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— Ms Woon Siew Hua, 21

Hotel chain's bursary helping students from low-income families to further their studies

Undergrads say money is big help



SUCCESS STORIES:
Ms Sharron Chan (left) and Ms Woon Siew Hua are two of the 42 beneficiaries of the Hotel 81-Choo Chong Ngen Bursary.
PHOTO: CHOO CHWEE HUA

Report by NABILAH AWANG
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When her father had a heart attack in 2007 and a stroke three years later, the bills mounted and so did problems for her family.

To help her family, she worked part-time as a florist and cashier in various food and beverage outlets.

But now that she has successfully applied for a bursary from a hotel chain, things are beginning to look up for her and other students from low-income families.

For the past 4½ years, Ms Sharron Chan, 24, worked to save money to fund her tuition fees for university.

She was among 30 undergraduates from the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) who were recipients of the Hotel 81-Choo Chong Ngen Bursary last year.

The \$5,000 bursary, awarded to students from low-income families, was started in 2013. Since then, 42 students have benefitted.

Ms Chan, a first-year student pursuing a degree in Offshore Engineering, told The New Paper her family faced financial difficulties after her

father's health problems.

Her mother, who works as a seamstress at home, became the sole breadwinner for the six months her father took to recover.

Ms Chan, who has an 18-year-old sister still in school, said: "Then, my mother earned an average of \$1,200 and she had to pay my father's medical bills and put food on the table."

Since she was 15, Ms Chan worked part-time as a florist and cashier before getting a job in local offshore and marine company Keppel Fels after completing her diploma.

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Ms Chan added: "Many of my friends went on to get their degrees, but I couldn't afford to pay university fees. I was a little sad, but I didn't want to be disheartened by it."

She worked as a planning engineer for 4½ years before she finally managed to save enough money to pursue her degree last year.

She is taking two years' worth of no-pay leave to study at SIT.

Ms Chan chanced upon the Hotel 81 bursary on the SIT website and was elated when she got it.

She said that with the bursary, she

does not need to work part-time and has more time to study.

One of the 12 recipients of the bursary in 2014, Ms Woon Siew Hua, 21, is a second-year student pursuing a degree in chemical engineering under SIT-Newcastle University.

She used the money to fund her Overseas Immersion Programme (OIP) at Newcastle in the United Kingdom.

The OIP is an attachment to the home campus of their university, where students get to experience living and studying on campus.

Ms Woon lives in a rented three-room flat with her parents and three siblings.

Her father is an odd-job worker and her mother works at a drink stall.

Ms Woon said: "The money I got from the bursary funded the entire trip — my accommodation, flight tickets, even my expenses. I don't know how much I would have to work if I didn't get it."

Ms Carolyn Choo, daughter of Hotel 81 founder, Choo Chong Ngen, said the bursary was set up by her father to help needy students to complete their university education without financial worries.

She said: "He hopes the financial help can encourage them to study hard and to give back to society as responsible corporate citizens in due course."

The director and shareholder of Hotel 81 Management added that her family would continue to support such students in getting a good education and many have also inspired her.

Ms Choo said: "I have met many bursary recipients who are so positive and determined and are ready to contribute to society despite their less privileged financial backgrounds."