

# Doubling Efforts To Improve Lives

## UCCW Ties Up With BATU To Help Casual And Contract Cleaners Upgrade



By **Naseema Banu Maideen**

**W**hen he first signed on the union membership form in April this year, Mr Lim Geok Soo was informed that he would stand to gain from a whole list of welfare benefits in store for him.

But at the age of 75, the contract cleaner who has been working with Succedo Maintenance and Services Private Limited for some 20 years, felt these benefits would not affect him much.

But within just days as a member with Building Construction and Timber Industries Employees' Union, his views took a turn.

Mr Lim, who is usually busy sweeping and mopping the premises of NTUC FairPrice's outlet at Queenstown from morning to mid-afternoon, sat through a training session in Mandarin on Workplace Health and Safety at NTUC's e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) on 15 and 16 April 2009.

"When the union officials and my employer spoke to me, I knew there will be 'someone' to look after my welfare at work. Maybe if I shopped at NTUC FairPrice, I would also get some good discounts. At least, I had a chance to go for training in a classroom," said Mr Lim.

This is one of the value-adds that the Unit for Contract and Casual Workers provides to about 20 members who have recently joined BATU's fold.

Succedo's casual and contract workers are engaged in cleaning services; they service about 20 NTUC FairPrice outlets across the island.

On the average, contract cleaners like Mr Lim take home about \$700 every month, taking into account their workload.

The company's Managing Director, Mr Yu Poh Teck, said being unionised by BATU has shed more light on issues like best sourcing and the tripartite guidelines on fair employment practices. With the help of BATU, the company has access to clear information on industry standards and practices as outlined in the Employment Act.

He added: "My workers benefit two-fold from this 'partnership' by the company, BATU and UCCW. For example, BATU provides added insurance that protects them beyond working hours. This stretches further than the protection from the Work Injury Compensation Act."



Getting Unionised... Succedo's Managing Director (left) Mr Yu Poh Teck and his workers, Mr Lim Geok Soo (second from left) and Madam Tan Poh Geok (fourth from left) gain more insights from union membership from BATU's union officials.

**“During these uncertain times, it is especially important that the unions are able to offer job security and a helping hand to our low-wage and low-skilled union members. To achieve this, BATU not only works hard with unionised companies which have many low-wage workers, but also works closely with various partners such as UCCW and e2i to offer better welfare benefits and job matching services for our members.”**

Ling Ngee Hua, BATU General Secretary

Contract cleaners are largely victims of cheap sourcing; getting them under the union's fold will benefit this group of workers in many ways. Hence, over the last two years, BATU has been actively organising cleaning companies. The members in these unionised companies enjoy better welfare through collective bargaining, a proper employment contract that ensures that they receive at least the basic benefits. Skills upgrading opportunities are a value-add through union membership for these workers.

Said Mr Yu: "Through NTUC, they will benefit from various training programmes that give them more skills. It helps that these courses are also planned carefully with our workers' varying needs in mind."

UCCW delivers a comprehensive training framework that focuses on providing employability, portable and vocational skills for these casual and contract workers.

Working together with e2i and NTUC LearningHub, UCCW conducts preparatory courses such as the Attitude, Skills and Knowledge workshops as well as provides training on Workforce Skills Qualifications

**“UCCW and unions are always working closely to improve the welfare of these low-wage contract and casual workers. Through our interaction with them, we encourage and share with them how they can benefit as union members in the areas of work, live and play. We will continue this collaboration with the unions and together, render the necessary support to help contract and casual workers secure better pay, better jobs and eventually better lives.”**

Zainudin Nordin, Alignment Director (Care and Share)

in many areas, such as security, landscape, food and beverage, retail, manufacturing and precision engineering.

It also carves out opportunities for the workers to attend Employability Skills System as well as Workplace Literacy and Numeracy courses.

For many of the company's cleaners like Madam Tan Poh Geok, 70, such training is the start of a new learning pathway.

"As a cleaner all my life, I've only attended courses related to my job that taught me on how to clean different flooring and carpets. Now, I can learn other new things like gardening and some basic English."

To these low-wage casual and contract workers, this union membership together with the collaboration between BATU and UCCW is the start of a new momentum to enhance their lives for the better.

BATU and UCCW will jointly organise a Cleaners' Day for the first time in Singapore on 29 July 2009. This event will celebrate the contributions and hard work of the cleaners in Singapore who play an important role in keeping Singapore a clean and pleasant city.