

# First Bite Of The \$23m Pie

## CIEU, BATU Among First Unions To Tap On U Care Fund



By **Naseema Banu Maideen and Timothy Fernandez**

As quickly as \$23.18 million has been accumulated in the Labour Movement's U Care Fund, assistance programmes to drive these funds into the pockets of needy workers are well on the ball. Unions with members who are feeling the heat of the crisis are already picking up on this momentum and are pushing out assistance to their low-wage and affected members.

The Building Construction and Timber Industries Employees' Union and the Chemical Industries Employees' Union are the first two unions to take advantage of the new \$1.2 million Bursary and Scholarship TOP-UP Scheme to benefit their members. Both unions held their scholarship and bursary awards presentations on 13 June 2009.

BATU spent \$80,000 on 327 beneficiaries this year. This is 85 per cent more than last year resulting in 120 more awards being presented. BATU was able to do this thanks to the Bursary and Scholarship TOP-UP Scheme, which encourages unions to top up as much as 100 per cent of what they spent last year.

NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and BATU Executive Secretary Heng Chee How, who presented the awards, said: "If we can educate and train our people to higher levels, then we can attract investments that create better-paying jobs for them. And then their living standards will go up and their families can enjoy a better life."

"This is why the Labour Movement fully supports the training and upgrading of our workers and the education of our young. This is why BATU has been presenting scholarships and bursaries to the children of our members for the last 26 years."

DSG Heng further explained: "50 years ago this month, Singapore gained self-government from the British. There were many problems. Unemployment was high. That situation

continued into the 1960s.

"Getting people into jobs was the key goal. But most of the people at that time was not well educated or skilled. That made it hard for them to do higher worth work, and earn better pay."

Over the decades, the education of our young has been completely transformed, with continuous huge investments and subsidies from the PAP Government. Today, more than 60 per cent of our young enjoy access to

tertiary education. The facilities of all our state schools, colleges, and institutes of higher learning are widely admired internationally.

"In that process, the kinds of work that were available to Singaporeans also changed for the better. Today, half of our workforce is considered PMET, ie, engaged in professional, managerial, executive and technical work. Many families saw their lives improve."

DSG Heng reminded union leaders and union members present: "As NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say has said, Singapore can no longer try to make a good living just by being better than those who are cheaper and cheaper than those who are better. Our future prosperity and living standards depend on our being able to quickly do better than those who are currently better than us."

This is why BATU has increased the number of awards by 50 per cent this year, even though Singapore is facing its worst recession since independence, DSG Heng explained.

CIEU presented 174 bursaries on 13 June 2009, a marked increase from the 10 bursaries that it could give out last year. From this, members' children received about \$42,000 this year, as compared to \$18,700 given out last year.

CIEU was also among the first dozen or so unions to tap on the U Care Immediate

**"BATU has a large number of low-income members. The new Bursary and Scholarship TOP-UP Scheme allowed us to double the number of awards for our members' children. The awards help to lessen the financial burden for the members."**

Nasordin Mohamad Hashim, BATU President

## Timely Top-Up

**BUILDING** Construction and Timber Industries Employees' Union's increase in the number of scholarships and bursaries given out this year is a step in the right direction, allowing more of its member's children to be recognised for their academic excellence. While the numbers are impressive, it is the number of people that the top-up is allowing unions to reach out to that provides the evidence to the U Care Fund's purpose.

One such beneficiary is Mr Salil Mohamed Ali, 51, a technician with United Premas Limited. He brings home \$1,700 a month to support his wife and two daughters.

"The bursary and scholarship my daughters received will be especially useful for our expenses. Every month we find ourselves short of money because my wife and I are both diabetic and we spend quite a lot on medical bills," said Mr Salil.

He is thankful for the award that BATU has presented to his daughters because it will help his older daughter Nadzirah to attend private tuition classes. The Secondary 1 student who studies at Tanjong Katong Girls' School loves Science but finds it difficult to cope with secondary level subjects.

"My daughters are motivated by the awards and appreciate them. Hopefully, NTUC will be able to help more students and their families through these hard times."



Assistance Scheme which hands out immediate relief to retrenched workers, workers on shorter work weeks and workers on temporary layoffs facing difficulties. The 250 affected members from CIEU's nine branches received "Immediate Assistance" ranging from \$200 to \$300 on 17 June 2009.

Said NTUC Competency Director (Industrial Relations) and CIEU Executive Secretary Cham Hui Fong: "The grant came in timely to help our members affected by the downturn. Many of our workers appreciate the gesture from the Labour Movement."

Madam Polly Tan Bee Ai, 47, Branch Chairman of DNT Singapore Private Limited, can attest to that. With the company's books in the red since the last quarter in 2008, the rank-and-file workers were slammed with a 5 per cent wage cut since March this year.

"Before that, the union persuaded our company to send us for training using funding from SPUR (Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience). So, we didn't have a pay cut.

But now, we have a pay cut and our low-wage members are feeling it."

All 22 of Madam Tan's branch members will receive \$300 from the U Care Immediate Assistance.

The 12 unions that have applied for Immediate Assistance for their members are: BATU, CIASEU, CIEU, MIWU, SISEU, SMEEU, SMMWU, SPHEU, SUBE, TPGEU, UWEEI and UWPI.

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