

# Giving Singaporean Women The Chance To Shine

By Nicolette Yeo



**W**ith the huge influx of foreign labour in the last few years, Singapore women now have to compete with guest workers for the same jobs.

To help them, will there be “job distinctions” between female Singaporeans and guest workers in the future?

This issue was fervently mooted at the first joint dialogue between the NTUC Women’s Development Secretariat and PAP Women’s Wing on 30 January 2010.

The dialogue, titled “Women’s Employability Today”, was chaired by Mrs Lim Hwee Hua, Minister, Prime Minister’s Office and Second Minister for Finance and Transport, and featured NTUC Deputy Secretary-General Halimah Yacob, NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Josephine Teo, Food, Drinks and Allied Workers’ Union Advisor Ho Geok Choo, and outgoing NTUC Eldercare Co-operative Limited Board Director Lily Neo.

As NTUC WDS’ director, DSG Halimah, also took the opportunity to reveal that Singaporean women were managing the crisis well despite facing more stress at work, a key finding of an informal survey WDS had conducted earlier this month with 300 married working women.

## Guest Workers Are Hired By Sector, Skills, Not Gender

**“We have been introducing a lot of differentiation between Singapore Permanent Residents, Non-PRs, Citizens and Non-Citizens in many areas but this has been done on a classification basis, not on gender. The role that guest workers play in Singapore is very specific to the sector and the skills. To tackle the specific job arrangements for women, such as back-to-work, we will need very targeted schemes.”**

Lim Hwee Hua, Minister, Prime Minister’s Office and Second Minister for Finance and Transport

## Singaporeans Need More Flexibility For Work Arrangements, Job Opportunities

**“Flexibility at the workplace is very critical in ensuring higher labour force participation rates. When women have children, they leave the workforce. They spend the next few years bringing up the children, and then they re-enter the labour market. In some cases, their jobs are kept for them. In other cases, the company gives them a job and they have to restart again, but they get the opportunities.”**

Halimah Yacob, NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and NTUC’s Women’s Development Secretariat Director

**“The problem for women going back to work is not the lack of jobs but issues such as not being able to fulfill fixed hours at the job, like a 12-hour shift. We need to consider how we can modify work arrangements to enable more women to get back into the workforce.”**

Josephine Teo, NTUC Assistant Secretary-General



## Meet The IR Man

By Vanessa Teo

Hollywood has its Iron Man and here at NTUC we have our very own IR (Integrated Resorts) Man. NTUC’s e2i Assistant Director Jason Ang may not have braved a fire to save the damsel in distress, but he has definitely saved the rice bowls of many by helping them find suitable jobs. Mr Ang played a pivotal role in recruiting jobseekers for the gaming industry, and was in the team that held 85 IR industry previews for more than 10,000 Singaporeans, referring over 9,000 jobseekers for IR job openings for both Resorts World at Sentosa and Marina Bay Sands.

**N**o one else could have been happier than NTUC’s e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) Assistant Director Jason Ang when the Resorts World at Sentosa opened progressively on 20 January 2010, and why so?

“Well, because it’s like seeing my students graduate. When they first came, they didn’t look prepared for a job. But after undergoing the Certified Service Professional course, Personal Effectiveness and Employability Camp, they managed to change their mindsets and are successfully placed in jobs today. And that is what we do here, to place them in suitable jobs,” said Mr Ang.

While his priority is to help jobseekers find suitable jobs, Mr Ang also emphasises that maintaining good relations with employers is also a way in itself to help jobseekers.

“Networking is a very important element in every job. It is also important to build relationships with the employers. With good relations, employers will then be more willing to hire those we recommend. Just like in Marina Bay Sands, where about 700 of their gaming positions are filled by our jobseekers,” said Mr Ang.

The process of placing workers into positions within the IR was not all smooth sailing for Mr Ang. Due to many misperceptions, it was tough to attract people to work in the IR, but he never gave up. Mr Ang explained: “I was somewhat like a ‘myth buster’. Jobseekers will ask me ‘Is it true you have to be good in Maths? Is it true that only young people can apply for this job?’ All these were actually misperceptions. However, after spending time to explain to them, the situation improved and job application rates increased. We even had a 58-year-old woman who accepted the job as a card shuffler! This made me feel that our efforts paid off.”

Even though Mr Ang only joined the NTUC family in April 2008, his passion to help workers began way back in 2003 when he was working in the Singapore Workforce Development Agency dealing with employment facilitation issues as well.

“Here at e2i, it is slightly different because we are not looking at only placing workers in jobs, but also at how to enhance their skills. My belief is never to rush into placement as this will only lead to short-term results. Yes the worker may be placed, but he may leave the job if it’s not suitable. So we look at the whole package – from mindset to skill set, to even grooming standards. At the same time, we will also look at other areas to enhance their retention rate,” said Mr Ang.



Mr Ang (with file) briefing Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (left) during a visit to the Marina Bay Sands IR booth at NTUC’s e2i recently.