic violence.

Parker produced a television series to document his journey and raise awareness of Wheel2Wheel's charitable partners.

A typical example of the organi-



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sation's funding mechanism was Own-a-Km campaign on the Wheel2Wheel website. Own-a-Km allowed friends, supporters and the public to sponsor the journey at the rate of RM39.86/km.

Wheel2Wheel is funding the building of a school in northern Laos with

Child's Dream, construction of a Moon Bear Education Centre in Vietnam with Animals Asia, and supporting Gecko to develop an online, environmental education platform targeted at Chinese students.

Those wishing to help WAO can call 03-7957 5636. — *By Veena Babulal*