

Time Not A Problem

Sajahan Begum Hayat Basha

Madam Sajahan Begum Hayat Basha, 54, who ventured out into the workforce again after being a home-maker for almost two decades, was recognised at the May Day Model Partnership Awards ceremony where she received an award together with her colleague Madam Chong Jee Wah, 57, and NTUC's Women's Development Secretariat Senior Specialist Ang Bee Ping.



Madam Sajahan was forced to return to work due to economic reasons. Unwilling to give up her family commitments, Madam Sajahan had qualms about holding on to a full-time job, but was encouraged when she found out about WDS and Singapore Post Limited's flexi-work arrangements to recruit female workers back to the workforce through a job fair organised by WDS.

In July 2008, Madam Sajahan was recruited as an indoor mail sorter. Initially, Madam Sajahan was having difficulties in adapting to the new work environment, and was always fearful that she would not be able to perform up to expectations after being out of work for close to 20 years, but many of her SingPost Colleagues assisted her along the way, especially her colleague Madam Chong.

"As one of the senior staff at Singapore Post, my leader tasked me with the responsibility to guide Sajahan through her duties. She was quite 'blur' at the start, but all our colleagues were very patient with her and answered all the queries she had," Madam Chong said.

Madam Sajahan has given her thumbs up to this flexi-work arrangement initiative, and has expressed it was precisely this reason why she was able to return to the workforce once again.

"It is important to have this type of partnership in the workforce where you help each other. This is the best encouragement to motivate us to work, and without this, it will be very difficult for people like us who want to go back to work," Madam Sajahan said.

"We believe that with this flexi work arrangement initiative, we will be able to defray some of the operational cost and this would help the employers bring in workers on part-time or flexible work arrangements. Despite it being the downturn period, women are still looking for flexible work arrangements, so it is a win-win situation for both employers and employees by introducing such a scheme."

Ang Bee Ping, NTUC Women's Development Secretariat Senior Specialist

Fell Hard, Rose Strong



John Loo

Mr John Loo, 50, was awarded at the May Day Model Partnership Award ceremony for his success today, contributed by the partnership that was in place in helping him start a new beginning. Together, Mr Loo along with NTUC LearningHub Trainer Francis Ho, NTUC e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) Employability Coach Francis Lee and NTUC LearningHub Sales Manager May Koh shared the glory of receiving this award.

Mr Loo was a stockbroker in the past, but left his then high paying job seven years ago as the stress was taking toll on his health. He struggled with part-time jobs along the way and finally approached the Central

Community Development Council for assistance where he was referred to e2i to undergo the Employability Camp Plus programme, which seeks to give the participants back their sense of self-belief and more importantly a can-do spirit.

Initially, Mr Loo was skeptical about the programme, but NTUC LearningHub trainer Francis Ho spent time to counsel him and encouraged him to see through the programme.

"Personally I felt that he was a go-getter. However, due to the experiences and obstacles he faced in life, he reached his lowest point, and that was when he came for this particular programme. What I did was just to give him that additional encouragement and confidence to bring him back, and from there he was able to take off on his own," said Mr Ho.

After completion of the EC Plus programme, Mr Loo knew he wanted to become a trainer and he embarked on the Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment programme. When e2i's employability coach Francis Lee learnt about it, he met up with Mr Loo and worked with him on the possible avenues for him to gain experience as a trainer and subsequently helped link Mr Loo up to NTUC LearningHub Sales Manager May Koh who strongly recommended him to the training department after seeing his potential.

With their combined efforts, Mr Loo is not only an associate trainer with NTUC LearningHub today, but also the associate trainer for EC Plus programme and volunteers at e2i to screen jobseekers and encourage them to go for training.

"When you fall, you tend to wallow in self-pity and pain and you forget what you can do sometimes. If there was no one that sincerely wants to help or give you pointers, there would simply be no direction for you," Mr Loo said.

"At e2i, it is our passion to help match potential workers to the correct job. For John, I felt that he had the potential to train and I just could not sit there and see this opportunity go by for him, I had to do something."

Francis Lee, NTUC e2i Employability Coach



Beating The Odds



Quek Soo Chair

Overcoming adversity seems to be the major theme of this year's awards, and Madam Quek Soo Chair is the perfect example of that. At the ripe old age of 68, she has overcome the boundaries of age and become a teacher with some help from Unit for Contract and Casual Workers Consultant Spencer Teng and NTUC LearningHub Trainer Kala Manickam after spending years as a lowly paid casual worker with little welfare benefits in a local Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic.

Doubtful of her abilities at first despite having relevant teaching qualifications, she had a life-changing moment when she attended the Attitude, Skills, Knowledge workshop for UCCW members where she was taught positive thinking skills which boosted her self-confidence greatly. After going through a Computer Adaptive Test, Madam Quek was found suitable to pursue a higher level of education and was encouraged by Spencer to take the Certified Service Professional Course.

"CSP is a very useful course in teaching workers to interact with customers. I felt that it would be beneficial to Madam Quek if she gets this accreditation, as it would be easier for her to adapt to the different sectors that requires interactions with customers," explained Spencer.

During her course, Kala played a great role in encouraging Madam Quek to throw aside her concerns of being too old and unable to take up new challenges in a different working environment as well.

"She is very positive and has the right mindset, but she lacked the confidence because her English is not very good. So, as a trainer, I just came in to tap on her potential and told her she could do it," said Kala.

For their tireless efforts, Spencer and Kala were also given the same award in recognition of their exemplary partnership.

Today, Madam Quek works as a Chinese teacher at Cherie Hearts Kidz Discovery Ark Private Limited, enjoying a pay increment of 300 per cent and better welfare benefits.

"I would not have been able to achieve what I have today if not for my boss Mr Chiam, Kala and Spencer and I'm very grateful to them. Credit also goes to UCCW who painstakingly made efforts to design such programmes for us matured workers. If we don't cherish the opportunities given to us to upgrade ourselves, it would be our own loss," Madam Quek said.

"I looked at Soo Chair's qualifications just like any other applicant and considered how she could contribute to our centre. I was won over by her intrinsic willingness to help us in any way possible. Age is not an issue, and if given another chance, I would still choose Soo Chair."

Chiam Choon Yong, Cherie Hearts Kidz' Discovery Ark Private Limited Branch Director

Skills Above Age

Three Companies Receive Honours For Re-employment Efforts



Older workers play an important role in Singapore's economy; many of them helped build this country into its current first world status. Recognising the companies that actively keep these workers in the workforce should therefore be the biggest motivator for other companies to follow suit.

Singapore Power, Robinsons & Co. and Seiko Instruments Singapore, the three companies receiving the Institutional Award this year, have been at the forefront of re-employment initiatives, with two of them tapping on the Singapore Workforce Development Agency's ADVANTAGE! Scheme. Contributions of their older workers are warmly appreciated and firm steps are in place to keep them employed past the age of 62, the official retirement age in Singapore.

Singapore Power, in particular, has been riding high on the re-employment wave. Just last year, fifty of their workers reaching the age of 62 were re-employed to an average age of 64. The company also provides health screenings and talks as part of its award-winning Quality Life Programme to ensure these workers stay healthy throughout their retirement years.

Mr Nachiappan RK Sinniah, General Secretary of the Union of Power and Gas Employees, attributes this to the positive relationship between his union and the company. "Singapore Power has always been a firm supporter of NTUC and a firm believer in the benefits of re-employment. Due to the exemplary relationship between the company and UPAGE, we worked together to save about \$20 million in non-wage costs and managed to achieve an impressive re-employment rate of 83 per cent just last year."

Robinsons is another organisation that is no stranger to the benefits of re-employment, as over 40 per cent of their workers are above the age of 40. With the aid of the ADVANTAGE! Scheme, some of the costs associated with recruiting and retaining older staff are defrayed.

"Mature workers are committed and bring with them a wealth of experience, which is valuable to our company. In addition, we feel that some areas of work may be better handled by them," said Ms Chee Nian Tze, General Manager of Group Human Resources at Robinsons. "As an example, mature workers are able to help customers make better choices for homewares and nursery products."

One of the most important ways that companies benefit from employing older workers is the experience they impart. Seiko Instruments Singapore realised that their ageing workforce could be a big asset to their company and signed an agreement with the Metal Industries Workers' Union in anticipation of their workers reaching the age of 62. The company successfully qualified for ADVANTAGE! Scheme, as more than sixty of its staff are aged between 50 and 58.

Mr Lee Chok Sin, General Manager, Corporate Headquarters at Seiko has good reason to keep his valued older staff employed: "We are in the unique industry of watch manufacturing, so knowledge and skills are important as they take a long time to master. These older employees can be re-employed as trainers, so they can impart their knowledge to newer employees."