

STU Cooperative Cares For Teaching Assistants



By **Jansen Yeo**

Teaching Assistants, most of whom earn about \$1,200 a month, are feeling the pinch from the double whammy of rising food and petrol prices. To cushion the impact, Educare Co-operative Limited, the cooperative arm of the Singapore Teachers' Union, has stepped in.

Educare will give out up to \$300 in a one-off payout to offset inflation, for Teaching Assistants who have been with the cooperative up till May 2008.

They will get \$50 for every month of service from January 2008 to June 2008.

This was announced at an Educare gathering session for Teaching Assistants on 19 July 2008, where they also received \$50 in NTUC FairPrice vouchers.

It's not the first time that Educare, the brainchild of former STU General Secretary Swithun Lowe, has given something to Teaching Assistants. It had previously given out an incentive of \$30 for every month of service to



Keep Up The Good Work... STU President Mike Thiruman has only words of praise for the good work done by Teaching Assistants.

Teaching Assistants in January this year.

Such incentives are to encourage a virtuous cycle. Good performance by Teaching Assistants in schools will present Educare with a pleasant win-win scenario: schools will recognise their work and in turn, employ more Teaching Assistants or give them higher salaries. They will also spread the good word of Educare, enabling the cooperative to attract more Teaching Assistants to its current number of 75. U

“ We are taking care of our Teaching Assistants, who are also STU General Branch members. On their part, we want them to perform well in their jobs.”

Mike Thiruman, President, STU

For Job Security And Recognition

TEACHING Assistants have to work doubly hard to gain recognition of their work with the schools and also for job security. Currently, Teaching Assistants are hired by schools on a yearly basis, subject to contract renewals. However, from next year, Educare will be starting a pilot programme, negotiating with schools to offer the more experienced Teaching Assistants a two or three-year contract.

“With longer contracts, we could negotiate annual increments and bonuses as well. Since the schools know that these Teaching Assistants are going to stay, they might also invest in their training. Schools will also treat these Teaching Assistants as part of their own staff, creating a sense of belonging in the Teaching Assistants, spurring them to perform better,” said Mr Thiruman.

“ Towards the end of our contract, most of us worry whether our contract will be renewed. We certainly welcome the news that Educare has our interest at heart and is negotiating for longer contracts with schools, be it the current school or any other school within our neighbourhood. I feel this move will motivate us to perform better and allow us to stay employable. I can see that Educare is taking small but sure steps to improve our livelihood.”



Linda Phee-Tan (right), 53, a Teaching Assistant with Pioneer Primary School since April 2006.

Combine To Save More

From now until end-December 2008, union members with U-Stretch vouchers may combine up to four vouchers for every \$10 purchase. At 50 cents each, members can save up to 20 per cent or \$2 for every purchase at participating Labour Movement Social Enterprises.

According to the NTUC Care and Share Alignment Director Zainudin Nordin, the

U-Stretch vouchers help workers directly to overcome the immediate price rises.

Funded by NTUC, Singapore Labour Foundation, NTUC Fairprice Co-operative Limited, NTUC Choice Homes Co-operative Limited and NTUC Income Insurance Co-operative Limited, the Labour Movement gave out \$4m worth of vouchers to 80,000 lower-income members in April this year.

