

# SUPPORTING VISUALLY IMPAIRED RUNNERS

AHEAD of the Aspen-Klipa Penang Bridge International Marathon (PBIM) taking place this Sunday, Aspen hosted a pre-marathon training session for 18 visually impaired persons (VIPs) from St. Nicholas' Home in Penang on Dec 7.

The session, held at Central Park in Aspen Vision City, featured a team of guide runners from The Ramakrishna Ashrama children's orphanage.

Beyond assisting the VIPs, the guide runners are part of Aspen's broader corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative to provide youth from underprivileged communities with positive exposure, discipline-building experiences and opportunities to grow through sports, volunteerism and community engagement.

Now in its second year, this initiative reinforces Aspen's ongoing commitment to CSR by championing inclusivity, empowering the visually impaired community and fostering youth development through meaningful engagement.

The training session enables VIP runners to participate confidently in the marathon while providing the youth from The Ramakrishna Ashrama with valuable life skills such as responsibility, leadership, empathy and teamwork.

This year, the participants demonstrated remarkable progress with several VIP runners advancing from 10km to 21km, and from half-marathon to full-marathon distances, a testament to their determination and the supportive, structured ecosystem surrounding them.

As one of the main sponsors of the Aspen-Klipa PBIM, Aspen remains steadfast in creating opportunities for VIP runners to pursue personal growth and athletic achievement.

The dedication of the guide runners alongside committed volunteers continues to strengthen the spirit of teamwork and trust essential for the VIPs' performance.

Aspen group managing director A. Anilarasu highlighted the initiative as a demonstration of the impact of inclusivity.

"Seeing our visually impaired runners take on greater distances, and the youth grow in confidence and leadership, demon-



Aspen hosted a pre-marathon training session for 18 visually impaired persons (VIPs) from St. Nicholas' Home, featuring a team of guide runners from The Ramakrishna Ashrama children's orphanage, at Aspen Vision City on Dec 7.



A visually impaired person and guide runner going through the paces during the pre-marathon training session.



With both holding on to towels or elastic bands, the guide runners accompany the VIPs around the running routes, helping keep them on course.

strates the impact of inclusive CSR," he said.

"Our vision is to create initiatives that go beyond financial support – ones that empower, inspire and create meaningful experiences.

"Whether it's through sports, education or youth development, initiatives like this unlock potential, inspire communities and foster the next generation. Aspen is proud to support these individuals and continue creating opportunities that fuel courage and empowerment."

He added that the initiative is also an example of how public-private partnerships can benefit the community as a whole.

"Together, this collaboration drives significant economic activ-

ity by attracting more people to Aspen Vision City, boosting local businesses and tourism, while also fostering community engagement.

"It's a clear example of how public-private efforts can deliver both social and economic benefits."

## A guiding hand

The weekly training sessions, organised by Howe at Gurney Bay, have strengthened the confidence and teamwork of both the VIPs and their guide runners, preparing them for the upcoming marathon.

The guided training session, held amidst the serene greenery of Central Park, reflects Aspen's vision of cultivating active,

balanced and healthy lifestyles within a community-centric recreational space.

Penang Tourism committee chairman Wong Hon Wai commended the initiative, stating that PBIM embodies the spirit of "Running for All".

"A marathon is never just about speed; it is about heart, perseverance and the shared journey we undertake together. Aspen's CSR initiative is highly commendable, as it contributes meaningfully to building a community that is inclusive, compassionate and celebrates the strength of every individual."

St. Nicholas' Home general manager Carmen Chew added that they were encouraged to see the VIPs returning this year with

greater confidence and renewed determination.

"Many have bravely stepped up to longer distances, proving that with the right support, they can achieve beyond expectations. We deeply appreciate the Penang Tourism and Creative Economy Committee, Aspen, The Ramakrishna Ashrama, Howe and all guide runners for their unwavering commitment," she said.

Looking ahead, Aspen remains dedicated to nurturing a culture of empathy, inclusivity and youth development.

The company looks forward to cheering on the VIP runners and their guide runners at PBIM, celebrating their achievements as they cross the finish line with strength and triumph.