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# Helping others help themselves

**L**AUGHTER filled the air. Skaters twirled and executed smooth moves as they glided effortlessly over ice.

The distant strains of a popular carol drifted into the Sunway Pyramid Ice Rink in Petaling Jaya, adding another festive touch to the sport commonly associated with Christmas. Think Rockefeller Center Ice Rink in New York at this time of the year.

Muhammad Razzaq Razali, 19, watched over the skaters from the sidelines. The ice rink attendant monitors the entry and exit points, mans the skates rental counter and assists customers in putting them on when required.

The former student of SMK Bandar Sunway works full-time at the rink but he used to intern there. The slow learner, who suffers from stuttering, had undergone vocational training provided by the Special Education Unit at the school for those with learning disabilities (such as slow learners and those with Down's Syndrome).

He is one of the participants of the Sunway Group Job Placement Programme which assists intellectually challenged teenagers to prepare for the working world.

Initiated since 2006, the group places special students from the school in its various business units. For six months, they learn work-related skills and ethics in a real work environment. To date, 50 students have taken part in the programme.

Muhammad Razzaq displayed marked improvement in handling his job placement internship after spending two years in the programme from 2008 to 2009.

Last year marked a milestone for the programme as Muhammad Razzaq made the transition from it to permanent employment.

He was offered a three-month contract as an ice rink attendant. He works a five-day week from 10am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.

Sunway Pyramid was deemed an appropriate training ground for special students given its broad public exposure. In 2006, the pioneer batch of two special students joined the mall's Job Placement Programme as cleanliness ambassadors.

Their primary role was to pick up recyclable materials such as empty plastic

bottles and papers discarded by shoppers and place them into bins.

Dressed in uniforms and parade gloves, they walk their rounds in the shopping floors twice a week in an effort to lead recycling by example. The success of this programme saw the increase of special student intake to four in 2008 and 2009.

A spin-off of the programme also saw the intake of two students as creative gift wrappers in 2007. Specially chosen for their talent in arts and craft, they pre-wrap old boxes and turn them into works of art for the mall's gift wrapping service.



Muhammad Razzaq Razali mans the skates rental counter.