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NTUC's new trust fund to benefit 600 kids from lower-income families

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A NEW fund has been launched to enable children from lower-income families to enjoy pre-school education at NTUC Childcare.

Called the NTUC Childcare Bright Horizons Trust Fund, the initiative will go towards helping families pay for the monthly childcare fees — which can reach as much as \$525 a month — and other supplementary learning programmes.

Launching the fund yesterday was labour chief Lim Boon Heng, who thanked the various contributors for making it possible and singled out OCBC Bank, which pledged a sum of \$450,000 over the next three years.

In total, some 600 children from low-income families will benefit. About 120 applications for financial support have already come in.

While these applicants typically come from households that earn no more than \$1,500 a month, NTUC Childcare said it would not be limiting itself strictly to this quantum. Those who, say, fall within the \$2,000 to \$2,500 bracket can also qualify on a case-by-case basis, as such families face hardship too in making ends meet.

Mr Lim, who is also Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, also officially opened a new NTUC Childcare centre at Punggol Central yesterday — the co-operative's 41st branch to date. With a capacity of about 75 students, the centre is another step towards the co-operative's goal of ensuring that no child is deprived of a quality education because of financial difficulties.

NTUC Childcare is also rolling out a new Read-to-Reach programme to help improve the literacy level of children who do not come from English-speaking homes.

Said Mr Lim: "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."

Meanwhile, on the job front, the employment outlook appears "good" for at least another six months, he said. With this being the second half of the 2006-07 financial year, the job market "remains strong". Already, the labour movement has observed shortages in sectors such as construction, which requires more engineers, and financial services.