

# Needy children get mentors to help them read, level up in life



Primary 2 pupils from Westwood Primary with their buddies from Hwa Chong Institution earlier this year. The Young Student Programme, now in its seventh year, has benefited about 150 Westwood Primary pupils. PHOTO: WESTWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL

[Amelia Teng](#) Education Correspondent 

A chat about retirement by six former classmates and colleagues in their late 50s led them right back to primary school.

The group - most of whom were classmates at Raffles Girls' School or former colleagues in a local bank - decided that when they left the rat race, they would help children who needed the most support.

The mission began when former banker Tan Cher Ling and her husband Tan Yong Soon were itching to do something for needy pupils.

To their delight, the couple, who are both 64, learnt in late 2012 that Westwood Primary School was willing to work with them to help lower-income pupils read better, among other activities.



The school was due to accept its first batch of Primary 1 pupils in 2013, and its principal hoped to uplift pupils on financial assistance.

Having roped in their friends, the Tans and four other volunteers crafted lesson plans and, along the way, roped in more volunteers from Society for Wings, a social service agency.

They also partnered Hwa Chong Institution (HCI) to get its secondary school boys to work with the younger pupils every week.

The Young Student Programme, now in its seventh year, has benefited about 150 Westwood Primary pupils. It has also been extended to pupils from First Toa Payoh Primary and Townsville Primary schools - with each having about 30 to 45 participants - since last year.

Students of St Joseph's Institution and Raffles Institution are now regularly helping as well.

The programme is an example of a ground-up effort by schools and the community to uplift children from low-income households.



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Other primary and secondary schools have adopted similar initiatives in recent years, through career exposure schemes or finding mentors from external organisations or other schools.

Last year, the Education Ministry announced the formation of the Uplift Taskforce to take a closer look at the issues faced by under-performing students from disadvantaged families, and to devise practical solutions.

Mr Ng Yeow Ling principal of Westwood Primary, said: "We want to do our part to bridge the gap between children from different households. This is the group of pupils who need motivation and exposure, and may not have as many opportunities as their peers."

His school took ownership of the programme in 2016 and also made use of literary resources from kids-READ, a National Library Board initiative for underprivileged children.

The weekly sessions at all three primary schools are now run by volunteers from Society for Wings.

First Toa Payoh Primary School principal Chua Choon Guan said the programme has helped his pupils develop an interest in reading and improved their literacy and communication skills.