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New NTUC fund to help kids from low-income families

It will help needy children enrol in childcare centres, support reading scheme

By Ken Kwek



GIVING NEEDY KIDS A BOOST: Mr Lim, seen here in some water play with children at the NTUC Childcare Punggol Central Centre, said it was essential to support low-income families to prevent a widening of the social gap. -- PHOTO: ASHLEIGH SIM

A NEW financial assistance fund is being set up by the labour movement to help children from low-income families enrolled in its childcare centres.

The NTUC Childcare Bright Horizons Fund will provide subsidies for needy children in centres run by the NTUC Childcare cooperative.

The fund will also support supplementary schemes, such as a new reading programme to improve the literacy of children from poor, non-English-speaking families.

The new fund, which has received an initial injection of \$450,000 from OCBC Bank, was announced yesterday by National Trades Union Congress secretary-general Lim Boon Heng at the opening of a new centre in Punggol.

Mr Lim, who is Minister (Prime Minister's Office), said the fund was in line with the Labour Movement 2011 vision, which seeks to improve the lives of workers and their families.

Bettering the quality of life for children below the age of 12 is a key area of focus for the labour movement, he told about 50 parents, children and childcare workers.

NTUC Childcare has already received 120 applications for financial support under the fund. The criterion is a monthly household income of \$1,500 or less.

But Mr Lim said some families with monthly incomes of \$2,000 to \$2,500 may be eligible as they also face hardship.

He also introduced the Read-to-Reach programme to increase the literacy level of children from low-income families who do not speak English, or speak little English.

'In Singapore, with English being the main medium of instruction throughout the child's schooling years, it is necessary to engage children as early as possible at pre-school level in a reading-focused programme,' he said.

About 300 children have been targeted for the reading programme, which will begin in December.

NTUC Childcare acting chief executive Ho Yin Fong told reporters that more supplementary programmes were being planned for the future:

'We're looking at programmes that focus on the thinking skills of children, which encourage flexible thinking and imagination.'

Such programmes would depend on support from donors and volunteers to succeed, she said. Some 240 students from schools have already volunteered to read to children under the Read-to-Reach programme.

Mr Lim said supporting low-income families was essential in the drive to ensure that there is no widening of the social gap here.

kenkwek@sph.com.sg