

# NUS gets \$10m donation for student mentorship scheme

Over 1,200 children from low-income families will get help from 700 uni student volunteers

Jean Iau

About 1,240 primary and secondary school students from low-income families will get more support in tutoring and mentorship from National University of Singapore (NUS) students following a \$10 million donation.

Teach Singapore (Teach SG), a community programme where more than 700 NUS student mentors work with community partners to provide tutoring and mentoring, was officially launched at the University Cultural Centre yesterday.

The donation came from real estate company Ho Bee Land.

One of the mentors is second-year medical student Celest Chiam, 21, who said: "I recognise that we were extremely privileged and we were able to receive many opportunities to attend enrichment classes and pursue our passions when we were younger. My group wanted to pay it forward through this project."

One of her mentees is Secondary 3 student Isabella Aw, who said she likes having someone she can relate to and has started taking her studies seriously.

"She motivated me to come to the mentoring sessions and pursue

my dream to become a psychiatrist," said Isabella, 15.

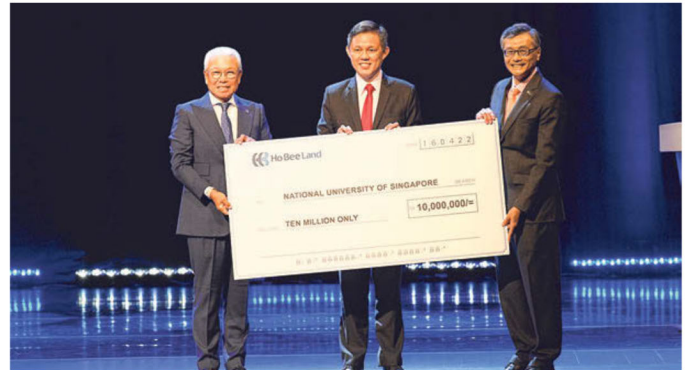
The Teach SG programme was piloted by NUS in January last year.

Volunteers are trained to approach mentees with empathy and are given instructional materials, activities and games, as well as budgeting guides and survey templates, for the mentoring sessions, which last at least 12 weeks.

Each mentor can take on two mentees, or two mentors can take on a group of three mentees.

About 700 NUS students have been recruited and they work with 76 community partners, including primary and secondary schools and social service agencies.

NUS president Tan Eng Chye said that coaching and mentoring children from less privileged families is particularly important amid



Ho Bee Land founder and executive chairman Chua Tian Poh (left) presenting the \$10 million cheque to Education Minister Chan Chun Sing and National University of Singapore president Tan Eng Chye yesterday. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

the Covid-19 pandemic, where the acceleration of home-based learning has resulted in challenges for students who do not have a conducive learning environment at home.

"As academically able individuals who have benefited richly from the Singapore education system, NUS students can play their part in helping other students," he said.

Yesterday, about 70 student mentor team leaders were awarded certificates, and a \$10 million cheque

was presented to NUS by Ho Bee Land founder and executive chairman Chua Tian Poh.

Minister for Education Chan Chun Sing, who was the guest of honour of the event, said he hopes that one day, every undergraduate in Singapore will mentor a child from a disadvantaged family and be a positive role model to help the child navigate his or her formative years into adulthood.

"This mentoring journey by all our undergraduates would last for

months or even years, (and) they would be giving back to society and learning the importance of not leaving those who are less privileged behind," he said.

Mr Chan added: "Success must be when our undergraduates can take care of not only themselves and their families, but when they have that innate desire to want to do more and to do good for our society."

jeaniau@sph.com.sg

## Volunteers help kids with schoolwork, engage them in activities

While many young people enjoy spending time off from university resting or relaxing with their friends, some 700 National University of Singapore (NUS) undergraduates have volunteered to become mentors to children from low-income families.

Teach Singapore (Teach SG), which was officially launched yesterday, is a community initiative by NUS that offers academic tutoring and mentorship to primary and secondary school students from such families.

Speaking to the media at University Cultural Centre, one of the volunteers, Miss Celest Chiam, 21, said: "I recognise that as kids, we had a lot of opportunities to pursue our passions, let's say, dance or singing, which not every household has the privilege to pursue due to maybe financial limitations."

The medical student added: "I wanted to pay my experiences as a kid forward and ensure that financial circumstances are not a limitation to people pursuing their dreams."

Under the programme, each mentor can take on up to two children, or a pair of mentors can take on a



Miss Celest Chiam, 21, and Mr Muhammad Rafiqi Leman, 25, are among 700 National University of Singapore undergraduates who have volunteered to become mentors to primary and secondary school students from low-income families under the Teach Singapore programme launched yesterday. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

group of three children.

Mentees are assigned following close collaboration with community partners including primary and secondary schools and social service agencies.

The mentors are trained to facilitate activities and games, as well as help their mentees academically during the two- to three-hour weekly sessions over at least 12 weeks.

Chemistry undergraduate Muhammad Rafiqi Leman said he signed up as a mentor so that he can also be a source of encouragement to the children.

"Ultimately, my aim is also to pro-

vide a safe space for students to share (with me) their feelings or emotions... In a sense, I journey with them to grow in their social and emotional development as well," said the 25-year-old.

PAY IT FORWARD

**I wanted to pay my experiences as a kid forward and ensure that financial circumstances are not a limitation to people pursuing their dreams.**



MEDICAL STUDENT CELEST CHIAM

GIVE KIDS SAFE SPACE

**Ultimately, my aim is also to provide a safe space for students to share (with me) their feelings or emotions... In a sense, I journey with them to grow in their social and emotional development as well.**



CHEMISTRY UNDERGRADUATE MUHAMMAD RAFIQI LEMAN

He added that his mentees share with him issues they face, such as those concerning their family and how they struggle to find the motivation to go to school each morning.

Jean Iau