

# SPURred On To Join SISEU

By Naseema Banu Maideen

**T**raining, up-skilling and retraining are the buzzwords in this crisis. And workers are increasingly awakening to the importance of upgrading their skills to remain relevant and save their jobs. It explains why many are increasingly valuing union membership, thus giving them the passport to ride on more training drives like the NTUC Education and Training Fund.

The Singapore Industrial & Services Employees' Union can testify to this. In the month of February, the union hit the highest net increase of 627 members, a 4.15 per cent increase on its current membership strength of 56,497.

"More and more non-members are

becoming aware of our activities. They are also keen to upgrade themselves in this downturn. There are also others who see the value of other assistance programmes like the public transport and utilities vouchers. In addition, through positive word-of-mouth from members, non-members are also aware of SISEU's own platform for members' welfare, such as scholarships and bursary grants," said SISEU General Secretary Lim Kuang Beng.

Mr Lim added that the introduction of SPUR (Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience) is an effective tool in engaging partners.

"We have shown our value as a partner by assisting the companies in starting on SPUR courses for their employees. So along with NETF, recruitment drives are better received by the companies."

GE Aviation Service Operation Private Limited is currently one of the most recently unionised companies in SISEU's fold. 811

workers, who account for more than 90 per cent of workforce in this company, have joined the union since January this year.

It was a year of "courtship" with constant communication on the benefits of a partnership with the Labour Movement before the "union" could take place, said Mr Lim.

The union also diligently expends its efforts on understanding the needs of its newly recruited members, like those at GE Aviation.

Several interactive sessions were held to find out their interests to help serve its members better; some valued the insurance protection from NTUC Gift, while others were more keen on upgrading courses.

As SISEU continues to engage its new members, existing branches are not neglected; the union is constantly in contact to further improve its effective partnerships to create a pro-business and pro-worker worker environment.



**"During this economic downturn, SISEU has seen an increase in workplace issues in our branches. It is important that we should not lose sight of our core fundamentals, which is helping workers and stepping up on membership recruitment."**

Lim Kuang Beng, SISEU General Secretary

## OCBC Gives \$250,000 To U Care Fund In Support Of Education

**F**resh from its generous \$200,000 contribution in March this year to the OCBC-Bright Horizon Fund Retrenchment Relief Scheme that helps retrenched parents keep their preschoolers in kindergarten, Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation Limited will be doing even more for education. The bank will be donating \$250,000 to the NTUC U Care Fund specifically for the NTUC Scholarship Awards and Education Grant to provide financial assistance for children of needy union members', especially those more affected by the downturn.



One such member is Mr Abdul Wahab Mustajab, 56, a former cooked food business owner whose life has been a downhill slide for the past eight months. Armed with some experience in the food business after working for a friend for many years, he ventured into running his own cooked food business last year. However, it failed due to the high rental and electricity costs, forcing him to wind up the business last December and set out on a job search. During this time, making ends meet on his wife's single income as a customer service staff in a fast-food outlet was very straining.

"We have a pair of 15-year old schoolgoing twin daughters and we're also looking after my elderly mother-in-law. All these meant that I needed to find a job quickly." But landing a job in this challenging time posed more trying for his family. Mr Abdul Wahab had to resort to selling his four-room HDB flat in January this year; his family has been staying with a relative since then.

Despite all that has happened, Mr Abdul Wahab, an NTUC Member since January 2003, is determined that his daughters' education should not be affected in any way. He applied for NTUC's education grants for both children and is looking forward to receiving \$200 in assistance in July. Just a month ago, he landed in a job as a delivery driver, with a take-home pay of \$1,200.

"With this income and some assistance from NTUC, I hope I will be able to get by this tough time. It has not been easy on my family these months and any form of help will ease some stress on us."

More families facing financial hardships like Mr Abdul's will benefit from OCBC's boost to the NTUC Scholarship Awards and Education Grant.

This year, to encourage union members to contribute to the U Care Fund, part of OCBC's \$250,000 contribution was made through the "U Care to Share" campaign. Through this, members were asked to write about what NTUC Membership means to them, in support of the U Care Fund. OCBC donated \$50 for every member's testimony that was submitted between 15 April and 20 May this year. A total of \$57,000 was raised with the 1,140 entries submitted on the campaign website, www.ntuc.org.sg/just4u/umember.

The NTUC Scholarship Awards and Education Grant is open to all union members whose children are currently pursuing fulltime studies in a recognised local school or institution from Primary 2 upwards and meet the necessary application criteria. Into its 13th year, the grant aims to help lower-income union members defray the cost of their children's education.

**"OCBC has always been supportive of NTUC's initiatives, and this time round, it has stepped beyond its role as a commercial partner, to support the Labour Movement's fund-raising efforts. Responding to our call to assist affected workers in the economic downturn, OCBC has donated \$250,000 to the U Care Fund. I'm heartened by its efforts to reach out to lower-income members and their children by being a major contributor to the NTUC Scholarship Awards and Education Grant. This amount will go a long way in helping our members' children, especially when we expect to see an increase in applications due to the downturn."**

Zainudin Nordin, NTUC Alignment Director (Care and Share)

**"Both OCBC and NTUC share a common goal of serving the community by helping them to achieve their aspirations. Specifically, OCBC's Corporate Social Responsibility programme is aimed at helping children and youths realise their full potential and promoting education. We believe our contribution to the NTUC Scholarship Awards and Education Grant through the U Care Fund will benefit children who need help the most during this economic downturn."**

Andrew Lee, OCBC's Head of Global Consumer Financial Services

## It Pays To Be A U Member

by Timothy Fernandez

**A**s part of the "U Care to Share" campaign, 1,140 U Members recently shared the reasons why they enjoy being a part of the NTUC family and their earnest efforts have raised a substantial \$57,000. It brought to light the steady growth of union members and enhanced the ever-growing appeal of being part of the NTUC family. Particularly during this time of adversity, being a U Member offered a plethora of benefits that could make the stress more bearable.

The steady increase in new U Members is mainly attributed to the growing number of recruitment exercises at workplaces. In the first quarter of this year alone, the Labour Movement and its unions helped recruit more than 13,000 new U Members.

The forward-looking attitudes that unions have also explained why U Membership keeps rising, and the Education Services Union is a fine example. Being the fourth fastest growing union this year, ESU has seen its initial membership base leap from 4,400 in 2006 to over 13,900 members today.

**"NTWU makes it a point to attend the orientation programme of all the new employees, taking the chance to explain to them the importance of union membership and urging to join on the spot. In the last six months, NTWU has stepped up its pace on reaching out to a few hundreds of our contract and casual workers at the Jurong Port Wharf area, Newspaper Vendors and Singapore School Bus Association. It is not just workplace protection we focus on, but also the privileges and benefits that membership offers."**

Fang Chin Poh, NTWU General Secretary. NTWU is the 3rd union with the highest membership growth (+342 members) and loss in the month of March 2009. It now has 14,180 members - a 2.46 per cent increase.

**"ESU has grown from an initial membership strength of 4,400 in 2006 to over 13,900 members. Building on our membership base, our union has embarked on various initiatives to ensure better workplace protection and provide relevant social and welfare benefits to members. We are also actively championing the working interests of members at the industry-level. Without a doubt, ESU will strive to do more for members, especially during this downturn."**

Michael Tan, ESU President. ESU is No. 4 in the list of top unions with the highest growth (+105 members) and loss in the month of March 2009.

**"In light of the economic downturn, USE has worked more closely with our tripartite partners to add value for our workers, members and unionised companies while doing our part to help upturn the downturn. For example, a security industry career fair was recently organised in April to enable workers from other industries to find jobs in the security industry. We have also introduced a new benefit in the form of our very own Scholarship and Bursary Awards to help out parents with school going children. As a result, more people are beginning to see the value of union membership."**

Nakalingam Silva, USE President. USE has the 5th highest growing membership (+51 members) and loss in the month of March 2009. It now has 3,508 members.

**"Many rank-and-file workers and executives are very vulnerable during this downturn. Without the union, there are limited avenues for these groups of workers to turn to should they encounter unfair practices from their companies or when they lose their jobs. As such, BATU has stepped up our recruitment efforts so that our workers can be protected under BATU's and NTUC's 'umbrella'. This year, our Ordinary Branch membership has crossed the 8,000 mark."**

Nasordin Mohamad Hashim, BATU President. BATU registered the eighth highest growth (+117 members) and loss in the month of March 2009, for a total of 8,177 members.

**"I get to earn LinkPoints when I purchase items and enjoy discounts at many recreational and entertainment locations. I also got training subsidies when I applied for upgrading courses through e2i (Employment and Employability Institute). U membership has really allowed me to upgrade myself for a brighter future."**

Huang Xiao Ying, 34, Technician

**"Being a U Member has helped me upgrade my skills during these tough times. Kudos to NTUC LearningHub for providing subsidies for a range of courses that benefit working adults. I really hope that these subsidies continue so that individuals affected by the economic downturn will have a chance to upgrade themselves and find new career paths with the skills that they have learnt."**

Muhammad Bukhari Marsayit, 24, Marketing Executive

**"The reason I signed up as a U Member is because of all the wonderful ways I've seen my mother benefit from being a union member. Back when I was still in school, my mother applied for an education grant to lessen the burden of my school expenses. NTUC also helped by giving out NTUC FairPrice vouchers at a time when household necessities started becoming more expensive. I am thankful for the help that they have given me."**

Nursilah Dahlan, 23, Retail Assistant