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Beneficiaries share how fund has helped them in different ways



Primary 2 pupil Adele Soong - pictured here with her mother, Ms Tiffany Tee, 45, an administrative assistant - used some of the money she received from the fund to buy an electronic keyboard and taught herself how to play it with the help of an app and YouTube videos. ST PHOTO: TAY HUI NGI GIN

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When he was in primary school, Mr Malcom Lau loved food but he would often skip meals during recess to save his pocket money.

The reason was that he wanted to help his single mother who struggled to put food on the table for him and his younger sister.

Things changed in 2007 when he was in Primary 4. He started receiving a \$35 monthly allowance from The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund (STSPMF).

The money not only allowed him to have a meal at recess, but also helped develop his self-confidence.

Those days of going hungry in school from Primary 1 to Primary 3 are still fresh in the mind of Mr Lau, now 23 and a National University of Singapore (NUS) undergraduate.

He said: "The extra pocket money allowed me to mingle with my friends and develop my social skills without worrying about whether I could afford to go out with them.

"These skills are important because they prepare a child for interpersonal relations at the workplace in the future."

Mr Lau is among the 180,000 beneficiaries of the STSPMF, which was launched on Children's Day in 2000. Today marks the fund's 20th anniversary.

Mr Lau said that when he was in polytechnic, the fund again came to his aid between 2014 and 2015.

His sister, now a 20-year-old polytechnic student, was also a beneficiary of the fund.

The family was also supported by the Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre in Bedok North.

Mr Lau, who is pursuing a degree in chemical engineering on an NUS scholarship, said he appreciates the assistance he received and plans to give back to the community.

"When I first joined the course, I was motivated by the potential to earn well. But now, I believe what matters more is what we do with the money that we earn. I want to uplift other kids who could be in the situation I was in," he said.

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For another beneficiary of the STSPMF, the pocket money has given her the opportunity to explore her creative side.

Adele Soong, eight, a Primary 2 pupil at St Margaret's Primary School, spent \$40 from the money she received to buy an electronic keyboard. With the help of an app and YouTube videos, she has taught herself how to play it.

STSPMF beneficiaries in primary school receive \$60 a month.

Her mother, Ms Tiffany Tee, 45, an administrative assistant, said: "When Adele wants to buy food or stationery, like a watercolour paint set, I can tap the fund to buy it for her instead of putting it off to the next month or her birthday."

Ms Tee and her husband also have two sons - a four-year-old and a nine-year-old who is autistic.

The three children receive aid from the Education Ministry's Financial Assistance Scheme, which helps needy families meet school expenses.

Ms Tee said the money Adele receives from the STSPMF is a welcome relief. On a typical school day, Adele and her best friend would tuck into their favourite food at recess: roti prata.

Though she enjoys painting and aspires to be an artist, she is saving up to buy a set of drums as she wants to learn new instruments on her own.

For 14-year-old Dahlia Dlaila Iskandar, the STSPMF has encouraged her to aspire to be a nurse.

The Secondary 2 student at CHIJ Katong Convent and her two siblings, aged six and 16, faced financial difficulties at home while growing up. Her parents had to set aside money for bills and basic needs, which took priority over other purchases.

Dahlia has been a beneficiary of the fund since 2013. She received an allowance for 19 months while in primary school and for five months this year, from January to May.

She said: "The fund encourages me to work harder in school so that I can achieve my dream to be a nurse and help other people. I'm thankful for the contributions made by donors."

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