

titles. She says some part-time volunteers were tasked to wrap some picture books, all of which are new.

“When we first started, many people sent us books but treated us as a dumping ground. Many of these books were infected with silverfish. I would rather purchase new books, hopefully even more if we get more funding,” she says.

Accumulating books and building a cooperative network of participants are her main objectives for now, but the long-term goal is to make The Reading Room the centre of the children’s development over the years. “My dream is to work with young children and carry on working with them as they grow up. It’s a long-term project,” she says.

The Reading Room sees itself as a complement and an alternative to existing libraries in the neighbourhood, including state-run facilities. “I call the project a library for lack of a better word. I don’t

like the word because it has a connotation, especially for children, that it’s a quiet place where you are hushed all the time,” says Daphne. In her library, children are encouraged to play and speak aloud.

“A great nation is a reading nation,” Frederic G Melcher once said. Melcher was the American publisher and editor of *Publishers’ Weekly* for 40 years. He was also the editor of *Library Journal*. In 1919, he initiated Children’s Book Week, an annual event celebrated in schools, libraries, bookstores, clubs, and homes in the US. Melcher described the initiative as a move to “put the cause of children’s reading squarely before the whole community and, community by community, across the whole nation”. Although it is project on a smaller scale, the dawn of The Reading Room in the suburbs of Petaling Jaya certainly looks promising.

For more information about The Reading Room, visit dramprojects.com. **E**